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Editor's Note
Acting and Reacting in Multicultural Spaces

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What remains to be said today about multicultural spaces? In an increasingly globalized world the meeting of cultures, their coexistence, would seem to be, at least rationally, rather a normal occurrence. However, the last years have seen throughout the world a rise in popularity for various isolationist political movements, and talks of "culture clash" have resurfaced again on the trails of massive waves of refugees from war ravaged African and Middle East states towards Europe. Thus, we see political discourses taking an anti-immigration turn on the background of calls for some purity of tradition. The United Kingdom votes in a referendum to depart from the politics of the European Union project, Donald Trump wants to symbolically wall the United States, former Soviet bloc countries see a rise of "illiberal" platforms (with both authoritarian and isolationist tendencies), and Italy votes in a far right government that sparks flashbacks from 60-70 years ago. Something has happened along the way from, say, the historically significant moment of Barrack Obama's election in United States to the current international political landscape. So what remains to be said today about multicultural spaces? Unfortunately, this question may not be able to lead us to an answer anymore, therefore we should probably reframe it.

We may start, most efficiently when reframing, by looking at definitions themselves. How do we, and how should we understand multiculturalism? We can think of communities characterized by a variety of ethnicities and cultural traditions living together peacefully. The members of such communities preserve their identities and, ideally, are in an ever-enriching dialogue with those of different identities. Multiculturalism as such would be a phenomenon that should be respected and enjoyed as it provides everyone with a widened and enhanced everyday life. However, this is a matter of perspective, as some political stances may struggle with the question of drawing the line between cultural enrichment

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and identity loss. Seen as such, multiculturalism appears to be rather a problem to be solved, a powder barrel waiting to blow, something that needs to be curtailed and kept in check.

These two ways of looking at multiculturalism can only lead us into a discursive deadlock, so we need to reposition ourselves in approach the matter in a slightly different matter. Thus, we may adopt a more pragmatic stance and start thinking from the direction of what should be, and not from what it appears to be. Tolerating difference, living in peace with the other, is not enough to create a stable and inclusive environment, but rather a stable state of segregation. To avoid this, we need to look towards allowing communities to commune and communicate. Under a common set of principles that may act as a meeting ground we can, instead of tolerating, look towards embracing the difference and, thus, making it visible. Instead of simply multiculturalism, we may turn towards cultural pluralism.

Can this be a useful move? We mentioned the increasingly globalized world in which we live. This means that we live in a world where cultures meet and mix in a wide range of ways. These cultures can adopt or adapt, they can integrate or be integrated, in a natural or forced way – yet definitely affecting each other. Languages do no longer belong to a single nation, but they become international, allowing communication between people of many countries, making it possible for various groups, sometimes oceans apart, to work together, or join in surprisingly common struggles. Yes, however fluid as they may be, such different groups, organized and recombined under categories such as race, class, gender, may also struggle together politically for representation, for defining and redefining the spaces between them and the world that surrounds them.

Yet such almost ontological upheavals are not left without response in the societies that concern themselves with issues of cultural difference and identity. This is why events like the refugee crisis in Europe, or the economic crisis in United States, managed to unearth a set of exclusionary rhetorics directly derived from, or resembling the xenophobic, ultra-nationalist discourses that led to the great tragedies of the twentieth century. This only proves that we find ourselves at a time when another academic repositioning and clarification of these terms is again necessary. In redrawing the pragmatic stance towards these issues, we have, still, the work of a century of scholarship before us, from Horace Kallen's definition work at the beginning of the twentieth century (1915) to Ronald Takaki's historic works on diversity theory at the beginning of the twenty-first century (2002). The context now is slightly different, but nevertheless unsettling, so again, more than ever, we need to readdress it.

Multicultural spaces are always, in one way or another, connected to a trauma. Perhaps this is something that an over-celebration of multiculturalism

tends to forget, and perhaps it is also yet another reason for the usefulness of a move towards a definition of cultural pluralism. The trauma in question is, evidently, that of the displaced, the un-rooted, and the exiled. But it is also a trauma of adoption, and of adaptation. Thus, multicultural spaces can turn into happy stories provided those involved can work out, consciously or not, these traumas. Sometimes it is the only thing they can do, but this is not always true. The incipient multicultural experience proves to be very volatile and extremely vulnerable to confusions, which are then solved by an appeal to defensive mythologies – reified stereotypes, internalized racist discourses, and displaced anger.

We gathered, in the first section of this Bulletin issue, three authors that explore three different, seemingly unrelated, instances of this particular aspect of the multicultural experience.

Paul O'Brian looks at the more general rhetorics of exclusion practiced by both sides of the apparent clash between secular (yet historically Christian) Europe and the Islam of the new waves of migrants fleeing Africa and the Middle East. O'Brian draws attention to the binary logic that informs these rhetorics and advocates for a need to completely overcome it, in order to escape the circularity of a hate speech that ultimately prevents any meeting from taking place.

Claudia Mayr-Veselinovic turns to the historic East European region of Vojvodina as a multicultural space *par excellence*. She looks at how people, left to their own devices, can manage to find a common ground upon which to build a multicultural life, but she also looks at these people's vulnerability in the face of the external pressures of various discourses of hate aimed at stirring up long forgotten imagined identities.

Cristina Ioana Dragomir takes three individual cases of people (of three different ethnicities) thrown into the extremely formalized multicultural space of the American military, as their entrance ticket into the equally multicultural United States of America. What is especially interesting about their stories is the interplay between their formalized experience, their own personal systems of stereotypies, and the new hierarchies of ethnicity and race they discover in the American society.

Reading people's ways of negotiating multicultural spaces and experiences also means looking at the ways they express themselves through various artistic media.

Oana Andreea Pîrnuţă and **Anca Bădulescu** are looking in their article at the Native American experience, in the particular situation of internal displacement specific to it.

Nicoleta Marinescu analyzes a seemingly seminal fragment from *L'Amour, La Fantasia* by Algerian French author Assia Djebar, a novel that situates her as a Berber in an Arab world conquered by the French.

Laura Pop explores the case of exiled authors being reclaimed by the space from which they were exiled in the first place, while **Maria-Marcela Ivan** turns to the actual biography of such an exiled writer, Andreas Birkner, exiled both in his own country (deported to the Baragan fields) and outside.

Both **Adina Câmpu** and **Aura Sibişan** take to literature as a medium fit for unveiling the day to day negotiation process that people living between worlds are compelled to practice. From the Chicano communities in the United States to the Indian experience in England, we see these traumas of displacement being played out, negotiated, and, sadly, sometimes never fully understood.

On the other hand, through the medium of visual art, **Ileana Botescu-Sireţeanu** turns to the works of Kara Walker, arguing that she successfully manages to advocate for a plural existence by candidly exposing the inadequacy of old hierarchies and stereotypical views of the world.

Allowing communities to commune and communicate means we have to also turn to language studies, and especially to the way the act of translation works both in an academic and non-academic sense.

From this point of view the discourse data mining practiced by **Mehrdad Vashegani Farahani** and **Ahmed Ibrahim Abdallah Mohammed** might unearth things we fail to notice, just as **Simina Anamaria Purcaru**'s etymological genealogies may unveil the cultural logic and cultural language behind the things we build.

However, a translation is never a purely mathematical thing, as a language translation always requires, comes with, a certain cultural understanding and communication. As **Bianca Anamaria Arion** and **Marilena Milcu** are showing in their article, finding an equivalent may prove to be a tricky task, especially when there is none in the target language.

Similarly, **Mona Arhire** shows how translations and finding equivalents in the target languages are also complicated by the (always cultural) understanding of the cohesiveness of a given text.

Finally, **Giustina Selvelli** shows how the practice of language can become a space for negotiating a plural existence in a multicultural space, by looking at the way in which the Armenian diaspora in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, has historically used and adapted their language for a setting that proves indeed trans-national.

So, what remains to be said today about multicultural spaces? Let us reformulate and readdress this question then. How does acting and reacting in multicultural spaces happen?