

XENOLOGY – ONE OF THE SOLUTIONS OF THE RECENT CULTURE

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Abstract

Within the cultural and philosophical studies (not unified and homogeneous) about otherness there had been outlined a special way of studying the Other and the Foreigner – xenology (the term proposed by the researcher from Cameroon Douala M'bedy). Moving away from the Intercultural German Studies as the science of the Foreigner, the xenological approach is centered on the nomad, non-integrated, limited, unidentified human. We can refer to several disciplines that study the stranger, the other, the cultural otherness. These are allology, ethnology, cultural anthropology, imagology, barbarology, ethno-psychoanalysis, and xenology. The last one involves an investigation of the phenomenon of the (in)tolerance between a subject and the Difference, the Other who proves to be rather the Alien, as it represents by the limits of the intelligible, as the Difference is positioned beyond it. From here there is seen the state of suspicion, mistrust and non-acceptance of the host, which reaches to stigmatize the stranger, being excluded the social altruism. The stranger is not only the different one, the Other, a distant entity; it is rather a close matter of the supposed risk. But complementary there appears the Other as a human need of openness and interaction, as the alien from the perspective of his identity outlines the limits of self, serving as a catalyst for self-identification. Considered by some researchers a method, by the others a science xenology, unlike the study of otherness in all its forms, doesn't relate to a simple differentiation, but to the element that is contrary and contradictory positioned between

the ipseity and otherness. From this we can conclude that not every difference requires a certain "xenology" of the studied object. This refers rather to a critical investigation of the intercultural phenomenon, to the estrangement, tolerance and aggression in terms of ethnology, philosophy and sociology (Albert Classen). Thus xenological steps from a simple cultural xenography may come to constitute a true xenosophy of the human being.

Keywords: *Xenology, Intercultural German Studies, the Other, the Foreigner, Difference, risk of the otherness, self-identification, xenophobia, xenography, xenosophy.*

In the book "L'Étranger, l'identité. Essai sur l'intégration culturelle" Toshiaki Kozakaï states that the humanity goes through an "identity illness" [4, p. 12]. The author considers that this comes from the fact that we are forced to coexist with the Foreigner, what makes to accept our own evolution [4, p. 14]. This somehow explains why "there are increasingly used terms like «multicultural», «multi-ethnic» or «creolism» and there is insisted on the adoption of a concept that would open the nation" [4, p 17]. It is evident that there is an increasingly need to know the socio-cultural instruments that coordinate the relationship with the others in the society (internal foreigners – minorities) and with those outside of it. This means the return to secular human experience of cohabitation with the difference, the study of the image of the otherness with-

in the human culture and of its evolution over time in various human communities. In this sense, the xenology is one of those sciences that have this goal.

There are so many investigations and researches in the field of xenology that it's quite impossible to summarize and synthesize all of them in a work of this kind. We are in some doubt about the fact that we can announce today a homogeneous science that would study the Other, the Difference, the Otherness and the Foreigner notwithstanding the acute interest of cultural studies to this subject. Strict terminologically we must specify that, while in the German-speaking space the terms of xenology and otherness coexist, in researches made in the francophone and English-speaking space there is used the notion of otherness. There is not only a lingual but also an investigational tradition, perhaps even the tradition of the perception of the otherness. However European languages show a lexical usage in this sense. Thus, in English there are many terms in the field of biology, medicine, chemistry, physics etc. where we find terms that refer to the idea of heterogeneous, strange. We can enumerate a few from the socio-cultural field: xenial relations ("relations of friendship"), xenial customs ("laws of hospitality"), xenogenicity, xenomania ("the passion to everything what is foreign") and xenophobia ("the fear of what is foreign").

What refers to the German culture, the term xenology and its derivatives are applied in the field of cultural studies, in art, where there appeared a new direction of the *alien art* concentrated on the nomad, non-integrated, bounded, unidentified human, in the *science fiction* as hypothetical science whose object represent the extraterrestrial societies constituted from other forms of life, in phylogeny that studies the existing or disappeared animal and

vegetal species from the perspective of their evolution, and, of course, in cultural studies. In the contemporary mass literature (SF novels and movies, computer games) xenology refers to the science of the extraterrestrial beings, communities and races that inhabit the spaces outside the Earth. In the field of modern biology and zoology xenology is related to the study of relations between the host and the ontogenetic stages of a specific parasite. In this study we will refer to the original meaning formulated by the Douala-M'bedy in the 1970-es referring to the concept of the "foreigner" in the cultural and civilization space of humanity.

From the perspective of the cultural studies, we can refer to many disciplines that have as a subject the Foreigner, the Other, the Otherness and the Difference. There is the ethnology, the cultural anthropology, barbarism studies, ethnical psychoanalysis, irenology, xenology etc. The last one supposes an investigation of the phenomenon of the (in)tolerance between the subject and the Difference, the Other that testifies rather to be the Foreigner as the limits of intelligible it present, as the Foreigner is positioned beyond it. What cannot be understood sends to the scientific theory of H.-G. Gadamer regarding the hermeneutics. Thus, tolerance involves the capability, the faculty or even the competence to relate with the Other without any aggression and suppression.

In the 1970-es the Cameroon researcher Munichois Munasu Douala M'bedy experienced the first xenological approach in this sense and founded a new "science about the foreigner" by criticizing the methods of cultural anthropology which was synchronized with the practice and theory of Western colonialism that did not treat the otherness as something equitable. Douala M'bedy proposed the term "xenology" which "serves as a gen-

eral term to designate the foreigner and his epistemological issues" [2, p. 19]. After the 1980-es xenology became an important niche of Intercultural German studies that was named by Alois Wierlacher the science of cultural otherness, a discipline that takes into account the diversity of German speaking cultures without to propose their hierarchy. Later xenology expanded from the German studies to the Indian, Oriental and African studies.

Etymologically the term comes from the ancient Greek in which ξενία (xenia) designated "hospitality", but the lexeme ξένος (xenos, plural xenoí) ment "foreigner". The ancient literature gives many examples of gestures and rituals of generosity shown to foreign guests by the xeinodokos, the host. Zeus was also called by the Greeks "Xenios" meaning "the protector of travelers". Theoxenia was considered a virtue of those who were welcoming with foreigners as they could always be found to be gods. At the same time here comes the state of suspicion, of non-acceptance and mistrust of the host that stigmatizes the foreigner, being excluded the social altruism. But there appears the Other too as a human necessity of openness and interaction, because the Foreigner is not just a different one, an Other, a distant entity, he is rather a subject of a supposed risk.

Alberth Classen, Professor of German studies at the University of Arizona, in his essay "Introduction: the Self, the Other, and Everything Between: xenological Phenomenology of the Middle Ages" proposes a set of images of otherness of the Middle Ages (Muslims, Hebrews, heretics, pagans, gays, lepers, monsters and witches). Also there he defines xenology as "the critical investigation of interculturalization, distance, tolerance, and aggression in ethnological, philosophical, sociological term" [1, p. xxiv-xxv]. A. Classen considers

that "the meeting with strangers works as a catalyst, requiring people to reconsider their culture and to examine their ideological premises. [...] All conflicts and encounters with foreigners are ambivalent and ambiguous, they can cause violent and harsh forms of hostility, rejection and fear and also they can produce the need of the self-analysis, which can lead to tolerant attitudes" [1, p. xxii].

Other researchers announced that the process of intercultural perception is also a part of the xenological studies or studies of the cultural otherness. Alois Wierlacher considers that this interdisciplinary approach requires understanding of the Other's discourse and reflects the need to deepen knowledge about the Other in the context of internationalization of politics, economics, media and everyday life [5, p. 280].

The Russian scientist Alexei Panich in his study "Another – Foreigner – Other: an attempt of typology of cultural patterns" notes that the very name of the new scientific field of allology or xenology contains in itself a problem. While the concept of difference, in Hegelian terms, supposes a simple differentiation, then the "other" and the "foreigner" in the reference to the "own" requires the opposite and contradictory [8, p. 218]. From this we can conclude that, as Panich considers, not every difference supposes a certain "xenology" of the studied object.

In a cultural sense, the German sociologist Fridrik Hallsson in his study "Xenologie: Eine Begriffserläuterung" speaks about a "xenological analysis of culture", a "sociology of the Foreigner". F. Hallsson notes that "xenos", notwithstanding its ancient etymology, is a recently borrowed word to designate the concept of the Foreigner [3, p. 2]. The researcher proposes his own definition: "Xenology is not only science about the Foreigner, but, after Georg Simmels, most probably about the

Foreigner accepted by a community; the subject of xenology, therefore, is not the Foreigner himself, not a different ethnic group, but the Xenos that came in order to integrate itself (so, it's not the foreigner as something "diabolical"); first of all it is an attempt of inclusion, especially within the local community, of this marginalized or assimilated, known Stranger. Therefore, the task of xenology to delimit the domain by means of the social structure of foreigners (relationship, discrimination and ignorance) explicitly can be interpreted as a social theory" [3, p. 2-3].

The Russian researcher Victoria Lysenko returns to the original concept of xenology introduced by Douala M'Bedy regarding the foreign element in a cultural and civilization sense in the human dimension. She also notes the expansion of the term, as in the contemporary science the term xenology is applied to the creatures, races and communities different from the human ones (in novels, movies and computer games in fantasy style). This fact explains why an approach restricted to cultural studies risks to weaken and even to "mystify" the concept of the Foreigner, as it comes from some deeper layers as the zoological and biological ones because the distrust in foreigners deals with the phylogenetic adaptation of the group, so the ethnocentrism and xenophobia have a biological support [7, p. 61].

The same researcher formulates four xenological principles. We can understand our own I only by a "non-I", by the otherness as a foreign element. This is the first principle of xenology. The second xenological principle involves an "I-picture", a complex construction of identity constructions in the civilization, cultural and national sense. It deals with the self-determination of people when there is a danger from the part of the foreigner (occupant). The third xenological principle deals with

the fact that the "non-I" remains a component of the construction of our own I because we will identify in it what is similar with us. The image of I is contained by the foreign model. The fourth principle is that the foreigner's image in a culture is an index of its level of development too: tell me who is your foreigner and I'll tell you who you are! [7, pp. 62].

Thus in the East also exists an opening for this branch of knowledge, xenology, science about the foreigner, in the limits of which there is stated that what is foreign should not be dissolved in what is our own, as the reaction of phagocytosis is not wanted [6, p. 12].

We can conclude that in the humanities xenology announces as a popular or even a necessary theory. Considered by some a science, by the others an amount of knowledge about the foreigner and by the others a research method of foreigner's customs within the host society and culture, xenology studies historical, social and moral problems that arise from the presence of the foreigner in a community. It is a branch within cultural studies and human philosophy which focuses on the problem of relativity of individuals in relation to others, bringing in evidence his difference that is always in change and formation. Thus xenology is regarded as the science of the confrontation with the "foreign other".

After axiological directions of studying human culture xenology puts the question of its own identification in relation to foreigner's difference. Ipseity is thus an exercise in identity, identification and representation by contrast with the Other, which is not necessarily a Foreigner (Deleuze). But the otherness is sure what cannot be elucidated and interpreted till the end (Gadamer, Ricoeur).

The relevance of the topic and of the xenology in general (regardless of termi-

nology and philosophical schools that study it) comes from the socio-political and cultural situation in the world. Armed conflicts, terrorism, propaganda battles etc., all suppose the interethnic and other forms of intolerance. Intercultural and multicultural openings seem to be a solution, but we don't see yet their definitive impact. "The philosophy of dialogue" and the idea of meeting of the Other (M. Bakhtin, M. Buber, V.N. Toporov etc.) imply a social-human empathy. These meetings may produce in sense of a cultural exchange (cross-culture), in the metaphysical (spiritual) and even physical (geographic) sense. Of course, the pure forms of intersection are not possible, as some of them are convergent to others.

The identity in the sociological and cultural sense involves a process of denoting and qualification of the self by means of categories that were already formulated by the society. This allows the proximity with a group and the distancing from another one. But "the era of identity and identification" is full of rage. The search for the identity divides and puts some questions too: What is, however, the alterity? Is it the foreign other constructed or real? How is it related to our self and our identity?

Xenofilia seems to be a solution of these times split by the xenophobia. And xenological attempts from a simple xenography come to constitute a true xenosophy of the human, the cultivation of dialogue and reception, for culture is first of all interaction and understanding.

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