Cultural Preservation and Empowerment of Immigrant Community

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In *The Interpretation of Cultures* the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz writes:

“Believing with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in a web of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning.”

This quotation stands for culture as an interpretation. Culture takes the meaning it is given to it. It is thus subjective. Culture is also a dynamic concept that changes over time and space and with interactions. So are the concepts of community and identity, the former refers to a structure and the latter to its content which reflect and reveal profound emotions of individual, groups, people. Culture and identity are redefined and affirmed in action and interaction, and change with the cultural, social and political environment. Communities differentiate themselves from the larger society by their language, their culture, their religion or their history. They are also defined in opposition to other groups, and to the society.

The classical sociology opposed community to society. Community (*Gemeinschaft*) corresponds to a social organization that is traditional and fix in time and in space, characterized by spontaneous and natural relationships among the members who express their attachments to a “primordial identity” that is an identity they share by birth and becomes a “basic identity”. In societies (*Gesellschaft*) on the other hand, social relations are more

“reflexive” to use the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies’s expression, that is rational and guided by social and political values set by rules and laws.

According to this typology, modernization leads to the dissolution of communities. Internal and external migrations take away individuals from their natural community and integrate them into the society. In reality however, community structures persist in so-called modern societies. But the search for a new meaning redefines its boundaries. Each element of identity supposedly “primordial” becomes more salient then others when the community wants to protect its members – protect from exclusion as well as to protect them from assimilation - and to assert itself in social and political spheres with its specificities.

Therefore the term “cultural preservation” raises the question of “what culture” we are talking about? What is to preserve? Are we talking about the culture of the home country with regard to immigrants? The culture of the home country itself is not protected from social evolution, internal migrations and international developments. Then comes the region, the language, the religion, all the fragments of a national identity of the home country that have been occulted in the process of a unified nation building reemerge with intensity in the context of immigration to be a locus of a community construction. Does “preservation” mean to freeze the culture over time and ignore the changes in the home country and all interactions within the new society, to reject all cultural experiences that can be added to life experiences? In this case culture is mainly a source of a permanent cleavage with regard to both the home and host society.

The other question would be in reference to “community”: which community: (1) a community based on a national identity? The response to this question is that in two generations the homeland becomes a long distance reference abstract and nourishes a “symbolic ethnicity” to use Herbert Gans’s term. (2) a linguistic community: such a community can be transborder and transnational such as the Kurdish community in Europe for
example and extends the identification from a regional to a national and to a transnational one
(3) a religious community is de facto a national and/or transnational at once that is beyond
national solidarity such as to be Muslim in Europe for example. In these two cases the internal
differences (national and ethnic) are “recentralized” around values and norms that are claimed
by the members and recognized by official institutions, in order to give coherence, unity and
integrity to the community. The internal differences are recentralized also around a common
identity defined by common experience –of immigration – common status, - being a minority
searching for recognition. The leaders of such communities use both the affective (what
could be considered as primordial) and the rational (links with local authorities and
institutions) in order to mobilize individual members and insure their loyalty to the
community on the one hand; elaborate claims over the state and society on the other. The
community in this perspective is “a bridge” between the individual and the society, between
the individual and the polity. Its “empowerment” relies on the capacity of its leaders to adapt
the cultural element that has been at its construction to the new social, cultural and political
environment. Its empowerment relies also on the capacity of the leaders to mobilize the public
opinion and the political class to the needs and interest of the members of the community,
moreover so when interest and needs are expressed in terms of culture and identity, then its
empowerment relies on its capacity to negotiate the identity of such a community with public
authorities.

With regard to our concern here, the question is to what extend such communities
structured around cultural identifications are a contributor or obstacle to successful
integration? The topic touches upon the effect of locality, the impact of the receiving society,
the role of NGO’s or voluntary associations, as well as central and local government agencies,
and the influence of transnational ties with the home countries. In order to answer these
questions I would like to focus on immigrant communities’ claims with regard to cultural
preservation – linguistic, religious, ethnic – and to states responses. I argue that the success or a failure of integration is a result of interactions and therefore of negotiations between states and communities. These negotiations refer to the elaboration of new codes of coexistence. They conduct political actions of the state towards the integration of immigrants and they guide communities to formulate their claims and structure their organization around a “culture and identity” that finds legitimacy as a source of empowerment for negotiations.

In order to answer the questions asked in this conference I would focus my analysis on three perspectives that I see as the evolution of immigration, in western democracies.

1) From assimilation to community empowerment
2) Culture and recognition
3) Transnationalism

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1) **From assimilation to community empowerment:**

Assimilation, a process, considered “natural” for previous waves of immigration, is now considered as taboo. It is perceived as anti-democratic, so it refers to the total disappearance of the culture of “origin” and deprecates cultural pluralism. Some scholar claimed that in the United States in the 1920s, assimilation was a synonym for the melting pot, a process that led individuals of different origins, living in a common territory, to create enough solidarity to sustain a common national life. In the 1930s, cultural pluralism emerged as closer to reality and ideologically opposed to assimilation. Since cultural differences were preserved from then on, cultural pluralism was only the coexistence of different cultures. A liberal view of the term defines it as a process of Americanization by stressing diversity in the unity that characterizes the American society. Now, the issue is “integrating” that diversity into the dominant trend or “incorporating” it into the political and national culture; and no longer is it assimilation, defined in the 1960s as “Anglo-Saxon conformity”.

So is in European countries. In France, integration has replaced assimilation a concept that was at the core of the Republican ideology that views the nation as one and indivisible and rejects any community (ethnic, religious) in the public arena. The French political discussions use the term integration with reference sometimes to cultural, sometimes to social, and sometimes to national. In official discourse, “integration is the struggle against exclusion.” The Ministry of the City, created in 1991, is called after 1996 “the Ministry for Integration and the Struggle against exclusion.” American academic and political discussions have adopted the allegedly neutral term “incorporation,” which seems to consider a structural presence and an institutional recognition of differences in the civil society.

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5 J. Costa-Lascoux, De l’immigré au citoyen, Paris, La Documentation française, 1989, p.10
In France, this change of vocabulary is one of the results of the “right to difference” praised in the 1980s. This right gave immigrants’ voluntary associations a legal and official status. Not only in France in Germany as well and in other European countries associations, defined as intermediaries of solidarity in the territories of identity, that are areas where poverty and otherness are concentrated such as enclaves, ghettos, banlieues (French suburbs), try to introduce or gain recognition for a cultural identity. Through associations, spontaneous gathering based on interpersonal relations in concentrated areas found an institutional and formal structure but needed a cultural content they needed to define an identity that intended to be collective. The question becomes of identity boundaries, and new solidarities.

Henceforth, culture became the constituent element of the new solidarities to be constructed. Discourse alternates with acts designed to shape the “cultural.” In this perspective identity organizations appear as a refuge, sometimes even a sanctuary, where culture, religion, ethnicity, and nation (of origin) are interpreted, materialize, and take root. Each of these concepts intervenes to transform an informal local community, constituted de facto by spatial proximity, into a cultural imagined in terms of common identifications.

At stake becomes defining culture and community that would help the integration of the immigrant population in the larger society, a response to the will to integrate that corresponds to the process of permanent settlement and the awareness of it since the 1980s. In Europe, one aspect of integration has become to get away from the influence of the homeland by taking in charge the instruction of the language and the culture imagined as that of origin, regardless of bilateral agreements with the homeland. In sum, it is necessary to mark its autonomy and perhaps even to break with colonial history in the case of France, aiming primarily at “changing the image of immigration in France,” even at constructing a new
identity by rewriting history, changing the image of the homeland by integrating the history of
immigration into it. In short, to develop a pride that is both national and immigrant.

The preservation of language as a part of the bilateral agreements between home and
host European countries has become an issue in Germany with the claim of bilingual
education. The bilingual education demanded by the Berlin Association of Parents of Students
naturally does not mean separate classes, but integrating the Turkish language into the
German curriculum. The argument is based on the de facto linguistic separation between the
world of the Turks, where Turkish prevails, and the world of the Germans, and moving from
one world to the other does not do away with that distinction.

Debates over bilingualism that started in Berlin in the 1980s, which have now spread
into almost all the Länder, are similar to arguments about Hispanics in the United States,
which were based on the educational failure of the children. The explanation for their low
scholastic achievement was found in the negative consequences of their limited knowledge of
English and time spent outside the curriculum. The demands are based on equal opportunity,
and their theories derive from compensation for educational failure as the cause of segregation
or non-integration. But unlike the demands of the Hispanics in the United States, where
bilingual instruction is justified for primary education, Turkish nationals in Germany have
turned their language into a permanent and fundamental demand for a distinct collective
identity. Such an assertion has a risk: it leads to the expression of membership in a community
with thick boundaries, and the will to preserve and assert an identity that is primarily national
and Turkish. Today, debates on language are increasingly linked up with citizenship mainly in
Germany. While difficult access to citizenship was one of the most problematic aspects of
maintaining identities separate, today with German citizenship laws that can be considered the
most liberal in Europe, language has become the main cleavage separating “new and old”
citizens, as if a primarily national identification – through language and not citizenship
anymore - remains as identity boundaries. In the last years, language acquirement, has become the locus not only of integration policy but also of immigration policy in Netherlands, Great-Britain, Germany.

Religion, Islam has become another way or reappropriating identity. “They will assimilate us, it will take two or three generations, but religion will persist” asserts a man of Turkish descent, grown up in Germany and himself father of two children. Islam appears in the discourse of post-colonial migrants as a source of “ethnic pride”, of “self-enhancement”, in a Weberian sense, a communitarian feeling the elements of which are drawn from its practice, traditions and rituals, but also from its moral values and social usefulness. Islamic associations justify their presence and importance in the French suburbs with the struggle against the delinquency, drugs, and violence of the young. While European public opinion projects the difficult process of assimilation onto a religion, Islam, by questioning its compatibility with the West and its ability to adopt Western “universal values”, the rhetoric of actors has been to criticizes the “inadequacy” of states in human rights and of citizenship as a foundation for democratic equality, tolerance and freedom of worship and redirect the loyalty from their members from the national community to a religious community. It is from these arguments that Islam confronts national institutions in a relationship of reciprocal suspicion behind boundaries perceived as communautarian by both side, boundaries drawn in religious terms, further more making of religion the main cleavage in the society.

2) Culture and Recognition

The search for “recognition” imposes the adoption of a new identity perceived as more relevant to the situation of immigration with regard both to individuals and to national institutions. The search for legitimacy reinforces the inventive character and revitalizes an
awareness of belonging to a community that emphasizes its difference with regard to its cultural, social, and political environment.

In Europe, Islam, the religion of the large majority of post-colonial migrants has been settled at the core of a re-appropriation of identity. In France, such a “re-appropriation” has crystallized around the “veil affair”, the first in 1989 when the issue shook French society for the first time when three teenage girls arrived at their public school all wearing Islamic headscarves. The case publicized existing tensions between national institutions and Islamic institutions, introducing a balance of power between the law of the Republic, and the “law of the Qu’ran”, the first representing the society and the second the community, the first refashioned around laïcité and the second around Islam.

Furthermore the mobilization of the political class around the headscarf issue has strengthened above all the role of the imams or leaders of Islamic associations, as representatives of a community taking shape around Islam. The imams, set themselves up as spokesmen for the “community”. But it is also the state which, by selecting imams of all ideologies as interlocutors in order to calm tensions and especially to convince families to obey the laws of the Republic, has increased the negotiating power of the religious associations. This comes to the recognition of home countries and/or international political forces in the definition of a local Muslim community.

The recognition of Islam finds legitimacy in the institutional recognition of religion in general in secular countries. Its institutionalization is a response to a demand for recognition by the Muslim population. In this perspective, it leads to treatment of Islam by the state on an equal footing with other religions in France. The separation of church and state in France grants legal institutional status to the Catholic clergy, the Fédération Protestante de France

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and the Consistory, established under Napoleon as a representative body for French Jews. This “recognition” is intended an expression of respect for freedom of worship and the neutrality of the laïque state. Since the first scarf affair, successive ministers have tried to establish a representative institution for Islam on the model of the institutions representing other religions.

Of course, this development raises a number of normative questions, in particular, the question of whether recognition can be limited to institutional representation, when other institutions, such as the school, and the labor market are not fulfilling their function of integration and the promotion of social, cultural and religious equality among citizens. This approach does not take into consideration religious rights as would defend the multiculturalist vision but gives an institutional basis to religious difference and installs Islam within the organizational framework of secularism as response to religious diversity at the time it was established as principle. The social cultural and political reality with regard to Muslim populations in Europe today links the question of religious rights to cultural rights.

Obviously an institutional representation does not prevent individuals and communities from social and cultural exclusion. But at the same time, if religion appears as the main cleavage in European countries today, then perhaps its recognition can be seen as a path toward social integration. It can encourage religion to develop within democratic liberal institutions and thus help them to break free of external political forces – their countries of origin and international Islamic organizations seeking to promote Islam in Europe. These forces weigh on the choices of individuals, families and local communities in France as in other European countries. Community oppression goes against the project of individual emancipation. The state in this case acts as emancipator of the individual - women mainly with regard to Islam and the scarf for example who can find a refuge in states’ democratic
laws and reject the social control or religious pressure, giving the opportunity to achieve emancipation through integration into a democratic society.

Recognition – institutional and/or political finds its ground in politics of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism has been defined and developed as a normative and political response to the management of cultural diversity within the nation-states, as means of their inclusion in the political community, a defense of the principle of cultural particularities by public institutions\(^7\). The term has circulated in North America since the 1960s in response to a “demand for recognition” by populations who are situated as national minorities or by ethnic minorities due to migration. The concept relates to the “democratic defense of cultural diversity within a universalist perspective.” In Canada the confrontation between the French and English languages and the debates around a bilingual and bicultural society, defined as such by the Royal Commission on Multiculturalism gave political legitimacy to the concept\(^8\). Much ink has also been spilled over multiculturalism in the United States, too. Founded in the civil rights movement of the 1960s, it took shape with the establishment of measures for affirmative action starting in 1965. These measures seek to reduce racial or other inequalities by trying to repair the negative effect of past policies, notably slavery and racial segregation those excluded from assimilation.

Despite philosophical and political justifications of recognition” any difference that is publicized, claimed and legitimated is a source of paradox. It privileges culture and identities while valorizing differences in the search for equality. The paradox comes from the equation differences and equality\(^9\). In other words politics that protect culture and identity in the name of respect of differences lead to the exclusion of the difference from the representation of the society and the nation. To recognize Otherness is to give the Other a different status then the

\(^8\) Philip Resnik, *Thinking English Canada*, Toronto 1994 (chap. 7)
larger community. Many studies put then the accent on the controversial consequences of such “openness”: the fragmentation of society into communities turned in on themselves, identifications differentiated from the political community that they defy a civic sense of the nation. In Europe the term is now systematically rejected mainly in countries that adopted Multiculturalism as principle for the integration of immigrants like the Netherlands (after the assassination of Pim Fortuyn and of Theo Van Gogh) and in Great Britain after the London attacks of July 2005. Increasing number of researches show now that the politics of difference, the recognition of communities has not led to any economic integration of communities, it had in the contrary contributed to their cultural and political isolation.

3) Transnationalism

The questions of community empowerment and/or ethnicity and the position of minorities, which are subject to classical analyses of cultural diversity as a phenomenon faced by democratic multicultural states, are increasingly linked to activities and new expressions of identity that are taking shape outside national territories. This is a consequence of the emergence of so-called transnational communities, which connect local experience with international developments that take place in other territories but are felt as an extension of life in the banlieues, or in any concentrated neighborhoods.

Transnational communities are constructed by immigrants and communities settled in different national societies, sharing common interests and references – territorial, religious, linguistic – and using networks to consolidate solidarity beyond national boundaries. Numerous studies refer to post-colonial migrants are involved in building such networks based on economic interests, cultural exchanges, social relations and political affiliations. Clearly, migrants have always lived in more than one setting, at least for one or two generations, maintaining ties with a real or imagined community in the state of origin. But in
the recent years they have also taken into account the context of globalization and economic uncertainty that facilitates the construction of social relations that transcend national borders\textsuperscript{10}. Increasing mobility and the development of communication have contributed to such relations, and create a transnational space of economic, cultural and political participation. Transnational communities constitute a new kind of migrant community\textsuperscript{11}.

Economic and political contexts have favored institutional structures and their transnational extension. Economic liberalism has encouraged ‘ethnic business’. Its extension beyond a local setting is the result of the dispersion of immigrants with similar regional and/or national backgrounds throughout a continent or even across the world. Indian and Chinese immigrant communities, despite their cultural, linguistic heterogeneity of the population, provide the best examples. The flux of capital and goods is linked to economic norms and a culture of consumption carried from one country to another by transnational actors\textsuperscript{12}.

Political liberalism privileging ethnic pluralism encourages cultural activities through migrants' associations, where identities are organized and redefined as I tried to show in the previous section. The home country provides the emotional factor, and the country of settlement the legal and political support for their action which, by definition, leads to political participation in both spaces, carrying political norms and values from one culture to another. Through social remittances, ideas, behaviors, identities internalized in the country of immigration and social capital flowing from one country to another in order to be influential.


\textsuperscript{12} Alejandro Portes, Transnational Communities: Their Emergence and Significance in the Contemporary World-System. In R.P. Korzeniewicz, W.C.Smith (eds), \textit{Latin America in the World-Economy}, Greenwood Press, 1996, pp 151-166.
in both countries transnational communities aim at acting as pressure groups for political recognition in both political spaces. Often this action structures the community.

Transnationalism is inevitably bound up with dual or multiple citizenships, insofar as it relies on more than one national reference as well as on at least two arenas of social participation. But dual citizenship concerns different conceptions of a community’s moral and political values, as well as the civic duties demanded of those residing within it. Thus, transnationalism leads to an institutional expression of multiple belonging, where the country of origin becomes a source of identity, the country of residence a source of rights, and the emerging transnational space, a space of political action combining the two or more countries.

The question is the effect of transnationalism on the integration of communities in the society. How and to what extent a refuge in identities and communities beyond national boundaries take away immigrants from their country of immigration, from the process of integration or assimilation and often from citizenship? In the contrary, I would think that individuals that are socially and culturally as well as politically integrated are better armed for building such transnational connections. Peter Kivisto argues even that theories of transnationalism and of assimilation shouldn’t be opposed but be considered in interaction. Based on some empirical studies, he shows that the incorporation does not prevent the second generation to maintain ties with the country of their parents. On the other hand an American anthropologist, Peggy Levitt notices that in the case of the population, migrants whose life is not limited to one national setting – that is who are transnational – are not transferring their loyalty to their home country. They show different degrees of integration in both societies.

Transnational solidarities in Europe bring another dimension to transnational studies. In Europe, “immigrants” with the status of permanent residents or legal citizens of one member state, foster solidarity networks across national borders on the grounds of one or several identities, linking the home country to the country of residence and to a broader European space. They take refuge in solidarity expressed by common nationality, ethnicity, and religion that cuts across boundaries in Europe which they perceive as a new political space for collective claims and representation. Despite the fact that immigration and integration policies come within the power of the nation state, such transnational activities and organisations seek recognition from supranational European institutions as loci of collective identity. Even though transnational networks contribute in some respects to the formation of “exclusive communities” out of their relations with the state, the latter from now on appear as indispensable structures for negotiating with public authorities the recognition of collective identities constructed and shaped within frameworks that remain national ones. In fact, the objective of such a transborder structure for voluntary associations is to reinforce their representation at the European level, but its practical goal is to negotiate ultimately its identity and interest with the state. The consolidation of transnational solidarities generally aims to influence the state from the outside.

The other aspect of transnationalism is when solidarities beyond boundaries contributes to the redefinition of a new understanding of nation that is denationalized and deterritorialized, a transnational nation, that is not territorial, and that creates new expressions of belonging and political engagement. This reflects the nationalization of communitarian sentiments such as religion guided by an “imagined geography”, leading to a non territorial nationalism. The rhetoric of mobilization recentralizes, in a non territorial way, identities that

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have become fragmented within the nation-state context. In this perspective, the national reference brings out “cultural heterogeneity”. Even though the home country provides the emotional factor, and the country of settlement the legal and political support for their action which, it is the transnational community itself that provides a basis for a “moral identity” and resources for action, such is the case of minority nationalism and diaspora mobilization. The question is how this new type of nationalism gives a new strength to the national question and becomes a stake of legitimacy in the international system.

The question of community becomes more urgent when the sense of belonging is nourished by external developments such as wars and conflicts that take place “elsewhere.” These developments transform old grievances into new aspirations, in which colonial relations give way to a desire for, and an expression of, local and transnational autonomy. In the case of immigrant population in Europe with Muslim background in the large majority, the debates on Islam as religion, as philosophy, as doctrine, the debates on “the present questions concerning Muslims, like the Rushdie affair or the headscarf affair, or even broadly, the Israel-Palestine conflict”, are as much a part of the identification to a common religious identity beyond national belonging. Islam becomes a “refuge” or source of identification with the causes that “trouble the world” at the local as well as transnational or global level. Mobilization around the Israel-Palestine conflict for example has reunited not only Islamist and religious associations, the most secular factions of Muslims as well, and the international public opinion. Other political groups consequently align themselves with their cause. This opening towards “the universal” gives a greater legitimacy to a “recentralization” around Islam.

One such expression of common identification is violence in the name of a “cause” that directly or indirectly affects Islam, which is perceived as “victimized on a global scale.” This image is reinforced by activists’ rhetoric emphasizing humiliation and
Western domination, referring especially to the war between Israel and the Palestinians. September 11 and the war in Iraq produced heroes and victims for young Muslims in France, influencing their dress, speech and action in a kind of localized “revenge.”

Of course, such transnational and not territorial identities are not generated only through wars and conflicts. It is not only in immigrant situations that Islam involves both local and non local elements of identification. Nor is it only Islam that develops transnational modes of belonging. Transnationalism is part of the process of globalization and affects all religions that are by definition transnational\textsuperscript{16}. It affects today perhaps Islam more strongly because of the politicization of Islam since the 1980s, which is expressed in a variety of ways in different parts of the world. Even in countries where Islam is the religion of the vast majority of the population and people’s sense of belonging has a strong territorial base, similar kinds of rhetoric transcending national boundaries can be heard. The rhetoric surrounding Islam, both with and without a territorial base, is now used as the foundation for a “liberation” movement, like a sort of a new movement for the emancipation of nations. Its effect is to create a form of identification with a new unity that seeks to create a power relationship with states on both the local and the international level, both in national institutions – including ones that are as important for the transmission of the national ideology as the schools – and in supranational institutions.

The fundamental question has to do with the capacity of states to negotiate both inside and outside their borders. Inside their borders, the negotiations have to do with the de facto pluralism that characterizes civil society, the terms of recognition of the communities that are emerging within it and the limits of their political legitimacy. In other words, the state needs to negotiate the terms of citizenship\textsuperscript{17}. External negotiations


\textsuperscript{17} R.Kastoryano, \textit{op.cit.}, 2002
have to do with degrees of institutional and decision-making interdependence with other states and especially with NGOs and other supranational institutions. Of course, the option of negotiation appears a priori to be a moderate solution. But that it is because the conflict it is responding to is itself moderate. The demand for recognition of religious specificities is simply a step toward recognizing a “right to difference” as a new foundation for democracy.

But how can the terms of negotiation be defined when the nature of the conflicts changes because of extraterritorial developments that have repercussions within the state’s territory? How can the limits of negotiation established? When issues have become nonnegotiable because of their scope, transcending national boundaries, and because of their effects on individual freedom in local communities within the territory of the state, by what mechanism can they be made negotiable again?