

Everyday Multiculturalism: Individual Experience of Cultural Diversity

ANTONELLA POCECCO

1. Introduction

According to some ideological visions, social cohesion is jeopardized by the growing process of cultural fragmentation, as well as by the revival of cultural specificities, so powerful as to destroy national identities.

The re-emergence of cultural specificities is often presented as a new phenomenon¹, reasoning that we have moved from a monocultural social configuration, characterized by a strong national identity (in the sense given by Modernity of overlap of culture, religion and territory), to a multicultural one, characterized by a weak national identity and by the demand for recognition of particular identities, even in an aggressive and conflictual way.

The discovery of this cultural heterogeneity is very frequently accompanied by the return of ideologies and social practices inspired by exacerbated forms of nationalism, regionalism, localism and, in extreme cases, of xenophobia and racism. On the other hand, it is just as often the case that forms of defensive closure

¹ This change could be essentially explained by the transition from an *industrial society* to a *post-industrial* one and by the end of the ideological conflict of the Cold War.

by minority cultural groups emerge, a closure that engenders different kinds of self-marginalization situations, even self-ghettoization.

In addition to this, it is now undeniable that the panoramas of the group identities [the *ethnoscapes* – recalling the Appadurai's term (2012, 67)] no longer represent tightly territorialized groups, spatially confined, unaware of their history or culturally homogeneous. This assumption implies that the relationship among cultures becomes increasingly more fluid, and ambiguous in its practical consequences, manifesting an antithesis between a radical relativism on the one hand, and an all-encompassing claim to universalism on the other.

Recalling the radical idea of a jeopardized social cohesion, multiculturalism would be the sign of a deep crisis of contemporary societies. The “management of the cultural difference” is not only a Western problem, but it is particularly acute in liberal democracies which have inscribed respect of cultural difference into their Constitutions and made the integration of difference a milestone of their legitimacy (and, sometimes, one of the main arguments in defence of their civil and moral superiority)². The solution has been, for a long time, to “dilute” the notion of difference into that of equality.

This theoretical step is flawed in a fundamental way, based on a perception of difference as a transitory phase toward a unit of higher order (toward a mechanistic vision of the social equilibrium), and as an individual and private fact, with which the institutions have not to deal. This “individualism of difference” reveals some important consequences:

- First of all, it demonstrates that the political sphere is no longer able to provide adequate and satisfying answers to the claims of the civil society.
- The political sphere seems compromised in its legitimacy, effectiveness and perspectives.
- The political sphere can barely maintain the central position that modernity has conferred to it.

In fact, all the problems related to a multicultural society unequivocally converge in the direction of a questioning of the philosophical project of modernity: “(...) the ideas and practices of democratic citizenship – as conceived by modernity – are no more able to provide significant steps towards the resolution of the problems associated with the political coexistence of different cultures” (Donati 1996, 247 – my translation).

² As Walzer said: “The construction of the European Union, the increasing mobility of Europeans and the presence in Europe of significant populations from other parts of the world, have opened a debate on the Old Continent that the United States know since long time. (...) It is undeniable that the questions, the concerns that were American become European too (...)” (Walzer 1999, 55).

Accepting the notion of post-modernity, one has thus to consider the transition from a multiracial society to a multicultural one.

Belohradsky suggests that modern society is multiracial in the sense that racial and ethnic differences are offset by common belief in the cultural unity of mankind: culture has a compensatory role. “The post-modern condition means that, above all, the compensatory role of culture has failed (...), all the discourses centred on mankind are perceived as mere rhetoric masking the imperialism of Western industrial civilization (...) the post-modern condition is the contradictory process in which democracy slowly adapts to the multicultural ideal” (Donati 1996, 264 – my translation).

Considering the foundations of society, one immediately realizes that a *culture* (national, ethnic, etc.) never constitutes a monolithic block, but it is nourished and remains alive thanks to the contact and inputs of other cultures, thanks to an uninterrupted “contamination” – in Nancy’s sense – from outside. A culture is a *mélange*, its vitality derives from the convergence of elements originated from other cultures: “Cultures are not summed one to each other: they meet, they mingle, they alter, they configure” (Nancy 1993, 13 – my translation)³. And it contains in embryo respect for difference, which also increases the same multicultural respect within a nation: a nation that it is not defensive but which contains multiple identities.

Every culture is, therefore, *multicultural in itself*, “(...) not only because there has always been previous acculturation, and there is not a pure and simple origin but, more deeply, because the act of culture is itself an act of mixture: it deals with, transforms, diverts, develops, reconstructs, combines, fixes” (*Idem*).

At the same time, the rediscovery of the cultural specificities has opened wide-ranging analytical horizons and new interpretive perspectives in terms of understanding current social and political dynamics. However, this also implies a substantial risk, namely giving rise to a univocal culturalisation of reality, deforming the same cultural categories and explaining many conflicts solely through cultural variables.

Are we therefore at the end of economic and/or ideological conflicts, and at the onset of real culture wars? This does not seem the most appropriate approach for dealing with the complexity of contemporary societies, but it appears, once again, the synonym of a reductionism that is sometimes naive but often conscious. It is perhaps more productive to think that we are at the end of the era of ideological debates and the beginning of the debates on society *tout court*.

³ One has to bear in mind, among several examples, such as *paper*, *gunpowder* and *print* found their origins in China some centuries before than in Europe, similarly *spaghetti*, or as much of the philosophy of ancient Greece has reached Western Europe thanks to the Arabic translations that were subsequently translated in Latin or in the various vernacular languages, or the *Greek P*, etc.

2. The visibility of cultural diversity

As we have seen, cultural diversity is not a new phenomenon: societies are based, in their very nature, on a complex variety of differences and specificities, whether these are grounded in religion, politics, class, gender, etc.

The problem of transition from a monocultural to a multicultural society is therefore a false problem: a society remains multicultural despite more or less explicit attempts of homogenization and its supposed monoculturalism is nothing other than an intellectual construction. In this sense, the intellectual and political elites hold considerable responsibility in the creation, organization and diffusion of myths and mythologies, collective imaginaries and cultural attitudes, oriented to either univocity or plurality.

The question must be then formulated in other terms: it is not so much the transition from a monocultural society to a multicultural one that undermines the political and institutional sphere, but its *visibility*.

The contemporary public visibility of cultural diversity is linked to the growing social and economic fragmentation of Western societies. The two movements appear intimately linked: “The greater the gap between the proclaimed egalitarian ideals and observed inequalities, the more people seem to seek refuge in exclusive identities and cultures that will try to be recognized” (Martiniello 1997, 26 – my translation). When, on the contrary, this gap is less pronounced, individuals will refer to open identities and cultures.

The current manifestation of cultural diversity has many faces, which are bound together both by the fact that culture forms an intermediate space between the individual and the abstract nation, and by its capability to claim public recognition (ranging from a symbolic dimension to that of politically separate dimension from the rest of society).

Assuming that each culture has been therefore confronted with others, producing forms of coexistence or conflict, why do we now perceive differently this relation between cultures? And, more importantly, why do we perceive it so dramatically?

As stated previously, this is essentially a problem of *visibility*.

I use the term *visibility* in a metaphorical sense, departing from a more stringent definition, namely: “the quality or state of being known by the public”.⁴ Rather, considering the several theoretical contributions about the concept, I want to contextualize it in the framework of multiculturalism in contemporary societies.

Consequently, I define *visibility* as:

⁴ Merriam-Webster: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/visibility> (Accessed November 15 – 2014).

- The capacity of the media to impose on to public opinion the prioritization of certain issues/problems over others (creating consequent shared collective visions of reality): “In an increasingly complex world, turned into a sort of global arena, where cultures come together, collide, and also strongly impose themselves for fear of disappearing, the media provide symbolic resources for establishing belonging and the worldwide stages for the performance of rituals and identity acts (including terroristic ones)” (Giaccardi 2012, 144 – my translation).
- The demand for recognition of groups in the public sphere on the basis of their cultural belonging [“Visibility is closely associated to recognition” Brighenti writes (2007, 329)].
- The possibility of each person experiencing in daily life the dimensions of the phenomenon and its implications: “As opposed to policy-oriented multiculturalism focused on group based rights, service provision and legislation, the everyday multiculturalism perspective explores how cultural diversity is experienced and negotiated on the ground in everyday situations such as neighbourhoods, schools, and workplaces, and how social relations and social actors’ identities are shaped and reshaped in the process” (Wise 2014, 156).

Visibility is therefore “(...) a metaphor of knowledge, but it is not simply an image: it is a real social process in itself” (Brighenti 2007, 325).

There are – of course – many causes that contribute to the contemporary visibility of cultural diversity. At least three main reasons can be stressed: (i) the changes which have occurred in the quantity and quality of migration flows, related to the changes both in the countries of arrival and of departure; (ii) the crisis of citizenship as model related to the nation-state and (iii) the globalization processes which considerably differ from the universalisation processes.

To these explications, I add a further one which reiterates what has been said above: the relevance of the media spotlights on the phenomena connected to immigration and multiculturalism. Media representations are directly reflected in the formation of collective perceptions, fears and insecurities that settle in civil society and are then revised and/or manipulated by political society⁵. Media content that seems to describe reality in a neutral and objective way, on closer examination is imbued by stereotypes, prejudices and forms of ethnocentrism, uncritically empowering the paradigm of a radical ethnicisation of most phenomena affecting contemporary societies⁶.

⁵ I think here to the influence of Italian media, by which immigration is prevalently presented (and explained) in terms of social emergency, loss of autochthonous identity and deviance.

⁶ Paradigmatic in this sense are the concepts of “tautology of fear” and “ethnicisation of crime” coined by Dal Lago (2005).

Returning to the first hypothesis, the relationship between cultures has been transformed because some important changes have occurred at the levels of quantity and quality of contemporary migration flows: current migrations have little in common with those of the past, mainly as a result of poverty. Contemporary migration flows become essential for many individuals, regardless of their economic or social status: migration becomes synonymous with the possibility of a new way of life, a solution to a dramatic existential precariousness. On this point, one may easily recall the recent massive flows of refugees and asylum seekers throughout Europe, which are the evidence of a peculiar migratory push that finds its reasons in conflictual and emergency situations of their countries of origin.

Immigrants appear today “(...) younger, often literate and politicized. The generation of silence and repressed anger is now replaced by a generation determined to not be fooled”, Ben Jelloun wrote (1998, 59) as early as the end of Nineties. And, undoubtedly, this new situation necessarily requires an urgent and different analysis about how the coexistence of different cultures changes over time, in regard to every peculiar social context. (Not forgetting that temporary hospitality towards immigrants is, for the host society, something quite different from their full and conscious integration, as well as that of their descendants).

A significant example of this trend concerns the Muslim presence in Europe.

In countries like France, England and Germany, Muslim communities are a historical presence, even if initially they were almost invisible, sunk into a “double silence”. On one side, these communities were not for a long time an object of study and so were cloaked in the silence of theory, largely due to the complexity of the dynamics of post-colonialism and the relationships with the Islamic world. From another point of view, in spite of the massive flow of Muslim immigrants as a result of the de-colonization and post-colonialism processes, Islam has been “enclosed in the suitcases” (Massari 2006), lived in the private sphere and not transferred in the public sphere: it has been a silence due to the immigrants themselves.

Since the Seventies, specifically in the second half of the decade, the situation has changed and a form of visibility of the religious dimension of these immigrant communities has taken shape. Massari (2006) uses the evocative expression that Islam has been “removed from the suitcases” to point out its socialization, and the fact that the Muslim religion is beginning to be made public and collectively lived, giving origin to a peculiar way of being Muslim in Europe.

“From the original *migratory* Islam, transplanted onto European soil (...), it has transitioned, not without conflicts, tensions and misunderstandings, to a post-migratory Islam (...), European, indigenous, *Europeanized* (...), transnational” (Ibid., 33 – my translation) (7).

⁷ My italics.

Since the early Eighties, the variety of experiences of living Islam in Europe became an important field of study, and there has been a sort of systematization of the various suggestions and analyses. Islam is in fact now the second largest religious presence in Europe, but it is born “migrant”, it is an unintended consequence and not (as a certain collective imaginary would like) the result of a planned strategy.

In these times, we are confronted with another, different visibility of Muslim communities in Europe, essentially engendered by post-11th September perceptions. Such perceptions include the idea of an Otherness with which any form of dialogue is impossible⁸. In such a context, it is useful to recall the results of some inquiries – carried out in Europe – that clearly highlight the changes which have occurred in the collective perception of the visibility of this cultural distance in recent years.

For example, in 2010, the majority of French and German interviewees have declared to perceive the presence of a Muslim community as a threat to the cultural identity of their own country⁹, have deemed Muslims and individuals of Muslim origin as non-integrated¹⁰ and have defined the influence and visibility of Islam as more important than it should be¹¹. Five years later, in 2015, two months after the attack in Paris on the editorial staff of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, a sample of 1339 French citizens declared itself in favour of the ban on wearing the veil or the Islamic headscarf in universities (72%), in favour of the prohibition on wearing the veil or the Islamic headscarf by a person accompanying children on a school trip (68%) and the elimination of halal food in school canteens (55%)¹². More recently, an international survey¹³ revealed that

⁸ This imaginary is clearly rooted in a strong trivialization of the controversial hypothesis of the clash of civilizations as theorized by Huntington, for whom “(...) the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great division among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural” (Huntington 1993, 22).

⁹ More specifically, the 42% of respondents belonging to the French sample and the 40% to the German one have responded in this way. The question was: “Would you say that the presence of a Muslim community in France/Germany is...?” (Ifop 2010, 4).

¹⁰ In detail, the 68% (48% – *No, not really* + 20% – *Not at all*) of respondents in the French sample and 75% (55% – *No, not really* + 20% – *Not at all*) in the German one. The question was: “Would you say that today Muslims and people of Muslim origin are well integrated into French society / German society?” (Ibid., 7).

¹¹ In detail, the 68% (48% – *No, not really* + 20% – *Not at all*) of respondents in the French sample and 75% (55% – *No, not really* + 20% – *Not at all*) in the German one. The question was: “Would you say that today Muslims and people of Muslim origin are well integrated into French society / German society?” (Ibid., 7).

¹² The question is: “Personally, are you in favour of or opposed to...?” (Ifop 2015, 5).

¹³ “The 2015 Pew Research Center survey was conducted after the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre and the simultaneous attack on a Jewish grocery store, perpetrated by radical Islamists in Paris. But, in the wake of these events, there is no evidence that the atrocity sparked new public antipathy toward Muslims in

the Italians appear as the most critical of a Muslim presence in their own country (61%), followed by the Poles (56%) and the Spanish (42%).

3. The aura of multiculturalism *versus* everyday multiculturalism

Some time ago, while I was surfing the Web, I came across a site¹⁴ where a lapidary title stood out: “The multiculturalism we like”. This title attracted my curiosity and I read the following lines: “A girl with gentle Indian somatic features, who dresses with French elegance, speaks with British accent and loves Italian food. The multiculturalism we like”.

To make clear my critical approach, I immediately state that this is not the multiculturalism I like: it seems to me rather the glossy cover of a long series of stereotypes and more or less conscious trivializations – hiding thereby the complexity of the challenges involved in multiculturalism.

The term *multiculturalism* still unveils several ambiguities: widely used, even abused, it does not appear clearly defined, because in its articulations different schools of thought, and even different world views, are confronted.

In spite of this, multiculturalism seems to become the obsessive refrain of several media contents and political discourses to which one can assist every day, and one of the analytical *topos* most frequently discussed in the academic field, putting it in correlation with other concepts such as democracy, citizenship, globalization, etc.

Generally, multiculturalism is a concept employed to describe diversity, that is the demographic and cultural diversification of societies, by referring to a multitude of social, political and philosophical attitudes. Every society, in fact, develops rules and procedures of a more or less explicit political action in order to practically manage its own cultural diversity and plurality of identities. This represents the comprehension of multiculturalism as a *descriptive term*, while its interpretation as a *prescriptive term* refers to ideologies and policies promoting diversity and/or its institutionalization. In this sense multiculturalism is the expression of a society which recognizes the desire of individuals to express their own identity in the manner they see fit.

In any case, multiculturalism – accepted, celebrated, denied, refused – imposes itself, as a “historical concept of change of both institutions and policies within Western democratic societies” (Kastoryano 2000, 164 – my translation).

any of the six European Union nations surveyed. In fact, favourability of Muslims actually improved in some nations. At the same time, French sympathy for Jews increased” (Stoker et al. 2015, 21).

¹⁴ See http://www.liberamenteonline.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=216:il-multiculturalismo-che-ci-piace&catid=28:brownsversion&Itemid=60 (December 2014).

Moving from the intrinsic dualism of multiculturalism (as description and as prescription), my critical approach is developed in the light of some considerations that seem unavoidable for the purpose of a proper understanding of the concept, of its relevance and significance, as well as of its direct consequences on everyday life.

Firstly, the time has come to put a stop to the media spectacularization (and not only to theirs) and to try assume a greater intellectual strictness. This is important because of the urgent and even dramatic nature which characterizes some recent and growing episodes of discrimination and racism in Europe. Secondly, one has always to remember that multiculturalism is not simply an interpretative category of contemporary cultural complexity (and certainly not the only one!), but a common and daily experience in which political, ethical, moral, solidaristic and, of course, cultural elements and references simultaneously play a role. And it is perhaps this multifaceted dimension which generates the “explosive” characteristic of multiculturalism: the simultaneity of levels and questions involved, so one can rightly talk of *everyday multiculturalism*.

Related to these assumptions, and in order to remove the misleading *aura* of multiculturalism as new “golden age” of society, it should be stressed that the dialogue and the confrontation with the Otherness is a difficult practice. It needs not only of the will of the individual, but also requires a substantial capacity to put oneself in question, to accept that one’s own cultural references are to be compared to others – a capability which is not easy to develop immediately. At the collective level, the density and variety of requests posed by multiculturalism to societal structural organization may be summarized at least in two fundamental questions:

- Is it then possible to reconcile the democratic exigencies, traditionally linked to the nation-state, with an idea of supposed homogeneity, which encompasses cultural diversity and which is empirically verifiable in everyday life?;
- How do we reconcile the demand for recognition of cultural specificity with one of the basic postulates of any democracy, namely the equality of all citizens?

To focus the issue of everyday multiculturalism more clearly, I would like to mention an episode from my own experience which occurred a few years ago.

I was in the Gorizia railway station and, suddenly, a boy furtively approached me and fanned under my nose a train ticket. The ticket had Ventimiglia (on the far side of Italy, at the border with France) as its last destination, and the boy, gesturing, asked me on which platform the train had to depart. I answered him in Italian, then in English, and then in French: nothing to do, clearly the boy did not understand any of these languages and he repeated the question in a likewise unknown one. Then, he shook his head and walked away.

Some minutes later, I saw him again, confused in a group of people (men, women and some children) and I noted that all of them were trying to “be invisible” in the bustle of the station. Indeed, when I smiled to one of the children who was staring at me, the mother (or at least, the woman I presumed to be) pulled at him, as though to protect him from my sight.

Thinking back to this episode, I came to the conclusion that it was a group of illegal immigrants, probably Kurds, abandoned by an unscrupulous smuggler (*passieur*) with a ticket for a journey to nowhere.

This experience forced me to immediately reflect on some questions. The first concerns the real experience of *incommunicability*, because the sharing of a language is in itself a bridge for the sharing of a universal identity (the identity of human being); its lack is crucial in making almost impossible mutual understanding and dialogue. Moreover, if in that case I had wanted to help these people, maybe accompanying them to a voluntary association or centre, I would have immediately revealed their condition as clandestine, making visible their situation of illegality in the framework of Italian legislation.

This reveals a conflict between the obligations of citizenship imposed on everyone by national belonging and a fundamental ethical sense of solidarity and support. The experience of Otherness often leaves an individual facing a deep contradiction between the principles of the identity of *civis* [as citizen of a specific political-cultural community, participating to the sense of civic loyalty]¹⁵ and of the identity of human being, as subject and social actor, with its distinctive cultural frames.

It is at this point that the second question clearly and unambiguously emerges, inherent in *the distance between practice and theory*. The exaltation of multiculturalism as the golden age of a society can be a merely theoretical exercise when everyday life constrains each one of us to resolve (or at least to try to resolve) situations involving a lack of communication, or conscious/unconscious forms of politically correct racism, or radical refusal of the Otherness based on fear and disorientation, skilfully amplified at a social level.

An interesting notation in this regard is proposed by the writer Ben Jelloun (1998, 27 – my translation) when he employs the sociological concept of *threshold of tolerance*: “(...) from a certain percentage (from 10% to 11%) of foreigners in an inhabited space, the risks of non-tolerance towards the Other are real and can lead to tragedies”. He continues, touching a sensible point regarding the collective mentality: “(...) there would be foreigners less foreign than others”. With this statement, he points out that the attitude towards immigrants is not

¹⁵ See the interesting text of Waldron (2000).

unique: there are immigrants perceived as “less different”, “less problematic” than others. In Italy, a Spanish, Portuguese or Greek immigrant arouses less mistrust and fear than an immigrant coming from the Arab world or Africa, because the collective perception is that of a small dissimilarity from the dominant culture. Likewise an immigrant from US or Canada will not be considered as “extra-communitarian” (non-EU citizen), although he is, compared to an immigrant from the Maghreb or Asia. As well emphasized by Ben Jalloun, “(...) the greater the distance between two cultures, the more the Other becomes a screen of anxiety and rejection” (Ibid., 83 – my translation).

On another perspective, Otherness may become the object of what I call “cultural paternalism” (a post-modern version of a not-too-veiled ethnocentrism) that similarly estranges individuals far from the consciousness of the universality of rights and duties. The intuition of the recognition and of the confrontation with Otherness (with the Stranger, the Different) is trivialized in contingent phenomenon, leading to uncritical acceptance, that is, lack of recognition: “The ‘different culture’ of immigrants, foreigners (extra-communitarians) must be protected as *Curiosum* and, when it touches the religious sphere, it should be accepted without entering because in the sphere of the sacred it is better not to interfere” (Rusconi 1997, 1011 – my translation).

Cultural paternalism is the contemporary form of the denial of coevalness, mainly expressed in accidental altruistic attitudes or temporary empathy, that nevertheless lead individuals to conceive of the Other as not belonging to their time or world, de-individualising and relegating him to a dimension of total extraneousness and dissimilarity, even inferiority. So, in its uncritical interpretation, multiculturalism acts in the direction of a radical relativism, a growing cultural mosaic of non-communicating identities and produces new inequalities: it aims at tolerance, but it generates intolerance.

The uncritical acquiescence of all the elements of a diverse culture is not the framework in which intercultural interactions may really take place: this cultural bulimia or cultural zapping swallows the same notion of Otherness. On the contrary, individuals must recognize that everyone brings with him a “particular mental software” and they have to try to understand, without prejudices or mental closures, others’ values, without disclaiming their own.

4. Conclusions: changing paradigms

Being a citizen of a global world does not automatically mean being a global citizen: “Passing from one civilization to another is the equivalent of a mutation, a metamorphosis that involves suffering and work, and that has nothing to do with

the noiseless slip of the jet plane that connects all parts of the planet” (Bruckner 1994, 31 – my translation).

Participation in an era deeply imbued by flows of people, ideas, and information, does not automatically lead to share this era’s basic axioms, nor to decrypting its complexity. The sense of dislocation carried by the globalization processes can push people to adopt more or less overt forms of closure, to retreat into crystallized identities, a sort of social autism which could degenerate into the dehumanization of Otherness. At the same time, an uncritical acceptance is becoming a sort of new belief, in whose name forms of inequality and discrimination are equally practiced, nourishing the non-communication among cultural identities. It is in a such climate of disorientation that stereotypical social representations, demonisation of the Otherness, fears, etc. easily take root, because they allow a simplified reading of reality and therefore offer a sense of consolation (they make one feel to be on the side of the right). They are in fact the “less laborious” solutions to a contradictory everyday experience of cultural diversity.

A first solution would be to clear the analysis from misleading misunderstandings, which constitute the humus for a dangerous confusion and ideological manipulation of the concept of multiculturalism.

The first misunderstanding is the overlap of terms *cohabitation* and *coexistence* of cultures. One can readily point out how the use of the two words is not an innocent choice but, indeed, underlies precise semantic differences and then, on a practical level, specific social situations and relational dynamics. *Cohabitation* in fact means “live with”, to an active sharing of existential and referential systems, a mutual recognition of coevalness, a dialogic dimension, and so on. *Coexistence* focuses instead the simple “existence with” and the term can be conceptually pushed up to a “existence despite”, recalling cultural universes closed in themselves, impenetrable and incommunicable, stranger one to another.

The opposition between the two concepts stands out in translating multiculturalism as a source of individual/collective enrichment and incessant process, not a *status quo* based on a mechanistic definition of social equilibrium. Finally, the term *cohabitation* refers to a precise idea of culture, not considered a monolithic and unchanging whole, but one in constant transformation, as a mix of different elements from the beginning.

Another kind of confusion concerns the terms *integration* and *assimilation*.

Despite being a classic dichotomy in sociology, it is still possible to observe how these terms are – not infrequently – used interchangeably in media and political discourse. The case of integration and assimilation is different to the previous distinction because even though the etymological roots and theoretical definitions are clear, the practical implications are nevertheless not equally evident. It is often noted that integrative practices can hide markedly assimilatory aspects,

or practices that provoke negative effects or dysfunctions – it is sufficient to make reference here to the debate about the consequences of Affirmative action.

The last consideration is that multiculturalism is not substantiated by abstract subjects, but by real individuals who live, experience and negotiate cultural diversity in their everyday situations, while not ruling out *a priori* the involvement of social and political structures. The meaning of everyday multiculturalism thus allows us to adopt a perspective that is “(...) both a way of observing and a way of conceiving diversity as it is lived on the ground daily by people” (Wise 2014, 156).

This process must necessarily be established at the individual level, as part of the relationship between the Self and the Other, where the Self does not exalt his uniqueness, making it absolute, and the belonging does not lead to emulation of the group.

References

- Anderson, Bridget, and Michael Keith, eds. 2014. *Migration: A COMPAS Anthology*. COMPAS: Oxford. Accessed January 20, 2016: <http://compasanthology.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/COMPASMigrationAnthology.pdf>.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 2012. *Modernità in polvere. Dimensioni culturali della globalizzazione*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.
- Belohradsky, Vaclav. 1996. "Polilogy: On postmodern space." In *The Annals of the International Institute of Sociology (Dialogue between cultures and changes in Europe and in the world)*, V: 264-266.
- Ben Jalloun, Tahar. 1998. *Ospitalità francese*. Roma: Editori Riuniti.
- Brighenti, Andrea. 2007. "Visibility: A Category for the Social Sciences". *Current Sociology* 55 (3): 323- 342.
- Bruckner, Pascal. 1994. *Le vertige de Babel. Cosmopolitisme ou mondialisme*. Paris: Arléa.
- Colombo, Enzo. 2006. "Multiculturalismo quotidiano. Verso una definizione sociologica della differenza." *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia* 47 (2): 269-296.
- Dal Lago, Alessandro 2005. *Non-persone. L'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Donati, Pierpaolo. 1996. "Different cultures, different citizenships? The challenge of a universal citizenship in a multicultural post-modern society." *The Annals of the International Institute of Sociology* V: 245-263.
- Giaccardi, Chiara. 2012. *La comunicazione interculturale nell'era digitale*. Bologna: il Mulino.
- Huntington, Samuel P. 1993. "The clash of civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72 (3): 22-49.
- IFOP 2010. *Regard croisé France-Allemagne sur l'Islam*, research realized for *Le Monde* in December 2010. Accessed June 10, 2015. http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/1365-1-study_file.pdf.
- IFOP 2015. *The adhesion to various proposals about the place of Islam in France*, research realized for *Valeurs Actuelles* in March 2015. Accessed June 15, 2015. http://www.ifop.com/media/poll/2981-1-study_file.pdf.

- Kastoryano, Riva. 2000. "Des multiculturalismes en Europe au multiculturalisme européen." *Politique étrangère* 65 (1): 163-178.
- Kylimcka, Will, and Norman Wayne. 2000. *Citizenship in Diverse Societies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Martiniello Marco. 1997. *Sortir des ghettos culturels*. Paris: Presse de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques.
- Massari, Monica. 2006. *Islamofobia. La paura e l'Islam*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. 1993. "Eloge de la mêlée." *TransEuropéennes* 1: 8-19.
- Rusconi, Gian Enrico. 1997. "Retorica del multiculturalismo e laicità delle istituzioni." *Il Mulino* vol. XLVI, no. 374: 1010-1017.
- Stoker, Brian et al. 2015. *Faith in European Project Reviving*. Pew Research Center. Accessed June 4, 2015. <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2015/06/Pew-Research-Center-European-Union-Report-FINAL-June-2-20151.pdf>.
- Waldron, Jeremy. 2000. "Cultural Identity and Civic Responsibility." In *Citizenship in Diverse Societies*, edited by Will Kylimcka and Norman Wayne, 155-174. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Walzer, Michael. 1999. "Le multiculturalisme au Cœur." Interview by Riva Kastoryano, Laurent Bouvet and Christophe Jaffrelot, translated from English by Laurent Bouvet. *Critique internationale* 3: 55-63. Accessed April 2, 2015. doi: 10.3406/criti.1999.1592 – url: /web/revues/home/prescript/article/criti_1290-7839_1999_num_3_1_1592.
- Wise, Amanda. 2014. "Everyday multiculturalism." In *Migration: A COMPAS Anthology*, edited by Bridget Anderson and Michael Keith, 156. COMPAS: Oxford. Accessed January 20, 2016: <http://compasanthology.co.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2014/04/COMPASMigrationAnthology.pdf>.