

XENOLOGY – ONE OF THE SOLUTIONS OF RECENT CULTURE*

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Abstract. *The present text approaches cultural and philosophical studies (not unified and homogeneous) about otherness which had been outlined in a special way of studying the Other and the Foreigner – xenology (the term proposed by Cameroon researcher Douala M'bedy). Considered by some researchers as a method, by others as 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 contrarily and contradictorily positioned between ipseity and otherness. From this perspective, the present text affirms that not every difference requires a certain "xenology" of the studied object. This refers rather to a critical investigation of the intercultural phenomenon, to estrangement, tolerance and aggression in terms of ethnology, philosophy and sociology (Albert Classen).*

Keywords: *xenology, the Other, Foreigner, Difference, risk of alterity, self-identification*

Introduction

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 Cameroon researcher Douala M'bedy). Moving away from the Intercultural German Studies as the science of the Foreigner, the xenological approach is centred on the nomad, non-integrated, limited, unidentified human. We can refer to several disciplines that study the stranger, the other, cultural otherness. These are ethnology, cultural anthropology, imagology, barbarology, ethno-psychoanalysis, and xenology. The last one involves an investigation of the phenomenon of (in)tolerance between a subject and the Difference, the Other who proves to be rather the Alien, represented by the limits of the intelligible, as the Difference is positioned beyond it. From here derives a

* A first form of the present article was published in *Dialogica*, no. 1, January-April 2019, Chişinău, pp. 57-61, E-ISSN: 1857-2537.

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state of suspicion, mistrust and non-acceptance of the host, which stigmatizes the stranger, excluding social altruism. The stranger is not only the different one, the Other, a distant entity; he is rather a close matter of supposed risk. But the Other also appears, complementarily, as a human need of openness and interaction, as the alien from the perspective of his identity, outlining the limits of self and serving as a catalyst for self-identification.

Considered by some researchers a method, by 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 contrarily and contradictorily positioned between 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 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.

In the book "L'étranger, l'identité. Essai sur l'intégration culturelle" Toshiaki Kozakai states that humanity goes through an "identity illness" [Kozakai, p. 12]. The author considers that this comes from the fact that we are forced to coexist with the Foreigner, which makes us accept our own evolution [*Ibidem*, p. 14]. This somehow explains why "terms like «multicultural», «multi-ethnic» or «creolism» are increasingly used and there is insistence on the adoption of a concept that would open the nation" [*Ibidem*, p. 17]. It is obvious that there is an increasingly need to know the socio-cultural instruments that coordinate the relationship with others in society (internal foreigners – minorities) and with those outside of it. This means a return to the secular human experience of cohabitation with the difference of studying the image of otherness within human culture and of its evolution over time in various human communities. In this sense, xenology is one of the sciences that have this goal.

Xenology – Contemporary Challenges

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 on this subject. Strictly 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 the notion of otherness is used. There is not only a lingual but also an investigational tradition, perhaps even the tradition of the perception of 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”).

When referring 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 *alien art* concentrated on the nomad, non-integrated, bounded, unidentified human, in *science fiction* as hypothetical science whose object represent the extra-terrestrial societies constituted from other forms of life, in phylogeny that studies the existing or extinct 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 extra-terrestrial 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 Duala-M’bedy in the 1970-es referring to the concept of the “foreigner” in the cultural and civilizational space of humanity.

From the perspective of cultural studies, we can refer to many disciplines that have as a subject the Foreigner, the Other, the Otherness and the Difference. There is ethnology, cultural anthropology, barbarism studies, ethnical psychoanalysis, irenology, xenology etc. The last one supposes an investigation of the phenomenon of (in)tolerance between the subject and the Difference, the Other that testifies rather to be the Foreigner at the limits of intelligible it presents, as the Foreigner is always positioned beyond it. What cannot be understood sends to the scientific theory of H.-G. Gadamer regarding 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 otherness as something equitable. Douala M’bedy proposed the term “xenology” which “serves as a general term to designate the foreigner and his epistemological issues” [Douala M’bedy, p. 19]. After the 1980-es xenology became an important niche of Intercultural German studies, named by Alois Wierlacher the science of cultural otherness, a discipline that considers the diversity of German speaking cultures without proposing their hierarchization. Later xenology expanded from German studies to 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 xenoi) meant “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 travellers”. Theoxenia was considered a virtue of those who were welcoming to 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, as being excluded from social altruism. But the Other appears as a human necessity of openness and interaction too, because the Foreigner is not just a different one, an Other, a distant entity, he is rather a subject of 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, he defines xenology as "the critical investigation of interculturalization, distance, tolerance, and aggression in ethnological, philosophical, sociological term" [Classen, pp. 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" [*Ibidem*, 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 [Wierlacher, 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 a problem. While the concept of difference, in Hegelian terms, supposes a simple differentiation, the "other" and the "foreigner" in reference to the "own" require the opposite and contradictory [Panich, 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 word recently borrowed to designate the concept of the Foreigner [Hallsson, p. 2]. The researcher proposes his own definition: "Xenology is not only a 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) can be explicitly interpreted as a social theory" [*Ibidem*, pp. 2-3].

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 contemporary science the term xenology is applied to creatures, races and communities different from 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 than the zoological and biological ones because distrust in foreigners deals with the phylogenetic adaptation of the group, so the ethnocentrism and xenophobia have a biological support [Lysenko, 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! [*Ibidem*, p. 62].

Thus, an opening for this branch of knowledge also exists in the East; 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 [Дорожкин, p. 12].

Conclusions

We can conclude that in the humanities xenology announces itself as a popular or even a necessary theory. Considered by some a science, by others an amount of knowledge about the foreigner and by the rest 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 of 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 confrontation with the “foreign other”.

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

The relevance of the topic and of xenology in general (regardless of the terminology and philosophical schools that study it) comes from the socio-political and cultural situation in the world. Armed conflicts, terrorism, propaganda battles etc., all presuppose interethnic and other forms of intolerance.

Intercultural and multicultural openings seem to be a solution, but we don't see their definitive impact yet. "The philosophy of dialogue" and the idea of meeting the Other (M. Bakhtin, M. Buber, V.N. Toporov etc.) both imply a social-human empathy. These meetings may produce a sense of 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 on 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 society. This allows proximity with a group and distancing from another one. But "the era of identity and identification" is full of rage. The search for identity divides and raises 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?

Xenophilia 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 in the first place, interaction and understanding.

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