

Strong Slavic and Iberian Identity Syndrome in the Perspectives of Glocalization

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Abstract

My assumption is that, although those identities which are weak, anti-essential, mobile and easily “open” to new phenomena are particularly popular in postmodern epoch, in Iberian and Slavic cultures strong identities, which are essential, stable and coherent, play an important role in social life. It is caused mainly by such factors as adherence of the cultures to the difficult past (inheritance, tradition and memory), producing of rich repertory of their own language systems and symbolic signs of another type and devotion to values, which maintain the sense of separateness or even uniqueness. I analyze the most important tensions which exist nowadays between those strong and weak cultural identities as a result of integrative and globalization processes, which are reinforced by the expansion of the media. The focus of my reasoning is, as the most current interpreting perspective, the phenomenon of glocalization, which is understood as globalization (globalizm, globality) strongly connected with localization (localism, locality). I consider how in social practice tensions between cultural identities are used “to open” locally to globalization and simultaneously participate in global processes which “open” to locality? The main concern then, is to produce new rules of intercultural communication.

Keywords: Identity, glocalization, communication directed

Introduction

Identity has fascinated all great humanists and probably each of them has created its definition, explaining at the same time that each person wants to know answers to such questions as: ‘who am I?,’ ‘whom do I have to I be?,’ ‘whom can I be?,’ – however, there is and will never be any satisfactory answer. On the one hand a person wants to know what kind of freedom he or she has and what borders are not to be crossed in order to feel just enough safe and secure, and have a sense of being rooted someplace. On the other hand the person feels and knows that complete self-identification is impossible, because that which one thinks ‘belongs ethnically’ to oneself is

phenomenon, unable to cease, and hence they announce the twilight of identity. Twenty years ago Jean-François Lyotard claimed that “we live in a time-space where no identity exists but only transformations” (Lyotard, 1988: 31). However, the majority take less radical stands on this case, proving that these days identity does not have to be constructed level after level, floor after floor, along an increasing line of knowledge and skills, for modern man more often makes use of his or her right (which he or she had never before) to choose an identity. Modern man renounces an outmoded identity, puts on the actually recommended one, or simply invents a new, often untrue version of identity (as is seen in electronic communication). In other words, postmodernity creates many opportunities to go in for peculiar, not very rigorous “identity training,” due to the fact that nowadays a person more easily renounces “the comfort of certainty” (Bauman, 1996: 32).

Undoubtedly, making reference to Heidegger, modern people’s identities quickly “travel many roads,” but we also observe the renaissance of state identities (new countries are still being built), national (nations till now enslaved articulate their existence), religious (new religions are emerging, sects and fundamentalist movements are springing up), political (ideological organizations come into existence and nationalisms develop), professional and other ones. In many regions of the world an answer to axiological opacity, an increase in ambiguity, cultural and anthropological uncertainty, information smog and universal pluralisation, is the belief in a nation’s uniqueness, mythologization of superiority of one’s culture or race, celebration of one’s identity in some respect, self-enclosing in certain determined contents and forms, hence, an articulation of what sociologists call a ‘razor’ type of identity which alludes to historical experiences, solid axiological systems and the hierarchy of social roles (Miczka, 2006: 181-182). No wonder such things take place; after all “there is no identity without otherness” (Smolar, 2002: 14), ever, not even in postmodernity.

Otherness can be articulated in a way which is less radical, but clear, decisive and considers different identities’ arguments and needs. It is what I would like to focus my attention on while making references to some transformations of modern Iberian and Slavic identities. In my opinion, Slavic and Iberian characteristics, despite some essential differences, are comparable phenomena in many respects. In the era of globalization they are affected by similar vicissitudes due to historical similarities; moreover, they have to react to the same cultural, communication, economic, ideological, ecological phenomena etc., yet, as far as possible, they want to retain their own specificity, identity and sense of authenticity.

On the grounds of cultural studies and sociology the division of identity of all sorts into strong and weak varieties, is very functional, since it

illustrates changes in a quite accurate way, referred to as tensions, as described by Kellner, between modern and postmodern identities. Modern identities were strong in the main, hence they have been based on many solid grounds. They were integrated internally and able to articulate clearly in all conditions and all types of disputes. Slavic and Iberian identities should undoubtedly be considered as such together with particular nations' identities creating them. They both are essentialist, integrated by geographical environments, languages communities, similar historical events, and identical religions and systems of values. Nonetheless, in modern times, much has been written and said only about weak identities and seldom did these have any chance for crystallization in social practice. It was not until the 1960's, that tensions between strong and weak identities became real. Thus, nowadays an awareness of possible choice between them is becoming natural, which, as I've mentioned earlier, certainly does not mean any universal and total freedom within this scope.

Borders for strong identities are derived from objective facts such as climatic and geopolitical conditions, historical memory, especially living tradition or religious ideas. They form the basis for the construction of identity's matrix which is guarded by authorities – the educated, churches, politicians, artists. Matrices create the patterns of Spanish, Portuguese, Polish, Czech characteristics etc., conveyed in communities, nations and cultures 'all the way through,' in accordance with an educational intention and the law. However, antiessentialist approach to identity is based on more and more popular, in the course of the last decades, belief that Spanish, Portugal, Polish or Czech characteristics are purely cultural constructs, even practical ones, hence individual ones, which consists in their self-defining and not requiring any basis on some general principle. An individual simply accepts and then chooses Iberian characteristics, Slavic characteristics or any other ethnic and cultural identity, reserving the right to change his or her mind as to this self-identification.

Strong identity is essentialist, which means that its center is composed of components differentiating it from other identities, integrating it internally and constantly strengthening its forces which work centripetally. What matters in the first place is languages and national literatures based on them, and axiologies, religions and philosophical conceptions. All Iberian and Slavic nations have worked out their separate languages and literatures and base their axiologies on christianity. Their ethnic philosophies stemmed from disputes between idealism and materialism, especially strongly emphasizing their own national uniqueness, even messianism, and their cultural and civilizational missions.

Strong identity is also always considered as a historical function, which means that the Iberian and Slavic past is carried on in the family,

language, state, art and science. What results from cultural research is that the more traumatic the experiences that occurred in the history of particular communities, the greater the cultural range their national literatures developed; the more often were communities forced to define their determined relations with their neighbours and other cultures and languages, the more carefully high societies worked out their philosophies of identity, that is the philosophy of portugality, spanishness or polishness. As an example can serve the fact that in the 16th century Luís de Camões defined in his epic poem *The Lusíads* (*Os Lusíadas*) the Portuguese nation as the one which “gave new worlds to the world” due to its sailors (Klave, 1985: 77). This feature of portugality became an important point of reference for all future generations. The religious reformation accomplished by Jan Hus at the beginning of the 15th century, became for a long time the basis for not only the Czech moral renaissance but also a way of opposing the German impact in Czech lands. At the beginning of the 17th century Miguel de Saavedra Cervantes, while parodying the Medieval chivalric novel *Don Quixote*, created at the same time proverbial characters of positive aspects of Spanish symbols. The Polish Romantic poets Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki and Zygmunt Krasiński were not called bards by accident. They became the spiritual leaders of their nation, thus designating, for the following years, the way of apprehending an artist’s objectives in a nation fighting for independence and their “Slavic soul.” Examples can be multiplied.

While redefining the Iberian and Slavic identities, history is always recalled. However, it needs emphasizing that it is a very nostalgic history one refers to, in order to cope with contemporary disasters, difficulties and cultural ambiguities referring to old disasters, difficulties and ambiguities. In this way, at the beginning of the 20th century, among others Teixeira de Pascoaes, alluding to the energy of his sailors’ race, recognizes saudaba (nostalgia replaced with the grandeur of a country) as an ‘emotion-idea’ due to which traditional portugality should compose an intellectual and emotional ground for the nation’s renaissance (de Pascoaes, 1913; 1915). In the middle of the previous century, while analysing spanishness from the perspective of donquixotism, Miguel de Unamuno wrote these characteristic words: ‘Me duele España’ (‘Spain hurts me,’ Castillo, 1989: 13). To this day Polish intellectuals and artists are convinced that the main ailment of Poles is ‘Romanticism sickness’. Jan Patočka, in his work entitled *Who are the Czechs?* – among other things, makes references to husitism. Historicism is hence a constant value of the Iberian and Slavic identities (Patočka, 1997: 42-56).

Finally, strong identities are exclusive in character. Seeing oneself from the standpoint of some Iberian or Slavic center sanctions excluding ‘strangers’ from it, today known as ‘others.’ Certainly the methods of

exclusion are always important. The Spanish, Portuguese and the majority of the Slavic nations, while trying to work out some methods of a dialogue favouring the recognition of cultural differences as enriching one's own identity, long ago rejected any solutions of this problem that would incorporate force (not always voluntarily). I think that contemporary humanist thinking developing in the Slavic and Iberian countries, has been moving for a long time in a direction that Józef Tischner describes in the following way: "So far we have accepted a principle that we retain our identity through emphasizing differences. But identity can also be retained through emphasizing similarities. Discovering that the other worships values I carry deeply in heart, I begin to be aware of them in a better way and I acquire some deeper sense of them." (Tischner, 1999: 78).

Such understanding of ethnic and cultural identity has a long tradition in Central and South-Western Europe. As early as 1880's Ernest Renan noted the fact that a nation is a community with a glorious past; however, above all it has to anticipate a common future and possess a programme of action also together with others (Renan, 1882). Half a century later José Ortega y Gasset argued that turning a nations' existence to the problem of defending its identity, means placing it in a second-hand bookshop (Ortega, 2005: 88). In the light of the hitherto reflections it can be stated that strong Iberian and Slavic identities defend themselves from (more popular at the beginning of the 20th century, universalized, especially through omnipresent electronic media) weak identities (antiessentialist ones, rejecting history and in accordance with the idea of total universalism enabling all people to come into its range). By contrast, considering the stands of Renan, Ortega and Tischner, it might be thought that their identities are open to others in as much as to maintain effectively their own essentials, histories and possibilities of exclusion.

These days it is hard to settle this issue explicitly, because of acute tensions between strong and weak identities. Such tensions did not take place in the past. Globalization processes, for which one of the most important mainsprings is audiovisual mass culture, are a source for them. Globalization is seen as an accumulation of loops of positive feedback in an unusually intricate networks which encompass individuals, companies and states. It is crystallized in the form of various dualities, paradoxes and contradictions, to which attention is paid by the most eminent representatives of this unusually intricate phenomenon. As dominant features they point to conflict theory (A. Giddens), uncertainty (R. Robertson), simultaneous integrity and fragmentariness, homogenization and heterogenization, universality and particularism (S. Huntington), structural hybridization, understood as an expansion of heterogenous and above-national cultures (J. N. Peterse), a restratification of the world, that is, a new world-wide stratification and

hierarchization of various forms and fields of social life (Z. Bauman), and dissemination (D. Held, A. McGrew, D. Goldblatt, J. Perraton). Some scholars also see globalization as forms of transculture (W. Welsch) and metaculture (G. Urban).

A common factor in scholars' thinking regards an ambivalence set as a major and indispensable feature of this phenomenon. From each research perspective it is seen that globalization automatically sets going localization, location, and a need for rootedness. In other words, for example, international and cultural integration creates regionalisms and localisms, fashion - celebration of difference, vibrant identity – strong, essential identity, excessive dissemination – strong yearning for accumulation, dynamism, determined search for rationality and the like, etc. The same phenomena can be both local and global in character; in this way, localism becomes unindistinguishable from globalism.

Just that multi-dimensional aspect of globalization, deciding upon openness, nonlinearity and permanent transformation of the phenomena, which most often is perceived as inextricable combination of two dynamic and only seemingly independent phenomena, Roland Robertson called glocalization (globalization + localization) (1995). And it is glocalization in which the basic source for modern Iberian and Slavic identities (hence fundamental to international communication) can be seen – as I am persuaded like many sociologists, anthropologists and cultural studies scholars. Zygmunt Bauman, who also uses this concept, thinks that glocalization is only a cultural phenomenon from the field of globalization and in the first place means the marginalization of local communities, the disappearance of public spheres which used to be centers for the creation of meaning, and describes a sense of hopelessness and impossibility of going beyond localness (Bauman, 2000: 71). However, scholars dealing with globalization more often argue that it is one-sided and limited perspective, which does not consider its very essence, just because globalization loses its profound sense without localization (localness, localism).

Globalization, deprived of its 'opposite,' would very soon become a new totalitarianism. Though there are enough proponents of such views, these days John Naisbitt's stand best corresponds to social practice. He thinks that even if people think globally, they should make basic changes at local stages, and in spite of the fact that acute tensions, which exist between globalism and localism, evoke a sense of hopelessness and openness, then, according to his views, openness enriches each person, and thanks to a sense of uncertainty more can be achieved than it is done as part of stability. As early as in 1982, in the first edition of his *Megatrends*, pondering the future of the world, he wrote with full conviction about the duality of this phenomenon: "Our economy's globalization will be accompanied by the renaissance of

language and cultural identities.” (Naisbitt, 1997: 9). B. R. Scott presents the essence of globalization in a different way, considering globalization – twenty years later – as a play in which all ‘players’ win: the win-lose perspective is replaced with the win-win position (Scott, 2001: 77).

From the reflections aired so far it appears that regardless of a pessimistic or optimistic attitude towards a changing order of the world, glocalization is most often understood as a juxtaposition of freedom and enslavement, as an opposition of safety and risk and of anonymity and openness. In other words, glocalization steers everything it encompasses, including Iberian and Slavic identities, which are at the center of my attention, in two directions. Thus, it seems that there is no other possibility of intercultural communication development, than simultaneous openness to both globalization and glocalization, that is, a transformation of identity through tensions created by manifold feedback.

In this light the theses formulated by Arjun Appadurai concerning the globalization of cultures sound very credible. Appadurai suggests that these days the prevailing global civilizational tendencies, such as electronic media expansion and mass migrations, not only are the characteristic of the new technologizing of the world, but they also constitute phenomena which exert a major influence on people’s imagination, which forms the basis for the construction of cultural identities (Appadurai, 2005: passim). According to his views, globalization is not - which it was thought to be during the 1990’s – ‘a story of cultural homogenization,’ but concerns in the main what happens in local communities, which are simply ‘infected’ by the media with things happening someplace. One general consequence for the comprehension of changes taking place in intercultural communication is to consider culture not as a coherent construct, as was done quite recently, but rather as a great set of differences. To utter these differences becomes a way of differentiation of one community from another, which in fact contributes to the creation of separate cultural identities (Canclini, 1990: passim).

Nowadays, a major cultural change is taking place. The change lies in the creation of global culture, often rendered as ‘global revolution’ or ‘global circulation.’ However, Kazimierz Krzysztofek convincingly argues that ‘a hierarchical relation, central cultures-marginal cultures, has been replaced with the relation global culture-local culture,’ which are understood both as national cultures and regional ones, that is identity cultures (Krzysztofek, 2002: 122). Therefore, glocalization consequently changes traditional orders of the world and what comes to the fore is intercultural communication which in the first place articulates cultural identities and cultural differences. In the center of the reflection on the essence and characteristics of contemporary intercultural communication appears a phenomenon which can be described in the following way: on the one hand, global tendencies cause

the danger of assimilation, uniformism, standardization to hispanicness and slavicness, which may influence the disappearance of diversity within social life. It can take place through absorption of communities and ethnic or regional groups, and thereby the loss of their subjectivity and cultural identity as part of that community. I consider a danger of standardization, absorption and a loss of diversity as an absolutization of globalization, for on the other hand, within Iberian and Slavic cultures a renaissance of regionality and subjectivity is taking place. More often particular ethnographic, language, ethnic communities become aware of their territorial, historical, social and cultural identities as part of great international and state communities. They are making efforts to decide for themselves in an authentic way, to have guarantees and respect for subjectivity, and a development of their cultural heritage (Miczka, 2015: 50-76).

Conclusion

To sum up, at the beginning of the 21st century intercultural communication is crystallizing in a simultaneous realization of the two conceptions of communicating: ‘communication directed to the world’ and ‘communication directed to the immediate neighbourhood.’ The components of the first conception are the following: an idea of cultural pluralism; the ability of the Iberian Peninsula and Central-Eastern Europe’s inhabitants to perceive changes on a large scale; a shaping of thinking in the perspective of ‘global systems’; an analysis of problems seen as positive aspects of ‘controversy’; and development of identification with other cultures. By contrast, the components of the other conception are: popularization of the idea of little homelands among Iberian and Slavic citizens (these ideas are lacking in extremism and fundamental attitudes), opportunities to see changes at the micro level, shaping of thinking in the perspective of ‘local system,’ an analysis of problems in terms of ‘similarity’ and ‘acceptance,’ and learning awareness and acquiring knowledge of one’s own strong identity.

A unique aspect of this kind of communication is shown in tensions which exist between the two conceptions, for they can be relieved predominantly by means of dialogue. It is the dialogue, which is the essence, axis, sense and aim of intercultural communication in a world torn between globalization and localization. The dialogue should point out and describe tensions between Iberian and Slavic strong and weak identities, and new, weak cultural identities, but it also should explain their origins, and also accept or reject them.

Thus, what will decide upon the effectiveness of intercultural communication is what we still do not know how to carry out, namely, dialogue. In dialogue the role of current, strongly ideologized and controlled

models of communication will be minimized and new principles of the mutuality rule will be worked out.

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