Contextual Identities

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A Comparative and Communicational Approach

Edited by

Emilia Parpală and
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INTRODUCTION

By bringing together the concepts of "comparativism", "identity", and "communication", this collective volume invites a reinterpretation of these defining concepts for postmodernism, a style which considers art as contextual(ized) and constructed. Their specific contextualization is reflected in the central position of identity problems actuated through various communication processes brought into sharp relief through the comparative method at the linguistic and literary level.

Comparative studies provide new insights into the complex matters of intercultural relations and identity issues, but they also inspire the field of communication studies. While focusing on comparative literature, it is not our intention, though, to limit the scope of the volume to this field; we envisage comparison as an all-encompassing scientific method, which might apply to linguistics, literature, anthropology and cultural studies, while facilitating a discussion about both objects and contexts of comparison.

Comparative imagology investigates auto-images and hetero-images– the reflection of one nation in itself and other nations' specific mentalities, shaped by beliefs and ideologies. It is not only a branch of comparative literature, it is also part of sociology, psychology and other cultural studies. Identity is a basic umbrella-term nowadays because the opening towards otherness that accompanies crossing borders of communication involves increased awareness of identity issues. Multicultural cohabitation is possible if individuals become aware of symbols of identity and their value, if they consciously participate in intercultural dialogue, operate with flexible concepts and, above all, if they place themselves under the unifying sign of tolerance.

Identity theories identify four facets of this notion: personal identity, role identity, social identity, and collective identity; the subcategories of cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, group and gender identity could also be added. Contemporary social psychologists espouse both process-oriented symbolic interactionist viewpoints (Goffman 1959; McCall and Simmons 1978; Burke and Stets 2009) and self-oriented models regarding roles and identities. For most scientists and writers, identity is not stable, homogeneous and independent, but a rather fluid set of characteristics, connected to others in time and space (Ferréol and Jucquois 2005).

Literature fictionalizes and "empowers" identity (Holden Rønning 1998) in a complex and subtle manner, dramatizing its fixity or fluidity, purity or hybridity, its deconstruction, dilemmas and interconnectedness. In fact, the issue of identity–otherness plays an essential role in the arts as well as in social interaction. Linguistic identity is implicit in the theory of enunciation (the discursive ethos), in the stylistics and pragmatics of variation in language use, in names and naming practices, in humor and in representation strategies.

Transmodern "globalized" communication involves rapid, large-scale and ambivalent processes; hence, the global aspect can no longer be separated from the local one. Communication can be seen as a means of emancipation for the individual or nation, but also as a means of their control. It is necessary, therefore, to rethink the "human condition" in the context of interculturalism and "netocracy" from the viewpoint of both mutual conditioning and interactive feedback. According to Jean Baudrillard (1997: 16), "we no longer live the drama of alienation, we live in the ecstasy of communication". Ecstasy and excess of communication are emblematic of postmodern culture, reducible to metonymies such as: network, screen, rhizome and fractals. Repositioning verbal communication in the present image-centric context (Parpală 2009) brings to this volume an interdisciplinary constellation which includes: anthropology, comparative literature, discourse analysis, cultural and rhetorical studies, gender and image studies, pragmatics, semiotics, social history (lifestyles) and cognitive poetics.

The contributors have expanded the topics raised in the previous six editions of the CIC international conference hosted by the University of Craiova since 2008. In this respect, it is worth pointing out the contributors' feedback in relation to the topics suggested by the organizer. We note that our three concepts of "comparativism", "identity" and "communication" have stimulated original and extensive theoretical and empiric reactions. A conference represents the development, stimulation and consolidation of research directions at a certain moment. As one of the former participants has stated, a "scientific international conference which poses such a serious topic as comparativism, identity and communication might be understood as a chance for humane communication which will not seek to overcome differences but to exercise their coexistence" (Veljković Mekić 2012: 272). The interdisciplinary and intercultural dialogue proposed by researchers from Australia, Azerbaijan, Japan, Romania and the Ukraine covers multiple identities activated in broader literary and linguistic contexts and with regard to different forms of communication.

This collection of 17 articles is structured into two diverse but intercommunicable parts: the first, focusing on the identity–otherness binomial, contains a series of "case studies" that can be subsumed within image studies and comparativism; the second, more narrowly focused, can be subsumed within linguistics (terminology) and literary communication.

Part I. Plural Identities and Comparativism provides a panorama of various forms of identity representations across time and space, emphasized by adopting a comparative study approach. The following directions of research can be distinguished:

a. Diversity: Racial, ethnic and collective identity

The poetics of racial, ethnic and collective identity, outlined in chapters one, two, four, six and ten spotlight some formal effects destined to emphasize "the distinctiveness of certain groups against a diffuse social landscape" (Kerkering 2003). While Leo Loveday concentrates on naming choices of Japanese nationals who share a dual heritage, Amada Mocioalcă and Liliana Tronea-Ghidel both examine literary representations of black identity. Comparative imagology inspires Claudia Costin and Oksana Lykhozhon to investigate otherness and European identity, respectively. All these point to the social construction of identity and complex processes of change.

Celebrating diversity, the contribution by Claudia Costin, *Diversity: An Image of the Difference Regarding the Other,* aims at diachronically describing the idea of otherness from Antiquity to modernity. Todorov's theoretical work on the discovery of America is a central reference for this topic. In today's postmodern society, the Other is not physically excluded but still remains problematical.

Plenary speaker Leo Loveday (*The Negotiation of Authenticity: Hybrid Naming among Japanese Nationals*) examines the resistance of those with plural identities in a society espousing an ideology of pure homogeneity. It focusses on the unconventional naming constructions of young Japanese citizens with a minority background, one of Chinese ancestry and the other as biracial. The study highlights the struggle for the retention of an authentic selfhood through unorthodox appellation. This socio-onomastic research applies the identity status theory of the developmental psychologist James Marcia to explain why it can be personally beneficial for a Japanese minority citizen to opt for societal visibility instead of adopting supposedly less stressful "camouflage" through a purely Japanese name.

A Ukrainian view of European collective identity is offered in chapter four, *The Comparative Imagology of European Identity: Central, Eastern & Western on the Way to Union*. Oksana Lykhozhon deconstructs the stereotypes related to the super-concept of "Europe" as a supracultural, supraterritorial unit by considering its three-dimensional structure. On the one hand, it includes the correlation of three components: Western Europe, Central Europe, and Eastern Europe, instead of the opposition between Western and Eastern, specific to the earlier concept of "Europe"; on the other hand, this semantic analysis reveals three layers: transnational, national and personal which includes feelings.

Within the defining frame of social identity, the racial concept of "black identity" results in the occurrence of a split self and, implicitly, of institutionalized inequality, intolerance and violence. The chapter by Amada Mocioalcă (*Jean Toomer: "Caine" and Racial Identity*) concerns the progressive construction of racial awareness in Toomer's prose. She considers that Toomer deconstructed a stable racial identity and never identified himself with his racial heritage. Even if he attempted to integrate his own identity into an "American" identity, Toomer's narrative vision "never reaches its goal of thematic and racial unification."

Liliana Tronea-Ghidel (*The Otherness of the Moor in Elizabethan England*) sketches semantic variation in the word *race* from the sixteenth century to modern times. By choosing a black protagonist for *Othello,* Shakespeare refers to the "Moor" according to the Elizabethan conception of blackness–a more comprehensive perception than it is today: "For us, 'black' means 'African,' but for Shakespeare's audience–so familiar with the presence of 'blackamoors' in the streets of London, the term 'black' could equally apply to Arabs."

b. Role and gender identity

Plenary speakers Rosemary Lucadou-Wells and John F. Bourke compare the role identity of the pound keeper in two different late 18th and early 19th century contexts (*"What Do I See in the Mist Beyond the Trees?" Reflections on the Role of the Pound Keeper in Colonial Van Diemen's Land, Australia, and Harpswell, Maine, United States of America*). The methodology is a reflective analysis of the content contained in four different genres of text providing access to cultural heritage; this qualitative methodology acknowledges the role and influence of the researchers on the materials. These Australian researchers conclude that "context is a strong determinant on identity."

Cultural and gender identities are frequently plural in the contemporary multicultural world, as a result of geographical and social mobility. Women, in particular, are much more sensitive to feelings of belonging. Remina Sima (*Work and Intellect in Women's Lives*) relies on the family context to reveal the interconnectedness between the private sphere (that represents the home) and the public one. The chance women now have to cross boundaries is a gender topic handled in this sociological approach to education and its impact.

c. Virtual identity and hybrid bodies

The issues of corporality and hybridity are central in postmodern culture. The notions of a "hybrid body" and a "cyborg" are discussed and exemplified by Catalina Ioana Petre in her contribution, *The Human Body: Are We Becoming a Hybrid?* Common examples of a hybrid body are the rock singer Marylin Manson in addition to plastic reparatory and aesthetic surgery. The lyrics of Manson's song, *Mechanical Animals,* articulate the concepts of hybridization and being a cyborg, which are also reflected both in the musician's name and on his album cover.

d. Spatial identity: discourse on cities

The dominating discourse on cities, central to the chapters by Alexandra Roxana Mărginean, Mariana Neț and Alina Țenescu, centers around identity, memory, the future, rationality and communication.

In analyzing two novels by Graham Swift, Alexandra Roxana Mărginean (*Revisitations of the Suburb in the Context of Identity Construction Via Use and Abuse of Space*) interprets the suburb as a space of ritual and retreat, a "heterotopia" which can neither be defined in Marc Augé's terms as "non-place" nor "anthropological place." On the contrary, Swift's suburb is transgressive and transitional: "a third or middle space which prefigures the position(ings) of the characters in relation to various aspects of their own identities, to their own social roles."; "It is neither as cold and impersonal to the character as the city, nor hospitable enough to be called home."

In search of urban identity, plenary speaker Mariana Neț displays another "tale" of two cities, New York City and Bucharest in the latter half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th. As a semiotician seduced by lifestyles (see López-Varela and Neț 2009), the author starts from the assumption that "street noises are a reliable feature for defining urban identity": *Cities Speak by Making Noise*. The first element to be

noted in this article is the freshness of the theoretical perspective–the concept of defining and comparing two cities according to their acoustical indexes. The discourse on cities is grounded on two rhetorical devices: the metaphor of reflection and the synecdoche of fragment-totality substitution. The cacophony of New York City main street noise is contrasted with the more subdued, semi-rural voices of Bucharest. The intricate interplay between lingering patriarchal habits and modernity is, in fact, the background of this analysis.

The methodology turns up once again in chapter eleven. From the cognitive poetic perspective, metaphor is a device for "better comprehension" (Stockwell 2002). Alina Ţenescu (*Urban Metaphors and Identity in Postmodern English-American and Francophone Literature*) focuses on the idea that, with English-American and Francophone writers Dos Passos, Dietrich and Chamoiseau, urban space relies on conceptual metaphors related to special spatial perceptions and representations. Using anthropologic and cognitive models, she argues that, in order to organize conceptualizations of urban space, classification is required; within the corpus of the study, the most recurrent urban space metaphors are those of the city as a human body, as a network, a machine, a chessboard and a self-conceived entity.

The articles brought together in *Part II. Communication and discourse* illustrate two directions of research: literary communication (chapters thirteen, fourteen, fifteen and seventeen) and terminology (chapters twelve and sixteen).

a. Literary communication

The idea of communication as a matter of communicating something needs to be qualified, considers R.D. Sell, the pioneer of communicational criticism, because "Literature can be thought of as a dialogue between writers and their public: a kind of give-and take which has both ethical entailments and communal consequences" (Sell 2011: 10).

The contributions in this section engage, to different degrees, in the expression of diversity: a reader-response study of an English-Canadian writer (chapter thirteen), the symbolic communication of flower language (chapter fourteen), corporeal language (chapter fifteen) and performativity in postmodern poetry (chapter seventeen)**.**

The contribution by Andreea Raluca Constantin, *The Reception and Influence of Margaret Laurence in Romania and around the World,* reviews Margaret Laurence's presence in Romanian and international research and her reception by critics, literary academics and readers. The

paper has also a personal value in that it offers the chance to present Constantin's own perspective on this prominent Canadian writer.

The Poppy and Carnation Communicate Life and Death by Jamila Farajova is a comparative semiotic study aiming to illuminate the relation between culture and poetry. In order to argue that poetry is a powerful reflection of intercultural relations, Furajova selects two national events (*The Remembrance poppy*–a sign of Remembrance Day in Commonwealth countries, and the *Mourning Carnation*–a sign of Black January in Azerbaijan) and two poems: *In Flanders Fields* by the Canadian poet John McCrae and *Do weep, Carnation, do weep* by the Azerbaijani poet Mammad Aslan. At the semiotic level, the poppy and carnation reveal a rich symbolism: memory, freedom, mourning for innocent blood, and "mainly love, either for the living or for the dead."

The human body, language and the transmission of double meanings are brought together in Alexandra Roxana Mărginean's contribution on *Grotesque and Abject Bodies in Graham Swift's Fiction*. The issue of grotesqueness occasions "existentialist and mythical perspectives," a reflection on the "transgressive mode" (grotesque, abject, and plant-like organic bodies) and opposition to the classical body. In Graham Swift's *Waterland*, the idea of "unfinishedness" may be linked with violence or with the intrinsic ambivalence of grotesque bodies, concludes the author.

Emilia Parpală (*Speech Acts in Postmodern Poetry*) examines the rhetorical values of performativity in Romanian postmodern poetry of the eighties. The playful thematization of speech acts represents a radical renewal of poetic discourse, but also a vulnerable aspect, with mannerist results. As a whole–the author concludes–the rhetoric of performatives is "polemical, subversive, (self)ironical, but still confident in the poetry's capacity for action in the world."

b. Terminologies

The theory of terminology, as a scientific interdisciplinary discipline, focuses on the significance of concepts. The socio-cultural expansion of terminologies reflects the contemporary process of the anglicisation of vocabulary. Mariana Coancă and Elena Museanu warn that the absence of Anglicisms in current Romanian language dictionaries leads to construal ambiguities or misspellings.

Mariana Coancă (*Trendy and Cool Terms in the Digital Age*) addresses the topic of lexical creativity in online language. People with increasing social capital "practise a continuous terminology exercise," and exhibit a more innovative approach in creating trendy and cool terms like *selfie*,

bitcoin, *phablet* and *BYOD*. In fact, s*elfie* or *selfy* became one of the most popular new words in 2013. The coinage of cool, trendy terminology constitutes an important potential catalyst for smart technology to promote interactive solutions.

A specialist in economic terminology, Elena Museanu (*Theories on Lexical vs. Textual Terminology for Economic Terms*) focuses on the specific features of this domain. Functional linguistic analysis is considered as an appropriate method to study textual terminology in the context of globalization. As a conclusion: economic terminology "is especially dynamic" and shows a close relation between the linguistic level and the extra-linguistic one.

The carefully chosen contributions to this volume clearly illustrate the plurality of our arena as they include approaches from literature, language and cultural studies. Above all, in spite of the methodological and thematic polyphony, this collection demonstrates unity and coherence with regard to our triple banner of comparativism, identity and communication.

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PART I.

PLURAL IDENTITIES AND COMPARATIVISM

CHAPTER ONE

DIVERSITY:
AN IMAGE OF THE DIFFERENCE
REGARDING THE OTHER

CLAUDIA COSTIN

1. Introduction

The world has always revealed itself as constituting an extremely complex and diverse socio-cultural structure, even when perceived as an apparently homogeneous unit. In a paradigm of diachronic values that has generated many questions over time two terms usually regarded as antonyms stand out namely: *Me vs. The Other* and *Us vs. The Others*. Despite their apparent antonymic nature, these terms actually represent "the essence of interpersonal relationships" because, as stated by Lucian Boia (2006: 113), "history itself is but a multiform discourse constructed around the antithetical and complementary principles of identity and otherness,"[1] in other words, around the diversity which forms the plurality of society.

Diversity should be regarded as a referential and ontological dimension which allows for the expression of cultural, social, economic, religious, ethnic, racial, and political values as well as the characteristics of gender, age and traditional dress-style found all over the world. Since the beginning of time, diversity has been an issue for all of humanity. In Antiquity, Greek and Roman writers and historians expressed interest in the meaning of both "human" and "non-human", often exploring the question to what extent a certain individual or group could be labelled as human or not.

This preoccupation with the Other, together with an increased perception of Otherness, intensified at the beginning of the 13th century, due to unprecedented geographical discoveries such as that of the Orient

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[1] Our translation of Romanian authors.

and later on, of America. It remained so until the twentieth century when, as a result of anthropological studies, extensive diversity was perceived, as expressed by Vintilă Mihăilescu (2007: 17), simply as "the difference of others."

It should be noted that this difference was always compared with the unquestioned identity of the Europeans–considered a landmark identity. The European peoples, especially Western Europeans, took pride in calling themselves Humans. The others, from outside their social system were considered non-humans. Thereby, a clear-cut distinction was created, between the civilized and the savage, between superiors and inferiors.

However, the beginning of the 21st century has opened a new perspective on the representation of the image of the Other because the focus is no longer on the outsider, on the one from far away, but on the one living inside the "city", inside this "centre of the world" in which everybody has to establish their own coordinates. This time, the minority, the marginalized or the women appear to be as strange as the savages used to be. This reveals a twisted representation of the world, an inverted image of a society based on well incorporated traditions which, more often than not, proved to be restrictive. Nevertheless, after two thousand years of searching for answers to the fundamental questions regarding relationships with the Other, why do the differences turn out to be more significant than the similarities? Perhaps because, as Lucian Boia points out in *Pentru o istorie a imaginarului* (*A history of the imaginary*):

> the Other is more often than not a real person or an entire community seen through the deformed filter of the imagination. What we perceive is an image which–as any image–is both real and fictional. Sliding from real to imaginary, the Other is simplified and also amplified, ultimately becoming a caricature or even a symbol. It cannot be ordinary; it has to be meaningful; after all, what would the Other mean for us if it had nothing to say? (Boia 2006: 113).

Or maybe the individual's desire to retrieve and re-define reality as it is perceived and brought out by symbolic behaviour is ultimately related to the human condition. Beyond what identity and identification provide, beyond what positions human behaviour takes in connection to the Other and the mind-games of history, humans have always yearned for the expression of individualization in every society and on every continent.

In a book which we consider fundamental for the understanding of contemporary society, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, Jean Baudrillard defines difference as absolutely necessary:

> To differentiate oneself is always, by the same token, to bring into play the
> total order of differences, which is, from the first, the product of the total
> society and inevitably exceeds the scope of the individual. In the very act
> of scoring his points in the order of differences, each individual maintains
> that order, and therefore condemns himself only ever to occupy a relative
> position within it. Each individual experiences his differential social gains
> as absolute gains; he does not experience the structural constraint which
> means that positions change, but the order of differences remains
> (Baudrillard 1998: 62).

Basically, difference is a mark of diversity in which the border
between *Me vs. the Other* and *Us vs. the Others* is obscure. Consequently,
being part of a certain ethnicity, belonging to a particular religion or
following a cultural code is not a sign of inferiority. On the contrary, this
perspective emphasises that the world is both diverse and different and
contains various value systems deserving acknowledgment. Tolerance and
understanding are human attributes and, moreover, they can determine
human action and the course of history.

2. The age of the Other in Antiquity

Due to the appearance of abnormality in ancient legends, the image of
the Other sparked the interest of countless writers and historians in
Antiquity such as Homer, Herodotus, Strabo and Pliny the Elder. For
example, in The Seventh Book of *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder (1847-
48: 174–180) presents in a realistic manner supernatural beings living
among humans such as people with heads on their chest encountered in
Lidya, androgynous people in Africa, *Macrocephali* (long heads),
Cyclopae, *Lystrigonae*, "people with no noses or with tails" and *Griffins*,
"a kind of flying Wild Beast". These bizarre creatures populating the
human world were regarded as an "axis mundi", the connection point
between the sky and the earth and between higher and lower realms. As a
consequence, whatever was outside it was considered non-human and
hence inferior.

The same vision is detectable to some extent in the work of Herodotus
for whom those situated at the greatest distance from the centre are viewed
with contempt, disregard and hatred. Furthermore, egocentrism, which
later came to be labelled as *ethnocentrism* by W.G. Summer (1907), was
common in ancient times. Consider, for example, this fragment from
Herodotus describing Persia:

And they honour of all most after themselves those nations which dwell nearest to them, and next those which dwell next nearest, and so they go on giving honour in proportion to distance; and they hold least in honour those who dwell furthest off from themselves, esteeming themselves to be by far the best of all the human race on every point, and thinking that others possess merit according to the proportion which is here stated, and that those who dwell furthest from themselves are the worst (Herodotus 1890: 134).

Furthermore, the comments of Tzvetan Todorov are pertinent here in order to understand the significance of the imaginary projection of the Other generated by distance.

As opposed to "Herodotus' rule", Homer's so-called "rule" stipulates that the ones living the furthest away from the Greeks are "the most just of all people" (*Iliad, Book XIII*) residing "at the end of the world [...] where life is nothing but delight for mortals." (*Odyssey, Book IV*). In this case, Tzvetan Todorov's comment is also relevant:

In other words, and as Strabo had already noted in the first century A.D., for Homer the most remote country is best: such is 'the rule of Homer', exactly the inverse of the rule of Herodotus. From this standpoint we cherish the remote because it is far away: no one would think to idealize well-known neighbours (Todorov 1994: 265).

Unworthy, an object of derision, or, on the contrary, an object of adoration and an example of justice, the Other challenged people's imagination in Antiquity. In both cases, as the anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu states,

the Other is not seen, but imagined [after one's own heart], as an empty space of some collective projections. Worshipped or hated, the Other does not actually exist, it is kept away and must remain as such in order to be worshipped or hated (Mihăilescu 2007: 63–64).

After more than a millennium, the image of the Other has changed its syntax and its manner of symbolisation but not its fundamental nature.

3. The image of the Other between the 15th and 19th centuries

Adventurers and missionaries increasingly began to bring back information about the humans they confronted in remote areas of the globe

starting with the 13th century. For example, Marco Polo travelled to the Far East and discovered a fascinating, rich world which had a totally different, complex culture from the Europeans; he offered a curious image of the Other which was to be continued over the next centuries with the discovery of the New World. As recognised by Tzvetan Todorov, the discovery of America and its indigenous peoples represents an "encounter (that) will never again achieve such an intensity". Moreover it

> is essential for us today not only because it is an extreme, and exemplary, encounter. Alongside this paradigmatic value, it has another as well–the value of direct causality. The history of the globe is of course made up of conquests and defeats, of colonizations and discoveries of others (Todorov 1984: 5).

In fact, the conquests made by the Europeans of the new geographical and cultural space of America, starting in 1492 when Christopher Columbus crossed the Atlantic Ocean, signifies "the beginning of the modern era". It constitutes, on the level of ontology and values, the beginning of a new period, of a "brand new time", different from any other in the history of humanity, because relationships with the Other, which were until then unknown, were completely reconfigured-as humans discovered the whole to which they belonged. Until 1492, "they formed a part without a whole" (*ibidem*: 5).

Thus the world "closes up" because, at its end, an extraordinary, imagined world is replaced by a strange, real one. In a journal describing his third trip, transcribed by the Dominican abbot Bartolomé de Las Casas, Columbus claims that he has seen Cyclopes, Amazons, humans that are born with tails, people with one eye and a dog muzzle in addition to mermaids whose faces have a human appearance.

In addition to Columbus, colonizers went on to declare that not only the appearance, the clothing and the habits of indigenous peoples were peculiar but that their languages were also odd. The Europeans continuously searched for familiar words in indigenous tongues and continued to scold the natives for their bad pronunciation of names and terms which they thought should be recognizable, totally ignoring the differences between their languages and even sometimes refusing to believe that indigenous languages were actually different from Spanish in the first place. In one of the pages of his journal, Columbus wrote that the Amerindians of the New World should be brought back to Spain to learn to talk. This misjudgment clearly reflects the superior way of thinking towards the Other and presents a disconcerting image of a world conquered through cruelty and war.

An extremely important point "which inflamed the mind and the actions of Europeans for a number of centuries" (Mihăilescu 2007: 56) concerned the question of the conqueror's fundamental attitude towards indigenous peoples: what were the Spaniards, the Europeans supposed to do with the Others, the "primitives", the "savages" living on the American continent? History has revealed some cardinal moments regarding this dilemma. One significant moment is presented by Tzvetan Todorov in *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* and concerns the famous Valladolid debate of 1550. This confrontation involved the supporters of racism and slavery on the one hand, represented by the philosopher Ginés de Sepúlveda, and the supporters of equality on the other, represented by the Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas, "Protector of the Indians" and author of *Historia de Las Indias (History of the Indies)*. Because Sepúlveda had been denied the right to publish his treaty justifying the colonization and enslavement of pagan, indigenous peoples by Christian Europeans, he made a request to publicly present his ideas, which he did in the Valladolid debate in front of a jury made up of jurists and theologians. The friar Las Casas gave his counter-arguments for five days but the judges could not come up with a verdict, even though most of them obviously shared the friar's views because the philosopher was not given any authorisation to publish his book. Sepúlveda based his arguments on

> an ideological tradition which other defenders of the thesis of inequality also draw upon to make their points. […] Sepúlveda believes that hierarchy, not equality, is the natural state of human society. But the only hierarchic relation he knows is that of a simple superiority / inferiority; hence there are no differences of nature, but only different degrees in one and the same scale of values, even if the relation can be infinitely repeated.[…] [In wisdom, skill, virtue and humanity, these people are as inferior to the Spaniards as children are to adults and women to men; there is as great a difference between them as there is between savagery and forbearance, between violence and moderation, almost–I am inclined to say–as between monkeys and men] (Todorov 1984:152).

Sepulveda's theory about inequality–in other words about differences–has no proof of validity (neither when it was created nor today) because of his insufficient arguments regarding the major differences between superiority–inferiority and good–evil. By vehemently criticising the Amerindian way of life involving cannibalism, the demon cult and human sacrifices, for example, Sepulveda goes to extremes ending up not even fully recognising their status as human beings.

Sepulveda's theory was strongly opposed by Las Casas, his ideas–as pointed out by Tzvetan Todorov–being derived from the teachings of Jesus Christ. The Dominican friar defended the rights of the Indians and declared that they could not be treated as slaves. He wanted to place equality as the foundation of any human policy: "The natural laws and rules and rights of men are common to all nations, Christian as well as pagan, and whatever their sect, law, state, colour and condition, without any difference" (*ibidem*: 162):

> he even goes one step further, which consists not only in declaring an abstract equality, but in specifying that he means an equality between *ourselves* and *the others*, Spaniards and Indians; whence the frequency, in his writings, of such formulas as: [All the Indians to be found here are to be held as free: for in truth so they are, by the same right as I myself am free] (*Letter to Prince Philip*, 20, 4, 1544) (*ibidem*: 162).

To justify native practices and rites, including cruel human sacrifice, Las Casas reminded the conquerors / conquistadors and his readers that these are still present in certain ways in the Christian religion.

Without a doubt, the position of Las Casas and important members of the Christian world (especially that of Pope Paul the Third who saw the Indians as "real human beings") led, in the next century, to a change in European mentality, in the way the Other was perceived and in the way they interacted with them. We must mention that the contact between them was defined by and realised through the Europeans' relationship with themselves. In other words, we are dealing with a renewed version of the Narcissus' myth through a discourse about power, egocentrism and ethnocentrism on the time axis. In *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other,* Tzvetan Todorov considered that highlighting the existing differences in reality implies the distinction between at least three problem axes: the value axis (the other is good or bad, is my equal or inferior), the axis of human actions ("I" understand and "I" accept, or "I" ignore the transindividual value) and the projection of the other's image (I accept or I ignore the other's identity). Obviously, there may be similarities between these axes, interpenetrations, but they can only partially solve the problem of diversity and consequently, that of the Other.

A rehabilitation of the "noble savage" is offered by Montaigne in 1579 in his *Essays* but that does not mean that his ideas were warmly accepted by the people of that time. Based on his discussions with a man from a Huguenot colony located near present-day Rio de Janeiro, the French writer notes that the indigenous tribes (*they*) who live there are considered "savages" simply because they are different from Europeans (*us*), which

does not mean that they are worse or inferior. Furthermore, he believes that there are more similarities between these two groups than differences, especially when referring to popular spiritual creations. In this sense, in The Second Book of his *Essays*, the following statement is revealing:

> which he would have delivered with greater assurance, had he seen the similitude and concordance of the new discovered world of the West Indies with ours, present and past, in so many strange examples. In earnest, considering what is come to our knowledge from the course of this terrestrial polity, I have often wondered to see in so vast a distance of places and times such a concurrence of so great a number of popular and wild opinions, and of savage manners and beliefs, which by no means seem to proceed from our natural meditation. The human mind is a great worker of miracles! (Montaigne 1877: 423).

The idea that there are no universal moral standards which can be applied in judging and evaluating a society or a culture which is different from the European one, is a highly modern argument especially for the time it was written. Montaigne understands that the only criteria used in judging the Other are our own and we obviously consider them to be the best. Continuing the work of Las Casas, although from a more ethnographic and anthropological perspective, Montaigne demonstrates that the European is able to discover the Other as an equal human being.

Moreover, in subsequent centuries, we gradually pass from the elimination, assimilation and circumscription of the Other's own existential, religious, cultural universe to the acceptance of the Other as different. In the eighteenth century, man (who had not existed previously, according to Foucault) regards himself in the mirror of the Other, because the Other is now considered human. One clear example is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theory condoning the 'savage'. Thus, the "barbarian", the primitive, the naive is considered the "model" of human consciousness, the "pure" and the "uncorrupted". Western society is perceived and criticized by the enlightened Rousseau through the eyes of the "savage" which the philosopher sees wandering through the woods, "animated by few passions and self-satisfied". This healthy state of the primitive uncorrupted by the elements of civilisation, a sense of ownership and progress becomes an irreproachable model.

All these not infrequently contradictory attitudes and aspects concerning man's relationship to the Other highlight the fact that

> the exemplary history of the conquest of America teaches us that Western civilization has conquered, among other reasons, because of its superiority

in human communication; but also that this superiority has been asserted at the cost of communication with the world (Todorov 1984: 251).

Not even the nineteenth century, in spite of benefitting from history, managed to better define the relationship between *Me* and the *Other*. According to Lucian Boia (2006: 121), in that century the evolutionists and racists took over from conquistadors through the "devaluation" on a global scale of "the simplified debate". Everything that was not European was considered inferior because, from a biological point of view, the Others were now considered "less able". On the other hand, even within Europe the way in which the Other was perceived changed. The augmentation of the social conflicts led to the creation of an overwhelming and disturbing image of the Other. The nineteenth century was a time when powerful social divisions between the rich and the poor took place, the latter constituting the "dangerous" working classes. Therefore, according to the observation made by Lucian Boia:

> the discovery made by Marx, in the middle of the nineteenth century, was not the product of hazard. This dialectic of distrust, of confrontation and repression ended up producing a grotesque image of the Other, producing the grand army of 'the miserable'. Mankind acquired different and disturbing contours, to the caricatured expression of a criminal theorised by Lombroso, who placed a considerable part of the population of Western countries in the category of 'potential killers', a degraded human being (*ibidem*: 125).

4. 20th century representations: imagining the Other on a global scale

Far from being an age of peace and tolerance, the twentieth century, until the First World War, brings forth new questions concerning interpersonal relationships between I and the Other on the scene of modern history. These questions are not present only in Europe, but also in America and Asia. Most of the time, the focus is not on the Other located in a remote area; it is especially placed on the Other living next to us, inside the "city" or at its margin. Geographical distances prove less important than cultural, ethnic, religious and even political distances. The Other, which is no longer the savage, the primitive, the barbarian, can be observed, even imagined or invented from multiple points of view, because he–the Afro-American, the gipsy, the dissident, the one suffering from AIDS–creates the image of an inverted world. He is the embodiment of non-value. For example, at the end of the twentieth century, AIDS

patients were marginalized and excluded from society because they represented a danger to others and because their disease was seen as resulting from sin and divine punishment. Thus, medical connotations were exceeded by symbolic connotations, and the difference was strongly amplified. The image of the Other here is similar to that of medieval lepers and that of the lepers who, from the second half of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century, were banished to Spinalonga (Kalydon) island, located near Crete. The disease was in these cases a "symbol" which augmented the difference.

One representation of the other is that of women, seen in opposition to man. In the world of men, whose speech is often virulent with an obviously dominating force, women still find it hard to attain a position of status in general:

> The Woman is a *complete* Other, meaning that she embodies all the essential characteristics of otherness, the entire ambiguity of difference. Opposed to the 'normality" of man, she has long been considered a marginal being, and, to some extent, [savage]; better and worse at the same time, she has aroused adoration and contempt, attraction and fear. A symbol of fertility and life, she may also symbolize corruption and the death of matter. She represents both wisdom (Athena) and madness, purity (Virgin Mary) and libido [...] Depending on the circumstances, she has been deified or demonized (*ibidem*: 128).

The image of these "incomplete beings," as Aristotle called them, was strongly altered in the 16th and 17th centuries by the infamous "witch hunts", a phenomenon fuelled by ancient prejudice which transcended centuries and by fears of all kinds related to war, pestilence, famine, the Apocalypse and Judgement Day.

The emancipatory reaction in the 20th century did not essentially change the "structural ambiguity of feminine mythology" (*ibidem*: 130). Woman, "equal" or "superior" to man, is nothing but a creation of the imagination, different from traditional representation but circumscribed to the same spiritual game of contrasts.

Another representation of the Other in the twentieth century was the Jew for the Nazis; the Jew was seen as opposed to the superior "Aryan", as the capitalist parasite for the Communist working class, the Westerner for the "new man" of an Eastern Europe dominated by socialist ideology.

Today, the pressing questions faced by the contemporary individual, and especially the European one, are: What do we do with immigrants?–a concern that European nations must confront. What are the Romanians going to do with the Roma minority as they resist social integration? The

Romanians have become more aware since gaining their independence, of the fact that this minority often travels semi-legally and commits acts outside the law in order to ensure their existence. It is undeniable that the majority have not manifested enough understanding or tolerance towards them by refusing to accept that, as a minority, the Roma people have the right to preserve their traditions, their customs and their language. Their behavior might be a reaction precisely to this lack of understanding and tolerance on the part of the majority. More than anything, this reveals how the Other has turned into a problematic agenda to be addressed by the contemporary world.

Conclusion

Throughout the millennia of existence, from Antiquity up to the present, the Other has always constituted a question mark for human beings: "Who is the Other?", "What is He like?", "Is the Other a Man like me and like Us?"

The major geographical discoveries of both Northern and Southern America, but also those of Asian space, which marked an important step in the evolution of society, revealed–in a more significant way than ever–the diversity and the difference between people. The Europeans admitted that the cultural elements of indigenous people in newly discovered geographical areas were essentially different from theirs, thus emphasizing the superiority of the great populations of the mythical continent of Europe.

The following centuries did not fundamentally change the vision and the attitude regarding human differences, for, on the one hand, whatever did not belong to the European world was considered worthless and labelled as inferior. On the other hand, a similar concept existed as well in 19th century Europe, emphasizing the difference between North and South, between fair-haired and dark-haired (the South being seen as inferior to the North).

In the first half of the 20th century, the modernization of society and industrialization in powerful European states increased the deterioration of the image of the Other with the idea of the superiority of the "Aryan race" promoting racist representation. After the Second World War and the coming of communism in the Eastern part of the continent, a new difference became dominant, namely that between the East and the West, between totalitarian space and democratic, occidental space. This was partially dissolved after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of its satellite states. However, major differences continue to