

Nataša HRASTNIK*

HUMANITIES AND THE ROLE OF INTERCULTURAL RESEARCH

Abstract: Research methods in humanities are different than in natural and social sciences, as this disciplines require more data and hard evidence. Human experience cannot be adequately captured with the hard data, so it uses other research methods, which can be historical, interpretive, and analytical in nature. Therefore it is so important for the field of humanities to use the intercultural research, which also connects different areas of humanities, such as anthropology, history, political science, sociology, literary studies. To do so, we also need to use it interdisciplinary. As such it serves as a unifying element between the research fields.

Key words: *humanities, globalism, intercultural research, literary studies, comparative literature, interdisciplinary*

INTRODUCTION

The many changes happening in the contemporary world in the last three decades have confronted the humanities with the new issues and perspectives, many of those summed up under the phenomenon of globalisation. Globalisation has become a significant subject of the humanities and the social sciences, and is bringing up the need to find common grounds. The methodologies reveal a similar scholarly response to the economic, political, and cultural forces, which go beyond national, and try to represent themselves in a unifying way. Humanities have also in its endeavours tried to cultivate a more historical and cosmopolitan consciousness (2), endeavours to reject the neoliberal exclusionism of globalisation and find ways to an all-inclusive totality which will nurture our common bonds to the planet, our custodial responsibility to it, and our duty to work out a sustainable economy. It is within the imaginative domain of literature and literary studies, that this "ideal of planetarism" can be made culturally persuasive and politically viable, or as stated later with the term "interdependent planetary culture" (2). On the other

* University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia

hand an increasing need arised to develop the methodologies which percieve and include the cultural and other differences, that still exist, and search for methodological tools which not only divide through difference, but also connect through sameness within differences. For this matter the terms multicultural, cross-cultural or intercultural have been used. It would be interesting to have a closer look at how humanities are placing and using the discipline of methodology of intercultural research. Two questions should be answered. The first one, what is intercultural research, and the second, what is the methodology of intercultural research.

INTERCULTURAL OR CROSS-CULTURAL

The terms intercultural and cross-cultural have not had clear lines as to what is the domain of each and also the marking difference. I have first opted for cross-cultural, as the term expresses going beyond the boundaries of cultures and unifying them at the same time. Intercultural seemed to express something that is happening in between two or more cultures, and at the same time also within the specificities of one culture. Contemporary research articles in the field of psychology tend to use the term cross-cultural, while those in the field of education prefer the term intercultural. *Inter* is implying the outside and also the inside of the culture, and seems to have a braoder scope of meaning, while the *cross* is implying only the outside of the two or more different cultures trying to be bridged. Both terms are descendants of multiculturalism. While multiculturalism – at least theoretically – relied on an idea of common culture and tried to find common grounds for equality, universality among cultures, it is different for cross-culturalism. Cross-cultural is open for all cultures, which (according to Mesić), communicate among themselves (1).

THE HUMANITIES AND THE METHODOLOGY OF INTERCULTURAL REASEARCH

The increased familiarity with the non-western world is a must in our educational future. To achieve this, we shall have to bring the foreign area to our students rather than depending upon their going to the foreign area (4). This thought has been expressed by an author of a research article dealing with non-western studies in 1964 in an article describing the situation in the USA, but it sounds relevant entering the second decade of the new millenium, and also for a small European country, where I live and teach with a different historic, political, and cultural background. According to Mackwardt non-Western studies have had a rapid development, but much more remains to be done, especially in the field of humanities. It may be assumed with a good reason that if non-Western world is to play a larger role in our higher education, than it has up to present, and if the humanities are to command their due share of attention, our pattern of education or at least certain phases of it would have to undergo some alternation. Curricula and procedures will need to change; values will have to shift (4). In the discussion of education, the proper place to begin is with a consideration of aim. To what degree do we

want to include the non-Western world within the framework of our college and university curricula? To what extent and how are the humanistic disciplines to be involved? Are we thinking only in terms of area specialists on the graduate level, of opportunities for undergraduate concentration, of inclusion of non-Western humanistic studies as an elective component which will be generally attractive, or as a requirement in the provisions which the curriculum makes for the general or liberal education (4). The direct experience is only the beginning. Therefore it is necessary to bring the possibilities of experiences into the environment. The purpose of any foreign-area program is to provide an acquaintance with and as wide an experience as possible in the culture of that area, interpreting the term culture in the broad anthropological sense. Many of these cultural insights can be communicated in the various social science courses or in a single integrated presentation (4).

All this sounds familiar and applicable, also to the methodology of intercultural research. In the past years I have had an opportunity to teach a core course Methodology of intercultural research, one on an undergraduate level for students of Sinology and Japanese studies, and another Methodology of intercultural studies at a M. A. program in literary studies. The goals set to achieve in these courses, especially the last one, are trying to deepen and expand knowledge and the use of analyses within the methodology, to move further and beyond different cultures and their forms of expression through literary and other texts and other means of art. The students should be motivated to think about intercultural terminology and placing it in the global perspective. They should embetter their ability of the critical evaluation of intercultural academic texts, and recognise, and use the critique for orientalist and eurocentric discourses. They should have ability to recognize and criticise orientalist and eurocentric discourses in literary texts, and an ability to go beyond cultural assumptions and embedded prejudice. They should get to know the term and political implications of eurocentrism in historical and literary context, and in the end acquire practical skills, such as bibliography, categorising, citing, analysing and interpreting texts and other skills of scientific research with taking into regard the specific problematics of intercultural studies. Intercultural research is a specialisation used in the anthropology and other fields (sociology, political sciences), which use the data from various societies to observe human behaviours and cultures. They offer a large, and a more extensive pattern as comparative studies. They are useful in many fields, among them in literary studies. The methods of intercultural studies are helpful in research and analysis of literary texts. The methodology is focusing on language and literature as a field of common grounds, confrontations, conflicts, and transformations among people and ideas of different cultures.

THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN INTERCULTURAL RESEARCH

The function of literature in any program or course dealing with non western cultures is to provide the student with an experience, a concrete expression of the values and concepts of the culture she is studying. Art, architecture, and music as component elements of area study may conveniently be approached in terms of the

creative process and of form, symbol, and value. Contrastive analyses of the target culture and of our own will provide a strategy of approach in which one proceeds from the similar to the different. In making such analyses, the humanist must seek the advice of the social scientist, thus paving the way for a closer integration of the two disciplines (4). One of the problems arising is, how to use and place comparative literature within the framework of intercultural research? Comparative literature is in an ongoing crisis. The more comparative literature reaches out to its perceived others, the more it fails to grasp them (3). Historically it has defined itself as a study of difference, but on the other hand denying those literary productions that it has deemed unequal. How can comparative literature begin to think the embracing of others upon whose very exclusion the discipline is founded (3) ?

Tötösy de Zepetnek proposed how to rejuvenate the humanities, that is, how to make the study of literature and culture socially relevant in today's world. His proposed framework of the so called "comparative cultural studies" is a field of study where selected tenets of the discipline of comparative literature merge with the selected tenets of the field of cultural studies, meaning that the study of culture and culture product, including, but not restricted to literature, communication, media, art, etc., is performed in a contextual and relational construction and with a plurality of methods and approaches, based on an ideology of interculturalism, practised in interdisciplinarity, and if and when advantageous, including team work, as well as employing the advantages of new media technology (5). He suggests many methods, which are interconnected and related, but not exclusionary. Literature has no boundaries. It does not change through time and history, but our perceptions do. Our ideas and thoughts of literature ironically say more about ourselves, than of the literary work itself, as Saussy states, that all literary works are interconnected, the question is only, how (1).

CONCLUSION

At the end or in the name of the conclusion I will serve you with an anecdote. While talking to a friend on what I am writing in this article, and as the nature of internet chat requires fast typing, I made some interesting misspelling mistakes, which, after being read, seemed to be more telling than at the very first moment, maybe not only of me, but also of the subject I was intending to research. Instead of the title "Humanities and the Role of Intercultural Research", I wrote "Hymenities and the Rome of Intercultural Research". Hymenities implying the area is still to be discovered in its certain segments, and the Rome appearing in the place of the title implying the abundance and wealth of this field offering space and possibilities for intercultural research. Ancient Rome came from humble beginnings and grew to become economic, political and military power house through innovation and technological development, it was, in its good times, a capital of the world. For Sigmund Freud, the archaeology of the city of Rome was, interestingly, a metaphor for the unconscious mind – a place where no memories or influences are ever lost or forgotten. As all the roads lead to Rome, the one of the intercultural research to the metaphoric Rome of humanities, even if unconsciously, is as well.

REFERENCES

- [1] K. J. Kozak: "Literatura in medkulturnost", *Razprave o medkulturnosti* (ur. Mateja Sedmak, Ernest Ženko), Univerzitetna založba Annales, 2010, pp. 129–142.
- [2] D. Leiwei Li: "Introduction: Globalisation and the Humanities" *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Autumn 2001), Duke University Press on behalf of University of Oregon, pp. 275–282.
- [3] A. J. Lopez: "Introduction: Comparative Literature and the Return of the Global Repressed" *The Global South*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Globalization and the Future of Comparative Literature (Fall, 2007), Indiana University Press, pp. 1–5.
- [4] A. H. Marckwardt: "The Humanities and Non-Western Studies, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 356, The Non-Western World in Higher Education (Nov., 1964), Saga Publication, Inc. With American Academy of Political and Social Science, pp. 45–53.
- [5] Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek: "The New Humanities: The Intercultural, the Comparative, and the Interdisciplinary, *The Global South*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Globalisation and the Future of Comparative Literature (Fall 2007), Indiana University Press. pp. 45–68.

