International Communication Gazette

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International Communication Gazette 2006; 68; 53
DOI: 10.1177/1748048506060115

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The International Communication Gazette
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LONDON, THOUSAND OAKS & NEW DELHI 1748-0485 VOL 68(1): 53–69
DOI: 10.1177/1748048506060115
http://gaz.sagepub.com

NEW FORMS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

Claudio Baraldi

Abstract / Communication is the basic concept in explaining globalization. Globalization can be observed as the worldwide expansion of a functionally differentiated European society through intercultural communication. In this society, since the 17th century, intercultural communication has assumed the form of a modernist ethnocentrism based on values such as knowledge, pluralism and individualism. During the 20th century, historical changes created the necessity for new forms of intercultural communication. In the last decade of that century, a transcultural form of communication based on dialogue was proposed as a basis for cross-cultural adaptation, a creation of multicultural identities and a construction of a hybrid multicultural society. However, this transcultural form creates paradoxes and difficulties in intercultural communication, mixing the preservation of cultural difference with the search for synthesis. Consequently, a new form of intercultural dialogue, dealing with incommensurable differences and managing conflicts, is needed to create coordination among different cultural perspectives.

Keywords / dialogue / ethnocentrism / globalization / intercultural communication / transcultural approach

Introduction

This article starts from the observation that the social phenomenon that we call globalization can be explained only through a communication theory that legitimizes its cultural interpretation. In the past, communication theories were used to explain one of the most important aspects of globalization, i.e. the function of mass media in creating a world system of information and their consequences in other fields. This use of communication theory appears reductive if we think of globalization in its complex cultural sense.

Adopting a general sociological approach based on a communication theory (Baraldi, 2003; Luhmann, 1984, 1986; Luhmann and de Giorgi, 1992), and expanding the widely diffused idea in intercultural relationships studies that communication is a central feature in cross-cultural processes (Kim and Gudykunst, 1988; Kim, 2001), it is possible to explain the most significant social processes observable in a globalized world, i.e. the most significant intercultural processes. This approach

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seems particularly appropriate to future explorations in the fields of world politics, international understanding and planning, peace and security.

The Communicative Meaning of Globalization and Glocalization

Globalization is a process creating interdependence among societies and cultures that were previously separated. Interdependence and intensity of relations in the world are the key terms in understanding how globalization has been observed by sociologists. Robertson (1992) defines globalization as the structure of the world as a unique set of meanings. Giddens (1990) observes that globalization gives an extraordinary intensity to social relations at a world level, resulting from different types of processes and creating interdependence in the world. Even if the expansion of economic markets and capitalism in the world has been the primary aspect underlined in globalization, it has quickly become clear that this aspect is combined with other processes, without linear causal relationships. Consequently, a more general 'cultural' understanding of globalization has been promoted by the majority of sociologists (Bauman, 1998; Beck, 1997; Giddens, 1990; Pieterse, 2004; Robertson, 1992; Tomlison, 1999).

The cultural perspective emphasizes the problematic connection between cultural innovation and the conservation of cultural traditions. Globalization means openness to cultural change and creates new opportunities for dialogue, but it also threatens the survival of cultural traditions. On the contrary, closure to cultural contamination maintains the plurality of cultures, but it prevents any meaningful dialogue among them. Both openness and closure create the value of diversity but at the same time they threaten the source of diversity. Both supporters of globalization and its sceptics look at the relationship between global cultures and local cultures, which Robertson calls 'glocalization'.

Glocalization derives from a societal evolution from a previously non-globalized condition. It is the result of a confrontation between previously non-globalized societies, starting from separated or non-globalized societal structures, not an internal affair of a particularly powerful society, primarily the European empires and the United States of America. The foundation of glocalization is confrontation between societies, i.e. glocalization has an *intercultural* meaning and is created through *communication*. In other words, glocalization is a product of *intercultural communication* (Bennett, 1998; Kim and Gudykunst, 1988; Samovar and Porter, 1997; Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Communication is intercultural if and when different cultural perspectives prevent the creation of a single, shared culture (Carbaugh, 1990, 1994), i.e. if and when it presents contradictions (and potential conflicts) on the level of shared symbols, as this produces different cultural orientations. Glocalization is the result of a systematic intercultural communication, involving participants socialized in differently structured societies. It is produced by a communicative confrontation between specific cultural forms of differently structured societies. Which societies are involved in this communication process?

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Using Luhmann's social systems theory (Luhmann and de Giorgi, 1992), globalization can be explained as an expansion of a functionally differentiated society, that is a society that is primarily differentiated in communicative subsystems with specific functions, like economics, politics, law, science, education, mass media, health, religion and the family. This kind of society appeared in Europe in the 17th century and has developed internally up until the present day. Globalization is based upon the cultural forms produced in relevant communications within a functionally differentiated society, which were expanded through colonialism and were then considered universally valid by the European states and their former colonies (like the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand), achieving an internal functional differentiation.

These cultural forms are *pluralism* (i.e. a multiple codification of different values, like money, power, empirical truth, love, information, health, etc.), *modernism* (i.e. the primacy of knowledge, learning and innovation) and *individualism* (i.e. the relevance of individual role performances and of the comparative evaluation among individuals based on these performances) (Baraldi, 2003). They became successful in a functionally differentiated society, which produces a plurality of values, great interest in change and innovation and a new, autonomous and unpredictable form of individuality. Pluralism, modernism and individualism became the principal cultural forms produced in the main communication processes in Europe and their former colonies and were used to fix criteria for the evaluation of degrees of civilization throughout the world. They increasingly became both the values to follow in order to achieve a satisfying standard of civilization and the main orientations in intercultural communication between the European functionally differentiated society and other forms of societies.

The long process of their establishment in the functionally differentiated societies promoted the perception that they were indispensable to the evolution and existence of society. In this way, pluralism, modernism and individualism became the basic cultural values exported through globalization of functional differentiation, as they work in all the function systems: economics, politics, education, science, mass media and so on. Globalization is a form of glocalization because it exists in a communicative confrontation between these cultural forms and different cultural forms, arising in differently structured societies.

Forms of Ethnocentric Communication

To sum up, globalization exists only in specific forms of intercultural communication, giving empirical evidence to the phenomenon called glocalization.

In a functionally differentiated society, globalization is meaningful as a generalization of values such as democracy, individual freedom, free enterprise, human rights, education and health systems, which are considered indicators of a 'civilized' cultural output, in the name of pluralism, modernism and individualism. However, these values are not generalized in a world that features evident diversities among societies: basic pluralist, individualist and modernist values do not succeed in becoming stable structures throughout the whole world. This means that we cannot

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empirically observe a single world society, although we can observe multiple world interdependencies.

Centuries of colonialism, a long period of imperialism and some decades of support in the development of Southern countries were not sufficient to create the structure of a world society on the basis of the European model of functional differentiation. This failure can be read as an indication that there is no evolutionary trend that inevitably creates a unified functionally differentiated society throughout the world. In these conditions, insensitivity towards alternatives to the mainstream cultural forms creates important communication problems in the functionally differentiated society.

Despite centuries of struggle, functional differentiation continues to face *stratified* societies (Luhmann and de Giorgi, 1992), in which the hierarchical relationship between dominating and dominated groups and the corresponding assumption of group belonging as a source of individual status constitute the main structure. In these kinds of societies, which have also been called collectivist societies (Hofstede, 1980), group relationships are basic and group belonging is the only possible way of giving meaning to individual identities. In stratified societies, individual identity and social identity overlap and cultural forms created in communication are assumed as unavoidable integrative factors. In a stratified society, group belonging works as a basic structure of society: in this model of society it is impossible to ensure free decision-making, choice, responsibility, roles within the framework of political democracy, free economic markets, modernist education, positive rights and so on.

The idea that it is impossible to give up belonging to social groups is largely shared among social psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and other scholars dealing with intercultural communication. For example, one of the mainstream authors in this field writes:

> *The only bases we have for communicating with strangers is their group memberships and our stereotypes about the group. Strangers' communication may be based on any (or more) of their social identities. To communicate effectively, we need to understand which social identities are influencing strangers' behaviour and how they define themselves with respect to these identities. (Gudykunst, 1994: 70)*

In spite of these assumptions, it is clear that in a functionally differentiated society, group belonging is not the basis of the most important decisions, choices, responsibilities and roles in primary subsystems: in this form of society, political, economical, educational, juridical and scientific roles do not require belonging to a group. A functionally differentiated society tends to be indifferent to notions of group belonging and group distinctions.

This structural difference creates relevant cultural differences, which are reflected in communication when individuals socialized in these different societies meet for political, economical, educational, intimate or juridical reasons. Through this communication, the pluralist coding of the functionally differentiated society is structurally coupled to the hierarchical coding of stratified societies: this is the general meaning of intercultural communication as we know it in a functionally differentiated society.

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The difference between collectivist and individualist societal structures (Hofstede, 1980) is the product of the fundamental difference between functional differentiation and stratification. The conflict between these two forms of societal structures is basic: consequently, within them the meaning of a cultural diversity is different, as functional differentiation promotes differences among the communication systems in which individuals must and can express themselves and assume responsibilities, while stratification promotes differences among groups and at best allows for negotiation among them. In a functionally differentiated society, group belonging and differences are tolerated as long as they respect individual rights, for example through multiculturalist policies (Colombo, 2002; Kymlicka, 1995; Wieviorka, 2000), while in a stratified society they are the basic structure.

In stratified and collectivist societies, *ethnocentrism* is the most important form of communication (Pearce, 1989). Ethnocentrism means the interpretation and evaluation of another's behaviour using one's own standard, i.e. distinguishing between a positive Us and a negative Them. Ethnocentrism is a form of diversity treatment. The insensitivity of a functionally differentiated society to group belonging and differences has created alternative forms of diversity treatment, such as pluralism (different coding), individualism (the value of individual role performances) and modernism (the value of change). Their main problem is their unavoidable reference to the cultural forms of the functionally differentiated society. This society assumes the positive value of these cultural forms (pluralism, individualism, modernism) and the negative character of any other cultural forms that threatens them (hierarchies, collectivism, normative stability). In this way, intercultural communication is *culturally* (and not interculturally) conditioned.

This produces a form of *modernist ethnocentrism* (Baraldi, 2003), which is a form of communication creating a contradiction between the positive values of pluralism, individualism and modernism and the negative values of hierarchy, collectivism (or group belonging) and normative stability. Ethnocentrism becomes 'modernist' because this contradiction is not based on prejudices, but favours openness, knowledge and development. Intercultural communication is based on knowledge and consequent evaluation of development. Knowledge legitimizes evaluation and rejection of any cultural form perceived of as a threat to personal freedom, economic initiatives, democracy, human rights, individual health and safety and so on. Modernism encourages both change in and appreciation of the Us, leading to the rejection of the different Them. This process produces a paradoxical effect; functional differentiation creates conditions of conservation in spite of a modernist attitude to change: functional differentiation adopts an Us-perspective (ethnocentrism) fixing rigid boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

Modernist ethnocentrism arose in Europe, during the passage from stratification to functional differentiation, between the 17th and 19th centuries. During this passage, the ethnocentric form of communication, although no longer useful and effective in these new conditions, could not suddenly disappear: the emerging social systems had to take into account its reproduction, although it was no longer essential in them. Cognitive expectations were used to absorb ethnocentric effects without high risks: a cognitive culture could know and evaluate cultural forms as

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either useful or not useful, functional or not functional, contingent or necessary, positive or negative. This cognitive method permitted the transformation of traditional ethnocentrism, based on prejudices, into acceptable evaluation: the use of reason and judgement for comparing and differentiating cultural forms became possible. Colonialism and imperialism used this method in order to legitimize hierarchies among societies.

In a functionally differentiated society, modernist ethnocentrism seems to be a stable form of intercultural communication establishing the primacy of a pluralist coding of societal values, the value of individual performances and expressions of personal diversity, a cognitive approach to social and natural environments, the relevance of autonomous individual action and experience, the opportunity to risk in a relatively safe environment.

All these cultural components are constantly affirmed in communication. The main aspect in this cultural architecture is the pluralist coding of values: a functionally differentiated society cannot renounce pluralism of values, unless pluralism is threatened by a cultural value. The modernist paradox (to change in order to conserve) produces a paradoxical structure of communication; pluralism of values is not possible when a value threatens pluralism. The legitimization of this paradox argues for the universal value of pluralism and in this way it increases the paradoxical effect of communication. It is easy to observe the self-legitimization of a cultural form that is working only inside a specific form of society. As this society does not become a world society, the lack of universal values in its communication with other societies is evident.

The success of modernist ethnocentrism is due to a lack of acknowledgement of a paradoxical monocultural communication about cultural pluralism. A society observing itself as pluralist is not able to accept other societies that are not pluralist. Celebration of diversity denies those who do not consider themselves diverse in the assigned meaning. The pluralist monoculture celebrates the unique value of diversity, denying diversity. The negative category of non-diverse includes all those whose diversity is not admitted. Modernist ethnocentrism does not admit cultural diversity as such, but instead a particular version of cultural diversity. Consequently, the functionally differentiated society speaks in the name of humanity, observing itself as a society in which a universal definition of rights and needs has been established.

Global suggests a pluralist, individualist and modernist cultural form, to which the local cultures must adapt, though preserving any other cultural characteristics. The multicultural policies (Wieviorka, 2000), aimed at acknowledging collective rights, are often intended as the empirical form of this idea of glocalization.

It should be noted that modernist ethnocentrism is not the result of a contradiction inside a functional differentiated society, which would be unfaithful to its ideals, but it is instead a genuine cultural production of this society, promoted as a general form of intercultural communication with stratified societies. A functionally differentiated society is observed as better than any other form of society and in particular better than stratified societies, persisting in the world in spite of the globalization of functional differentiation. Through intercultural communication

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with these societies, the functionally differentiated society asserts its superiority: modernist ethnocentrism asserts the primacy of a social Us, supporting it with knowledge, learning and critical evaluation.

Towards a World Society Based on Communication?

In the last two decades, modernist ethnocentrism has prevented the creation of a world society, in spite of the increasing globalization of functional differentiation: through this form of communication, the economic system has created inequalities and poverty; the political system has failed in ensuring a world government; international rights have not been guaranteed; education and health have been generalized only in the northern part of the world; access to information has remained strongly unequal in the world; children and women have had limited opportunities of social participation in different parts of the world. At present, a unitary structure of a world society does not exist.

Modernist ethnocentrism has favoured a neo-segmentation of societies: differently structured societies have been considered uncivilized and encouraged to choose between adaptation and the rejection of civilization. After a history of colonialist abuse and confronted with the evidence of cultural diversities, refusal was frequently the main reaction and modernist ethnocentrism fostered separation instead of coordination.

On the contrary, the construction of a world society would require a form of communication coordinating differently structured societies, instead of promoting a dominant unitary structure. Such a coordination cannot be guaranteed through the cultural forms dominant in the framework of functional differentiation, as this would be a new form of modernist ethnocentrism. The problem is to find a form of communication that can coordinate different societal segments; a world society could exist only through such a form of communication.

This form of communication is particularly relevant as segmentation cannot be controlled in a hierarchical way. Neither the UN nor single powerful nations or coalitions of nations can control a segmented world. Cultural diversity prevents any form of political or military control, as the history of colonialism and imperialism teaches. Necessity for coordination is primarily evident in all the functionally differentiated systems: in the economic system, as the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank demonstrate; in the political system, as has been evident since the end of the First World War; in the juridical system, if human rights and international normative expectations are to be maintained; in the highly segmented and conflictual religious system; in education and health systems, as local traditions and global trends are often in contradiction; and last but not least, in the area of intimate relations, as immigration and travel create increasingly intimate encounters among people of different cultures.

Specifically, three main forms of segmentation require a new form of communication: (1) segmentation produced through internationalized organizations, pursuing either capital investment (multinational enterprises) or local development (NGO), needing intercultural management; (2) segmentation produced through

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consistent immigration processes from the southern to the northern part of the world; and (3) segmentation produced through international political relations, which at present often create a necessity for military solutions for intercultural problems.

In recent decades, coordination has been promoted by mixed coding of intercultural communication, i.e. combinations of different cultural forms, determining a joint construction of communicative orientations. Specifically, there has been an attempt to mix pluralist coding and hierarchical coding, that is functional differentiation and stratification. On the one side, pluralism, modernism and individualism have been introduced in the framework of stratified societies (mixed hierarchical coding, i.e. moderate collectivism). On the other side, hierarchies have been modified through pluralism, modernism and individualism (mixed pluralist coding, i.e. multiculturalism). The success of these combinations is of primary relevance for the destiny of a world society; the mixture of these forms can promote a world society. A mixed coding can be successful only if cultural differences can be maintained and respected in communication: this means that contradictions and conflicts between cultural forms must be managed, not avoided. A multicultural society can be interpreted as a society in which a mixed coding gives form to the most important communications.

At present in the world, there is a great deal of mixed coding, due to the abundance of glocalized structures. Mixed coding is an intrinsically contingent and unstable solution to intercultural problems, a result of continuous negotiation – which requires intercultural communication. For this reason, the only possible way to promote mixed coding is to find forms of intercultural communication that embody it in specific social situations. This is a very ambitious enterprise: on the one hand, moderate collectivism does not completely accept personal rights, democracy, generalized education, free intimacy, which can compromise the basic premises of hierarchies, threatening group belonging; on the other hand, multiculturalism accepts group belonging only if it does not interfere with personal autonomy.

Mixed coding is based on *hybridization* (Pieterse, 2004), in its turn producing *métissage* (Wieviorka, 2000). According to Michel Wieviorka (2000), métissage means fusion of different cultures, each one with its own history and tradition: therefore, métissage means unity of differences; however, this unity is embodied in individual actions and consequently it varies according to the individual case. Formulating a similar idea, Barnett Pearce (1994) has observed that any communication is intercultural as each individual is culturally different from any other. From this perspective, in functionally differentiated societies, métissage means empowerment of personal diversity as the embodiment of cultural diversity. It is observed as a form of affiliation, through adaptation to functional differentiation, as Hanif Kureishi demonstrates in his novels and screenplays (Kureishi, 1986, 1990, 1995, 1998), showing immigrants struggling between personal choices (métissage) and group belonging (refusal of métissage). David Matza (1969) defines affiliation as a process through which an individual is converted to a consolidated action that is new for him or her. Conversion to personal choices seems to be at the core of métissage, as it is requested of individuals who have been socialized to group belonging.

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Kureishi makes it evident that this conversion is not a generalized phenomenon: in his works, many protagonists reject it and seek cultural purity and tradition. Métissage as affiliation is not completely successful and maybe it is not sufficient to create the conditions for a mixed coding. As Matza underlines, the probabilities of conversion are not readily predictable; we can add that conversion through cultural adaptation is much less predictable than conversion within a monoculture. In fact, research indicates that third-generation immigrants are characterized by the search for cultural roots (Landis and Wasilewski, 1999).

Métissage and hybridization produce cultural diversity in society (Pieterse, 2004). They create intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993; Bhawuk and Brislin, 1992), instead of promoting a new cultural form. Métissage adds an unpredictable cultural variety. Cultural diversity is not the product of differences between stable groups or societies: it is the consequence of a continuous production of hybridization through intercultural communication. The high contingency of this variety also produces a search for cultural stability: sensitivity to all cultural forms in itself can lead to harmonious polyphony, as well as to fundamentalism. In order to promote the former and avoid the latter, some successful form of intercultural communication is necessary.

In the absence of such a form of communication among societal segments, risks of intercultural conflicts are very high. As modernist ethnocentrism cannot avoid them, researchers and practitioners (above all educators and mediators) have started looking for new forms of communication.

Intercultural Dialogue

At present, in the functionally differentiated society, a particular sensitivity to cultural diversity seems to be spreading. It is emerging as this diversity seems to threaten pluralism, individualism and modernism. In particular, a new way of thinking known as *cross-cultural adaptation* (Kim, 2001), is emerging which considers different cultures as open systems in reciprocal relationship. Closure is condemned as an indication of insensitivity towards intercultural exchange and communication. Openness represents the dissolution of boundaries, which are considered obstacles to cross-cultural adaptation and causes of ethnocentric conflicts. While on the basis of a hierarchical coding, boundaries create certainty against crisis in social identities, on the bases of a multiple coding, cultural boundaries evoke claustrophobia and constriction. In this perspective, cultural boundaries symbolize a negative closure, separating and defining spaces for conquest and possession, preventing openness to other possibilities of action and cultural expression. For this reason, cross-cultural adaptation requires the abolition of ethnocentric boundaries.

Dialogue is the cultural form supposed to abolish ethnocentric boundaries and create cross-cultural adaptation. Dialogue defines the conditions of openness, exchange between cultural forms and meeting among cultures, permitting the joint creation of new cultural symbols (Jorgenson and Steier, 1994).

Dialogue is a form of communication requiring expression and acknowledgement of diversity, as well as a reciprocal observation of competence in knowledge

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and expression (Todd, 1994). Dialogue is balanced communication constructing knowledge without denying diversity (Jorgenson and Steier, 1994). It requires negotiation (Isajiw, 2000), above all when sharing of normative expectations cannot be taken for granted.

Dialogue is based on two communicative conditions: (1) equal distribution of opportunities for active participation in communication; and (2) empathy, that is competence in assuming another's perspective, integrating listening and understanding, interest in expression and a sensitivity to the needs of others (Gudykunst, 1994).

Dialogue is supposed to produce a *co-created cultural contract* (Onwumechili et al., 2003): different cultures express themselves together in communication, appreciating each other. In this way, dialogue emphasizes *conjunction* among different cultural forms in communication, avoiding asymmetries and assimilation. Dialogue intends to produce harmonization in reciprocity and a coupling of interests and needs. Dialogue is a creative, co-constructed form of communication, based on active participation and empathy.

Dialogue is embodied in specific communicative strategies, centred on the participants, facilitating an understanding of another's actions, such as perception checking, active listening, emphasizing interest and understanding efforts, feedback aiming at clarifying the effects of actions, the utterance of non- aggressive and non-evaluative assertions (Gudykunst, 1994; Kim, 2001).

Dialogue promotes cross-cultural adaptation through intercultural learning (Dueñas, 1994), which is reciprocal learning permitting participants to use newly learned cultural forms in order to give meanings to their world. Through intercultural learning, participants can assign a meaning to information using new cultural forms. Intercultural learning is learning *from* other cultures, not *about* other cultures, as it permits the use of other forms, not simply the knowledge of them. Assimilation of cultural forms is followed by their application and creation of new meanings: use of cultural forms differentiates intercultural learning from cultural adaptation as it is creative and innovative. Dialogue is the structural basis for intercultural learning as it creates conditions for reciprocity, active participation and empathy. Intercultural learning favours the acquisition of intercultural competence (Spitzberg, 1997), as an answer to a cultural dissonance and a lack of control, altering participants' perspectives, which need to be adapted to different cultural forms. Furthermore, it favours intercultural sensitivity, that is the ability to understand and perform appropriate actions in intercultural situations (Yamada and Singelis, 1999).

Dialogue and intercultural learning have important effects on *cultural identities* produced through communication processes. A cultural identity is observable through participants' expressions in communication. Research on *sojourners* in other cultures, *returnees* to their own cultures and above all *transients* between different cultures show how multicultural identities are shown in communication. Dialogue and intercultural learning lead to the construction of new mixed cultural identities (Kim, 2001; Onwumechili et al., 2003; Sparrow, 2000; Tang, 1994; Todd-Mancillas, 2000; Yamada and Singelis, 1999). A multicultural identity can be

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observed in competence in crossing cultural boundaries (Onwumechili et al., 2003). It means that 'individuals may keep their own cultural habits and beliefs while "integrating" aspects of the new culture into their lifestyle' (Yamada and Singelis, 1999: 707).

Cross-cultural adaptation, dialogue, intercultural learning and multicultural identity are the key concepts used to identify a new form of transcultural communication in order to defeat ethnocentrism and create the conditions for a multicultural society and for a mixed coding of social systems (Milhouse et al., 2001). Conjunction means crossing cultural borders, interpenetrating cultures (Tang, 1994) and communicating between boundaries (Onwumechili et al., 2003). Conjunction is a new form of fusion that respects cultural diversity and aims at enriching diverse cultural forms.

The Paradox of Transcultural Communication

It is not clear if the transcultural form of communication is either a sum of other cultural forms or an emergent form, as is suggested by the TCB (Third-Culture Building) model (Casmir, 1999; Chen and Starosta, 1998). In any case, the suggestion of a new, emerging transcultural form, a form of collectivist belonging is crucial, as '*Together* implies, rather than merely considering the relationship between self OR (or even AND) other, that we can build something that eventually is *ours*' (Casmir, 1999: 112–13).

The idea of a transcultural form of communication underlines the fact that a preservation of pure cultural diversity is impossible. Contamination is unavoidable as cultural forms are produced in communication and this means that *intercultural* communication has effects of hybridization (Pieterse, 2004) on learning and identities. However, a transcultural form of communication is paradoxical, as it implies a modernist overcoming of diversity *together with* its respectful conservation. In fact, conjunction means simultaneously the conservation of previous cultural differences and the production of a new culture: the new shared symbolic form should preserve the previously differentiated symbolic forms. A symbolic form can be preserved and simultaneously changed.

The paradoxical relationship between newness and conservation, cross-cultural adaptation and identity maintenance is not observed in scientific literature: 'there is no contradiction between maintenance of a positive cultural identity and the development of a flexible intercultural identity' (Kim, 2001: 67–8). This perspective fails to acknowledge the paradoxical aspect of its preference for a fusion (Tang, 1994) that creates a new shared cultural form; its ideological link to the value of cultural diversity prevents a clear observation of preference for sharing and cohesion, founded on basic principles of dialogue, such as the acknowledgement of others and their rights (Isajiw, 2000).

The transcultural paradox derives from the reluctance to abandon the cultural centrality of group belonging. For example, the theory of social identity supposes that the mere presence of strangers provokes ethnocentrism (Lee, 1994) and that barriers against different cultural forms are psychologically constructed (Spencer-Rodgers

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and McGovern, 2002). According to Gudykunst, the ethnocentric tendency 'is natural and unavoidable' and 'everyone is ethnocentric to some degree' (Gudykunst, 1994: 78). This perspective promotes scepticism towards the possible generalization of the value of cultural diversity, inviting the sharing of symbols 'together' and producing the meaning of coherence and sharing.

In this way, a transcultural form of communication aims to create a new, harmonized and coherent culture of respect and reciprocity, adopting cultural forms that have value in the functionally differentiated society, such as openness, dialogue, learning, adaptation, conjunction, personalized identity and understanding. Even the observation of conjunctions between different cultural forms is a product of a modernist approach as the psychological reading of the Japanese feeling called *amae* demonstrates (Doi, 1991). All cultural forms that are appreciated in other forms of society are carefully selected in the transcultural form of communication, starting from some cultural values of the functionally differentiated society.

The debate about multicultural identity clearly demonstrates the dependence of a transcultural approach on the functionally differentiated society. Originally, multicultural identity was considered a plastic form, based on openness, personal competence, autonomy, flexibility, creativity and reflexivity (Adler, 1977). As it was clear that this idea of identity originated from within the functionally differentiated society, it was criticized as not a truly cross-cultural identity. In this perspective, a real multicultural identity should be characterized by a conjunction between autonomy and belonging (Bhawuk, 2001; Hofstede, 1980; Onwumechili et al., 2003), i.e. it should be a well-developed co-construction of autonomy and interdependence (Yamada and Singelis, 1999). This perspective is promoted by a new tendency to include Oriental (Chen, 2001; Kim, 1997; Tang, 1994) and African (Asante, 1998; Schreiber, 2000; Sparrow, 2000; Taylor and Nwosu, 2001) cultural forms of communication and identity construction. It criticizes the modernist idea of identity, pointing both to the crisis of validity currently being experienced by the notion of individual diversity, and to the renewing of the notion of group belonging as an important cultural form.

However, this approach undervalues an important cultural form in a functionally differentiated society. In such a society, individual identity is not simply based on the value of individual performances (individualism) but also on interpersonal relationships (Baraldi, 2003). Autonomous personal identity requires affective interdependence, which is not a bond for it, but a way of constructing it. Consequently, interpersonal interdependence is well developed in the functionally differentiated society and the connection between this interdependence and personal autonomy is a genuine internal cultural product, created through interpersonal communication. In fact, during the 20th century, the functionally differentiated society developed a basic cultural difference between individualism and personalization, that is between the value of cognitively founded individual performance and the value of affectively founded personal choice. Consequently, including interdependence, the concept of multicultural identity does not introduce a new cultural form: it is clearly a cultural product of functional differentiation.

Starting with dialogue and concluding with the construction of a multicultural

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identity, a transcultural form of communication seems to represent a renewal of the internal culture of the functionally differentiated society, trying to find through personalization a new horizon for harmonious intercultural communication. In fact, this form may be a new, powerful means for globalization of functional differentiation. As it faces the communication problems that are observed in the functionally differentiated society, a transcultural form of communication promotes a new, monocultural perspective, based on some selected values (i.e. empathy, dialogue, participation, learning) that are typical of this society. Can this attempt be successful? In other words: can these become universal values? And, can a *transcultural* form of communication be a genuine *intercultural* form of communication?

It is evident that every society produces its own identity starting from some basic cultural forms, giving orientation to the most important communications. This means that in the functionally differentiated society, some cultural practices, such as the amputation of hands for thieves, the veil for women, genital mutilations, can be neither understood nor considered legitimate. For the same reason, hierarchical societies cannot appreciate sexual freedom and violation of normative rules in families. These are socially and historically constructed obstacles to successful intercultural communication, not intrinsic psychological features of humanity. The main problem is not the presence of these cultural diversities, but the way to deal with them in intercultural communication. In a multicultural society, the problem is not which cultural forms are necessarily to be preserved, but how to deal with different forms in communication, respecting cultural diversity.

The traditional way to deal with this problem in the functionally differentiated society is the modernist promotion of progress and civilization, with internal room for subordinated collective rights. A transcultural form of communication makes some choices from among the internal cultural values, but also encourages openness to change in other cultures. The case of the cultural support for the Iranian youth protest against the Islamic regime, assuming that it indicates a multicultural identity, is an example, but is it a transcultural example? As it is not a prerequisite, but a result of communication, diversity is unavoidable: if the Iranian revolt were successful, the result would not be a functional differentiation in Iran, but a new societal structure with new cultural forms. By looking at the degree of cultural diversity first among European countries and then between European countries and the US, in spite of a long, shared history, we can better understand this point.

Dialogue and Conflict Management in a Globalized World

A transcultural form of communication risks being ineffective, as dialogue is used to obtain a new sharing and a new belonging: in this way, cultural diversity continues to grow unacknowledged as a result of intercultural communication. A new paradigm for intercultural communication should acknowledge this as a final result, not as a starting point. A transcultural form of communication can be observed as a step in a long process starting with ethnocentrism and progressively creating mindfulness (Gudykunst, 1994) of intercultural communication and cultural diversity. However, it cannot be considered a solution to present problems of intercultural

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communication: it would be more interesting to consider it as a communicative approach that deserves further development, starting from dialogue.

This development can be connected to the problems of *conflict management*. A transcultural form of communication is oriented to eliminate conflicts through dialogue, as coherence and consensual sharing are supposed to be the necessary results in communication. However, coherence and sharing are negations of diversity (Pearce, 1989, 1994), which is provided by a plurality of different and then contradictory cultural orientations. This cultural plurality causes conflicts that cannot be solved through a cultural sharing: a form of conflict management can be promoted only by creating a new form of coordination of persisting diversities, through communication.

Following the social systems theory, we can consider conflicts as important symptoms of social problems, which should not be ignored (Luhmann, 1984). The problem is not the solution of the conflict, but the management of the conflict, based on a form of communication that does not threaten social systems and at the same time legitimizes expression of diversity, without looking for sharing and coherence. This is a risky strategy, as conflict management can unintentionally promote ethnocentric conflicts: however, communicative conflicts are the only opportunity to express dissent and then diversity.

The first step in this direction is acknowledgement of the existence in communication of *incommensurate* cultural forms (Pearce, 1989): some relevant cultural values expressed in communication can neither be translated into other equally relevant cultural values, nor exported to differently structured societies. It is not a problem of rights of expression: it is a problem of cultural priorities in the self-perpetuation of different societies. When diversity becomes a primary value, as happens in a multicultural functionally differentiated society, the problem is through which form of communication to coordinate incommensurate cultural forms.

Admitting to conflicts is the starting point for coordination of incommensurate forms. This requires a transformation from an ethnocentric management of conflicts (based on Us/Them distinction) to a comparative and non-evaluative management of conflicts. A *comparative conflict management* is a form of communication that preserves or produces an emerging diversity without associating it with evaluative coding, such as right/wrong or true/false. This form of conflict management pays attention to communication processes, 'cultivating' diversity in order to see where it leads in communication: basically, conflicts are not regarded as being *among* or *against* participants, but as being *about* the ways social processes are created and structured. This form of conflict management acknowledges that each cultural form is produced in a context of social processes and it deals with comparative analysis of the different social processes producing cultural forms. In this way, each cultural form is rooted in structured communication processes and conflicts are managed in order to compare these processes, not in order to fight against other participants or to dismiss them.

This form of conflict management can be promoted to include *appreciation* (Pearce, 2002) in dialogue. Appreciation avoids critical intervention against other participants and promotes their positive connotation, focusing on the positive

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aspects of their experience, on the positive evaluation of their cultural forms and on attention to their good practices and hopes for future communicative consequences. By integrating appreciation, dialogue creates communicative conditions of welfare and safety for participants: this favours a free narration of participants' accounts. Dialogue is not limited to sharing and coherence and is protected through appreciation: consequently, it can draw full attention to incommensurate diversities, promoting self-expression (using active listening, perception checking and so on). Through techniques aimed at promoting active participation, dialogue produces diversity in communication, while appreciation focuses on its positive effects on communication.

This comparative form of conflict management looks to a new way of observing social systems, by considering them as ongoing constructive processes: if interest in these ongoing processes becomes primary in communication, the main problem is no longer sharing and coherence, but attention to coordination of conflicting diversities. As Theodore Zeldin (1998) writes about mediation, the main interest is in the satisfaction of all participants, not in the creation of a shared culture. From this perspective, world political processes, international planning, and the promotion of peace can find new forms of expression, possibly more effective than modernist ethnocentrism and transcultural communication.

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