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Art, artists and cross-cultural psychology

The paper seeks to examine several topical issues that situate themselves between some new trends in psychology, and old ones such as culture, arts and artists. The problems encountered include adaptation, acculturation, multiculturalism and globalization. In view of these issues the fates of three artists will be examined; the artists whose life stories made them cross national and cultural boundaries and whose artistic achievements can be verified in the light of cross-cultural psychology. The two men to be considered are Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855) and Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875-1911) and Eva Hoffman (b. 1945).

In spite many differences, their life stories show striking similarities. They had to leave their native land (the place of birth). In case of Mickiewicz and Čiurlionis it was Lithuania, then non-existent as an independent country after the final partition of Poland in 1795. They both died unexpectedly and far away from their homeland. It can be assumed that their 'nomadic' lifestyle was due, at least partly, to the circumstances they had to face. Mickiewicz had to leave Vilnius to escape imprisonment, Čiurlionis went to study and develop his talent. Mickiewicz emigrated to France where his talent blossomed but also experienced many drawbacks, Čiurlionis spent ten years of his short life in Warsaw, having already travelled across Europe. Mickiewicz remains an unquestionably great Polish romantic poet, Čiurlionis a gigantic figure, a proto-modernist composer and painter. Neither of them saw his native country again and died untimely deaths, Mickiewicz in Istanbul, Čiurlionis at Marki-Pustelnik near Warsaw. Presumably, Mickiewicz died of cholera. Čiurlionis suffered a breakdown, was diagnosed schizophrenic (not certain?), and TB and died of pneumonia (Siedlecka, 1996, p. 103).

Eva Hoffman also had to leave Poland for Canada when she was in her teens, as her Jewish parents, Holocaust survivors, decided to emigrate. Her memories of acclimatizing there are contained in her first novel *Lost in translation: A life in a new language* (1989). Hers is by all accounts a success story, she earned a PhD in American and English literature, used to teach literature and creative writing at several universities, work for the New York Times and the New York Times Book Review, before embarking on novel writing. She publishes regularly, and her latest study confirms her interest in various cultures and contemporary issues, *The inner lives of cultures* (2011).

The reasons to emigrate vary. But they usually remain unchanged, as the list below shows. Both former and present day emigrants set out looking for a safe place to live, better living conditions, interesting jobs, better educational opportunities. They also

leave to escape persecution or flee from war zones. Living in a foreign country brings several problems, concerning everyday existence and deeply personal ones that could very well be and often are diagnosed as disorders, grave enough to be given psychological or psychiatric explanations.

Mickiewicz and Čiurlionis used to be and still are claimed by Poles and Lithuanians, respectively as their fellow countrymen; although their artistic achievements situate them on the international Olympus of poetry, music and painting. They knew foreign languages and could use them freely. And were well acquainted with national and European tradition and culture. Čiurlionis's art is by its very nature more universal than poetry. But Mickiewicz presents a complex case as for his national identity when the opening lines of *Pan Tadeusz* are considered, the lines written in Polish, defying the traditional view that the language denoted one's national identity:

O Lithuania my country, thou
Art like good health; I never knew till now
How precious till I lost thee. Now I see
Thy beauty whole, because I yearn for thee (Mickiewicz, 1966, p. 2).

Or:

The land of childhood! That shall aye endure as holy as a first love and as pure,
Unshattered by the memory of mistake,
Nor can the changing tide of life unmake (ibid. 285).

Or when travelling across Crimea, he longed for some news from his homeland (the name of the country "Litwa" in the original, but left out in translation), and failing to hear anything resigns to continue his journey, as the last couplet from his famous sonnet runs: "From my far home if word would come to me!--/ Yet none will come. On, o'er the meadow-seal!" (Mickiewicz –on line). Several biographers of the poet described his fluctuating moods, failing creative powers, depression, desperate activities to promote "the Polish cause" (Krzyżanowski, 1972; Witkowska, Przybylski, 1999).

Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis' short life was devoted to arts, first to composing music that made him posthumously a leading Lithuanian composer, both innovative and tradition – conscious. Travelling, studying, suffering poverty, enthusiasm, depression and TB made him no different from other European artists of the day. His uniqueness showed when, unable to compose he moved found for himself another artistic venue – painting. He remained a great admirer of romantic poetry, his native tradition and also Polish romanticism. His correspondence in Polish shows him a great stylist, a poet, compared to Słowacki (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2003), another great Polish romantic. Obviously his mastery of Polish must as striking as his amazing poetic imagination and sensitivity to be able to describe such a scene:

Look among the snowy crowns of the mountains, spiry mountains. Soaring almost up to the sky, stands a man. At his feet cloud has covered the whole earth; down there earthly history proceeds, muddle, din, babble, but the cloud has covered all. Silence. White, strange crowns around. Strangely huge, strangely beautiful of opals and

pearls, of topaz and malachite, of crystal and diamonds. Strangely magnificent, huge crowns and among them stands the man and looks with his eyes, wide open, looks and waits. He promised that at sunshine – the moment when the crowns are on fire, when colors mingle and rays dance – he would sing a hymn to the sun. A hymn to the sun! (Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2003).

Čiurlionis's letters to his wife are full of nostalgia, longing, heartbreaking descriptions of poverty, illness and disillusionment, but also full of love for her and their little daughter whom he had never seen (Siedlecka, 1996, p. 92-101). Huge parts of his letters describe his artistic plans, what he has already done and what he wants to do, recording meeting other artists and friends. Often they describe his changing mood, due to good or bad reception of his paintings and music:

The committee consisting of four not very nice gentlemen, was much less enthusiastic about my work, I was playing and playing and felt that my compositions will not be heard soon. They praised them all right but not the things I thought worth praising. They did not understand what was truly original and new (Siedlecka, 1996, pp. 93-94, tr. MWM).

Or:

I am truly ashamed to admit that having paid 27 roubles for my loggings, I have only 5 roubles left. I was very careful with money but small expenses mounted up. I can survive on this money for about ten days. I have some smoked sausage, the cheese I have not started yet, and a piece of Swiss cheese. So, "Lithuania has not yet perished" (ibid. p. 99).

Personal ordeal, depression or diagnosed schizophrenia did not prevent the most unique creative power the artist must have achieved. His Sonata written in autumn 1907 bridges poetry and music as it was divided into such parts as Allegro, Andante, Scherzo and Finale (Siedlecka, 1996, p. 85-87). His most famous cycles of paintings were created towards the end of his life, mainly from 1906. Creation of the World, Cycle winter, Cycle Zodiac, Sonatas (of the Spring, of the Sun of the Stars, of the Pyramids), Cycle Fairy-Tale and several others are breathtaking for connoisseurs of art, and for medical men sure signs of his mental condition.

What he felt, achieved and thought could hardly be read from his correspondence with his wife and friends. Soon, however, his days could have looked as in the description given below:

In his tired mind pictures were reeling, pictures of the bubbling cultural life of Warsaw at the turn of the century, which he temporarily left in bitterness when Xavery Dunikowski, with whom Čiurlionis studied sculpture, shot dead – his friend Waclaw Pawlitzak – presumably in self-defense. In spite of the cold day, Konstantinas did not put his coat on – are such trifles of importance? Before long pneumonia linked with TB. Soon, on April 9th 1911 death relieved his sufferings. His body was transported from

Pustelnik to Vilnius and buried at the famous Rossa Cemetery. He never saw his daughter... (Ulica Ciurlonisa - dlaczego właśnie w Markach? on line).

Another story to be described here deals with a seemingly successful adaptation. As a teenager, Eva Hoffman left Poland in late fifties as her Jewish- Polish parents decided to emigrate to Canada. Her biographical novel entitled *Lost in translation: A life in a new language* gives an account of the importance of linguistic competence and culture and tradition awareness. In her new country of residence she realizes she has neither. Adaptation that takes place over a stretch of years takes a successful turn. Yet, the years Canada and US are her "exile" (the subtitle of the book's part). Her adaptation consists not only of learning the words but realizing with painful awareness her ignorance concerning customs, TV serials, children's stories, dating and small talk. First her name – certainly the most personal item we possess is pronounced differently (Hoffman 1989: 105), words fail to denote things (ibid., p. 106), give her nightmares (ibid. 107), the signifiers severed from the signified – words no longer stand for things they used to in the native language. As picturesquely observed " the way of informing the ego where the id had been" (ibid., p. 107). Strikingly:

I have no interior language, and without it, interior images –those images through which we assimilate the external world, through which we take it in, love it, make it our own – become blurred, too. (ibid. 108). /.../ Alienation is beginning to be inscribed in my flesh and my face (ibid. p. 110).

Soon: "The language is beginning to invent another me" (ibid., p. 121). Though the author learns to play her "immigrant card" rather well, she also observes another danger that of adapting and conforming to the middle class standards – to the unambitious version of suburban wives bitterly quarrelling with their successful businessmen husbands but never doing anything but complaining. At the same time her mother is at a loss how to bring up her daughters " In Poland I would have known how to bring you up, I would have known what to do" (ibid., p. 145).

The author's new linguistic milieu ostracizes her from her family, who complain on her 'becoming English' – which for them means criticism and dissatisfaction. In reality, the author begins schooling herself in becoming less expressive and spontaneous. These (cultural) characteristics make her look odd with the local people. Making friends presents another problem. Eva has been brought up in another tradition, another family, with different rules and references. She cannot 'read peoples' faces, cannot make appropriate remarks, sees problems (big or small) through different lenses. Trying to advance her social position, make a career, and pursue her goals:

The only catch is that I have lost the sense of what, driven as I have become, I am driving toward. The patterns of my life have been so disrupted that I cannot find straight lines amid the disarray. Gradual change within one context, one diagram, is one thing; scrambling all the coordinates is another" (ibid., p. 158).

In consequence, Hoffman has to assimilate to the ever-changing fragmented culture, society in a flux, and of multiple perspectives, in other words "I will be made like a mosaic, of fragments – and my consciousness of them. It is only that in observing consciousness that I remain, after all, an immigrant" (ibid., p.164).

Though successfully assimilated in American society Hoffman conducts endless juxtaposing her American friends' opinions with those of her Polish friends. Meeting other Poles and visiting her native Cracow offers rich material for comparisons and for questioning assimilation theories. In an interview she said: "...since I disappeared like a chameleon I walk the footsteps of both a fox and a cat". She admitted that the process of putting on her new skin was painful, as she was defensive about putting on her new skin: "for I had to go through the process of translating myself/.../ I wanted to save some thread of myself in the process trying to understand that new world and enter it somehow" (Nie chcę żyć w wędrówce – on line). More recently Hoffman is able to assess the process, probably all emigrants experience:

I think every migrant becomes a kind of amateur anthropologist – you do notice things about the culture or the world that you come into that people who grow up in it, who are embedded in it, simply don't notice/.../ At first you notice the surface things, the surface differences. And gradually you start noticing the deeper differences. And very gradually you start with understanding the inner life of the culture, the life of those both large and very intimate values [Hoffman 2000, on line].

Loneliness, longing, poverty and high hopes are emigrants' common experiences. There is enough evidence that those artists felt the same as migrating Poles, Italians, Irish, Lithuanians, Mexicans and others. However, artists converted all such experiences into art, though psychology and psychiatry could, and occasionally did, diagnose the symptoms indicated in the above quotations (and many others) as mental disorders.

But it is comparatively recently that the notion of culture came to be associated with the problems of adaptation and globalization. The notions are also quite recent, assimilation is a mid-nineteenth century acquisition, multiculturalism and globalization came into use in the second half of the 20th century. However, the phenomena they tried to describe are as old as humanity itself and existed before it was named and studied. The role of culture as an indicator of individual identity has been gaining currency at least since the ongoing debate on its status in the modern world, especially juxtaposed with civilization. The importance of culture in spite of its endless definitions, the rise of cultural studies indicate how important culture is nowadays. The words of Ernest Gellner (1983, p. 36) strike as true when he states that "[M]odern man is not loyal to a monarch or a land or a faith, whatever he may say, but to a culture".

In psychology, adaptation means outward behavior serving/helping to secure the most basic needs of an individual. It is usually linked with mass migration due to economic reasons. In psychology and sociology, it denotes a shift in sociological or

cultural disposition. One is said to 'adapt' to a new environment (Reben, 1995). The phrase 'cultural disposition' used, indicates that there are probably other areas and other ways, and also other needs to be taken into account when a certain adaptive norm or practice is established. The situation changes when adaptation is to reach innermost and personal problems, such as identity, accepted or rejected universals, a sense of purpose in life, etc.

In other words, when it is not the problem of health after illness or normality after medication. It is a psychological problem of a different nature, of individual choices and consequences going well beyond 'normal functioning' and everyday affairs, projecting on the individual's functioning in a foreign society, unknown culture and strange linguistic milieu.

Several attempts have been made to explain at least some of the above. In the seventies John Berry provided an answer in his acculturation model. The term acculturation has been defined in a variety of ways, including the notion of cultural modification of individuals or groups adapting or borrowing from another culture but also merging with that culture. Some definitions state that it is the culture of a given society acquired from infancy (Acculturation on line).

Berry's model has been widely discussed and adopted (Chica) as the figure 1 (Berry, 2008) shows. Its main forte is accounting for several choices and consequences that follow such choices. Individuals may either participate in another culture while maintaining his/her own and in result get either assimilated or marginalized. The problem of marginalization has become such a burning issue in various parts of the world, worrying psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, criminologists, judges, teachers, representatives of various religious denominations – almost all who try to organize, educate, treat and ... penalize.

So unsurprisingly, modern anthropology, sociology and recently cross-cultural psychology have taken up psychological problems of long-term residence in foreign countries. Yet, early studies mainly concentrated on living conditions, environment, eventual success, assimilation, or its absence. They devoted little attention to cultural clash experienced by immigrants encountering foreign customs, religion, language, living conditions, etc. It is only recently that it has been accepted that human behavior depends very much on cultural traditions that human beings carry with themselves. Indeed, the principle of "culture – bound nature of most human behavior" [Jahoda 1999: X] is comparatively new and the relationship between psychology and culture dates back from World War W II.

Cross-cultural psychology has been defined in a variety of ways. The basics of those definitions necessitate following scientific and systematic approach to how human behaviours are shaped and influenced by social and cultural forces, studying individuals from more than two cultures, finally, how they are influenced by culture and how it leads to changes in existing culture (Berry, 1999; Jahoda, 1999).

Leaving aside the ancient archetype of a modern migrant (why not think of Odysseus in Homer), one encounters several cases for whom adaptation or its absence cannot be defined and who turn it into completely different uses. This is the case of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. It might appear that Kępiński (1972) had him in mind when dedicating his famous study *Schizophrenia*: "To those who feel more and understand differently and because of this suffer more, and whom we often call schizophrenics."

The unquestionable greatness and uniqueness of Čiurlionis is beyond discussion. However, cross-cultural psychology may offer a different view on his disorder, at that time diagnosed as schizophrenia (thus stating the norm and pointing to pathology). Čiurlionis's disorder could very well be taken for an eruption of freedom and creative energy, for breaking away from artistic constraints, a flight to happiness, a struggle against the norms enslaving his inner world and his many-sided talent. In terms of the paper's main topic, he successfully adapted himself several times to changing living conditions and opportunities, seizing them from his early life at the Oginskis household, education, studying music and the plein'air workshop at Arcadia near Warsaw (Siedlecka, 1996, pp. 44-61). And yet, he was a patient and an outsider, though well versed in languages and cultures, in artistic trends of the epoch, he seemed to have decided NOT to belong and NOT to conform. Mickiewicz and Hoffman made the best of the most disadvantageous situations imaginable.

Psychiatry and psychology can differentiate between what is normal and what is not by conducting tests and assessing symptoms. Čiurlionis did not match up, twisting and turning rules, which shows in his music and his paintings, complex and absorbing.

Standard methods of assessment fail to adequately describe art and artists. Though internationally recognized after his death, Čiurlionis remains outside Berry's diagram, various diagrams and globalization /ethnicity/ adaptation conflicting evidence.

Cross-cultural psychology can better examine the importance of tradition and language and also tremendous efforts migrants make in order to adapt to living in a new society, another country, among complete strangers.

The above cases support the need for some new approach to the study of adaptation to new surroundings, culture, language and society. For adaptation is more than norm or pathology, it is more than conforming or paying lip service to prevailing ideologies. Numerous studies indicate how complex the problem is and how vital in our times. To assess it must be personalized because some extraordinary individuals can use their seclusion and loneliness, illness, etc. They may achieve unbelievable results struggling with various constraints. So far, psychology was geared mainly to pathological processes more than to welfare, to interpreting statistical data instead of individual's growth-oriented functioning. Psychological diagnosis on the disintegration of personality can go both ways – toward positive or negative results.

Cross-cultural psychology is more likely to assess gains and losses of adaptation processes. Some gains are obvious, such as new horizons, experiences, personal development, eventually recognition, or fame. So are losses, such as lost or modified identity, nostalgia, (a passing) phase of shock, inability (or refusal) to adapt, etc. Cross-cultural psychology can more sensitively enter the world of an artist, without branding him/her for not conforming to common stereotypes and norms, without stigmatizing with illness or mental disorder.

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