

Culture Shock and Adaptation in a Multiethnic City

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This batch of papers has been presented at the Third Conference “Diversity in cities: Visible and invisible walls”

Culture Shock and Adaptation in a Multiethnic City

Summary

The paper presents the results of an intercultural study done at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, USA. 23 informants from 17 countries were interviewed with face-to-face interviews about their experiences and difficulties in encountering a foreign culture. On the basis of the collected data the paper discusses the nature of culture shock, its perception by sojourners, and the pattern in which most of the interviewed people cope with it. It also dwells upon the process of multiculturalization in big American and European cities and tries to find an answer to the question whether full adaptation is equal to cultural assimilation.

Keywords: Culture Shock, Adaptation, Cultural Identity, Multiethnic City, Diversity

JEL classification: Z, Z0, Z00, Z1, Z10, Z12, Z13, Z19

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Culture Shock and Adaptation in a Multiethnic City

This paper presents the results of an intercultural study done at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, USA in the period September 2006 – February 2007. 23 informants from 17 countries were interviewed with face-to-face interviews long from 40 min. to 1 hour and 15 min and recorded on tapes. The informants came from the following countries: Bangladesh, Bulgaria, China, Ecuador, Japan, India, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, Russia, South Korea, Spain and Vietnam. At the time of the interviews the sojourners had stayed in the USA from three weeks to six years. They were asked about their experiences and difficulties in encountering a foreign culture.

On the basis of the collected data the paper will discuss the nature of culture shock and the pattern in which most of the interviewed people cope with it. It will also seek an answer to the question whether the intercultural context in multiethnic cities in the USA and Europe is universal or there is 'differentia specific' for the two continents. Moreover, some European scholars (Lehning 2001; Risse 2003; Hymans 2004) have recently launched the idea about the creation of a 'European demos' through 'melting pot' in multicultural and multiethnic European cities. Thus using the cultural comparison the paper will discuss the phenomenon of cultural diversity in Europe and the USA.

Culture shock revisited

The concept of 'culture shock' was first introduced by Oberg (1958) who indicated with it the distress experienced by the sojourner as a result of losing all familiar cues, signs and symbols from his physical and social environment. According to the researcher the psychological consequences can be a sense of loss and feelings of deprivation, confusion, anxiety, disgust and indignation. A considerable literature has already been compiled on the questions of culture shock and adaptation of immigrants, sojourners, tourists and travelers. However, there is an agreement that the constant demand of coping with differences in climate, housing, transportation, food, and social norms leads to frustration and sometimes to a sense of worthlessness (Brislin 1981: 138).

Using some empirical data Furnham & Bochner (1982) prove the relationship between culture distance and social difficulty in the host country. The more distant the sojourner's native culture from the host culture is, the more difficult his or her adaptation becomes. The scholars view culture shock not as a deficiency in the personality or cultural socialization of sojourner but rather as a lack of given social skills with which to negotiate social situations in the host country (see also Furnham 1988). Comparing the data of different Canadian studies Berry, King and Boski (1988) conclude that the adjustment of immigrants and sojourners results in acculturation. The latter term is defined by them as 'culture change that results from continuous firsthand contact between two distinct cultural groups'. According to the authors acculturation may also be expressed in physical, social, cultural and psychological changes.

Gudykunst & Hammer (1988: 132) discover that intercultural adaptation is a function of uncertainty reduction. Most often culture shock appears out of uncertainty. The latter is understood as individuals' inability to predict their own and others' beliefs and attitudes (cognitive uncertainty) as well as their own and others' behavior in a given situation (behavioral uncertainty) (Gudykunst 1989). The reduction of uncertainty means for sojourners to overcome their culture shock.

Although many scholars underline the negative experiences related to culture shock, there are some positive interpretations of it too. For instance, Adler (1979:30) defines culture shock as a cross-cultural learning experience. As a result of it individuals become aware of their own growth, learning and change. It is in this direction that the positive outcomes of culture shock should be sought. Among the best strategies to cope with culture shock is the increasing of individuals' communication competence, expressed in their knowledge of the host country as well as in their empathy (Rothwell 2000). Empathy is the ability of the individual to see the world through the eyes of the others and thus to better understand their thoughts and feelings.

Ting-Toomy and Chung (2005) state that adaptation in the host country inevitably involves the reentry shock too or the shock that sojourners experience when they return back home. Moreover, it is often harder than the entry shock. The sojourners understand that the newly acquired values, emotional patterns and behaviors are either unfamiliar or unaccepted in their own culture. Thus they may turn

into alienated returnees but on the other hand there is the more positive option for them to apply the knowledge gained in the host country to their own culture.

The existing literature on intercultural contacts dwells on the development of culture shock through different phases: 1). fascination with the new culture, 2). hostility and frustration; and 3). acceptance and adaptation (Hall 1959; Smalley 1963; Adler 1987; Furnham & Bochner 1982; Ting-Toomey & Chung 2005). However, almost no attention has been paid so far to the perception of culture shock itself by sojourners and to the different stages that individuals pass until they fully realize they have experienced culture shock. On the basis of the existent data from the interviews I will try to outline the main phases in the perception of culture shock.

Culture shock perceived

The main thesis of this paper is that the perception of culture shock develops through three different phases. Initially most of the sojourners are not aware of their culture shock. The latter is also not based on some basic cultural differences. Rather, all of the interviewees reported that they were surprised or even shocked by 'small things' or specific details of the material culture they encountered. These were, for example, 'food', 'quality of food' or 'freshness of food', 'cars', 'traffic' and 'public transportation', 'clothes', 'fashion' and 'hairstyles', 'technology', 'mobiles', 'climate', 'geographical distances', 'buildings' and 'architecture', 'locks of windows and doors', etc. These are mainly elements of the material culture in the host country.

Many of the sojourners interviewed emphasize also on the 'big size', 'quantity' or 'abundance' of goods in America.

The greatest shock was to see how people cook excessively here and that they throw the left-over food. We usually don't do this while here in restaurants as well as in people's homes they use plastic cups, plates, forks and then they throw away all these things. This lavishness is very unusual for us.

(Informant 1, from Nepal)

The greatest surprise... well, everything was so big! I was really shocked by the sizes. Everything was so big, really big! Hamburgers, pizzas, meals, plates... And even the people were so tall, big and fat!

(Informant 7, from Japan)

When I came for the first time in the USA I was overwhelmed by the stores and the amount of goods, and I guess, by the size of stores, the size of cars, the size of refrigerators. At that time in Moscow the average department store was much smaller.

(Informant 12, from Russia)

The sizes of cars and houses, the distances were different here. In Italy everything is smaller. Taking a plane and going far away for the week-end is considered a trouble, while here it is normal. And the houses are bigger.

(Informant 18, from Italy)

It seems that geographical distance, material forms and their 'bigness' or 'smallness' determine the first impressions of the host country. They are important elements of the country image and often become the reason for surprise, wonder or shock of the new culture.

One discovery of this study is that culture shock may develop not only due to the language spoken but even because of the physical and racial traits of the people living in the new country:

When I came here it was a real shock. I traveled outside Nigeria for the first time and it was a shock. About three weeks I was sick, very sick, it was like malaria. Nigeria is an English speaking country but I had to speak English all the time. But the greatest problem was that I was seeing only white faces. So many white faces... This made me really sick.

(Informant 16, from Nigeria)

Here I didn't have any big shock. My real culture shock was in Japan, where I lived for a year before I came here. I remember very well my first two- three weeks there, it was like a sickness. I was watching all the time only Japanese faces with stretched eyes. This made me sick and crazy!

(Informant 18, from Italy)

The sojourners' physical environment has changed and they face a totally new setting. This involves adjusting to new situations including race, ethnicity and even physical traits of people. What has been 'different' and 'alien' in the home-country, now becomes 'ordinary' and 'normal'. And it is the sojourner who is different, alien and stranger. This change in the environment engenders a shift in the self-perceptions and triggers culture shock and crisis of identity. The two sojourners from Nigeria and

Italy define this period as a 'sickness' that has obviously brought much suffering to them.

So, in the first phase of the perception of culture shock the sojourners usually observe and register different facts mainly from the physical environment and material culture of the host country. These can be houses and shops but also physical and racial traits of the people living in the new country as well as the languages spoken by them.

In the second phase the sojourners become aware of the values and the way of life of the host people. They begin to actively compare the values in their native countries with these in the host country. As it was shown already even material elements of the host culture are perceived by the prism of the home culture. But in the second phase this process becomes more evident. The sojourners have put a highly selective screen between them and the host culture and see the new culture only through it. This screen is composed of the values, attitudes and meanings of the home culture and it is only through them that sojourners perceive, judge and interpret signs, symbols and behaviors in the host culture. From this disjuncture between real meanings and wrong interpretations a real culture clash can occur. This becomes obvious when the observations of the different informants are compared to each other. Actually two major groups of reported characteristics of the host culture can be outlined. The first one consists of 'differences' that are mentioned by all the interviewees, independently from what countries or regions they come. And the second group of characteristics consists of perceptions of the host country that are dependent on the cultural zone of the interviewees. I will dwell consequently on the two groups of characteristics.

Firstly, three main traits of the American culture were pointed out by all the informants, independently from the country they come from. On the first place the interviewees underlined the working habits of the Americans:

Life in America is more difficult than in Nepal, because the people are working day and night. There is a lot of stress and a lot of pressure by the society to work.

(Informant 1, from Nepal)

I think they start to work here at a very early age. When they go to college they also work. I had to apply for a job too and it was pretty difficult for me to get used to the situation.

(Informant 4, from India)

There are no clear differences here between the week-end and the week. You may go shopping in Sunday but in Europe there is almost no shop open in Sunday. And here nobody complains that he is working in Sunday. That's weird.

(Informant 19, from Spain)

The second characteristic of the American culture, mentioned by practically all the informants, is the American individualism. The interviewees perceive the American society as highly individualistic, especially in comparison with the society in their home country. However, the informants coming from Eastern countries put a stronger emphasis on this characteristic. They also give different interpretations to it, varying from positive and neutral to negative:

I think here people have a strong sense of individuality. They respect themselves but they respect the others as well. In Vietnam, if I am younger than you, you won't respect me so much. I actually love this sense of individuality.

(Informant 2, from Vietnam)

In Japan I go everywhere with my friends, I take classes with them and I do everything with them. In America it is totally different. You go to the cafeteria alone and you find friends there. You go to the library alone and you will do all your work alone.

(Informant 7, from Japan)

In Bangladesh it is more social. You know everybody and everybody knows you. Here it is OK, if you are alone and you don't know anybody.

(Informant 8, from Bangladesh)

And the third characteristic underlined by all the interviewees is the Americans' lack of knowledge often associated with an ethnocentric worldview. In the most of the cases this characteristic is given negative interpretation, although some exceptions are present too:

They even don't know where Ecuador is situated. They only see that you are Latin-American and they put this label on you for both good and bad but mostly for bad.

(Informant 20, from Ecuador)

I think that the Americans have a very non-historic perspective of the world. For them America is the world. They don't even know when they declare war to Iraq or Afghanistan and they don't know where these places are. When they understand

that I come from Pakistan, they ask stupid questions: 'Do you have cars there?'. All this is due to their educational system; they study only American history but not history of the world.

(Informant 5, from Pakistan)

The most shocking thing here for me was that people think if I am Iranian, I belong to the Arab culture. They don't know the difference between Iran or Persia and the Arab countries. They even think that we speak the same language.

(Informant 13, from Iran)

I remember very well my first day in the high school two years ago. I was introducing myself in English and most of the people were very surprised that I spoke English very well. They told me: 'Oh, we didn't know that you could speak English in India'.

(Informant 9, from India)

I know many Europeans who complain how limited the Americans are because they don't know anything about the world. But I found out that they are curious, they want to learn. Sometimes they are like children. They don't know anything but they are excited to learn about you and your country.

(Informant 17, from Bulgaria)

To resume, there are three main characteristics of the American culture emphasized to one or another extent by all the 23 informants in the study: the hard working of the Americans, their individualism and their lack of knowledge about 'other' countries and people, often associated with ethnocentrism. This means that these characteristics are perceived by the informants as 'differentia specific' of the American country in comparison with all the other countries.

Together with this there are some sets of characteristics that are observed and analyzed only by a group of people coming from a particular culture zone. For instance, all the Asian informants underline certain traits of the American culture that are not considered so important or surprising by the Europeans, while the Europeans in turn emphasize on other characteristics that are not paid any significant attention by the Asians. This is an indication that sojourners see the host culture through the selective screen established by their own culture. For example, all the Asian informants, both male and female, dwell upon the personal relationships and sexual practices in the USA, while most of the European interviewees do not mention them at all.

Well, one of my greatest surprises here was the idea of sexuality. In Vietnam if you are bisexual, trans-sexual, lesbian or gay, you hide it from the other people. While here they are very open about it and they are even proud of it.

(Informant 2, female, from Vietnam)

I was shocked by the girls here and especially by the fact that they have so many sexual relations before their marriage. When we have parties, they get drunk and they look for a boy to go to his bed. This was really shocking.

(Informant 10, male, from India)

In China the culture is more homogeneous. If you are homosexual, the people will be looking at you in a different way. Here it is something ordinary and nobody pays any attention to this fact. So, I can see more weird people here... Well, the homosexuals are shocking and maybe the drug-users too. They seem a big issue even for our generation in China.

(Informant 11, female, from China)

What I dislike here? Well, I think the way people relate to each other. And especially the fact that they can easily switch from one partner to another. They are not loyal. This creates difficulties for the relationship and they become more vulnerable. In Iran the relationships are more controlled but much more stable.

(Informant 13, male, from Iran)

If the theme of sexuality appears in the speeches of all the Asian interviewees without any exception, no one of the European informants finds it a surprising or interesting topic to talk. At the same time the three Eastern European interviewees underline two traits of the American character that are not given priority by the other informants and even by the Western Europeans interviewed. The first trait emphasized is the American materialism often related by them to aggressiveness and intolerance in attaining one's goals.

One thing that I saw is the aggressiveness with which the Americans pursue their goals. They are aggressive in their jobs, they are aggressive in their ambitions, they are aggressive when they compete. They want to make and they make a lot of money.

(Informant 3, from Romania)

If I have to draw a portrait of the typical American, it would be let's say a guy who has a good job and who is interested in making a lot of money, who has a big house, a big car or several cars, whose hobbies are football and golf or baseball, who

likes pizza and beer and who is not interested in traveling outside the US. The portrait turns out to be of a very narrow minded person who cares only about his comfort and money.

(Informant 12, from Russia)

It is interesting how hierarchy works here. You can be accepted as long as you make money. In Bulgaria people don't like those who have money. In Bulgaria the connections are more important while here everything is money.

(Informant 17, from Bulgaria)

The second trait emphasized by the three Eastern European informants turns out to be the 'superficial' or 'false' friendliness of the Americans.

In Romania the smile is supposed to be an initiation of a relationship. It means 'I like you'. It could be also flirting with somebody. Usually you never smile at people whom you don't know. In America, especially in small cities, everybody smiles at you. At the beginning I felt extremely well but later I realized that it was not a friendship.

(Informant 3, from Romania)

Some things here really shocked me. I don't know about others but Russians can mistakenly take the Americans' appearance of friendliness for something more than it is. It's just a way for them to behave well in public places. But it doesn't mean a deep friendship.

(Informant 12, from Russia)

I was really very, very easily accepted here. The Americans are very polite to the foreigners. But this is not a real friendship.

(Informant 17, from Bulgaria)

In fact the characteristics underlined by the informants as 'typical of the Americans' are reflections of their own cultural values and standards of judging and do not necessarily present the American culture in its true light. Donal Carbaugh (2005) analyses the European perception of the Americans' superficiality and lack of depth. He presents a particular case in Finland and concludes that Finnish people take the Americans' smile and readiness to talk as a sign of friendship, while most often they are just an ordinary politeness. Similarly, the Eastern Europeans interviewed expected that smiles and polite behavior would indicate friendship and true curiosity about the individual. In the Eastern European countries friendship is given much significance. In addition the smile can be a sign of liking, support, courtesy or flirt. This is why smiling at unfamiliar people is most often considered to be inappropriate.

While in the US the smile appears in ordinary situations like shopping and meeting strangers as an act of politeness and can thus be given wrong interpretations by sojourners. This is also the case of the informants in this study. The interviewees interpret the act of smiling and of being polite with the codes of their own culture and out of this opposition between original and perceived meanings cross-cultural misunderstandings appear. This is also an example of the difficulties that sojourners face in their adaptation to the new culture.

Thus all characteristics pointed out by the informants as ‘typical of the US’ are informative as for the host culture as for the sojourners’ native cultural environment because they are seen through the eyes of outsiders. This is how also certain traits are surprising or even shocking from the point of view of a particular cultural group and not deserving to be paid any attention, or ‘normal’ for another. These peculiarities are indicative of the main mechanisms of culture shock. Culture shock appears because of the disjuncture between real codes and interpretations of meanings, coming out of the selective screen through which sojourners see the new culture. Once they are able to displace it and to see the host country without it, they are on the way to overcome their culture shock. They do not any longer give meanings, interpret and judge according to the standards of their native culture but are now able to see people’s behaviors from their own perspective.

In search of one’s own identity

In the second phase of the perception of culture shock individuals actively compare the host culture with their home culture and try to understand the values, behaviors and meanings in the new country. In the third phase the sojourners are already fully conscious of having experienced culture shock. In the process of coping with it two main factors become important. Firstly, the results of the interviews show that there is a correlation between the sojourners’ expectations before they enter the country and their real life in it. Those who had predominantly negative expectations were surprised by ‘positive things’ but were overwhelmed by their distrust in the new situation, and vice versa, those, who had unrealistically high expectations suffered from disappointment and disillusionment.

Among the sources of knowledge and impressions of the future host country the interviewees mention ‘TV’, ‘books’, ‘Internet’, ‘history textbooks’, ‘school

lessons', 'encyclopedias', 'conversations with ex-sojourners in the US' and 'personal meetings and talks with Americans'. For most of them also the Hollywood films have created a wrong picture of the country.

I have an American friend in Vietnam but the movies illustrate America as a very chaotic country. I thought that here all the people are bad and that everything is bad. Well, I had some positive expectations too but it turned out to be much better than I supposed.

(Informant 2, from Vietnam)

I watched so many Hollywood films and whatever I knew about America was due to them. I thought the Americans have fun, like parties and do everything that they want to do. Well...it is partly true but only partly.

(Informant 10, from India)

I remember the first day when I and my wife came here. The whole day we stayed locked at home because we were afraid to go out. There were no bars on the windows and in the night we couldn't sleep at all. We were listening to every noise and every creak in the house. Because of the movies we thought that in America people are shot in the streets and in their homes. It turned out to be a very different country and we are happy of this.

(Informant 20, from Ecuador)

Because I had lived in a communist country, for me America was an ideal. It was everything that one can dream of. I expected to find an extraordinary country with very interesting people. But I found good people and bad people, clean places and dirty places, rich and poor.

(Informant 3, from Romania)

One perspective of country image is stereotyping based on media information (Bentele 1995; Lehtonen 2005, 2006; Petkova & Lehtonen 2005). From the examples above it seems that even when the informants have some knowledge of the host country it is difficult to form realistic expectations based only on the information from the media. Many of the feelings of satisfaction/ dissatisfaction of the new country are related to the extent to which both good and bad expectations are discrepant to the real experiences in the host culture. Thus the expectations that sojourners have before they enter the country predetermine, at least to some extent, the intensity of their culture shock and the difficulties that they encounter.

The second significant factor in order to overcome culture shock is the previous experience as sojourner. For example, the informants who were for the first time abroad, like the Nigerian, Iraqi and Ecuadorian interviewees, reported that they had met great difficulties and suffered for weeks. In opposition the informants who had had previous experiences as sojourners stated that it was not difficult for them to adapt to the new culture. These were the Vietnamese, South Korean and Italian interviewees. Although at the time of the interview the Vietnamese informant had stayed in the US only three weeks, she reported no difficulty to accommodate to the new culture. The reason for this was her previous experience as a sojourner in New Zealand for 2 years. So, a previously experienced culture shock makes the new one easier to cope with. Moreover, the three informants from Vietnam, South Korea and Italy compared the new culture not only to that of their home country but also to the culture of their previous host country. This means that their picture of comparison is much broader than the one of the other informants. In addition they showed more understanding of the cultural attitudes, values and behaviors in the host country.

Thus in the third phase of the perception of culture shock, however difficult or easy the adjustment is, most of the informants state that they 'feel good', although they may have been 'sick' at the beginning. This means that they have adapted to the new cultural environment. Many of the sojourners have made considerable shifts in their understanding of the social roles, attitudes and behaviors in the host country. Most of them openly name their experience 'culture shock' and speak of 'adjusting', 'understanding', 'thinking on' the new culture and even 'compromising' with it. In such a way they have obviously accepted the basic values of the host country. This also means that their understanding of the new culture has increased and that they have experienced empathy. In other words now they are more willing to see the host culture through the eyes of the hosts.

Empathy, understanding and thinking over the new culture are the true signs of adaptation. However, there are different levels of accommodation to the new culture: from full acceptance and acceptance with some reserves to a limited acceptance.

America is for me one home. I emphasize 'one' because I have another one in Romania, and I have an imaginary one, at least one, which is neither in America, nor in Romania.

(Informant 3, from Romania)

I have few American friends here. I think it is easier to hang up with international people than with Americans. I don't know but it is easier to communicate with foreigners.

(Informant 1, from Nepal)

Actually I have a lot of European friends here. It is true, most of my friends are not American.

(Informant 4, from India)

I lived here more than five years but it's not my home. I don't feel America as a home. It is just another environment. You know, when I go back to Japan I will always feel 'Oh, I am back home'. When I come back to America, I don't feel the same. I don't know whether I will ever feel America as a home.

(Informant 7, from Japan)

I wouldn't like to improve anything here. I am quite happy as a visitor.

(Informant 19, from Spain)

Obviously a part of the coping strategy with culture shock for some sojourners is the knowledge that their visit is temporary and that they will return home. This gives them the self-confidence to manage the cultural differences in the host country. As Furnham (1988) argues, unlike the immigrants, nobody expects from sojourners to fully accept and adapt to the host culture, which in turn makes the adjustment of sojourners easier than that of immigrants. So, the awareness of the temporary stay is a fact that contributes to the quick recovery from the culture shock experienced.

From the interviews of the sojourners it is also evident that many of them make friendships much easier with foreigners than with Americans. They either find friends among their co-nationals or simply choose an international setting. This is normal and understandable since co-nationals and even foreigners can better understand the experiences and feelings of a sojourner. But on the other hand this fact hinders their integration into the host culture. Thus in the third phase of the perception of culture shock there is an acceptance of the new culture, which may vary from a low to a high level.

In this phase people become more aware of their cultural identity too. Paradoxically culture shock, which is often also accompanied by confusion and crisis of identity, highlights one's own identity. In the process of comparison many people begin to perceive more clearly their belongingness to a particular culture. Some of the interviewees reported that after their adjustment they began 'feeling stronger who

they were'. This means that they have strengthened their ethnic or national identity as a response of potential threat to cultural assimilation. However, knowing better who you are does not necessarily mean that it is easy to confirm your own identity:

I am Muslim. I found myself defending the Islam a lot, especially in conversations and in the classes that I took. Many of them are based on the Islam, like 'Political Islam' and 'Postcolonial nationalism'. So, even my studies involve the Islam. I did hear some horrible stories after 11.09.2001 and that's scary. Actually when I say 'I am Muslim', people look at me slightly differently and they even say 'I don't expect a Muslim woman to be like you' or 'Oh, my God, you are Muslim and I have to stay with you?' ...Actually I found it difficult to be a Muslim here.

(Informant 5, from Pakistan)

I cannot say that being an Iranian is very easy here. There are political problems that influence the people's relationships. It doesn't mean that we are under pressure. But we are aware of the situation between the two governments. However, there is a difference between governments' relations and people's relations. These are two separate things and that's what I am struggling all the time to show.

(Informant 13, from Iran)

It is such a difficult time for the Iraqi people. Actually some Americans sympathize with us. They say 'OK, how are you doing? How do you think, what do the people think of us?'. So, I don't have so bad problems here but I will have many problems when I return back home and say that I have been here. I can return neither to my home town, nor to my university. I will definitely go to some other place far away or even to some other country. I am thinking of Jordan, for example.

(Informant 21, from Iraq)

It seems that the bigger the difficulty to maintain one's identity is, the stronger the identity becomes. Any perceived non-acceptance, distrust or suspiciousness on the side of the hosts provokes the resistance of the sojourner and actually highlights his or her identity. In the opposite, individuals who feel that they are very easily accepted accommodate themselves easier to the new environment and are even prone to some modifications in identity. These are the cases of the Romanian and Bulgarian informants, for example. They reported not only the easiness with which they were accepted but their readiness to become part of the American society too. The Muslim informants, on the other hand, feel a kind of pressure and openly declare their need to maintain their cultural identity. Simultaneously some of them are aware of their

personal change and know that they will never be accepted in the same way by their co-nationals back home.

This means that although they struggle to confirm their identity, they have developed, at least subconsciously, a hybrid identity. On the one hand, they stick to their native traditions, customs and values. On the other hand, they have been influenced by the values of the new culture and thus they have modified to one or another extent their social behavior. Most of the informants are aware of the difficulties that they have faced being nationally or religiously different but few of them are conscious of their new psychological tendencies. This conclusion actually confirms the thesis of acculturation (Berry, King & Boski 1988) and the hypothesis of hybridization in multiethnic cities, first launched by Hall (1993) and later by Pieterse (2004). Although they relate cultural hybridization mostly to the immigrants in a new culture, the results of the interviews confirm that this thesis is applicable to the life of sojourners too.

Another example of the process of cultural hybridization is one of the Nepali people interviewed, a 19 year-old woman.

I didn't know anything about dating, because I grew up in a Nepali culture. Going to school here was very difficult. For me the most shocking was that kids my age had sex. I always knew that sex is done only after marriage. And the Americans talk about everything, even in school there is health education where they teach you about sex. I am Nepali and I won't do sex before my marriage. But I don't understand why we don't talk on this topic. In my family we have never done it and I don't think it is a good thing.

(Informant 22, from Nepal)

In her speech the informant from Nepal actually unites two cultural traditions. On the one hand, she follows the Nepalese pre-marriage customs but on the other hand, she is doing it in the 'American way': she talks openly about things that are not aloud to be spoken in her culture. Thus she has obviously preserved the essence of her cultural identity reflected in the native values, beliefs and attitudes upheld but simultaneously she has changed its expression or the modes by which these values, beliefs and attitudes are represented. In such a way this example brings to the fore an important question: what is actually cultural hybridization and does it mean homogenization or diversification?

Homogenization or diversification?

This paper does not agree with the popular thesis that cultural hybridization will most probably lead to the homogenization of cultures, languages, and ethnicities and to the creation of a global identity (Risse 2003; Hymans 2004). The latter is most often understood as an amorphous synthesis of cultural elements taken from everywhere (Smith 1991). Some authors make parallels between the USA and the EU. According to them the establishment of a common European state will in the long run lead to a 'European melting pot' and to the creation of a 'European demos'. The European cultural identity is also envisaged to translate in the future into a global citizenship and a global cultural identity (Lehning 2001).

The theory that Europe will be Europeanized in the same way as America was Americanized in the past is actually self-deficient. Most of the American sociologists nowadays confess that the two concepts of 'melting pot' and 'Americanization' have turned to be unsuccessful. Rather, they prefer to refer to the contemporary American culture as to a 'mosaic picture' (Glazer 1998). In this relation Servaes and Lie (2003) state that in the current age identities are composed of interpreted fragments that originate from multiple levels, which range from the global to the local. Thus according to them a global identity and a local identity are ideal forms not existing in real life.

It seems that at least in the present stage the idea of a homogeneous European culture is utopian. In addition, there is a considerable difference between multiculturalism in America and Europe. The US is a country of immigrants. In the new continent individuals from different races, ethnicities and nationalities integrate into the common American society, while in the European Union these are nations but not individuals or even ethnicities that are integrated. No matter how intensive the process of multiculturalization of Europe is, it cannot be compared to that of the US. However ethnically diverse the nations in Europe are, the EU is still comprised of nationalities but not of ethnicities. This fact also creates two very different pictures of the multiethnic cities in the US and EU.

The ethnicities in America have not only survived in the 'melting pot' of the past centuries but nowadays some of their members tend to strongly differentiate themselves from the other communities. Let us take for example the cultural fragmentation of New York. One of its biggest communities is the Chinese one. The

Chinese people in New York have their own territory in the city, China town, where mostly Chinese language is spoken and the Chinese way of life dominates. Similarly there are Russian, Italian, Polish, and many other ethnic quarters in New York where respectively Russian, Italian, Polish and other languages are spoken and particular life-styles are maintained. This means that 'global' and universal cities like New York are culturally parceled and fragmentized. Thus, even in the process of globalization and homogenization the opposite tendency of cultural fragmentation and ethnic and national self-determination is at least equally strong.

So, it seems that cultural hybridization is not a simple, elementary and one-sided process. I argue here that cultural hybridization should not be equaled to cultural homogenization and assimilation but rather it should be understood as a multiplication of social roles that people play in multiethnic societies. Moreover, these roles are situational and are highly dependent on the cultural context. For example, a Chinese in the New York China town may speak Chinese and behave in congruence with the Chinese etiquette but when he is among white Americans he speaks English and adopts different behavior. Speaking English and doing things 'in the American way' does not necessarily mean that he or she is assimilated. Nowadays individuals should respond to many different social situations. This is why they need to acquire new knowledge and to develop intercultural skills and abilities. This is a process of multiplication of social roles but also of social and cultural identities. In such a way the identities should not be viewed as monolithic but rather they are compounds of many different belongings, which according to the context can be brought to the fore and underlined.

Conclusion

The existing literature on culture shock pays almost no attention to the perception of culture shock by the people who experience it. The main thesis of this paper is that the perception of culture shock develops through three different phases. Initially most of the sojourners are not conscious of their culture shock, which is based on some specific details of the material culture they encounter. In this phase individuals usually observe and register facts mainly from the physical environment of the new country. These can be houses, shops and geographical distances but also race, ethnicity, physical traits of people and the languages spoken by them.

In the second phase the sojourners become aware of the values and the way of life of the host people. They actively compare the attitudes, customs and traditions of the new country with these in their home country. Most of them also perceive and interpret signs, symbols and behaviors in the host culture through the values, attitudes and meanings of the home culture. Thus this paper also argues that culture shock appears out of the disjuncture between true codes and perceived meanings.

Two basic groups of characteristics of the American culture were outlined on the basis of the interviews. The first group consists of characteristics mentioned by all the informants independently from the country they come from. The second group comprises characteristics mentioned only by groups from particular culture zones. This is why also these characteristics are informative as for the host culture as for the home culture of the sojourners. It was found out that the intensity of culture shock depends on the sojourners' expectations before they enter the country and on the previous experiences as sojourners that some of them have. The feelings of satisfaction/ dissatisfaction of the new country are related to the extent to which both good and bad expectations correspond to the real experiences in the country.

In the third phase of the perception of culture shock the individuals are fully aware of having experienced culture shock. Most of them have made considerable shifts in their understanding of the social roles, attitudes and behaviors in the host country. Empathy and thinking over the new culture are the true signs of this process. However, few of the sojourners interviewed are aware of their new psychological tendencies and of the fact that they have developed a hybrid identity. On the one hand, they hold to the native traditions, customs and rules but on the other hand, they have been influenced by the new culture and to one or another extent they have changed their social behavior.

Finally this paper argues that cultural hybridization is not a sign of assimilation. Rather, it should be understood as a multiplication of social roles in multiethnic societies. Thus identity is not simple and monolithic but rather, it is a complex compound of different social belongings dependent on the particular cultural context.

Notes

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