
LINGUISTICS AND LITERATURE

New Approach to Multiculturalism in the U.S.

Tamara SHIOSHVILI*

Abstract

The face of America has been dramatically changed in the last decades of the 20th century. In 1960s and 1970s a new generation of scholars started to destroy the myth of exceptionalism. The hostility to exceptionalism remains, while we observe a step from exceptionalism to transnationalism, which carries the multicultural impulse to an international plane. It accentuates fundamental differences between cultural groups. Transnational Approach to multiculturalism is important as well as advantageous for Georgians. Since ethnicity has become the focal point for the scholars of American Studies, we hope Georgian immigrants will well preserve their language, culture for their posterity and at the same time introduce it to Americans.

Keywords: multiculturalism, cosmopolitan, diversity.

What America is today, is very much different from what it was a few decades ago. The once dominated belief of America and Americans as mainly British in ancestry - with just a few other European nationalities - Protestant in religion and having the largest cities and centers of power along East Coast, is not up-to-date any more. Due to multicultural changes today we see “transnationalism,” as a new approach of scholars in the field of American Studies.

A long line of intellectuals have cultivated an internationalist outlook to strengthen liberal American values. That cosmopolitan perspective informed the vision of the leading scholars Henry Nash Smith and Leo Marx, to name the most prominent who forged the field of American Studies from the 1940s to the 1960s.

Prof. Robert A. Gross in his article “The Transnational Turn: Rediscovering American Studies in a Wider World” considers “transnationalism” as the latest move to alter an interdisciplinary field that has been radically remade in the last two decades under the multicultural challenge. How exactly is transnationalism related to multiculturalism? The face of America has been dramatically altered in the final years of the 20th century. America's face is not just about physiognomy, or even color, although endless varieties of each can be seen throughout the land. It is about the very complexion of the country, the endless and fascinating profusion of people, cultures, languages and attitudes that make up the great national pool. That pool, constantly fed by new streams of immigrants, has produced in the U.S. of 1993 what author Ben J. Wattenberg has labeled “the first universal nation”, a truly multicultural society marked by unparalleled diversity. It has also brought fresh challenges for the U.S. and considerable doubts among Americans about continuing the country's traditional open door policy toward new immigrants. A nation of immigrants from the beginning, the U.S. has welcomed most newcomers, grateful for any new pairs of hands to tame its vast interior or

* Assoc.Prof., Faculty of Humanities, IBSU, Tbilisi, tshioshvili@yahoo.com

help stoke its huge industrial engine. For more than a century, most of the new arrivals were from Europe. But in the 1960s the U.S. undertook a basic shift in national policy, from one stacked in favor of European immigrants toward one that favored the rest of the world, particularly Third World nations. The full effects of that policy have exploded only in recent years. The past decade has seen the greatest rise in immigration since the great wave of 1901-10. Immigrants are arriving at the rate of more than 1 million a year, mostly from Asia and the vast Hispanic world. In 1940, 70% of immigrants came from Europe. In 1992, 15% came from Europe, 37% from Asia and 44% from Latin America and the Caribbean. The impact of these new immigrants is literally remaking America. Today more than 20 million Americans were born in another country. There are higher birth-rates among the mostly young Third World arrivals, demographers are predicting that the U.S. before long will have to redefine just who its minorities are. In 1950, for example 75% of all the minorities in the U.S. were African Americans. Hispanics now number about 24 millions, and by 2010 they will have surpassed blacks in number and sometime during the second half of the 21st century the descendants of white Europeans, the arbiters of the core national culture are likely to slip into minority status. The new immigrants enter a country whose population of 258 million has comfortably filled the land and is worried about overpopulation and international environment. If the immigrant tide continues, The U.S. population will rise to 392 million by the middle of the next century. Normally tolerant Americans succumb to complaints about the newcomers' contributions to crime and disease, about the burdens on schools and welfare rolls. Three-quarters of questioned U.S. citizens feel that the nation's current policy has got out of hand and that 9*--government should limit immigration more strictly. Does this mean the end of the American pact with newcomers to its shores? Almost surely not. Though different and more problematic than those who have come before, the latest immigrants are helping form a new society, a variation and intensification of the great American experiment. Too complicated to be described as a melting pot, or even a "goulash" or a "mosaic", that society today is really a collection of intertwining subcultures, each contributing its own character to the nation's life from food to fashion, from art to politics while retaining its distinctiveness. The present popular discontent may produce some needed changes in immigration laws and practices. But there is no turning back: diversity breeds diversity. It is the fuel that runs today's America and in a world being transformed daily by technologies that render distances meaningless, it puts America in the forefront of a new international order.

The differences among Americans gain their impact, however, from the bonds that unite them. They are differences that should not divide or weaken America, but distinguish and strengthen it.

Transnationalism brings new voices and topics to the agenda of American Studies. It forcefully disputes and deconstructs Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur classic question: "What is this American, this new man?" Is transnationalism simply a reflection of changing times? Arguably, it represents an intellectual outlook born of new global realities. Who could gainsay the far-ranging transformation of the world economy over the last two decades, as transnational

corporations have brought about an unprecedented integration of finance, production, and distribution around the globe? As recent financial crisis in Asia, Russia and Brazil make plain, no nation-state can command its economic destiny, though of course, some have far greater power than others, especially in shaping the policies of the European Union and of the International Monetary Fund. And who has been untouched by the fundamental instrument of globalization: electronic communications? Information technology serves multiple ends. Like the telegraph in the 19th century, it “annihilates time and space”. Organizations, both large and small, in every field can pursue activities in the international arena. In the academic community desktop computers ease cross-national communications and research and foster cosmopolitan ties. It is in the realm of news and popular culture that global communications have made the most dramatic impact. Television, led by CNN fashions are image of the world, to which politicians are compelled to respond. Broadcasts track the price of interdependence for the environment: oil spills, nuclear accidents, global warming, the spread of AIDS. As for popular entertainment, the U.S., in the words of popular tune and exhibit at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, a “small, small world”, thanks to the marketing power of mega-companies like Disney, which have made the sale of American “software and entertainment products” abroad a \$60 billion a year industry. “American's biggest export is no longer the fruit of its fields or the output of its factories”, according to the Washington Post, “but the mass-produced products of its popular culture movies, TV programs, music, books and computer software”.

The impetus for transnationalism marks the arrival of fresh voices in the field. Prominent among them are scholars from diverse ethnic communities that have taken shape since 1965, when the United States opened its doors to immigrants from all over the world. As participants in that movement, they have an insider's view of life in the new transnational world. Others develop their ideas from outside the United States. Theirs is an international perspective, fascinated and bemused by an expansive American culture, most palpable in music and film, that captures the immigrations of millions around the globe. As superpower and symbol, “America” enters into others' cultures. To take account of that process, to assess, for example, the so-called “Americanization” of Europe, has set a new dynamic agenda for the practice of American Studies abroad. The transnational turn registers the growing influence of international scholarship about the U.S.

In 1960 and 1970s, a new generation of scholars initiated to demolish the myth of exceptionalism. The hostility to exceptionalism remains while we observe a step from exceptionalism to transnationalism.

Transnationalism carries the multicultural impulse to an international plane. It highlights fundamental differences between cultural groups. The transnational turn should, then, be an easy move for American Studies. At home with multiculturalism, surely Americans will welcome its international dimension.

How is “the American” constructed as “the national subject?” Radway considers alternative approaches to that question. The first is the “exceptionalist tradition”, whose goal was to identify a unique, homogeneous “American mind”,

coterminus with the geographical boundaries of the nation itself. The other tradition (W.E.B. Dubois and Jose Marti) viewed the U.S. in “international context”.

The debate over what it means to be an American is as old as the republic. Not because the critics are attached to an outdated view of national identity as “an organically unified, homogeneous thing”. That position was discredited long ago, so much so that many scholars stopped talking about American identity. Radway's innovation is to revitalize this discourse by way of ethnic studies. In the “confrontation and exchange” she finds the key to shifting versions of the American idea. Hence the centrality of ethnic studies to American studies as a whole.

As America becomes increasingly a transnational “mélange”, it ratifies anti-exceptionalism.

Transnational approach is important as well as advantageous for Georgians. With its beautiful scenery, delicious cuisine and ancient winemaking tradition, Georgia was called the jewel of the Soviet Union, but today is still unknown, by most Westerners. Georgia, which during Soviet times held 4th place after the Baltic republics for high living standards, faces many economic problems today. Especially hard was economic situation in Georgia after the dissolving of the Soviet Union (1991), and during the following transitional period. Hence, a lot of Georgians immigrated to the U.S. sorrowfully for us, the scope of Georgian ethnic community in the U.S. has greatly enlarged and is still increasing. According to an official source, ethnicity is becoming prioritative, and we hope that Georgian immigrants will preserve their language, culture for their posterity and at the same time introduce it to Americans.

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