# CULTURE AND IDENTITY DYNAMICS IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSCULTURATION

**Mgr. Kristína Jakubovská**

Constantine The Philosopher University in Nitra, **Slovakia**

## ABSTRACT

Never before was sociocultural communication as complex as it is these days. Natural character of man represented by his sociability, on the one hand, and curiousity, which make him explore and want to see and understand what is there beyond any border, on the other hand, intertwines with the deconstruction of original physical limitations and great time-space compression of our time. This creates a major common platform (and particular platforms) where plentiful and diverse cultures and their representatives meet, communicate, confront themselves, exchange cultural values and transform. We transculture, crossing the border of our well-known system of beliefs, ideas, norms, values and ways of life. But what does it look like and what happens next, after we do so? Is the process only positive or does it have any possible negative aspects? What is its impact? For sure, two critical sociocultural variables, being in the centre of contemporary research, as well as, being vital parts of our everyday life and self-consciousness (identity and culture) will never be the same as before. The transformation of our self-portait and relations of belonging somewhere and referring to something is an inevitable and unavoidable part of the encounter with the otherness. The author of the paper studies the process of transculturation in its contexts and relations. In the centre of her attention is the impact on individual and collective identities transformations, as well as, changes in contact cultural systems. She presents their dynamics pointing out at their both converging and diverging character and looks for new organisational principles of postmodern sociocultural reality along with already existing, historically-determined ones (local, national, international and global) towards translocalism. The paper presents the process of cultural traditions´ revitalization which leads to re-defining of local communities and localities and tendencies of translocalism. It also points at the inner balancing mechanism of the cultural system, which ensures that culturally decentralising processes (transculturation) and culturally centralising processes (cultural traditions revitalisation) are in mutual balance.

**Keywords:** culture dynamics, individual and collective identities, transculturation, cultural traditions revitalisation, community, translocalism

## INTRODUCTION

Culture and man resemble two inseparable categories with deep mutual relations. Upon every birth, man is shaped by the culture he has been born to or he has grown up in. Traditional understanding of this process is linear, meaning we are brought up into understanding, respecting and repeating a certain complex of cultural values, practices and patterns, which make our sociocultural conduct readable and corresponding to

others´ expectations, producing copies of conduct and identity. Such perspective is, however, restricted in outer influence and inner dynamics. In fact, it is diversity resembling a basic organisational principle of sociocultural reality and dynamics being its inner momentum which make intercultural contacts unavoidable and create a large platform for intercultural encounters. The linear and monocultural socializational model is challenged by other cultures and their values reaching new, unoriginal, places and societies. [8] Whereas, in the past the bond to one´s own culture was strong and enhanced by the power of traditions and, consequently so, secured many restrictions in transculturation, the modern and postmodern time is typical for a large-scale crossing of one´ s cultural borders. Cultural systems are more open than ever and communicate with each other more intensely. There is an almost unlimited flow of cultural values and patterns, which is well-represented by local-global interconnectedness. What happens to the cultural system and identity in this place of ever-changing sociocultural reality? They are no more viewed as stable categories but dynamic ones, fluid. The culture-man relation is now seen in the way how culture dynamics and processes result in changing patterns of individual and collective identities.

There are various types of intercultural processes and processes which lead to cultural values dispersal over large cultural areas. The general division recognises the intercultural process within a certain sociocultural system (transculturalism within a particular society) and the processes crossing the national context (internationalisation, transnationalisation, globalisation etc.). Although these two categories are of different scale and have their specifics, there is something they have in common. They include the aspect of crossing one´ s cultural borders, the complex of shared and transmitted cultural practices, and result in changes in cultural systems and identities. In this way, we suggest that all these processes are roofed under the term of transculturalism.

## TRANSCULTURALISM AS A TRANSCULTURAL EXPERIENCE

In our opinion, there are two main possibilities how to understand transculturalism - from a narrower and wider point of view. The narrower viewpoint understands transculturalism as a process of active cultural exchange and creation of new forms, which is realised both inside of particular societies and between and across them. As for its exogenousity, it lies somewhere between internationalisation and globalisation being closer to the second one. It is typical for hybridisation, weakening of the national context and ambiguous character (being both integrational and differentional). The wider viewpoint sees the term of transculturalism as the most general term representing any experience of crossing a cultural border. This means that various forms of transcultural processes based on intercultural communication and exchange are, at the same time, forms of a transcultural experience. We presume that transculturation is carried out within sociocultural systems and also beyond them, both respecting and disrespecting of the national context, while taking on different forms of internationalisation, transnationalisation, globalisation etc.

But what does the transcultural experience mean and when it happens? In general, we consider a transcultural experience to be an experience of communication between (among) cultures which initiates individual and collective cultural self-reflection and





leads to cultural enrichment. It is necessary to emphasize, however, that this communication has different forms as for its dynamics, intensity and the character of relations. It can be both physical (interpersonal) and nonphysical (nonpersonal, mainly in connection with contemporary technologies), tolerant and culturally-sensitive but also offensive, both creative and destructive. We can experience transculturalism from the position of tourists, migrants, researchers who are doing a terrain research of some community; from the position of a local inhabitant of a culturally-heterogenous place or even of a reader of travelogues and novels depicting other cultural environments etc. The source of such an experience can be an exogenous factor in the form of migrants, who we share our living space with and come to mutual contacts and relationships with and whose cultures we get to know. Another source of it can be penetration of foreign cultural values into our own cultural environment (e.g. traditional production and healing practices, ideas, religious images, models of family relationships, traditions etc.), which we learn about in the process of sociocultural practice and potentially get inspired by. An important source of a transcultural experience is a personal contact with an unfamiliar majority cultural environment. Such situation is quite specific because man finds himself in other sociocultural, political and law framework and experiencing contact with another culture and its representatives is much more intense. In case of potential conflicts, as a result of discrepancy between particular cultural patterns, man tends to modify his conduct according to local norms, i.e. he acts as a representative of the other culture.

In the situations and positions which we have outlined, we can observe the aspect of crossing one´ s own cultural border, penetration into another culture or adoption of other cultural values within our own cultural framework. This is carried out by means of learning, observation, reflection, comparison, the effort to understand the other. The aspect of reflection, becoming aware of the circumstances has, in our opinion, a key position in the process of transculturation. The first level of the transcultural experience resembles the change in one´s consciousness, which happens. Even if being a tiny one. Man crosses his cultural border and comes back enriched by the experience. The higher level of transculturation is represented by cultural import itself. The cultural import not only means adopting a foreign cultural value and identifying oneself with it, but, consequently so, re-evaluation of one´s own identity and re-structuring of individually perceived referential culture. We consider the even-higher level of transculturation to be represented by the state of permanent openness of cultural systems between (among) which there is intense cultural flow. A creative process of cultural hybridisation, various forms of mutual interpenetrations and combinations of cultural elements, is initiated. We suggest the following classification of transcultural experiences and transculturalism:

1. *reflection of the other*, getting to know another culture through the prism of its own (ethical approach, the approach of cultural relativism);
2. *acculturation in the sense of cultural import;*
3. *hybridisation* as a process of forming new, hybrid forms in the place of cultural interpenetrations or in the place beyond these cultures; it is characterised by openness, interactivity and leads to intense individual and group re-

identification, it tends to have socially and culturally inner consolidating character.[1]

4. *polyculturalism* as an extreme form of transculturation, which leads to destructive processes, having impact on individual and group identities and resulting in 'inner desintegration' of the referential culture and group, which become so internally disunited, fragmented and inconstistent that an individual looses his awareness of belonging somewhere or to something particular; of his own reference;

In the above presented reasoning we wanted to introduce our understanding of the term and process of transculturation. Our understanding from both the narrower and wider point of view has a dynamic (process) character. Another attitude to transculturalism, pointing at its universality from the static point of view, has been brought by Michail Epstein, a Russian philosopher, literary theorist and culturologist. [1] In his texts he uses the term of transculture, which he sees as a specific super-entity of a continual character. According to his words: *'Transculture lies both inside and outside of all existing cultures as a Continuum, encompassing all of them and even the gaps and blank spaces between them. The transcultural world is a unity of all cultures and nonecultures, that is, of those possibilities that have not yet been realized.'* When we think about transculturalism as an universally-running process, being reflected in the forms of particular processes happening on various levels of intercultural relations (intranational, international and global transculturalism), the idea of the transculture as a certain super-entity of all transcultural overlappings, as a set of particular transmitted and hybridised cultural forms, becomes relevant. We can get the feeling as if the transculture was reaching above particular cultures, which find their interpenetrations in there. But is it really situated beyond them? Transculturalism also includes processes happening inside these cultures, on the subcultural level. This means that particular cultures and their subcultures belong to the transculture. Individual cultures do not resemble absolute new-forms, but continually reviving complexes of cultural values which we inherit and further develop. They remain somewhere on the frontier of the past and actual creative present and we can presume their continuity in the future. Future positioning is connected with Epstein's noncultures, i.e. the cultures which haven't been realised so far, resembling potential cultural entities. We can notice that all three aspects of space, time and structure are important in case of the transculture. In connection with this, we agree with M. Epstein's ideas and enrich our dynamic concept of tranculturalism, being a universal all-encompassing process (of various modifications), in his static concept.

## REACTIONS TO THE TRANSCULTURAL EXPERIENCE

Transcultural experiences have transformational impact on the categories of cultural system and identity, which are mutually intertwined. As a result, we can see how both of them are getting more complex and layered, reflecting the presence of both original

[1] It is important to emphasize that our statement on its consolidating character is not an absolute one, because transculturation also has its differential aspect, meaning that particular manifestations stem from particular practical situations and experiences.





and new values being mixed and placed under one roof. We can distinguish several aspects of the contemporary identificational processes and identities:

***Identity as a dynamic category***

In comparison with older identificational models of more stable character, contemporary identities are characterised by their inner dynamics. [4] They are fluid, flowing, they change during life of an individual. The postmodern subject is desintegrated, unstable, fragmented and so is its identity, being desintegrated without a permanent essential character. [6] The constructivist discourse of identity is becoming more actual in connection with its contextuality. According to the opinion of V. Gažová, a Slovak culturologist, *'the cultural identity is formed within a process and as a process of searching for a consensus between an individual and his context'*. [3] We can state that due to its fluidity, the contemporary identity is flowing unlimitedly over time and space, across particular cultural systems and values, remaining open and unfinished.

***Identity fragmented and multiplied***

The image of ourselves (once predominantly organic and internally integrated due to stability of one's sociocultural position) is splitting up internally as a result of a number of identificational bonds and roles, all shaping us, often being mutually contradictory. We are becoming 'fragments of ourselves'. At the same time, we can view the process in terms of identity multiplication. It means that our referential values and groups, which we identify ourselves with, are widening and as J. Tomlinson states, even occurring in places where there was not originally any identity. [9]

***Ambivalent identity – on the verge of the past, present and future***

Our identity is primarily determined by the culture we have been born to and socialised in. In the conditions of large-scale transcultural overlappings, our attention is getting more and more turned to the present (actual representation) and the future ('a future identity project'). *'Cultural identity (...)is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past.'* [5] We can state that the contemporary identificational processes imply both the principle of continuity and discontinuity as the basis for their dynamics and ambivalent character.

***The feeling of being rooted out***

As a result of growing dynamics and exterritoriality of our lives we are facing, more intensely, the feeling of being rooted out. Identificational bonds are getting weaker and less stable. In some cases they cannot provide man with sufficient feelings of stability and attachment, in extreme forms leading to the feeling of loosing a home. He finds himself everywhere while belonging nowhere. For the feelings of being rooted, spacial, social and cultural attachment (secured by tradition) and physicality of the relationships are required. [2]

***Individualised identity***

In the environment of weakening strength of traditional values and social control tools, of intense and available transcultural experiences, we are gradually facing an open model of socialization, influenced by even more factors and alternative cultural values coming from other cultural environments. Another aspect of the process is a higher level of individual participation in the process and a progressive transition between the

position of the object of socialisation and the subject forming its own identity. A 'man-nugget' model, growing up with insufficient sociocultural guidance, is getting more common. Such tendencies lead to variability of identification and weakening of its socially-integrational power.

As a result of intense transculturation the mechanism of counter-process has been initiated. We observe that culturally decentralising processes (transculturation) trigger culturally centralising processes and vice versa. In this way, the cultural system keeps its own balance, therefore, we can speak about a dynamic balance of cultural powers. While culturally decentralising processes open the cultural system towards foreign cultural values which penetrate it, culturally centralising processes focus on the core of the cultural system (traditional culture) and strenghten it. One of the tendencies representing culturally centralising processes is the phenomenon of cultural traditions revitalisation, which we have identified within our research and understand as a new sociocultural tendency and factor forming 21st century cultural identity. In this way, culturally centralising aspect of the balancing mechanism is reflected in the current quest for one´s individual and group identity by means of the revival of traditions. Cultural traditions revitalisation resembles the process of individual and collective re-identification and sociocultural re-integration. It is represented by many sociocultural practices: discovering one´s lineage history (ethno historical and ethno psychological aspect); `fascination´ with spiritual values and practices (e.g. orientating on eastern philosophy and religious practices, neopaganism etc.); the return to nature (e.g. the philosophy of permaculture); revitalisation of traditional production technologies and methods (building, food processing and cooking, folk medicine, traditional crafts etc.); questions on natural man´s ethics, efforts towards spiritual and moral purification; tendencies of negating current materialism, consumerism, voluntary ignorance of the modern age technologies etc.. [7]

We think that the cultural system has its own mechanism keeping the balance between culturally centralising processes and culturally decentralising processes, which secures its progressive continuity – i. e. cultural continuity and, at the same time, its actualisation due to new sociocultural conditions, challenges and needs. Without the balancing mechanism, the cultural system could get into one of the extreme forms of:

- *excessive openness*, which resembles a threat of its gradual destruction in the ouside-inside direction and potential desintegration; or
- *excessive closedness*, which leads to exhaustion of its creative powers, stagnation and, afterwards, regress;

The balancing mechanism of the cultural system is activated in cases when one of the above-mentioned positions dominates. Consequently so, it secures their balance. We are observing the parallel processes of sociocultural convergence and divergence. We notice that cultural unification stimulates differentiation and globalisation is linked with regionalisation. Through the prism of these tendencies, we can understand the mutual relations between transculturation and cultural traditions revitalisation.

The revival of traditions should be understood both as the process of sociocultural re-identification and re-integration and the reaction of cultural systems to decentralizing transcultural tendencies. At the same time, we think that contemporary sociocultural dynamics points at the quest and need for a new integrational principle, beside and to





some degree also opposed to some of the existing, historically-determined, ones (local, regional, national and global). The cultural traditions revitalisation challenges them. It focuses on the local life and conditions, while enabling the process of transculturation and connections with other localities. Therefore, we suggest to call the new principle translocalism. We understand it as a tendency towards local communities revival which are given new meanings. Translocalism enables communication within communities but also among and across them (*-trans*), which reflects current need for both local community stability and focus; and translocal and global interconnectedness. It leads to more physicality in communication and sociocultural practices, reduces the feelings of social loneliness, disintegration and the crisis of identity, as well as, contributes to developing one´s sense of responsibility for local, and on higher levels, also national and global issues. The process is also important because local communities resemble fundamental units of intercultural communication between individuals and ethnocultural groups. The contradictory character of transculturation (decentralising tendency) and cultural traditions revitalisation (centralising tendency) is outlined in the following chart.

The difference between transculturation and cultural traditions revitalisation

| **Transculturation** | **Cultural traditions revitalization** |
|---|---|
| decentralizing | centralizing |
| cultural cover | cultural core |
| destabilization | stabilization |
| cultural disengagement | cultural attachment |
| new, foreign cultural values | predominance of own cultural values |
| polycultural orientation | predominant monocultural orientation |
| translocal and transnational community | local community and national society |
| the dominance of nonphysical contact | physical contact |
| identity multiplication and layering | the reduction of side-identificational bonds |

Source: own research (2015)

## CONCLUSION

Intercultural dynamics challenges and transforms cultural systems and, consequently so, individual and collective identities. Communication among cultures can take on different forms as for its sources, mechanism and impact, from both quality and quantity points of view. We suggest that it is roofed under the term of transculturalism as a general term representing any crossing of one´s cultural border (transcultural experience). Transculturalism, along with other tendencies of the postmodern reality which is hyper-technical, hyper-mobile, ethnoculturally diverse and intertwined, with the compressed time and space dimensions etc., is culturally decentralising. It means that it diverts the attention from one´s original culture and its elements towards alternative (competitive) ones. Due to the inner stabilising mechanism of the cultural system, the opposite tendencies are triggered and are happening collaterally. One of these is the phenomenon of cultural traditions revitalisation, which resembles both the defensive reaction of the cultural system and reaction to the contemporary identity crisis. The return to traditions leads to the revival of local communities, being the fundamental units of intercultural communication, and revival of their sociocultural life, while giving new meanings to them. At the same time, the process points at the current

quest for new integrational principle which combines physical contact and experience, embedding of social relationships and in local and regional traditions along with possibilities for transcultural overlappings within a locality and across localities and cultures.

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# GENDER PECULIARITIES OF INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN DIFFERENT STAGES OF FRONTIER

**Prof. Dr. Sergey Yakushenkov**

**Assistant Prof. Ph.D. Olccia Yakushenkova**

**Prof. Dr. Romanova Anna**

**Ph.D. Topchiev Mikhail**

Astrakhan State University, **Russia**

## ABSTRACT

Frontier interethnic relations take different forms due to many factors defined by a peculiar frontier stage or a phase. There are three frontier stages that differ from each other. They are early frontier, active frontier and postfrontier. One of the markers that can help to mark out a concrete stage of it is a role of interethnic gender relations. They can be presented in various forms, mainly through such terms as acceptance, negation and as a norm. On the early frontier the interethnic marriage is acceptable and even beneficial. During the active stage this interethnic marriage is looked as unfavorable, it has negative connotation and is neglected by dominant or both actors of frontier relations. This frontier stage is characterized by military confrontation and any gender relations with the opposite actor are not approved by a society. In a period of postfontier all interethnic relations and especially interethnic matrimonial relations are again accepted by a society. They turn into a norm and are free from any axiological judgments. We can find a vivid historical evidence for some of these types of relations in Russian Frontier history. Interethnic gender relations were a common practice in the period of the early Frontier. Though this practice didn't excluded confrontation and conflicts. In the period of the active frontier stage this interethnic marriages were not acceptable due to many factors. One of them was a religious characteristic of the actors of these relations. All interreligious relations were excluded but the interethnic marriage was acceptable by a dominant society if a stranger changed her or his religious status.

**Keywords:** gender, Frontier, interethnic relations, stages of Frontier

## INTRODUCTION

When presenting his Frontier thesis F. Turner considered Frontier to be a unique characteristic of the American history. Due to his point of view and his predecessors, the frontier was a territory between wilderness and civilization. For the most Americans the frontier was the Wild West where a civilizer met a savage. For a long time this thesis was one dimensional. For Turner and all Americans in the 19th century the Frontier was only depopulated territory, there was no place for the Native Americans, nobody counted them and nobody followed their natural rights for the land. Only in the second half of the 20th century a new generation of scientists began to analyze the

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