

## LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS OF IDENTIFYING CULTURAL INDIFFERENCE

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*Cum poate fi exprimată indiferența față de cultură? Care sunt acele mijloace lingvistice care arată cât de indiferent este omul față de valorile sale culturale sacre? Care este formula verbală cu care poate fi identificată indiferența culturală, astfel încât, cea din urmă să fie eradicată în societate?*

What is happening to our culture? Could it not be that an "axis of indifference" (by underlying causes of evil, religious understandings, lasting cultural values, etc.) creates a situation more potentially evil than evil itself? Which is the formula for it? How is the cultural indifference expressed? Does it really exist? If yes, then, how should it be identified, thought over and eradicated?

In this report, based on the PhD dissertation topic, the issue of expressing cultural indifference is examined from its different aspects.

"The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference." "...to remain silent and indifferent is the greatest sin of all..." (Elie Wiesel) [1, p.1]

What is indifference? Etymologically, the word means "no difference." A strange and unnatural state in which the lines blur between light and darkness, dusk and dawn, crime and punishment, cruelty and compassion, good and evil. What are its courses and inescapable consequences? Is it a philosophy? Is there a philosophy of indifference conceivable? Can one possibly view indifference as a virtue? Is it necessary at times to practice it simply to keep one's sanity, live normally, enjoy a fine meal and a glass of wine, as the world around us experiences harrowing upheavals? Of course, indifference can be tempting -- more than that, seductive. It is so much easier to look away from victims. It is so much easier to avoid such rude interruptions to our work, our dreams, and our hopes. It is, after all, awkward, troublesome, to be involved in another person's pain and despair. [1, p.1] Yet, for the person who is indifferent, his or her neighbors are of no consequence. And, therefore, their lives are meaningless. Their hidden or even visible anguish is of no interest. Indifference reduces the other to an abstraction. This could refer to cultural indifference too.

While the dogma of cultural diversity is keen to avoid making artistic and intellectual judgments, it does create barriers. At the heart of many of the ideas on different voices and interpretations is a great sense of impenetrable difference. There is no one story, only many interpretations. There is a sense of no common ground to understand and enjoy these cultures. Thus this formula of diversity reinforces and legitimizes a sense of separation. We are told to respect difference, but the implication is that we can never grasp or comprehend it. Therefore, we will never understand each other with this attitude and instead will reinforce fragmentation and division. It will limit people to their ascribed identities, reducing everyone to be seen apart from each other.

The reality, though, is that cultural diversity policies have become thoroughly mainstream, and are endorsed by all the major figures in arts institutions. Cultural diversity policy represents an extension of policy of indifference in the culture. There are many problems with these policies. Michael Clyne mentions: “Culture is the whole life of distinct people, its total set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, behaviour, social habits. Somebody sees culture as ‘patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, consisting of distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values’. Tracing the development of the notion of culture, there is a suggestion to investigate the forms of emotional structures as their expression side, drawing meanings from practice of the life style of an epoch, thereby showing indifference to surface linguistic forms.” [2, p.3]

Thus, the notion of culture, seen by many differently, generates cultural diversity policy that represents an extension of political interference in the arts. It makes artists' and audiences' cultural background the focus of policy decisions - and judges and promotes people according to their ethnicity and not on the basis of their creative work or creative response. There is also the issue of the self-importance of arts professionals, who put themselves in the business of categorizing people's identities for them. Worst of all, cultural diversity is embraced for its own sake. Celebrating art merely because it is 'culturally diverse' is actually a formula for indifference. It represents a retreat from engagement with different kinds of artwork, and a retreat from judgments on the basis of aesthetic criteria. Instead, we end up with the formulaic celebration of 'diversity', which compounds dislocation from the art. It is because of an indifference to the content or nature of the art that schemes declaring 'diversity' in creative life use exactly the same empty language to describe their aims and objectives.

Cultural diversity policy tells us to 'respect other voices' - not because they are good, interesting, stimulating or have any integrity, but for the sake of it. This is a phoney respect; rather than being earned, it is imposed on the artwork from outside. Why should we respect a performance, painting or installation, just because it is 'diverse'? It is not hard to see something like contempt lying beneath this formulaic recognition. Cultural diversity policy does not mean a serious engagement with the arts of diverse cultures. What matters is not the traditional artwork itself, but the role that it plays in 'breaking down barriers' and 'raising awareness'.

The trumpeted praise for culturally diverse artwork goes along with an ignorance of it. We end up being discouraged from really listening, looking or learning, because we are so busy proclaiming our respect for it all. That is why diversity champions sound the same, because they are talking about a fixed position that has not engaged with the work. It shuts down interest because it creates inattention rather than engaging, comparing and judging the artwork.

It is exactly this evasion of judgment that attracts the major players and arts institutions to embrace cultural diversity as an outlook. The campaign to increase cultural diversity is a way of not talking about what the artwork is, and why it is good or bad. By celebrating diversity, arts organizations are evading their responsibility to judge art on aesthetic grounds.

The lack of confidence within the arts world to account for the quality of the work has led to an embrace of a diversity of voices. Cultural diversity policy is a defensive framework for arts institutions no longer able to discuss excellence and quality. The arts world has been unable to discuss art on its own terms for some time. Maligned for not being economically or socially useful by the right and the left, and unable to talk about some work being better than the rest, in case they are accused of

arrogance or elitism, arts policymakers have retreated to promoting and reflecting diversity.

Showcasing or funding artists because they are diverse means that the institution is less accountable for their work, and does not have to judge it to the same degree. This also reinforces the outsider status of the diverse artist - who has been included because they are different, rather than because their work is excellent. Since we do not genuinely engage with their work, but just promote its difference, we will never really understand or like it, and it is pushed further away.

The idea that all diverse culture should be respected means that nothing is respected. Promoting diversity as a virtue in itself will not bring people together or increase understanding. It will not build bridges or show the connections that bind human culture and society together. In fact, the embrace of 'many voices' for their own sake promotes the idea that difference is impenetrable and incomprehensible. And that is why cultural diversity policies in the arts should be scrapped.

Finally, indifference is not a beginning, it is an end. And, therefore, indifference is always the friend of the enemy, for it benefits the aggressor -- never his victim, whose pain is magnified when he or she feels forgotten. The political prisoner in his cell, the hungry children, and the homeless refugees -- not to respond to their plight, not to relieve their solitude by offering them a spark of hope is to exile them from human memory. And in denying their humanity we betray our own. Indifference, then, is not only a sin, it is a punishment. And this is one of the most important lessons of this outgoing century's wide-ranging experiments in good and evil. One writes a great poem, a great symphony, one does something special for the sake of humanity because one is angry at the injustice that one witnesses. But indifference is never creative. Even hatred at times may elicit a response. You fight it. You denounce it. You disarm it. Indifference elicits no response. Indifference is not a response.

Our biggest question for ourselves is how we can better understand the deeper truths and need, and how to move ourselves to change - to destroy indifference, to deal with our own issues of evil, intolerance and misunderstanding.

The too-often indifference of our Moldovan Ministry of Culture to the needs of Moldovan citizens is expressed in how and to what extent it contributed to the degradation of our art (national, multinational, etc) so that theaters do not work properly, artists and actors are not paid adequately and a lot of people are not interested in going to the theatres and art galleries any more. Is not The Moldovan Ministry of Culture executives' too-often statements "there is no money", "survive by yourself" a real indicator of the "axis of cultural indifference" that we have to get rid of and, then, revive our cultural values?

#### **Bibliography:**

1. Elie Wiesel. The Perils of Indifference. Remarks delivered at a White House Millennium Lecture, Washington, D.C., April 12, 1999
3. Michael Clyne. Intercultural Communication at Work. Cultural values in discourse. - Cambridge University Press, 1994, - 249 p.