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DIALOGUE-DRIVEN CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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DIALOGUE-DRIVEN CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE:
AN INTRODUCTION

Cornelia Ilie

The International Journal of Cross-cultural Studies and Environmental Communication has decided to devote two special issues (Volume 2, Issue 2, 2013 and Volume 1, Issue 1, 2014) to selected papers presented at the 2nd ESTIDIA Conference, University of Bari “Aldo Moro”, Italy on 3-5 October 2013. These papers raise and discuss a significant range of current issues related to the theme of the conference “Dialogue-driven Change in the Public Sphere”.

The first of the two special issues (Volume 2, Issue 2, 2013) brings together 17 articles devoted to the following three topics: (1) Multi-voiced discourses in the changing European public sphere; (2) Changing strategies in gendering discourses; (3) The impact of digital environments on citizens’ empowerment.

The second of the two special issues (Volume 1, Issue 1, 2014) features 12 articles pertaining to the following two topics: (1) Socio-political change at the interface of tradition and modernity; (2) Intercultural approaches to educational change.

The articles in these two issues address the challenges involved by processes of change in context-specific dialogue practices and strategies from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, crossing both geographical and methodological borders. The focus of these studies is on the traditions, principles, purposes and practices of interaction in the public sphere that are part of, and conducive to, societal change. Since language use is crucial in shaping individual and collective identity, social interaction and power patterns, the construction and use of discourse gives meaning to specific events, circumstances, attitudes and actions (Wodak and Meyer, 2009; Van Dijk, 2011). Discourses are used in everyday contexts for building power and knowledge, for regulation and normalization (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), for the development of new knowledge and power relations (Chilton, 2004), and for hegemony (excess influence or authority of one group or nation over another). Moreover, there is increased awareness that changes at the societal level are closely intertwined with changes at the organizational level (Seo and Creed, 2002; Scheuer, S. and Scheuer, J.D., 2008). A particular concern of the articles in these two issues is with the role of language in contemporary social, political and cultural change – for example, how do (changing) uses of language contribute to the multi-voiced discourses in the public sphere, to the changing structure of ‘information society’ (through the impact of digital environments), to the construction of regional, national, trans-national identities, or to effects of ‘globalisation’.

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Change, be it subtle or dramatic, is constantly an integral part of social life, bringing about significant alteration of social structure, behavior patterns and cultural values. Social change refers to variations over time in the ecological ordering of populations and communities, in patterns of roles and social interactions, in the structure and functioning of institutions, and in the cultures of societies. In recent times, two fallacies about social change have been intensively debated. According to the first fallacy, social change is simply a linear movement in time from a traditional past towards a modern future, while old values and institutions are regarded as impediments to changes and obstacles to modernization. The second fallacy is based on the assumption that there is an irreconcilable conflict between old and new traditions and structures, which leads to old traditions and structures being simply displaced by new ones. However, both fallacies have been proved wrong and consequently discarded by a large body of studies which provide alternative interpretations that challenge the assumptions of the traditional-modern polarization. In the dynamic and multi-dimensional reality that we experience daily, tradition and modernity are in fact mutually reinforcing, rather than being mutually excluding systems. It is these two aspects, dialogue-driven continuity in discontinuity, and discontinuity in continuity, that are the focus of the contributions in these two special issues.

The various theories of social change range from those that explain specific factors that cause small-scale changes to abstract and broader theories which attempt to understand underlying trends in the evolution and transformation of human societies. While many societies are currently experiencing dramatic shifts in their political, economic and social structures, there are at least two dominant trends: the increasing democratization of political life, and the rise of complex bureaucratic institutions. The key factors of social change underlying these trends are globalization, technological developments, systemic upheavals, migration and the ensuing multiculturalism and multilingualism. But perhaps the most potentially powerful factors of social change are the people animated by a profound need to communicate and, through public dialogue, to craft a dynamic vision for a more just set of social arrangements in the pursuit of major goals in the service of the common good. The implementation of visionary ideas calls for critically discussing ideas and conceptualizations which take into account the continuously changing nature of societies and communities, and which aim at explicating the interdependence between individuals’ interaction practices and the discursive construction of identities, on the one hand, and their access to full participation in society, on the other.

Some of the major issues of interest discussed in the articles included in these two special journal issues are the following: understanding and fostering the dialogue of tradition and innovation at the interface of the public and private spheres; scrutinizing patterns of social and personal change at micro- and macro-discourse level; identifying divergence and convergence patterns in public narrative and dialogue; identifying new citizen-centred multicultural and social practices in Europe and beyond; analyzing empowering or disempowering paradigm shifts in gendering practices occurring in public and media discourses;
examining societal change articulated in public debate (e.g. media interviews, press conferences, political debates); evaluating bottom-up or top-down societal change (e.g. in processes of political transition, power transfer and empowerment, business outsourcing).

REFERENCES


I. MULTI-VOICED DISCOURSES IN THE CHANGING EUROPEAN PUBLIC SPHERE
UNDERGOING OR ENACTING CHANGE?
SOCIETAL CHANGE AS DISCURSIVE PRACTICE

Cornelia Ilie

“Isn’t it funny how day by day nothing changes, but when you look back, everything is different...” (C.S. Lewis)

Introduction

With changes occurring in all sectors of social and professional activity more regularly and more rapidly than ever before, we are faced with the constantly daunting task of trying to make sense of the sources, mechanisms and effects of these changes. In modern and postmodern socio-political thinking the notion of change has taken centre stage through identifying, analyzing, comparing, disputing different approaches to, or interpretations of change: major or minor changes, economic or political changes, long-term or short-term changes, deliberate or non-deliberate changes, peacefully or coercively implemented changes, successful or failed changes, to name but a few. In the realm of politics a landslide mandate for change occurred in the 2008 US election campaign during which the phrase “Change we can believe in” led to the victory of Barack Obama’s party and his election as President of the United States. And in Europe, François Hollande, challenging Nicolas Sarkozy, opened his 2012 official campaign as a socialist presidential candidate with the slogan “The time for change is now”.

Change has been a recurring buzzword in mainstream institutional discourses promoted at both micro- and macro-levels in the European public sphere during the past few decades. Due to its geopolitical, cultural and ethnic diversity, the EU, as an officially endorsed pan-European body, feels compelled to continuously legitimize its existence and policies both internally and externally. Its communication strategies have largely focused on branding its self-image as a diverse, interdependent and citizen-oriented entity, based on democratic and consensus-seeking principles. As a result, the notion of change has been embraced as a token of the progressive, exploratory and self-regenerating spirit characterising the cultural and geo-political entity represented by the EU. Since the meanings of facts and phenomena are socially co-constructed and communicatively conveyed through language, what matters are not only facts and phenomena in themselves, but how they are perceived and interpreted. Consequently, EU representatives have constantly endeavoured to achieve political influence by articulating carefully constructed meanings of the concept of change that Europeans are expected to respond favourably to.

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Institutional discourse is the result of socio-discursive practices that are meant to establish and legitimize specific well-defined relations between concepts and their meanings. Such practices are generally associated with the notion of ‘soft power’, which was defined by Nye’s (2004) as ‘getting others to want the outcomes you want’ (p. 5) or to shape what others want, not by means of coercion, but by attraction. A frequently used rhetorical strategy of inducing change by attraction is the recourse to the use of euphemisms, which are meant to operate a semantic shift by turning a negative into a positive description, thus dissimulating potentially offensive, repulsive or hurtful expressions, and therefore face-threatening, with agreeable or less offensive expressions that are perceived as face-saving devices. Thereby harsh, unpleasant or negatively sounding words often get replaced with gentler, positive or neutral ones. For example, in many cultures, a doctor is expected and thus likely to say “the patient passed away” rather than “the patient died”. On social and human considerations, the word “unemployed” is increasingly changed with the euphemism “between jobs”. Political discourse in particular displays a great number of euphemisms used as substitutes for distasteful, unpopular or problematic vocabulary, which could alienate or cause offence to the audience or some third party. In order to attract and maintain public support, and ultimately power positions, politicians resort to rhetorical strategies of euphemistic manipulation of people’s minds: for example, instead of explaining the mechanisms of “economic decline” they try to mitigate its negative meaning by speaking about “disinflation” and “negative growth”; and instead of “dismissal from service” or “firing staff” they try to minimize their negative impact by speaking instead of “downsizing” or “workforce adjustment”.

How is change contextually instantiated in official discourses of EU institutions?

Endless examples of such semantically manipulated expressions are to be found in EU official documents. For the purposes of this study, a sizeable number of recent documents issued by the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union have been examined. In order to avoid the negative connotations triggered by the implementation of changes in certain sectors of activity, several ‘watered down’ semantic alternatives are used to replace the straightforward notion of change, as illustrated in extract (1) below:

(1) Now with the proposed package the main common objective of the proposal for the amendment of the Regulation and of the parallel proposal for recast of the Directive is to foster innovation and economic growth by making trade mark registration systems all over the EU more accessible and efficient for businesses in terms of lower costs and complexity, increased speed, greater predictability and legal security. These adjustments dovetail with efforts to ensure coexistence and complementarity between the Union and national
trade mark systems. (Comments by ICC – International Chamber of Commerce – on the European Commission Proposals for Reform of the EU Trade Mark System, 1 July, 2013, p. 2)

This official EU document was prepared by the Commission on Intellectual property and presents a package of initiatives aimed at making trade mark registrations systems in the European Union cheaper, quicker, more reliable and predictable. The largest part of the document (particularly sections 2 “Changes to the Regulation”, 3 “Changes to the Directive” and 4 “Changes to Fees”) is actually devoted to the application of changes (to the regulations and to the directives). One recurrent way of discursively conveying different types, extents and implications of change is simply to refer to this notion by means of other, partly synonymous, terms. In excerpt (1) above, three different euphemistic synonyms are used to substitute the word change, i.e. “amendment”, which is normally defined as a formal or official change made to a law, contract, constitution, or other legal document; “recast”, which is the result of a new form produced by recasting; and “adjustment”, which is a small change that improves something or makes it work better (cf. online Merriam Webster, Macmillan and Oxford dictionaries). The substitution of the word “change” with these three words contributes to conferring a more positive note on the whole passage by directing the reader’s attention to the positively connoted “innovation and economic growth” as outcomes of these changes.

Another way of discursively conveying the notion, extent and implications of change related to EU institutional discourse is to use the word “change” itself, while contextually emphasizing its positive or negative connotations. The rhetoric of change at institutional and inter-institutional levels is often used to legitimize or, on the contrary, to delegitimize planned or ongoing policies, new administrative practices, re-allocation of financial resources, to name but a few. In order to reach ordinary citizens and to obtain their support, various institutional rhetorics of change have been tailoring their appeals to popular concerns and interests. In EU discourses, whether referring to the recent past, the present or the future, change is one of the words most frequently used with regard to the phenomena pertaining to politics, social sciences, economics or ethics. Through its frequent occurrence, the use of the word “change” singles out an ongoing qualitative and paradigmatic shift in the very process of inducing, implementing and monitoring the very process of change.

Theoretical framework of analysis

Processes of change can take different forms and target different outcomes, but above all, they affect, and involve, all members of the respective communities. From a sociological and psychological perspective, a process of change brings to the fore two main categories of agents enacting two basic roles: on the one hand, “change-takers”, who need to follow and adapt to changes determined or decided by other agents, and on the other hand, “change-makers”.
who are responsible for initiating and fostering change (Scheuer, S. and Scheuer, J. 2008). The latter are often acting from positions of power that give them legitimacy and authority to initiate change and persuade others – the “change-takers” – to follow. At the same time we should not lose sight of the fact that change may be more or less legitimate depending on the extent to which it resonates with jointly accepted institutional principles and a widely shared system of norms and beliefs. Moreover, there may be diametrically opposed perspectives on one and the same process of change, depending on the roles and goals of those involved: the same phenomenon or event may be perceived as a welcome change, or as unwanted change.

A relevant parallel to the two categories of agents – change-makers and change-takers – identified by Scheuer, S. and Scheuer, J. can be found in the framework of the semantic theory of semantic, or thematic, roles (Fillmore 1968, Carlson 1984, Jackendoff 1987) which was integrated into a pragma-semantic approach by Ilie (1998, 2005). These semantic roles represent large classes of participants in a communicative event in the sense that they specify who did what to whom. Such a role is associated with a particular participant in an event and it designates his/her relationship with other participants in the same event. This relationship is articulated through the intermediary of the predicate in the sentence reporting the event. Semantic roles are also called participant roles, because they can be viewed as the linguistic encoding of the parts participants play in an event. This is why the term participant role has been adopted in this study to refer to the pragma-semantic interface of the notion of role. The most basic participant roles are Agent (compatible with Change-maker) and Patient (compatible with Change-taker).

Defining change

What do we understand by change, or rather, how do we understand the notion and implications of change in a pragmatic and discourse-analytical perspective? No matter what focus or analytical goal we pursue, we are confronted with the basic issue of distinguishing between two linguistic instantiations: (to) change as a verb and change as a noun (cf. online dictionaries: Merriam Webster, Macmillan and Oxford dictionaries). For the present discussion it is further necessary to understand the nature of the verb “to change”, which is an ergative verb, i.e. a verb that can be used both transitively and intransitively. The following dictionary meanings have been selected for their salience regarding the present analysis:

To change – transitive verb

1

   a : to make different in some particular way: alter <never bothered to change the will>
   b : to make radically different: transform <can’t change human nature>
   c : to give a different position, course, or direction to
a: to replace with another <let’s change the subject>
b: to make a shift from one to another: switch <always changes sides in an argument>

In the transitive meaning, the Agent (+/- animate, performing the action) is the subject of the verb and acts upon a Patient (+/-animate, undergoing the Agent’s action), that undergoes the effects of the action, and is the direct object, as illustrated in (2) below:

(2) The history teacher (Agent, subject) changed her life (Patient, direct object).

To change – intransitive verb

1. to become different <her mood changes every hour>
2. to undergo transformation, transition or substitution <winter changed to spring>
3. to exchange, switch <neither liked his seat so they changed with each other>

In the intransitive meaning, the focus is on a self-empowered Patient role (+/-animate) that is usually placed in initial position and becomes the subject of the verb. There is no ascription of the Agent role in such cases. As a result, the Patient role becomes all important, by assuming the responsibility of achieving the outcome of the action performed by the verb, as illustrated in (3) below:

(3) She (Patient, subject) changed dramatically.

A significant difference between the transitive and the intransitive meanings can be identified at the pragma-semantic level: the transitive use lays the emphasis on the role of the Agent, whereas the intransitive use lays the emphasis on the process or outcome whereby the Patient is in focus. By ascribing the two roles – Agent and Patient – the transitive verb construction enables a more accurate accountability for the outcome than the intransitive verb which ascribes only the role of Patient. This difference between the transitive and intransitive uses emerges more clearly in particular context-specific usages. Whereas a semantic framework of analysis treats these participant roles as more or less static entities that are examined in isolated sentences, a pragmatic framework of analysis enables a contextualization of participant roles both at micro-level, by investigating their word-specific features, and at macro-level, by analysing their dynamic correlation across passages of interconnected utterances. This is particularly relevant in institutional discourses,
which display many-layered, collectively constructed messages addressed to multiple audiences, which share the rhetorical goal of inducing positive reactions, or genuine belief, and ultimately persuading the audience to act in certain ways.

**Shifting uses of the concept of change**

Prototypical change-focused rhetorical strategies are noticeable in widely disseminated official EU documents where the concept of *change* tends to acquire shifting meanings in different discursive contexts. The present analysis is based on randomly selected documents issued by the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union after the 2008 crisis that was followed by a series of institutionally introduced changes meant to operate in social, economic, political and cultural areas across EU member countries. The changes initiated and promoted in EU discourses have been widely discussed and debated, but considerable less attention has been paid to the very discourses recommending and reinforcing change in many EU documents. Whereas the *discourse of change* – in all its forms – has been continuously in the spotlight, the *change of discourse* has been mostly sidelined and overshadowed by the discussions and negotiations regarding the proposed changes. However, underlying those discussions are the actual struggles of competing discourses for assuming the control over the final outcome of master discourses defining, identifying and imposing change throughout the EU region. Eventually, inter-institutional, inter-cultural and inter-personal disputes and divergences had to be reasonably neutralized and euphemized. It is particularly symptomatic that institutional EU discourses about change exhibit changes indicating a gradual marginalization of institutional, as well as social, actors (= pragma-semantic Agents) through rhetorically manipulated discursive practices.

Change has been the default process underlying the evolution of EU institutions and organisations during the last ten years. Thus, between 2005 and 2009, the balance between member states and the Commission was widely reported in the literature as having changed at the expense of the latter (Barbier, 2011). The Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in 2009, introduced institutional grounds for change with the entry into the arena of the new President of the European Council. Moreover, the balance between social and economic actors within the Commission itself (i.e. among Commissioners), as well as the balance between DGs, changed, not least because, with the arrival of Central European member states, centre-right governments were in a majority. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, the “Agenda for Change” (2011) was laboriously worked out and implemented by the European Commission with a view to reducing poverty in a rapidly changing world. A proliferation of the discourses of change has constantly occurred since 2013, when the preparation of the 2014 elections for the European Parliament started. On the whole, however, no specifically targeted changes are being discussed: it is rather the concept of change itself that is being recycled over and over again, gradually gaining ground in the public sphere, as illustrated in the following excerpts:
As times are changing, so are we. Since the last European elections, the rules of the game have changed. The European Parliament now has more power, both to set the political direction of Europe and over the day-to-day decisions which affect us all. A more powerful European Parliament means more influence for everyone, more ability to deal with our problems, more ability to change what needs changing, more assertiveness to conserve what we want to keep. (European Parliament – Elections 2014, The power to decide what happens in Europe, 10-09-2013 - 11:39)

As times have changed, so has the European Parliament. (European Parliament – Elections 2014, Act React Impact, 10-09-2013 - 11:41)

By using the intransitive verb “to change”, the process of change in (4) and (5) is obviously interpreted in rather general terms, which makes the description sound vague since no Agent is identified. There is a noticeable absence of information about the cause(s) of change, the kinds of change and the tangible effects. Both people (As times are changing, so are we) and institutions (“As times have changed, so has the European Parliament”) are described as undergoing change, but the initiation of change is not ascribed to any Agent(s). The Agentlessness is supposed to signal that neither the people, nor the institutions can be held accountable for the respective ongoing changes. In other words, according to the authors of the document, neither the people, nor the European Parliament are treated as playing a significant role in the changes that they have been undergoing. Hence, the changes are ascribed to the indefinite and abstract concept of “times” (“times are changing; times have changed”). However, paradoxically, in (4) this manipulative Agentless use of change points in fact to a contradiction deriving from the juxtaposition of two statements expressing contrary messages about the actual direction taken by the European Parliament: on the one hand, (i) in favour of change – “more ability to change what needs changing”, and, on the other hand, (ii) against change – “more assertiveness to conserve what we want to keep”.

In more recently published reports (by the European Commission) on the new Horizon 2020 programme, the default EU discourse displays an updated rhetoric in a more interactive and dialogic perspective. There are fewer occurrences of instances describing vague, Agent-less “change” like the ones in (4) and (5). Although the verb “to change” is still often used intransitively, i.e. grammatically deprived of Agent, there are contextually explicit mentions of a responsible Agent, as illustrated in (6) below.
Since its creation, the European Union has been constantly changing, shaped by European citizens, and young people represent both its present and its future.


In (6) the verb “to change” is obviously used intransitively (“the European Union has been constantly changing”) and it emphasizes the process of change that the European Union has been undergoing, without ascribing it to any Agent. However, in the subsequent parenthetically introduced explanation (“shaped by European citizens”) an implicit correlation is established between the process of change and an explicitly identified multiple Agent (“European citizens”). Hence, the underlying message of the overall sentence is that the European Union has been shaped by European citizens through successive processes of change. Thereby the multi-level changes undergone by the European Union are explicitly accounted for by ascribing them to the agency of European citizens. In this instance, as well as in a few other instances, we can witness a transition of the emphasis in the rhetoric of change – from the process of (the European Union) undergoing change to the process of (European citizens) enacting change.

There are also several instances in EU documents where the verb “to change” is used transitively, thus providing a clearer and more nuanced description of the situation, as illustrated below:

(7) Economic and monetary integration in Europe, underpinned by the creation of the euro, has changed the landscape of international monetary relations with far reaching impacts both for the EU and its external partners.


In excerpt (7) the verb “to change” is used transitively, which involves an emphasis on the causal relation between the Agent (“Economic and monetary integration in Europe”) and its corresponding Patient (“the landscape of international monetary relations”). Whenever the transitive, rather than the intransitive, use of the verb “to change” is selected, we are provided with a more transparent account and a many-sided picture of the process of change, due to the fact that the transitive verb is supposed to imply, and often to specify, the essential pragma-semantic relation between a change-enacting Agent and a change-undergoing Patient. The paradigm represented by the transition between the transitive and the intransitive uses of the verb “to change” reflects, and at the same time, prompts discursive and rhetorical changes in the assumed value of change as
the driving force of the joint effort towards the harmonization of cross-European social and economic co-construction.

It is apparent that the change-related discourses of EU documents are meant not only to describe changes, but also to evaluate these changes in terms of their causes, effects and feedback on those experiencing them. Consequently, an in-depth analysis of the discourses of change calls for a context-based approach that should not be limited to semantic analysis, but integrate a pragmatic and discourse-analytical framework. Moreover, since change is a diachronic phenomenon par excellence, its multi-layered functioning can most appropriately be explored in a historical perspective (Skinner, 1999; Kosseleck 2002). The shifting use of concepts has been examined in a rhetorical perspective by Skinner, who argued that “there cannot be a history of unit ideas as such, but only a history of the various uses to which they have been put by different agents at different times.” (1999: 62). If we take a closer look at the most frequent occurrences of the concept of change, we will notice that conceptual shifts occurring over time can reveal significant changes in thinking patterns and ways of approaching social phenomena.

An examination of varying uses of the concept of change (as a verb and as a noun) in several documents issued by EU organisations during the past few years reveals shifting meanings in terms of positive vs. negative evaluation. A significant example is the following:

(8)
The reputational risks of not making a change outweigh the risks of making a change.

In (8) an absolute dichotomy between making or not making a change can be seen as a parallel to the intrinsic distinction between the will to change and the wish to keep things unchanged in excerpt (4) above: “A more powerful European Parliament means more influence for everyone, more ability to deal with our problems, more ability to change what needs changing, more assertiveness to conserve what we want to keep”. The following two excerpts illustrate two viewpoints: a positive and a negative evaluation of the process of change:

(9)
At the same time, the Bologna Process attracted worldwide attention and changed the image of European higher education “from being regarded as a (rather sclerotic?) collection of traditional but administratively hidebound institutions to being seen as more dynamic, composed of modern and potentially more entrepreneurial institutions” (Scott 2009a:7).
But even in countries where institutions still benefit from or had no reductions in public funding (e.g., Sweden), there is a fear that the situation will change in the future.

The positive perception of change in (9) is conveyed through the transitive use of the verb “to change” which requires the specification of an initiating Agent (“the Bologna Process”) and a concrete Patient that undergoes change (“the image of European higher education”): “the Bologna Process [...] changed the image of European higher education”. Typically, this positive meaning of change is further reinforced by adding concrete details that are intended to enhance the persuasive force of the statement. In (10) the negative perception of change is expressed through the intransitive use of the verb “to change” whose action is not ascribed to any Agent. Instead its meaning is associated with the co-occurring notion of “fear”, which expresses a negative but rather vague feeling of insecurity: “there is a fear that the situation will change”.

It is apparent from the discussion and illustrative examples above that the notion of change – whether conveyed by a noun or by a (transitive/intransitive) verb – has the potential to set the tone and impact the content of the recent and currently prevalent discourse in representative European institutions. Depending on the issues under debate, the historical moment, as well as the prevalence of divergent or convergent voices, the shifting discourse of choice in official EU documents can be perceived as both reflecting and shaping the social-political agendas of certain influential Agents of change.

Concluding remarks

The range of changes that have been taking place in the ongoing process of European integration is rooted in a complex system of shared beliefs, values and ideals, as well as of diverse perceptions, assumptions and expectations. Against such a complex social, cultural, and geo-political background, the notion of change has been at the heart of position-takings, debates and choices made by European citizens and their representative institutions. For obvious reasons, not all changes can be unanimously accepted, which makes the overall discussions on the pros and cons of proposals for change a constant and valuable feature that contributes to shaping EU institutional discourse at all levels.

The aim of this study has been to capture and explore the shifting interpretations of change as a socio-political paradigm and a discursive strategy in...
EU policy-making and policy-reviewing documents. The analysis has focused on identifying competing perspectives and representations of change as a positive vs. negative challenge (i.e. as a valuable opportunity or as a potential danger), as a randomly occurring Agentless process vs. a deliberately pursued institutional and popular goal. Methodologically, a major emphasis has been on the conceptualization of change articulated at the interface of semantic and pragmatic levels of discourse in terms of the interaction of participant roles. The use of a pragma-semantic approach to change as a phenomenon, process and goal, has made it possible to establish relevant correlations between the discourse of change and the change of discourse which have been manifest in a wide range of EU documents over the last ten years. A significant finding is that the change-related discourses of EU documents are often meant not only to describe changes, but also to evaluate these changes in terms of their causes, effects and feedback of those experiencing them.

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EU – FROM MEDIA DISCOURSE TO CITIZENS’ INTERPERSONAL CONVERSATION AGENDAS

Oana Ștefăniță

Abstract: The paper addresses the role of media in the Europeanization process, in determining the transition from a Romanian public sphere to a Europeanized Romanian public sphere, by analyzing the influence of media coverage of European topics on people’s discussions about the European Union. The Europeanization of media discourse is an essential step in the construction of a Europeanized public sphere (Koopmans & Erbe, 2003; Brüggemann & Königslöw, 2009), and a key element of the theoretical frame of the realist model that guides the analysis (de Vreese, 2007). However, a Europeanized media communication model does not necessarily ensure the interest of citizens or their involvement in discussions regarding EU topics. For an accurate analysis of the Europeanization process of the national public sphere, both levels should be considered. Therefore, the research consisted in a comparative approach between media coverage of the EU topics and their reflections on citizens’ conversations and attitudes towards EU.

In order to analyze the Europeanization process at the level of media discourse a quantitative research was conducted which consisted in a content analysis of a corpus of 6626 news from March 2013 on the two main online news portals in Romania, ziare.com and hotnews.ro (according to the ranking on trafic.ro). We aimed to see how visible and prominent are the news on EU topics as compared to other types of news in the online Romanian media; which are the most visible actors in the European news and whether the EU topics are presented from a European or a national perspective.

To analyze the short-term media effects, the transition of EU subjects and perspectives from media to citizens’ interpersonal conversation agenda, 20 interviews were conducted at the end of March 2013 among Romanian master students to see how young and educated people relate to EU topics and get involved in discussions. The research questions that guided the analysis were: Which are the European topics that raised people’s interest or determined them to enter discussions, and to what extent the topics match those covered in the media?; To what actors they refer mostly when discussing EU topics as compared to the most visible actors at the news level?; Which is the contextualization of the EU topics within discussions and to what extent it corresponds to the one prevailing in the news?

The results indicate a lack of real connectivity to the European Union as a whole both at the level of media coverage, and at the level of citizens’ interest since the Europeanization of the national public sphere is in its early stages. The aspects that have a national impact or a direct relevance for personal activities are still the main ones that stimulate the interest in EU topics and the involvement in discussions.

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Keywords: public sphere; Europeanization; Europeanized national public spheres; media coverage; citizens’ agenda; EU visibility; EU prominence; EU actors; contextualization; people’s interest.

Theoretical background

The European Public Sphere – models and perspectives

The concept of European public sphere appeared as a necessity to favor the Europeanization process, the integration at all levels within the EU, from an economic to a political level. According to the “White Paper on a European Communication Policy”, there is a gap between the European Union and its citizens and the solution consists in using communication in the service of citizens. Thus, the paper emphasizes the need for a “European dimension”, for a “European public sphere” where the European debate can unfold.2

The concept of public sphere was defined by Jürgen Habermas as “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body.”3 In the trans-national multi-lingual context, the concept of public sphere becomes very communication-centered4 and media have a central role in sustaining the communication flow.5 Furthermore, the classical theory of the public sphere as an area for the communicative generation of public opinion is linked to the concepts of nation-state and sovereign power, but in the context of interdependency among states, the concept of public sphere should be perceived as “discursive arenas that overflow the bounds of both nations and states”.6

Regarding the European public sphere, we can relate to three models – the utopian, the elitist and the realist models. In the utopian perspective, the European public sphere is perceived as a singular, supra-national, pan-European public sphere, a communicative space which requires a shared identity, a transnational media system and a common language.7 From the elitist perspective, we only relate

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6 Fraser 7.
to segmented transnational public spheres, which are based on communicative spaces at national levels on a specific subject, determined by media with global or European outreach, and thus involving mainly elites in the politic or economic fields. The realist model relates to the Europeanization of the national public spheres and includes an increased coverage of European subjects and an evaluation of those issues that transcend the interests of one country.

Therefore, a European, supra-national public sphere implies discussing the same themes, at the same time, at similar levels of attention across national public spheres and media; using similar frames of reference and patterns of interpretation, having a transnational community of communication, and citizens observing each other across national spaces, but perceiving EU as an issue of common concern for them. A European public sphere requires the same conditions as a national public sphere, a common language, a European-wide media system, citizens developing an increased interest in the EU issues and a feeling of European identity, simultaneous reporting and discussion of European issues seen in a European perspective and perceived within a shared frame of relevance.

However, the criteria for a European public sphere are mostly missing as there is no real common interest for EU issues, no political uniformity, no official common language, no common tradition or culture and no significant European media. Although the infrastructure of a general public sphere in EU is not completely missing and English can substitute the common language, it does not seem sufficient to determine a collective interest or a feeling of collective identity. Furthermore, there is a lack of a real connection between institutional debates and a general public debate. The EU is even confronted with the lack of a European public as this is sectoral, socially highly selective and it might include actors that are not located within the EU official borders. Therefore, as the criteria for a European public are not yet achieved, more researchers turn to the process of Europeanization of the national public spheres also called the “realist model”, and especially to the media-driven ways of supporting the Europeanization process, this being also the pattern that guided the present research. To support the Europeanization process, the media have to cover the EU topics from a European perspective.

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8 Idem.
9 Ibidem, 10-11.
Overall, the Europeanization of the national public spheres can represent the solution in bridging the gap between the national level and the European level and reduce the democratic deficit of the EU. Media have a central role within the realist model and they can increase citizens’ support and involvement in European debates through ensuring the informational basis for deliberation. Moreover, growing citizens’ interest and spreading a European perspective when covering or debating European topics are also part of the conditions. The Europeanization of the national public spheres is an essential step for developing the political dimension of the Union and thus, for consolidating and developing the European project.

Media discourse – from national to European

Media are an essential factor in the Europeanization process as they increase the level of understanding for the European issues by providing information and enhance the level of accessibility, by urging debates, by attracting the public support for the EU projects, and by raising citizens’ interest and involvement. The main tools are the agenda setting and the coverage perspective whereby they can ensure the visibility of the European topics and provide a European perspective detrimental to the national interests and perspectives.

According to the media type and media involvement in the Europeanization process, three phenomena can occur: the emergence of a supranational European public sphere (this implies interaction among European institutions and actors on European topics through the means of a European-wide media); vertical Europeanization (implies communicative linkages between the European level and the national one); horizontal Europeanization (implies communicative linkages between different member states). By mixing the vertical and horizontal dimensions, four types of Europeanization resulted: comprehensive Europeanization – the vertical and horizontal levels of Europeanization are present; segmented Europeanization – the vertical level prevails, an increased attention is paid to EU as an entity, and not to member states; Europeanization aloof from the EU – the horizontal level prevails, the communicative exchanges among member-states; a parochial public sphere – neither a vertical, nor a horizontal Europeanization is present in the national media.

Therefore, the Europeanization process can be supported by an increased coverage of European topics in national media. Some indicators of an Europeanized communication can be that EU officials are starting to debate with protagonists from other places, different actors from EU member states take part in debates on common issues and agree upon solutions, similar topics are discussed simultaneously in the media of several EU states, EU protagonists from different states interact through national media inquiries, Brussels’ policies are present on the media agenda from EU member states. However, by simply providing an increased visibility of the EU topics, we cannot speak about a Europeanized communication system or about a European public, especially if the messages remain attached to national viewpoints. A Europeanized communication implies spreading a European perspective on issues that transcend the national interests or the national impact. Another limit is given by the citizens’ lack of interest in European topics, since a Europeanized public sphere implies the citizens’ interest in EU issues caused by a frequent need for information.

In conclusion, a Europeanized media discourse serves to ensure information and knowledge so as to provide the necessary support for people to discuss, participate and form opinions. Media should grow the appetite and interest for EU topics beyond the national interests and the national impact of the EU issues by providing a European perspective. Thus, a Europeanized media discourse can make a major contribution in developing the Europeanization process and in accomplishing the steps that lead towards a Europeanized national public sphere through enabling an open deliberative communicative space.

Methodology

The research addresses the role of media in the Europeanization of the national public sphere by analyzing the influence of media coverage of European topics on people’s discussions. Therefore, the approach consisted in a comparative approach between media coverage of the EU topics and their reflections at the level of citizens’ interest and discussions.

The research questions guiding the analysis were:
RQ1: How visible and prominent are the European topics compared to other issues?
RQ2: Who are the most visible actors in the European topics and what is the prevailing coverage perspective (national or European)?

RQ3: Which are the European topics that raised people’s interest or persuaded them to enter discussions, and to what extent did the topics match those covered in the media?

RQ4: To what actors do citizens refer mostly when discussing EU topics as compared to the most visible actors in the media?

RQ5: What is the contextualization of the EU topics in discussions and to what extent does it correspond to the one prevailing in the news?

In order to analyze the Europeanization process at the level of media discourse a quantitative research was conducted. The approach consisted in a content analysis of a corpus of 6626 articles from March 2013 and published on the two main online news portals in Romania, ziare.com and hotnews.ro. The analyzed period included important events for EU such as the rejection of the 2014-2020 EU budget; the severe crisis in Cyprus; discussions on the UK’s proposal to leave EU as a reaction to the imposed bonus regime; and the rejection of Romania’s and Bulgaria’s request to join the Schengen area at the JHA Council.

To analyze the short-term media effects, the transition of EU topics and perspectives from media to citizens’ interpersonal conversation agenda, 20 interviews were conducted at the end of March 2013 among Romanian master students to see how young and educated people relate to EU topics and get involved in discussions. The students were asked about the European topics that raised their interest or persuaded them to engage in discussions about aspects related to media consumption, about their perspective on the most visible actors in the media and about those they refer to in conversations, and about the contextualization of EU topics in discussions. To determine the influence of media coverage of European topics on people’s interest and discussions about the European Union we compared the content analysis data with the data from the interviews.

Findings

The visibility and prominence of the European topics

The content analysis included 6626 news published on March 2013, 64.7% on ziare.com and 35.3% on hotnews.ro. In terms of visibility, the EU issues represented only 12.9%. Considering the data resulted from previous research, the visibility level from March 2013 is still under the European level, which is around 20%. The most visible EU topics were the Euro crisis – 27.7%, Romania and Bulgaria’s adhesion to the Schengen area – 25.6%, and subjects related to society 18.8%.

21 The portals are on the sixth position - ziare.com and eleventh position - hotnews.ro at the news section, the other ranks being held by the online versions of newspapers, according to the ranking published by trafic.ro. March, 2013.

In what concerns the visibility progress of the European topics, two visibility peaks were registered. On 3-6 March with the highest visibility peak on 4 March since in this period Romania and Bulgaria’s request to join the Schengen area was rejected at the JHA Council. Following the declaration of the German minister for internal affairs in which he announced Germany’s opposition regarding the admission of the two countries, several European leaders and Romanian politicians started heated discussions over the issue. The second visibility peak was on 25-26 March and concerned the crisis in Cyprus, the consequences of the euro crisis and the discussions over the possibility that Cyprus might leave the eurozone. The consequences of the crisis were also felt in Romania through the closing of some Cypriot banks in our country. Therefore, the high visibility of the topics was also due to the national impact.

Fig. 1 - The evolution of visibility for the European issues on each portal, March 2013

Overall, regarding the visibility of European issues, we cannot state that media have allocated an important number of articles and editorials to cover these topics. Additionally, even the most important EU issues were covered from a national perspective with references to the local context and to internal economic consequences, or with references to other member states and to their actions, but not to EU as a single entity.

The analysis on the prominence of European topics shows the number of registered views in favor of European issues as compared to other topics, and the number of comments. The number of views and comments are variables that can offer information regarding the citizens’ interest and their availability to get involved in debates with other online readers. The average number of views for the European topics is 4142.7, while the average for the other topics is 2754.6. In what concerns the number of comments, the average for the European topics is 14.0, while for other topics is 7.0. The European topics were mostly from the political field and this area attracts a large number of comments. Furthermore, the events that took place in March 2013 as the rejection of Romania and Bulgaria’s adhesion to the Schengen area, the crisis in Cyprus that lead to the closing of some bank subsidiaries in Romania had a national impact.

Therefore, the most commented topics and the most visualized ones were about the Schengen case, respectively the rejection of Romania and Bulgaria’s
adhesion so the citizens’ interest and involvement in discussions was given by the national impact. Furthermore, the perspective from which these subjects were covered was a national one and the most visible actors were the national ones as well.

The coverage perspective and the presence of actors in the European topics

Regarding the analysis of the actors, we aimed at identifying the types of actors that are present in the European topics, to see if the most visible ones are European actors, national ones, European institutions or the leaders of the member states. The most visible actors are the countries – 51.8%, the national actors – 15.3% and European institutions 8.7%. There are no major differences between the two portals, but hotnews.ro focuses more on European institutions and actors from EU member states, while ziare.com on countries and national actors.

For a better representation of the actors, we grouped them into national actors, European actors and non-EU international actors. The European actors represented only 56.6% of the actors mentioned in the European topics. By grouping the actors in countries, institutions and persons, we could observe that the countries are the most prominent – 51.7%. Considering the distribution of the actors featuring in the European topics, the EU actors prevail, although they are represented mostly by countries and the difference between them and the national actors is reduced.

In what concerns the contextualization of the European topics, the approach angle is the internal one – 55.4%, followed be the European perspective – 41.6% and the non-EU international perspective 3.0%. Since the prevailing perspective is the national one, the Europeanization process is not effectively supported by the media discourse. Media still focus on the issues that affect the national level, that have a direct impact on Romania. The Europeanization of the national public sphere is an obstructed process if there is no real interest for EU as a whole, for the effects of the events at the European level, and not only at the national level.
The European topics at the level of citizens' conversation agendas

To analyze the media effects, the transition of the EU topics and perspectives from media to the citizens, we conducted 20 interviews with Romanian master students to see how young, educated students relate to the EU issues. Regarding the interest for European topics, the interviewees are interested in what happens at the EU level, but especially concerning the national effects of the European issues (9 out of 20) and the important events that are highly visible in the media or have an impact on their work (7 out of 20). Four interviewees are not interested in the European topics.

“I am not particularly interested, but if there is an important and interesting issue that is internationally or nationally debated and it has an echo in the media, then yes.” (O.D., 24)

“I don’t watch EU topics or look at talk-shows on the EU issues; they don’t represent a point of interest for me.” (C.U., 24)

If we relate to March 2013, only 8 out of 20 respondents watched EU topics in this period either to keep up to date with the EU events and decisions, or to look for useful information in their working field. The interviewees watched and remembered mostly subjects related to the euro crisis, especially the crisis in Cyprus (9 out of 20), and the rejection of Romania and Bulgaria’s adhesion to the Schengen area (6 out of 20).

Regarding the citizens’ discussions on EU topics, most interviewees discuss very little (8 out of 20) and only if there is something important and very visible in the media or if the issue has a great influence on Romania or on their lives. Seven interviewees do not discuss at all on EU topics, while five try to discuss especially with persons from whom they might learn something.

“(I discuss) Only if it seems to have an impact on us (on the country), on me, if it could potentially influence my future.” (I.M., 24)

“I don’t discuss at all on topics related to EU and I don’t comment in general. They don’t constitute the topic of my discussions with my friends or my family.” (C.U., 24)

In what concerns the actors mentioned by the interviewees as being the most present in the European topics, the most visible was the German chancellor Angela Merkel (15 out of 20). On a second level were the national actors especially the president Traian Băsescu (10 out of 20) and the premier Victor Ponta (8 out of 20) followed by other ministers and politicians. The other mentioned topics regarded the member states, mostly Germany, Cyprus, France and Greece and the European institutions, especially the European Parliament and the European Commission. Comparing the interviewees’ responses to the media analysis for March 2013, the classification is very similar to the observation that at the news level, the countries are the most prominent.
Regarding the perceived contextualization in the media, the interviewees clearly indicated the national perspective, the national impact approach (18 out of 20). Only two said that the European perspective prevails when presenting the EU related issues. When discussing about European topics, the interviewees opt for the same perspectives as the ones perceived in the media so the national approach prevails.

“National (perspective), clearly. For the general view, there is the tendency to explain and show the effects, the impact of the European actions on us. In the end, this is what interests us. If some prices rise in Europe, they will rise here for sure too, and not the other way around. The national impact seems very important to me.” (O.D., 24)

“The national impact. How it is for us, how it affects us and that’s it. I rarely happen to see an article that also talks about something else.” (O.A., 23)

Overall, people’s interests and involvement in discussions about the EU are influenced by the subjects approached in the media as they relate and discuss on the most visible media topics. The citizens take up the most prominent issues and actors in their discussions about EU topics and they use the prevailing media perspectives in evaluating the European issues. However, the citizens’ interest in the EU is mostly related to issues that might affect the country or their work and not to subjects that concern the EU as a whole.

**Discussions and conclusion**

In the context of the European crisis and considering the deficits of democracy and legitimacy, the European Union needs an increased communication with its citizens. Without taking into account the citizens’ voice, without the Europeanization of the national public spheres, without a sense of affiliation to a European identity, the EU cannot develop its political dimensions to become a federation.

Media have an essential role in sustaining the Europeanization process so they can bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens and can increase the general involvement and the cohesion among member states. Therefore, to analyze the influence of media coverage of European topics on people’s discussions, we conducted a comparative research between the media visibility and prominence of the European issues and their reflections on citizens’ perspectives.

Considering the visibility of the EU topics, in March 2013 only 12.9% of the articles were on European subjects so the media coverage of EU issues is still under the European average. Furthermore, the visibility peaks for EU topics regarded the rejection of Romania and Bulgaria’s adhesion to the Schengen area and the crisis in Cyprus along with the possible withdrawal of the country from the eurozone. Both issues had national implications as the first case determined some heated discussions among the national politicians, while in the second case, the
severe crisis led also to the closure of some Cypriot bank subsidiaries in Romania. Therefore, the most visible subjects had national implications and their main coverage perspective was a national one.

In what regards the prominence of the EU topics, the most commented issues and the most visualized ones were about the Schengen case, respectively the rejection of Romania and Bulgaria’s’ adhesion. Therefore, the citizens’ interest and involvement in discussions was given by the national impact. Furthermore, the national actors had a high presence in the European topics. In what concerns the contextualization of the European topics, the predominant perspective is still the national one so we could say that the Europeanization process is not effectively supported by the media discourse.

If we consider the most visible and prominent EU topics, and the issues mentioned by the citizens as points of interest and discussions, we can see that the two plans are almost similar. The issues that are highly visible in the media and those that may affect the national plan or their work, are those that capture the citizens’ interest. Media influences their agenda as well as their perspectives. The actors they mention the most are those that were visible in the news. However, they refer mostly to leaders of the other member states and to national actors, this indicating that the Europeanization process is reduced and it has more elements of horizontal Europeanization than elements of the vertical dimension. Furthermore, the citizens are interested in topics that approach the national consequences and not in issues that regard the EU as a single entity. The prevailing contextualization both in the media and in citizens’ discussion is the national one. Without a European perspective, the Europeanization process is practically obstructed.

Overall, the citizens’ interest in European topics is either related to the most visible topics in the media, or to those issues that affect the national plan or their activities. Moreover, they discuss very little about European issues and their conversations agenda contains topics with high level of media visibility or with a direct impact on their personal plan. Therefore, the Europeanization process requires more support at the level of media discourse through increased media coverage of EU topics and a European perspective.

In conclusion, the Europeanization of the national public sphere is a shy process as debate is almost missing and the media coverage of EU topics still does not succeed in transcending the national interests and perspectives. National media should commit to developing a comprehensive Europeanization process through a Europeanized discourse since so far they favored the Europeanization aloof the EU. Since information is the base for involvement and debate, a Europeanized communication will increase the interest of the citizens without which a Europeanized public sphere is not possible.

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POLITICAL SATIRE ON TELEVISION: 
HOW POLITICAL SATIRE ENCOURAGES CRITICAL 
AWARENESS OF POLITICAL ISSUES 
AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE FORMATION OF A CIVIC CULTURE

Francesca Ruggieri

Abstract: This study examines the nature of political satire on UK and Italian Television, starting from the phenomenon of popular politics. It takes a new approach to the concept of political activity that needs to be revised to fit with our continuously evolving culture, the one dominated by popular media. Political satire, in particular, plays an important role in the “New Political Television” providing a level of truthfulness that cannot be accessed by traditional news programs (Jones, 2005).

Keywords: satire; politics; citizenship; pop politics; television; democracy; active citizen; information; political awareness; civic culture.

1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to examine the nature of political satire on UK and Italian Television. It is not easy to define this concept in the two national contexts: first of all, there is a limited amount of relevant material on this topic, Secondly the concept of political satire is so very complex as a result of its long and diverse history. Therefore, to carry on the investigation, it will be necessary to take into consideration the international studies which have been carried out in this sector and in particular in the U.S.A.

I will contextualize political satire within the phenomenon of popular politics, drawing on the work of earlier international scholars, such as Postman, Kellner and Putnam, as well as recent ones, such as Van Zoonen, Jones and Holbert. I will then analyze the phenomenon of political satire on television as has been appraised by those scholars who have discussed the existent relationship between politics, television and audience, in terms of democratic citizenship. In particular, I will use the research conducted by Jones and Gray on some American TV programs.

Through the analysis of the satirical English program “Yes, Prime Minister” and the Italian one “Italiland”, the questions I will ask are: how does political satire – in particular, irony and jokes – encourage critical awareness of political issues? To what extent does satire contribute to the formation of a civic awareness?

This research work allows an understanding of a fascinating and highly topical area of interest that has been overlooked for a long time. Existing sociological and political studies have focused for a long time on the direct forms

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of political communication and have seen the media as the cause of passive citizenship.

The following section of this paper is developed in different stages, in order to investigate to which extent political satire on TV, is a new form of democracy. In particular political satire is contextualized within the wider phenomenon of pop politics and therefore it is considered in its connection with politics. Moreover the genre will be defined in relation to the television context and the audience.

2. Definitions of pop politics

What is the meaning of pop politics? How does it act on the audience?

First of all, it is necessary to give a definition to the concept of “Pop Politics”. Baym believes that in the last few years it has been possible to observe:

“A wider turn toward discursive integration: the emergence of a media environment defined by the collapse of previous distinctions among once-differentiated genres, social practices, and discursive fields. In this environment, politics and popular culture, information and entertainment, laughter and argument, the real and the surreal have become deeply inseparable, fluidly interlaced in differing discursive blends on a nightly basis.”

In particular according to Mazzoleni, Pop Politics “means that events and personalities, stories and words that belong to the political environment become, thanks to the media and in particular to television, arguments of interest, discussion and entertainment.”

For many scholars who study the phenomena, democracy is in decline in America. The primary threat is not any particular administration or political platform. The most serious threat, insidious because of its banality, comes from the modern media and in particular from television. Several books that have dealt with this subject – such as “Amusing Ourselves to Death” by Neil Postman, “Television and the Crisis of Democracy” by Douglas Kellner and “Bowling Alone” by Robert Putnam - criticize the impact that media have on the civic culture and on the public sphere.

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These authors collectively argue that television has transformed the United States from an active, engaged and informed country, into a nation of passive, noncritical pseudo-citizens, increasingly cynical and easily manipulated by media and political elites. However, the perspective of this group of authors is quite dated.

Instead of blaming the TV and the other modern media, academics like Van Zoonen and Jones try to find possible democratic moments within political entertainment. Their intent is just to find positive, active, thoughtful, democratic moments in contemporary media.9

In particular, Van Zoonen in “Entertaining the Citizen” tries to demonstrate how entertainment can provide a context to contemplate the concept of citizenship and how it becomes the environment in which citizenship can flourish.10

According to the author, pop politics means both pop representation of political events and of its protagonists and the use of pop codes by the politic actors.

Van Zoonen insists on the positive influence of the convergence between politics and popular culture, which she believes strengthens democratic awareness and political citizenship. And television, in this process, is considered as the main source of popular culture because it provides more entertainment to the audience than any other medium.

Jones in “Entertaining Politics” focuses his attention on what he calls new political television: television that uses satire, humor and common sense arguments to analyze current political topics, specifically “Politically Incorrect” with Bill Maher, “The Daily Show” with Jon Stewart and “Dennis Miller Live”.

Like Van Zoonen, Jones wonders if what she referred to as the modernist ideal of citizenship is no longer the norm, or if it ever was. Perhaps the problem is not that television and popular culture are turning us into vapid, disengaged pseudo-citizens, but that the model of the rational, engaged, fully informed citizen does not take into consideration new ways in which citizens can actually participate in politics.

Jones demonstrates that the new political television encourages an active civic participation in political activity, as is confirmed by analyzing audience engagement for “Politically Incorrect”. The audience members view the show as more representative of their political fears and apprehension that are not currently being addressed by political and media elites.

Thus, according to Jones, new political television provides interesting and relevant reasons to think and talk about politics.

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Also Holbert\textsuperscript{11} has similar perspectives in his article “A typology for the study of entertainment television and politics”. His empirical reveals that audience members actively engage the sociopolitical messages offered via entertainment content thanks to the individual-level of selectivity and they ultimately interpret it in a political context.

The next section will therefore analyse political satire in more depth and particularly in relation to how it acts on citizens.

3. Political satire on television

3.1. The definition of political satire

This section focuses on the importance of political satire as a form of pop politics. It aims to understand what makes satire a politically important form of critique, and how it is distinguished from other comedic forms.

As a form of political discourse, two of the most important components of this definition are the verbal \textit{attack} that in some way passes \textit{judgment} on the object of the attack. So it is the ability to attack power and pass judgment on the powerful that makes satire a particularly potent form of political communication.\textsuperscript{12}

Therefore satirists see their job as helping “to distinguish right from wrong in society and willing to attack the wrong without reservation.”\textsuperscript{13}

3.2. An underused genre

In “Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era”\textsuperscript{14}, Gray and Jones want to underline the relationship between television comedy, politicians and political process. According to these authors television satire is flourishing in the post-network era.

Thus, whereas news more often presents politics as something to learn, satire not only offers meaningful political critiques, but also encourages viewers to play with politics, to examine it, test it and question it rather than simply consume it as information or \textit{truth}. Satire TV offers viewers a means for playful engagement with politics that has been sorely missing\textsuperscript{15}.

3.3 Satire, television and audience

While satire has no requirement to be funny, television networks and producers generally expect it to be, seeing it as another form of ‘comedy’, “that

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Cf. Gray, Jonathan, and Jones, Jeffrey P., 2009.
\item Cf. Gray, Jonathan and Jones Jeffrey P., 2009.
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should be comprised of the same textual features and produce the same audience reactions as a sitcom or variety show.”  

But satire is a much more complicated process that:

“Asks that its audience engage in a dialogue of a special kind. In addition to making associations, the audience is expected to assimilate the special mixture of aggression, play, laughter, and judgment that is set before it.”

Furthermore, satire tends to require a heightened state of awareness and mental participation in its audience that network television infrequently demands. It provides important narrative critiques that enable democratic discourse and deliberation, rather than news that for years theorists have tended to emphasize.

Satire is something that entertains, makes us think critically, something that comes from us as an audience looking for a laugh, as citizens desiring meaningful engagement with public life. Gradually, satire TV has crept up on the news as one of the preeminent genres used to understand varied political realities in the early twenty-first century.

Satire has been, for a long time, an underused genre. It has been criticized, along with television, to make spectators passive citizens uninvolved in political life. However, new American studies, demonstrate how this genre is actually a new tool of democracy, able to turn the audience into an active maker of political contents.

In spite of that, the studies of political satire and its effect on the audience, are still presenting some shortfalls in empirical research. Particularly in Italy and in the UK, none of the scholars investigated the subject in such a deep way as did Jones in the US. Therefore this research tries to remedy these gaps in the field of proof to which extent effectively satire can be considered as a new tool of democracy within the two national contexts.

4. Italy and the UK: two different perspectives on democracy

After a deep understanding of the American scenario, it has been interesting to compare it with the results of my research conducted in Italy and the UK. With this work I want to prove how the “new political television” creates a new political awareness among the audience. In particular my research is developed in the attempt to answer to two main researchable questions:

- How does political satire – in particular, irony and jokes – encourage critical awareness of political issues?

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18 Cf, Jones, Jeffry P., 2005
To what extent does satire contribute to the formation of a civic awareness?

Therefore it can be said that this kind of research is focused on the qualitative aspect rather than on the quantitative one.

This work is developed on the focus group methodology, a good way to ask members about their perceptions and opinions towards the viewing of the chosen program. It allows to direct observation of to what extent the members of the group believe that political satire is an important tool of democracy.

After the projection of a satirical program and through the questions that the moderator asked, the members were encouraged to discuss and compare their opinions with the other members.

Therefore it was possible to verify how the sample reacted to the satirical programs and establish to what extent the initial hypothesis of my research has been justified or contradicted.

4.1 Focus Group Structure

On the day of the data collection, the program chosen for the discussion was presented to the participants. In particular I showed an episode of “Italiland” to the Italian group and one of “Yes, Prime Minister” to the English one.

The focus groups, composed of 6 people, started with a dichotomous questionnaire where the participants were asked to answer the political issues later presented in the episode shown. The members of the two focus groups were asked to put a tick on one of the two possible responses: “true” or “false”, in order to have a general idea of the initial preparation of the participants on the topics to be discussed, and afterwards check the new level of preparation they achieved at the end of the discussion.

After the questionnaire, the Italian and the English samples were shown to an episode of the two shows chosen for the research, in order to open, at a later stage, the discussion.

4.2 The discussion

The first part of the investigation addressed general topics such as the existing relationship between politics, television and satire on the one hand and the role of the viewers considered as active citizens on the other.

The second session of the focus group included more specific questions inherent in the episode and the political issues developed during the program. Thanks to the discussion it was possible to observe which were the points that influenced more the members, how their awareness on specific subjects was changed and how the interaction and the discussion made them feel an active part in the political process.

Political satire can be considered as a mirror of society, it represents what people are, what they think, how they behave. Therefore the outcomes that emerged from the research are very disparate from one country to the other, as they reflect the civic culture of each place.
4.3 Italian group

Italy is clearly facing a deep crisis, that is not just economic, but it is also concerning the political leadership and, indeed, the idea of democracy. A program like “Italiland” by Maurizio Crozza, represents exactly the new political television that Jones describes. In fact, after the viewing of the show, the sample of people involved in the focus group increased its awareness on political and economic issues.

The transmission of Maurizio Crozza, can be considered a hybrid between entertainment and satirical one-man show. It is one of the few cases in Italy, even more if you consider that is transmitted from a theater and not from a television studio.

The comedian, with a strong charisma, conducts the entire show with a great capacity of entertainment and satirical invective directed at politicians in office. He successfully entertains the audience, encouraging their laughter with sharp jokes and imitations. Crozza simulates the politicians, taking on their physical appearances and behavior with great versatility and creating paradoxical gags.

Crozza, therefore, with his incredible mime, creates a show that can entertain, but at the same time criticize and ridicule the political protagonists of Italy.

Moreover, from the dichotomous questionnaire, it emerged that the episode was also really useful to improve the knowledge of the spectators about political issues.

Below is a chart with the answers given in the dichotomous questionnaire before and after the projection of the episode of “Italaland”.

As can be observed from the table, after the viewing the participants had considerably increased their knowledge. At the end of the program all members gave the right answers to the questionnaire. It means that the program really helped them to improve their political awareness regarding Italian politics.

One of the participants said: “This program is even better than our TV news” and another continued: “Yes, I agree. TV news is fictional, fake, it’s made to support the politicians, whereas this program is authentic. It shows the scandals that are behind the power”. Another one said: “This comedian represents the Italians, our distrust in the institutions, our desire to change”. In other words, as Gray and Jones would affirm, this program is clearly an important tool of democracy. The use of the pop codes becomes an important form of political communication: the audience feels represented in its ideas and in its needs, the political satire leads to an active civic participation.

Therefore, politics is not addressed to be discussed and analyzed in its contents, but it is itself the object of mockery with its forms and its protagonists.
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<td>TRUE</td>
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<tr>
<td>1) Italy is involved in the economic crisis.</td>
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<td>2) The Lega Party used public money for personal interests.</td>
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<td>3) Italy has the highest corruption in Europe.</td>
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<td>4) Article 18 of the Constitution hasn’t been changed.</td>
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<td>5) In Italy there is an increasing number of people that are evading taxes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6) The new political party “5 Stelle” took 10% of votes at the last political elections.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7) The “Lega” Party won the last political elections.</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>8) Italy has the higher debt in the EU.</td>
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<td>9) Italians pay 150 million Euros each year for the life annuity of the Members of the Parliament.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>10) The Minister Giovanardi suggests anti-homosexuality policy.</td>
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<td>11) The Italian public debt doesn’t exceed the allowed threshold.</td>
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Figure 1
4.4. English group

On the other side there is English satire. Unlike the Italian satirical programs, the English ones are more moderate: they don’t attack directly the corrupted system, but they make fun of the politicians in a moderate way. English sarcasm is always masked, caustic but never offensive, humorous but not satirical.

“Yes, Prime Minister” is a satirical sitcom where all the characters are fictional and they just evoke the real leaders. It is a series of political satire that had been broadcast since 1980 on BBC 2 and more recently this year a new series. Each episode is about some of the main political and economic issues that affect the UK, but they are presented in a fictional context.

However, instead of what happened in Italy, this program didn’t have such a strong impact on the political knowledge of the spectators. In fact the chart below shows how the political awareness of each participant didn’t improve significantly after the episode.

As it can be observed, after the projection the participants had increased their knowledge just in a small part. Only one member changed her opinion on statement eight, ten and eleven during the course of the projection. However the general improvement is really low if considering the number of the participants and the number of questions.

Hence, this initial result seems to show that the thesis of Jones, Van Zoonen and Holbert failed: apparently the new political television has lost, in the UK, its capacity to present us with innovative ways to be politically engaged.

As one of the participant of the focus group said: “these satirical programs are entertaining, but they’re definitely not new tools of democracy. They make me laugh, but they don’t improve my political knowledge!”. Referring to this sample, TV is still interesting just because of the news programs or because of the political debates. However they consider the new media as the new democratic tools that make them active citizen, active makers of contents.

Another member of the group explains: “anything that stimulates some degree of political interest, I think, is a good idea. […] The general public don’t know what the politicians […] are up to and an interest in political issues is good, but if you are not in possession of all of facts, then you can only be scratching the surface and this is in the best in the interest of politicians and the establishment, and for you to not understand.

However satirical programs make you laugh, they sensitize you in a way […] They stimulate the interest because they are humorous, but actually they don’t help you to bring your investigation much further!”.

Therefore, according to the English, the idea of the new political television is dated. They consider satirical programs as pure entertainment, amusement, the democracy of the citizens is somewhere else.
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Figure 2
5. Conclusion

This research has allowed me to investigate a field of interest quite new in England and in Italy, that led to compare the findings within the two national contexts, with the International ones.

The aim of my work was to understand how political satire encourages a critical awareness of political issues and how it contributes to the formation of a civic culture.

According to Livingstone\textsuperscript{20}, the citizen should be observed by its prospective of spectators, “Being a member of the media audience is starting to be an essential way to perceive the public life.”\textsuperscript{21} From this point of view, according to Mazzoleni\textsuperscript{22}, pop politics can be considered as a civic resource, able to reconcile the spectator with the politics and to put political information in the social network.

Satire is therefore an important component of pop politics that adapts itself and has been adapted to television’s needs. In other words, satire can be considered as an essential tool that informs about political and social issues.

From the qualitative analysis I conducted on the two samples, it emerged a clear difference between the Italian and the English role of satire. On the one hand the Italian findings confirmed the international studies to which I referred, on the other hand, on a first sight, it looked like the English findings were in contrast with my initial thesis.

In Italy, even if satire had a lot of restrictions – due to the control of the politicians – it seems that the genre remains an important tool to fight the abuse of power. In fact the Italian public has shown a preference for the personification of an idea or a political speech rather than abstract representations. Leaders with their personality traits, their manners and idiosyncrasies, their tics and weaknesses, have become the privileged object of media interest, which make it the target of good-natured irony or biting satire, sometimes up to excess.

Therefore the programs of political satire are perhaps the ones more allowed to go overboard with the emphatic representation of politicians and of their deeds.

Contrary to the Italian point of view, English people declared to find political satire an old tool of democracy, that has been important, but now it is just a form of entertaining. Maybe this change can be blamed on the public broadcast services, that, in order to compete with the private networks, have deprived satire of its original contents. Therefore satire could have lost its depth, maintaining just a humorous form. The English spectators wouldn’t find any answers to their political uncertainties; neither would they increase their political awareness. In other words the model of a new political television\textsuperscript{23} wouldn’t exist.


\textsuperscript{22} Cf. Mazzoleni, Gianpietro, Sfardini, Anna, 2009.

However, at this point, it is interesting to show how, on the other side, the behavior of the participants of the English group were almost opposite to what they affirmed.

The program of political satire showed, stimulated a great discussion among the participants. They often referred to what was mentioned in the episode and they frequently changed their opinions about relevant political issues.

In conclusion my research demonstrated how, in any case, satirical programs make the spectators active citizens, involved in the political issues, even though they seem to be not conscious about that. The reason of this discrepancy maybe lies in the differences existing between English and Italian satire.

Anyway satire, in both contexts, despite the cultural peculiarities, not only offers meaningful political critiques, but also encourages viewers to play with politics, to examine it, test it and question it rather than simply consume it as information or “truth”.

5.1. Recommendations for further study
This investigation has left a wide opening for further research. First of all, in order to improve the study and achieve a deeper comprehension of political satire within the UK and Italian television context, it should be repeated taking into account a wider sample of satirical programs broadcasted on the national channels. This quantitative research could be useful to check to what extent political satire programs have a relevant role in the national schedules.

Furthermore it would be interesting to choose some of the most representative satirical programs in the UK and Italian schedules and analyze them in order to consider the different formats they adopt and to examine the differing impacts they have on viewers.

Finally the study could be conducted on a younger audience in order to investigate if young people still consider political satire as an important tool of democracy, bearing in mind the increasing use of social media.

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Delli Carpini, Michael, and Williams, A.Bruce.“ ‘Fictional’ and ‘non-fictional’ television celebrates earth day (or, politics is comedy plus pretense).” Cultural Studies, 8 (1884): 74-98.Web. 21 February 2013.

Gemma Scalise

Abstract: This article is part of the scientific debate on European identity and develops the argument in respect of the problem of a deficit of democratic legitimacy in the European Union. The results of a case study bring to the fore the importance of the European public sphere in constructing a sense of belonging shared by Europeans.

Keywords: social identity; European identity; European public sphere; media discourse; European integration; Europeanization; narratives; meanings of Europe; participation; European citizenship.

1. The social construction of European identity

Following the major political and economic metamorphosis faced by Europe during the last sixty years, it can be said that the very identity of Europeans has changed. The social and cultural life of EU citizens is no longer necessarily linked to a specific place and the removal of borders, thanks to the processes of Europeanisation and globalisation, is giving way to an institutionalised “post-national condition” on a political, economic and social level.

Despite these profound changes, a number of empirical studies show that a healthy majority of European citizens state that they still identify themselves primarily with their own country, even though a large percentage of them refer to themselves in certain circumstances as “European” and the social category of European is not a contested one. These results highlight a general difficulty with embracing the social construction of identity in contemporary Europe and understanding the social consequences stemming from the process of Europeanisation. This problem arising certainly from the difficulty of studying a complex phenomenon such as social belonging, is also linked to the fact that

1 Gemma Scalise is a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Florence.
within the scientific debate on identity the issue is still often understood and studied within its national and essentialist definition. Thus it tends to be fixed and a given, territorially bound and understood as an immutable common feeling that is typical of early modernity. A concept of this type, that ignores the activities of processing and reflection inherent in social belonging in contemporary life, is ineffective in defining the sense of belonging to Europe by EU citizens who live in the dynamic and transnational dimension of late modernity. Any discussion on the subject of the sense of belonging in contemporary Europe involves starting from a different standpoint, one that sees belonging as an identity “in the making” and that imagines it to be "deteritorialised" and set in a transnational dimension.

The construction of identity within Europe can thus be investigated, both in its individual and collective dimensions, by considering the configurations that it has taken on as a result of changes in the organisational structure of society following the process of European integration. This can also be done by adopting micro- and meso-social analyses that consider social practices and the mechanisms governing communicative intermediation, the spread of consciousness and the construction of meanings that individuals use to refer to the concept of Europe and that give a sense to the link with Europe itself. These levels of investigation allow us to go beyond the concept that sees how the state, culture and civil society correspond to one another, something that is typical of societies within nation states, and permit us to trace the origin instead of a society that still perpetuates itself in the social practices at play that are active in the transnational space. This analytical ability enables us to pinpoint the discursive construction of Europe through the public sphere, civil society and European citizens, all functionally interwoven with each other and which, by defining the involvement of citizens in the process of integration, reinforce and promote a European identity.

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8 The concept of European citizenship is among the most controversial and hotly debated in scientific literature on this question. In some cases it is considered to be an institution that is symbolic rather than having any practical value due to the "elements of deficit" that define it. These include attribution on the basis of nationality that excludes some categories of immigrant citizens; the distance and poor representation of citizens due to a lack of actual powers on the part of the European Parliament; the absence of rights and social protections despite that fact that the concept of social citizenship has not been completely excluded from the project of integration. At the same time, this debate has generated interest in the role of citizens in the EU and participatory aspects leading to questioning about the existence of a European public sphere and the possibility of developing a sense of belonging through participation in European public life. For more on the debate, refer to Eriksen, Erik Oddvan. “An Emerging European Public Sphere”. European Journal of Social Theory, 8, 4, 2005. Print.; Rumford, Chris. The EU: a political sociology. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002. Print; Trenz, Hans-Jörg. "Elements of sociology of European integration". Arena Centre for European Studies, Working Paper, 2008, 11. Print.
The means of communication play a central role in the construction of European society and in promoting EU legitimacy. In a non-hierarchical and multi-level governing system, negotiation and consensus depend and build themselves on a horizontal means of communication between institutions and society. The European public sphere is the structure of functional intermediation that generates cohesion, participation and a sense of belonging to Europe and where this fails to develop, it negatively affects the process of democratisation within the EU.

The public sphere and civil society are dynamic elements of the bottom-up construction of European society; they are driving forces of the process of Europeanisation, driven forward by those who themselves feel in some way involved at a supranational government level. Public debate and civil participation are also fundamental elements of a narrative construction of European society because the narratives of Europe that circulate in the public sphere make EU citizens "feel united", linking them to events in the past and allowing for reciprocal recognition. By creating such a link between Europeans, the narratives enable the development of a sense of belonging: a European collective identity.

If we assume that a public sphere is emerging in Europe, it becomes necessary to ask ourselves how this is influencing the ways in which ideas spread, how national and European public spheres interlink, what meanings and information are transmitted and between which social categories. In addition, it is important to understand how the public debate is evolving on various territorial levels as well as the role this plays within the processes of identification and with respect to the conceptualisation of Europe.

2. Media and conceptualisations of Europe: Findings from a case study

In order to look more closely at the relationship between the public sphere and the construction of a sense of belonging within Europe, I detail below some results from a research project designed to investigate the construction of European identity in a local context. The study concentrates on meso- and micro-levels and investigates shared narratives of Europe that are constructed through interaction and daily social practices and that circulate in networks of social relationships between "ordinary" Europeans.

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11 The research project developed out of the theory of "narrative identity" of the German sociologist Klaus Eder, according to whom the construction of European identity can happen by means of sharing the narratives in Europe that emerge, grow and circulate within the space of European communication. For further information, see Eder, Klaus. “A theory of collective identity: Making sense of debate on a “European identity”. European Journal of Social Theory 2009, 2, 4: 427-447. Print.
In a case study, four different networks of social relations – joining secondary school teachers, pupils and their parents – have been selected. The networks were located in Tuscany, an Italian region that has traditionally been involved and active in European affairs. Two diverse local contexts have been chosen: Florence\textsuperscript{12} and Prato\textsuperscript{13}. These Tuscan cities are in close geographical proximity but very different in their economic organisation, cultural and political tradition, local history and social composition.

Between March and June 2012 forty individual interviews with teachers, students and parents were carried out in four schools – two licei [high schools] and two technical institutes chosen from different socio-economic and cultural strata. In addition, eight focus groups were organised within the classes. The number of students per class for the focus groups varied between ten and fifteen, involving a total of one hundred and twenty two in all, aged between fifteen and twenty.

The analysis of the narratives of Europe that circulate within these networks has enabled me to analyse how the conceptualisation of Europe has come about and understand how local and European identities coexist and communicate with one another and the role played by the public sphere in these processes.

\textbf{2.1. Different imaginations of Europe}

Europe has accumulated an immense narrative heritage. The many stories and unconscious assumptions within Europe circulate in the public sphere and among social networks, both physical and virtual, on a local, national and transnational level. The narratives allow us to order and understand the experience, and the sharing of stories is necessary in order to live in a multicultural and transnational context such as Europe and to contribute to the development of a feeling of identity.

“Europe” means something completely different depending on various contexts and circumstances as well as individual characteristics and experiences: it

\textsuperscript{12}Florence is the capital city of the region and it is a prestigious tourist and university center. The city, governed by a left-wing mayor, is a major national cultural and economic center and the venue of annual EU cultural events like the “Festival of Europe”. Regional institutions as well as European and international organizations are located in the city, such as the European University Institute. Florence is influenced by transnational flows of people, cultures and meanings that shape everyday social practices and relations.

\textsuperscript{13}Prato is an industrial district specialized in textile production. It is the Tuscany's second largest city, which experienced significant internal and external immigration. The second largest Chinese immigrant community in Italy is located in Prato. The formation of a Chinese ethnic economy operating inside the industrial district and the textile industry economic crisis, started from the 1980s, generated a demographic and socio-economic change of the city, a critical situation related to immigrants integration and to a high level of unemployment. The conjunction of all these factors led to a political change in 2009 with the election, for the first time since 1949, of a right-wing major. Prato's local system has been extensively studied (see Becattini, Giacomo, et al. From Industrial Districts to Local Development. Edward Elgar Publishing: Cheltenham, 2003. Print; Trigilia, Carlo. Small-firm development and political subcultures in Italy. E. Goodman, J. Bamford (eds). Small firms and industrial districts in Italy, London: Routledge, 1989. Print.).
can embody images of modernity, cosmopolitan ideals, just as it can be seen as one of the “evils” of globalisation or simply synonymous with the EU.

Responses to the question “what does the word Europe make you think of?” were very different:

«When I think of Europe, I think of the different people who have crossed it over time and followed on from each another. I can't accept the idea of excluding anyone who has spent any time in Europe. For example the period of Medieval history when the Arabs were in Spain, or the cosmopolitan world of the Enlightenment – these are concepts I like to think about when I talk about Europe [...] that melting pot, that vocation to contain so many differences that Europe must be able to provide [...]. There are some powerful ideas nevertheless that make Europe stand out: a strong sense of democracy and the rule of law»

As mentioned earlier, not all Europeans perceive Europe in the same way:

«The images that spring to mind are Italy, the crisis, the Euro and the German Chancellor! Because ultimately, and especially in the papers and on television, when talking about Europe she's always there because there's a crisis and she is becoming the leader [...]. The history of Europe is that we have a crisis and this crisis brings us all together!»

Gathering and putting together different stories of Europe and investigating their origins is one way of illustrating which factors influence the construction of the citizens’ link with Europe and the various elements that determine this. These include the milieu in which people live, the distribution of economic, social and cultural resources, different life experiences, varying educational achievements, different professions and the networks of social relations underpinning them. These are all characteristics that affect the conceptualisation of Europe and explain why people have such different ideas of Europe that lead to their having different links and senses of identity with it too.

2.2. The weight of media on the ideas of Europe

The media participate in the construction and spread of ideas, values, interests and opinions on Europe and the European Union, which in turn affect the social construction of a European identity. The interpretations and salience attributed by the media to news influence public perception and varying “uses” of means of communication and of information that lead to the construction of different meanings associated with Europe.

The question “how did this idea of Europe emerge?” highlighted this fact:

«Reading, studying, finding out about things from the radio, newspapers, books. And on the internet, as well, I sometimes look for information on these...»

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14 Italian and Latin teacher, High school, Florence, female, 48 years old.
15 Parent, Technical institute, Prato, male, 45 years old, factory worker.
16 In the narratives that were garnered, the terms "Europe" and the "EU" tend to overlap and be used interchangeably reflecting how Europe is used in communication within the public sphere, in national and supranational institutional speeches, in news reported by the media, in public debates and in informal discussions in everyday conversations.
questions [...]. My husband belongs to Attac, the international organisation, and he communicates with other activists from different countries and takes part in their activities so of course I have to admit that this influences our idea of Europe a great deal. More generally, I have signed up to lots of mailing lists so I receive information on international initiatives and recently I've also signed lots of online petitions, some of which are EU-related, and it seems a good thing to me to add my voice to these popular initiatives»17.

Some of the interviewees receive and go in search of a large quantity of in-depth information about European issues, through a number of media sources, some of them international, and chiefly by way of the radio, newspapers, specialised magazines and journals and internet. They belong to a group of individuals who have a specific interest in questions concerning Europe and who, for various reasons, often professional ones, surf institutional websites and take advantage of the possibilities offered by internet. They are often people with an international background and of mixed heritage and who have travelled or lived abroad. Knowing several languages allows them to study issues more in depth through the international press and foreign websites.

Interactive participation such as that offered by the internet, being able to link via social networks, mailing lists, blogs and online forums, all aid participation in the public sphere and in civil society organisations on a European and transnational scale. These media tools bring them into contact with people of different nationalities and backgrounds with whom they can share their ideas, opinions and narratives of Europe and the EU. And this has real influence not only on the conceptualisation of Europe but also on the construction of a social link between Europeans.

The internet is also the tool used to take part in forms of direct democracy, online debates and public consultations that enable new types of solidarity to spring up between individuals who share interests and values, that is to say Europeans who join together to express themselves and ensure their voices are heard. The actual sharing that stems from taking part in transnational networks affects their awareness of belonging to a social group called Europeans.

Most of the parents and pupils interviewed, on the contrary, stated that they do not try to find out about Europe via media, nor are they interested. Despite this the influence of the media in formulating their opinions and their behaviour towards Europe is evident. Interviewed pupils and parents share meanings associated with Europe that stem from being exposed to messages generated on national media, whether through watching television news or reading online newspapers, both of which are frequently described as ways of getting to know Europe and which, for many people, is the link to it.

«These meanings come from the mass media, watching TV, going online, indeed all these means of communication, it's a huge melting pot! I don't read newspapers chiefly due to lack of time [...] so I just limit myself to watching TV basically ... and going online, you get the same news as you hear on the TV, so you

17 Literature teacher, High school, Florence, female, 47 year old.
could say that my main source is the TV news but I have to admit that it's not something that I find that interesting.18

The students who participated in group discussions in class share the ideas about Europe that are circulating on their own networks and reflect the image of Europe itself broadcast by other means of communication:

«We hear about Europe through the media, it's impossible to avoid comment on something that's happening, see an image of what's going on, the media bombard us with information and so you form an idea of Europe. What I read in the Italian press is that Europe is there to impose laws that Italy doesn't respect and so if we are to make ourselves fit into this Europe, which after all is something of an abstract body, we have to make sacrifices and our new Prime Minister raps us over the knuckles if we step out of line. However, I've never heard talk about Europeans, whether on the news, or on TV, there's never been any discussion on Europe, on who Europeans really are, perhaps because we're second class citizens in Europe as far as politics and the economy are concerned and perhaps because at the end of the day people aren't that interested in Europe.»19

2.3. A cosmopolitan European identity

Exposure to mass media and the content of messages they broadcast has a direct effect on tendencies towards Europe and contributes to the process of social construction of a European identity. Those who gave weight to positive narratives of Europe and who share favourable meanings vis-à-vis Europe stated that they use several media sources, including international ones, and that they look out for news about Europe because they are personally interested. Positive news items on the EU are also spread by those who appear to have more open and cosmopolitan identities. A Europe-oriented identity can be seen in those who have greater knowledge and familiarity with it and a better chance of fulfilling their needs by visiting other countries. These are individuals who are familiar with international cultural resources and participate in a public, transnational sphere and European, civil-society organisations.

«Being European is a tradition involving civilisation and culture; it's about the values of openness, freedom, democracy that have evolved over time. The European is ready to accept others, clearly upholding basic tenets such as the refusal of the death penalty. I feel proud to belong to this wonderful reality because there are marvellous things there, from a natural as well as artistic-cultural point of view. Proud of belonging to this part of the world that has produced so many beautiful things. From music, to culture, to shows, philosophy, art. For me, Europe is constantly part of my life because my points of reference and the way I think and do things are never just Italian, but at the very least European.»20

Just by considering Europe as a daily fact, something that is simply part of one's everyday reality makes identities more open towards Europe. Awareness of

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18 Parent, Technical institute, Prato, woman, 53 years old, unemployed.
19 Pupil, Technical institute, Florence, 17 year old.
20 Parent, High school, Florence, male, 55 years old, head of photography.
the existence of European institutions on the home territory where we live combined with the fact that Europe is involved in all our lives, that our way of living is also regulated at a European level and not just locally and nationally, are all elements that help us build a strong identity with it.

«The first ideas we have of Europe stem from school, at primary school we start talking about Europe. Today the Europe I observe means all the many things that have become easier in my everyday life, if I think back to how I used to travel before the Treaties that opened up the borders and all the things I had to do, or if I remember life before the Euro, when you had to change your currency. And then there are all the food safety standards that we implement [...], all the non-Italian products that you find on sale when you go shopping, the public works that are carried out in towns and cities, structurally and on an ecological level, I am seeing so many changes, thanks to Europe, as well as getting to know people better. And I suppose it's the same for other Europeans»21.

2.4. A functional and localistic European identity

On the other hand, there are those who have emphasised all the endless media news stories on the negative connotations of the EU and who show a complete lack of interest in Europe and talk of their indifference or antagonism towards the EU project. These individuals have a weak European identity and confirm the hypothesis that such information tends to distance them from having any interest in a European dimension. An analysis of different socio-economic realities highlights that these differences are also linked to cultural and material factors such as a low knowledge base of activities and opportunities offered by the EU and are due in addition to a sense of exclusion from European practices and experiences.

«When I see the word Europe, I find myself feeling confused. In the sense that right now.... crisis, problems... between various EU countries... and the sense that we aren't so united, that we don't have a clear economic and political programme. We are less united that the United States of America. In the end, the Euro, which is something that brings us together, have made us collapse! [...]. Europe could be seen as an opportunity perhaps, but unfortunately we either are unable to or don't succeed in taking up these opportunities [...]. The problem is Italy. Here what we're experiencing of Europe is the crisis»22.

In the face of such narratives of inequalities, of a "two-speed" Europe, that talk of a sense of exclusion from European society, people react by closing themselves off and through identity-based "reterritorialisation"23 that gives rise to an emotive rootedness with one's place of origin which is familiar and offers security.

«Europe interferes in our lives! There are specific matters that only we Italians know how to solve, not Europe, all this policy of sacrifice, it's the Italian
government that knows where to go to find money and not the EU. From my perspective the countries that are stronger than us have forced us to make choices that have not helped us. The weight of nations can oblige smaller countries, Italy included, to submit to the policies of the larger countries. I don't see why anyone must feel French, English, German or European when we aren’t!24.

In these instances a more exclusive identity emerges in which the sense of belonging, linked to one's homeland, and the strong involvement in the local economic and social realities, together with the lack of trust in the national and European political institutions lead to a concept of a European identity as an extremely abstract condition. The perceived distance from international-based, social relationships influences the sense of closure towards Europe25. The knowledge of the global market and the use of internet give people a “global awareness”; however, this does not mean they are automatically able to feel they are global citizens26.

3. Conclusions

Different narratives of Europe are shared among Europeans: stories related to the cultural and historical roots of the continent, institutional and “official” narratives of the EU, biographical stories weaved together with collective memories. Multi-level stories, a mixture of values and references coming from the local and national heritage and linked to the European postnational plot.

In the broad range of the narratives which have emerged, the influence of the local context, where the stories originate, can always be identified. The stories of Europe are embedded in the regional territories. They are composed by elements coming from the political, economic, cultural and institutional local context and are developed in a European perspective.

The results of the case study underline the relevance of the local dimension on the meanings associated to Europe, which are built and explained using local resources. There is a dynamic relation between the local, national, supranational and transnational dimensions. These levels interact in the European identity construction process.

Europeanization is not just a matter of political and economic regulation, but also of social relations, expectations and normative values which overlap and are transnationally interconnected. The local dimension is part of these processes and the regional cultures, values and identities can be commended and conciliated in the European dimension.

From the narratives of Europe we can see shared criticisms of the Italian media as well as expressions of disapproval of the way in which the EU is represented through these means of communication, especially by television. The

24 Parent, Technical institute, Prato, 59 years old, shopkeeper.
criticism concerns the absence of an international dimension to the news, the sparse and superficial media coverage of topics and events with a European dimension, often only given coverage in specialised journals and on special-interest internet sites. The general absence of any analysis of European policies by the mainstream national media is especially clear to those people who use and understand international media. Those who are more informed and interested in a European dimension are aware of the pertinence of information provided and the objectiveness or lack of it on the part of the means of communication.

«There are so many things involved: the redistribution of resources, employment, education. There are countries that have good ideas, in Europe, but these are not discussed in Italy. Here we are still talking about the same old things, about politics and national news. In Italy you know if Armani has held a new fashion show because all the TV news run five minute bulletins on it, but there is no five minute slot on Europe. You only know about things concerning Europe if you look for them. There are no jobs, there is no money to pay for education, the retirement age is rising and there’s no work for the young. We need to talk about it because it's our future!»

In translating European policies and in explaining, on a national level, EU notifications, an important role is played by the political class and the national media because it is they that mould the national public attitude towards Europe. Indeed, the political class and the national media act as filters for EU communications and this go-between role does not always favour the link or the sense of inclusion with Europe.

And yet the question of inclusion for European citizens and the closeness of European institutions to the countries themselves both play a large part in the crisis of legitimacy in the EU and in the political crisis that stems from the spread of Euroscepticism.

The public discourse on Europe is a central element in constructing a European society and the building of spaces for communication between Europeans is part of the political project of the EU. The European institutions can sustain this process, already underway, by including ever more citizens in the European public sphere, reinforcing the system of means of communication for European matters and creating a European public dimension. The European public sphere already exists but does not involve everyone as it is fragmented and divided. There is a strong component, the intellectual and political élite who actively participate, there is an intermediate public sphere made up of organised civil society, and then there is civil society in the full sense of the word, that represents a “weak” public space.

Those who do not have access to the European public sphere are limited to the debate on a national level. The European institutions have the task of bringing themselves closer to those who perceive Europe in a more distant fashion and who

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27 Parent, High school, Firenze, female, German national, 52 years old, doctor.
often belong to the lowest strata of society and they need to do so by getting closer to the realities of these people.

Linguistic plurality among European citizens is one of the biggest obstacles in constructing a transnational discursive space. Even if the spread of languages grows and involves all social and cultural strata, the public sphere and European media cannot reproduce the characteristics of a national public sphere, yet need to penetrate the existing national and local public spheres and so they must adapt themselves to a multi-level and plurilingual model. European institutions can moreover promote other places where Europeans can meet and exchange views, such as transnational spaces for participation and communication (European associations, virtual communities, transnational movements) and thereby support the concept of European citizenship that is not just formal but actually based on social practices that involve active participation in public activities, that is to say a citizenship that understands how to conciliate the differences between the various ideas of Europe and its many identities and cultures spread across the European area. This would facilitate the democratic legitimacy of Europe by spreading a narrative of European citizenship that is not only an institutional narrative but also a narrative of belonging.

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29 Linguistic and cultural plurality could be tackled by promoting it, highlighting the many differences within Europe, placing a higher value, for example, on translations, and not dumbing down to a lingua franca because “one language” is also a legacy of the nation state.

ENDORSING CHANGE FROM A CONSERVATIVE PERSPECTIVE? THE CASE OF A NEW ROMANIAN RIGHT-WING PARTY

Raluca Levonian

Abstract: This study aims to investigate how the attitude towards change is expressed in the discourse of a Romanian right wing political organization, Noua Republică (The New Republic) which was legally recognized as a party in January 2013. The corpus consists of the texts of five infobullets mailed by the organization during February and March 2013. The topics covered in the selected texts concern the party’s identity and its attitude towards the health reform and towards Romania’s foreign affairs policy. The research draws mainly on critical discourse analysis methods, employing van Leeuwen’s (e.g. 2008) theory on the representation of social actors. The results show that the party’s identity is constructed on a real but also on a symbolic level as an in-group opposed to the group represented by the government parties.

Keywords: legitimation, social actors, political discourse, Romania, right wing, identity, othering.

Introduction

Political change is a defining feature of democratic societies, where the alternation of different political parties to the government allows all political groups – and therefore all the electors – the possibility to have their interests represented by the governing structures. This study aims to investigate the case of the Romanian party Noua Republică (The New Republic- NR). This opposition party claims to represent a valid alternative to the governing parties and employs various discursive strategies in order to legitimate the necessity of such a major political change. Its discourse addressed to the possible electors focuses mainly on a marked polarized representation of the main political actors represented by the governing and the opposition parties.

There are several reasons for this investigation. At present, there are some important studies on Romanian political communication but this topic still

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deserves further analysis within the field of disciplines like pragmatics, discourse analysis or rhetoric. Another reason regards the fact that the discourse of right-wing organizations in contemporary Romania also deserves further investigation, especially from a comparative perspective. First, it should be compared to the discourse of extremist organizations in pre-communist Romania and thus be placed in a historical continuum. Second, comparisons with the discourse of other European right wing parties may also provide useful findings. One last reason for this research regards the medium used for getting the political messages to the electors. Computer-mediated communication tends today to become a significant alternative to traditional media and this is also the case for political communication. The use of direct e-mails in order to get the political messages across to the electors represents an original technique in the Romanian public sphere.

**Romanian political life before and after communism**

The two major political forces in 19th century Romania were the Liberals and the Conservatives. The first party represented the interests of the middle class while the second one was sustained especially by the landowners, the rich members of the upper class aiming to preserve their large estates. The Conservatives insisted on the preservation of the traditions and of the differences between social classes. In time, the Conservative Party weakened considerably so that in the interwar period the Liberal Party remained the strongest political force in Romania followed by ‘Partidul Național Țăranesc’ (The Peasants’ National Party). Extremist organizations also gained force in the first half of the 20th century. The Communist Party was founded in 1921 but it was declared as illegal soon afterwards, in 1924, and remained prohibited by law until 1944. As a reaction to the communist organization, the extreme right-wing group ‘Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail’ (‘The Legion of the Archangel Michael’) was founded in 1927. Members of this organization participated in the successive governments formed in 1940 but, in order to obtain the complete control of the state, the organization started an anarchic movement known as the ‘legionnaire rebellion’, consisting in thefts and massacres throughout the country. This rebellion was stopped in January 1941 through the intervention of the army and Ion Antonescu, the President of the Council of Ministers, took complete control of the government.

‘Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail’ sustained an ideology which was profoundly religious and based on a moral evaluation of the members of other political parties and the chosen name is suggestive for its doctrine. The word *legiune* alludes to the Roman origin of the Romanian people as the party members

viewed themselves as descendants of the legionnaires of the Roman Empire. The reference to the Archangel Michael is also connected to the idea of war and army. According to the Romanian Orthodox religious beliefs, Michael is the warrior archangel, the one leading the army of angels in the great battle against the demons. His name literally means ‘who is like God’ and it is his God-like character that enables him to bring justice everywhere in the world. In Romanian popular culture, Michael was associated with Death and represented as the Angel of Death, one of his responsibilities being to ascertain that the spirit of the dead received the deserved reward or punishment. The figure of the Archangel Michael signifies the triumph of the Good over the Evil but also the idea of final inexorable judgment both at a cosmic and a personal level.

One of the first consequences of the coming to power of the communist forces was the dissolution of all other political forces around 1950. Between 1948 and 1965, the unique political party was ‘Partidul Muncitoresc Român’ (the Romanian Labourers’ Party), which afterwards changed its name to ‘Partidul Comunist Român’ (the Romanian Communist Party). The revolution in December 1989 marked the end of the totalitarian regime and the beginning of the transition towards a capitalist society. Leftist forces have still been represented in the Parliament and formed various governements in post-communist Romania. However, one of the major goals of all post-revolutionary governements and parties was to distance themselves from the communist doctrine and to enforce their democratic orientation.

How far, how right?

According to the data available on the party’s website, NR was founded in June 2012 and entered into an alliance with other parties (‘The Electoral Center-Right Alliance’) which allowed it to run in the elections held in December 2012 and to obtain one senator position in the Romanian Parliament. The status of NR as a political party was officially acknowledged at the end of January 2013 and the party became a member of the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR) at the end of 2013.

Being a new party, one of the main challenges that NR faces involves distinguishing itself from other previous Romanian parties. It needs to construct a coherent collective identity and also to find specific discursive topics in order to legitimate its presence and actions in the public sphere and to delegitimate those of the competitors.

The party status explains NR ideology as a combination between classical liberalism, Christian democracy and modern conservatism. The mainstream parties which are closest to this positioning in the Romanian political sphere are Partidul Democrat Liberal (PDL, the Democrat Liberal Party) and Partidul National Liberal (PNL, the National Liberal Party), both positioned as moderate right parties. However, NR’s discourse in the first stage of its existence indicated support for PDL and opposition towards PNL. This choice is grounded above all in the values openly assumed by PDL, whose key topics include anti-communism and
‘realization of justice’ (*înfăptuirea justiției*). NR disagrees openly with the positioning of PNL as a right wing party because of their decision to form an alliance with the Leftist force represented by Partidul Social Democrat (PSD, the Social Democrat Party) which allowed them to become members in the recent government.

NR’s economic policies support free-market economy and competition alongside with a reduced role of the State. As Green notes, the determination of the role of the State represents a major issue for conservative politics throughout the 20th century. The politics led by the British conservatives in the last decades starting with Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher show a growing orientation towards libertarian principles instead of paternalist ones. NR adopts such principles not only because of its explicit inspiration from Anglo-American conservative models but also because laissez-faire policies and anti-statism are opposed to the ideology of the former communist regime.

The asserted orientation towards conservatism and especially towards Christian democracy distinguishes NR from other contemporary Romanian parties. The ideology grounded in Christian democracy is more frequently sustained by parties in some West European states like France, Germany, Belgium or Italy and it derived from the increasing preoccupation shown by the Catholic Church for the social and political situation at the beginning of the 20th century. In pre-communist Romania, the development of a political ideology influenced by Christian values was characteristic for the National Peasants’ Party, with whom NR attempts to create a symbolic affiliation. Furthermore, this choice also links NR with other prominent Western right wing parties such as the German CDU (Christlich Demokratische Union).

By choosing this ideological position, NR also runs the risk of being associated by the voters with the former ‘Legion’ and thus be perceived as a radical instead of a moderate right wing party. The party status and the texts analyzed show that the authors of the messages are aware of such risks and state their rejection of extremism. However, the question arising at this point would be how to define precisely the ‘extreme right’ and whether NR shows signs of such a potential radicalization.

In the last two decades, a few Romanian parties have taken an explicit radical stance, with little success in the long term. One of these parties, ‘Partidul Noua Generație’ (New Generation Party), founded in 2000, appeared to have

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maintained some elements from the doctrine of the ‘legionari’. The only political party which still legally exists is ‘Partidul România Mare’ (PRM, Greater Romania Party), founded in 1991, though it has not received enough votes at the last elections in order to gain Parliamentarian representation. PRM is centered around the charismatic figure of the party founder and leader, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, who is actually the most prominent figure of the organization. In comparison to this strategy, Mihail Neamțu, the president of NR, has chosen a more discrete approach. One of the analyzed texts shows the emphasis placed on the connection between the party founders, members, supporters and electors and on the creation of a community of views. Furthermore, the PRM leader constructs his discourse by highlighting national values and rejecting ethnic, religious and sexual minorities. Such a stance is not explicitly adopted in the NR corpus analyzed. Yet, the discourse of the infobullets issued after the period selected for research shows recurrent topics like national identity and values and even some rigid views, as for example the rejection of same-sex marriage.

As the analysis of the selected texts shows, NR’s identity is not far from right wing populism because of its constant criticism towards the political elites. According to Jaschke, populist right parties claim to plead for the interests of the citizens against the corrupt elites and thus address directly to ‘the people’ as a coherent community instead of targeting specific classes or groups of voters. Populism is also one of the conceptions characterizing right wing extremism in the model developed by Harrison and Bruter (2011). The model encompasses two ideological dimensions, authoritarianism and negative identity, each one with two possible ideological conceptions: a reactionary and a repressive one for the authoritarian dimension, and a xenophobic and a populist one for the negative identity dimension. However, the authors note that populism may be a durable or a temporary characteristic of a party’s discourse. Though populism characterizes other extreme right wing parties such as the Front National in France, there are also specific topics of such discourse that are not addressed in the NR discourse. The immigration issue, a common topic for West European parties, does not represent a problem in present Romania. Instead, the xenophobic dimension may take the

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form of a violent discourse against ethnic minorities, but no references about – either pro or against – minorities were found in the corpus. On the whole, its discourse shows that NR attempts to appear as a party composed of members with modern views, excluding extremism and, at the same time, related to former Romanian parties and politicians famous for their opposition against communism.

**Corpus and characteristics**

The corpus consists of the texts of five unsolicited e-mails which I have received during February and March 2013. The sender of the messages was labelled as ‘Noua Republică’. The messages were selected from a larger array of e-mails for two reasons. One reason regarded the topic discussed, which was, in all cases, clearly connected to the concept of social and political change. Another reason for the selection regarded the period when the messages had been issued. As NR’s status as a political party was acknowledged by the Romanian State at the end of January 2013, the messages issued in the following weeks appeared to be very relevant for understanding the party’s doctrine and standpoint. The research questions are: (1) how are the in-group and out-group defined in the party’s messages and (2) how does NR legitimate the need for a government change.

Each message sent has the form of a brief newspaper article, but the content differs. The texts ‘Vrem domnia legii într-o Românie bogată!’ (‘We want the law to rule in a rich Romania’ - DL) and ‘Noua Republică merge mai departe’ (‘The New Republic goes on’-NR) focus on the presentation of the party’s identity. The other three texts present the stance taken by the party on a specific issue, as indicated by the headline: ‘Acordul transatlantic: o oportunitate pentru antreprenorii români’ (‘The transatlantic agreement: an opportunity for the Romanian entrepreneurs’ – AT), ‘Reforma Sănătății: proagăniștii vechi și soluții la fel de vechi’ (‘The Health Reform: old actors and just as old solutions’ – RS), ‘O Nouă Constituție pentru o Nouă Românie’ (‘A New Constitution for a New Romania’ – NC). The text ‘Noua Republică merge mai departe’ (‘The New Republic goes on’) is the only one which does not represent an autonomous article. It contains only an excerpt from the speech held by Mihail Neamţu, the founder and the president of NR during the National Meeting of the NR party members, and a link to the party’s website for accessing the entire speech. For the purposes of the analysis, this link was accessed in order to retrieve the entire speech and to avoid drawing conclusions based on a single excerpt taken out of the context.

The choice of computer-mediated communication in order to convey messages for the electors is not uncommon for Romanian politics as, for example many politicians and parties – if not all of them - have webpages, personal blogs or social media accounts. The innovation lies in the technique used by NR, the direct e-mailing, which is usually exploited by corporate advertising. As Wodak notes, political life tends increasingly to be organized according to marketing principles. Contemporary media tend to present political activities and politicians in a ‘fictionalized’ manner and, at the same time, political communication involves a wide range of genres apart from the traditional political speeches, some of them
involving advertising techniques. A possible explanation for the choice of this technique is that at the beginning of 2013, NR had less access to ‘traditional’ media like the television or the print media than the leading political parties. As a consequence, they found less conventional means of communication – like the electronic and the social media – in order to get their messages across to the audience.

It is still difficult to assess whether the messages fulfilled the party’s objectives or not. They may have contributed to informing the audience about the existence of the party and its constructed identity. However, when direct mailing is used, the sender has little control upon the composition of the audience reached by the message and it is likely that the receivers of the NR mails were varied and had different political views, opinions and education. The content of the messages reveals that the text producers attempted to avoid such drawbacks by appealing to what may be called ‘standard common ground’, in other words a system of values and beliefs which had the least chances of being rejected.

**Theoretical framework**

Political communication tends currently to be equated with the use of language with persuasive or manipulative goals. Such a view derives from the ideas advanced by Berger and Luckmann regarding the role played by language in the construction of reality. It is not surprising, therefore, that the importance of language appears to be only tacitly acknowledged in the field of political studies. However, the use of language in the political domain represents a major research direction for critical discourse analysis, because of its contribution to ‘the enactment, reproduction and legitimization of power and domination’ in society. Power and legitimation are key concepts for understanding the structure and functions of contemporary political discourse.

A common characteristic for CDA research is the interest in the social and not the (inter)personal dimension of power which is generally defined in terms of asymmetry and dominance though with some variations. For example, the social dimension of power is highlighted by Reisigl and Wodak, who advance a general

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view of power relationships as being ‘asymmetric’ and occurring between social actors ‘who assume different social positions or belong to different social groups’. A cognitive approach is preferred by Van Dijk\textsuperscript{17}, who explains social power as the ability to exercise control over ‘the acts and minds’ of other groups or of the members of other groups.

Another recurrent point in CDA is the preoccupation for the distinction between various forms in which power may be exerted in society. Fowler\textsuperscript{18} distinguishes between two types of linguistic processes intended to the achievement of social control: directive practices and constitutive practices. According to him, social control is gained especially through constitutive practices which contribute to “the construction of institutions, roles, statuses that preserve the hierarchic structure of society”\textsuperscript{19}. A similar opinion is advanced by Fairclough who observes that a mark of contemporary societies appears to be the trend to exercise power through consent instead of coercion\textsuperscript{20}. This appears to be the case of the majority of political discourse, issued either by governing parties or by opposition groups. The state is traditionally viewed in CDA as the most significant among the institutions aiming to enforce their domination in the society especially because the state has the largest array of resources at its disposal in order to create social consent\textsuperscript{21}. However, attention should likewise be paid to the discourses which attempt to challenge the dominant perspective and offer an alternate representation of the reality. The new representation may be different from the one preferred by the elites, nevertheless just as subjective. NR discourse illustrates this idea as the messages construct a reductive and polarized representation of the society in order to persuade their audience. Similar to all other actors on the political scene, NR attempts to project its “practices as universal and ‘common sense’”\textsuperscript{22}.

The framework chosen for the data analysis is van Leeuwen’s theory of social practice\textsuperscript{23}. Based on the Foucaldian view, discourse is defined as ‘a socially

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constructed knowledge of some social practice. Social practices are ‘socially regulated ways’ of action that include: participants with specifically ascribed roles, a specific set of actions, performance modes, presentation styles, times, locations, resources and eligibility conditions that need to be fulfilled. The analysis focuses on the representation of the social actors in the given discourse and on the legitimation of the social action, aiming to identify some of the most frequent strategies employed.

Discussion of the results

The main aim of the study is to investigate the manner in which a new and small right wing party as NR attempts to construe its identity discursively in the communication with the mass of electors. The selection of the texts forming the corpus does not, however, imply that all messages issued by NR since its foundation belong only to the infobulletin/news article genre. During 2013, NR has become more visible in the print and visual media, for example through the interviews given by the party president. In addition, its relationship to the supporters and voters is not limited to the use of the media, but also consists in direct meetings. Thus, the communicative strategies at the disposal of the party are broader than those representing the focus of this analysis. A larger corpus would have been more difficult to investigate, first, because of reasons of space. Second, it is important to remember that political parties also undergo a process of development and adjust their programmes and communicational strategies in response to the evolution of the national and international context. Last, but not least, it is also possible that the party’s messages to its electors vary according to the targeted number of voters. At the beginning of its existence, a political party is more likely to choose ‘safe topics’ in order to attract as many supporters as possible and radicalize its programme only in the maturity phase. The following analysis of the five texts issued by NR does not claim to be representative for the entire political communication of the party throughout its existence so far, but for the views expressed in the first stage, after its foundation. In order to answer the two research questions, the analysis will first focus on the means of construing the speaker’s identity and the ‘othering’ strategies related to it. In the second section, the four legitimation categories identified by van Leeuwen will be introduced in order to assess the signification ascribed by NR to political and social change in the Romanian society. Besides, both sections will try to examine the NR messages taking into account the populist dimension pervading the ideology of contemporary right wing parties (though not exclusively right wing) as discussed above.

Social actors as culprits and rescuers

The main social actors represented in the examined corpus are: the party NR, the opposing political groups and the Romanian citizens. The aims of the messages are to differentiate NR from the other political parties and to create a relation of solidarity with the citizens who form the audience of the messages. The differentiation from the other parties is realized through a marked relation of antagonism, leading to the construction of an in-group identity positioned versus an out-group.

The most common strategies used in the NR discourse are differentiation and appraisement. While the first strategy constructs the differences between the in- and the out-group, the second one implies the use of evaluative lexis, labelling social actors as good or bad. Through the use of these strategies, NR constructs its identity at two levels. At the concrete level, it states its political views as a new actor on the political stage. At a deeper level, it also constructs a symbolic identity, by depicting the opposition between NR and the other parties as a struggle between good and evil.

This is a recurrent feature in the discursive creation of in- and out-groups, which ‘necessarily implies the use of strategies of positive self-presentation and the negative presentation of others. [italics in original]’ . The opposition between identity and alterity in the political domain is extensively discussed by Connolly, who pays attention to the philosophical dimension of this relationship. He identifies two ‘problems of evil’ on the political level, concerning the attempt to create and preserve a hegemonic identity, which can be done only by defining what is different as evil. In order to maintain the created identity, it is necessary also to define an ‘other’, opposed to it. It should be noted that Connolly’s observations apply both to the sphere of international and national politics. In the last case, the enemy is not represented by another state, but by a political organization whose views and courses of action are perceived as different and menacing to the identity of the organization or political actor in question. Here, Connolly points out an interesting paradox: it is necessary to live in a democracy in order for difference to ‘establish space for itself as alter-identity’. At the same time, the democratic society allows the legitimation of a dogmatized identity. This observation applies well to the case of NR discourse: the party rejects the government parties labelling them as totalitarian, but it would have been impossible for any party to exist and take such a stance, had it not been a democratic environment.

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The in-group is first represented by the party NR. Such references occur in all the five texts analyzed, usually in order to assert the party’s standpoint on specific issues. The nomination of NR as a social actor is realized through the use of the name (Noua Republică), through the first-person plural pronoun ‘we’ (noi) and corresponding verb forms or through constructions with the corresponding possessive adjective (partidul nostru/‘our party’). The use of the party’s name creates the impression of objectivity and at the same time, represents the party as a monolithic force. No persons are individualized within this group, a strategy which creates the impression of solidarity and coherence:

‘The New Republic sustains a real constitutional reform.’ (‘Noua Republică susţine o adevărată reformă constituţională.’ (NC).

Occurrences of the ‘we’ pronoun and/or the corresponding verb forms were found in four of the five texts examined and they fulfilled more complex functions. The first-person plural pronoun mitigates the impersonal character of the e-mailed messages as a mass communication technique and adds to the value of personalization. ‘We’ is frequently used in the corpus as a synonym for NR, suggesting the idea that the political organization is not represented as a mere abstract entity, but as a group of people:

‘Our party defends the two fundamental axes of democracy and of the rule of law: economic freedom and independent justice. We want money for the Romanians and a justice that is honestly done!’

In the example above, the party fulfills the role of the Agent, while the ‘Romanians’ have the position of Beneficiary. This is an instance where the ‘we’ pronoun is used with an exclusive meaning. The receiver of the messages is often cast in the role of the witness, assimilated in the large category of ‘Romanian people’. Similar to all political parties, NR highlights its desire and ability of defending the interests of the common people and, in order to sustain these ideas, NR presents itself not only as a leading political actor but also as a representative party. It is likely that at the beginning of 2013, NR had less members than other political parties. However, the party discourse attempts to avoid the representation of NR as an isolated political organization. By emphasizing the existence of common values and beliefs, the NR discourse extends the in-group until it virtually incorporates all Romanian citizens:

‘We are born to talk to the millions of citizens who stay at home, disgusted. Millions of righteous and honest citizens have grown tired of the torment of surviving from day to day, of the scarce money and of an

30 ‘Partidul nostru apără cele două axe fundamentale ale democrației și statului de drept: libertatea economică și justiția independentă. Vrem bani pentru români și o dreptate cinstit împărțită! (DL)
undignified life. Millions of hard-working Romanians feel defied by the class of the newly rich people, by the flashiness of the nomenclature emerged in our eternal transition."\(^{31}\)

This excerpt illustrates how the representative character of the party and its connection to the citizens are expressed by means of the aggregation strategy, which includes the use of quantifiers (van Leeuwen 2008: 38). The quantifier *milioane* (‘millions’) accompanies here the nouns *cetăţeni* (‘citizens’) and *români* (‘Romanians’) and marks the antagonism between social actors also in terms of numbers: ‘we’, ‘the citizens’ are many, ‘they’, ‘the rich people’, are only a few. In this example, the aggregation strategy is combined with the positive evaluation of the in-group and the negative evaluation of the out-group.

The writer of the mails does not address the receivers directly. The only occurrences of second-person pronouns were found in the speech delivered by the president of the party at the national meeting of the party members and supporters. The speech highlights the existence of an in-group that comprises the current party members and supporters:

‘While you, Ladies and Gentlemen, you didn’t only complain, didn’t only think about, didn’t only talk, didn’t only write letters waiting for the news. You, brave people, reliable men and women, energetic young people and wise seniors, from Valahia and Moldavia, from Banat and Transylvania, you, unlike the others, you rolled up your sleeves, gave up comfort, started working and in one year and a half, you perfected a new party, born and not made – a living, bold and clean party, a party of freedom, nurtured with few resources but animated by great values.’\(^{32}\)

The relation with the audience is marked through the repeated use of the Romanian honorific pronoun *dumneavoastră* (a polite version of the second person pronoun ‘you’) which is commonly used for expressing the distance between speaker and addressees. Here, the honorific functions as a marker of respect and even contributes to creating an inclusive, not an exclusive relationship as the speaker praises the audience and evaluates their actions as positive. Instead of foregrounding his role in the creation of the party, the speaker presents it as a

\(^{31}\) ‘Ne-am născut pentru a le vorbi milioanelor de cetăţeni care stau acasă dezgustaţi. Milioane de români dreptişi şi cinstiţi s-au săturat de chinul supravieţuirii de pe o zi pe alta, de bani puţini şi o viaţă nedemnă. Milioane de români gospodari se simt sfidaţi de clasa parveniţilor, de ostentaţia nomenclaturii formate în veşnică noastră tranziţie.’ (DL)

\(^{32}\) ‘Dumneavoastră, însă, Doamnelor şi Domnilor, nu doar v-ai plâns, nu doar v-ai gândit, nu doar aţi vorbit, nu doar aţi scris rănge în așteptarea nouătăţii. Dumneavoastră, ca nişte oameni curajoşi, bărbaţi şi femei de caracter, tineri energici şi vârstnici înţelepti, regăşiţi şi moldoveni, băneşti şi ardeleni, Dumneavoastră aşadar, spre deosebire de ceilalţi, v-ai suflecă mâncile, aţi renunţat la confort, aţi trecut la treabă şi, într-un an şi jumătate, aţi desăvârşit un partid nou, născut, iar nu făcut – un partid viu, curajos şi curat, un partid al libertăţii, hrănit cu resurse puţine dar animat de valori măreţe.’

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collective work. The representative character of the party is suggested by the description of its founding members, comprising virtually all categories of age, gender, and also geographical origin. Throughout Mihail Neamțu’s discourse, the group represented by ‘us’ is often distinguished from other groups, which are either referred to by indefinite pronouns as unii (some) or mulții (many) or by nouns or noun phrases, especially in relation to other political parties, as will be discussed below.

The examples introduced above show a clear tendency of constructing a marked positive identity of the party as in-group. In addition to that, the ‘people’ are also represented as a secondary social actor, in a highly idealized manner. The Romanian citizens are depicted as being honest and hard-working (having only qualities), but also poor (as victims of the context and, more precisely, of contemporary politicians). They are represented as being threatened by the political elites at present but as certain beneficiaries of the NR policies in the future. It should be noted that the idealized representation of the ‘citizens’ is also very homogenous: they are all Romanians and come from all historical regions of Romania, but no word is mentioned about the ethnic or religious minorities living in Romania. In spite of the fact that the corpus contains no explicit rejection of minorities, the references to the category of party supporters as being ‘Romanians’ may represent a form of implicit suppression of the minorities, thereby excluding them from the public sphere.

An interesting characteristic is the extensive depiction of the villified Other in all the analyzed texts. Though the main purpose of the e-mails should have been the construction of NR’s identity as a political party, this goal is never fulfilled independently of the depiction of the Other. The positive presentation of the party NR is achieved through the parallel construction of an out-group that encompasses various negative traits. The e-mails have therefore a mixed character, juxtaposing the presentations of both social actors. In contrast to the few nomination strategies used to designate the in-group, references to the out-group comprise a wide array of nomination strategies.

First, the out-group is represented by the contemporary political parties and NR’s differentiation from these parties is made through ‘ideologically contested’ terms like ‘socialist’ or ‘communist’. In the case of NR discourse, the antagonism is intensified by the fact that the right wing party is in opposition while the left wing alliance forms the current government. In the following excerpt, the repetition of the term ‘socialist’ enforces the negative connotation and underrates the alliance formed by the governing parties:

The regime installed after the misappropriation of the Revolution in December 1989 by a group of important members of the former Romanian Communist Party was an authoritarian one. [...] The partial democratization between 1996 and 2000 had no consequences for the long

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term. The elections remained corrupt. The dirty money remained at the politicians’ disposal. The local administration and the Justice have remained in a state of disorganization.

The Socialist Alliance (USL) pretends now that they want to revise the current Constitution. This action is of a rarely seen hypocrisy, even for the miserable standards introduced by the Ponta regime.’

We remind [you] that the same Socialist Alliance (USL) organized a coup d’etat during 3 – 6 July 2012 that frightened the civilized Europe, being condemned by the European Union and the Venice Commission as a menace against the state.’34

The real name of the alliance appears only between parantheses, as the acronym ‘USL’ which stands for ‘Uniunea Social-Liberală’ (‘the Social – Liberal Union’), formed by a left-wing party, the Social – Democrat Party together with the National Liberal and the Conservative Party. The adjective social might have had positive connotation for the large public as it is frequently used in structures like măsuri sociale (‘social measures’) or protecție socială (‘social protection’). The writer replaces this term with socialist which is more likely to have negative connotations for many Romanian electors, reminding them of the abuses of the communist dictatorship.

The critique directed against the contemporary politicians is embedded in a more extensive frame which appeals to the collective memory of the audience by giving a particular interpretation of recent history. According to this perspective, the last two decades in Romania’s history represent only a period of stagnation. In the example discussed above, one of the lexico-grammatical means of expressing this idea is the repetition of the verb a rămâne ( ‘to remain’) in three parallel structures. Besides, what NR states is that the Romanian governements after 1989 have not been different from the dictatorial communist government. Even if some political leaders of today were not members of the government after 1989, a negative judgment is cast upon all of them by the mere association with the Romanian Communist Party. The members of the first post-revolutionary government are not nominated here, but, instead, they are referred to by means of functionalization, as activiști ai fostului Partid Comunist Român (‘important members of the former Romanian Communist Party’). The NR discourse thus

assimilates the class of actual political leaders to the former communist elites, responsible for countless abuses towards Romanian people and violations of human rights.

The vilification of the Other is frequently performed by means of assimilation. This strategy implies the reference to a social actor as a group35 and as a consequence it allows no place for differences within this group. According to the view advanced by NR, all political actors are equally bad. This is a strategy which directly enforces the uniqueness of NR as being the sole political force that truly serves the citizens’ interests:

‘Every day, the actors of the political life seem to distance themselves more and more from the Romanians’ expectations. The socialist power buries the country in bankruptcy. Putting an end to poverty and driving away injustice seem to be vain promises.’36

In this fragment, the ideological antagonism is associated with a polarized social relation, viewed in terms of a class struggle. This representation additionally activates the powerful rhetorical topos of threat, drawing attention to what the behaviour of the political elite, depicted as contrary to the citizens’ welfare.

The negative representation of the Other is connected to a negative depiction of the current economic and social situation of Romania and the out-group is depicted as a culprit and held responsible for the current state of affairs. In addition, the collective identity of NR is constructed through the recourse to a symbolic frame, aiming to make the party stand out among the other Romanian parties. This dimension was particularly salient in two of the texts analyzed, one presenting the party’s perspective on Romanian politics in general and another one including the speech held by the president of the NR party in February 2013.

The symbolic representation of social actors is realized especially through metaphors that carry highly affective evaluations. For instance, the out-group is sometimes represented through metaphors of illness and death. The last excerpt included the verb a îngropa (‘to bury’) used in order to represent the activity of the government parties. In the speech delivered in front of the party supporters, Mihail Neamțu refers to the out-group in terms of physical illness, especially cancer. All such references appeal to a powerful script, regarding the attack on a human body by an insidious and evil enemy.

‘The New Republic appears today in the life of the Romanians from everywhere as continuing an older project of a country, but also as a work

36 'În fiecare zi, actorii vieţii politice se îndepărtează parcă tot mai mult de așteptările românilor. Puterea socialistă îngropă țara în faliment. Ieșirea din sărâcie și alungarea nedreptății par niște promisiuni deșarte.' (DL)
of healing the open wounds in the body of our nation, a work of exorcising an endemic evil and an attempt to stop a cancerous metastasis."37

Following this argumentative thread of the speech, the identity of NR is constructed by means of symbolic references to life. Not only is the party represented as being able to ‘heal’, but the discursive construction of the party’s identity undergoes a process of anthropomorphization, NR being presented as a person. The texts examined include references to the ‘birth’ of the party and Mihail Neamțu even speaks of the party’s identity card. A further characteristic of the NR discourse is that the party even acquires Messianic traits. For instance, NR is depicted through an apparently ambiguous construction in the following excerpt of the party president’s speech. The expression născut, iar nu făcut (‘born, and not made’) appears in the Orthodox prayer Crezul (‘Credo or the symbol of faith’) referring to Jesus Christ and his miraculous birth.

‘you perfected a new party, born and not made – a live, bold and clean party, a party of freedom, nurtured with few resources but animated by great values.’38

Another connection to the figure of Messiah occurs in the depiction of the three major hardships that the party founders had to overcome, according to Mihail Neamțu. What stands out here is the number of three and the reference to the second impediment as the ‘second temptation blown away’. The lexical choices allude to the three temptations which, according to the Christian religion, the devil presented to Jesus while he was praying in the desert. This representation casts the political struggle into a more complex frame, not only of Good versus Evil, but the fight led by Christ against the devil:

‘First, we defeated the apathy of an abused people. […] The second temptation blown away by the New Republic was the struggle against the kafkian bureaucracy of an oversize State. […] Finally, the New Republic survived the fight against the USL propaganda and upheaval machine.’39

The appeal to ideas stemming from the Christian theology is not random. It functions as another means of differentiating the party from the communist doctrine, which dissuaded religious beliefs, labelling them as ‘mysticism’. The

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37 ‘Noua Republică apare astăzi în viața românilor de pretutindeni ca o prelungire a unui mai vechi proiect de țară, dar și ca o operă de tămâduire a rânilor deschise în trupul națiunii noastre, o operă de exorcizare a unui râu endemic și-o încercare de stopare a unei metastaze caneroase.’ (NR)
38 ‘âți desăvârșiți un partid nou, născut, iar nu făcut – un partid viu, curajos și curat, un partid al libertății, hrănit cu resurse puține dar animat de valori mărețe.’.
39 ‘Mai întâi, am înfrânt pasivitatea unui popor dezabuzat. […] A doua ispită spulberată de Noua Republică a fost lupta cu birorâcia kafkiană a unui Stat obez. […] În sfârșit, Noua Republică a supraviețuit luptei cu mașinăria de agitație și propagandă a USL.’
presence of Christian elements in the NR discourse links its ideology with that of the Romanian ‘legionari’.

The construction of in-group identity is based on shared opinions about the current state of affairs. Generally speaking, criticizing somebody implies holding a sort of authority over the targeted persons, the ability to notice their errors and the advantage of being in a position to judge them. As NR is not a party represented in the Parliament, the construction of such critical messages addressed to the large public is one of the few ways available in order to assume for itself a special type of authority. The asymmetric power relationship existing between governing and opposition parties is thus inverted at least on the discursive level, if not in real life. By means of the dichotomic representation of the social actors, NR assumes a political but, even more important, a moral authority. The negative values connected with the advanced representation of the ‘political Other’ are: lack of democracy, lack of transparency, an authoritarian regime, even lack of civilization. The NR party presents itself as immune to corruption and to compromises and as the only party that understands the dissatisfaction of the ‘common people’.

Legitimating change

The discursive legitimation of social actions concerns the act of providing reasons for a specific practice. In the case of political discourse, legitimation regards the practice of the elections: voters must be persuaded that they should vote for a specific party or person instead of for another. Legitimation is an important dimension of NR messages, as NR needs not only to persuade as many citizens as possible to vote for it, but also to financially support the party. Further, NR needs to show that the change of the current government is necessary and that NR is the only reliable actor in the political sphere.

Van Leeuwen identifies four categories of legitimation strategies: authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization and mythopoesis. All categories are represented in the corpus which indicates the importance of the discursive legitimation for the party. The most frequent category is that of moral evaluation, deeply connected with the positive presentation of the in-group and the negative presentation of the out-group. The critique is expressed in terms of moral values: the out-group is portrayed as corrupt, deceitful and lacking the knowledge and the abilities required to govern a state. At the lexico-semantic level, most texts (4 out of 5) show a strong tendency towards overlexicalization in the depiction of reality, towards the accumulation of lexical items with strong negative meanings, like ‘poverty’, ‘bankruptcy’, ‘injustice’ or ‘blackmail’.

The negative evaluation of the out-group (especially of contemporary politicians) is connected to one of the main ideas stated in the NR e-mails: the need for justice. As one of the examples above showed, NR doctrine includes two key points: an economic one, regarding the free market, and a legal one, referring to the need of making justice.

‘The New Republic [party] exists in order to question the rusty patterns and the hypocrite appearances of the politics deployed along the banks of the Dâmbovița river. Romania needs radical, not conventional solutions; we want a
New Republic led by brave leaders and not by persons who can be blackmailed or who are corrupt.\textsuperscript{40}

Moreover, what seems to be another characteristic of NR discourse is the tendency to impose moral evaluation upon time. In other words, specific segments in time are evaluated as being good or bad. The words associated with the current state of affairs have negative meanings or connotations, while the words associated with the future change and with NR imply positive judgments. This classification scheme holds whether the subject is punctual (the health system, the economic development) or general (Romanian political life as a whole). A negative depiction of a present situation represents an important step in the argumentation in favour of change. By presenting the present as entirely negative and the alternative future as entirely positive, the writer manages to naturalize the need for change, making it appear as a natural consequence of the given premises.

This evaluation is manifest in the semantic relation of antonymy which recurred in the texts analyzed. The relation is established between the semantic fields of ‘new’ and ‘old’ which acquire positive, respectively negative meanings. For instance, the headline ‘Reforma Sănătății: protagoniști vechi și soluții la fel de vechi’ (‘The Health Reform: old actors and just as old solutions’) is based on the opposed meanings of the terms within. The term reformă (‘reform’) implies the idea of renewal, while the adjective vechi (‘old’), used twice, acquires a negative meaning in this context and it is used in order to contradict the reader’s expectations. The positive meaning assigned to the adjective nou (‘new’) is visible in headlines such as ‘O Nouă Constituție pentru o Nouă Românie’ (‘A new Constitution for a new Romania’) and in the party’s name, ‘Noua Republică’. The name already shows the positive meaning attributed to change, which, in this case, equals renewal: what is new is good as it is necessary. The name also includes an ambiguity, because, from a strictly legal point of view, Romania is a republic and has been so since the last king abdicated the throne and the communist party took the power. The choice of the party’s name indicates that the party does not view the present statal organization as truly respecting democratic principles.

The strategy of rationalization is less frequent in the corpus, being employed especially in the texts following a news article genre, where financial or diplomatic issues are discussed. Still, this is the main strategy used in the text ‘Reforma Sănătății: protagoniști vechi și soluții la fel de vechi’ (‘The Health Reform: old actors and just as old solutions’) whose main claim regards the inefficient use of public money in the health system. The writer appeals to numbers, statistics and official documents in order to sustain the critical stance, but also to the repetition of some negative words. For example, the term risipă (‘waste’) is used four times, twice marked, once by an adjectival determiner, risipă suplimentară (‘additional waste’) and another time by capitalisation. Another word with a similar meaning is

\textsuperscript{40}’Noua Republică există pentru a contesta tiparele ruginite și aparențele ipocrite ale politiciei dâmbovițene. România are nevoie de soluții radicale, nu convenționale; vrem o Nouă Republică condusă de lideri curajoși, iar nu de persoane șantajabile sau venale.’
the adjective inutil (‘useless’), which is also repeated in the text: bunuri inutile (‘useless goods’), cantități inutile de produse (‘useless product supplies’).

The strategy of authorization is more clearly manifest in Mihail Neamțu’s speech which acknowledges the recent formation of the party and, at the same time, presents it as continuing a former doctrine, that of the opponents of communism. Authorization serves here to avoid the risk of NR being considered a new and minor party; instead, it is linked to the more prestigious Peasants’ National Party (Partidul Național Țăranesc), which existed before the communist dictatorship. NR does not construct its identity as merely opposed to communism but it legitimates its existence and its standpoint through an appeal to the collective memory. An important model brought into discussion is the Romanian politician Corneliu Coposu. Because he was a member in the Peasants’ National Party, he was accused and sent to prison by the communist authorities; still, he managed to survive and lived to see the fall of the communist regime.

‘Many of those who joined the New Republic loved Corneliu Coposu in their youth because the Senior wanted not only for him, but mostly for the descendants, a free, dignified and prospering Romanian nation. [...] Humbly taking up this historical mandate, the New Republic translates optimism into political action and makes boldness a cardinal virtue.’

The figure of Corneliu Coposu embodies values such as resistance to communism, tenacity and courage. The reference to this politician also contributes to the creation of a common ground between the speaker Mihail Neamțu and the public: the in-group encompasses also people who reject communism because they or their relatives have suffered in communist prisons. This type of legitimation adds value to the political programme of the party. Its actions signify more than the will to replace the actual government, namely the desire to do justice and to restore the ‘normal’ democratic state of affairs, which prevailed before the communist regime.

According to van Leeuwen’s framework, the strategy of mythopoesis is achieved through storytelling. The speaker inserts a myth, in fact a story, that suggests the legitimate course of action. Mythopoesis is employed in all the instances when NR discourse represents the party as a divine figure fighting against the evil. Moreover, the reiteration of the myth of genesis is visible in Mihail Neamțu’s speech. Creation myths represent a significant element in all cultures and it is not a coincidence that the party president transforms the official acknowledgement of NR into a symbolic event. Talking about the acknowledgement, Mihail Neamțu creates the image of an anarchic world, which allowed the existence of a reversed set of values.

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41 Mulții dintre cei care au venit la Noua Republică l-au iubit în tinerețe pe Corneliu Coposu pentru că Seniorul și-a dorit nu doar pentru el, ci mai ales pentru urmași, o națiune română liberă, demnă și prosperă. [...] Preluând cu umilință acest mandat istoric, Noua Republică traduce optimismul în acțiune politică și face din îndrăzneală o virtute cardinală.”
‘On January 29, 1990 […] . People were booing a lot and insulting without restriction. Broken windows, broken doors, mutilated objects, wounded bodies and dead souls.

The disciple of the late Iuliu Maniu (who died at Sighet sixty years before) […] was threatened, humiliated and chased like a wild beast. Why? Because the great Corneliu Coposu wished another Romania, because he was dreaming, like so many other former political prisoners, of a clean and worthy country.

January 29, 1990 remains a dark day in the calendar of Romanian democracy.

January 29, 2013 represents, on the contrary, the equinox of hope – the moment of the passage to the zodiac sign of freedom and responsibility.’

This speech establishes a connection with a specific past event, the street protests that took place in Bucharest at the beginning of 1990. Such intense social events are considered to be linked to the concept of ‘political crisis’ and also imply a mobilization of values. The insistence on this specific past moment acquires a symbolic function when it is linked with the foundation of the NR party. Its legal acknowledgement is thus transformed in a mythical Genesis, the time of order and creation comes after chaos. The birth of the right-wing party comes after the disorder created and preserved by communists, in a manner similar to God’s creation of the world. This overdetermination based on references to Christian beliefs makes the NR party stand out and it is sustained in the party founder’s speech by various further references to Christian religion.

Conclusions

The characteristics discussed above show that social actors are represented in the NR discourse in a dichotomic manner. The in-group formed by the party and its supporters is depicted in a positive, even idealized way, while the out-group is formed by the contemporary governing parties and negatively represented. The two representations are juxtaposed in the messages issued by NR, still the negative representation of the Other is sometimes so extensive that it becomes the core of the article, leaving the party’s identity and standpoint in the background. The representation of the social actors on the level of reality is accompanied by a representation on a symbolic level, with the party NR in a Messianic role, while the

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42 ‘În 29 ianuarie 1990 […] Se huiduia abundant și se proferau calomnii fără opreliști. Geamuri spante, uși rupte, obiecte desfigurate, turburi rânte și suflete morte. Ucenicul răposatului Iuliu Maniu (mort la Sighet acum 60 de ani), […] era, așadar, amenințat, umilit și hăritat ca o fiară. De ce? Pentru că marea Corneliu Coposu și-a dorea o altă Românie, pentru că visa și el, ca atâția alții foști deținuți politici, la o țără curată și demnă.

29 ianuarie 1990 rămâne o zi neagră în calendarul democrației românești.

29 ianuarie 2013 reprezintă, în schimb, echinoxul speranței – momentul trecerii către zodia libertății și a responsabilității.’

governing parties incarnate a villified and demonic Other. Such polarized representations cannot exist without an important legitimation strategy, that of the moral evaluation of the social actors. This strategy serves here to legitimate the existence of NR as a social and political actor and the necessity to replace the current government. It is not clear, however, how this change could be accomplished, as the e-mailed messages include more or less ambiguous formulations, such as the reference to ‘radical solutions’ for example, but also to the democratic practice of elections. The role of the religious references and the marked deontic dimension evoke the discourse of the former extremist organization ‘Legiunea Arhanghelului Mihail’. A possible direction of research would therefore need to focus on the comparison between more texts issued by the two political formations.

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THE FUNCTIONS OF RHETORIC IN THE BULGARIAN PUBLIC SPHERE

Ivanka Mavrodieva

Abstract: Political rhetoric in Bulgaria after 1989 has changed as a result of political, cultural, technological, social, philological, and media factors. The participants in the protests use social networks as virtual tribunes; Bulgarian citizens broadcast their civil demands in front of virtual audiences. Civil rhetoric is an instrument to involve the citizens in the political activities, to present the requests and suggestions of the Bulgarian citizens in front of the state institutions.

Keywords: Bulgaria; rhetoric; public sphere; dialogue; institutions; citizens; protests.

Introduction

The oratory of Bulgarian politicians plays a key role during the processes of transition from socialism to democracy, from a mono-party to a multi-party system; from passive behaviour to active citizen behaviour; from recipients of public speeches to participants in the different formats of virtual communication on political topics.

The hypothesis is that the Bulgarian political rhetoric after 1990 has undergone different transformations as a result of technical, technological, social and physiological factors. In addition, the traditional rhetorical matrix orator-speech-audience is transformed, virtual communication includes verbal and visual elements and the civil oratory displays new manifestations simultaneously with traditional public speaking.

Theoretical background

The definition given in Book I, Chapter 2 of Aristotle’s Rhetoric states that “Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Aristotle 2004). We do agree with this basic notion but the actualization of specialized terminology is of crucial importance for the contemporary scientific knowledge. The constant observation of new articles and practices in the field shows that there is a growing diversity of rhetoric’s applications in the modern world. Internet is one of the places where rhetoric is widely applied. The Internet has gradually influenced and changed the functions of rhetorical communication, as has been discussed in Mavrodieva (2012).

The traditional rhetorical genres speech, report, lecture, address etc. have stable positions in the contemporary public political speaking. More institutions, party leaders and NGO’s are interested in traditional dialogical formats conference, discussion, debate, seminar and press-conference.
At the same time it is reasonable to designate new manifestations and some of new terms. Mavrodieva (2010) introduces the term virtual rhetoric in her book and she (2012) uses the terms virtual political rhetoric and visual political rhetoric (223-279). New genres on the Internet are video-conference, webinar, virtual forums, and posts. The Bulgarian state institutions prefer to inform citizens in an official manner and they avoid participating in virtual communication. The protesters take part in virtual forums and many of them publish posts in social networks. The posts are verbal, visual (pictures, photos, caricatures, video clips, parody of official public speaking, paraphrased words delivered by politicians etc.) or a mixture of verbal and visual elements. The multimodality is a feature of these short messages and some of them consist of animation effects, sound etc. The asynchronous virtual communication is networks mediated because the Bulgarian citizens use social networks to express their appeals and to share their positions. The traditional rhetorical matrix orator–speech–audience is transformed; everybody can be a sender and more protesters avoid accepting themself only as receivers of political massages. Consequently, the political rhetoric in the virtual space has new manifestations and the virtual forums, posts and asynchronous dialogues after e-massages are some of them. The posts have common characteristics and one of them is brevity, some of the posts are original messages but others are shared with the virtual audience of active Bulgarian netizens.

The terms presented above are used in the article as the basis for my investigation of traditional and new rhetorical genres. The subject of the research demands an interdisciplinary approach including rhetorical analysis and visual rhetorical analysis.

The political speaking in Bulgaria after 1989 is characterised by its heterogeneity. The political rhetoric includes speeches delivered during street meetings, demonstrations and protests, state-political discourse, official statements, international negotiations, events and (Karasimeonov 10-112); press-conferences, politician’s interviews and presentations posted on the Internet (Krasteva 79-102). Bulgarian political orators use verbal tools and non-verbal techniques but some speakers prefer to include visual elements presenting political ideas, slogans, appeals, and messages. Politicians appraise rhetoric as an instrument to create a personal political image and publicity and to legitimate new ideas in the civil society in Bulgaria. Only some political speeches have features of the best models of contemporary political speeches and most of them follow the model of routine public speaking (Mavrodieva 99-125). Bulgarian political rhetoric is also interpreted as a function of the state institutions, political parties and NGOs.

Civil rhetoric during the protests and demonstrations (1989-1990, 1996-1997, 2010-2013) has been transformed too and Bulgarian citizens present their demands more categorically. The participants in the protests use social networks such as Facebook and Twitter which they perceive as virtual tribunes; Bulgarian citizens broadcast the speeches, appeals, programs, and civil demands in front of virtual audiences. Krasteva (2013) uses the term “digital citizen” and she researches transformations in the society, party system and institutions determined by a new model of citizenship which includes using social networks (99-117).
Ildiko Otava investigates the eco-mobilizations in the contemporary Bulgarian civil society off-line and on-line (147-161). Mavrodieva (2013) focuses on the new manifestations of the civil oratory during the street demonstrations and virtual rhetoric in the social networks as part of the ‘Bulgarian spring’ (248-267).

Bulgarian politicians and citizens accept the Internet as a tool for mobilisation, they post information and use Facebook as an instrument for citizen activation and acceleration of the protests but they cannot combine effectively the digital literacy and political activities. Ivaylo Dichev analyses the new attitudes of the young Bulgarian citizens during the demonstrations on topics such as ecology, human rights etc. (14-44). Todorova (2013) investigates the Internet mobilisations and particularly the attitudes of the generations and the different kinds of participations in the protest using social networks (161-172). The brief observation presents a steady scientific interest in investigating the changes of contemporary Bulgarian society and the focus is on the manifestations, factors, communication channels and effects of using the Internet in political events, actions and processes.

State-political discourse, institutional rhetoric and party oratory

From a rhetorical point of view more Bulgarian politicians present political speaking in a boring manner; they re-present messages and appeals pre-prepared and announced. Politicians avoid real, media and virtual dialogues with Bulgarian citizens; they do not favour negotiations on the current and strategic topics with the representatives and leaders of the protests. The institutional political rhetoric is formal and banal and it plays an informative function, the persuasive function of the state-political discourse is reduced and it is subdued to a secondary place.

The theoretical approach includes publications concerning parliamentary rhetoric. Ilie (2003) investigated parliamentary debates in the United Kingdom (House of Commons), concluding that these debates are organized following, as well as breaking, parliamentary rules and that the spatial and temporal variables are specific features of institutional dialogue (Ilie, 2003: 269-291). She argues that parliamentary discourse is distinguishable for its agonistic features (25-53). We agree with the positions presented by Ilie and we would like to add that the parliamentary debates have established solid traditions in the National Assembly and in the contemporary Bulgarian state.

The debates in the National Assembly are agonistic dialogues and they play the role of presenting pre-prepared, co-ordinated and approved positions and the persuasive function has been reduced during the past decade. The effective dialogue has decreased as a result of the conformism to the party policy; political polarization has created opportunities for verbal aggression but not for consensus and effective dialogue in the legislative institutions in Bulgaria. The temporary conflicts or ‘colds wars’ between the Presidential institution and the National Assembly, between the Presidential institution and the Council of Ministers has established barriers to making decisions in favour of Bulgarian citizens.

The connection between oratory, politicians and ethos has been investigated by Zaleska (2012) and the results are presented in Chapter Two named “Rhetorical
Patterns of Constructing the Politician’s Ethos” from her book “Rhetoric and Politics. Central/Eastern European Perspectives” (2012: 29-50). We completely agree with the positions presented by Zaleska that ethos is connected with credibility; ethos is a factor in identifying both the orator and the audience (2012: 29-50). The investigation of the oratory in the state institutions and political parties in Bulgaria demonstrates that the power of political speaking is changeable and the influences of public utterances under the Bulgarian citizens gradually decrease. The disappointments removed the attitudes of the Bulgarian citizens and frustration remains as a permanent manner of civil behaviour. Citizens are gradually losing interest in the state institutions, public speaking, media participation. Politicians regard themselves as political elite but they do not play a role of responsible and competent statesmen and strategic decision-makers. Fair play is substituted for personal, party and corporate interests. As a result their political utterances stop performing a function as a tool in the effective public dialogue.

The state-political discourse and party oratory have a pragmatic function, the ministers and political leaders deliver speeches presenting ideas, platforms, and programs. At the same time the rhetoric in the state institutions is determined by rules and norms, standards and constrains. These speeches, reports, utterances are delivered during parliamentary debates, meetings of the Council of Ministers, discussions initiated by the Presidency. The Bulgarian state-political rhetoric has its own traditions and specific features in the different institutions.

Party oratory is an inseparable part of congresses, conferences and election campaigns. Most political leaders prefer to deliver monologues (speeches, utterances, reports) and the main function of the political speaking is to inform the members of party but not to persuade the political opponents. The model orator-speech-audience has permanent attendance. The main figure is an orator who delivers a speech in front of the public. The members of this public are receivers of the messages and they send the signals of feedback to the political speaker. The model has several enlargements and variants, for example:

1. assigning a task to a politician – orator – speech – audience;
2. assigning a task to a politician – advice given by experts from different scientific fields (political sciences, philology, philosophy, history, European studies, anthropology etc.) – orator – speech – audience;
3. assigning a task to a politician – preparing of the utterance by a speech-writer and coaching of the orator by a trainer or a team of specialists – delivering the speech in front of an audience.

It is obvious that the traditional monologue is combined with the hierarchical decisions and the way from the initiation to the delivery is a long one.

**Oral and virtual civil rhetoric**

Civil rhetoric has started to be an instrument of involving citizens in political activities and process, of presenting the requests, proposals and suggestions of the Bulgarian citizens in front of the state institutions. The result of the analysis confirms the position presented by Christian Kock and Lisa Villadsen: “We see
rhetorical citizenship is a conceptual frame that emphasizes the fact that legal rights, privileges and material conditions are not the only constituents of citizenship; discourse that takes place between citizens is arguably the basis of what it means to be a citizen.” (Kock and Villadsen 2013). The civil oratory plays a role in convincing Bulgarian citizens that active positioning and rhetorical citizenship is a relevant tool in the civil society.

The rhetorical situation is changed; the messages are sent and shared on the horizontal level among the participants independently of the environments: social networks or streets. The hierarchical communication, instructions and strict control and party coordination are not typical features of the civil oratory and virtual communication. Dialogue and interaction are specific features of social networks; the political speaker is replaced by the e-communicator. Assigning the tasks is changed by citizen’s initiations and self-organization. The traditional channels are substituted by social networks; the simple verbal messages are changed by visual elements and multimodal products. The messages created online aid Bulgarian citizens in organizing the protests off-line, they re-organise the locations of the groups on-line. The actions, events, activities organized off-line are presented on-line as posts, photos, video clips in the Facebook groups established in favour of the protests. Some of them started in February named “Occupy Bulgaria”, <http://www.facebook.com/occupybulgarianstreets>, http://forum.4at.info/index.php?top; https://www.facebook.com/events/424843110925585/.

During the summer protests e-citizens started to use hash tag # and some of this groups are #Оставка (#Retirement), #протест (#protest), #България (#Bulgaria), #Идвайте (#Come along). It is obvious that social networks support civil rhetoric and that the Internet is an instrument of mobilisation and organisation and a specific PR and media channel to re-present messages, events and activities. The civil oratory includes clear words, short sentences and the leaders of the protests avoid sophisticated verbal style and metaphorical language. The protesters include new terms in their messages, they are anonymous authors, and they prefer participation in the street parades but not personalization and leadership. Probably it is a result of their behaviour as netizens (net plus citizens) in the social networks when more representatives of the Net generation avoid a demonstration of domination; they are members in the dialogical virtual formats. It is very important to specify that their messages are relatively new and unique manifestations because they are delivered orally in the streets during the demonstrations and simultaneously they are written on the posters as part of the performances. These are some of the protesters’ slogans: civil quota, civil control, civil board, civil participation in the decision making process, institutionalization of the civil participation, civil control over state institutions, national protest, international investigation, electoral code, equal access to media during election campaigns, new organization of the elections, new voter lists or electoral rolls, transparency with regard to the connection between parties, institutions and corporations; abort state support for political parties, two mandates as a member of the Parliament, new Constitution, etc. These words are not part of the ideological language but
they are a proof of a process of growing maturity of the civil society in Bulgaria. Most of these words are created spontaneously, they are written on the posters; in the slogans and delivered during the public speaking in front of the protesters. Most protest leaders don’t have any experience as political orators but institutional leaders are good manipulators. The civil oral speaking is a tool of organizing the protesters, unfortunately, it is not an effective instrument of dialogue especially during political negotiations.

**Virtual rhetorical analysis of the dialogue between the institutions and the Bulgarian citizens**

This part of the article includes the results of the investigation organized on the basis of the rhetorical model presented by the researchers Jos van den Broek, Willam Koetsenruijter, Jaap de Jong, Letitia Smit in the book „Visual Language. Perspectives for both Makers and Users“ (110-111). The model of rhetorical image analysis is reconstructed on the basis of the rhetorical canons and principles. The model includes 6 phases: the first one is named “0” and it includes analysis of the communication situation, of who the sender of the image is; what the medium is, etc. Phase 1 is named “Inventio” and it determines the choice of what is portrayed. Phase 2 includes the next rhetorical cannon (Dispositio) and it determines the formal arrangements of the image. Phase 3 (Elocutio) determines the devices that stand out. Phase 4 includes ethos, pathos, logos and it determines to what extend these three devices of persuasion are applied. The last one, phase 5 is the stage of final assessment and the question and research aim is: “What does this image aim to persuade you of, and how effectively are the chosen devices applied?” (Broek et all 2012: 110-111).

This article is a first attempt to investigate this topic in the Bulgarian rhetorical scientific tradition but the period of 23 years and the complicated subject do not permit us to research in-depth.

The corpus includes 300 photos, video clips, publications in the social networks and online media, especially Facebook, Twitter etc. The genres and materials are posts, video clips, caricatures, photos, appeals, messages, speeches, utterances, etc. The aim is to create a representative corpus including verbal and visual elements.

The communicative situation during the protests develops on three levels:
- oral political speaking, political and state-political discourse;
- communication during demonstrations;
- virtual communication in the social networks.

Strating from the first one is named “0” we can say that the communication situation is unique if we want to identify who the senders of the images are Bulgarian citizens who take part in the protests but not Bulgarian political leaders. The second interesting fact is that the medium is not only one. Some visual massages are created online and they are published as a post in the social network Facebook and after that they have a “second” life off-line. The creator does not write the name and the sender use as a medium a common virtual space when the
Bulgarian citizens accept themselves as citizens and at the same time as netizens, etc.

As mentioned above phase 1 is named “Inventio”; it is very interesting phase from visual rhetorical point of view because the protesters choose the parody and paraphrase but not official portrayal. This choice is reasonable because they express negative emotions and expressions follow this way, the members of the Council of Ministry and party leaders are described ironically.

Phase 2 (Dispositio) include arrangement of visual elements and the observation permit to summarize that more posters include two, three of four politicians and it is reasonable because the protesters express their disappointment in the Bulgarian political elite and in absent of mural of the current coalition including representative of the Bulgarian Socialist Party and the Movement for Rights and Freedom, supported by the nationalistic party “Ataka”. The clear and simple background is relevant because everybody can read the text and understand the message.

The results of the analysis in phase 3 (Elocutio) are presented below. Bulgarian citizens prefer to write appeals, messages and calls on the white background of the posters. The appeals are created very fast and they consist of rhetorical figures ellipsis, zeugma; slogans sound clearly and they are acceptable for most citizens who avoid verbosity and politically sophisticated utterances.

Phase 4 includes ethos, pathos, logos and from a rhetorical point of view the short and pathetic appeals are preferable because long phrases create communication barriers. As tension in the streets increases intricate explanations are not relevant. A telegraphic style is appropriate during the protests because civil communication avoids elaborate figurative language, verbosity and allegorical words. Written slogans are presented in front of hundreds of people and in front of journalists and cameras.

Phase 5 includes the final assessment and we can say that the visual appeals persuade real and virtual audience including the protesters but not the political decision makers. Short sentences and visual expression are typical features of the appeals; they consist of negative connotations, polar assessments and evaluations of the state institutions, political leaders, big corporations which are monopolists in Bulgarian business spheres and market.

Some of the reasons are completely different attitudes and manners of expression comparing Bulgarian citizens and Bulgarian politicians.

Politicians prefer clichés and an amorphous style, but the citizens’ expectations are to hear clear political messages. Politicians speak about political system, security, stability, responsibilities, crisis, democracy, civil society, patriotism, dialogues, discussion etc. The sense of appropriateness is absent from most political speeches and official institutional utterances.

The citizens write direct appeals and slogans on the posters and placards and they articulate orally the same appeals: “You are not sufficiently intelligent to manage us”, “Mafia out”, “No mafia”, “People against mafia”, “Citizens Strike Back”, “2013: Oligarchy – forbidden, “Oligarchy – out”, “March! Out!””, “After the „Borissov plan“ and the „Oresharski” plan comes the “March All!””. Other
slogans are „National protest: Retirement of the Oresharski cabinet”, „Go voluntarily! You have a choice at present! After that we will use force!” The appeal “Retirement!” is used very often. It is clear that the words „march”, „mafia”, „oligarchy” „out”, „go out” are also frequently used. These messages are shared very rapidly across social networks as texts and as photos from the street protests.

The effective dialogue between the institutions, party leaders and citizens is actually absent. The members of the street demonstrations initiate spontaneous performances, which consist of creative elements but they have not experience to take part in complicate and long political negotiations in a business like way. The requirements of the Bulgarian citizens are refused and the tension increases permanently. The representatives of the state institutions avoid a participation in a constructive dialogue with the members of the protests. The political elite is capsulated and the citizens prefer to establish a new virtual tribune. Most of the protesters have profiles in social networks, so they create virtual groups. Digital Bulgarian citizens publish posts, photos, video clips; they share and broadcast them across the social networks. The dialogue is on three different levels: real, virtual and a combination between the two. For example, an expert in philology who is a member of the Bulgarian Socialist Party evaluates the e-citizens as ‘internet vagabonds’, ‘internet lumpens’. This rhetorical approach, which is named argumentum ad hominem, activates the protesters who write on the posters and on the wall of the social network Facebook the following slogans: “I am not an Internet lumpen!” and they include emoticons, smiles and positive visual images, bright colours and multi-coloured slogans.

The active participants in the protests give answers while politicians follow in a passive manner, they send trivial messages and express institutional positions using traditional means. Citizenship is manifested on the Internet, the protesters send answers and slogans using the social network Facebook and more rarely Twitter. They have established a site named “Dance with me!”, which has expanded very fast and now has a Facebook group and hash tag. The protesters add further elements such as “Smile” against the passive official position. The virtual tribune is used effectively by politically active Bulgarian citizens who have digital skills: #ДАНСwithme – Smile. This hash tag is a special virtual tribune, it updates its content permanently, the creators of the content and appeals being dozens of people.

Some politicians accuse the protesters that they receive money and that some party pays them, that they have no ideas, ideals and that this is not a spontaneously organized action, that they play the role of small actors in the big political scenario written by politicians or by groups and foundations from abroad. The members of the demonstrations write immediately on the posters and on the walls: “I am here free of charge!”; “I am not paid!”, “I am here gratis!”, “I hate you free of charge”, “I hate you gratis”.

The next reproach is that the more active leaders are paid by “The Open Society” and that George Soros has given grants to several members of various NGOs. The argumentum ad hominem is “sorosoid” and the answers in virtual space are photos of Sergey Stanishev as a leader of the Bulgarian Socialist Party.
featuring next to Soros. The easy and fast access to the information from the Internet helps the protesters to verify the facts and to prepare, send and share new information immediately. Most young participants in the demonstrations prefer transparency, at the same time they avoid an aggressive approach during the dialogues in virtual forums. Some Bulgarian citizens take part in brief dialogues, the protesters as e-communicators prefer to write emotional appeals on their own Facebook walls; they appreciate this social network as a personal virtual tribune. The protesters do not have a long and solid experience as virtual debaters; they are members of political virtual forums and they express clearly their positions, they argue the official political messages presenting verbal and visual arguments selected predominately from the Internet. The members of protest groups improve gradually their skills in argumentation in Internet political discussions (the term was introduced by Marcin Lewinski in his book “Internet Political Discussion Forums as an Argumentative Activity Type” (Lewinski 2010).

The parody and caricatures, the variants of humour is another preferred approach. In the social networks, the protesters publish caricatures presenting the prime-minister, the leader of the „Ataka” party, the leader of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms as winners of the Olympiad of the deaf people. The visual elements and the humour express the political refusal to hear citizens’ demands.

The protesters in Bulgaria have written in a poster “A one-way ticket to Mars! The red planet for the government!” The figurative language draws a parallel between the government being retired and sent into exile on the planet Mars. The metaphor establishes meaning associations meant to emphasise the negative evaluations of the political elite.

The slogan “One way ticket. You go out. We stay here!” is part of the photos featuring two young people (a boy and a girl) who are carrying a poster with the same slogan. The visual image has a positive connotation and at the same time it makes a reference to socialism when the ticket to any country outside the socialist camp metaphorically and literally was a method or mode to immigrate. The other contextual sense is the need to establish a new order. Boney M’s song “One way ticket” of is now applied to a different political context.

Some of the slogans on the posters are written using different colours and as a mix between two alphabets – Cyrillic and Latin - and between two languages: Bulgarian and English. On the one hand, it is a creative invention; on the other hand, it is a manifestation of the positive visual messages sent by protesters.

Bulgarian citizens combine words with a negative connotation from different languages and this specific combination is a way to present their disappointments. The message is “Shame! Schemed! Срамота! Verguenza! Honte! Позор! Vergonga! Срам! No More!”

Young Bulgarians who are not burdened with memories dating back to socialist times and who have a sense of the freedom of speech, digital literacy, and political culture use the English language to present their position more clearly – namely that they do not tolerate political parties and they prefer instead to change the political system and the practices of political management in favour of the Bulgarian citizens and they write the slogan ‘It’s not about Right vs. Left! It’s about Right vs. Wrong!’
The protests in Bulgaria are heterogeneous as requirements and appeals. At the beginning, Bulgarian citizens created negative slogans. Gradually the messages have changed and the demands are presented more clearly and in a more structured way. They talk about new rules during the election campaigns; equal access to media; transparency concerning decisions and budget, European projects and financial support; new Constitution, etc.

The rhetoric is manifested on a visual level. Parody and paraphrase are preferable approaches because visualisation is impressive and powerful and encoding it is very easy and fast. The posters are also represented in the Facebook groups. One of them imitates the official poster of the new version of the movie “Les miserables”. The faces of the main heroes and characters are replaced by political faces – those of the leaders Stanishev, Siderov, Mestan and prime-minister Oresharski. The text (Просветнициите – wicked men) is paraphrased with Bulgarian words of cursed (克莱тва- проклетник - проклетници) but not of the “клетник” (miserable) and the sense is not miserable but accursed by Bulgarian citizens.

The parody and the paraphrase are basic visual and verbal elements of the poster with the faces of Stanishev, Siderov, Mestan in the place of Marx, Engels, and Lenin on one the most popular posters during the socialist era. The verbal slogan is “They were born by the red flag”; the red colour and the red flag being the symbols of communism. The synchronisation between verbal and visual elements establishes good opportunities for easy encoding.

Parody is the main element of the posters presenting the waltz dance between the political leaders Stanishev and Siderov and between Stanishev and Mestan. The political context is that the lobbyism, lacking in transparency and coulisse negotiations and stipulations make the dialogue between politicians and citizens difficult. The visual image is enlarged and the poster presents the civil demands as a dance with all parties: „Dance with me to the end of BSP, MRF, Ataka, CEDB”, “Dancing Stars! Dance with me!” The hats as visual elements consist of symbols: the first one is typical of a soldier of the Soviet Army and Sergey Stanishev as leader of the Bulgarian Socialistic Party is wearing it, Volen Siderov as a leader of the nationalistic party is wearing a hat typical of Nazi soldiers and Lyutvi Mestan as a leader of the ethnic party of the Turkish minority has a red fez.

Visual rhetoric is manifested during street art and performances. The remarkable celebrated picture “Liberty Leading the People” painted by Eugene Delacroix was presented as a performance on 14 July. It was young people who took part in this performance and they demonstrated a creative approach, drawing parallels between political processes.

The public speaking of the protesters and the official political rhetoric do not reach a common ground. The emotional appeals of the Bulgarian citizens and born political and state discourse do not have cross points. These factors establish irrelevant opportunities for dialogue between citizens and legislative institution (the National Assembly), Council of Ministers, and political leaders. The messages
sent by protesters to politicians sound in another surface and space; communication channels, words, visual elements are the part of another parallel level.

Conclusion

The state-political discourse and party oratory has the pragmatic orientation, the normativisation and regulation are features of the institutional rhetoric in Bulgaria after 1990. Parliamentary debates, meetings at the Council of ministers, public discussions (between politicians, NGOs and citizens) initiated by the state institutions are organised in accordance with the rules and norms, traditions and stereotypes. The utterances, speeches, reports are prepared beforehand and only some of them are delivered spontaneously by political leaders and statesmen. The main function of the speeches in front of members of the parties during conferences, congresses are informative. The utterances during the election campaigns present proposals on the basis of their political platforms and programs. Unfortunately, the public debates in the contemporary Bulgarian society do not carry out; the dialogue between the institutions and the citizens is not accomplished. The monological utterances dominate, the media carries out the representative functions. Political rhetoric makes popular political leaders, political ideas and concepts. During the last two decades after 1990 the oratory has become generally known of Bulgarian political class and political elite.

The citizens make use of an oratory and in particular verbal and visual elements during oral communication and street protests and in the virtual environments. The participants in the protests use brief sentences; they avoid verbosity, ornateness, abstract words, clichés. Most Bulgarian protesters are e-communicators, they are citizens and at the same time they are e-citizens who accept virtual communication as a place when they discuss the topics initiated by them. From their point of view social networks and virtual forums are a virtual tribune and virtual agora. The freedom of speech and new technological circumstances determine a new model of behaviour, new attitudes to write, prepare, design, share and broadcast very easy and fast the information across the social networks. Web 2.0 and new technical devices and apparatuses (I-phones, smart phones, tablets, etc.) provide opportunities for easy and fast re-location in the streets of Bulgarian towns, for mobilization and for self-organization. The participants in the protests are creators of the content in the virtual space across social networks. They are not passive receivers of messages or viewers in front of their TV sets. The active members of the virtual forums and groups create and send the appeals permanently avoiding hierarchy and coordination with the party structures and political management. The initiators of the civil protest are active in the social networks and they use them as a virtual megaphone – using figurative language – to inform about the protests and about the results of the events every day and permanently all day long. The new model of behaviour of e-citizens is completely different from the traditional hierarchical model of political institutions and this is one of the reasons for not being able to organize and conduct the dialogue between Bulgarian state institutions and Bulgarian citizens over the past
five years. The citizens prefer informative and not too abstract words, real plans and not concepts, correct proposals and not empty promises; they have stopped believing in pseudo-elites and leaders who do not follow the model of moral and ethical leaders and statesmen.

Bulgarian citizens and Bulgarian politicians use the Bulgarian language on two different levels. Some leaders of opinions in the virtual space are active citizens, but unfortunately online communication does not succeed in influencing off-line civil communication and the political dialogue. Traditional political rhetoric and civil communication in the street protests have not cross-topic, the oral political discourse and social networks are two parallel realities and they accelerate new communicative problems. On the one hand, politicians could develop a way of speaking correctly and effectively as party leaders, ministers and members of the Bulgarian Parliament. On the other hand, Bulgarian citizens could develop and improve their rhetorical skills and attitudes to take part in the complicated political negotiations for the general benefit. The civil participation, civil control and open door to interactive political communication is one of the ways to start, conduct and finish successfully the public dialogue between state institutions, political parties and citizens.

In conclusion, it is reasonable to say that political rhetoric and civil oratory have parallel manifestations in the contemporary Bulgarian society, they play a key role in the public space but an effective dialogue between the state institutions and citizens has not been established.

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FOR A BORDER-DIALOGUE IN ‘FORTRESS EUROPE’:
THE REAPPROPRIATION OF MEDITERRANEAN ROUTES

Luigi Cazzato

Abstract: Contemporary Europe is again haunted by the old stereotypes of corrupted southerners and virtuous northerners, lazy Mediterraneans and vigorous Teutons. This paper aims to survey these tropes among current academic and public debates, from postcolonial and southern studies perspectives. These labels and views have to do with discursive formations such as orientalism and meridionism, and stretch back to the Mediterranean colonial history dominated by northern modernity. Terms like “change”, “innovation”, “modernity” on one hand, and “immobility”, “tradition”, “backwardness” on the other, can be easily and predictably attributed to the two geo-cultural spaces. Nevertheless, our task is less attributing the right category to the right side than disrupting the whole paradigm, under the pressure of the migrations from the South.

Keywords: Border-dialogue; Fortress Europe; PIGS; Mediterranean, orientalism; meridionism; southern thought; modernity; modernization; tradition.

Fallacies

Two of the fallacies regarding social change usually are: social change is a linear movement in time from a traditional past towards a modern future; the assumed irreconcilable conflict between old and new structures. In fact, these two fallacies have been profoundly challenged, at least within the academic context, by postcolonial and southern studies. Above all, these studies have contributed to the diffusion of a critical spatial consciousness. Nevertheless, there is a third fallacy to be challenged. The opposition past/tradition vs. present/modernity, according to European mainstream thought, has a precise geography, a precise map. As a result, this fallacy reads: change and modernity is northern, immobility and tradition is southern (or, if preferred, Mediterranean). This fallacy is as old as Modernity, that is to say as old as Enlightenment.

Brave New North vs. Timorous Old South

Though modern liberal society was born in England at the time of the so-called Bloodless Revolution in 1689, it is to France we should turn for a moment, to listen to one of the fathers of constitutionalism, Charles-Louis de Secondat, notably known as Montesquieu. In L’Esprit des Lois, he memorably claims:

1 University of Bari “Aldo Moro”.
Les peuples des pays chauds sont timides comme les vieillards le sont; ceux des pays froids sont courageux comme le sont les jeunes gens … Vous trouverez dans les climats du nord des peuples qui ont peu de vices, assez de vertus, beaucoup de sincérité et de franchise. Approchez des pays du midi vous croirez vous éloigner de la morale même…

According to Montesquieu, then, vice and virtue have a precise climate and geography: the north is young and virtuous, the south old and immoral. These are sentences written almost three centuries ago which, however, would bring a knowing smile of recognition to the lips of the Euro-American technocrats of econometrics. Half a century later, still following the climatic hermeneutic tool, Hegel claims that in the extreme zones cold and heat are too powerful to allow Spirit to build up a world for itself.

The true theatre of History is … the [European] temperate zone; or rather, its northern half, because the earth there presents itself in a continental form, and has a broad breast, as the Greeks say. In the south, on the contrary, it divides itself, and runs out into many points.

To the German philosopher, the real theatre of world history is the more homogeneous and compact region of continental Europe, since Mediterranean Europe is too heterogeneous and fragmented to form coherent nations and civilizations.

**Euro-Mediterranean PIGS**

If this is so, we have found the roots of modern-day technocrats’ moralist economics, according to which the Mediterranean countries are to be called "PIGS", an acronym that would gather together the countries of Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain (of course Italian conservative politicians maintain that the “I” stands for Ireland rather than for Italy).

Contemporary Europe, therefore, is still haunted by the old stereotypes of corrupt southerners and virtuous northerners, indolent Mediterraneans and vigorous Teutons. According to Agence France Press, PIGS has been used as an abbreviation for Euro-Mediterranean countries since 1999, when these countries and eight more countries decided to adopt the euro as a common currency. However, the phenomenon started earlier, when the Schengen Treaty for the

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2Charles de Secondat, Montesquieu, *L'Esprit des Lois*, 1748, XIV, chap. II (trans: "inhabitants of warm countries are, like old men, timorous; the people in cold countries are, like young men, brave … If we travel towards the north, we meet with people who have few vices, many virtues, and a great share of frankness and sincerity. If we draw near the south, we fancy ourselves entirely removed from the verge of morality… "), Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989. Print.

abolition of borders was signed and a fear of border trespassing was felt. Although champagne was offered at Milan and Rome airports to mark Italy's full membership of Schengen, *The Economist* wrote the following: “Other Schengen countries – including Austria … – remain highly dubious about Italy's apparently lax controls over illegal immigrants, many of whom move on to other EU countries.”

At this point one might reason that this is so because a journalist was speaking. What about serious scholars? Let us consider Niall Ferguson, the British Professor of History at Harvard University named as one of the 100 most influential people in the world by *Time* magazine in 2004. This is the incipit of his semi-humorous article in *The Wall Street Journal*, in which he envisages the future of Europe: “Welcome to Europe, 2021. Ten years have elapsed since the great crisis of 2010-11, which claimed the scalps of no fewer than 10 governments, including Spain and France. Some things have stayed the same, but a lot has changed.” An amusing map shows Scandinavia and Germany hypertrophically enlarged, while the Mediterranean countries are shrunk to a Lilliputian size. It reminds us how southern continents were truly represented in the 19th century, with Africa much smaller than the real Africa and Europe the opposite. One might argue that Ferguson is a neocon and has contributed as an editor for Bloomberg TV and, on top of that, has also been an advisor to Republican U.S. presidential campaigns. However, the problem is that his views are shared by a wider audience, larger than the conservatives. In northern countries, it has become common sense: the story goes that the Greeks are lazy, the Italians corrupt, the Spaniards unreliable… they are only good as beach attendants or gardeners, as the newspaper’s map shows. The “natural” consequence is that they are not able to have a stable economy. Economy becomes a moral fact.

Here, the adjective “natural” is not accidental. There is someone who has connected intelligence to genetics and history. It is hard to believe, but Richard Lynn, British Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Ulster, has conducted research under the title: “In Italy, north-south differences in IQ predict differences in income, education, infant mortality, stature, and literacy”. It is even harder to listen to his conclusions. Why is the IQ of southerners lower?

The diffusion of genes from the Near East and North Africa may explain why the populations of southern Italy have IQs in the range of 89–92, intermediate between those of northern Italy and central and northern Europe (about 100) and those of the Near East and North Africa (in the range of 80–84).

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According to his unbiased result: “IQs decline steadily with more southerly latitude”. In other words, the more southern the worse, the more northern the better. Once more, in this case as far as intelligence is concerned, geography is a destiny, as much as genetics is. Since over the course of history there has been considerable immigration by peoples from South-East, “the north–south gradient of intelligence in Italy has a genetic basis going back many centuries, and hence predicts the social and economic differences documented in the nineteenth century up to the present day.” We have come then to the core problem: the Mediterranean is not simply but dangerously the sea between the lands. Southern Europe is too close to Africa and Asia. Hence its imperfection.

From Orientalism to Meridionism

But a step back. Let us read for a moment a passage from Said’s Orientalism:

Orientals or Arabs are … shown to be gullible, “devoid of energy and initiative”, much given to “fulsome flattery”, intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; Orientals cannot walk on either a road or a pavement (their disordered minds fail to understand what the clever European grasps immediately, that roads and pavements are made for walking); Orientals are inveterate liars, they are “lethargic and suspicious”, and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race.

I am sure that for many of us reading these words raised the thought: these are not Arabs, they are southerners, Italians, Mediterraneans. Southerners cannot properly use a pavement either, nor are they modern and open to change and innovation. Tradition, backwardness, immutability are their dimensions, as the stereotypical discursive formation would have it. Apparently, according to the north-Eurocentric perspective, East and South share the same destiny. According to that historical perspective, indeed, progress has apparently followed the route of the sun (Voltaire), from East to West, that is to say, from despotism towards freedom (Montesquieu). Once this path has been identified, the next step is to turn progress into a teleology. Hegel, who claims that “the history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom”, also claims, after the Philosophes, that it “travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end

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7 Ibid.
11 Charles de Secondat, Montesquieu, op. cit.
of history, Asia the beginning”\(^{13}\). It goes without saying that “Africa is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature”.\(^{14}\) No wonder that Mediterranean began to be disregarded and, at the end of the 18th century, the northerners began to look for the exact European border where History stopped; to look for the threshold through which one passed from progress to backwardness, from civilization to barbarism, in short, from proper Europe to the first glimmers of African continent. As a consequence, Europe has constituted itself not only against the Orient but also against its South, which has been the “constitutive outside”, to quote Judith Butler, \(^{15}\) even though it was and is inside Europe. I have elsewhere called this discursive formation “meridionism”, which is brother to orientalism but not overlapping with it\(^{16}\). If orientalism was born as a cultural tool for the implementation of European colonialism, meridionism was born as a cultural tool for the foundation of modern European identity.

**Modernization or Modesty and Moderation?**

Indeed, it is time to ask what is modernity. First of all, we may distinguish modernity from modernization. If modernity refers, as Jean and John Commaroff point out, to “a vision of history as a progressive, man-made construction, to an ideology of improvement through the accumulation of knowledge and technical skills…”\(^{17}\), in short, after Arjun Appaduray, if modernity is a *fact*, modernization is a (western) *theory*.\(^{18}\) Or, still through Commaroff’s words, modernization is a theory that “posits a strong normative teleology, a unilinear trajectory toward the future … to which all humanity ought to aspire.”\(^{19}\) Once you have accepted this distinction, you realize that every people and every region of the world may have their own “vernacular” modernities which contrasts with their traditions. Appadurai disagrees with modernization theory’s identification of societies as modern vs. traditional, urban vs. rural, and so on, for he sees irregularities within both so-called modern and traditional societies. For instance, such modern metropolitan cities as Sao Paulo or Cairo experience modernity and tradition simultaneously. The same is true of Europe or any other part of the world in which both traditional and modern ways of life are experienced at the same time.

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\(^{13}\) Hegel, op. cit., p. 103.

\(^{14}\) Hegel, op. cit., p. 99.

\(^{15}\) “… the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation” (J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, London: Routledge, 1993: p. 3. Print.


\(^{19}\) J. and J. Commaroff, op. cit., p. 9.
This being said, we may take, for instance, the problem of Islamic traditional culture and the awkward, and for sure uncomfortable, question of *jijab* (the veil). The interesting thing about it, for instance, is that Islamic feminisms tackle the issue of the veil and gender equality not through Occidental modernity but through a re-reading of Oriental traditional, that is to say, through Oriental modernity. We are talking about a new interpretation of the Koran that denounces the patriarchal contradiction with the assertion of equality of all believers *vis-à-vis* God. Furthermore, not only do Islamic feminisms put into question androcentric Islam, they may also interrogate Western culture.20 The Moroccan Fatema Mernissi denounces the patronising misogynist Islamic culture, but at the same time also lays bare the patronising Western male view of “liberated” women, through what she calls “the tyranny of the ‘size 6’”. Indeed, after realising that in a big Paris store there was no skirt for her, Mernissi sarcastically concludes: “I am so happy that the conservative male elite does not know about it. Imagine the fundamentalists switching from the veil to forcing women to fit size 6”.21 The interesting thing here is also the discovery that the Westerners impose their own *jijab* on women too.

So, as Franco Cassano puts it, provided *modesty* is not imposed by males but freely chosen by women, the East can teach the West the revolutionary potential of opacity.

Modesty is not only a repressive cage that those who seek emancipation must escape. It is also a grammar of the relationship between bodies that incites pride and builds opaqueness in a world of windows and shops. Modesty has often been an interdiction decreed by the powerful, a claim of dominion over the body of another; but it can also be a tassel of individual freedom, an interdiction that protects the individual from the temptations and the omnivorous pretenses of the market, the safe-keep for a private space rescued from universal commercialization, which forces the latter to wait outside the door.22

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20 Actually, and astonishingly, in the early 18th century Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (the wife of the British ambassador to Ottoman Turkey) examined western culture through what she could see and experience in Istanbul. According to her direct experience, contrary to “extreme stupidity of all writers” that have given accounts of Turkish women, they have more liberty than the English have: “This perpetual masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their inclinations without danger of discovery ... Upon the whole, I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the empire” (*The Selected Letters of Lady Mary Montagu*, ed. Robert Halsband, London: Longman, 1970, p. 96). These statements are more astonishing if compared to Montesquieu’s ones about the servitude of oriental women connected with oriental political despotism.


This is a way in which Eastern “modesty” interrupts the perception of Western love manners, revealing, at the same time, other possible (and forgotten) manners. It is as if the conquest of the ‘new’ can be performed through the re-appropriation of the apparent ‘old’ of the other. We are not expected to look to the past in a nostalgic mood… ‘the good old things’, to feed the essentialist idea of a South made of Blood, Land and Tradition. Of course, in what we call “tradition” or “past” there are a lot things to be thrown away… cruel superstitions, silent subordinations and fierce exploitations. But there may be also something precious which points to the future. If we do not adopt this ‘ecological’ attitude towards our past, or towards what we consider belonging to an outdated world, our present loses something crucial, and its neurotic run towards the future is unrestrained. Moderation, indeed, is another key word for southern thought, which may counter the totalizing drive of modernization.

Furthermore, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak speaks about two kinds of communities: the responsibility-based communities, like Islamic society, where human individual rights are neglected, and rights-based communities, such as North-Western ones, where on the contrary what is neglected is the sense of social responsibility. Therefore, the epistemological lesson to be learned by the so-called non-modern communities, as the Bengalese scholar would have it, can be that “another antonym of right is responsibility.” Of course, the opposite is also the case in point, as Spivak does not fail to remind us. She is not “suggesting that they [responsibility-based communities] are better, just that they are different, and this radically different pair - rights and responsibility – need to relate in the hobbled relationship of supplementation.”

Roots, Routes and Mongrel Europe

Similarly, and ultimately, the outlook of the others may be a chance for us to consider so-called “tradition” in a non-traditional way. It is a chance for us to supplement our view through the others’ eyes. We are quite far from the hierarchical if not racist views of Ferguson, Lynn and company. The “diffusion of genes from the Near East and North Africa”, to speak Lynn’s words, may be a blessing for Europe and its idea of community as a Fortress. It may be a blessing for the West and its Faustian idea of civilization as linear endless progress to be imposed on everyone on the planet. Either Europe recognizes its Mediterranean roots (backgrounds) and routes (paths) or it is nothing. Identity, if you should choose one, is not a stable pure condition. If we can turn to botany, identity is a not a carrot (a single root) but a potato intertwined to other potatoes (a rhizome). There is no root-identity, only rhizome or relation-identity, as the Caribbean poet

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25 Ibid.
Édouard Glissant puts it: “La racine unique est celle qui tue autour d’elle alors que le rhizome est la racine qui s’étend à la rencontre d’autres racines.”

Finally, the proposal is, then, of a border-dialogue, as the Mediterranean waters have taught us for centuries. Far from being a negative contamination, as the Schengen Treaty and its supporters would have it, the “intrusion” of the global South into Europe may be a chance for the continent to be supplemented and, for Southern Europe, a chance to be seen as no longer a periphery, but the center of a new creolizing world, in which the Mediterranean may retrieve its ancient role of cultural and economic crossroads.

Paradoxically, thanks to the traffic of human beings towards Europe, the Northern Mediterranean (that sort of imperfect Europe), finally has the chance to re-experience its pluriverse. The many people of the Mediterranean are incurable mongrels: their identity is full of alterity. Cassano utters the ultimate words here again:

Mediterranean today means putting the border, that line of division and contact between people and civilizations, center stage … We do not go to the Mediterranean to seek the fullness of our origins but to experience our contingency. The Mediterranean shows us the limits of Europe and of the West.

WORKS CITED


26 E. Glissant, Introduction à une poétique du Divers, Paris, Gallimard, 1996, p. 59 (my trans.: “The single root is the one that kills everything around itself whereas the rhizome is the root that stretches towards other roots”)
Spivak, G. C. ‘Righting Wrongs’ *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 103, n. 2/3,
Augustin Renouard, 1773. Print.
II. CHANGING STRATEGIES IN GENDERING DISCOURSES
THE CURRENT WORLD CRISIS
AND THE THEMATIC CHANGES IN MEDIA DISCOURSE:
AN ILLUSTRATION OF MASCULINIZATION OF POLITICAL
JOURNALISTS’ DISCOURSE

Ruxandra Boicu

Abstract: This paper proposes an analysis of journalistic discourse in two media events. The current world crisis produced economic and social changes which triggered alterations of the priorities on the journalists’ and politicians’ agendas. Through the analysis of thematic structures in the political journalists’ discourses, we aim to reveal these alterations that we associate with the masculinization of political and journalistic discourse.

Keywords: economic crisis; political journalism; televised presidential debates; debate moderators; debate management; topic control; thematic structure; salient debate issues; feminine discourse; masculine discourse.

Introduction

This study aims to reveal the way in which, during electoral campaigns, the media echo the social changes triggered by the present-day economic crisis. In recent televised electoral debates, for instance, this critical situation has been discursively translated into a range of recurrent topics related to the economic and social difficulties that have lately affected people’s lives. We equally propose a gendered interpretation of the thematic changes that have marked political journalists’ discourse.

Like all journalists, the TV journalists’ who “conduct” televised debates aspire to fulfill their professional mission of serving the public, as responsibly and ethically as Habermas (1985) thought they ought to do. They should prove that they do voice the voters’ concerns, that they know the public agenda better than the candidates themselves and represent public interest as legitimate spokespersons (Boicu 2013). Electoral televised debates provide the ideal context for debate moderators to substantiate Charaudeau’s thesis (2005) according to which journalists stand for the link between the politicians and the citizens, in the societal triangular relation that unites these three poles.

In practice, the TV journalists who moderate presidential debates manage this political show through three main professional functions, those of controlling the observance of the themes under discussion, of controlling the candidates’ turn

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taking and of controlling the interaction time devoted to each candidate on each theme.

For this research, we selected two famous French presidential confrontations, the one between Ségolène Royal and Nicolas Sarkozy that took place in 2007, namely, before the economic crisis, and the debate between François Hollande and Nicolas Sarkozy, broadcast in 2012, in times of crisis. More specifically, we focused on the comparison between the sets of themes announced by the journalists at the beginning of the debates and the time treatment of these themes, in the two above mentioned televised electoral debates.

The first objective of this study is to assess the salience of each theme in the journalists’ agenda, in order to prove the high share of the topics that refer to the economic crisis and to its social consequences in the case of the 2012 debate, as compared to the 2007 debate.

To this end, we used two quantitative content analyses, relying on the statistics of the key words used by the moderators in relation to the themes of the two debates. In order to check the results, we measured the respective time spans allotted for discussing the issues associated with these key words, out of the total time of the two TV shows.

The data that resulted after these quantitative analyses showed that, in the 2012 presidential debate, the journalists’ insisted on the tough solutions and the austerity measures imposed in order to cope with the critical problems that appeared during the crisis. This led us to the second objective of the present research, that consists in interpreting this thematic change in terms of masculinization of media discourse.

As hypothesized, the economic crisis triggered a significant change in the journalists’ agenda, an emphasis on economic problems at the expense of the social issues and the so-called issues of society (sujets de société) such as education, culture, research, etc. that had a greater relevance in 2007, before the crisis and that are perceived as feminine issues.

1. Values and functions of tv debate journalists

The journalists’ mission is implied in a communication contract that Charaudeau explained, from various angles, in more than one works. He wrote about the double finality of the journalists’ communication contract, an ethical one, consisting in the transmission of information according to democratic values and a commercial one, meant to conquer the greatest audience possible in order to sell the media product (Charaudeau 2005: 71-73). According to Charaudeau (2006: 5), in an electoral debate: “les principes de distance et de neutralité sont encore plus
difficiles à tenir, car c’est le journaliste qui procède […] à la distribution des paroles et c’est lui qui par ses questions impose des cadres de questionnement.  

Since in the French format, unlike the classic American format, the public is not physically present at the debate, it is the journalists that moderate the TV show who ask questions on behalf of the electorate. Moreover, it is the moderators who create the thematic structure to be debated, through a thorough selection of the most urgent problems of the moment.

Their responsibility is all the greater as their professional competences may be judged by the largest possible national audiences. In the specialized literature published in the United States and in France, where there are long and respected traditions in turning the electoral/presidential confrontations into popular TV shows, designed both to inform and to entertain the public, the televised presidential debate is unanimous considered the climax of an electoral campaign (Boicu 2012a).

One of the first definitions of the televised electoral/presidential debate was offered by Auer (1962: 146) apud Trent and Friedenberg (2004: 267). This definition may be read as a set of five features, three of them referring to the main professional functions of the debate moderators. Actually, the debate is:

1. a confrontation,
2. in equal and adequate time,
3. of matched contestants,
4. on a stated proposition,
5. to gain an audience decision.

Firstly, by defining the debate as a confrontation (1), Auer implies that the politicians are invited by the moderators to speak in turns. Through turn control, the moderators give their guests the opportunity of taking the floor alternatively and of benefiting of an equal number of turns.

Secondly, as mentioned in this definition, each candidate should have the same amount of time at her/his disposal (2), which indicates that the moderator is also in charge of time control. If the broadcast editor/director negotiates with the politicians’ teams that the answers to the questions should not exceed 2 to 5 minutes, or more, it is the journalist’s function to interrupt the interventions that exceed the time limit.

Thirdly, it devolves on the debate moderators to launch questions/ issues about the most stringent problems in society, economy, foreign affairs, etc. In most cases, it is the moderators who choose the content and the form of these questions (Sandré 2009) and who exert topic control (3), urging all the candidates to answer all the questions.

2 “the principles of neutrality and distance are more difficult to maintain because it is the journalist who monitors […] the distribution of turns and it is he who, by his questions, maps questioning frames”. [our translation]
Topic launching and control represent the essential functions in our present research, although they could not be studied independently from the other two types of control. That is why, the management of a presidential debate is a difficult professional task that only reputed TV journalists are invited to do. For the two French debates under discussion, the moderators were chosen from among the most successful TV journalists: Arlette Chabot and Patrick Poivre d’Arvor in 2007; Laurence Ferrari and David Pujadas in 2012.

2. Feminine and masculine topics

In politics, feminine topics are stereotypically associated with the promotion of policies that address improvements of women’s life and representation in society. More specifically, in civic organizations as well as in politics, women militate for the eradication of domestic violence, for women’s safety at work, for equal chances to education of disabled children, etc. (Boicu 2012b). In cultural studies literature, as seen in Hofstede, Hofstede G. J. and Minkov (2010), the concern for domestic problems and the caring for children led to the notorious distinction between feminine and masculine national cultures, in which these sociologists assimilate competition, force, self-assertion and selfishness to masculine societies and the caring for the weak, health protection, education, social services, social security, environment protection, equal chances, love for nature and beauty to feminine cultures.

Feminine issues are closely related to the typical left wing claims such as better life conditions and more respect for the retired, improved work conditions for the employees, etc. that come into contradiction with the neo-liberal policies and with the austerity measures that most governments have adopted during the current world crisis. The governments’ “austerity drive, which attempts to garner public support for the reduction or withdrawal of welfare entitlements through appeals to frugality, self-sufficiency and fiscal prudence [...] is argued to present a particular challenge to the financial security and autonomy of women, signalling the end of the process of modernizing the welfare system” (MacLeavy 2011: 255). The welfare state system that stood for the epitome of the third wave feminist aspirations, since “women [were] the majority of recipients of many social welfare benefits” (Sarvasy 1999: 329), is presently seen as a pre-crisis project. “Jane Jenson [1999] recently used "neo-liberal" [the reassertion of market forces, according to Larner (2000: 10)] as a general descriptor for post-welfare state citizenship regimes” (Larner 2000: 5).

Analysts are aware that, more than suspending a project, the present-day crisis menaces to suspend the progress that women benefited from before 2008. “Widespread economic recessions and protracted financial crises have been documented as setting back gender equality and other development goals in the past. In the midst of the current global crisis – often referred to as “the Great

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Recession” – there is grave concern that progress made in poverty reduction and women’s equality will be reversed” (Antonopoulos 2009, Abstract). Likewise, in the texts compared in this paper, we noticed that the political journalists’ discourses in 2012 are marked by the changes in governance priorities, as a consequence of the crisis. Since women are biased on a social ideology, as Van Dijk (2006) confirms, social issues are perceived to be feminine, while foreign policy, for instance, is perceived to be masculine (Murray 2008: 488). More specifically, “female politicians are described as having a special preference for the social domain which corresponds to an incapacity of managing the prestigious fields: economy and international relations” (Olivesi 2009: 75 apud Boicu 2011: 143). Since feminine discourse is made up of soft issues, women politicians are assigned soft portfolios (Walsh 2001: 6).

3. Corpus and methodology

In order to compare the moderators’ discourse in terms of the thematic structures used in two electoral debates, we analyzed the transcript versions of the presidential debates that took place in France, in May 2007, between Ségolène Royal and Nicolas Sarkozy, moderated by Patrick Poivre d’Arvor (TF1) and Arlette Chabot (France 2) and in May 2012, between Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande, moderated by Laurence Ferrari (TF1) and David Pujadas (France 2). The former text has 71 pages (Source: (La Tribune.fr www.latribune.fr) and the latter covers 74 pages (Source:http://discours.viepublique.fr/notices/123000884.html). In spite of the difference of three pages, the total duration of each show was of 2 hours and 40 minutes.

Since our first objective was to evaluate the relative salience of each theme that the moderators launched for discussion, we used two statistical approaches:

- we counted the occurrences of the most recurrent key words that the moderators uttered in relation to the themes that they announced in their opening interventions. In principle, we retained the first 3 most salient key words for further interpretation.
- we checked the results of the first statistics through the calculation of the amount of time devoted to the candidates’ debating on each theme (or thematic area); this calculation consisted in transforming the number of pages that contained the discussion of one theme into minutes (taking into account that both the total number of the pages in the transcripts and the total number of minutes were known.)


4.1. The 2007 Debated Themes

4.1.1. Key words
In keeping with the format of the French presidential debate, the moderators announced the topics at the beginning of the show, after greeting the candidates and asking them whether they felt comfortable and ready to start the confrontation. The candidates were supposed to discuss four thematic chapters within fairly equal periods of time. The first chapter concerned the candidates’ views on power and the institutions, the second covered the economic and social problems, the third, the so-called issues of society (education, family, research, culture, environment ...) and the fourth, the international relations, with Europe included (4).6

Throughout their 27 interventions (out of which 8 were just reminders of the themes to be insisted on) that followed, the debate moderators, Chabot and Poivre d’ Arvor, used the following key words: institutions (4 times) and power (twice), on pages 2-12 and 65-67 of the debate transcript. Within the second thematic chapter, they used the words: taxation (twice), jobs (twice), debt (twice), retirement (twice), social security (once), etc., on pages 13-35. The next set of key words concerned the issues of society: family (twice), environment (twice), education (twice), culture (once), etc., on pages 36-55, while the last set included two key words: Europe (twice) and immigration (twice), on pages 56-69.

4.1.2. Durations of the issue debates
The time shares of the thematic groups are presented in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Chapters</th>
<th>Durations in minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The candidates’ views on power and the institutions</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The economic and social problems</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The issues of society (education, family, research, culture , environment ...)</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The international relations, with Europe included</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Durations of themes discussing in the 2007 debate

Others corresponds to the themes included in the opening interventions (welcoming) and the closing interventions (the candidates’ address to the nation and leave taking).

6« quatre grands chapitres de durée à peu près égale : la conception du pouvoir et des institutions, les problèmes économiques et sociaux, les problèmes dits de société (éducation, famille, recherche, culture, environnement...), les relations internationales avec l’Europe comprise ». (La Tribune.fr www.latribune.fr)
4.2. The 2012 Debated Themes

4.2.1. Key words

The moderators, Ferrari and Pujadas, decided to tackle the economic issues first. As they mentioned, this thematic category includes growth, employment, purchasing power, public accounts - that is to say, the deficit, debt, taxes. Then, there was the category of the major issues that had been often discussed during the 2012 campaign, such as housing, education and immigration. The category that was next announced contained political issues, including the rules of democracy. And in the end, the two candidates, Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande, were to discuss international issues.7

Actually, the candidates did not approach all the announced themes, because the moderators were not able to control the adversarial exchanges, although they had 127 interventions (as against 27, in the 2007 debate) meant to dictate thematic and turn change. What resulted is the following thematic list and the key words associated to the areas under debate:

- economic issues: growth, employment, purchasing power, public accounts - that is to say, the deficit, debt, taxes (key words: economic – mentioned 6 times, the debt – mentioned 5 times, public accounts – mentioned 4 times, the Euro-zone crisis – 4 times, jobs – 3 times, deficit – 3 times, the stability pact – 3 times, unemployment – 2 times, taxes – 2 times, etc.), on pages 4-39;
- issues of society: (economic) immigration (key words: the immigrants’ voting rights – 3 times, flows of immigrants – 2 times, holding centers for the immigrants – 2 times, etc.), on pages 39-53;
- nuclear power plants – mentioned 6 times, on pages 53-61;
- political life, public life rules, presidential style (each mentioned twice), on pages 62-69;
- foreign policy (mentioned twice) and the terrorist threat (mentioned twice), the hostages (mentioned twice), on pages 69-71.

4.2.2. Durations of issue debates

In Table 2, we included the durations of the themes that were discussed in the 2012 presidential debate.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Thematic Chapters</th>
<th>Durations in minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Economic issues: growth, employment, purchasing power, public accounts - that is to say, the deficit, debt, taxes</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Nuclear power plants</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Political life, public life rules, presidential style</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Foreign policy</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Others corresponds to the themes included in the opening interventions (welcoming) and the closing interventions (the candidates’ address to the nation and leave taking).

Conclusions

The first statistical analysis shows that, in the 2007 debate, the most salient key words correspond to the themes announced by the moderators. Institution and power are the exact words that defined the first thematic chapter. The number of occurrences of the key words associated to economic and social issues prove that the economic field and the social one have a balanced representation in the discussions (taxation, jobs, debt counterbalance retirement, social security, health issues). The key words in the category of issues of society are numerous and equally salient (2 occurrences each). They are: family, environment, education and culture, while in the foreign affairs category, the key words Europe and immigration have an even distribution too (each is mentioned twice). In relation to immigration, the candidates insisted on the regularization of the illegal residents (le reglement des sans papiers), which confirms that, before the crisis, the French politicians were willing to integrate the immigrants.

In the 2012 debate, the most salient key words have an uneven distribution within the same thematic category or across the categories. Moreover, there is no distinct category of social issues. Both the moderators and the presidential candidates, Sarkozy and Hollande, insist on the economic issues at the expense of the other themes announced at the beginning of the debate. Thus, the key words: economic, the debt, public accounts, the Euro zone crisis, jobs, deficit, stability pact are mentioned at least 4 times each by the moderators; the theme of immigration is included in the category of issues of society, but is actually treated as an economic problem whose key words are: the immigrants’ voting rights and the holding centers, as a step before the immigrants’ expulsion. Nuclear power plants, the theme and the key words, stand for the unique environment issue proposed and discussed, and treated as an economic issue as well. In foreign policy
issues, all key words are mentioned twice and they show the French concern with terrorism and hostages. The foreign policy category is comparable to the public, political and presidential rules, since these words are also mentioned twice each.

The economic issues are prevailing, there are new key words that appear in the moderators’ interventions that were not initially announced, such as the oil price, the VAT, etc.

The results of the second statistics are categorical: while in 2007, every thematic group is discussed between 31 and 48 minutes, in 2012, almost half of the show time (78 minutes) is allotted to the debate of the economic issues.

Considering the data supplied by both statistics, we can conclude that the typical feminine issues, such as the social ones, are almost inexistent in the discourse of the moderators of the 2012 presidential debate, in times of crisis. In 2007, with Ségolène Royal as the first woman candidate who reached the second round of the presidential elections in France, women could feel that their needs were represented in her discourse. Likewise, influenced by the stable situation in 2007, the debate moderators proposed and imposed a balanced approach to all the main thematic categories. Order and balance are perceived as feminine values.

In exchange, the tough solutions and austerity measures proposed for discussion to the 2012 debaters are characteristic of masculine discourse. It marked both an ideological and an economic defeat for French women; the economic and social crisis is synonymous to the crisis of care.8

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GENDER IN BLACKNESS: STEREOTYPING IN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE, MEDIA AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Rosanna Masiola¹ and Renato Tomei²

Abstract: This paper features the strategies of gender stereotyping enacted by hegemonic groups in the sphere of institutional ‘dialogue’ and advertising discourse. The sequence of themes interfaces diachronic variation and cross-cultural differences (Italy, UK and USA). The stigma imposed on blackness in the Western world started with the translation of the Song of Songs, as perpetuated by the Latin translation Nigra Sum Sed Formosa, whereas the original gave: ‘I am black AND beautiful’.

Keywords: gender; stereotyping; racism; black; ethnicity; translation; parody; institutional clash; advertising; colonialism.

1. Cross-cultural dialogue and institutional clash

This paper is partly inspired by the tragic deaths of four hundred African refugees and asylum seekers in the Mediterranean (Island of Lampedusa, October 2013). The deplorable episodes of intolerance flared at institutional level, before and after the tragic events, well account for the need to understand the dynamics of the process of racist stereotyping. These are examined with specific reference to gender and ethnicity in media and advertising.³

The Naomi Campbell versus Cadbury case (June 2011) in the British press was globally resonant and received massive coverage in the press and on the web. The latter highlighted the power of group and consumers’ associations in the UK and US endangering and boycotting the launch of a new product. The event became ‘news’, and a case for Naomi’s furore at being likened to a chocolate bar.⁴ It involved the Advertising Standards Association (ASA) in UK and the Operation

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³ According to Roger Fowler “A stereotype is a socially-constructed mental pigeon-hole into which events and materials can be sorted...The formation of news events, and the formation of news values, is in fact a reciprocal, dialectical process in which the stereotypes are the currency of negotiation. The occurrence of a striking event will reinforce a stereotype, and reciprocally, the firmer the stereotype, the more likely are relevant events to become news” (Fowler, 1991: 17).
⁴ “Britain’s advertising watchdog has dismissed a complaint by an anti-racism charity that an ad for a new Cadbury’s product, which referred to supermodel Naomi Campbell as a ‘diva’, was racist in content. (http://www.thejournal.ie/cadburys-ad-ruled-not-racist-despite-apology-to-naomi-campbell-159893-Jun2011/. The ‘Move Over Naomi there’s a new Diva in Town’ advertising a new chocolate bar, ‘Bliss’, was launched in Europe, but then immediately withdrawn. (Last access 24 May, 2013).
Black Vote (OBV). When a glamour icon reacts against racism, visibility is viral and pervasive.\(^5\)

These facts are better understood when examining texts and materials featuring the causes and factors underpinning the development of stereotyping in the institutional domain and media discourse. The items are sequentially drawn from mixed corpora, i.e. literary texts, children literature, and mainly advertising.

2. Blackness and Gender bias

Gender plus blackness have been negatively targeted connoting a full spectrum of caricatures and abusive representations.\(^6\) Zoomorphic metaphors evidenate that this is recurrent in literature, whether derogatory or complimentary. It happened to the Queen of Sheba (goat-feet), Cleopatra (crocodile), and to women achieving a high status. The infamous ape-like simile plaguing the Italian media (Summer 2013) epitomized an attitude of intolerance masked as jocular ‘humour’. This occurred even at parliamentary level. It came from a former Minister, Mr. Calderoli, as he referred to a female Minister, Cécile Kyenge. It seems not to have subsided while presently taking a threatening turn.

The mandatory formal apologies from Mr Calderoli, the sequel of vignettes and caricatures, plus a flurry of incandescent telephone calls to radio stations have heated up the debate from the institutional domain to social networks. Negative coverage came also from European and international press, highlighting Italy’s colonial past and racist present:

“The events of the last few weeks have proved, beyond doubt, that Italy has a serious problem. Bananas have been thrown at Cécile Kyenge, Italy’s first black government minister. A (female) councillor for the Northern League has said she should be raped. A Northern League senator has likened her to an orangutan.” \(^7\)

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\(^5\) Erving Goffmann in *Gender Advertisements* (1976) does not have any reference to Blacks. Guy Cook’s *The Discourse of Advertising* (1992), Judith Williamson’s *De-coding Advertisements* (1978) or Mark Tungate’s *Adland: Global History of Advertising* do not cover such themes. In Twitchell’s *The Twenty Ads that Shook the World*, Michael Jordan is a successful celebration of body power: “Michael Jordan stayed in the air with his legs apart for the last ten seconds of the commercial […]fusing spectators who had never been to a basketball game with the abiding fantasy of athletic virtuosity and escape.” (2000:207).

\(^6\) On exploitation of Black women in the media in US, see also Erin Chapman (2012).

All these facts enlarge the debate to historicity and colonialism, when the “specifics of discursive and historical colonialism, imply a relation of structural domination” as observed in Laura Donaldson’s Decolonizing Feminism:

“Like the relationship of colonizer to colonized, Western culture has defined women as different in kind from men and has often used animal imagery to dramatize this difference.” (Donaldson 1992:5; the emphasis is ours).

Ethnic bias and negative stereotyping have developed not only within institutional and ideological frameworks. They also proliferate through literary canons and popular prejudice. Parody and mimicry are reciprocally interdependent, and cover a spectrum ranging from simply funny to the bleak gender hatred or sexual bias, and gross prejudice. What is generally dismissed as harmless parody if coming from institutional referents can dangerously strengthen hierarchies and social marginalization.

The selection of visuals and corpora presented in the following section focus the manipulation and distortions of Black identity based on gender. These are then indexed in terms of gender and evolving stereotypes. Consequently, we have tried to feature Europe and Italy, and its correlation where necessary to UK and USA. Reactions are slightly different: whereas in UK and USA there is a frightening threat to sabotage the market heralded by civil rights associations, this is hardly unlikely for the Italian market as yet. This type of ethnic marking and negative stereotyping, however, has deep roots in the cultural and historic past of Europe. What follows is a brief introduction to instances of ethnic bias in literary traditions, aesthetic canons, and popular tradition.

The Song of Songs also known as the Song of Solomon has been recognized by many as the epitome of erotic poetry and has largely influenced literature through translations and adaptations. And yet, this beauty (female beauty) is somehow flawed as it starts with stigma imposed on blackness. At least this occurs in the translation of the original Aramaic Šir hašširim, as perpetuated by the Latin version by St. Jerome (540 d.C): ‘Nigra Sum Sed Formosa’ (Black am I and Beautiful) and the following ‘Nolite me considerare quod fusca sum/quia decoloravit me sol’ (Do not consider me that I am brown, because the sun hath altered my colour). Being dark of skin is cause by the sun-tan. Whereas the Greek version translates: ‘I am black and beautiful’ (1:5). In the Hebrew text it simply is

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8 In Language and Gender, Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet define the approach on stereotyping, as ‘the relation between stereotypes and language providing us with crucial information about the ideological landscape in which language unfolds” (2013: 59).

9 Kerstin Brückweh (2011) refers to the ‘political public sphere’. Citizen consumers have two voices in the public sphere, one constructed by associations and movements, the other by opinion polls and market research.
a question of the conjunction /and/ which has an extended polysemy in the original Aramaic, fading also into restricted /but/. The Greek version known as the Alexandrine Septuaginta version had ‘melaina eimi kai kalé’ ‘black am I and beautiful’. Consequently, in the Latin version more commonly known as the Vetus Latina, /black/ has been used as a construct opposed to /white/.

Furthermore: the ‘black…but beautiful’ female is sometimes erroneously identified as the Queen of Sheba. The Queen of Sheba, on the contrary, in the Ethiopian tradition she is praised for her wisdom as in sacred text of the Kebra Neghast (Glory of Kings). This adds a negative connotation to traditions describing her as having goat-like feet. Kate Lowe notes the choice of /but/ as adversative, in the Song of Songs:

“The adoption of this model, first in Latin, and then in the major European vernacular languages, had a detrimental effect on how sub-Saharan Africans were viewed in the period 1440-1650, enshrining negative expectations about what black skin signified.”

This did affect the Western canon of aesthetics and imagination as Shakespeare followed suit with his sun-tanned Cleopatra: “with Phoebus’ amorous pinches black and wrinkled deep in time” (Antony and Cleopatra, V:33-34).

3. Stereotyping in children’s literature

The downgrading of blackness is likewise reinforced especially in English popular proverbs dating to Middle English, as well as in colonial and postcolonial vignettes and caricatures. Little moors where featured on shop sign-boards advertising colonial products and anything connected to blackness since the seventeenth century in England (Heal 1988) and Europe, reinforcing the ambivalent logos of and/but ‘beautiful’ (Fig. 1). The tradition of chocolate has a long history in terms of Blacks being used as puppets or caricatures. The language of metaphors ranging from ‘sun-tanned’, ‘ink’, ‘coal’, to ‘chocolate’ as colour or

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10 For /black/ the Hebrew has sehorà (1:5) dark, followed by šeharhoret → /brunette/. The original Aramaic has sheḥovrah ani v’navah. Literally it is ‘Black I and comely’. The whole question relies on the construction of /and/ /v/ (the letter /vav/) (Zatelli 2012: 76-77; Beretta 1991:26-27; Ravasi 1992).

11 Caprine features are part of the iconography of demons and satanic creatures.

12 In various European languages this ‘black’ is translated with different connotations and meanings. It is translated as ‘soot’ in the Northumberland dialect of colliers of the Song (Tomei 2013).

13 In the Renaissance, nigredo or blackness refers to alchemic phases of transmutations (rubedo, albedo) as may be symbolized in Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra. (Rosini Masiola, 1988: 134-138).

14 ‘Those that eat a black pudding will dream of the devil’ (Apperson 1993: 52) or with reference to sexual stereotyping ‘black men are pearls in beauteous ladies’ eyes’ (Shakespeare, Two Gentlemen of Verona, V, ii, 11).
as merchandise is patronizingly connoted at its best. And, it was a ‘chocolate’ explicit reference on packaging connoting the ‘Diva’ (Fig. 2), against which British Jamaican top-model Naomi Campbell reacted.\textsuperscript{15}

Gender and race stereotyping is also present in children’s books and illustrations. There are countless examples of use of black caricatures. The following example is from a small children book, as it contains illustrations and very little writing, imitating the comic-strip style, for children who cannot read. The author is Grete Meuche (Leipzig, 1921). The book has had notoriety in Italy and featured several editions. The first Italian edition dates to 1944 and was approved by fascist Minculpop, Ministry for Popular Culture (ex-‘Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda’). The original title was \textit{Mampampebuche} and in Italian it is known as \textit{La storia di Pik Padaluk}. Pik Badaluk’s mother is a caricature inspired by the American fat Mamie, dressed in blue checkered calico. All the family members are intentional caricatures. The idea of blacks used as puppets used to amuse a white audience is a total contradiction in terms of cross-cultural pedagogy.\textsuperscript{16} The mantra stereotype is always ‘chocolate’.

Illustrations feature the caricature of the black boy, his family and tribe members. Pik is alternatively called ‘piccolo moro’, ‘moretto’ and qualified as: “buono come il più buon cioccolato, nero alla pari d’un carboncello” (“good as the most goodie chocolate, and black as a small piece of coal”). The opening lines are: “C’era una volta un piccolo moro, che si chiamava Pik Badaluk” (“Once upon a time there was a little moor whose name was Pik Badaluk”). The characters bear similarity to other Black children as portrayed in European literature, in Germany and in Britain, notably to \textit{Little Black Sambo} (1899).\textsuperscript{17}

Although Pik Padaluk’s characters are themselves derived from ethnic stylization of caricatures, other caricatures are in turn derived. The prototype is famous Aunt Jemima featured in packaging (Quaker Oats) for waffles and pancakes (Fig. 3). Jemima was actually the model for the Hollywood ‘Mamie’

\textsuperscript{15} President Berlusconi used ‘tan’ as an interjectional remark (‘ed è pure abbronzato’,--> ‘and he is even tanned’) intended to be a compliment to the looks of President Obama. Former Minister Roberto Calderoli iterated the remark publicly referring to Italian-Palestinian anchor woman, Rula Jebreal. He meant to be offensive and deliberately manipulated the metaphor, as he also added ‘camels and the desert’.

\textsuperscript{16} The first Italian edition did not mention the author, and attributed it to a ‘Mago Cif ‘ (Wizard Cif). There were further editions in 1974, 1994, 1998 and 2010. Today it is also downloadable in its Italian version in many reprints. In recent times it has been adapted into ‘favola in musica’, where caricature is even more marked. Adaptation is by Marina Allegri, and director Maurizio Bercini, Gattatico (Reggio Emilia). In their words “Ci è piaciuta l’idea di proporre ai bambini delle scuole materne ed ai loro educatori questo sguardo ingenuo sull’Africa per riscoprire lo stupore verso un popolo ed un paese lontano ed assai differente,...” (“We really liked the idea of presenting to the children of primary schools and their educators this naive perspective on Africa to discover anew the sense of wonder towards a people and a country so far and so diverse’...’). See http://www.caluogodarte.com/spettacoli (Last access 25 March 2013).

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Sambo} is a censured book in the US (Notini 2006: 164).
(Figs. 4 and 5). Pik’s mother (Fig. 6) generated in turn other family caricatures, as seen in billboard advertisement for cigarette paper (Modiano, Trieste 1930 ca) featuring a monkey-like kid stealing cigarettes from his father’s pockets (Fig. 7). The father is dressed in circus attire, typical of the black staff taking care of in charge of lions and elephants. Assumption may be reasonable as both book and ad were printed in Trieste.

4. Spreading racial and gender discrimination in advertising

A domain often exploited for fun was that of the Circus and American vaudeville; favourite black characters were often real clowns (i.e. Rastus) or toys (the British Gollywog). Using emancipated blacks in distinctive attire was aimed to warrant genuine products from the plantation complex. Most of this paraphernalia is now longer used as market brands, or has been ‘gentrified’ like the new Mamie, yet there are still examples which can be found in shop-windows and on display, from Chinese gollywogs dolls sold in Hong Kong to the Mamie mascots advertising chocolates in Italy (2012). But what is interesting here is the development and markedness in stereotyping.

Blackness has been branded as a product for the Western world, something to be ‘commodified’, branded and globalized, evolving from the stereotype of the black savage and criminal, to deformed clown, down to the present day where emphasis is essentially on physical power and body (Perilli 2012). The film industry and commercials featured taglines and cartoons where ‘stunted’ language became even more prominent in the dubbed versions. Conversely, today a black body (female) is displayed as ‘silent’ or voiceless ‘showcase’ for luxury items. This may be seen in the display ads from glossy magazines featuring a naked body, or part of a body with no facial features (Fig. 11-12). Here black bodies are merely used as holders for the advertised object, usually a jewel or gold, with reference to a condition of slavery and subjection. It seems then that global beauty is thriving on black bodies and physical beauty (Jones 2012). Conversely, identity and any cultural or intellectual feature is annihilated and rendered ‘invisible’, recalling Ralph Waldo Ellison’s The Invisible Man (1952), only that it is not America in the fifties: it is display ad for the launch of jewel design in Italy (2007).18

The same stereotyping of the Black Mamie as a good house servant as a clumsy or a very fat lady with big eyes has been featuring endless chocolate packaging and cooking products (Goings 1994; Manning 1998). A contribution came also from the Hollywood industry with the stunted accents and voices of Blacks, and the matrix of stereotyping in film-making was with ‘Mamie’ in Gone With the Wind (see Figs. 3 and 4). There is a circular intertextuality in terms of

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18 Agency Armando Testa (2007) for Pasquale Bruni Jewels Collection ‘Anima e Cuore’ (Body and Soul). Black display ads are no longer accessible online, and have been presumably withdrawn since 2011. Testa is one of the leading Italian advertising agencies.
Black stereotyping, where a musical vaudeville character inspires packaging, packaging inspires films, and in turn films inspire packaging and commercials.  

Examples of negative stereotyping in advertising are equally found in European countries such as the UK, Germany, France and Italy. Packaging and gadgets were still very common in the sixties and even if more rare, there are still mascots to be seen in Italy advertising chocolates either with Mamie and her ‘funny’ and big smiling faces with big red lips (Figs. 8-9) or more sad and realistic, reminiscent of plantation and slavery (Fig.10).  

Our last example is an Italian cult commercial featuring a Mamie (see Appendix), where intratextual references denote a binary ethnic opposition, where Blacks are subservient to the patronizing ‘master’ class, albeit in a jocular way. For sure what seemed innocent in the fifties is perceived today as markedly racist and offensive.  

This last Italian Mamie adaptation is from a famous tv commercial, aired in Italy in the sixties featuring a house servant, ‘Matilda’, played by singer Edith Peters of the ‘Peters Sisters Trio’. The perception today is that of maximization of ethnic and cultural clash, albeit totally unperceived as such at the time. It is

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19 Actress Hattie McDaniel was awarded the Oscar (1940). She was the first Black American woman to sing on the radio. Yet, even more surprisingly, one of the many Aunt Jemimas on stage was played by an singer of Italian origins, Therese ‘Tess’ Gardella (1894-1950). Another case of a member of a minority community with a caricatured black mask the Jewish singer Al Jolson (1886-1950), famous for his song ‘Mamie’. It seemed that prevailing taste was to have minority groups performing as Black Africans (or even Indians in films).


21 As the commercial cannot be shown, there is a segmentation of the single items and a multimodal analysis (multimodality) following Vasta (2002) and Baldry and Thibault (2006). See also Gunter Kress and Theo van Leeuwen and their much-cited Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design (1996) illustrating paradigms to decode visual advertisements.

22 The commercial advertising olive oil Sasso was broadcast in 1965 and directed by Corrado Farina, (Studio Testa Agency) Male actor is Mimmo Craig. Edith Peters is made to speak in Venetian dialect, to mark subordination to her ‘white master’ who gives her orders: “Cossa ghé xe parón?” (Whassop Mastah?), mimicking the silliness of house servants of the ‘commedia dell’arte’ typical of Carlo Goldoni’s (1750). ‘Matilde’ and represents daily routine and grim reality to an alluring and elusive blonde appearing in a dream. It is divided into two parts, ‘dream’ and ‘awakening’ (see Appendix). The music chosen for the dream is Edvard Grieg’s famous ‘Awakening’ from Peer Gynt (1875). The black and white television enhanced the effects.

23 As noted by Ron Scollon: “Any attempt to work out how discourse representation is accomplished in advertising is frustrated by the fact that rarely are there any real speakers or writers communicating to a real audience. That is to say, the discourse representation of advertising is among fictional players in constructed scenarios, not between the producers of the discourse and those players.” (Scollon 2004: 163).
worthwhile noting that very sadly, Edith Peters (1926–2000) was a sophisticated Afro-American singer, performing repertoires in Ella Fitzgerald’s style, such as *A tisket of tasket* or *A rainy day* (1947). A juxtaposition of two images may do justice to her (see Appendix image and Fig. 13). These were the fifties and sixties in Italy, in institutionalized broadcast commercials (one and only channel) as television was under governmental and party control.

Again the words of Naomi Campbell may well stigmatize the perception of the black community when connoted as chocolate in the Cadbury’s Dairy Milk Bliss campaign:

“...It’s upsetting today to be described as chocolate, not just for me, but for all black women and black people. I do not find any humour in this. It is insulting and hurtful”.

Then, in terms of marketing and management she was even more abrasive:

“They should avoid causing offence in the first place, which is best achieved by having greater diversity at board and senior management level”.

5. Conclusions: dialogue and identity

Michael Cronin in his *Translation and Identity* prophetically noted that:

“The danger is that culture is simply perceived as politics without the pain. It is easier, in other words, to promote upbeat images of cultural diversity and deal with racial violence on a piecemeal basis than to address the structuring effects of racism on national societies. The emergence of multiculturalism, interculturalism and cultural diversity as issues for many societies in recent decades is to do with the increased scale of migration attendant on economic and political developments and demographic changes but the prevalence of the debate on these topics is also linked to the implications of living in a world of global connectedness” (Cronin 2006: 49).

Multi-integrationalism should perhaps be the key issue for the future, following the Australian example. Italy today hosts many different Black ethnicities. Such communities are multi-lectal and multi-lingual. Solutions and cultural assets rely on implementing all resources enhancing multi-integrationalism.

Yet the question of cyclic emergence of racism and nationalism calls for a re-appraisal of the significance of gender and ‘black’. Africa and the Euro-

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24 Campbell sent a written statement to CNN (online, accessed July 2013). Extracts are reported also in *The Independent*, “Naomi Race Row: Leave our Sweets Alone”.

25 In terms of Black semantics, the distinctions exist in the press and the media. Subtly, constellations of meaning depend also on spelling. As for the ‘Orangutan’ injurious similitude as well as the American and British ‘chocolate’ terms for Blacks is strongly offensive. In her listing of African-American terms which have impacted on American English, Geneva Smitherman notes the difference between ‘nigga’ defiant in attitude, to ‘the nigger’, compliant and eager to please the institutional system. (Smitherman, 2006: 49). See also recent *Articulate While Black*, on language and race in the US (Alimi and Smitherman 2012).
Mediterranean area are the actors in dialogic and heteroglossic construction of new identities, fluidity and multiple identities, in full respect of female subjectivity.\textsuperscript{26} With regard to actual facts, the African Holocaust has presumably totalled one hundred and sixty millions victims, while the African Diaspora to the Mediterranean reached thirty-five thousand in only fifteen years.

A dialogue-driven change in the public and private sphere has been long overdue, and to put it in the very clear words of Naomi Campbell’s mother: “Do these people think they can insult black people and we just take it? This is the twenty-first century, not the fifties…”.

\textbf{VISUAL REFERENCES:}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig_1.png}
\caption{Black and/but Beautiful – Colonial Packaging by Samuel and Henry Harris (London 1850). \url{http://www.stgite.org.uk/goodmansfields3.html}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{26} In her view, Carole Boyce Davies focuses on the problem of intellectual and physical migrant subjectivity. “Employing a variety of meanings of subjectivity, I want to pursue the understanding of the resisting subject and apply it in different ways to the diasporic elsewheres of a radical Black diasporic subjectivity” (21994: 37). Two decades ago this was a virtuoso furthering in Black gender studies and ‘female subjectivity’. Today the real challenge is African women and their often fatal journeys towards Europe.
Fig. 2 - Cadbury’s Packaging (London, 2011). (http://jezebel.com/5806989/naomi-campbell-declares-chocolate-ad-racist-threatens-to-sue).
Fig. 3 - Vaudeville Aunt Jemima. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page.)
Fig. 4 and 5 - Actress Hattie McDaniel Mamie in *Gone With the Wind* (1939). http://oldhollywood.net/the-beginning-of-the-end/.

Fig. 6 - Pik Badaluk’s Mother (1921) (photo credits: authors’ collection).
Fig. 7 - Modiano Cigarette Billboard, Trieste, Italy (1930) (photo credits: authors’ collection).

Fig. 8 - Venchi Nougatine Chocolate Mascot, Porcelain Statue, Italy (2011) (photo credits: authors’ collection).
Fig. 9 - Venchi Chocolate Paper, Italy (2013) (photo credits: authors’ collection).

Fig. 10 - Stainer Chocolate Packaging, Italy (2011) (photo credits: authors’ collection).
Figs. 11-12 - Pasquale Bruni Jewels, ‘Anima e Corpo’ Series, Display Ads Studio Testa, 2007 (credits: authors’ collection).

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LOST IN A MEN’S WORLD:
WOMEN IN ROMANIAN LOCAL POLITICS

Adriana Ștefânel

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to present, in a descriptive perspective, the women’s participation in Romanian politics, with a closer attention to local government. The starting point of this article is the low number of women politicians which represents a feature of the post-communist Romanian political system. In this political system women are an exception rather than a rule. As an exception a woman can announce her intention to run for the Presidency of Romania, however, it is better not to carry out the plan and withdraw, leaving the place for a man. As an exception a woman can be president of the equality committee of Parliament, but as a rule she must be content with the less important role of witness and moral support of the great male enterprises. Using quantitative data we will emphasize the persistence of women’s discrimination in Romanian local politics, not as isolated cases but as features of Romanian politics.

Keywords: women politicians, local politics, discrimination, gender equality.

The Universal Declaration of Democracy, adopted in September 1997, in Cairo, by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) states that:

The achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarily, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences.

Despite this worldwide adopted principle, the discrimination against women political participation persists, even if hidden by the guise of an egalitarian discourse; all over the world men outnumber women in parliaments and in governments; the progress of women’s representation in parliaments is stalling; and the parity between men and women in local politics remain only a northern European achievement.

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27 Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies, University of Bucharest.
28 With the exception of Rwanda where women represent 63.5% of the Lower House, but only 38.5% of the Upper House (according to www.ipu.org. Women in National Parliaments Project, last update 24th November 2013); and Andorra where the balance is even 50% women, 50% men (out of 28 members of the Andorra Parliament)
29 According with the final report of European Network: Sister Cities Going Gender (2005) supported by 5th Community Action Program for Equality between Men and Women of the European Union: In the City of Stockholm, for example, there is parity between male and female representatives in both the municipal government and municipal assembly (...). In comparison, the average proportion of women in municipal councils and assemblies in the Netherlands is 26.5%, in Germany 24.7% and in Italy 9.8% www.sister-cities-going-gender.org, last update 24th November 2013.
Unless women and men are equally involved in politics, at all levels (national as well as local) and all fields (e.g. social protection as well as defense), democracy is just another big but meaningless word. If more than a half of the population is underrepresented, one cannot talk about democracy in the full sense of the word.

The aim of this paper is to present, in a descriptive perspective, the participation of women in Romanian politics, with an emphasis on local government. We believe that local government is can be a breaking point for women’s entrance into politics, due to relative reduced competition, low campaign costs that are involved and, last but not least, because of the issues concerned. Moreover, local politics provides training grounds for women who want to prove themselves and to reach higher levels of elected or appointed office in national politics; also women’s participation in local politics will accustom citizens (both males and females) with the idea of women politicians and change the community perspective over the presence of women in politics.

Women in post-communist Romanian politics

After almost 25 years of democracy, based on the separation of powers and equal citizens participation (in spirit but not in fact), In Romania, politics is still a boy’s club. From the patriarchal communist system, Romanian society has only abolished communism, consistently maintaining the patriarchal component. Conservatism is masked by liberal democratic appearances resulting from a collision between political discourses and everyday practices. Any egalitarian discourse is viewed with reluctance and any action in this regard is labeled as nostalgic. The widespread misogyny in Romanian society has suppressed the presences of women in power spheres, which resulted in subsequent reduction of feminist claims. The changes brought about by the Romanian revolution acted in fact, not in spirit, against women’s political participation. The pro-women implication discourse was labeled as communist residue and any attempt of imposing some balance between women and men politicians became trite.

The low number of women-politicians represents a feature of the post-communist Romanian political system, labelled by both scientists and politicians as "the terrible Romanian phallocracy" or «the gender asymmetry of Romanian democracy»30: Only one woman (from 61 candidates) ran for the Presidency in 23 years of democracy; no woman prime-minister in the same period; no vice-prime-minister either; less than 10% women ministers (27 out of 367). Even if the situation is slowly improving (see the percentage of women in the 2012's Parliament, for the first time over 10%), women are still banned from political decision.

These numbers, however small, do not represents entirely the low importance of women in Romanian politics. Women and men do not share the political power equally. Women politicians are employed in 'soft areas' (health,

education, etc.) and at the bottom of the political hierarchy. Women's position in society has practically remained the same nowadays. Only the settings and the political scene have changed from the private sector to the public one.

Only after the elections in December 2012, the percentage of women in Parliament reached the symbolic threshold of 10%. It should be noted, however, that this situation is based on a substantial increase in the percentage of women in the lower house of parliament. In the Senate, the situation remains the same as in previous mandates: only 13 out of the 176 senators are women but none of them is in the leadership of their political group or the Permanent Bureau of the Senate. Only 3 out of the 18 standing committees of the Senate are headed by women and 7 are true boys-club sites. In Romania in 2012, public administration, defense, finance and foreign affairs are still managed by male politicians. In the committee dealing with equal opportunities, there is only one woman, SilistruDoina (PSD31), a clear sign that, in Romania, equality is not for women. In the Chamber of Deputies the gender balance of power is also unbalanced. Only two women are committee chairs, and these are Health and Family and equality between men and women. At the governmental level, in the last 10 years we note an improvement in the presence of women ministers and also an attempt to impose the idea that a woman can lead a ministry associate with masculinity values (ex. The ministry of Transport is led by Ramona Manescu, PNL35).

In 23 years, only one woman, Daniela Popa, was, for a brief period, the formal leader of parliamentary political party (PC33). Since 2012, one parliamentary party has a woman leader34 but this entire party is built around a man, Dan Diaconescu, a popular and controversial television show-man. Only one party (the social-democrats) has more than 1 female vice-president (3 out of 15).

In the majors parties (PSD, PNL and PD-L35) there are women's organizations whose agenda is "the Romanian women's agenda, so that we can solve inequalities in society and to meet the needs that women have" (Rovana Plumb, 19.01.2013, at the National Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Women). In fact, these organizations have reduced power within the political parties repre-

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31 Social Democratic Party
32 National Liberal Party
33 Conservatory Party
34 Simona Man, People’s Party-Dan Diaconescu
35 Democrat-Liberal Party
senting a platform for male leaders. They organize 8th of March parties where the only men allowed are the top political male leaders; their virility is on display\textsuperscript{36} been the center of the celebration. At the women’s organization conference, the speakers are male, as in picture 1 beside.

The website of the Social-democrats women’s organization has been under construction since 2011, but the organization’s Facebook page one can see a particular concern for celebrating the birthday of Mihai Eminescu (Romanian national poet, born 163 years), ignoring – as well as other similar organizations – Gigi Becali’s sexist statements about women’s involvement in politics or the fact that Romania was rocked in early 2013 by a sexual harassment scandal involving a policewoman.

There is an extensive literature about women in Romanian politics. The studies\textsuperscript{37} conclude that the poor representation of women at the top of politics as well as the fact that women and men are treated differently, and women are portrayed negatively and stereotypically. In this context, we try to find out if the glass-ceiling model is reproduced in the deep layers of local politics.

**Women in Romanian local politics**

The local politics deals with daily issues and influences daily lives. As Laura van Assendelft argues (in O’Connor K. eds, 2010, p.123), local politics develops policies and implements a wide range of programs and services influencing everything from public safety and schools, to recreation and environmental protection. Local politics is also more accessible for participation than any other level of government.

In Romania, the local government has a two-headed management: on the one hand there are prefectures, led by prefect and two sub-prefects, senior civil servants, and territorial government representatives appointed by the Prime Minister, on the other hand county council, whose members and chairman, are elected by the people through direct vote. In 2012, in 4 of the 42 counties (including Bucharest) the Government is represented by a woman, other 8 women are sub-prefects. Following the 2012’ elections, no woman has been elected to lead a county council and only 7 women (from 82, 2 in each county) were designated by the county councilors’ vote to fill the position of Vice President of the County Council. A stronger female presence is reflected in the county secretaries: 15 out of a total of 37.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} After all, they have to face so many women!
\item \textsuperscript{37} To name the most representatives: Laura Grunberg, Daniela Roventa-Frumusani Doina Pasca Harsanyi; Mihaela Miroiu, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, Liliana Popescu, Irina Moroianu-Zlatescu, Oana Baluta, Ionela Baluta, etc.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Only 4% of elected mayors in Romania, in June 2012, are women, most of them in rural areas, as shown in the table above. In five counties and in Bucharest (there are 7 mayors in Bucharest) there is no woman mayor. Of the 1684 localities for which we have complete data (mayor, deputy mayor, secretary), 3 (0.17%) are driven only by women, while 713 (42.33%) are run only by men. Other municipalities 828 (49.16%) are headed by a mayor and a deputy mayor man and a woman secretary, this being the most common pattern. In the case of very small cities (under 10,000 inhabitants) the dominant leadership model is the same: mayor- man, deputy mayor-man, secretary- woman (in 58.13% of cases).

The situation is changing in large cities where the dominant model is strictly male (63.60% of cases). The reason for this shift lies in the attributes of the secretary: in a large city, the secretary of the town-hall has a great power (symbolic and economic as well), which is not the case in small cities or in the countryside.
If elected functions are dominated by men, in executive functions (civil servants, access is based on competition) there are mostly women, as shown in table 2 below:

### Table 2

Women secretaries in Romanian local administration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of political-administrative structure, by size</th>
<th>Secretary</th>
<th>Women secretary</th>
<th>% women secretary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>village</td>
<td>2479</td>
<td>1307</td>
<td>52,72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very small town, less than 10.000 inhabitants</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>55,71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small town, between 10.001 and 50.000 inhabitants</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium town, between 50.001 and 100.000 inhabitants</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34,78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large town, between 100.001 and 500.000 inhabitants</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29,62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very large town, more than 500.000 inhabitants</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is worth noting that, as the number of inhabitants in administrative-territorial unit managed grows, the percentage of women employed in this position gets lower.

**Possible explanations of women’s exclusion from local politics**

Feminist literature identifies a number of weak points that maintain this disparity of representation of women in the public sphere:

1. Willingness and ability to enter the political game is lower among women than among men. Many women underestimate their potential or are too preoccupied with the daily struggle to be willing to engage in politics. The gender discrimination in terms of time available (woman's double burden don’t to give them time for political actionand violence of Romanian public space are barriers to women’s access.

2. To this, one must add the quasi-absence of female models. The most known woman politician in Romania is Elena Udrea, with a hyper-sexualised public image, a model of politician which become dominant in Romanian politics, at any level, crossing parties’ boundaries. In order to remain in public eyes, women politicians resort to cancan which leads to a quasi-exclusion of women from serious political debate or (perverse effect) causes women to resort to
alternative strategies to capture attention (pseudo events focused on femininity and not on competence, glossy photographic presence). This distorted pattern of the woman politician but compatible with the collective mind tend to generalize and cannibalize the other models, which rule out the women who do not fit into the model and reinforce the gender stereotypes.

Using some confidential date and participative observation procedures, we found out that women do not miss from political life, but from the political decision sphere. At the bottom of the political party structure, women exceed men; at the top, the situation is reversed, as in table 3 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Vice-presidents</th>
<th>Secretary</th>
<th>Other national leaders</th>
<th>Local leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>total</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>total</td>
<td>women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSD</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNL</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDL</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overcoming filters preceding application of candidature, especially in the absence of regulations on egalitarian representation based on percentages. The main barrier that women have to overcome previous to the announcement of the candidature is the persistence of traditional social roles and attitudes of discouraging women leadership skills. Also, the competence to succeed as woman among a political class with rules established in time to a world fundamentally male machismo and violence marked the symbolic represent a possible hindrance. Women do not get often on the electoral list; when it happens, they are placed at the bottom, where the elections chances are close to none. Using 2012 election data, we found out that only a low percentage of women were designated by their party to run for a county or town council mandate, as can be seen in table 4 below.

3. Supporting voters and their reluctance to vote for women running for management positions. According to gender barometer 2000, for 45% of voters, candidates’ gender is important when have to vote a member of the Parliament. The percentage rises to 55% for mayor and 73% for the president. Moreover, 54% of respondents believe that men are better political leaders than women.
Table 4

Overall candidatures for county and local councils, in 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>County council</th>
<th>Local council</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>People designated by different parties to run for: men</strong></td>
<td>15669</td>
<td>11975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>women</strong></td>
<td>1202</td>
<td>3656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% women</strong></td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>23.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions of the study

The changes brought about by the Romanian revolution acted in fact, not in spirit, against women’s political participation. The pro-women implication discourse was labeled as communist residue and any attempt at imposing some balance between women and men politicians become trite. The patriarchal discourse, natural for the majority, has imposed over the modern one; the latest was left for official meetings at European level and did not produce any real, important, effect.

In Romanian politics, women are an exception rather than the rule. As an exception a woman can announce her intention to run for the Presidency of Romania, however, is better not to carry out the mind and withdraw, leaving the place for a man. As an exception a woman can be a mayor or a prefect or a member of the equality committee of Parliament. As a rule, she can be secretary of the commission, the municipality or county council. This scarce representation of women in the areas of decision reduces the chances of fair representation of women (who represent nearly 52% of the electorate) and reinforces the stereotypical image of second-class citizens with fewer rights but more obligations.

WORKS CITED


GENDER ISSUES IN THE INTERACTIONS OF ITALIAN POLITICIANS ON TWITTER: IDENTITY, REPRESENTATION AND FLOWS OF CONVERSATION

Stefania Spina¹, Jessica Cancila (PhD)²

Abstract: Twitter is emerging as a medium where users negotiate and maintain relationships and identities. How do political actors use Twitter? In a gender perspective, this study aims to shed light on their interactions on Twitter, which can be considered a window on how women and men represent and construct their gender and political identities within conversational flows.

Keywords: social networks; computer-mediated communication; Twitter; dialogue; gender; identity; social interactions; conversation; political discourse.

1. Introduction

Twitter, the social network that enables users to post messages of up to one hundred and forty characters, recently reached almost five million active users in Italy, with an increase of fifty percent in the last year. The first tweet by an Italian politician dates back to mid-2007; after six years, most Italian Members of Parliament have a Twitter account and use it to communicate with their followers. Bentivegna (2006)³ points out that, during the 2006 election campaign, the use of Internet by Italian politicians was overall unable to exploit its full potential, in terms of networking, self-promotion and conversationality.

In this study, we investigate how politicians use Twitter today, with a specific emphasis on two different themes, deeply related to Internet and more specifically social network communication: conversationality and identity construction.

2. Background and research questions

One of the emerging discursive features of Twitter is its conversationality: unlike older media, like television, Twitter is based on interactions among users. Interactions on Twitter can be described as short, public conversations that share a

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double audience (Herring, Honeycutt 2009): a general audience of followers, and a specific one, selected through the use of mentions (a username preceeded by "@").

In example (1), a politician (@Idvstaff) addresses his tweet to a specific user (@santovasta), who asked him a question, and at the same time to the general audience of his followers.

(1)
@Idvstaff il governo con la scusa di far quadrare i conti vuole licenziare migliaia di dipendenti pubblici ma i partiti dove siete?
(@Idvstaff the government with the excuse of making ends meet wants to lay off thousands of public employees but where are you, the parties?)

@santovasta noi siamo a fare opposizione da più di un anno a questo governo, ma hanno una maggioranza bulgara...
(@santovasta we have been opposing this government for more than a year, but they have a Bulgarian majority...)

Previous research on the use of Twitter by Italian politicians suggested that women and men have different attitudes in their approach to dialogue and in their use of conversational features (Spina 2012).

On the side of identity construction, social networks can be used to affirm users' multiple identities. Identity can be defined as the display of or ascription to membership of some feature-rich category (Antaki, Widdicombe 2008). As such, identity work is in the hands of participants and it is an endemic feature of discourse.

Twitter users can define themselves through interaction, as it occurs in every type of interaction, but they can also explicitly design self-presentations in the "profile" slot. The profile can be analyzed - this is our interpretation - as an invariable part of discourse, such as greetings or question-answer pairs. Its use (or its absence) can be interpreted as a "signal" that plays against the expectations of the readers. People use descriptive categories and apply membership criteria to perform various kinds of discursive actions, and if categories (such as age, profession etc.) are not merely factual, the analytic work is to find if and for what they may have relevance.

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In the study of the different ways in which men and women construct their identities of male and female within Twitter interactions, different perspectives need to be considered, connected with political and computer-mediated discourse. From the political discourse perspective, according to Chilton (2004)\textsuperscript{7}, political discourse serves the double function of: representing oneself as a politician, and therefore as someone who has credibility, in order to be accepted in the political arena; and interacting, with all the participants in the political process. In this perspective, Twitter is the place where political actors can spread a positive representation of their multiple identities (Wodak 2003)\textsuperscript{8}, while interacting with their multiple audience. From the computer-mediated discourse perspective (Herring 2001)\textsuperscript{9}, it is well known that, after the age of broadcasting, in which communication is vertical, unidirectional and one-to-many, social media brought a radical change and established a new paradigm of interaction, in which people share horizontally dynamic flows of conversations that create new forms of interpersonal relationships.

Despite the restriction to one hundred and forty characters per tweet, users on Twitter perform different communicative actions on multiple dimensions, and dynamically reshape context (Auer 1996)\textsuperscript{10} through the use of five main “contextualization cues” (Gumperz 1982)\textsuperscript{11}:

- \texttt{@} = addressing
- \texttt{http} = redirecting to other texts
- \texttt{RT} = redistributing (with an implicit evaluation)
- \# = indexing and aggregating people around key themes or values
- \texttt{profile} = self-defining

Twitter then can be considered a multi-referential discourse system (Dang-Anh 2013)\textsuperscript{12}; through the systematic use of these functions users perform complex communicative activities, based on multiple referentiality, intertextuality, interdiscursivity.

In this broader context, the focus of our investigation will be the role of gender. As gender is continually realized in interactional form (Wodak 1997:13)\textsuperscript{13},
does it affect
1. the way politicians perform multi-referentiality and participate in the flow of conversations?
2. self-presentations in profiles?

3. Methodology and data

In order to answer these questions, we have collected a balanced corpus of the tweets produced by one hundred and eighty Italian politicians (ninety male and ninety female) in a time-frame of six months (from January to June 2013). The selected politicians are all members of the current Parliament and are equally distributed into five age groups (25-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59 and over 60).

The result is a corpus of 86,841 tweets (36,780 written by men, 50,061 written by women), for 1,460,000 total words.

In this study we will present and discuss some preliminary data extracted from this corpus, which are relative to:
1. the distribution of mentions;
2. the distribution of replies (responses to other tweets);
3. the distribution of selected conversational features.

As for the identity construction in profiles, the analysis is focused on the resources politicians use in producing self descriptions, and more specifically on the use of categories/features of categories made relevant by people in self-presentations.

The analysis takes into account:
- if participants use self-description;
- which categories and features they use in profiles.

Four analytic groups have been created, according to the following partitioning:
1. Personal or Biographical Data, such as Place of birth, residence; age; religion; interests.
2. Professional Data such as Job; civil charges or political roles; other relevant remarks.
3. Political Role, to describe the current political position.
4. Involvement Features, which include Aphorisms (quotes or visions) or Contact Data (Personal websites, Blogs, mentions, hashtags).

Personal data are contrasted with Professional and Political data. An Involvement group summarizes information aimed at engaging the audience, such as quotes, personal annotations or contact information. Each group is split into subgroups, to control gender effects in more depth.

The assumptions in this analysis are that each choice of categories is aimed at offering an image of self and that each Category implies some values: the use of

avvocato (lawyer) may imply a series of values in terms of skills, attitudes, believes etc..

What follows are the preliminary results and the discussion of these results.

3. Results

As far as conversationality is concerned, 70.1% of tweets written by women contain a mention, against only 57.7% of tweets written by men, as shown in fig. 1.

In addition, 22.4% of women's tweets (against 14.8%) are a reply to a tweet written by someone else.

Fig. 1 - The use of mentions and replies by women and men politicians

Following previous literature on gender patterns in computer-mediated discourse (Baron 2008), we have also measured and analyzed a number of selected linguistic and discursive features traditionally associated with dialogic interactions, in order to find evidence of gendered attitudes in the way politicians manage social relations with their followers and participate in the flow of conversations on Twitter. A few examples of these linguistic features are emoticons, second person pronouns and a list of discourse markers. In general, the data replicates previous findings on online and offline gender patterns: women use significantly more conversational features (emoticons for example are almost twice as frequent as in men's tweets, as shown in fig. 2), and they use them especially when they reply to other tweets.

Moving to identity construction in profiles, a first analysis looks at the four main groups (personal, political, professional, involvement data): as shown in fig. 3, the involvement and political data are the most used by both men and women, and, interestingly, women score less than men in all types of self-presentation. In addition, a considerable number of women (27%) do not use any profile description.
5. Discussion: conversationality

The first aim of this study is to provide evidence of the different strategies used by women and men within the stream of conversations on Twitter. As for the term “conversation”, we follow Herring’s broad definition, which includes all the written forms of conversation that are typical of computer-mediated discourse: a conversation is “any exchange of messages between two or more participants, where the messages that follow bear at least minimal relevance to those that preceded or are otherwise intended as responses”\(^{15}\). According to this definition, the typical form of conversation that takes place on Twitter is a short exchange, usually symmetrical, made up of a first message and a reply. More rarely, conversations have a longer extension and multiple participants.

In all these conversational exchanges, a key role is played by the mention, which is an increasingly interpersonal resource and performs the multiple roles of:

- marking addressivity or reference to other users;
- relating one tweet to another;
- assuring coherence to exchanges (which is an important function, because turns in conversations are often interrupted by other tweets).

The results of this analysis of mentions revealed that women use this deictic strategy much more than men, to involve someone else in a conversation and to reply to someone else’s tweet; as suggested by Herring and Honeycutt (2009:6)\(^{16}\), tweets that contain a mention are more focused on an addressee, and their content is more interactive. In contrast, tweets without mentions are more self-focused. The data also shows that men proved to be more self-focused, less interactive, less inclined to reply to the requests of involvement from other participants, and less prone to conversation than women.

The analysis of the selected conversational features also revealed that Twitter interactions share some of the same conversational strategies as in face-to-face conversations.

Women use more than men these strategies, particularly in replies: what emerges from the data is that when they reply to someone else, their focus is much more on establishing interpersonal relationships rather than on simply providing information, as it happens in example (2), which is a tweet written by a man politician (@kito_84):

\[(2)\]

ora su #radiowave [link]
(Now on #radiowave [link])

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An example of these different strategies is the use of emoticons, which is aimed at the representation of paralinguistic features (Baron 2008), but also at the establishment of interpersonal connection with other users.

The smiley, for example, has precisely this function of creating familiarity and complicity with the addressees, and it also has a strong association with mention, with whom it co-occurs very often; in example (3), @RosCapacchione, a woman politician, interacts with someone who was asking for news on a wind farm in Sardinia:

(3)  
@RosCapacchione Che bello sarebbe conoscere tutta la verità sul parco eolico del Sulcis, pezzo di paradiso in pasto alla malapolitica!  
(@RosCapacchione How nice it would be to know the whole truth about the Sulcis wind farm, a corner of paradise in the hands of bad politics!)  
@frademuru con un po’ di pazienza, se ci fanno lavorare, ci riusciremo :)  
(@frademuru With a little patience, if they let us work, we will succeed :) )

Example (4) shows that the smiley and the mention themselves can make up the entire content of a tweet, a very short and fixed pattern to reply to a question expressing a mixed feeling of agreement and search for conviviality.

(4)  
Che sia giunto il tempo anche in Italia di un ministro della difesa donna?  
@robertapinotti #flashforward  
(Could it be the time in Italy for a woman as Defense Minister?  
@robertapinotti #flashforward)  
@defilipochiara :-)

The widespread use of emoticons, with the function of creating familiarity with others, is one piece of evidence of a search for interaction and dialogue in Twitter exchanges; a striking difference between men and women is not only in the overall frequency of emoticons, but also in their diversification (see table 1), in an attempt to express different nuances and feelings when connecting with others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emoticons used by women and men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:-(</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>::p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:-*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

---

To summarize what we have discussed so far with regard to the attitude to conversationality, the analysis of the data suggests that women politicians:

1. systematically use the mention as a deictic marker of addressivity, and they do it significantly more than men;
2. reinforce the co-occurrent use of other conversational devices (discourse markers and emoticons), which strongly qualify their tweets as real conversational exchanges;
3. base their exchanges on Twitter more on the construction of interpersonal relationships than on the simple delivery of information.

6. Discussion: Identity

As mentioned before, women score less than men in all types of self-presentation in profiles.

The involvement group, in particular, seems to be more often used by men: 69% of men against 39% of women present themselves by offering, among other things, information that aims at involving readers.

Looking more in depth into the communication patterns of this group we found that this high percentage is mainly due to a definition used exclusively by the members of M5S in their profile, that is citizen. M5S members, in fact, stress that they are not a party but a “movement of citizens”. In addition, few women are interested in offering an email or blog/site address to establish a contact with their readers: as the data on conversationality revealed, connection with others seems to be instantiated by women more in actual interactions.

Personal data is the third category in use. No gender effect has been observed at a general level. Moreover, the mention of sons or daughters not only is less used than other personal data (such as place of birth, age), but women also refer to children less than men (six women and ten men, 6,6% vs. 11%). We can speculate that the features associated in our culture with the role of father (responsible, reliable, serious) have more positive implications for a politician than the features associated with “mother”.

The most striking result, however, is that twenty four women vs. eleven men (27% vs. 12%) do not use any profile description. This issue will be the object of a further investigation: are “empty” profiles correlated with linguistic features of tweets?

To sum up, the actual political role is the most frequent identity chosen by politicians. Almost one third of women do not use profiles and in general women systematically score less than men in the use of the four category groups.

7. Conclusions

Twitter is emerging as an environment where people establish relationships rather than simply share information (Zappavigna 201218, and where, through a

continuous stream of conversations, users negotiate and maintain these relationships.

Political actors, who use social networks to spread a positive representation of themselves, are faced with a new approach to their audience, based on horizontal and pervasive forms of conversation; in a gender perspective, this study aimed to shed light on their interactions on Twitter, which can be considered a window on how women and men represent and construct their gender and political identities within conversational flows.

This study has shown a different approach by Italian men and women politicians towards this conversational nature of Twitter exchanges: while women appear more inclined to a dialogic approach and systematically use linguistic resources to engage specific users in conversations and to establish interpersonal relationships with them, men are far less oriented to the new conversational approach and tend to adopt a self-focused attitude.

It is possible to read in the same direction the results on the use of profiles, in which women appear to disattend the expectations that the profile slot creates in readers/users more often than men; men, conversely, are more comfortable with an assertive and declarative way of presenting themselves.

The politicians in our corpus often do not offer contact information in their profile, but connecting with others seems to be instantiated by women in actual interactions: for women, conversationality is not regarded as an episodic, ephemeral feature, or only as an instrument for creating relationships, but it appears as an intrinsic aspect of the self.

A further stage of our research will be devoted to investigating the procedural consequences of self-definitions (through the integration of profile and tweet analyses), in order to answer the question: how visible is the declared identity in interaction? At a practical level, on the basis of gender peculiarities, can we suggest more consistent ways of integrating men and women styles, and of using Twitter as a platform for networking and self-affirming?

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HOW ITALIAN FATHERS’ PERCEPTION OF THEIR CHILDCARE CAPACITY IS CHANGING BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

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Abstract: This exploratory study provides an examination of Italian fathers’ perception of their child care capacity and their concepts about fatherhood and parental sharing before and after childbirth. A snowball sample of fifty fathers living in a big city of Southern Italy, with social and cultural heterogeneous background and children aged one to six, was interviewed. Subjects declare their willingness to accept new models of fatherhood, showing a positive attitude towards parental sharing, although these purposes appear scarcely applied in their daily life. Their involvement in child caring seems to be limited to slight activities, whereas primary care remains an almost exclusive mothers’ prerogative. The results show that paternal role appears still to be “under construction” when compared to the maternal one and in search of its own and independent identity.

Keywords: new fathers; child care; parental sharing; gender roles; parental leave.

1. Introduction: a different culture of parental roles

In the last five decades the traditional family model and gender relations within European society have been undergoing deep transformations, especially regarding the new role of women as salaried workers, the consequent reorganization of parental tasks, the development of different fatherhood models connected to the growth of new paternal identities.

Social and cultural meaningful changes shook the Western society in the 19th and 20th century, the period when the great mass movements, such as feminism, contributed to the passage from a patriarchal to a nuclear family model, with the birth – for the first time in history – of a “family-feeling” (Ariès, 1981). The patriarchal family was organized as a unit, with indistinct economic and affective functions. In this model, several generations lived together, gender roles were strictly defined, fathers occupied a main position as economic providers – breadwinners – unlike women, considered responsible for home and children.

With the beginning of the Industrial era, affective and economic aspects, until then rigidly combined, split up, due to the modernization process. A new consciousness arose about family, perceived now as the elective place of affects, with a clear separation from the public sphere (Badolato, 1993). The nuclear family

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1 University of Bari, Italy. Para. 1, 2, 4.
2 University of Bari, Italy. Para. 3.
model appears to be generally constituted by two parents and their children, their grandparents, father’s and mother’s siblings and their sons and daughters. Relations and roles inside it are established in a very different way when compared to the previous model: children represent no more a working-force and their birth is accompanied with different motivations, often following a conscious choice by parents.

In the 20th century another important factor in determining this passage was the increase of school attendance rate in many European countries, with more women educated and employed, a condition that influenced the aspect and the sense of the traditional family. In addition to this, the relationship between men and their paternal models began to change, causing a crisis of the traditional fatherhood and the need for new identities.

Maternal and paternal models constitute points of reference during pregnancy and childbirth for the parents-to-be, who search for indications useful to face the new tasks, interpreting them according their time sensitiveness (Rosnati & Iafrate, 2007). In this context, the maternal role seems to have gone better through historical transformations, appearing more codified than the paternal one, fairly vague and uncertain. So a different culture of parental roles has emerged or is trying to emerge in Europe, with many differences between the northern and the southern part of the continent. In the Italian case, in their effort to develop a new role, fathers cannot count on strong social reinforcement, and in these conditions mothers’ support appears to be more crucial.

A particular form of nuclear family model is the symmetrical family, where concepts such as “equality of roles”, ”sharing” and ”interchangeability” are emphasized, due to the greater presence of women out of the domestic environment. In this model the relationship inside the couple becomes central, the object of mutual egalitarian expectations, with a pressing demand of continuous trading especially by women. The contemporary European and Western society is in fact characterized by women's dual role, mothers and workers at the same time, who show more assertiveness and determination than in the past. Still, although they are expected by themselves and society to advance in their career, the roles’ arrangement inside the family continues to be traditional (Pleck, 1985).

On the other hand, men, whose dominant values are independence, self-sufficiency, competition and individualism, seem to have lost the “authority”-role, that has defined fatherhood for many centuries.

2. Shared parenting and child’s development

In the last years very extensive theoretical considerations and empirical studies have been carried out about the division of roles and shared parenting in the Western society. In these contributions both the mother's and the father’s importance have been stressed, recognizing their complementary resources, useful for integrating, modifying and sharing the daily tasks, in order to develop common purposes in children’s education (Surrey et al., 1991). Some findings (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 2001) highlight the importance of fathers’ support
to their partners in the early days after child birth, promoting the idea of a shared parenting, focusing on the qualitative aspects of interaction among adults and their child: the triadic unit (McHale, 2010). According to Feldman (2000) each dyadic relationship seems to affect the others: parental convergence on marital satisfaction depends on father-child interaction; sharing household tasks and child caring influence mother-child and father-child relationships; child caring activities performed by fathers are associated with maternal sensitivity. Assuming more responsibility in child caring helps fathers to develop a more emotionally funded relationship (Clarke Stewart, 1978). Moreover, Pleck (1997) reports: “[…] the childcare tasks in which parents engage also differ, with mothers doing more physical or continue care of children than fathers. Additionally, although mothers spend more absolute time playing with children, fathers spend a proportionally larger amount of their time engaged in play”.

In Italy a breadwinner typology of family still prevails (Sainsbury, 1996). Ichino & Galdeano (2003) argue that Italian fathers dedicate less time to child care when the mother is unemployed, offering more of their contribution when their partner works, unlike what happens in Sweden or Germany, where fathers’ behaviour remains unchanged. Italian society is characterized by a low female participation in the labour market and this condition is more evident in families with children. More than half of the women with children 0-3 do not work (Del Boca et al., 2004). Some studies in Europe and the US (Engle & Breaux, 1998) report that a fully experienced fatherhood represents a beneficial growth factor for children’s intellectual, social and emotional development (Clarke Stewart, 1978). The quality of interaction between father and his child, rather than the overall amount of time, was found to be a better predictor of children’s cognitive performance. These children had fewer behavioural problems, more sense of their ability to do things and higher self-esteem. For Badolato (1993) we have the best condition when a father is "neither seduced nor frightened by his son’s needs and desires, responding appropriately to them".

In the past, fathers were forced to spend most of their time out of the domestic environment, either for economic reasons, or because their presence was considered unimportant for care purposes. They established the rules, guided their family, accompanied children in their socialization process, but always as “distant figures”, both in a physical and psychological way, due to their emotional control.

The framework appears still nebulous also because the scientific literature contains very few contributions about fathers, having always focused its attention particularly on mother-child relationship.

At the moment a father is considered “involved” when he wonders about his identity and its changes, desiring a real daily relationship with his children. It represents a difficult task because fatherhood has cultural roots and needs social

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confirmation and rituals, attesting its boundaries and peculiarities. Paternal models pass through family of origin’s education, that establishes father’s role in the marriage, work and in relation to the other family members. In the course of time, once any position of authority got lost, fathers assumed a peripheral role.

3. New images of fatherhood and social laws

Our exploratory study has been carried out in a big city of Southern Italy, involving a snowball sample of fifty fathers aged twenty-fifty belonging to heterogeneous socio-cultural backgrounds with children aged one to six. The aim of the research was to investigate fathers’ attitudes towards new models of fatherhood and parental sharing, examining the feelings they reported before and after childbirth and perceptions they had about their child care capacity. The sample responded to a semi-structured questionnaire composed of three parts: the first one involved social and personal data, the second and the third ones open and close questions about several aspects of fatherhood.

According to fathers’ answers, desire for parenthood was fully shared by both parents (eighty-six percent). In the ninety percent of cases the news of pregnancy were accompanied by "joy", while ten percent declared “surprise”; no one mentioned have been afraid. However, if they were asked to speak about feelings experienced during the period of pregnancy, sixteen percent of them experienced "concern".

Fifty-six percent of fathers stated that child birth limits personal freedom and determines deep changes in the couple's relationship (forty-two percent). At the end of the pregnancy most of them experienced happiness and pride. Eight percent felt "confused".

Almost half of the sample thought to be immediately capable to care for children, while sixteen percent reported the opposite, reflecting the difficulty in hiring new paternal behaviours still not confirmed by experience.

Some fathers have expressed their desire of recovering a deeper relationship with their children, characterized by dialogue (seven percent) and tenderness (two percent), showing different approaches from the mean.

According to these results, fathers spend less time in child caring than mothers and their role appears to be only additional. Fifty percent of them state that it is always the mother who takes care of the children, especially washing, feeding and dressing the baby, whereas dads seem to be totally eclipsed. Their presence is rather large in the play-verbal communication areas such as playing games (thirty-two percent), walking (twenty-one percent) and talking (five percent). Interaction with children lasts one-three hours per day in twenty-six percent of cases, while mothers’ presence is continuous. Although fathers’ role in child caring is severely limited, eighty-six percent of them think that child caring should be “shared equally” by the parental couple.

When fathers are asked to imagine their partners to need help for children, sixty-four percent replied that they would look after them without any problem, as "helpers". In fact, forty-four percent report receiving often information about child caring by wives, an aspect confirmed by literature (Thompson & Walker, 1989).
Figure 1 - Fathers’ answers to the question: “Who generally looks after for your child your family?”

Figure 2 - Fathers’ answers to the question: in “In your opinion, child caring is a task for?”

Figure 3 - Fathers’ answers to the question: “What activities do you do with your child?”
The question "do you think that after child birth fathers should remain more time at home to help their partner?" obtained affirmative answers in the eighty-two percent of cases, even if subjects are vague in specifying what they should do with their children ("a bit of everything every time it is required", "what my wife asks me to do"). It seems clear that they avoid to perform those activities less delightful for both, such as cleaning or getting up at night if the child is crying. The reason they gave is the alleged difficulty to handle infants, relying on a supposed better performance by their wives ("have more practice ", "are more inclined to do it"). Only sixteen percent spends more than six hours a day with child, and in general the main characteristics they think a father should have are: patience, responsibility and authority.

Discussing these data we can evidence an actual but difficult transition from a traditional model of fatherhood to another one, where sensitiveness and readiness to perform all child caring tasks are clearly declared but barely put in practice. Taking care of a small child implies tenderness, a capacity of emotional abandonment and intimate communication, anxiety and fear, elements that men are generally accustomed to distance and control (Gianini Belotti, 1981). The literature also shows mothers’ ideal images of their children’s fathers, viewed as practical, active, simple, efficient, able to perform their duties safely, with the desire to spend more time with children. According to Des Rivières-Pigeon et al. (2002) cultural factors determine the expectations and desires of men and women concerning fatherhood and motherhood. In a culture where women expect men to play a large role in domestic work, strong tensions may build up if the actual division of domestic work in the couple does not confirm what is expected. Alternatively, in a culture where men play a lesser role in domestic work, women's expectations are probably different. Thus, alternative strategies, such as asking support from other
family members, may then be used by women. Furthermore, in the first case, while performing most of the family work, mothers get to the stage of desiring their husbands to be no more involved in newborns' care, to avoid a 'surplus' of effort, in giving detailed instructions, checking whether the task has been carried out properly, and when something does not work, doing it again (Romito, 1997). Like this last author, we are very sceptical in considering this behaviour as the consequence of a supposed women's attitude to maintaining their "sovereignty" in the domestic sphere, but actually it could be a form of ambivalence not really supportive towards their partners' efforts. Twenty-six percent of Italian mothers indicate to do “always” more than half of child care tasks, while in France this percentage decreases to twenty percent and in Québec to fifteen percent (Des Rivières-Pigeon et al., 2002). This last author considers male participation as an “outcome value”, particularly important for mothers of one-year-old children: it is perceived as a form of support and as value for the child, fulfilling what women expect from their husbands/partners. Some tasks appear to be accomplished exclusively by women: feeding the child and changing his/her nappies. According to recent findings (Tanturri & Mencarini, 2009) there are some categories of fathers more involved with their children, depending on their work: clerks and teachers, unlike managers or independent professionals, who represent the least involved category. The authors of this study conclude that fathers having a higher position are probably those who invest more in their role of providers than carer. Thus, time constraints seem to affect father's involvement in daily care activities. Ackerman (1968) observes that especially young and more educated couples tend to have an extraordinary awareness of their role as parents, even if they appear to be more doubtful and scared about their ability to care. Bianchi & Robinson (1997) indicate that well-educated mothers and fathers focus more of their child-related time on activities finalized to nurture their children's cognitive development. Other researchers (Aldous et al., 1998) emphasize the fact that fathers’ education has no effect on direct physical care of young children but does influence the amount of time fathers spend playing, reading or going out with their preschool-aged children. Moreover, highly educated fathers generally show more egalitarian beliefs about shared breadwinning and care giving (Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992).

According to Weldon-Johns (2013), the European Community itself has been emphasizing the pursuit of equality between men and women, especially in the last years. Previously (1976, 1992) EU reinforced working mother’s role forgetting working fathers in child care, despite the aims of a shared parenting. The Equal Treatment Directive (1976) and the Pregnant Workers Directive (1992) adopted some measures to protect women during pregnancy and maternity, reinforcing the importance of the mother's caring role (McGlynn et al., 2000). In this way, working mothers were confined in their child care roles and fathers ignored with regard to their child care duties.

In 1996 a new parental leave directive was issued and legislators appeared more aware that the most important factor that would support a greater utilisation of this right was a financial compensation during this period (Moss e al., 2008).
In Sweden, where parental leave is paid, men have used or would use it in sixty-seven percent of cases, unlike in Britain or Italy, where the percentage decreases to lower values due to the absence of income replacement. This condition persists in reinforcing mothers in their role of primary caregivers and main users of parental leave (McColgan, 2005). Another impressive aspect is that only four percent of European men had or would take parental leave thinking that both parents should equally share responsibilities towards their offspring (Weldon-Johns, 2013).

The Parental Leave Directive 2010/18 tries to face more the traditional gender roles, focusing on both parents’ right to care, “recognising the neglected role of working fathers” in the EU countries. It shows a continued focus on the reconciliation of work and family life and the need to achieve equality between men and women with regard to shared child care responsibilities, particularly by increasing the participation of fathers. The new acquisition is certainly represented by recognizing the right both parents have to care for their children, going beyond the “motherhood ideology” (McGlynn et al., 2000) that have characterized European laws in the past years. It is more important to support care during the early stages of the child’s life than only defending women in the post-birth period. In Italy parental leave is scarcely used by men, with many differences between public and private sector, where private is more penalising in terms of pay (thirty per cent of the ordinary salary). Only in 2012 the Italian government, following the EU legislation, decided to introduce one obligatory day of parental leave for men during the first five months of child’s life. Italy constitutes an example of the southern European welfare, with a limited presence of child programs and low levels of economic support for families. Thus, policies that economically support parents and their children may reduce time constraints on fathers, ameliorating educational effects (Sayer et al., 2004), a field where Italy has still much to do.

4. Conclusion

In the Italian context we can notice the absence of new well recognised fatherhood models, supported by experience and useful to offer solid points of reference when fathers are with their children. In fact, as we have seen, the paternal role in child caring appears still to be “accessory” when compared to the maternal one. Italian fathers are making several efforts to develop new values, trying also to construct an independent identity, different from their partners’. It represents a crucial and critical condition, where fathers appear to be uncertain about what they are supposed to do and society’s expectations; after neglecting the traditional models, they are torn between imitating the already present examples of

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parenthood (such as maternal ones) and developing different ones. Primary care remains an almost exclusive mothers’ prerogative, while fathers, although their declared purposes, show to be mostly involved in the play-communicative areas of child caring. It is evident in this case the lack of paternal models in such activities as “holding and handling” babies. In this situation, a more faithful attitude by ambivalent mothers about their husbands’ capacity of child caring would be useful to reinforce their self-confidence. Fathers’ distance from these tasks depends also on a sense of inadequacy and difficulty to express some feelings as tenderness or delicacy, due to cultural reasons, especially in the Southern Europe.

The fatherhood issue is combined with the gender equality matter, partly unsolved in many countries inside Western society. Italy is one of these, even if some differences exist according to the social and cultural background of parental couples and their level of education. Fathers with high education seem to dedicate more time to their children, but this percentage changes on the strength of their job: for example, managers spend fewer hours in child caring than teachers or clerks, with different effects on their babies’ cognitive and social development.

In order to support all these processes, many contributions are needed, especially from society and government, through social reinforcement and laws, promoting a real gender equality and a closer relationship between fathers and their offspring. It is verified that some behaviours generally performed by women, such as feeding children or pushing stroller, are more likely to be performed by men when they can see other fathers doing that (Engle and Breaux, 1998).

In addition to this, we consider as absolutely meaningful the educational efforts towards the new generations, inside families and schools, to promote a real reconsideration of gender roles and equity within society.

At the present time it seems like we are witnessing a psychological and pedagogical “re-framing” of the father’s role, with the interesting question about what is/are the principle/s on which it will be definitively grounded.

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A HUMAN RIGHT ISSUE:
THE CASE OF ALBANIAN WOMEN

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Abstract: Gender-based violence needs to be reported and understood within the context of what it actually is, a global phenomenon that is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality. It is a complex problem that includes more than just a violent act in terms of interpersonal relationships between sexes. It is a multidimensional social problem, whose roots-run deep.

Albania, compared to the European context, is one of the countries with the highest rates of diffusion of domestic abuse. This can be explained by the fact that the discussion on human rights does not show any sensitivity towards women’s issues and their social positions. Due to its patriarchal features, the Albanian society has a long story of masculine domination in both public sphere and social life.

Domestic violence against women has and comes in phases. Even though for many years it has been thought to be an exclusive problem within couples, nowadays it is becoming an important issue for the entire society. This paper aims to identity the main factors that have influenced and are still influencing the increased rate of violence against women and the reasons leading women not to denounce this violence.

Keywords: Albanian society; identity; emancipation; transformation; domestic violence; human rights; women; education.

1. Introduction

In the Beijing Declaration for the Elimination of Violence against Women, approved in the year 19933, the violence against women has been defined as follows:

“Violence against women is the gender-based violence that may lead to or result in causing physical, sexual or psychological damage or suffering to women, including also threats to such acts, as well as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, happening both in public and private life”.4

Gender-based violence is a phenomenon reported in an alarming level. In fact, violence against women is a complex problem including more than a mere act

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in personal relationships between both sexes. It is a social problem of large measure with deep historical roots, as it has been observed.

Albania is estimated, in fact, in the European context, as one of the countries with the highest rate of domestic abuse diffusion. This is explained also by the fact that the discussion of rights does not show much sensitivity related to the position and issues of women, “because the Albanian society, identified as a patriarchal one, has a long history of men domination in the social life”.

The roots of continuous women mistreatment by men are very old and essentially associated with the lack of respect towards women. It seems paradoxical, especially reminding that in the Kanun there were provisions ensuring the immunity of women.

“But Kanun, on the other hand, is considered a discriminatory “law” towards women.”

It is often stressed that Kanun is the main source for the discriminatory position of women in the Albanian society.

Modern times for the Albanian women arrived late. The emancipating season for them could be regarded in the period after the Second World War, during which was noted some success in their role and position in the society. A season that was made of social and cultural changes related to women’s role limited no more only in the familiar and domestic domain, but including also the process of education and training, and combating against illiteracy. These results provided to a certain extent a kind of economic independence to the women and therefore gave them more power within the family.

6 Kanun of Leke Dukagjini is a customary code of laws transmitted orally for centuries. It is the first “constitution” based on national traditions. Shtjefen Konstandin Gjeçov, father of the Franciscan province of Shkodra, born in Kosovo, was the one who collected directly in the region the legal customs of the mountains people. The laws of Kanun have served for more than five hundred years as a fundamental canon of social behavior and its administration for the clans of Northern Albania. The same Kanun shows how over the centuries was built the legal and institutional tradition of the Albanian people. The rules and norms of Kanun still exert a strong influence both among Albanians living in Albania, and those immigrating to other countries. Kanun is concerned with both civil and criminal law, regulating numerous aspects of life, including: Besa (indicating the term allowed by the family suffering a loss by murder, with a “promise” or “guarantee” that during that term they will not kill in turn the guilty person.), rights and immunity of the church, family, engagement and marriage, private property and its inheritance, labor, loans and donations, the ways of taking oath and respecting the promise, honor, ways of compensation, infamous murders, revenge, privileges and exemptions of them. Beshiri, Dilina. Puka, Edi. Women’s Rights in the Albanian Kanun of Leke Dukagjini, in Democratic Education, 6, Bari: Graphic Arts Favia, 2013. pp. 34-42. Print.
2. The emancipation of Albanian woman between tradition and transformation

In fact, the emancipation of the Albanian women has been slow over the years. After the 90s, as the society went through a real change, the media has been reporting many cases of rape and humiliation of women. It seems difficult of course to determine the exact incidence, but non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations working in the field of human rights agree that violence is a serious obstacle to the affirmation of a substantive democracy in Albania.

During the communist regime, in the years 1945-1991, a period of nearly half a century, the Albanian society never dealt publically with the problem of abuse against women, as that would not contribute to the image of a perfect society propagated by communism. Indeed the woman was portrayed as the largest manufacturer and emancipating force of the society, equal to man, completely free and independent. In fact, during the communist regime, violence against women was a phenomenon that remained mostly within the house walls. At the same time, men’s violence to women who were not part of their family, especially physical and sexual violence, was strongly punished by the state that had a strong control over the whole society.

In addition, the question of physical and mental exhaustion of women who were forced to work in three shifts in plants and factories was ignored as if it didn’t exist at all, besides not ensuring the sufficient economic and social level of living conditions for the women. Violence against women, which was not mentioned, “but only exercised, had become almost a taboo”.8

The collapse of communist economy, which had connected the work of women with their emancipation through creation of jobs almost equally for both men and women, announced the introduction of post-communist age of free market, which in fact limited the opportunities for women to find a job as easily as men do. This has forced many women to stay at home and live in the position of housewife.

“The economic changes brought by the transition period have also caused reduction of social and economic situation of a large part of the Albanian men and growth of incompatibility of their situation with their social status”,9 heightening “the risk of a discomfort that he would continue to express itself in the form of abuse and violence against women”.10

3. The impact of socioeconomic factors in family violence

As stated above, this research aims essentially to show the factors that cause domestic violence in Albanian society through the interviews conducted during the research project on the role of Albanian women in today’s society.

The interviews were conducted in the cities of Tirana and Durres, addressed to a total sample of 46 women, aged between 18 and 60 years. The technique of “half-directive interview” was applied in order to guarantee to the interviewed persons a large degree of freedom in articulating their discourse and hypotheses.

By the interviews was observed that violence against women is a phenomenon reaching large dimensions in the Albanian society, especially after the 90s. 83% of respondents believe that even during communism there were cases of violence, but they were rare and usually remained within home, unlike today, as a larger number of women seem more conscious and ready to denounce such acts.

According to the respondents, the main factors influencing the increased cases of violence against women are family education and the models that have been cultivated (42% of respondents), the family’s economic conditions and unemployment among women (29% of respondents), stress (11% of respondents), the abuse of men with alcohol (9% of respondents), the common cultural heritage of women’s submission to their husbands (6% of respondents), other causes (3% of respondents).

In Albania, family violence against women is a problem appearing in all its forms, to the extreme, becoming an ever more sensitive issue for the entire public, although since many years it is dealt with only as a problem within the pair. Despite a few reported cases, in 2009 there were four victims of violence among spouses. The fact that violence against women is a major problem in Albania is indirectly confirmed by the number of women committing crimes against their mates. In the face of continuing violence perpetrated by their husbands, some women can’t restrain themselves and react by killing them.

The Albanian legislation foresees the gender-based violence, including domestic one. For the first time the art. 62 of Family Law provides for the possibility of one of the spouses to remove the violent mate from marital residence for a period up to three years. This arrangement uses a gender-neutral language, but studies and surveys show that in such cases in Albania women are mostly subjects to this form of violence, and this leads to the conclusion that this provision is intended to protect women in particular.

During the year 2010, relying to the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues, there has been a clear improvement in the issues of gender equality and domestic violence.
violence. There is the case of implementation of gender statistics designed to “detect” the persistence of this phenomenon, a revision of the legislation for the growth of economic power and opportunities for employment and vocational training for women. But on the other hand, there are in fact no official statistics on violence against women in order to ascertain this improved status and emancipation of Albanian women. Moreover, the crime of violence covers only the physical one, while it does not include the sexual, psychological or economic violence, leaving the victim with no adequate protection.

A significant contribution to the fight against violence on women and dealing with needs of abused women has been provided by women’s NGOs. The contribution of such organizations in defense of women has resulted in a public information campaign against violence, besides promoting advice lines, opening of refuge centers for abused women, legal clinics and law proposals aiming to combat for, defend and protect the women. Due to this contribution, it has been possible to arrive at formulating the strategy of the year 2007 - 2010 as one of the objectives including also action against violence. The government conducted with the support of parliament, civil society and press, a series of campaigns to increase public awareness on the phenomenon.

4. But which women do not report violence in the family?

Secondly, until 1995, police and judiciary institutions considered domestic violence a fact where parties had equal responsibility and intervened to convince the woman to exonerate the aggressor. If a woman was to carry forward the complaint, she had to take charge of collecting witnesses and presenting them in the courtroom. In the rare cases in which a trial ended with a positive verdict, the aggressor was punished with a fine only and he was never imprisoned. Only in the new Family Law, approved as the Law No. 9062, date 8/05/2003, the divorce was recognized to the woman as a right without imposing to her the burden of bringing proofs.

It is to be remarked that women reporting the violence are mostly those living in the cities. But “non-governmental organizations argue that unemployed women in rural areas are the most violated ones.”

Even the concept of violence varies among women in rural and urban areas. Especially rural women consider mainly only the physical violence, while women in the cities mention mostly psychological and economic violence. However, there are always larger percentages of women considering the “violence” only in its extreme form. Some of them say: “If your husband hits you once while he is bored, you cannot consider this as violence.”

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Relying on interviews, the main factors imposing the Albanian woman not to report violence are the lack of financial support, keeping of family unity for the sake of children, lack of a job and housing, fear of being condemned by the ostracism of the community. There are cases in which a woman makes everything to hide the truth of violence she is suffering. This shows that the Albanian society is still dominated by the culture of education through violence. “Through education at home, women learn to be humble and to bear all pressure of male power”. It is thought that since there is an increasing in women’s education out of their families, there should be also an increasing in the number of women who report violence.

In fact, this does not always happen in Albania. Many educated women wear a social “mask” of convenience and refuge they feel they must preserve at all costs. They do not have the moral courage to denounce violence, because the preservation of the mask of a good image is very important for them.

5. Concluding remarks

The phenomenon that we have analyzed definitely requires a multi-causal approach, tending to emerge from individual dynamics and to keep in mind the complex psycho-social dynamics of women, of their family members and other individuals involved.

In fact, the lack of financial support is one of the main factors forcing the Albanian women not to report the domestic violence. The abused women agree to keep quiet and accept torture just to remain in the “false refuge” of the family. Within themselves they feel hidden prejudices, justify themselves in the social context as people having a perfect family, forgetting and trampling themselves. Not in rare cases they accept violence as a normal fact, not only to avoid living lonely or just to appear in public without their husbands, but to avoid the obligation of giving explanations to the public.

Although women in Albania have been able to achieve high levels of education and progress in the labor market and public life, gender inequality remains however a problem for the society, causing more and more women to face the dilemma between raising up children or having a career, due to lack of adjustment of schedules, social services and other obstacles that are brought by traditional gender stereotypes and male mentality of the society.

The old Kanun rules, which prescribe obedience to women, may also contribute to this situation, since women consider a sin opposing to their husband. Besides that, domestic affairs are still something usually to be kept as a secret.

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SOCIAL CHANGE AND GENDER ISSUES:
LOOKING AT NEW MALE JOB CHOICES

Letizia Carrera

Abstract: The paper aims to analyze how the performative dimension of gender affects heavily the social expectations in relation of some jobs. This qualitative research is focused on the life-stories and choices of some men who have chosen, and sometimes who have accidentally begun, care giving jobs, traditionally “suitable for women”. Their words and their explanations have been the starting point of a reflection on gender issues, and on current changes. At last, the attention is focused on institutional choices, and their importance for changing gender representations.

Keywords: gender, socialization processes, politics, job, social change, institutions.

1. Gender and the socialization process

In this essay, we focus on the deep changes in the gender representations which have been the concern of the Italian social context but also the international one for too long a time. This process has not followed and does not follow a linear development and goes through sudden accelerations: just think of the ideology and the movements in the 70s, but also the slowdowns and even regressive moments. So we need to reflect about the gender representations in a historical perspective, but starting from the specific contents which connote them today, looking at the reinforcement processes of those representations, but also of the changes which have characterized them. Also nowadays gender, or better genders, are the object of a wide debate focused on their being or not produced by culture. On the one hand, the innatist perspective, on the other hand, the constructionist one. Both consider that women and men have very different characteristics. Women “are” nice, emotional, sensitive, cerebral, sweet, “not rational” weak, “in need of help”, able with care. Instead men are rational, “hard”, not emotional, strong, aggressive, practical, inable with care. From the one side there are those who regard gender characteristics as something genetically determined, a sort of biological and social “destiny”. In this perspective the features which mark men and women would be attributable to this genetic equipment which makes them “naturally” different from each other. From the other side, on the contrary there are those who believe that differences between women and men are rather the result of a learning process, of a sort of “social imprinting” which subjects receive from the moment they are born. Therefore the idea of a sort of biologically determined nature is replaced by the idea of a sort of “social nature”, a “second nature” to be intended in a durkheimian...
sense. Margaret Mead (1950) – on the basis of her anthropological surveys – recognized the decisiveness of the influence of the referring cultural model, thematizing the difference between sex and gender. In this second perspective the processes of cross-gender socialization are completely central; in these processes subjects, born female and male, learn to be women and men. In other words, gender becomes the organizing element of the whole normative and value assets, and consequently, it influences the choices and behaviors of women and men, just as women and men. Every gaze at the world is oriented by our regulatory and value models, our prejudices, our representations of reality. In this sense, gender has always represented a strong parameter for giving a sense, a lens to filter the reality in order to acquire even widely different meanings. Gender plays a central role in organizing our implicit knowledge, we can say with Bourdieu, our habitus (1979), which go to substantiate the normative symbolic order. Gender is embedded and naturalized social order. The daily exposure to gender practices, i.e. separated according to gender, allows people to learn gender through those same practices which become incisive and efficient workings of socialization. Through the exposure to these practices people learn not only gender but especially naturalness. In this way, baby girls learn not only what being little girls, doing little girls means, as baby boys learn to do little boys, but moreover they learn that it could not be different than this, that they could do nothing else but “doing so”. The sexually-differentiated and differentiating habitus are produced and reproduced in the daily life of subjects, men and women, through both a sort of unconscious mimesis and explicit indications. At the same time, there is the mechanism of gender’s social construction, and the concealment of its unnatural and artificial feature. This concealment leads to – and strengthens – the naturality of that way of being into the world. For all people who adapt to this gender status there are true symbolic rewards for the accordance with the common feeling. So people become «respectable» and get the symbolic privilege «to be respectable, according to the rules, so they enjoy a symbolic benefit of normality» (Bourdieu 2005: 127). The action of gender's social building is therefore complex and involves different social structures which can apply strong pressure on the socialization processes to the gender. Family, school and media (above all TV and cinemas) are certainly the agencies which have a particularly incisive power in influencing gender models, but especially in the process of naturalization of these models. Familiarity creates a sense of necessity of those contents and makes learning obvious and natural.

2. Gender and job choices

Job is still one of the places where this gender representation and self-representation shows its drag force. And even all the ambivalence which still characterize the way of thinking at men and women. According to those who

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3 Here we do not cite the widespread debate on the issue of “other genders” who fight to be recognized, and of their claims about asking the overcoming of a merely dichotomic concept of gender differences. We can also report some LBTG (Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Gay) associations and movements.
believe in the constructionist approach, job could have showed how the “natural” female features were the result of long and invisible processes of socialization. Women, released from a traditional education, would have been able to break the invisible walls and assert themselves in the male sectors. This phenomenon would have showed how vitiated was the innatist ideology which explain the reasons of an insufficient presence of women in some sectors exactly searching for their biopsychic peculiarity that made them suitable for some types of job (cleaning and housekeeping and, as regarding “outside” jobs, only those ones which are considered an ideal appendage to these jobs) and not suitable for other jobs (“male jobs” which require a greater skill, high decision-making abilities etc.). But, though the undeniable changes, the cultural oppositions become visible exactly here and are recorded by statistical data which show not only the female employment on a lower level than the male employment⁴, but also concentrated in some sectors closer to social care giving activities. Women and men carry on being considered and considering themselves, as more suitable and well-versed for very different jobs and tasks. This situation soon determines the area of the possible and of the thinkable and, as a sort of a self-fulfilling prophecy⁴, leading both women and men towards their natural social destinies. The gender socialization starts soon and it has, also, the shape of very different educational choices which lead women and men towards very different professional futures. Gottfredson (1981) elaborated the theory of circumscription and compromise, according to which six-eight years old kids already develop a very clear perception of the most accessible works, and moreover, more appropriate for a woman or a man. It means that a range of working alternatives related to the gender representation is generated. Sometimes this range is very limited and not always easily modifiable; its formation is significantly influenced also by the cultural level and the wider cultural capital of the belonging family and social group⁵. The parents’ jobs, the interpretation of gender roles in the family experience, exercise, although not in a deterministic sense, an important influence in the construction of children’s mental patterns and in their vision of the world, which end to influence, even unknowingly, choices and future attitudes. The family has an important role in socializing gender roles and, consequently, in reproducing inequality and gender disparities: «when moms and dads decide what to teach their Johns and Marys, they make exactly the right choice, in fact act with much more sociological sophistication than they should have, assuming of course, that the world is as they have known and it is what they want to reproduce» (Goffman 1979, 6). «The center of resistance to gender equality [that] runs in the family, at home, in the most basic practices» (Scisci, Vinci 2002, 60). This kind of “gender imprinting” still today continues to influence the people self-representations starting from their gender belonging. These representations are

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⁴ These trends seem to be structural and very far from being the result of short-term trends related to the crisis that has had effects on the job market for some years (Carrera 2011).

⁵ This analytic line also supposed a decisive influence by role models, that is, people of the same sex performing professional activities which are distant from those traditionally defined as appropriate for a man or a woman (Gysbers et al. 2001).
united by a round causality with the wider social representations and this current situation still today shows how difficult is imaging women with male jobs (Cfr. Carrera 2011b) and similarly there are still a lot of “pink jobs” which are almost precluded to men. These “female jobs” are more bound to the housekeeping and the care giving, jobs which are imagined as the ideal appendage to the female job par excellence: the housewife! The housewife is the only job that, according to the Istat data, is considered a female job until at least 2000 or in some cases even until 20046. Even in this case, words are at the same time a interesting observation point of the state of change, but also an important means able to interfere with this complex process of achievement/change of the gender representations. And even in this case, change is not only proved by the necessity of new words, but is also confirmed and made possible by those new words. But new words have to find also new frames where they can produce new effects. Cultural frames that have to be confirmed by legislative systems which roundly can reinforce and legitimate them. Still today it is valid a group of expectations founded by culture which limits the option set at people’s disposal and determines the job and social space where everybody, according to the own gender, can and have to move, and all choices those have to be done in order not to incur blame or even social penalties.

3. Beyond traditional gender representation: Research interviews about new male job choices7

Of course, something is changing. The traditional gender representations start to show substantial cracks. Women have begun to “infringe upon” traditionally male spaces for many decades, for example by doing jobs that before were reserved to men (Carrera 2011b). But also the opposite process is in progress. The world of traditional female jobs, those jobs which are regarded, as care giving activities, has begun to be performed and even chosen by men. And this concerns also the job of “housewife”. Starting from these considerations, we have implemented a qualitative survey which has allowed us to observe the presence of men employed in traditionally “female” jobs (Carrera 2013) and to examine itineraries, reasons and approaches. Between the end of 2012 and the beginning of 2013, we carried out about forty interviews addressed to men employed as babysitters, domestic helps, caretakers, male nurses, teachers and even house-husbands. The reference geographical area is Apulia. The main aspects have been: a) the itinerary these men have walked through towards their actual jobs; b) the senseand feeling with which their family and friends and themselves have regarded that. Through the analysis of the interviews we have been able to build a well-structured classification of four different types of men: resigned men, emotionless men, adapted men and innovators. Resigned are men who have fallen into their actual jobs. A big part of them have lost their previous jobs and afterwards they have tried to find something else. But they haven’t found anything and now they are

6 (Fagiani, Ruspini 2011, 95ff).
7 We will refer to a research whose full results are published in Ruspini, Perra 2013.
discouraged and just resigned to stay in this new job condition. *Indifferent* are men, especially young men and university students, who don’t care about their actual job condition. They are just indifferent with respect to being employed in “female jobs”, as they themselves call them. But they don’t care about this situation even because they don’t think of their actual jobs as “definitive” jobs. «Jobs for the rest of their life life». *Adapted* are men who haven’t chosen their actual condition, but who now see it as a positive one. They like what they do, and appreciate all the new possibilities they have available (free time, more time with children, and above all a medium level of satisfaction for what they do). *Innovators* are those men who have chosen their job condition and moreover, they like it! Some of them are really fighters for “men’s rights” to be employed also in care giving jobs. They say that men are able to do it and, moreover, they can choose them if they want. Many of them are teachers and “stay at home men” and they report having more time with their children, more time for themselves and, in some cases, a better sense of their own life. Surely something has changed and something is changing, but there are many steps, a long way to arrive to a new definition of genders and relationship between them. And men and women have to reflect on this. Because, as research shows, women, as well as men are involved in traditional gender representations\(^8\).

### 4. Gender and politics

Politics has a key-role in hastening or on the contrary even opposing the process of change of gender representation. The social thought and the incentive towards a bigger change, which has interested these representations for some decades, need to be politically supported. The question now becomes wider, if we think of the laws that allowed women to become independent professionals, such as a magistrate, or more recently employed in the Army. Or think of the laws which replaced “maternity leave” with “parental leave”, according to the logic of shared parental care\(^9\). Or think of the very recent and discussed laws which require companies on the stock exchange to have at least 30% women on supervisory boards. There are also legislative proposals for the need to have an impartial presence of both genders on the electoral rolls, otherwise they will be considered unlawful. Also, the system of the double preference\(^10\) and the proposals of the “gender share” should all be according to a logic of equal democracy. But the

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8 Some men tell about difficulties with their wives or girlfriends just because of their «too female jobs»!

9 The first organic law on the subject was the law of 30 December 1971 n. 1204, which included provisions for maternity leave for females only. The rule was later amended with the law of 8 March 2000, no. 53, which for the first time introduced the use of parental leave for men.

10 Similar to what has already been recognised by the regional electoral law adopted in Campania. Even Apulia tried to approve this law in 2013 with a first draft of a law, an initiative organized by people that raised subscriptions but then was rejected by the Regional Council.
process is still long and implementing an only “recently” officially recognized equality in real equality needs a great and shared responsibility. We need to deal with the cultural oppositions of principles or values which all people, men and women, have experienced. Widespread systems which show to be pervasive, with the consequence that making different choices, is lived with discomfort and embarrassment, not only by those who make them but also by those who are close to him/her. Parental decisions, for example, as a result of the above mentioned, continue to be taken only by women, accounting for almost 90% of the total amount. This is certainly a consequence of the economic reasons regarding the sacrifice of a part of the male wage, which is usually higher than their partners, but is also a reason why men feel ashamed amongst colleagues for making this kind of choice. Even normative choices have to be necessary according to a totally updated gender logic. Going forward, for example, we observe that the agreement on the parental permissions recently subscribed by European countries in 2009 aims to build the conditions for a conciliation which considers, as unavoidable precondition, the sharing of the care responsibility by the two parents. This could be an important step in order to declare the parenting as normal life condition of the workers (women and men) and so to dispel the image of the mother who is stifled by several roles and thousands of tasks, with all the stereotypes and discriminations which follow; and also manage to overcome the invisibility of the paternity on the job and inside the organizations. Concerning these aims, the European good practices, and especially the Scandinavian ones, show to have been absolutely effective. We need to start from the safeguard of the “social normality” (Carrera 2009) and a welfare that, even though it has to deal with economic difficulties which have become relevant in this specific historical situation, is able to avoid every temptation to take only a residual aspect, by safeguarding only the desperate situation of poverty. It must exceed and go beyond the consideration and the safeguard of the social normality’s bracket, represented not by “poor people” without financial resources but by all people who can find the conditions to make also different job choices in a more careful welfare system. With good consequences both on the personal level and on the widen social level. Starting from the possibility that the sphere of the economic poverty does not expand, by swallowing up other families and other people inside.

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11 “What male workers feel about their capability of exercising care giving activities are patterned after what other male workers do in their job places” (Bygren and Duvander 2006; Haas, Allard and Hwang 2002).
12 Think of the symbolic value of the choice to fix only a day of compulsory leave and up to two days of leave optional: they are in a nutshell the days of absence from work to be recognized for the new father on the birth of a child.
14 We refer, for example, to the higher risk of poverty suffered by one-income families.
It means that territorial, national and international institutions have a fundamental role to contribute on changing traditional gender representations. And consequently, they have high responsibility to do that.

**Conclusions**

The change of the traditional gender patterns, like any other cultural change, can only be done over a long period of time and it has its own intrinsic complexity. And it can only be the result of an integrate approach which is able to build and teach a possible condition of difference. Men, as are women, are embedded in cultural and normative models, that they learn from childhood and that they incorporate as "second nature." Any chance of change starts from deconstructing and de-naturalizing these models, and understanding them as a result of learning that, as such, can be challenged and changed. But these patterns have for a long time been so well embedded in our culture, that it’s very difficult recognize them in our everyday life. The starting point for all change is to take an ethnographic perspective. And we have to pay attention to any social and personal “space” where these gender representations occur and give results, but also where they are starting to become weaker. Because, as the results of our research show, something is changing. With women but also with men (although later), they are starting to “practice” new male models, new experiences “to be men”. But it’s only the starting point! There is strong resistance against this changing process at personal, social and, even, institutional levels. For these reasons we need to improve our ethnographic research to find and to collect these forms of change and these forms of resistance should be allowed a wide scientific debate that can drive social and institutional decisions and changes.

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III. THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS ON CITIZENS’ EMPOWERMENT
THE ROLE OF TRUST IN E-ENGAGEMENT: 
A CASE STUDY ON EU GOVERNMENTS

Donatella Padua

Abstract: The objective of the paper is to illustrate the impact of digital technology on the relationships between institutions and stakeholders in the Internet environment. The study sheds light on how trust builds value within the social dynamics of the digital ecosystem. The following case study on the ‘EU Governments – Stakeholders e-Engagement’ is meant to clarify the effort that the governments of the EU member states are making to change the citizens’ mindset required to face the new Internet Age society.

Keywords: Digital technology, Ecosystem, Complexity, Dialogue, Engagement, Horizontal society, Trust, e-Governments, Internet Age, Stakeholders.

The complex digital ecosystem

The ‘Internet Age’ is an era that started with the diffusion of the internet global network (Cavanah 58-49, Padua 3-18), characterized by a radicalization of social postmodern complexity (Appadurai 27-47, Castells 36-63, Luhmann 1995: 12-58, 2010: 105-214, Bauman 21-38). Indeed, the Internet is an ecosystem characterized by high levels of complexity (Luhmann 5-1, Prigogine 27-40) leading to a paradigmatic shift from verticality to horizontality. This statement is justified by the following phenomena:

- the disruption of vertical top-down power and control systems exerted by organisations and institutions tracing to the creation of a new horizontal society.
- The generation of horizontal value-chains based on peer-to-peer sharing and on the production and control of information not governable by traditional top-down value chains.
- The dissolution of rational linear patterns versus creative disorder and connecting dots methodologies. This fact implies that knowledge develops more on the surface than following mainstream vertical traditional patterns, which were based on depth rather than superficiality.

The role of trust

In the Internet Age, trust has become essential to business. In a world where the new paradigm is based on connection, collaboration and innovation, marketing is shifting from a measure of success based on Return OnInvestment (ROI) to

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value measured in relationships and trustworthiness. As trust is the essence of relationship, building a ‘Trust Strategy’ (Padua 91-95) is of utmost importance for both private and public organisations. Some institutions are already operating in this direction via e-governments, participation strategies and transparency politics, namely: ‘Open Government’ or ‘Wikicracy’. These terms relate to a form of democracy empowered by web collaborative tools (wikis) aiming to reach win-win solutions between institutions and stakeholders. As shown below in the case-study, these forms of engagement allow institutions to meet the stakeholders’ need to express their opinions freely, to become protagonists by exerting a ‘control’ over the government, empowering people to access data and information. This process forces institutions to become more transparent and benevolent, showing integrity, key requirements to become trustworthy.

With all the difficult challenges institutions have to face today – shrinking public budgets, a fragmented and diversified society, global movements, to mention only some of the reasons behind the loss of central powers – it is much harder than earlier for governments to solve all the issues related to their institutional role.

That’s why stakeholders are increasingly invited to help solve governments’ problems with creative and innovative solutions. In the Internet environment opportunities for stakeholders-government collaboration lie in all forms of crowdsourcing. Challenge.gov², for example, is the US platform where the public and government can solve problems together; SeeClickFix.com³ is an opportunity for the government to hear citizens’ ideas about the perfect system to receive feedback and service requests; Mysociety.org⁴ builds websites which benefit the civic and community aspects of people’s lives. The objective is to help people become more powerful in these areas: reporting transport issues and street problems, receiving answers from public bodies and contacting public representatives are just some of the ways to exert civic rights and contribute to the improvement of the civic society.

In this light, building trust via the design of trust strategies becomes of utmost relevance. However, this is a complex challenge for more than one reason: trust is multidimensional and it requires to establish a one-to-one personalized relationship between the institution and the stakeholder to gain insights on his or her real need; secondly, customers are increasingly distrustful, particularly regarding institutions. As the Edelman Trust Barometer indicates⁵, in the past two years institutions have been undergoing the highest drop in trust by people, followed, at a distance, by business and NGOs: specifically, comparing the average of 2012-2013 vs. 2011, governments scored – 7 vs. – 1.5 % points of business and NGOs.

² Challenge.gov, 16 Nov 2013. Web
Who has gained trust then? ‘A person like you’ and ‘Regular employees’ scored + 21.5% and + 15% respectively vs. – 12.5% of government officials and – 12.5% of CEOs (average 2011-2013).

Some reasons have to be traced to scandals and lack of competence on the institutions and organisations side versus the transparency of peer-to-peer relationships granted by the absence of any form of hidden interests: peer-to-peer trust is more immediate and irrational rather than rational and logic. As a matter of fact, trust has two sides, an irrational one and a rational one, called respectively trust and confidence.

These two constructs have several definitions in literature (Giddens 39-44, Luhmann 35-45). By synthesizing the various interpretations, trust and confidence may be considered two sides of the same coin: on the trust side, non-rational attributes prevail; on the confidence side, rationality emerges quite clearly.

Within the complex Internet social ecosystem, the irrational side of trust prevails over the rational one. This accounts for its unpredictability, to the disruption of linear patterns and the impossibility to connect causes to effects.

Relevantly, trust allows the possibility of an action within a framework of reciprocity. The circulatory process of exchange, which is an inside link among persons and a builder of society, is the main framework within which interaction takes place generating reciprocal influence and exchange. As society is made up of social interactions and exchange is not possible without trust, it is clear that trust generates social cohesion and it is a very powerful tool of integration, allowing action to take place (Giddens 85-112).

The objective of a trust strategy (Padua 95, 179-182), is to manage reputation via:

a. working on the five critical areas of trust, which are Competence, Benevolence, Integrity, Transparency and Value Congruence:

1. **Competence** relates to technical ability and performance (Cofta 39-40);
2. **Benevolence** relates to the positive quality of relationship. It is the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good to the trustor, aside from an egocentric profit motive (Mayer et al. 709-34).
3. **Integrity** refers to values and to an ethical approach. It implies that the trustor perceives the trustee as adhering to a set of principles (personal integrity) considered acceptable (that is, to display moral integrity) by the trustor, including honesty, fair treatment and the avoidance of hypocrisy (ivi718);
4. **Transparency** relates to the rule to communicate. It may be interpreted as the possibility of the trustor to acquire information about the trustee’s integrity.

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6 Georg Simmel, a philosopher and sociologist, in his work on the ‘philosophy of money’ (Simmel, 1900) argues that exchange is one of the functions that creates an interjacent link—that is, society- from the simple proximity of individuals.
5. *Value congruence* is related to identity (Porson and Malhotra 43-50). It expresses the sociological relation between identification and integration or sharing (Simmel 500-1).

   a. being able to create positive experiences and perceptions, via a communication strategy and dialogue. In the case-study shown below, different communicational formats emerge from various governments’ websites, indicating different levels of emotional communication and involvement: an example is the Denmark website, rich in pictures, colours and engaging content versus the Latvia website, which appears very informative and straightforward.

**Trust and social capital**

Trust is an enabler of social capital.

In sociology as in economics, these two concepts are of primary importance. Social capital allows an understanding of the new meaning of *value* within the digital society – the relationship upon which relational goods are founded. In our perspective of digital context and responsibility, we focus less on Coleman’s utilitarian position (Coleman 300-21), giving more attention instead to the collectivist positions of Putnam, and to the relational-dialogic approach of Donati, who has investigated the concept of relational goods in depth (Donati and Solci 140-187; Putnam 65-78, Nussbaum, 343-354). In fact, as the utilitarian position refers to a cooperative rationale (i.e. an entrepreneur cooperating for a project with other entrepreneurs), the collectivist positions refer to building social capital as an outcome of a reciprocal exchange of relations useful to the collective.

Fixmytransport, for instance, is a web community to make petitions for the fixing of transport problems. According to Putnam, social capital is the «set of socio-organizational elements – as trust, shared norms, social networks – which may improve the efficiency of society itself, facilitating the coordinated activity of individuals» (Putnam 65-78).

Based on this consideration, it is evident how social capital puts trust at the centre of the process: social capital, by connecting people, is an essential element in the building of social networks that are vital in nurturing and meeting the expectations and preserving of social norms. In turn, trust reduces distances between brands and stakeholders following viral patterns. Trust is a diffusive good, tending to expand from one point of a society to many others (Stzompka 37-62). Trust virality leverages the invaluable trustworthiness of those stakeholders having a leadership in opinions, the so-called ‘influencers’ or ‘trust agents’ (Brogan and Smith 1-31) of a company. Within social networks, trust may be inferred by the observation of other agents’ behavior, without a complete pre-existing set of information.

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In summary, managing trust online reduces brand-consumer distances and may be a fast diffuser of a positive reputation, thanks also to the role of influencers or trust agents. For this reason, building a trust strategy means managing reputation in time and space.

Case-study: Analysis of the EU Governments – Stakeholders e-Engagement Background

Institutions provide different levels of interpretation to the concept of e-government. According to the definition of the World Bank,

«e-Government” refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens (G2C), businesses (G2B), and other arms of government (G2G) into more friendly, convenient, transparent, and inexpensive relationships. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions»¹⁰.

In some countries, the meaning is restricted to a mere offer of electronic inquiry or to file an application, to electronically receive information, to ease the handling of administrative procedures; in the other cases, instead, e-government relates to the adoption of digital stakeholders’ engagement strategies to build deeper and long-lasting relationships with people, to encourage bottom-up participation and horizontal dialogue.

The below analysis is grounded on this latter more extensive interpretation of e-government. Results provide a ranking of EU countries based on digital stakeholders engagement.

Key Learnings

It is evident how a well-established stakeholders’ engagement strategy doesn’t make the political, economic and social success of a whole country. However, it is clear how it represents an initial way to drive the socio-political strategy of a country towards a stakeholders’ engagement strategy, matching the new needs of the digital empowered society. Giving voice to the people, letting them participate in the process, building long-lasting relationships represents the strategy of capturing value from the horizontal society. Indeed, a digital

stakeholder’s engagement strategy has to be integrated within a whole offline strategy, aiming at accomplishing the same objectives.

Notwithstanding these considerations, a signal of an innovative strategic approach such as digital stakeholders engagement has to be interpreted critically. In fact, not always does it represent a well-rooted and trusted new approach. In some cases it may only represent a media-oriented ‘maquillage’ strategy, simply tied to the communication strategies of the institutional leader of the moment.

As evidenced in the first part of the study, many institutions still strive to change mindset and strategies towards an ongoing revolution requiring such a cultural change. This is the reason behind why only one-third of the EU member states (32%) appear to adopt stakeholder’s engagement strategies at excellent or good levels (see Figure 1, red and orange colour). Specifically, even though only a limited percentage of EU countries (7%, United Kingdom and Italy) hold excellent positions, indeed, another interesting group of countries (25%) also shows very good levels in encouraging dialogue through their digital channels (Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Malta, Slovenia). This translates into governments encouraging participation via specific digital and e-government platforms, well evidenced within their institutional website, and, in top performing cases, stimulating open consultations on different topics and encouraging petitions. Moreover, in these cases, participation such as volunteering or direct involvement in improving communities demonstrate the intention of governments to transfer power to stimulate bottom-up and horizontal decisional processes.

Key:

Presence of an e-engagement strategy:

Red = Excellent
Orange = Good
Yellow = Low
White = Absent

Figure 1
Indeed, a substantial two-third of EU countries are still reluctant to start an interaction with their stakeholders. Out of this figure, 47%, representing the overall highest percentage of performance (yellow colour), show low levels of engagement. This reflects a lack of any form of participation platform, missing open consultations or petitions encouraged by the government and lack of any other form of participation such as volunteering and direct involvement in improving communities. The residual 6% don’t show any form of engagement.

Sample and Methodology

The totality of the universe of the 28 EU member states has been considered. For each country the official government website has been analysed according to the following variables:

a. Presence of participation platforms. This variable refers to dedicated webpages such as ‘gov.uk/government/get-involved’ for UK or ‘partecipa.gov.it’ for Italy. In some cases this variable includes the presence of social media links well evidenced in the institutions’ website homepage.

b. Level of evidence of the above specified webpage link in the home-page. If well-evidenced, it reflects a clear-cut strategy of stakeholder engagement, encouraging an open dialogue and participation.

c. Social media channels. Presence of blogs and/or other social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Pinterest, Youtube, G+, to encourage conversation and horizontal WOM (Word of Mouth).

d. Open consultations with stakeholders on specific subjects. This is a major way of building trust via participation. It corresponds to co-production processes in the business sector.

e. Petitions encouraged by governments. Often, petition websites are bottom-up sourced, created by other constituencies. In this study we refer only to specific petitions webpages linked to the official government’s website.

e. Participation. The analysis refers to other forms of participation following the UK ‘Big Society’ concept. According to this model, the government supports people who care about their communities and want to get involved in improving them. It believes that people understand the needs of their area best, which is why it transfers power so people can make more decisions locally and solve their own problems to create strong, attractive and thriving neighbourhoods. It includes volunteering, community organisation, protecting building, and many other bottom-up initiatives.

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**Key findings**

The percentage of governments putting stakeholders engagement at the centre of their strategies is still very low, 7% vs. 25% of governments showing a good level of engagement. The majority of governments (68%, 47% at C-level + 21% at D-level) have a low or absent level of engagement (see Figure 2).

Undoubtedly, the UK shows a top performing website both under the communicational and engagement perspective. The claim ‘Simpler, clearer, faster’ perfectly summarizes the opening to involvement and dialogue. The four ‘trust beliefs’ clearly emerge both from the content and execution of the website, matching transparency, benevolence, competence, integrity and identity. The number of closed and open consultations confirm the success of the strategy: 76 open consultations and 600 closed consultations in the past 12 months indicate a positive government-stakeholders engagement. Consultations cover a wide range of topics, from arts and culture to law and justice, from employment to crime and policing.

The Italy website, at the time this study was carried out, had an excellent and well-evidenced platform, stimulating participation: partecipa.gov.it, aiming to a consultation on Constitutional reforms. The outcomes appear encouraging: more than 200,000 filled applications (validated by ISTAT, the Institute of National Statistics), 4 million minutes spent online by Italians of all ages to express their own ideas on forms of government, on tools of free and democratic expression, on priorities on the effectiveness of the Parliament. However, after the consultation was successfully closed, the government website did not show any other open...
consultation (nor does it currently\textsuperscript{15}). For this reason, time will confirm if there is a consistent intent by the government to field a stakeholders’ engagement strategy.

Germany is a case apart. No traces of any encouragement to participation, no stakeholder engagement emerge. Clearly, this reflects an institutional decision and strategy.

Some other governments are positioned in between an A- and B-rating, indicated as a B+. This rank reflects a solid presence of an e-government platform although with a somehow restricted interpretation of the e-government approach. Specifically, the Austrian government’s website highlights Austria as the ‘2013 European Champion in e-Government’ for the fourth time in a row\textsuperscript{16}. Although this is an excellent result, digitalization appears to work essentially for electronic inquiries or to file an application, to electronically receive information, to ease the handling of administrative procedures. No direct encouragement to dialogue is expressed in the official website. Seemingly, the Slovenian government shows an e-government website\textsuperscript{17}; however, the concept of e-government is interpreted in a quite restrictive and one-way direction, being informative only and not encouraging any thorough interaction with stakeholders.

The Estonia\textsuperscript{18}, Ireland\textsuperscript{19}, Malta\textsuperscript{20} websites represent similar cases, performing same rankings.

B+ -ranking also indicates governments not using any specific platform dedicated to stakeholders’ participation, indeed showing an engaging and rich scope of social media links, well evidenced in the homepage. The Danish and Finnish governments’ websites are cases in point.

In the C-ranking cases, there is a lack of any specific participation platforms and other indicators are usually negative. However, an encouragement to dialogue via blogs or social media is often present, evidenced at low or good level. This may reflect a genuine first step to an engagement strategy that reveals a ‘shop-window’ approach, aiming just at a communicational or ‘maquillage’ effect.

In this view, and close to the Germany-case, it would be worthwhile to further investigate the reasons behind the poor performance of the French government’s website, which restricts dialogue with stakeholders to a few social media links posted on the home page. Seemingly, Spain just adds to some social media links an invitation to write to the President.

D-ranking shows no engagement in any form: besides the ‘Germany’ case, there are Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Sweden.

\textsuperscript{15} At Feb. 3, 2014.
Concluding remarks

In the Internet Age we are witnessing an unprecedented reversal of roles, where stakeholders are able to freely produce content, dramatically impacting on an organisation’s reputation (Padua 46). These are premises that point to a new dynamic concept of value, based on a direct participation in the process, calling for two-ways dialogic communication patterns.

Opening a dialogue to the extent of building relationships has become the critical objective for organisations as, in the Internet Age, this means building loyalty to the brands of institutions. To achieve this intent, however, organisations have to become trustworthy, as trust allows the opening towards building a relationship. Indeed, it means complying with the power of stakeholders, able to ‘act’ on the web, that is: to get information, express their judgment and govern the reputation of the institution. In other words, institutions are called to reach win-win solutions, matching their compelling objectives with the stakeholders’ new digital needs. The case-study shown in this paper is a case in point, shedding light on a cultural issue generating a massive communication gap between institutions and stakeholders and on many missing opportunities of dialogue (only about one-third of governments show an excellent or good level of engagement).

Importantly, this study may represent a useful basis for further researches aiming to investigate the impact of the above analysed e-engagement strategies in terms of value generation. The goal would be to capture the real effectiveness of the levels of engagement and trustworthy relationships between governments and stakeholders. An interesting route could be to apply indicators such as Social capital and Relational or Common goods (Donati 140-187) and models of measurement of engagement and trust (Cofta, 73-85, Lacohée 29-31, Padua, 167-200).

Appendix I: Levels of Engagement of the Websites of the EU Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EU Countries</th>
<th>Participation Platforms</th>
<th>Level of Evidence</th>
<th>Social media Channels (FB, g+, Twitter, ...)</th>
<th>Open Consultations</th>
<th>Petitions Encouraged by government</th>
<th>Participation big society model: volunteering, community org., national service, protecting buildings…</th>
<th>Rating on Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Austria</td>
<td><a href="http://www.austria.gv.at">http://www.austria.gv.at</a></td>
<td>Yes (1)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>B+ (digitales.oesterreich.gv.at)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Belgium</td>
<td><a href="http://www.belgium.be/en/">http://www.belgium.be/en/</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Yes(2)</td>
<td>Yes +</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 8   | Estonia           | Yes(2)           | Yes +++       | Yes      | No                  | No           | No         | B+ (e-
estonia/digital-
society) |              |                 |
| 9   | Finland           | No               | No            | No       | No                  | No           | B          |           |                   |              |                 |
| 10  | France            | No               | Yes           | Yes      | NO                 | No           | No         | C          |                   |              |                 |
| 11  | Germany           | No               | No            | No       | No                  | No           | No         | D          |                   |              |                 |
| 12  | Greece            | No               | Yes           | No       | No                  | No           | No         | C          |                   |              |                 |
| 13  | Hungary           | No               | Yes           | No       | No                  | No           | No         | C          |                   |              |                 |
| 14  | Ireland           | Yes              | Yes ++        | Yes      | Yes                 | No           | No         | B+ (gov.ie/services/
Egovern-
suggestions/) |              |                 |
<p>| 15  | Italy             | Yes              | Yes +++       | Yes      | No                  | No           | A          |           |                   |              |                 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Status 1</th>
<th>Status 2</th>
<th>Status 3</th>
<th>Status 4</th>
<th>Status 5</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mk.gov.lv/en/mk/sastavs/">http://www.mk.gov.lv/en/mk/sastavs/</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td><a href="http://www.lrv.lt">http://www.lrv.lt</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td><a href="http://www.governement.lu">http://www.governement.lu</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Malta</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gov.mt/en/Pages/gov.mt%20homepage.aspx">http://www.gov.mt/en/Pages/gov.mt%20homepage.aspx</a></td>
<td>Yes (2)</td>
<td>Yes +</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>B+ (mygov.mt/portal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td><a href="http://www.government.nl">http://www.government.nl</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td><a href="http://www.govand.gov.pl">http://www.govand.gov.pl</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td><a href="http://www.portugal.gov.pt/ei.aspx">http://www.portugal.gov.pt/ei.aspx</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gov.ro/main/indexlh2/">http://www.gov.ro/main/indexlh2/</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td><a href="http://www.government.gov.sk">http://www.government.gov.sk</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gov.si">http://www.gov.si</a></td>
<td>yes (1)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>B+ (<a href="http://e-uprava.gov.si">http://e-uprava.gov.si</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td><a href="http://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/home.htm">http://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/home.htm</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td><a href="http://www.government.se">http://www.government.se</a></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td><a href="https://www.gov.uk">https://www.gov.uk</a></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Yes +++</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key:

A=excellent. Key indicators are positively performed: the presence of interaction platforms is well evidenced, enforced by social media and consultations. In top performance cases, petitions and other forms of participation are performed such as: volunteering, community organisations, national service, protection of national buildings.

B=good. Interaction platforms, e-government websites are present on the homepage. Sometimes well evidenced social media links replace specific interaction websites, often integrated with other indicators. Consultations, petitions, citizens’ participation are usually not encouraged. B+ are ratings between A and B, due to effective digital technology efforts such as e-government platforms, even though sometimes intended in a restricted way, and not directly encouraging dialogue.

C=low. Absence of specific participation platforms. However, an encouragement to dialogue via blogs or social media is often present, evidenced at low or good level. Other indicators are usually not performing.

D=absent. There isn’t any form of engagement; dialogue is not encouraged.

Notes:

(1) Government websites with a restrictive interpretation of the e-government concept, not directly encouraging any interaction with stakeholders. E-government works essentially for electronic inquiries or to file an application, to electronically receive information, to ease the handling of administrative procedures.

(2) In these countries, even in the absence of a specific webpage, a rich scope of social media is well evidenced on the homepage.

WORKS CITED


THE SEED PROJECT: ENFORCING CITIZEN-CENTRED SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN EUROPEAN MUNICIPALITIES

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(Interfusion Services Ltd, Limassol, Cyprus)

Abstract: This paper describes the initial results of the Speeding Every European Digital project SEED (www.seed-project.eu), a thirty-month pilot type-B EU co-funded project running under objective 4.1. “Towards a cloud of public services” of the CIP-ICT-PSP programme in seven member states (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Latvia, Romania and Spain.

Keywords: e-Participation, inclusive e-Governance, social media, social dialogue

1. Introduction

Conceptually the aim of SEED is to expand, through a cloud computing approach and a very cheap network of Interactive Public Service Advertising (i-PSA) nodes, the positive results of European Inclusive e-Governance initiatives to boost citizen-centred e-Government Services, to reuse as much as possible the European, National, Regional and Local stocks of Public Sector Information (PSI) and to leverage saving costs of e-Government and e-Governance deployments. SEED reuses PSI making mash-ups of e-Government contents for raising awareness of citizens about e-Government services available across all Europe, in effect transforming PSI in i-PSA messages. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section two outlines the current situation in Europe and the SEED value proposition, while section three describes the facts in SEED partner Member States. Section four presents the applicability of SEED. Section five presents the benefits of SEED for Public Administrations. Finally, section six concludes the paper.

2. The current situation in Europe and the SEED value proposition

Governments are being asked to do more with less. This seemingly elusive goal of efficiency, effectiveness and added value has become an inevitable reality for public administrations across Europe. The economic and financial challenges...
over the past few years have affected the private and public sectors alike. The public sector is facing radical and on-going changes and is being shaped by macroeconomic, social and environmental, and global business trends that are affecting governments and companies around the world. These trends are determining new policies and also transforming the way in which governments and agencies are led and managed. The economic uncertainty in the present times of austerity as well as the lack of stability at governmental level in some countries results in frequent reorganizations and replacements. These negative factors can greatly affect the service market introduction, more precisely if they are combined or/and assisted by situations such as:

1) High centralization and direct economic dependence from the Central Government (this is a commonality in most European countries).
2) High bureaucracy and dependence (lack of autonomy in decision making and implementation, and delays in procedures).
3) Low interest of National, Regional and Local Public Administrations to provide new e-Government services as well as promote similar services that may exist.
4) This last point is essential in understanding the main reason behind this poor behaviour of European citizens. Unless users/citizens are aware of any service (action), usage is bound to be low. Likewise, unless users/citizens accept that e-Government services can deliver what they require (reaction), take-up will be low.
Figure 1 depicts the strategy that SEED follows in order to overcome the barriers that slow down the deployment of e-Government services in Europe. With less effort (mainly by reusing previous efforts already spent) it aims to achieve a larger impact on citizens and, in turn, to increase the engagement of citizens and Public Administrations in a constructive social dialogue. At the same time, the adoption of SEED i-PSA strategies even allows to empower the impact achieved and multiply the efficiency of those e-Government deployment efforts, generating savings to the Public Administration.

3. Facts in SEED partner Member States

Focusing specifically on the negative exogenous facts that can be identified individually per member state/SEED partner, for example, in countries like Cyprus and Romania, we realise that the level of sophistication of digital Government services between some beneficiaries and the EU average is very uneven, whereas in Bulgaria e-Government development is still in its initial stage and the take-up of e-services is relatively low, with low socio-economic groups still at risk of e-exclusion.

Croatia reports the lack of a national strategy for public administrations and reusing PSI stocks is not among its priority, absorbed as it is with its accession into the European Union on 1 July 2013. The country is currently facing significant economic challenges and reforms, but it is also aware of the importance of investments in ICT, which is one of the fundamental drivers of economic growth. Implementation of new technologies that allow public administrations to improve their services to citizens by reducing administrative barriers, increasing socio-economic impacts on society and at the same time reducing the costs of providing new services are indispensable. On the other hand, the private and non-governmental sectors in the Czech Republic face a number of obstacles regarding PSI reuse. Some public institutions in the Czech Republic explicitly prohibit the reuse and especially commercial exploitation of PSI. Information published, for instance via a website, is followed by an announcement that only personal usage of the information is permitted, but processing and dissemination is prohibited. Some institutions refuse to provide information for commercial use especially to commercial entities. Those institutions are probably not even aware of the fact that they interpose and put up barriers against European trends, where reuse of PSI is supported and encouraged by the EC. The lack of clarity around the long-term strategy of the public sector in the Czech Republic concerning the future development of digital services is a significant barrier for more dynamic development of commercial services based on PSI. Private companies, therefore, consider very carefully their own investment in value added information services. If it is not clear whether the public sector would invest public money in the same services, the business sector will always hesitate. No private company can win over the state in a long-term perspective. There are quick-changing socio-economic conditions in the Czech Republic, creating a demand for very flexible public administrations. It seems that better cooperation between PAs and private
businesses is welcomed. So, any positive experiences of public-private partnerships could be very useful and should be supported.

In Latvia many of the developed electronic services are not designed as user-centric. Even with SEED contributing to disseminating and making citizens aware of them, they lack the attractiveness necessary to be used by citizens.

Other negative factors that are common in all seven SEED participating member-states (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Czech Republic, Latvia, Romania and Spain), include services that are not easy enough to be used in order to be accepted by a majority of citizens and especially by socially disadvantaged groups; citizens’ ignorance of existing services; unclear goals and guidelines in e-services; unclear long-term strategies in the development of Public Administration electronic services; broadband problems like uncovered areas or low speeds; technological scepticism, civil servants reluctance to change; self-training required by civil servants.

Nonetheless, there are also positive aspects that allow us to be optimistic about the deployment and the future of SEED. There are several pros for the SEED service deployment in the partner-countries that are mentioned in the remainder of this section. Most important is the backing of the European Commission to the amendment of Directive 2003/98/EC3 (on the reuse of public sector information, also known as the PSI Directive), that was formally approved on 10 April 2013. Once into force, the Directive will boost the data market in Europe by making all the generally accessible public sector information available for reuse.

Developers, programmers, creative citizens and businesses will be able to get and reuse public sector data at zero or very low cost in most cases. They will also have access to more exciting and inspirational content since materials in national museums, libraries and archives now fall under the scope of the Directive. The reuse of public sector information is and will be, at least for a few years, a hot topic generating huge interest in all member-states.

In many European countries the provision of e-Government at a centralized level is promoted by governments, whereas at a local/regional level, this is done by the local authorities, which in most cases are independent and autonomous organizations (such as municipalities and communes). Almost all municipalities and a large number of community councils maintain their own website and promote the electronic communication with citizens who can lodge complaints, report problems and recommendations electronically. Nevertheless, in many countries “face-to-face” communication is the traditional and still most common way to interact with public authorities. The means used for this interaction include phone calls and personal visits to the local authorities, and are limited to the time call centres and offices are open to the public. From their portals only one-way communication is supported and citizens can only retrieve limited information, and therefore they are rarely used.

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In Spain, a lot of “disaggregated” products can be found (such as digital certificates, digital signatures, content management systems), but an integral solution combining them is not offered. Thus, we can say that the PSI-PSA/e-Government market is still a highly fragmented one. All the partners report that several of the Regional Authorities are highly committed to deploying e-Government services that need to be filled with an adequate content to be of any use, and they are prepared to develop their own systems if no suitable commercial system is available. There are quickly changing socio-economic conditions creating demand for flexible services in public administration (something that still remains an exception). Moreover promotion and raising awareness of e-Government services is still an underdeveloped issue, which makes SEED an innovative approach.

The reduction of costs (per citizen) and administrative burden can be a big advantage in reaching citizens by reusing public spaces and facilities. Governments need to adapt and continuously evolve to create value. They need to stay relevant by being responsive to rapidly changing conditions and citizens’ expectations. Citizens are demanding more visibility on the allocation of public resources and challenging governments to be more efficient and equitable through accountability and transparency. Throughout this process, governments must stay coherent, which may prove to be the biggest challenge of all. SEED can be an ally to help achieve the objectives that current Public Administrations are forced to reach.

4. SEED application framework

SEED is a most convenient tool to facilitate the implementation of the new PSI Directive\$\cite{4} it is a good means to redistribute data digitally through multiple communication channels while, at the same time, promoting social dialogue between Public Administrations and their citizens. Public Organizations are by norm rather passive and quick decision-making rarely counts among their strengths. They usually react when something becomes mandatory; laws are published urging for concrete actions and results usually when approaching electoral campaigns. Fortunately, EU regulations and directives are working towards improving this situation. Surprisingly, it is possible to find small and very small local public administrations active in adopting innovative ICT services. This confirms once more that will and creativity more than money are the source of making success possible independently of the entrepreneur size. It is true that there are barriers to overcome the traditional ways of doing things and nowadays budgetary cuts have become the perfect excuse for most administrations to do nothing. On the other hand, we are amid quickly changing socio-economic conditions creating demand for very flexible public administration. Moreover, promotion and raising awareness of online Government services is still an underdeveloped issue, which makes SEED proposals innovative and appealing. Furthermore, by reusing public resources (infrastructures, information) reduction of costs (per citizen) and administrative burden can be a huge advantage in reaching citizens. A challenge will be the empowerment of a network between private and
public stakeholders both. SEED’s future goes interlaced with the future of government that lies across networks that include government, business, NGOs and civil society at multiple scales and levels, from global institutions to large cities and small commune councils. In this fragmented market, SEED has a role to play and plenty of opportunities ahead. Locating the most effective nexus for particular activities and understanding how governance works in this new complex ecosystem are at the core of SEED priorities for the future of government. Governments need to adapt and continuously evolve to create value. They need to stay relevant by being responsive to rapidly changing conditions and citizens’ expectations. Citizens are demanding more visibility on the allocation of public resources and challenging governments to be more efficient and equitable through accountability and transparency. Throughout this process, governments must stay coherent, which may prove to be the biggest challenge of all. SEED can be an ally to help achieve the objectives that current Public Administrations are forced to reach. Summarizing, we could say that despite the currently unfavourable economic restrictions and the financial instability that can result in limited business interest for new services, this could be an opportunity for SEED. With SEED (a solution based on the cloud) Public Administrations have an easy and affordable tool to increase the citizens’ awareness of digital services availability, uncovering their potential and possibly, as a consequence, contributing to an increase in their use by citizens. SEED’s flexible and sensitive strategies towards the needs of public administrations can be offered to them as “very fast, very cheap and with little upfront investment” – which should result in being a very competitive alternative in a time of crisis. Public administrations across Europe are engaging in transformation processes, aiming at achieving a more efficient, effective, friendly, and citizen- and business-centric delivery of public services. This approach, also known as “Transformational Government”\(^4\), has become a driving force for innovation and reduction of the administrative burden in European public administration, taking advantage of the possibilities that the most recent technological developments have opened. The opportunities presented are enormous, but so are also the challenges to address in the implementation of such transformation processes.

SEED is but one answer to approaching administrations and citizens, effectively envisioning to act as a bridge between traditional social dialogue and modernized social dialogue. SEED enables the deployment of new channels of service delivery, making transactions with public administration more convenient for citizens, and contributes to making possible the redesign of services around the needs of citizens instead of around the needs of administrations. SEED e-Government solutions allow local, state and national governments to improve the quality and effectiveness of their communication with citizens, as well as between various government agencies and other governments. SEED gives to any public

authority a flexible tool for blending priorities with available human and financial resources.

5. Benefits for Public Administrations

The main aim of SEED is to properly tackle the issue of raising the awareness of European citizens about useful e-Government contents and services previously invested by European Public Sectors, mainly by mixing cross-border services at European, national, regional and local levels. The results achieved so far where SEED pilots were launched in seven member-states demonstrate, firstly, the multicultural acceptance of the idea and, secondly, the feasibility of supporting such a citizen-centred social dialogue empowered by previous municipal investments in e-Government services and in public digital nodes like internet-enabled TVs, info-kiosks and digital signage.5

It is therefore planned that the main benefit for public administrations would not be a direct income, but a set of combined socio-economic gains, not all of which can be monetized. However, speaking about benefits in a long-term perspective, it is necessary to stress the significance of more efficient e-services for better economic situation in the region and for overall cost savings. The use of SEED can bring benefits to the community such as:

1) Improvement of the communication between civil servants and citizens (multiple ICT channels available);
2) Cost-savings on staff costs due to more efficient services;
3) Higher awareness among citizens of the activities and initiatives organized by local councils;
4) Upgrade of the quality of the public services and the existing infrastructure;
5) Enhancement of decentralization and organizational flexibility;
6) Deeper impact among the population as a whole and especially among the typically excluded groups such as the elderly and people with disabilities; offer of inclusive services targeting citizens with disabilities;
7) Provision of deeper customization depending on the needs and special circumstances of every customer;
8) Reuse of content (PSI), thus avoiding new investments;
9) “Giving a voice” to citizens. Enabling higher e-Participation especially in the evaluation of public services;
10) Their residents who will be informed with absolutely no charge for a wide range of topics and moreover they will have the opportunity to express their opinions and suggestions and even criticisms, giving valuable feedback to the municipality in their effort to make SEED an essential tool towards the provision of quality and effective e-Government services;

11) Improvement of the communication between civil servants and citizens (more channels available);
12) Cost-savings on personnel costs due to more efficient services;
13) Achieve higher awareness of the activities and initiatives organized by the local council;
14) Upgrade the quality of the public services and the existing infrastructure;
15) Achieve greater decentralization and organizational flexibility;
16) Provide a deeper customization depending on the needs and the special case of every customer.

Table 1 summarizes both the tangible and intangible benefits of SEED for Public Administrations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Civil Servants</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Political</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A technological platform to promote inclusive e-services such as: employment, citizenship participation, e-government, multimedia, etc.</td>
<td>Tools for ensuring better management services</td>
<td>Savings due to a cloud computing model of service provision</td>
<td>Easier access to public services (friendlier interface, design for all, multi-channel capabilities) = DIGITAL INCLUSION</td>
<td>The administration will be recognized as an active booster of e-Inclusion policies in order to transfer the message to other municipalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low costs of implementation</td>
<td>Saving efforts due to the interoperable capacities of SEED, Reuse of information</td>
<td>Reuse of previous investments (Kiosks, PCs, TVs)</td>
<td>More services available with a citizen-centric perspective</td>
<td>Due to the fact that all services have an innovative aspect the administration can act as an innovation vehicle towards the transfer of knowledge to the other PAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less effort needed in content maintenance as result of the web-services developed</td>
<td>New services deployed in different organizational areas</td>
<td>Cost-savings on personnel costs due to more efficient services</td>
<td>Increasing of supporting courses for digital literacy supported by the SEED platform</td>
<td>The administration can establish a role as a promoter of several e-services in different areas (employment, e-government, e-democracy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A platform with multi-channel capabilities and multilingual features together with accessibility features

Improving proximity between civil servants and citizens (more channels available)

Moving towards “green” organizations (digital instead of paper)

Higher awareness of the activities and initiatives organized by the PA

The administration will increase the use of their previous IT projects through the interoperable web-services built in SEED and moreover can proceed to joined solutions

Reusing previous investments in hardware (kiosks, public PCs, etc).

Better reports about the use of public services and a way to justify job tasks.

Reuse of content (data) avoiding new investments

Promotion of e-Participation. “Giving voice” to citizens. Higher participation in the evaluation of public services.

Being a more efficient organization overall

6. Conclusions

Amidst the current European debt crisis and the public sector budget cuts\(^6\), the SEED project aims to provide a completely novel approach to traditional politics, which is meant to change the way public administrations communicate with citizens and promote social dialogue in a smarter, ICT-empowered, more efficient and economical way. Simultaneously, SEED – based on a continuous and sincere democratic debate – will help public administrations to re-establish a new citizen-base. Citizens will be informed on a wide range of topics and, moreover, they will have the opportunity to freely express their opinions, suggestions and even criticisms, giving valuable feedback to the administration. Therefore, SEED will be an essential tool towards raising citizen awareness about existing e-Government services.

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THE ROLE OF FORUMS IN THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF PUBLIC OPINION

Andrea Cassano

Abstract: We live in a time where knowledge construction is strongly influenced by social media. Many social and educational analyses about digital natives focused on the wiki as a way to build knowledge. This is a dynamic platform inspired by Wikipedia, in which cooperation and collaboration are central. In this work we want to analyse the role of the web forum as a part of this process. In particular the focus will be on the use of these spaces in discussions on political and public topics.

Keywords: forum, politics, Bildung, knowledge, discourse, analysis, web, cooperation, education, citizenship.

1. Introduction: the role of forums in formal and informal situations

One of the most important functions developed by the social success of the web is the large use of forums in daily life. Forums are often considered useful tools for problem solving. When we have doubts about any aspect of our culture, we look for the opinion of other people using the Internet and we usually spend a lot of time reading forums. This process could appear spontaneous, especially to young learners but it represents a real revolution in our culture. In the past few years people have shared and built new forms of knowledge in small communities. In these communities, people exchanged their thoughts with other people that they knew and each one had a role and a clear expertise. Nowadays we do not see the author of a thought, but we search for opinions, which are not connected to a person with a role. In general, we try to understand if an opinion is eminent using an unscientific discourse analysis. We use spontaneous tools and we do not resort to a scientific method of analysing texts. For example if we find a good dictionary or if we can understand that the author has a good competence in the subject matter of the forum we deduct that his/her opinion is plausible. This kind of discourse analysis does not constitute a scientific study but instead a daily practice. So we can also build our knowledge in a large community where Internet users share their expertise. We could ignore everything about these users except for their own personal opinion. This is a new form of collective knowledge building. In the past few years, a lot of studies in communication researches underlined that people used to consider more plausible opinions than the ones developed on television. The Internet changed this paradigm because web users used to search plausible opinions in the on-line world. Internet users are more interactive than television viewers. They generally try to analyse the texts that are shared in forums or in other web-spaces.

1 Andrea Cassano collaborates with the University of Bari; andreas.cassano@virgilio.it
In Psycho-Pedagogical studies, we can find a lot of research on forums. In particular, the constructivist approach focuses greatly on collaborative practices of knowledge building. Forums could help to develop communities of learners, where people cooperate and share their expertise. The exchange of opinions and points of view makes learners more stimulated and makes the process of learning more interesting and interactive.

We can mention the progressive inquiry model proposed by Mukkonen et al. \(^2\) and the model of Knowledge Building Community.\(^3\) In these models, the forums are improved as useful tools to permit learners to compare their points of view and to develop their capacities in the use of the web. In fact, in these environments tutors indicate the steps to build knowledge on the topic of the community and give to learners useful tools to cooperate. Tutors plan the learning environment before the process of knowledge building starts and supervise every interaction between community’s members.

In informal contexts, this process could be more irregular.

2 The political forums

For our study on forums, we selected a particular type of argumentation: the one on politics. Political discussions generate public opinion and so we can consider the use of forums as meaningful in the development of public debate, in a society where knowledge is shared every day through the Internet.

Our goal is to observe if it is possible to use qualitative discourse analysis to understand the building of knowledge about political questions. Our interest is on informal process of knowledge building and so we analysed forum web sites largely used in Italy. Therefore, this research is focused on the Italian context.

It is difficult to resume in a few lines the features of the national situation. Still, we can underline the most important factors of social and political communication in Italy.

Firstly, the use of media in politics is largely dominated by the presence of charismatic leaders. In the past few years, former prime minister and media mogul Silvio Berlusconi used his channels and his abilities in top-down communication to develop his personality and his idea of society. The spread of the web partially reduced the Berlusconian hegemony in political communication. Beppe Grillo and his movement also largely used the web for their propaganda. In this case, we can consider the presence of a mixture of top-down and bottom up communications. In fact, the movement promoted on-line debate and their delegates in Parliament were


selected through an on-line election. On the other hand, Beppe Grillo, using his leadership’s role, has given a strong direction to the movement’s action. In the last year we also saw how some antagonistic leaders used social networking to promote their image.

Secondly, there is a strong and popular movement in Italy that is called “Anti political”. The image of political Italian protagonists appears damaged by the inefficacy of the government’s action and by the wastefulness of public resources during the economic crisis. This image makes people very distant from political dynamics and in the last years a lot of people did not go to vote.

It is important to underline these aspects because forums can be a thermometer of political feelings in the national context and the way people speak about politics in forums might be influenced by the cultural environment.

As mentioned above, the method applied to this research is discourse analysis.

3.1 The first step of the research: discourse analysis as a method for study of political forums

In the next pages we will attempt to define discourse analysis. According to Fairclough, this method concerns the study of the language in use analysed as social practice\(^4\). The qualitative approach tries to discover the implicit aspects of speech. For this reason, this method studies discourse in its general construction and does not want to break up the text in single variables. This aspect could be useful when we analyse forums because these are characterised by very short texts and so we cannot find a large number of sub-elements. The basic idea of this approach is to read the presence of social practice covered by the way people use to speak.

Maneri reminds us of the steps in carrying out discourse analysis. The author underlines that it is very important to find specific questions to study\(^5\). In our research, the starting question is to understand if forums can favourite a kind of discourse that useful to the development of knowledge about political situations.

3.2 The second step: the selection of the material to study

The second step of our research is to select the material to study. We chose five forums available on four important forum web sites: www.forumpolitico.org, forum.termometropolitico.it, giovani.it and it.answer.yahoo.com.

In particular, we chose five discussions from every web site about Italian current affairs. The discussions studied were opened in the period between August and September. We had to select the longer discussions in every website to find

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adequate material to study – the discussions that we studied were composed by at least three pages.

The results of the analysis were as follows:

Forumpolitico and termometropolitico treated more specific questions connected to current affairs. In termometropolitico, we found two discussions about Berlusconi’s legal punishment, one about the economic strategy of Fiat’s manager Marchionne, one about the sell of Telecom Italia and one about the contingent economic situation of the North of Italy. In forumpolitico, we found a discussion about Telecom Italia’s sale, one about the resignation of the Members of Parliament who supported Berlusconi and three discussions about The President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano, his strategy and his relationship with the Members of the Parliament. In contrast, Yahoo.answer and giovani.it treated more general questions about Italian politics. In Yahoo.answer we found one discussion about the possible foundation of an Italian anti-euro Party, one about of the electoral situation in the South of the Italy, one discussion about Grillo’s strategy and two discussions about Giorgio Napolitano’s strategy. In giovani.it we found different sections regarding every single party.

As we can see, even though themes can vary, we can find some recurring themes such as Telecom Italia’s sale, arguments relative to Berlusconi’s legal punishments and the strategy of the President of Republic. We must underline the peculiarity of giovani.it. In this forum, we did not find many discussions that started in the last months, but we found old discussions continuously updated by the members. These are focused on general themes such as Berlusconism, the relationship between state and church, anarchy, political coherence and the basic ideas of Italian parties.

3.3 The third step: the codification of the material

The third step of the analysis was the codification of material. Discourse analysis does not need hard codification or the use of quantitative aspects. We used an open approach based on the identification of orderliness.

We already talked about the social context where our texts were born. We must also consider that on-line texts have a lot of peculiarities.

Firstly, these texts are interconnected with other kinds of text both on-line (articles published on other sites, messages published on Twitter profiles of Politicians) and off-line (concrete political events). Secondly, when we analyze a forum we do not know the real social situation of the speakers, but we can rebuild their profiles by analyzing the text’s elements. However in our study our focus is not on the characteristics of the speaker but on the way the forum is used to build a discussion on the web.

Another aspect that we tried to observe is whether there are peculiar social practices covered by web forums. Forums have specific characteristics. The texts are composed by connected single presences. These presences are often based on small sentences. These characteristics make us consider forums as a genre of text with a specific nature and with specific rules.
Our codification consists in identifying the modalities of organizing discourse. The organization, according to Halliday’s indication, is composed of the following aspects: the representation of experience; the consideration of politicians; the way these aspects – representations and relations - are organized. Therefore, our analysis must treat the following aspects: a) vocabulary, b) *tropoi* (Figures of speech) and c) Processes. This last aspect consists in observing the sentences of texts and in underlining what kind of participants, interactions, categorizations and circumstances appear to us.

For example, it can be important to identify if there are recurring categorizations of character or if speakers choose to give preeminence to some person in their sentences.

The process could also be categorized through the analysis of verbs. If we find many verbs that indicate feelings or impressions we can underline a peculiar kind of process, but if we find verbs connected with the cognitive area we can identify a different situation. It is also very important to identify which relationships are described in discourse. In particular, it could be interesting to underline which kind of relationship exists between authors of sentences and politicians. For example some authors consider politicians as people without a real social distance. They speak to politicians using direct form of dialogue.

Therefore, it appears important to analyze the grammatical construction of sentences. If a character is often a subject in the sentences, connected with active verbs, he/she has a preeminence in the building of the meaning. We can also find subjects that are often passive actors in sentences or characters that are rarely mentioned or replaced with other verbal forms. The way a character is mentioned is also important. For example, if the real name of a political character is used, this gives him or her an important role, but if the name is replaced with a general category, then the person can be protected.

Finally, another aspect that we analyzed is the relationship between speakers. Users can choose specific linguistic acts. The observation of the elements indicated by Halliday, which are the representation of experience, the consideration of politicians and the way these aspects are organized, through the individuation of vocabulary, *tropoi* and processes used by speakers, as indicated by Maneri are important to study whether forums can be a concrete tool to improve the comprehension and the analysis of political events for digital citizens. For example, if I call my interlocutor “dear”, it is because I want to create a positive environment that could improve the comprehension of the discourse’s themes. However, if I create a hostile environment, users will probably not collaborate and therefore the forum will not be a positive tool to build comprehension.

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8 Maneri, 8-19
4.1. Emerging aspects of the analysis: vocabulary and tropoi

We followed the codification presented by Maneri, that we presented in the previous paragraph. As we saw, one the most important and eloquent elements to observe is the vocabulary. Vocabulary could tell us more about the experiences of forum users. We can start our focus on termometropolitico.it and forumpolitico. These websites are similar because they are thoughts for users with a previous interest for politics. In fact, we can define these website as thematic forums. Despite that, the vocabulary used in a lot of presences is a mix of elegant and informal language. Speakers describe political events in the third person, in a detached way. They try to explain facts to other users using their competences and expressing their point of view. At the same time, we can find in users’ words a lot of negative feeling. There is a rising rage among users against many political protagonists. This rage determines the use of vulgar or aggressive language also between expert users. The representation of political experience in these cases appears negative. Speakers often consider actions of politicians connected to personal interests.

However, this perception also causes a creative use of language. So we can often find two specific tropoi: distortions of names and similes. The first tropos is used both in an ironic and aggressive way. In this use, we find the concept of Transpolitica proposed by De Kerckhove and Vincenzo Susca. The theme proposed by these authors indicates web users who take the mick out of politicians through the peculiarities of Internet language. In fact Susca and De Kerkhove consider the language of the Internet informal, free from authorities or hierarchy. This characteristic of the Internet makes it a space where people can often be ironic and where people can feel themselves near to politicians or to other important personalities. This perception makes the Web rich of direct and ironical messages which users write to politicians.

This could be the symptom of the proximity to political protagonists felt by people. It is possible to consider that users apply this language because they see politicians as characters with a low moral profile. In general, politicians are considered as guilty persons. For forum users, they hold responsibility for the problems faced by people in daily life.

The use of similes is also an exercise of style used by speakers with considerable expertise. These users show their competence through these tropoi. The effect for reader is an ironical and informal perception of political events that appears from a creative use of the web’s language.

We can conclude that in these forums we can find the same confusions that we experience in our everyday context. Often a discussion starts with an explicative intention but in its course this becomes a passionate debate. There is no possibility to build a coherent discourse. Mixes of opinions and information without clear connections prevail and this makes a real building of knowledge impossible.

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4.2. Emerging aspects of the analysis: the processes

Even though Forumpolitico and termometropolitico are similar websites, we can find some differences. Forumpolitico’s users often speak in a more complex way. Many moderators use their post to resume political events. In fact, there is some presence composed by a lot of consecutive sentences. These posts are generally used by speaker to resume the story of political episodes. It is the trend of this site to be more informative, but also in forumpolitico users speak in informal way to politics.

Often we find users that speak directly to political protagonists, making questions or ordering. If we want to use a label to define the process that we described – using our codification – we can speak of a confused information exchange and we can speak of a general disaffection and diffused rage.

Our analysis must be quite different for giovani.it and yahoo.answer.it. These are two websites where users can debate about various arguments. These sites are forums supposed to clarify questions, to give answers. The target is also different because these sites are conceived for young users. In fact, the average age of users is about 23. So this different background of the websites stimulates a different user’s approach. The nature of giovani.it is to give information to the student population. In most cases, we analyzed political discussions that we can consider as general. The focus is not on current affairs. The lexicon in this website is varied. There are a lot of didactic questions. But in these texts the language is not simple. Young users in these discussions do not give information, but express their ideas. These ideas appear as a result of passionate studies and this passion makes the language rich, elegant and cultured. We can consider this result as a mirror of the forum’s users: young students with the passion for politics. There are many quotes and the process that appears in this discussion is an exhibition of knowledge.

The goal of this discussion should be the transmission of information but the trend to express personal ideas makes this space a virtual place to debate. This debate is not similar to the debates described in forumpolitico or termometropolitico. In fact, we cannot find any personal involvement. The subjects are often concepts rather than persons and the verbs used are connected to the cognitive area rather than the emotive field. The users involved in this discussion are less than other debates. In fact, the average number of participants is 3/4 users while in other discussions we find also 15/20 users involved. This space creates a sort of community of practice, close to other explorers.

We find a totally different representation of politics that appears placed in an ideal plan. In student.it we also find discussions more connected to actuality where users speak about Italian parties.

In this case, discussions start from a request made by one of the users and it becomes a debate. The language is used in interrogative forms in a lot of presences and, differently from termometropolitico or forumpolitico, often speakers use the first person. The verbs used regard the cognitive area, the need felt by users to clarify and to explain. Again, we find processes which describe a general rage against political protagonists and parties. In fact, in these discussions there is a
large use of informal language and we find a lot of offensive adjectives connected to politics.

Similar processes appear in yahoo.answer.it. This is a young and dynamic site and the discussion seems more instinctive. In this website, we found many discussions about the most recent political events. All of these texts had a very negative connotation. In fact, the terms more commonly used are adjectives with a reference to extremism (“fascism”, “communism”) and adjectives with the prefix “un/in” (“ineligible”, “un-presentable”). In these websites, the relationship between participants appears more aggressive. In all website, the dialogical nature of forums is recognizable through the large use of suspension points. These are often used to support a sort of continuity between presences in forums. In Yahoo.answer this use is intensive, but the dialogue between users often is aggressive. We found many sentences starting with a threatening style. The subject is “You” connected to verbs with a negative connotation or connected with offensive words (“You don’t know where you live”, “You’re saying stupid things”). We also found in Yahoo a negative connotation given to the political class. The subjects are often collective and badly connoted actors, except for Berlusconi or other specific leaders.

5. Concluding remarks

What reflection can we have from this analysis? We can use the models of participation proposed by Dahlgreen. He speaks about civic agency to define an active process of political participation that connotes values, practices and experiences. This is a positive model for an activism that could be stimulated by the web. This possibility could be limited by the pre-condition of cultural contexts. In fact, the context can influence participants’ identities (the author defines this typical situation cultural agency). In our analysis, every forum appears influenced by cultural backgrounds that our national situation has given to participants. Forums are dialogic and so appears space where a positive debate is possible. For example, a previous study demonstrated that social networks seemed to be spaces where the debate was aggressive in many situations. However, the negative connotation of politicians felt by people is very influential.

In Italy, as Michael Slaby said in a recent meeting, politics rarely use the web-tool in a real engaging way. Italian leaders use the web as they use television. So, Italian citizens are not educated to use the Internet to make politics. This factor does not stimulate a real building of knowledge in informal uses of forums. People are used to speak about politics in a self-referential way. They show their

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12 Michael Slaby was the Chief Innovation and Integration Officer for Obama’s electoral campaign. He spoke during the conference “Italia – Usa. Campagne elettorali a confronto” in Bari on 25/10/2013.
knowledge of facts but do not contribute to a process of knowledge building. They may also show their rage against politics. The only positive model we found is giovani.it: the discussion about general questions that people engaged in this website appears to us a positive way to debate. Every user explained his/her idea and his/her point of view in a cooperative way. The only problem was the absence of in depth-analysis on topics of forum: every user prefers to use his/her own ideas instead of information treated by literature. In fact a lot of users, during a debate, argue their case without the corroboration of different theories or information. They argue their chase using partial information taken from a restricted literature or empirical experiences. A lot of users base their opinion on media events, interviews where politicians give an image of themselves.

For this reason, the discussion sometimes did not appear as a process of knowledge but it produced a “cultured chat” without a goal.

In conclusion, we can underline the importance of giving a guide to the process of building knowledge through forums. Forums can be a good tool to stimulate participative process. The good model in our research is giovani.it. Educators must know the power of forums in the process of knowledge building: a good use of these tools in educative environment can be a very important opportunity.

Additionally, the emptiness left by local politics in online communication could be repaired by the good use of forums in educative environments. If we want to create an educative project in civic education, it is important to know what happens in informal situations.

In our research, we saw how forums can be interesting for young people and how they can create a sort of virtual focus group, but we also saw that a process of knowledge building in our confused context needs a guide. Forums need a guide which structures the debate’s environment and leads the speech’s direction towards a constructive one. This is one reflection that we can resume from our analysis but we have to remember that discourse analysis is always an open process.

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I. SOCIO-POLITICAL CHANGE AT THE INTERFACE OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY
WHAT IS PERSUASIVE ABOUT THE OLD AND THE NEW?

Rafael Jiménez Cataño

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

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

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

“The place that the argument from authority occupies in argumentation is significant, but one must keep in mind that, like any other argument, it should be taken together with other accords.”

1. What is Old or New

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

1 Holy Cross University, Rome.
4 Ibid. 473.
how far in the past must something be to be considered old? How near must something be to be considered new? Actually, distance itself is not enough for the analysis: it has to be put into context, a time segment which enables the distance to be considered short or long.

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

1.1. Dimensions of Time

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

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

1.2. Argument from Direction

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

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

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

7 Cf. Perelman, op. cit. §66, 434-443.
in other countries, or the comprehension of a behaviour by situating its place in the age of a human being. Perelman classifies it among arguments that are based upon the structure of reality.8

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

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

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

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

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

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

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8 Cf. ibid.
9 Cf. ibid. 438.
strictly temporal meaning, “which can be attested to at least from the fifth-sixth centuries, specifically as found within certain letters of Pope Gelasius I (492-496) and in the Variae of Cassiodorus (485-480).”

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

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

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

2.1. The Length of Modernity

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

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

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

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

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

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13 Koyré, Alexandre. “La pensée moderne”. Le Livre, 4e année, nouvelle série, mai 1930, n° 1, 1. It appears at least three times in Oxford Greek Grammar.
15 “Magister Anselmus et illi antiqui dixerunt quod (...). Magister vero Petrus et fere omnes moderni dicunt quod (...)” (Peter of Capua. Summa theologæ. q.11, Codex 51, Biblioteca Municipale di Todi, f. 7vº a).
17 Chenu, La teologia nel dodicesimo secolo, 440.
the creation of new treatises of logic, which received the name of *logica modernorum*, while the collection of *logica vetus* and *logica nova* now became the *logica antiquorum*.

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

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

3. Axiology and Progress

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

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

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

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

3.1 Modernity as an Identity

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

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18 Ghisalberti, op. cit. 630.
21 Ghisalberti, op. cit. 609.
an identity, the awareness of being “creators of a new tradition.” This is the essential meaning of Bernard of Chartres’ (+ 1124/30) famous formulation: “We are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants and see farther than they.”22 Here is the substance of progress in a cumulative sense.

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

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

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

4. Formulations of Common Places

From antiquity comes the most oft-repeated formulation of the common place of appreciation of the past: the laudatio temporis acti. In its Horatian origin,
the meaning was narrower than that currently attributed to the expression. Horace is describing the idiosyncrasies, generally negative, of the old. The complete expression is laudator temporis acti / se puero:24 “given to praising the years when he was a boy.”25

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

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

\[\text{\textsuperscript{26} Coplas de don Jorge Manrique por la muerte de su padre, I. Manrique, Jorge. Cancionero.} \textsuperscript{3} ed. Ed. A. Cortina. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1952, 89.\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{27} “(…) quán presto se va el plazer, / cómo, después de acordado, / da dolor; / cómo, a nuestro parecer, / cualquiere tiempo passado / fué mejor”. “(…) Swiftly our pleasures glide away, / Our hearts recall the distant day / With many sighs; / The moments that are speeding fast / We heed not, but the past,—the past, / More highly prize” (Transl. Henry W. Longfellow. Complete Poetical Works. 1893. Bartleby.com. Fri. 1st November 2013.} \textless\text{http://www.bartleby.com/356/478.html}\textgreater.\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{28} “El poeta no afirma, nota únicamente que —a nuestro parecer— fue mejor lo pasado” (Cortina, Augusto. “Jorge Manrique. Voz, alma y ámbito”. Manrique, Jorge. Cancionero. Cit., XLIX).}\]
this was the real thought of the author.\textsuperscript{29} The Horatian expression “\textit{quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus}”\textsuperscript{30} betrays this reluctance to report an error in an authority.

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

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\textsuperscript{30} Ars poetica, 359.


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SOCIAL CHANGE: HOW ‘TRADITION’ RENEWS ITSELF THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF DIALOGUE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Mariselda Tessarolo

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

### How social is social change?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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9 The quotes in quotation marks of translated texts in Italian, referring to the Italian translation.
“after reaching their apogee, all civilizations have witnessed their culture lose the aspects of a creative minority. A cultural hodgepodge (pammixia) becomes established between the dominating majority and the increasingly vast internal proletariat, whereas increasingly closer cultural exchanges develop with the more backward communities (external proletariat), in such a way that reciprocal contributions are not organically embodied in either culture”.\(^4\)

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

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

Sennett\(^1\) shows that only through repetitiveness it is possible to strive toward creativity, and only by looking at other peoples’ culture it is possible to go toward change, which is not to be seen as ‘assimilation’ – and thus disappearance of one’s own culture – but as something new that blends together the two cultures in varying parts and leaves room for novelty. The scholar sees a crucial value in habit both as regards social practices and self-understanding: we test our alternatives only in relation with the habits that we have already mastered. A life without habits is a life without a meaning. On the other side, Hobsbawn and Ranger\(^2\) and


Giddens revisit the term ‘tradition’, which in itself is a continuous search for change linked to its etymological meaning, that is, ‘transmitting’ from one generation to the next, while each generation interprets the world through the eyes of their own times. In human knowledge, there is always a link with what already exists; absolute novelty does not exist and if it did it could not be taken into account. Traditions and customs have existed throughout history, but, Giddens observes, “It is amazing how little interest scholars have in that while we are endlessly discussing modernization and what being modern means”14. Interesting is the concept of contemporaneity, seen as the joining link of generations along the diachronic and synchronic course of history and sociology. Zerubavel15 maintains that the past has to be considered as an integrating part of the identity of the present. Nowadays, the continuity between past and present is jeopardized by the acceleration of social and technological change as well as by economics based on replaceability, that is planned obsolescence (predetermined limitation of the life of consumer goods)16. The future, according to these two perspectives, may be viewed as progress or as decay, depending on the idealization of the future or of the past, or of the preservation of the world by reducing waste in the process of degradation. Such a trend, however, has led to a conservative drive (holding on to everything, diverse forms of nostalgia). Nostalgia is felt also for lost or irretrievable times of our past (collective as well as individual). Human beings tend toward a forced linearity of evolution, not toward a ramification; they do not consider the fact that discontinuity is a social invention17.

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

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

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

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

16 This observation refers to the ‘single-use’ consumption (Latouche 2013).
convince or be convinced, or develop new opinions together. The public sphere is no longer the *agora*, the square, but a place within the media where problems and political or moral values are shared.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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between real knowledge (*epistéme*) and opinion (*doxa*). Kant observed that holding an opinion is insufficient knowledge, both subjectively and objectively, which is accompanied by consciousness, and Hegel turned opinion into a private ‘thing’ that cannot be communicated\(^{25}\).

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

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

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

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

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

“Today, it is the public sphere that must be protected from the invasion of the private sphere, and this, paradoxically, in order to increase and not reduce individual freedom”\(^{26}\).

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

“Our fleeting and elusive world does not need less government but more government and this can be guaranteed only by the democratic institutions”\(^{27}\).

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

**Conclusions**

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

Modernity and tradition strengthen each other (continuous-discontinuous). The new and the old are representations of discontinuity within continuity and vice versa. Tradition and progress have always been two opposing weapons. The idea associated with progress is that “later is better”: the future is better than the past\(^{30}\).

The view of history in terms of progress begins with the philosophical thinking of the 1700s, and since then history has been seen as a progressive rise from the wild to the civilized stage. However, this optimistic modality of the future is opposed by

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

“history is always something more or something less than what is stated about it and language always does something more or something less than what occurs in real history”\textsuperscript{34}.

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

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

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

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

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


\textsuperscript{34} Zerubavel, E. \textit{Mappe del tempo}. Bologna: il Mulino, 2005: 47.
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Abstract: This paper focuses on the impact of socio-political change on the normative model of communicative rationality as the method of public sphere debate. It aims to explore the theoretical implications of the impact of new, diversified publics, institutional complexity and multilingualism, among others, on Habermas's model of communicative rationality. It proposes a reconceptualisation of this model in conditions of overcomplexity and along the lines of a de-transcendentalised, dynamic normativity.

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

1. Introduction

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

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2. Communicative rationality

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

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

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

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

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

It is evident that Habermas’s model is overburdened with too many presuppositions from the outset: intersubjectivity, understanding, argumentation and consensus. This results in an overly restrictive concept of rationality, which actually hinders instead of facilitating uninhibited expression and reflective participation in public sphere debate – contrary to Habermas’s aspirations for a
public sphere as “a medium of unrestricted communication” (1996: 308). In other words, communicative rationality implies narrow rationality. It also represents a model of linguistically embodied, “situated” reason (Habermas, 2001: 130) that is neither absolute nor goal-oriented but based on communication and therefore contingent. This contingency is significantly heightened if we consider the impact of socio-political change in shared communicative practices.

3. The impact of socio-political change

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

Habermas did offer an extensive analysis of social complexity and its impact on public deliberative practices (1996; 2006), with a focus on the rise of complex bureaucratic institutions, the influence of money and technological advancement. However, he did not feed this analysis back into his original concept. He proposed a distinction between informal/weaker and formal/stronger publics (1996) but still, this solution addressed the issue of differentiation in the structure of the public sphere but not in communication. In this respect, this paper proposes the distinction between system publics and emergent publics (cf. Keith, 2013), which emphasises their deliberative character. While emergent publics are becoming increasingly active but also increasingly diffuse, system publics, such as parliaments, succumb to a routinisation of procedures that can seriously undermine the deliberative character of the public sphere in a way that debate would work almost mechanically. In addition to this, the diffuse and largely unregulated character of emergent publics in the public sphere matrix constitutes the lifeblood of its publicness, but it may also expose publics to risks. Smaller and weaker emergent publics may be swallowed by better-organised ones. System publics may be institutionalised and hierarchical, but their opinions and their reasons are institutionally protected, in contrast to those of emergent publics that are increasingly heterarchical in an agonistic public realm.
Lastly, multilingualism against the backdrop of increasingly multicultural and globalised societies leads to multiple competing rationalities in essentially agonistic public spheres. In this way, public spheres become "a field of competing traditions and competing languages" (Alejandro, 1993: 205). If, as examined above, communicative rationality is based on language, what happens when interlocutors use a language different to their native one, or when more than one languages are used in the same public sphere? It becomes even more challenging to determine whether understanding, one of the key parameters of communicative rationality, is truly established and also if agreement, another key parameter, is truly reached "for the same reasons" (Habermas, in Cooke, 1998: 320-1). From this perspective, multilingual debate in public spheres may constitute a case of "pseudo-communication" (Habermas, 1970: 205), where participants do not recognise any communication disturbances unless a third party points them out, and which may in turn lead to "false consensus" (ibid.). A presupposition of universal communicative rationality with emancipatory potential is of no use against this backdrop.

4. Rethinking communicative rationality

4.1. Power and over complexity

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

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

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2 The impact of multilingualism on communicative rationality is not going to be analysed extensively in this paper. The implications of multilingualism, such as the need for interpreters in multilingual public spheres or the use of dominant languages by non-native speakers, will constitute the focus of a separate study that will be published in a forthcoming paper on Communicative Rationality and Multilingualism.
however due to the inequality and complexity of the publics, the purpose of debate is to compete for influence in dominant public spheres and formal institutions. ‘Agonistic’ is not considered here as an alternative to ‘deliberative’, but instead it defines the process of deliberation. It is essential for the public sphere to hold some form of internal struggle, because debate and polemic are at its core. By articulating power differentials within the public sphere, its idealising presuppositions will turn into functional preconditions for effective critical debate.

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

4.2. Criteria for public deliberation

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

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

Secondly, argumentation is infiltrated with power relations, negotiation procedures of bargaining and arguing (Saretzki, 2009) and specialised discourses. Publics need to be agonistic, they need to question, clarify, justify, contest and challenge opinions and information fed to them by various sources, if social emergence is to be taken seriously. This is not only because of communication uncertainties but also because of the increasing diversity of participants of all forms attempting to mediate public opinion. Instead of presupposing that all participants work towards a common interest (as Habermas suggests), we must instead
presuppose that participants aim at promoting their own (or their groups') private interests. Only in this way can participants truly adopt a critical attitude to debate and communicatively seek the optimal solutions for the promotion of common interests. In this context, understanding is viewed as collective procedure, similar to Habermas's original conception, which is necessary for opinion formation and further argumentation. The process is agonistic – in and between publics, as well as between public and the state.

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

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

The importance of “considered” debate is also raised by Habermas in his discussion of empirical applications of his normative theory (2006). He uses an experimental study by Neblo, which investigated how trial groups learn through deliberation by asking them for opinions on key political issues before and after deliberating on them and reaching collective decisions. The resulting individual opinions were found to be “quite different” (op.cit: 414) from their initial opinions prior to deliberation. According to the study, this change reflected “broader
perspectives” on the issues discussed, as well as “increasing trust expressed in the procedural legitimacy of fair argumentation” (ibid.). Habermas uses the example of similar studies that offer empirical evidence for the learning potential of political deliberation. In short, the argument is that the more we deliberate, the more knowledge we acquire, which lowers the possibility of “polarisation of opinions” (ibid.).

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

4.3. Towards a dynamic normativity

It is evident from the above analysis that the shift in the conceptual role and structure of public sphere deliberation also denotes a shift in the normative core of Habermas’s model. As a rule, normative theory has to do more than be prescriptive. It must not be detached from practical life concerns or from contemporary issues; otherwise it runs the risk of becoming self-referential. Moreover, normative theory does not have to be non-pragmatic and belong to the sphere of the ideal and unrealistic. It should maintain its guiding role without claiming moral or ethical supremacy. The aim is to have norms that do not “possess conclusive validity” (Honneth, 1991: 281), but the role of which is to go beyond the contingent. Habermas himself recognises that “absolute, binding normativity only exists in law, which is both positive and compelling” (1996: 58). Communicative modes of sociation are actually governed by a looser version of normativity, which tracks practice and acquires reflexivity. This type of normativity, advocated here for the status of the reworked version of communicative rationality, does not bestow on its respective theory a meta-status. It is de-transcendentalised and represents a dynamic as opposed to static normativity, constantly tested against shifting social practice and not locked in time.
The notion of a dynamic normativity has been advocated by scholars in the fields of social sciences, law and human sciences. It lies between the extremes of positivism and relativism and focuses on the impact of change on values, laws and practices. Social norms are governed by a dynamic instead of static, diachronic normativity, because they are “institutional embodiments of communicatively-produced knowledge” (Honneth, 1991: 259). Furthermore, as Sherry (forthcoming) points out, normativity as a social dynamic is “always elusive” in the sense that it is contingent upon social interaction, through which it can be “complicated, modified, reshaped, reinterpreted and reconstructed” (Sherry, forthcoming). Similarly, Peschard argues that “the normativity of a cooperative practice can only be a dynamic normativity, generated from within, in response to the elucidation and reformulation of what is at issue” (Peschard, 2007: 151). Conversely, the rigidity of Habermas’s concepts of rationality and the public sphere as a purely normative space threatened by non-normative forces functions as a barrier to free expression, diversity in communication and communication with bodies outside the public sphere.

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

5. Conclusion

This paper has shown that socio-political change in the form of the introduction of new actors, new media and multiple languages results in agonistic public spheres with competing rationalities. The ensuing contingencies, as well as the uncertainty and risk inherent in overcomplex contemporary societies pose significant challenges to the normative role of Habermas's model of communicative rationality. Idealising presuppositions cannot be made in light of such circumstances without risking crossing the fine line between counterfactuality and impracticality. The tension between normativity and empirical relevance requires a reconceptualisation of communicative rationality on the normative level as well as its redefinition on the operational level (cf. Splichal, 2013). Against this backdrop, this paper has a) reconsidered communicative rationality away from the constraints
of consensus and intersubjectivity towards the inclusion of conflict, power
dynamics, bargaining and negotiating, pragmatism, overcomplexity and informed
debate and b) argued for a de-transcendentalised redefinition of normativity less
tied to idealising presuppositions and counterfactuals and more informed by
actually existing practices. In the face of challenges such as increasingly
multicultural societies with different moral and ethical norms, commercialised
societies with changing values and ensuing legal and constitutional modifications
to accommodate such radical changes, the purpose and role of this dynamic
conception of normativity is all the more evident.

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

Paola Zaccaria

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

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

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

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2 See, in reference text, for bibliographical details about works by Wendy Brown; Franco Farinelli; Saskia Sassen; Homi Bhabha; Soja and Hopper; Balibar; Mezzadra.
3 I prefer the word locality in the acceptation discussed by Doreen Massey (Space, Place and Gender. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994) because this concept goes beyond the categories of “space” or “place”, which are often saturated by ideas of immobility, stagnation and temporality. Locality involves the ideas of connection, interrelationship and entanglement of places/people/cultures/knowledges: in the shifting from space to locality, the concept of place is “touched” by the unavoidability of change and movements.
Within this framework, I am presently working on the Transatlantic and Mediterranean writings and arts of migration, diaspora, post-colonization and decolonization in order to investigate whether and to what extent the creolized border writings and border arts can stand nowadays as alternative political agendas and can enhance knowledge, social justice and convivencia beyond/notwithstanding walls and borders. Moreover, as for the theoretical, critical and methodological research group procedures of inquiry into the transatlantic neo-colonial policies and poetics, it must be added that in my case, until 2009, my geo-critical, gyno-critical and transcultural gaze methodology in analysing the concept of the border(lands) and its interrelations to old and new forms of colonialism was greatly indebted to chicana theorization and poetics of border crossing and mestizaje (Gloria Anzaldúa), Caribbean poetics of creolization (especially Glissant, Gilroy, Hall) and Cuban and Cuban-inspired concepts of transculturation (Ortiz). But, at this point in Hi/story, my history as a woman who cannot entirely disavow her Mediterranean roots required that my political and intellectual circumnavigation around the narratives of colonialism, post-colonialism, diaspora and neo-colonialisms did not only have to take into account the transatlantic unavoidable facts: “The Colonial, the Postcolonial and the Global are a network. There is no Europe without Africa and the Americas. Issues of colonialism, anti-colonialism, post-coloniality are issues of globalization”, but had also to be concerned with the undeniable evidence that the underlying reasons of today’s mobility from African countries to Europe are to be searched in yesterday colonialist drive to conquest that drove ships from the Mediterranean and North European ports towards the New World, with the atrocious shameful stop in some harbours along the Western African shores to “pick up” human “chattels” to be sold in the most abject markets of South and North America, the new world colonized by “conquerors”.

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

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4 A chicano expression for a way of living together beyond nationalistic feelings of belonging, close to what Homi Bhabha calls “togetherness-in-difference”, a kind of cosmopolitanism from below, or vernacular cosmopolitanism.
5 From Giovanna Covi’s ppt. slides for a seminar on Postcolonial Studies held at the University of Bari, December 10-13, 2009.
6 Actually, at a more global level, material and jurisdictional walls have also been erected both between Asia and Europe and along the Ocean surrounding Australia to protect the “sovereignty” of Western Eurocentric countries and continents from the entrance of the colored bodies arriving through liquid routes.
much borderized and yet marked by global processes of cultural mobility. Actually, as Wendy Brown discusses in her book *Walled States, Waining Sovereignty*, the walls’ function is more a fiction, kind of theatrical stage aimed at giving the citizens an image of power, order and national self-determination challenged by terrorist technologies and neoliberal capitalism. As a matter of fact, this fiction is politically instrumental to expel the over-worn boats carrying the worn out bodies of the asylum seekers. The performance, apparently designed to stage the national sovereignty, to give the residents the feeling of protection from invasion of the other, in the age of national dis-homogeneity and transnational globalization answers the need to be “contained”; and yet, psychologically and culturally, the walls that should assure insiders from vulnerability, engender xenophobic feelings towards the *arrivant*, the diverse and the not belonging (t)here.

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

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

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

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

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9 Ivi, p. 92.
10 In the conference days, Europe was shocked by the migrant shipwreck at Scicli, in Sicily, on Sept. 30th, and the Lampedusa boat disaster, where more than 300 migrants travelling from North Africa to Southern Europe lost their lives on October, 3.
The focus of the survey and the theoretical/methodological approach

In the attempt to undertake feasible paths leading to the intersection of these issues, I have chosen to bring the focus of the enquiry on the intercultural and transcultural exchange readable/showing up in cultural and artistic product(ion)s originated at/by the confluence of Mediterranean and Transatlantic waters and to adopt a theoretical, critical, comparative, intermedial thinking that enables intellectual workers to look into the present through a methodology aimed at deconstructing the colonial frame that still permeates the interpretation of creolized, decolonizing, inter- and trans-cultural signs and visions, i.e. a method that de-colonizes the reader’s/observer’s language, eye and thought. These ARTivist (artist and activist), intensely performative works are usually ACTed/performed in alternative, non canonized public spaces and consequently require alternative, non-canonized interpretations12.

In a critical inquiry that aims to weigh the impact of art and literary works that are close to or are originated within artistivist movements that produce sociological and cultural transformations in that they shift their creative impulse from individualism to community bonds (the condition of convivencia and togetherness mentioned earlier, but also the new tribalism in “les lieux de sociation” Maffessoli speaks of13), I have been applying a theoretical hermeneutical approach which is partly inspired by the African American oral-aural and musical pattern of call-and-response – someone poses a verbal or musical question or unfinished phrase and another subject/player or the band (in music)/a community (in oral exchange), answers back, or can re-launch the call from another perspective. My methodology aims at developing a call-and-response dialogue between Western theories on performativity (Butler), gender, neo-materialism (Barad, Braidotti, Parisi), neo-tribalism (Maffesoli), geo-criticism (Westphal) and post-colonial, diasporic, de-colonizing, and chicano studies that have articulated theories on creolization, mestizaje, transculturality, intersectionality, queerness, diffraction, alternative utopias and archives of sentiments (Spivak, bhabha, Glissant, Anzaldúa, Mesa-Bains, Arteaga, Gilroy, Hall, Brand, Ahmad, Latorre, Lugones, Ortiz, Ann Cvetkovich and Ann Pellegrini, etc.).

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

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

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

Call and response between facts and research

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

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

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

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

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

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suggested in *The Spaces That Difference Makes*: “all real geographies are imagined and all imagined geographies are real”15 (1993: 196). Geocorographies such as the ones Brand traces in her books offer transcultural and transformative poetical conceptions of space and place in the field of visual and literary representations. These new maps, born out of the interrelation between dis-homogeneous geographical and cultural belonging, design new public, literary and aesthetic localities. While bearing traces of the authors’ cultural identities16, the diasporic imaginary and yet real maps create an interrelated, multifocal and poly-sensorial texture disrupting the dominant reading of space. In the case of Brand, for example, she directs the reader’s attention on wisps of traces, almost indiscernible imprints and sighs left over by real and imaginary memories and they map new visions of the past kneaded into the present freed from the shoals of silence. By elaborating artivistically the concept of imaginary and yet real geographies through an eye-tact-re-memory made up with rags of alter-native documental narrations and knowledge popping up from the depth of genealogical roots that are not dreamt as pure, but as inevitably contaminated, mestizajed, creolized, the author stages, call for the necessity of a dialogue.

The “Atlas of emotions”17 charted by Brand cannot but unavoidably be restive and restless to a conception of the Atlas of the world as incontestable, truthful representation of the earth. Artivistic works such as hers, by conjugating roots and routes, offer to our eyes and minds the representation of the time-lag in a dimension of vernacular cosmopolitanism, and, I would add, a sort of MediterrAtlantic cultural hub18, although diasporic authors genetically know what African *harragas* are learning today: the detention camp, the reservation, the wall, the drowning in water, the segregation, the ex-(a)propriation, the rejection.

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

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

... *The best cartographer is only trying to hold water*, to draw approximations of rocks, inclines, bays, depths, plains19.

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

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

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

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

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

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

At this stage, in order to develop the geo-critical, geo-political and intellectual actions and topics instrumental to carry on strategies of un/walling the Mediterranean, the research group needs funds in order to create a MediterrAtlantic multi-country joint project, composed by a network of universities, grass-root organizations, NGOs, social networks, scholars, activists, writers, artists, filmmakers, musicians who are already working in the field of interculturality, transculturation, transnationalism, peace, social justice, artivism, crossings, resistance to the “walling in” of territories and seas. In this way, it will be possible to establish a supranational and cross-continental dialogue fit to produce changes in the public sphere about social justice and freedom of mobility.
The next issues of theoretical, critical and political enquiry and action on our research agenda are: *focus on the mental and ideological walls leading to the definition of race, sex, culture and class; *deconstruction of the sea-wall (in Italian: mare-muro) concept as well as of the idea of border/confine ment and formulation of new practices working out a new vision of the Mediterranean sea as a porous crossing bridge/free-port so as to foster new reception procedures; *investigation of the effects that material, geographic and cultural walls separating people and countries have on art and literature in those countries where the research will be carried out; *Europe(an) new face(s): urban transculturations in condition of vernacular cosmopolitanism; *displaying, supporting, exporting the counter-action, counter-narration of migration and transculturality called artivism in the public spheres of fortress Europe in order to create a public opinion that “rejects” rejection procedures; *enhancement of processes of transnational and transcultural bridging promoted by translation practice as a counter-action resisting the practices of expulsion of the “strangers” through the policy of building real and legal walls and boundaries; *Selection of literary and visual works coming from Italy, Spain, Israel, Palestine, the Chicano community, the transatlantic diasporic cultures and the African-Mediterranean region to be translated/screened; *implementation of an Apulia “no border wall” network in collaboration with anti-racist and anti-rejection groups operating in Apulia, Italy, Palestine, Israel, Tunisia and along Mexican-American borderlands.

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

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CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGICAL QUESTIONS: INSIGHTFUL REFLECTIONS ON CURRENT SOCIAL SHIFTS

Maja Muhić

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

Crisis of Representation in Postmodern Anthropology

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

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

3See more in Salzman, Philip, C. Understanding Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theory. Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2001. Print. Among other things, he points out that postmodern epistemology, exemplified by the subfields of symbolic and feminist anthropology brings into focus the importance of moral responsibility and the worth of positional relativity and subjectivity, thus challenging the positivist ideal of objective, unbiased perspective.
predominantly with the publication of several works, among which, the edited volume *Writing Culture* by Clifford and Marcus\(^4\) and Clifford’s *On Ethnographic Surrealism*.\(^5\) George Marcus, Michale Fischer, Renato Rosaldo, James Clifford, Vincent Crpanzano, etc, are among some of the key figures who are considered responible for this anthropological shift in the second half of the twentieth century. The importance and meaning of anthropology have been brought into question with these contemporary post-modern dilemmas about the validity of its study. Yet, current engagements of anthropologists are a clear proof that it is a discipline of utmost importance.

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

**Contemporary Anthropology – An Engaged Anthropology**

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


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

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

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


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

There is a clear distrust in the ethics of science and the influence of new technologies in other contemporary anthropological writings as well. These writings are based on ethnographies of various countries in relation to the global market economy as a major trigger of social shifts. To name one example, Janer Roitman's article on the bandits and traffickers in the Chad Basin, who would by most standards be labeled as violators of certain rules, reveals similar grievances regarding the power of the international market and the local reactions to it, through various forms of banditry. Here again, the question of how to live is posed in relation to technology and biopolitics. Roitman talks of the “garrison-
entrepot” (those who cut off the roads) characterized by a range of unregulated activities including smuggling of hardware, electronics, dry goods as well as petrol, vehicles, and ivory black market trading. The marginalization of African economy has led to new forms of economic integration. Banditry emerges as a regime of living that actively reshapes existing forms of regulations, governments and ethics. Yet, Roitman wonders how much this new political subject created in reaction to the forces of modern liberalism and bureaucratization can really destabilize the sovereign.

The University and Life in Crisis

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

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

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

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

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


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

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

Conclusion

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

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http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2972600/#b12-cln_65p937

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

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

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

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

1. Introduction

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

Due to such a sudden inversion of the migratory trend, as well as to the ethnic, religious and cultural “super-diverse” features of immigrant communities (Vertovec, 2007), in Southern European countries public discourse on immigration is traditionally characterized by alarmist tones that amplify any
problems related to this state of affairs, leaving little room for reflection on how integration could be better understood (EUMC 2005).4

Immigration is often blatantly branded as a problem, especially in media discourse (EUMC 2002).5 Even institutional discourse about immigration and cultural diversity is not free from bias. It is therefore particularly interesting to analyse what happens within educational contexts, where increasingly diverse school populations inevitably must lead to reflections both on the challenges and on assets related to multicultural societies.

Plurilingualism and linguistic diversity brought about by immigration represent an everyday experience for pupils, and it is at school that they have to be taught to appreciate the value and potentiality of them. On the contrary, in the absence of an institutional discourse which legitimises and favours a progressive detachment from the monolingual habitus6 (Gogolin, 1994), as well as from traditional homoglotic ideologies7 (Lüdi, 2011) of many educational institutions, there is the risk that these individual and collective linguistic resources remain largely extraneous to the school community or are regarded as limitations to overcome, while only European languages of wider communication taught at school are credited with status and prestige. Very often, in fact, bilingual and/or multilingual programmes in schools are equated to the study of English while other languages, which may be extensively present in social contexts of Southern European countries, are almost totally excluded. This situation seems even more incongruous, if we take into consideration that an increasing number of children who speak many different languages join these educational institutions every year.

2. Research questions

In this paper, we will focus on the educational policies and settings of six Southern-European countries (Portugal, Spain, Italy, Slovenia, Malta and Romania), discussing data gathered through MERIDIUM, a EU-funded Life Long Learning project8 conducted from 2009 to 2011. On the basis of the above, the research questions to be discussed in this paper are summarized as follows:

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8 LifeLong Learning Program (LLLP), key-action 2 (Languages), project number 143513-LLP-1-2008-1-IT-KA2-KA2NW.
1. At a macro-level: in these Southern European countries do official policy documents promote cultural diversity at school and do they explicitly call the attention of teachers to plurilingualism and linguistic diversity brought about by immigration? And if so, to what extent does this occur?

2. At a micro-level: are plurilingualism and linguistic diversity present extensively in today’s schools, explicitly brought to the attention of pupils in everyday classroom activities and eventually exploited in order to create a learning environment which fosters interlinguistic and intercultural awareness?

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Official policy documents on plurilingualism and linguistic diversity

As far as the first research question in concerned, we have noticed, in the first place, that in the last few years these countries have made significant progress in adopting structural measures aimed at supporting the plurilingual growth of the young generations: as Eurydice reports (EACEA-Eurydice, 2008; 2009; Eurydice 2004; Eurydice-EUROSTAT 2012) clearly demonstrate, foreign language teaching has been introduced from the very early grades of schooling and methodologies such as CLIL are adopted by a growing number of schools.9

However, a more careful assessment of the language policies and measures taken in these countries leads to the conclusion that the exhortations of the European institutions in favour of pluri- and multilingualism have been transposed, by and large, according to a pragmatic and instrumental vision, which focuses on the formally certified acquisition of foreign languages with economic and professional marketability. The result of this is mainly an increase in the offer of English courses, as stated earlier. Moreover, although in some of these countries policy documents do include intercultural dialogue among the general objectives of school curricula and envisage specific measures for the integration of children whose L1 is different from the official language of instruction, generally they just vaguely mention, if ever, the need to support the languages and cultures of origin of immigrants. Moreover they substantially ignore the Council of Europe guidelines for the development of policies and curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education (CoE, 2007; Beacco et al., 2010).10


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

### 3.2 Plurilingualism and linguistic diversity in schools

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

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

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

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

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

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

Children’s language use was investigated within the school domain, both from the point of view of ‘institutional’ interactions with their teachers, and from that of personal relationships with their classmates. If we consider the pupils whose responses we analysed above, as far as language use at home is concerned (1,984 subjects), we observe that 1.8% (36 cases) and 1.5% (27 cases) of them state that they use allochtonous languages (i.e. languages that are different from those taught at school) with their classmates and with their teachers respectively.12

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

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12 Of course, the possibility of having two or more children in the same class who potentially could use the same allochtonous language to communicate varies according to the state in which data were collected: while this possibility is frequent in Italy (29 classes out of 36) and Slovenia (5 out of 6), it is much less frequent in Romania (7 out of 13), and more so in Spain (8 out of 21), Portugal (6 out of 17) and Malta (4 out of 10). Nonetheless, in each one of the countries involved in the research the tendency to shift towards the language of schooling is very clear, also when interacting with classmates.
Secondly, didactic activities directed toward the stimulation of metalinguistic reflection by means of languages other than those included in the curriculum are very rare: in fact, forms of cooperative learning exploiting the linguistic resources of pupils with a foreign background were not registered in the schools under study. This difficulty is particularly pronounced as there is a lack of practical teaching materials which encourage the use of different languages and which foster linguistic and cultural diversity. Thirdly, there is an emphasis, by ‘immigration-receiving’ countries, on the fact that migrants are to gain competence in the country’s official language/s. While acknowledging the importance of the above, such an outlook may narrow the teachers’ perspective, as they encourage these students solely to acquire the language used in schools.

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

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

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

4. Initiatives to promote awareness about plurilingualism and linguistic diversity

4.1. The MERIDIUM booklet: Babel and languages

With the aim to give teachers some concrete suggestions on how to promote awareness about plurilingualism and linguistic diversity among pupils, MERIDIUM researchers have created a booklet (Babel and languages) conceived as a tool to stimulate children’s curiosity on language diversity around them.\footnote{The booklet is available on the official MERIDIUM website: \url{http://meridium.unistrapg.it/}.} The
booklet is designed as a sort of travel diary written by an alien, Babel, landing on Earth from his planet Multilingua, where languages of the universe are studied in order to communicate with the inhabitants of other planets. Babel relates what he has learned during his trip, writing in six languages (the ones examined by the MERIDIUM project: Italian, English, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovenian and Spanish); he also asks pupils to help him in order to collect new information. The text is composed of six sections, concerning respectively linguistic diversity in the world; individual bilingualism; official vs. non-official languages and collective bilingualism; language families; writing systems and language learning.

The sequence of arguments is organised on the basis of increasing complexity and aims to create a discourse-space where plurilingualism and linguistic diversity are “naturalized” at a discourse level, that is represented as “normal” and taken for granted - as usually happens in Southern-European counties - either as a by-product of migration, or as an extraordinary phenomenon. Through the materials pupils are encouraged to talk about their experiences and feelings concerning the languages they speak and hear around them, reflecting on the socializing function of languages. They are also called to reflect consciously on the way in which they learn a language, focusing on the different language abilities, on transfer phenomena, lexical cognates etc. Occasions are offered to observe and compare the structure of different languages, starting from those which are spoken within the classroom.

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

4.2. “MERIDIUM experimentation” in Italian primary schools

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

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

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

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

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

The following are some of the remarks made by pupils:

• «Thanks to this project, I understood the meaning of “bilingual”. “Bilingual” means that a child can speak more than one language, and I am one of them, as I can speak two languages: Italian and Romanian.» (Iulian, born in Romania of Romanian parents, arrived in Italy in 2004)

• «This project has allowed me to discover that, in the school I attend, bilingual children are more numerous than children who speak just one language.» (Filippo, born in Italy of Italian parents)

• «Thanks to this project, I have discovered languages I did not know and I found out that all languages are valuable.» (Leonardo, born in Italy of Italian parents)

These few remarks are but an example of the positive feedback received, which shows that this MERIDIUM didactic activity was indeed useful in a multilingual classroom, such as the one we have taken as an example. Feedback indicates that teachers have found a new way to discuss bilingualism and multilingualism, without being somehow “forced” to frame it within the discourse about “immigrant children’s problems”. Moreover, in a vast number of cases they proved capable of overcoming their fear to show their “ignorance” about the languages spoken by the pupils: they assumed a more open stance towards the possibility of learning from children and integrating their own knowledge by using web-resources. Children of bilingual families, and the families themselves, clearly
perceived their languages of origin as resources and assets, regardless of whether or not they are used within the schooling context. They were proud to show how similar (Romanian) or different (Chinese) their language of origin is compared to Italian, and have become aware that their language knowledge, far from being an obstacle, can be exploited as a tool for learning Italian as well as other languages.

Monolingual national children gained awareness, not only of the unimagined abilities of their “foreign” classmates, but also of their own abilities to speak, understand and reflect on foreign languages and Italian dialects. Moreover, they learned several interesting facts about important international languages (e.g. Arabic) that in Italy are viewed with suspicion and sometimes even looked down upon.

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

**5. Conclusion**

Before adopting plurilingual and intercultural education as a practice in schools, its core values - equal opportunities for all, social cohesion, enhancement of individual linguistic and intercultural resources - have to be incorporated in everyday discourse practices, uncovering and recognizing the linguistic and cultural background of pupils and, in so doing, “de-naturalizing” the (assimilationist) assumption that at school pupils have to “function” in one and the same language (the language of instruction). Such a goal can be obviously reached by means of various strategies, and the MERIDIUM project has been a worthy occasion to become aware of other initiatives which have been taken in MERIDIUM countries by other researchers.15

15 Amongst these, it is worth mentioning a project conducted by Antoinette Camilleri Grima in a Maltese school: see Camilleri Grima, Antoinette. “Fostering Plurilingualism and Intercultural Competence: Affective and Cognitive Dimensions”. In: Caruana, Sandro;
Dissemination of MERIDIUM results has been met favourably both in local schools and in the wider community. During the discussions held as part of the dissemination it emerged clearly that educators view schools and classrooms as places which offer opportunities to students with different backgrounds to reflect on linguistic and cultural diversity. The presence of foreign students is considered to be enriching, despite the challenges it creates. Although the body of research in the field has increased recently, head-teachers, teachers and school staff still complain about the lack of practical resources necessary to address students’ needs, especially when faced with newcomers who start attending school throughout the course of the year and with students who have difficulty understanding the language of schooling. A question which features regularly is whether didactic tools are readily available for the needs of today’s multicultural classrooms. Such queries clearly spell out the urgency of devising educational policies and teaching materials which address these needs and take into consideration practical experiences in different settings (as outlined in Kenner and Hickey, 2008) and an “adjusted” curriculum (Olshtain and Nissim-Amitai, 2004).16

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

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

Bibliography


LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Angela Şoltan

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

![Diagram](image)

**Fig. 1 - Intangible capital.**

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

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

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

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

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

The research hypothesis

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


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

Methodology

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

Discussion on findings

Quantitative research

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

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

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

Similarly, 88.3% of respondents remembered grammar rules as the main activities in studying foreign languages. Audio and video materials, as well as authentic texts were mentioned as teaching activities in average by 30% (Fig. 3). At the same time, the answers generally indicated that the teaching activities are diversified, even if grammar holds a leading position.
The respondents had to select the language or languages spoken in the Republic of Moldova and the foreign languages they have studied in the secondary education to rate the usefulness for their further activity of what they had learned. The study revealed a high degree of irrelevance of the knowledge of language acquired in the secondary education for all local languages, except Russian, which was the main language of communication before the independence of Moldova. (Fig. 4)

![Fig. 4 - Relevance of the knowledge acquired in the secondary public education for the local languages](image)

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

![Fig. 5 - Relevance of foreign language knowledge acquired in secondary public education](image)
Qualitative research

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(University student in applied linguistics, interview, September 12, 2013).

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

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

From the discussions we had with some representatives of the working groups that developed curricula, we can conclude that about 90% of the teachers do not really understand the complicated requirements of this curricula and cannot meet its standards. The standards remain vague in many respects, because they have not been adapted for practical application. Teachers are attending training
supported by the public education system only once every 5 years, when the curriculum is modified. In-between trainings there are very few professional development possibilities supported by the public education system. At the same time, only some training needs are covered by the non-governmental sector. Therefore many teachers are still kept in a rigid framework of their linguistic disciplinary knowledge without distinguishing it from the pedagogical content knowledge.\footnote{Richards, Jack C. Competence and Performance in Language Teaching. NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Print, p. 5}

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

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

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

Conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Federico Zannoni

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

Definitions and data

According to the data released by the Statistical Service of the Ministry of Education, University and Research, in the 2011/2012 school year at various levels of the Italian school system 755,939 students with non-Italian citizenship were enrolled, representing 9% of the total number of students. 44% of them were born in Italy. To get an idea of the impetuous progress of the school population with foreign origins, it is sufficient to consider that, in the 1996/1997 school year, that number did not exceed 59,389 (0.7%). Scholars have long debated about how to define the immigrants’ children, agreeing on the functionality of the paraphrase second-generation immigrants. It is an imperfect definition, disrespectful of the complexity of the universe of these new young people. We might ask: second generation in reference to whom? Since many of them were born in Italy, we could argue: why immigrants?

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

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

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4 “I am a supernatural entity, suspended between an angelic world and humanity, changeable and very elusive. A little good jinn, but also a bit pissed off. Because sometimes damned misunderstood”. Ghazy, Randa. Oggi forse non ammazzo nessuno. Storie minime di una giovane musulmana stranamente non terrorista. Milano: Fabbri, 2007. Print. pp. 121-122. All the translations from the Italian editions in the paper have been made by Federico Zannoni.
Maurizio Ambrosini defines the second generation as the children of at least one immigrant parent, born abroad or in Italy\(^5\), and therefore:
- Children born in Italy from foreign parents;
- Minors who arrived after the birth for family reunification;
- Minors who arrived alone;
- Refugee children;
- Children sent over for adoption;
- Children born in Italy from an Italian and a foreign parent.

A comparison between the different sub-categories reveals large differences with regard to experiences, problems of integration and available resources, as well as individual peculiarities of each child. The need to categorize allows us to bring order and to be less disoriented by the excessive heterogeneity, providing a basis on which to strike up conversations and reflections that can be characterized with sufficient rationality. Rumbaut\(^6\) defines:
- Generation 1.25: minors who arrived in Italy after twelve years of age;
- Generation 1.5: minors who arrived between six and twelve years old;
- Generation 1.75: minors who arrived in pre-school age;
- Generation 2: children born in Italy from foreign parents;
- Generation 2.5: children born in Italy from an Italian parent and a foreigner.

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

The integration factors

*The personal stories of immigration*

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

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

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

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

The relations with the countries of origin

“Il viaggio spinge le persone a sperare che in un altro Paese, in un altro clima, in un’altra lingua, troveranno quello che manca là dove sono. Spesso ho
percepito gli amici che partono come gente che si libera da una prigione. Perché la libertà sta sempre dall’altra parte. Finché l’altra parte non diventa la tua dimora. Allora il viaggio verso l’altrove che non esiste ricomincia.\(^8\)

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

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

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

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

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

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

\(^9\) “Now I am a perfect foreigner. When you are so foreign, you look at everything in a different way. Sometimes, being condemned to look from the outside gives rise to a great melancholy. It’s like coming to a family dinner and not to be able to participate; a frosty
The boys and the girls who regularly travel to the places of their origins can maintain relationships and interactions with relatives and old friends also through physical contact and are not limited only to phone calls and virtual chat: “It is clear that the distance cools down relations. My relatives now look at me differently. I honestly do not know what they really think, but I feel this difference”, admits Cristina, and adds: “The last time I went to Moldova I felt different from my peers, from my former classmates: in the way of thinking, or even in the way they dress, or in the interests that I have now. I felt a little different also due to the fact that here I feel a lot of pressure, I have so many things to think about, while they are at their home, they think more about having fun, maybe to do those things which are done by young people. When I lived there, we were in close contact, I used to meet them every day, it was another kind of relationship. But now, if I go there, I talk, I say my things, but I feel the distance, the diversity”.

The everyday experiences

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


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

10 “Up to what length is a skirt permitted? Below the knee? And a little above? Can vinegar be used to flavor foods? Cakes and snacks with a low percentage of alcohol? May I eat them? And what about lard in certain types of bread? Does it send you straight to hell? To list only some of the more mundane dilemmas. And is it credible that all these problems are raised by a little ‘Milanese’ girl? Is she a true Muslim? Who can decide it? Is there a license, a certificate? If yes, let me know. It continues to rain, and the chaos inside of me
In Jasmine like in other boys and girls, the religious, cultural and generational affinities generate a tumult of identity that grows with the progress of their awareness. The teenager Hayat, born in Italy from Tunisian parents, is the protagonist of the previous novel by Randa Ghazy, Prova a sanguinare:

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

The children of the immigrants play with their Italian friends; when they become teenagers, they usually listen to the same music, they frequent the same places, they dress alike, they study the same things, they experience the same transgressions. They pursue the canons and the impositions of the same cultural model, generally they don’t want to imagine different behaviors and aspirations. Sometimes they are rejected and they develop oppositional positions, radicalizing their culture of origin, but this is increasingly rare. At the same time, even the most
integrated boys and girls continue, with varying degrees of intensity and awareness, to be bound by the contents of the parental culture, in search of an identity that can increase self-esteem and social recognition. Ahmed Djouder, a former boy of the French banlieues, complains:

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

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

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

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

\textit{Successes and failures at school}

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

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

\textsuperscript{13} “Gogol now knows that his parents have lived their life in America in spite of all that was missing. He has spent years to hold off his origins, his parents to bridge that distance as best as they could”. Lahiri, Jhumpa. L’omonimo. Trans. Claudia Tarolo. Parma: Guanda, 2006. Print. p. 331.
(Penalizzanti a livello sociale). Accepted as workers, they couldn’t express claims or protests and they had to limit the manifestations of attachment to their own culture within their home. Their priority has been, and continues to be, to gain money to help relatives and to give their children a better future, to be built in Italy starting from education, which is considered as the essential gateway to find jobs of higher prestige and security. Ahmed Djouder’s words can be applied to the foreign families in Italy:

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

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

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

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

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


\textsuperscript{16} The boys’ and girls’ speeches reported in the paper are part of the results of a qualitative research carried out by Federico Zannoni in the province of Reggio Emilia and Ferrara through in-depth interviews with 31 boys and girls with migrant backgrounds, attending secondary schools (14-22 years old). Cf. Filippini, Federica, Genovese, Antonio, and Zannoni, Federico. Fuori dal silenzio. Volti e pensieri dei figli dell’immigrazione. Bologna: Clueb, 2010. Print.
that each student brings with him/her, in part to the evidence that most likely young Cristina is right: some teachers “do not know exactly how to proceed, maybe they feel a bit intimidated”. Teachers feel disoriented, lost and insecure in dealing with these pupils; the well-established educational and relational strategies do not work anymore. Society has changed, and students with it. It is no longer possible to think in categories, it is not correct to distinguish Italians from foreigners, because these pupils are new, different individuals, that escape anachronistic membership criteria.

Discussion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lucia Salvato

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

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

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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1 Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan (Italy).
2 An example of a brilliant social thinker is Zygmund Bauman. His latest works are about social changes in the so called “liquid modern world”, which reflects an age of uncertainty; cf. Bauman, Liquid Life, 2005; Liquid Times, 2007. In the German field Niklas Luhmann’s study of the social system in modern society (“systems theory”) is also being applied by sociologists all over the world; cf. Luhmann, Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft 1997.
(1991) and J.R. Searle (1979; 1995), and it begins with the teachings of the Ancients, especially Cicero and Aristotle.

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

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

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

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

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

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


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

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

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

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8 Many are the ways in which communication occurs and simultaneously changes people. They can be summarized according to three main levels. The informative and the emotional involve superficial or transitory changes, while the third level regards a long-lasting change in the behavioral patterns (hábitus) in everyday life; cf. Peirce, *Collected Papers*. 1931, 221-226.
9 For Peirce, a habit is an “acquired law”, equivalent to a “disposition”, which is similar to “some general principle working in a man’s nature to determine how he will act”; Ivi, 1932, 100.
of tossing aside old ideas and forming new ones’. As observed in the encounter of the students with Michelangelo’s fresco, such a conversion is “always consequent upon impressive experiences”, which bring human habits into “an active condition” by creating “a habit of changing habits”. Moreover, this habit change makes students “learn how to learn”, and this can “sustain a lifelong desire for learning”, both in the individual and in the social sphere.

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

Jemand fragt
bist du auch Taucher
tauucht du auch in dir
nach dir

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

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

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11 Ibidem.
13 Lutz, Bleistiftgespinste. 2006, 87 (‘Someone asks/are you a diver too/do you also plunge into yourself/towards yourself’).
15 Ibidem; cf. Ivi, 293, 347.
they question it and enrich it with their personal experiences, carrying into it their own accents and expressions, thus creating a “dialogizing background”.

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

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

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

Untertauchen und wieder auftauchen
erst viel später
vor einer unbekannten Küste.

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

16 Ivi, 358.
18 Cf. Ducrot, Dire et ne pas dire. 1991, 4-8, 11-14.
19 Lutz, Bleistiftgespinste..., 44 (‘To dive and come up again/much later/in front of an unknown shore’).
a wider context, the one regarding his future work. The poem actually conveyed to him the moral principle that people can reach their goal only if they are ready to struggle and to spend the required time on it. Moreover, as graduation theses are an important step in the social life of students, this young man produced a virtuous model for his future way of working with people inside society.

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

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

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

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

1.2.2. ‘Social Change’ Through Prose: Franz Kafka

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


\(^{21}\) “Scorre intanto il fiume/del mio sangue vermiglio alla sua foce:/e forse il dono che puoi darmi, il solo/che valga, o vita, è questo sangue: questo/fluir segreto nelle vene, e/battere/dei polsi, e luce aver dagli occhi; e amarti/unicamente perché sei la vita.” Ivi, 769.
similar challenge was offered to an entire group of students on a Master’s degree course. In addition, as the course was on expressive techniques of German as a foreign language, the short text *Gemeinschaft* (‘Fellowship’) by Franz Kafka was proposed.22

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

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

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

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

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

24 The inestimable power of man’s desire was expressed by the American writer Don DeLillo in the opening of his novel *Underworld*, “Longing on a large scale is what makes history”, and it was somehow explained with following words: “The game doesn’t change the way you sleep or wash your face or chew your food. It changes nothing but your life”. Cf. DeLillo, *Underworld*. 1999, 11, 32.  
26 Ivi, 112sq.
experienced a similar situation in their lives and how they had reacted, if they had perceived that their closed circle was suffocating, and if they consequently had desired to expand it. As they felt involved in the content of the story, they reacted by answering openly. All of them had lived through a similar situation, but they admitted that their encounter with Kafka’s words had enabled them to better judge the past event. They became aware that the rejection emerges from a negative attitude (hábitus) toward people and life in general, and destroys any possibility of experiencing new worlds.

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

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

1.3. Concluding Remarks

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

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

What does this “exceptional social service” consist of?

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

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27 As underlined by Benedict XVI, the experience of beauty “leads to a direct encounter with the daily reality of our lives, [...] transfiguring it, making it radiant and beautiful”; Benedict XVI. Meeting with Artists. 2009. Not surprisingly, the ‘world of the books’ has been seen as the sole key to comprehend ‘the book of the world’; cf. Serrano, El mundo de los libros ilumina el libro del mundo. 2009.
29 Searle, Expression and Meaning..., 77.
30 Ivi, 90.
31 John Paul II. Letter to Artists....
soul” and “the unity of the self”. Indeed, the exposure to beauty predisposes the viewer to the good and the true, and this is profoundly edifying because it enables people to recognize the difference between beauty and ugliness and, consequently, between good and evil, “making the soul graceful”. This pedagogical recognition consists of the change that the individual experiences in life and which actually starts in the soul.

According to Solzhenitsyn, since beauty is a privileged route to both the true and the good, art is important in helping the modern world because it has a profound impact on a person’s moral character. This is the original contribution which artists offer to the history of culture. Not surprisingly, in The Idiot by Dostoevskij, one of his characters asserts that the world will be saved by beauty. Moreover, works of art and the beauty they convey, understood in the light of the Ancients, enable the viewer to experience ‘the joy of knowing’, which is intellectual enjoyment. This joy allows people to come into contact with their true selves, with their longing to be united “with the True, the Good, and the Beautiful”, and this desire causes a sort of “remaking of the self”, a redirecting of one’s own life “to the true good and the ultimate telos”.

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

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33 Ivi, 92.


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

Rosita Maglie and Annarita Taronna

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

1. Introduction

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

With this in mind, the research attempt here is to demonstrate that what we need in prospective teacher education are not better generic strategies for “teaching multicultural education” or “teaching for diversity”, but rather productive ways of constructing progressive, holistic and engaged pedagogy, as suggested by hooks (1994: 15). Specifically, she promotes a notion of praxis as a combination of reflection and action which requires teachers to be aware of themselves as practitioners and as human beings if they wish to teach pupils in a nonthreatening, anti-discriminatory way. Thus, the goal of any teacher should be to develop self-
actualisation and intercultural competence through the “decolonisation of ways of knowing” (hooks 2003: 3) and systematic self-critical inquiry. Shifting from theory to practice, this paper has a fundamental research aim: to train PPETs to develop intercultural competence through multiethnic children’s literature. Such authentic material can lead teachers in general to deconstruct most of the stereotypes of major vs. minor ethnic groups, religions and gender identities, white vs. black people(s), that have frequently been passed down from generation to generation as a result of ignorance and misunderstanding. Of course, introducing such literature to pupils requires background information prior to the reading of the text, as we have attempted to demonstrate in the next paragraphs related to the discussion of specific teaching strategies. Specifically, we use ‘historical’ biographies to help PPETs learn that individuality can be a source of a community’s strength and can be taught and shared at schools with their pupils, hoping the books chosen will inspire both teachers and children to be themselves and make a difference. To this end, we propose specific children’s books about race issues, religious diversity and gender diversity as key-examples of the way multiethnic literature can be incorporated in primary classrooms to develop reflective cultural, national, and global identifications, that is to say intercultural competence, by which pupils as well as teachers can acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function within and across diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, language, and religious groups.

2. Developing intercultural competence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 This guide contains some detailed proposals on how intercultural language education should be inserted into European language programmes.
(c) developing critical awareness; (d) knowing how to discover cultural information; and (e) knowing how to relativize oneself and value the attitudes and beliefs of others.

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

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

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

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

- Discover and clarify the pupils’ own cultural view points: begin by ascertaining their own beliefs, values and practices. To appreciate other cultures, they must be clear about their own;

- Learn to be more culturally competent: examine the cultures represented in the community where they live. See what cultural groups there are which they know very little about or that they would like to learn more about;
- Examine the stereotypes about other groups that they have in the classroom or that they have encountered: help them do a self-inventory to find out what they know about any stereotypes associated with those groups;
- Read about people from other cultures and languages they are supposed to meet, work with or teach about;
- Consider the importance that this content can have when planning and designing their future classroom experience.

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

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

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

6Although this proposition gains prominence in the forethought of the *Souls of Black Folk* (1903), DuBoishad already introduced the concept of the color line-as follows below – in his “Address to the Nations of the World” on behalf of the first Pan-African Congress: “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line, the question of how far differences of race-which show themselves chiefly in the color of skin and the texture of the hair-will here after be made the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost stability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilization” (1900a: 125).
role he assigned it in African and human history (Butler, 2000; Fontenot, 2001; Juguo, 2001; Rabaka, 2001). The colour line is established when Europe problematizes the existence, meaning, colour, worth, and status of the peoples of colour by constructing a bio-social identity called race (Gordon, 2000a) which became in the world’s thought a designation of devaluation, degradation and domination. The system of social practice which is organized around this concept of race on the national and international level is racism. It is important here to distinguish racial prejudice and racism: the former is an attitude of hostility and hatred toward persons and peoples based on negative assumptions about biology and culture; the latter is the imposition of such attitude as social policy and social practice. In other words, racism is a system of denial, deformation and destruction of a people’s history, humanity and right to freedom based exclusively or primarily on the specious concept of race” (Ibid., 305).

The revolutionary aspect of Du Bois’ thought also lies in his conception of Africa as the place of origin of the basic culture of African Americans in the larger sense of the descendants of Africa who are “spread though the Americas and now writhing desperately for freedom and a place in the world.” It is these Africans in the diaspora who with their brothers and sisters on the African continent, must imagine and pose a new paradigm of human freedom rising up in resistance, wage fierce and heroic struggles for liberation and higher levels of human life. This is precisely the kind of social action endorsed by the protagonists of the three stories, that is Rosa Parks, Sojourner Truth and Nelson Mandela, who represent what Du Bois advocated as a new paradigm of struggle to expand the realm of human flourishing in the world, and through this, to pose and bring forth the best of what it means to be African and human in the fullest and most promising sense. In this light, it can be useful to retrace a brief profile for each of the selected historical biography in order to detect some of their common features: Sojourner Truth was a prominent abolitionist and women’s rights activist. Born a slave in New York State, she had at least three of her children sold away from her. After escaping slavery, Truth embraced evangelical religion and became involved in moral reform and abolitionist work. She collected supplies for black regiments during the Civil War and immersed herself in advocating for freedpeople during the Reconstruction period. Truth was a powerful and impassioned speaker whose legacy of feminism and racial equality still resonates today. Similarly, Rosa Parks is best known for her refusal to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery, Alabama bus in 1955. Her action galvanized the growing Civil Rights Movement and led to the successful Montgomery bus boycott. But even before her defiant act and the resulting boycott, Ms. Parks was dedicated to racial justice and equality. She remained a source of inspiration and, most importantly, an activist for the remainder of her life. Finally, Nelson Mandela was born in 1918. He became President of South Africa in 1994 and retired in 1999. He was in prison from 1962 to 1990 for trying to overthrow the pro-apartheid government. After he left prison, he worked to achieve human rights and a better future for everyone in South Africa. He never wavered in his devotion to democracy, equality and learning. Despite terrible provocation, he never answered racism with racism.
In the light of these premises and motivations, the English teacher educator can give a brief introduction to the history of South Africa, the African diaspora and the settlement of African-American communities in the US in order to prepare PPETs to read/listen/translate/retell/discuss the suggested stories. They can work in small groups to examine the main events concerning the South-African and African communities under discussion through the support of a world map. They are also invited to use Google to search for additional background information such as recent surveys which indicate, for example, that South Africa’s multi-ethnic society is reflected in the constitution’s recognition of 11 official languages which is among the highest number of any country in the world, or that there are approximately 36 million African Americans in the US, representing 12.3 percent of the total population. On this background, PPETs will be able to a) learn some relevant stages of the history of the South Africa and the US with a crucial focus on the system of racial segregation in both countries; b) make comparisons between past immigration flows to the US and the current ones to Italy mainly from the North African coast; c) detect/learn/teach cultural references attributed to the ethnic communities under discussion; d) become more familiar with the biographies and stories of Rosa Parks, Sojourner Truth, Nelson Mandela and with the collective value of their protest; e) experience a recreation of some of the feelings, challenges and decisions facing people in this country as they lived in a system of legalized segregation and discrimination. Furthermore, some crucial language objective can also be achieved since PPETs will be able to a) understand the hegemonic role that English as the colonizer’s language has played in South Africa and its co-existence with the other official languages; b) recognise African-American not just as a vernacular variety of the English language but as a language of its own; c) teach multicultural varieties of the English language through the use of children’s multiethnic texts as those discussed here.

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

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

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

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

Moreover, knowing about the beliefs and practices of people who share this world with us is vital to the future (Douglass, 2000). In Italy, where people of many nations, faiths, and ethnicities live together, all of us as citizens have the responsibility to learn about one another so that we can unite in positive social conduct and accept civic education as a way to reinforce the practice of equity and religious freedom enshrined in the Italian Constitution. But again these principles
are hollow if we do not know one another. More broadly, learning about the history, cultures, and belief and value systems of peoples who follow and practice a religion different from ours, engenders respect and understanding. Going beyond wary, silent tolerance, the guidelines and mandates in current state and national standards should allow parents to send children into classrooms where they learn about their own faiths and those of their classmate sitting at the next desk, the neighbour, the future colleague, or the world at large, in an academically and constitutionally sound framework. To become dialogue-driven change activists, PPETs thus should learn personally both to appreciate cultural/religious differences, and to understand that all people share common values. We propose a viable practice in teaching English as a foreign language about/through religions which presents religious figures objectively and authentically in the context of the sacred narratives told through the ages. Using accurate terminology from within each faith, we try to enter “the realm of the between” (Buber 2002: 243), the “Third Space” (Bhabha 2004: 56), i.e. the classroom considered as a possible arena for interreligious dialogue and change. In particular, Buber’s characterization of the realm between, as well as Bhabha’s notion of Third Space add invaluable insight to the understanding of intercultural/interreligious interaction in “dialogue didactics”:

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

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

4.1. Developing teaching methods for educating PPETs on religious issues

We propose a picture book Little Monk’s Buddha which is made up of eleven stories of Buddha’s births in animal form. These pleasant stories – which are simple and easy to understand – revolve around the importance of compassion and kindness, not only typical qualities of this religion but also civic values which can be applied to everyone and to any society. The other two picture books are about MaaSaraswati and MaaLaxmi, two Hindu goddesses. We decided to insert two female figures to give voice and space to a minority women’s religious representation and focus on their valuable contribution to religion. We introduce MaaSaraswati to investigate the role of symbolism in Hinduism and to investigate multicultural varieties of the English language and literature in the classroom, and MaaLaxmi to analyze what role the Hindu goddesses play for Hindu women and their ideas about equality between men and women, and to better understand the roots of today’s Hindu women’s subjection to men.
Through such teaching strategy based on these stories PPETs will be able to a) learn some relevant aspects of Buddhism and Hinduism with a crucial focus on English for Religious Purposes; b) make comparisons between the two faiths and Christianity; c) detect/learn/teach the interconnections between religion(s) and gender attributed to the communities under discussion.

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

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

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

To achieve c) PPETs can use picture books (e.g. Sheela’s story in MaaLaxmi about her subjected condition towards men) together with contemporary articles (e.g. SharadaSugirtharajah’s “Hinduism and feminism: some concerns”, TahiraBasharat’s “The Contemporary Hindu Women of India: An Overview” and Hanna Hedman’s“Hindu Goddesses as role models for women? A qualitative study
of some class women’s views on being a woman in the Hindu society”) and the
web (sites and videos) to develop and explore multiple points of view and
expository writing styles around religions according to the genre chosen and to
engage in critical discussion of complex religious issues concerning gender
specifically. Such investigation can involve Hinduism from an issue-centred
perspective (in particular, the role of women; marriage equality) and aims to
produce a discussion about religions and womanhood.

5. Getting to Equal: Promoting Gender Equality through Children’s Queer
Literature

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. Concluding Remarks

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

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

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

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

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

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THE EDUCATION REFORMS,  
PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS AND SOCIAL CHANGES IN BULGARIA

Yanka Totseva

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

The methodology of the study includes two phases:
- To analyze the changes of the two main laws of the school legislation – Education Act and the Act Level Education, General Education Minimum and Curriculum;
- To analyze the public attention and media publications reflecting the actions of the Ministry of Education and the attitudes of students, teachers, parents, citizens and their organizations (nomination committees, NGOs, trade unions, parties and other formal and informal associations) to proposed or made changes.

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

As primary sources for gathering empirical data on public reaction were used: On-line newspapers, websites of organizations and institutions, personal blogs, YouTube videos, internet forums, Facebook.
Key assumptions (supposition): A review of the short (just over 20 years) new history in the development of the Bulgarian state on the path of democracy and European values in secondary education shows two persistent trends:

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

1. Lack of continuity in education policies

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

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

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

2. Resistance to change

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

Mother tongue education in Bulgarian schools

The trend of resistance to change in education legislation can be traced back to 1991 when a new Constitution was adopted which provides every Bulgarian
citizen with the right to study their mother tongue. Article 36 of the Constitution stipulates that "Citizens who do not speak Bulgarian as their mother tongue have the right alongside the compulsory study of the Bulgarian language to learn and use their own." [Constitution, 1991]

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

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

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

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

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

In 2012, the subject again came to the fore in connection with the statements of representatives of the same party regarding the need to change the electoral character of the mother tongue and its introduction as a compulsory subject. "During the discussion of the Law for school and pre-school education, which GERB note as mine, Lyutvi Mestan (then deputy leader of MRF) said: "Movement for Rights and Freedoms" will not support it because the problem of mother tongue education in schools is still in the fields of speculation. He stressed that the quality of educational services is much reduced, and therefore reduces the number of children who want to learn their mother tongue." [Antonov, 2012]
In support of the proposed evolution change two Turkish NGOs – Federation "Justice Bulgaria" and Shumen Association "House of Culture" began a campaign for introducing the obligatory study of Turkish in Bulgarian schools. [Myumyun, 2013]

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

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

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

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

**Required exams**

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

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

Students due to graduate in 2003 prepare strikes against exams. They manage to collect over 70 000 signatures against the "ongoing reforms and uncertainty in secondary education". In a special statement to National Assembly and The Ministry of Education future graduates present their wish to complete their
secondary education upon the curricula in with that have been adopted. As a result of the public pressure in February 2002 Ministry proposes to hold two instead of three required exams as civic education exam was abandoned. [Two instead of three]

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

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

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

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

**Teachers' strike**

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

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

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

A conclusion that can be drawn after reviewing the comments and forums is that parents generally did not support the strike because they are concerned about missed school time. On the topic of teachers’ demands for increased wages once
again, society was divided and opinions were extreme – from full support to a total
denial of the teachers' demands for wage increases.

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

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

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

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

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

In December, the “National network for parental involvement in the
educational process” [Press Conference: Mandatory, 2012] organized a series of
protest meetings in Sofia, Pleven and several other towns.
Prior a debate on the Draft Law in the National Assembly the Syndicate of Bulgarian teachers expressed a favorable opinion towards it. "Many of the parents who oppose compulsory education of the four years olds children go against certain policies out of stubbornness", said the President of the Syndicate of Bulgarian teachers to Information Agency "Focus". [Press Conference, Takeva, 2013]

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

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

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

Since the political party GERB’s government resigned on February 20 and the National Assembly was dissolved the Law was not adopted. In late May, members of political party GERB resubmitted the Law. The new Minister of Education Klisarova got involved in the debate on a TV show in August 2013 where she said that she would make a complete review of two of the most controversial decisions of the previous government, "the 4-year-olds children will not go to school, they are not ready for it, and let them play." She explains that the new government would focus on improving school education for 5 and 6 year olds and motivates this decision with the fact that there is not enough places for 4-year-olds in the compulsory kindergartens, and the government does not have the money for it."[4-year-olds, 2013]
In an interview published in the newspaper "Trud" from August 2013 Vanya Dobreva – Chairman of the Committee on Education in National Assembly commented on the text for the introduction of compulsory education for the 4-year-olds. She said: "I use "education" because the Draft itself includes the term "preschool education". Education is different from "upbringing" and "preparation". In the first case a learning process is presumed, and in the second - the creation of skills. I am against compulsory education and pre-school process for the 4-year-olds … Generally compulsory is characteristic of totalitarian societies that deny rights, educate in a matrix principle, etc. Democratic society does not act that way. It guarantees the right of choice. As far as minorities are concerned, the system should be stimulating rather than obligating and punishing them." [Petkova, 2013]

Main conclusions

1. Diachronic analysis shows that there are inconsistencies in the policies for secondary education reform, which are reinforced by the lack of public consensus on their usefulness, social value and efficiency.
2. Education legislation is created within the Ministry of Education and external experts have the final word.
3. There is a cycle of 4 years (one term of government), within which a new law of education is prepared and it cannot be adopted by the National Assembly.
4. Public discussions at the end of the last century were passing mainly through television but in the last few years the share of online digital discussions is growing, consisting of comments after articles in digital newspapers, forums and in social networks.
5. Although politicians express their willingness to publicly discuss the changes in education legislation, the majority of their decisions are taken independently of the reviews submitted by citizens, education experts and representatives of non-governmental organizations concerned with education and children.
6. For the last twenty years no proposed change in the law was met without resistance.
7. In all problematic issues participants are strongly polarized depending on their personal and corporate interests. The most vivid examples are the two strikes – against matriculation exams and the Teachers’ strike. In the first case students, their parents and the wider community were all against the implementation of the article of the law adopted which was based on European priorities and practices, especially the long-term benefits of taking state exams. In the Teachers’ strike against them was the government as well as large number of parents. Teachers’ unions were unable to meet their demands or to provoke a positive dialogue.
8. Every social change meets resistance due to the specifics of the Bulgarian culture, which has a strong avoidance of differences, but also due to the inability of the authorities to create the conditions for broad public discussion in which to engage experts and politicians to argue convincingly the need for change and to identify long-term and short-term benefits as well as possible negative effects.
The results of the analyses and conclusions allow us to say that the hypothesis for lack of continuity in the educational policies and the resistance towards change on the part of stakeholders were convincingly proved by many arguments and facts. On the other hand a global conclusion can be made that an educational reform can succeed if there are positive attitudes formed and agreed upon by all stakeholders and actors in the civil society. Undoubtedly, the Bulgarian school is in need of legal prerequisites for its optimization and innovation, but they will not happen until the change gets support from inside and outside. Also most conducive to the formation of public opinion among large groups of people in recent years are digital media and social networks. Their influence can no longer be ignored by those in power, and should be used for the purposes of information and communication campaigns in support of education reform, legislation and innovation in educational practices. Opinions and recommendations by teachers, educational managers and experts have to be appreciated and to be a base for agreement on the issue of the importance of education to achieve national prosperity and receiving international recognition in the scale of European education.

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

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

Introduction

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

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

Sociological theories of social change

Within sociological research, some of the re-occurring concepts related to social change are: contradictions (Marx, Eder), differentiation (Smith, Spenser, 1 South East European University, Tetovo, Macedonia
Durkheim, Marx), rationalisation (Weber), integration, conflict (Eder, Smelser and Eisensdtat) and internationalisation (Marx, Lenin, Smelser).3

Thus, Marx sees changes as arising from contradictions and conflicts, based on differentiation of economic and social positions. On the other hand, Weber sees rationalisation as the guiding principle of labour division that brought unprecedented societal changes4. On a different note, Eder5 speaks of contradiction as underlying both differentiation and rationalization, and also as a mechanism that initiates or continues communication, which in turn initiates a sequence of change6. The idea relates to Discourse Analysis (DA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in the process of understanding of social change, whereby changes are related to language use as a form of both discursive and social practice. Therefore, it is highly important to study language in this context, as DA and CDA do.

Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis

**DA as theory of social change**

Developing a linguistic model for studying social change, Fairclough7 asserts that language changes both reflect and initiate social and institutional changes at large. In this respect, he identifies: a) changes in the discursive events and b) changes in the societal order of discourse. The latter are guided by three broad tendencies: democratization, which reduces and eliminates overt power markers of asymmetry, commodification, by which reconceptualisation and restructuring of certain social domains in terms of commodity production, distribution and consumption is achieved.8 Commodification is additionally explained as an “application of means-end rationality to discourse which makes it more bureaucratic”,9 and which is achievable by the third tendency – technologisation of discourse. Here, “instrumental rationality is applied in the reshaping of discursive practices in order to improve performativity”.10 This tendency may be interpreted

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9 Although not explicitly stated by Fairclough, the Weberian legacy in this idea of treating bureaucracy as particular case of goal oriented rationality imposed on organisation is more than evident.
as serving the ends of reproducing dominance and unequal power relations in society. In this respect, it is CDA’s seminal role to carry out research aimed at exposing such power imbalance, and thus bringing about change.

**CDA as practice of social change**

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

**Discourse model**

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

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\(^{13}\) Ibid: 23-27.


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

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

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

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

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

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Data analysis

This model will be applied to three sets of empirical data: a) informal interviews focused on the text(s) about “changes in education”, and b) a news agency interview with the Macedonian Prime Minister in which he speaks about changes in many social domains, among which the newly introduced education reform of “external testing”, and c) the objections to this disciplinarian technique of examination21 by the Youth Education Forum (YEF), as manifested in new releases, articles, analysis and a petition.

Interview summary

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

During the interview, many of the interviewees pointed to the poor quality of pupils’ knowledge, which was explicated by lack of parental care, by reduced scope and depth of learning materials, unmotivated/ing teachers, and the dying habit of reading due to computerisation. All these factors were also used as intertextual building blocks in the accounts of the disastrous level of school education, evidenced among other things, by the low thirty percent baccalaureate passing margin. This devastating practice was related to the paradox involved in the Macedonian Law on obligatory high school education22 which, by stating that secondary education is obligatory, aims at increasing the number of educated citizens.

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

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

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

To test or not to test: A hegemonic struggle

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

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

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

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

25 Although the Prime Minister does not speak of changes per se, it may be assumed that reforms, as processes of institutionalised changes inevitably cause changes in both social and discursive practice.
26 By way of contextual implication, one can easily infer the referent of the phrase being the Government’s political adversary – the Social Democratic Party.
people feel happier and solve their problems”, “the law states that any trained employee will be financially rewarded” or “the new law forbids employment without prior testing”, etc.), implying the very impartial role of the Government as a bureaucratic institution facilitating the necessary ongoing process of (positive) change. On the other hand, personal clauses like “in the process, we attracted many enemies”, “we faced serious critique”, and “we are aware that the reforms demand victims”; ideationally create a military metaphoric frame whereby the opposition is represented as irrational (“they hysterically screamed”), and the Government as the true Samaritans who suffered ungrounded criticism for their well intended, righteous decisions.

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

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

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

27 The repetitive use of the attribute is a signal of Government” uncompromising position on the issue.
28 In this phrasing by YEF makes it is hard to miss the disciplinarian nature of the process in Foucault’s sense, as he in Discipline and Punishment succinctly explains that the technique of examination which combines surveillance and sanction is a normative one that enables classification and punishment, in which the display of power is realated to establishing the truth (Foucault, 1995, pp.184-194).
29 All arguments expounded can be found on www.mof.mk and www.radiomof.mk, the specific documents used are listed in the reference list.
discernible goal seems to be assessing the degree of objectivity of the teaching staff\(^{31}\).

In terms of breaking the legal frames, YEF points to several weaknesses, such as: breaking legislative procedures, situations undefined by the law, the law being discriminatory towards teachers of obligatory subjects, etc. The objections based on technical failure in execution are more numerous, some of them being: tests spilled into public, computer system failure, test questions that were not part of the curriculum, and so on\(^{2}\).

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

## Some concluding remarks

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

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\(^{34}\) Ristovski, Spiro. “The external testing was successful, hope next year will be even more successful”, interview with the Minister of Education, Mr. Spiro Ristovski, Tocka. 28 Jun. 2013. Web. August 2013. \(\text{http://tocka.com.mk/1/}\).


\(^{36}\) A1 ON. “Ministry of Education: MOF was late with the reaction”, 23 Jul. 2013. Web. August 2013. \(\text{http://a1on.mk/wordpress/archives/}\).
Government, examples of which are endless: the costly and scandalous project “Skopje 2014”, the passing of the annual budget with no parliamentary debate, the control over almost all media, to name but a few.

In this respect, one can easily see that there is a strong bureaucratic tendency to impose institutional changes that are argumentatively challenged, but one can also easily observe the overall contradictions, textual, interactional, and ideological. And yet, these contradictions are somewhat different than what theory states since they bear neither (positive) change potential, nor initiate communication.

Finally, the whole discourse of social change, one example of which is education, is perplexed with signs of difference – positive evaluation versus negative, the big vision of future progress versus problematic details like technical obstacles, depending on the text producers. More importantly, it is overwhelmed with signs of power abuse like naturalizing the ideology of education’s importance. At times, this dominant voice is being challenged, proving that discourse on change is also a site of struggle, although not always successful. What seems problematic in these opposing representations is that reality cannot follow two texts, and since their synthesis has practically shown to be impossible, it remains to be discursively and politically contested regardless of the disheartening circumstances.

WORKS CITED


