One of the central issues must be how human beings are seen. Should they be categorized in terms of inherited traditions, particularly the inherited religion, of the community in which they happen to be born, taking that unchosen identity to have automatic priority over other affiliations involving politics, profession, class, gender, language, literature, social involvements, and many other connections? Or should they be understood as persons with many affiliations and associations the priorities over which they must themselves choose?

Amartya Sen, 2006: 156

The field of intercultural communication, but also sociology of youth and generation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2009), anthropology of globalization (Pieterse, 2004) and language and intercultural education (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2003), are witnessing important changes in the way they engage with the central concept of identity. As such it seems that most scholars dealing with such themes as international mobility, immigration and ‘Otherness’ in general are now moving away from studies that rely exclusively on methodological nationalism (MN) to tackle research through a transnational paradigm (TN). Methodological Nationalism designates “the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural and political form of the modern world” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002: 302). On the other hand, Transnationalism privileges “the simultaneity and the mutual interaction of national and international, local and global determinations, influences and developments (Beck & beck-Gernsheim, 2009: 26). This has also been conceptualized by Cosmopolitanism by Ulrich Beck (2006). Increasingly some scholars find the often artificial boundaries between MN and TN to be blurry. Both thus deserve a critical examination.

In the article, I would like to discuss how the study of identity is impacted on by the approach chosen by researchers within the context of interculturality. I will first look at how research on identity is positioned within MN and TR, and the problems posed by both approaches. Following this critical review, I will propose a third approach (or layer) to identity and interculturality, which I shall call Mixed Intersubjectivity (MIN). MIN aims at discussing and correcting many of the problems posed by MN and TR. What Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) call “Methodological Fluidism” is very close to the notion of MIN. For the sociologists (2002: 326), “where there were fixed boundaries, everything is now equally and immediately interconnected. Structures are replaced with fluidity”. In order to illustrate the three approaches to identity and interculturality, various corpora will be used: research interviews, podcast, scientific studies…

The concept of identity will be reviewed as follows. First of all, we shall examine Solid Identity within the MN approach. Secondly, what I call Façade Identity, which corresponds to some extent to TR, is sketched out. And finally, I focus on Identification and MIN. The following graphic summarizes these three positions:
1. Solid Identity

In intercultural communication, the concept of “cultural identity” is often used to deal with people who meet interculturally. Identity is reduced to culture in this context. This is now increasingly viewed as a slippery slope as the concept contains two extremely problematic and questioned terms: culture and identity. Many scholars working on interculturality have now highlighted the problems posed by an over-emphasis on “culture” to explain the meetings of people from different times-spaces, especially as it is often presented as being something solid, unchangeable and objective/objectivising. The concepts of culturalism and essentialism describe this way of working on interculturality and the impact it has on giving a limited view of identity. For Bayart (1996: 21), for example, culturalism is “an ersatz of demonstration”. In other words, an alibi, an easy way to explain what happens when two individuals meet. But this is problematic as it gives the impression that there “are resolutely distinct human essences” (Laplantine, 1999: 46). Culturalism is also often used parallel to Nations and thus is very much reminiscent of MN. It should thus be considered as anachronic as MN. Yet many scholars who criticize MN still hold onto the concepts of culture and cultural identity. They seem to ignore the fact that “Culture is now widely employed in a discourse that denies human agency, defining individuals through their culture, and treating culture as the explanation for virtually everything they say” (Philips, 2007: 9). It is surprising that even though the boundary between MN and culturalism is non-existant - yet the latter is still very much used to do what researchers want to avoid with MN. The following quote taken from Jack (2009), who criticises culturalism, could easily be used to substitute any criticism of MN: “epistemologically, I believe that a ‘dimensional’ approach to culture, which allows us to plot or map representatives of national cultures onto some kind of continuum, presents students with unhelpfully fixed categories of analysis that essentialize culture and divest it of its key processual and political contingencies” (Jack, 1999).

Let us now look at a few examples of culturalism to see how culture is used as explanations, almost natural phenomena just like NM has been used in the past. This first example is a comment left on the Times website in reaction to an article which criticized Finnish society in the aftermath of school shootings in 2008:

Yes, we are maybe quieter than people in other countries. Why it is such a big problem? It just belongs to Finnish culture. It doesn’t mean that we were depressed or something, it’s just in the habit of Finland.

It is easy to see here how culture is said to shape Finnish society and Finns in a somewhat programmatic, explanatory way – removing any possibility of agency on
the side of the people. The next example differs from the previous one as it shows how solid identities, related to space ("Nations") are often used to determine an “other”. Taken from a podcast recorded by a young girl who lives in the USA and whose parents are from India, the excerpt enacts a dialogue that the young girl had with a German tourist when she was in India:

- where are you from?
- I tried to explain that I was a student living in Jodhpur that I spoke a bit of Hindi and that my parents were from India
- what does your passport say?
- I have an American passport
- well then you are American

Later on in the same episode of the podcast, the young girl also shows how this can also occur between herself and people from India (“Desis” in what follows). In what follows the speaker clearly shows that they can contribute to limiting her identity or “solidify” it:

Many people would say: -Just say what you are, if you’re Indian, say you’re Indian... however, if I do use the word Indian to describe myself, many Desis from the home country would say: -You’re not Indian, you’re American

Though these imposed identities are witnessed on a daily basis, it is also interesting to note that some researchers also contribute to such discourse on the “other”, which limit their identity. This is often the case with “the Chinese Student” in research on stays abroad. In a recent critical article on such studies (Dervin, forth), I showed how culture was often used as explanations for the so-called non-acculturation of the “Chinese student”:

- “The students had arrived in Britain with their own cultural scripts which were no longer applicable in the new environment”.
- “It seemed rather that coming in contact with a different culture forced them to become aware of their own cultural perspectives”.
- “the opportunity to experience the target culture and speech community firsthand”.

Here again, it is clearly culture – theirs and the hosts’ – which serves as an agent and “dictates” how one should behave, experience the world, etc.

All in all, this approach to identity in interculturality leaves little space for the individual and what s/he does, co-constructs with the people s/he meets. For Ouellet (2002: 11), there is now a need to move away from such limiting visions, which are suspicious, anachronic and contrary to the criticisms that are targeted at NM. Clearly, this approach attempts a question which could be summarized as: - What is their cultural identity? What is their culture? A question which cannot be fully/accurately answered in today’s mixed, glob/cal and complex societies.

In terms of research, the solid identity approach is very much problematic as analyses are often based on a simple review of what research participants say during data collection (interviews, focus groups…). The participants’ discourses are taken at face value and serve the purpose of providing evidence and/or “truth”. Also, researchers rarely implicate themselves in the analyzing section of their research, i.e.
the fact that researchers cannot but intervene in the creation of data and ensuing discourses. In other words, by not making clear what their position is in the created data, which they analyse, scholars eradicate intersubjectivity and fall into the trap of Othering. Every time the researcher asks a question, or by his mere presence in research contexts, his influence on what is said – on identities that are created – cannot be ignored.

In what follows, we examine a research movement which seems to increasingly take over culturalism or MN in interculturality. This is worked upon in research by transnationalists. As such, discourses on the plural self and the other resonate in human and social sciences. But are they taken seriously?

2. Façade identity

The second approach to identity and interculturality is named façade identity. It seems to correspond fully to the Transnational paradigm which has increasingly taken place in research. Before we start looking at Façade identity in details, let us mention what the sociologist Z. Bauman (2004: 10) has to say about identity work. For him, it corresponds to “The daunting task of ‘squaring a circle’” (Bauman, 2004: 10). In the age of “crisis of belonging”, it is clear that national identity is competing with other global, alternative identities, globalization leads towards some sort of pluralization of identities (Bauman, 2004: 20; cf. also Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2009). But it doesn’t mean that national identity has disappeared as it is still very much present in people’s discourses and identification. What we are sure of today – at least in research worlds – is that this identity is imagined and communitarian – but not the “Truth”.

How do we deal with this fact as researchers? To me, this question equates the question how do we treat utterances? i.e. how do we treat what our research participants have to say about themselves and the ‘Other’. What the speaker usually presents to the researcher as an identity is just “declared”, and chosen as a “true identity”. But is it enough for us researchers to present them as “truth”? As such, there are many scholars who work within a transnational paradigm and who, instead of relying on one national identity, will satisfy themselves with two or three or four identities as presented by their research participants. For example, someone who has lived in a country for a long time might say “I feel I am both German and English”, or they might say I feel I am European or a World citizen. These utterances are, in my opinion, as problematic as solid identity or MN. Because instead of limiting an identity to one entity, they restrict it to two or several identities, which are clearly defined. But identities and expressions, constructions of identities cannot be so precise. This is not enough. Also this approach is ethically problematic, as the researcher co-constructs the identities that are put forward in his results, i.e. s/he cannot but influence the choice of identity. Yet this is never taken into account.

Let us look at some examples here as well. The French linguist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, who originally comes from Bulgaria was interviewed twice on television at a week’s interval. On the first occasion, she was interviewed by French journalist Bernard Pivot and had the following dialogue:

Pivot: Do you feel more French than Bulgarian today?
Kristeva: Well today I feel I am more American, because Americans understand me better.
A few days later, having received a prestigious prize in Norway, she was interviewed on national television:

Norwegian interviewer: You have lived in France for over 30 years now, what are you now? French or Bulgarian?
Kristeva: French, you know the French taught me how to appreciate Human rights and les Lumières…

It is interesting to see how different the answers were for a very similar question, which basically urged the linguist to identify. If I want to look at her identity in these excerpts, I face a big problem: what is the real Kristeva? Is she French or American? Does she feel French or American? It is easy to see how such questions are irrelevant, in terms of research and how we face façade identities... Can we explain the shift in identification? Not really but we may propose the following hypothesis: the interlocutor (i.e. the interviewer) and the context (a mere interview and an interview following the reception of a grand prize) may impact on such acts of identity. Also the way the questions were formulated probably influenced what was said about the self.

In a similar vain, the following excerpts show how problematic it is to position the other – this time in research. They are all taken from the studies on “the Chinese student” mentioned earlier. While all the papers that were studied clearly reduce the identity of the students to a MN/solid culturalist identity, many of the authors warn us of this generalizing practice, especially in the conclusions to the studies – which gives a very contradictory tone to the articles.

The first example is interesting in the sense that the researchers explain that they want to avoid generalization – and thus emphasise complexity of “the Chinese student”. In order to do so, they have decided not to choose students from the whole of China but simply students from Shenzhen in Southern China. As such, they believe that their study will not be generalizing. In other words, it means that instead of representing 1.3 billion individuals, the research participants symbolize “only” 9 million people (the population of Shenzhen)… The same unconvincing claim goes for the scholars who assert that “(...) it is important not to essentialise communication among Chinese and to acknowledge that there may also be considerable in­group differences in every culture (...)” even if their article clearly reduces the students to “Chinese culture”.

At a recent event that I attended many of these contradictory discourses were used by researchers. One researcher had done what he defined as “ideal-types” of how binational/multinational individuals identified themselves in terms of national identity. I told him that his work was ethically problematic because he was imposing wrongly and “monologically” identities on participants. He answered that his case was different because he had presented mere “ideal-types” not “truths”. I responded that I understood his point but that probably other researchers – more positivistic than him – were probably going to use his “ideal-types” to classify research participants.

To sum up the façade identity approach, it is clear that such an approach can lead to contradictory discourses on interculturality, the self and the “other”. By recategorising individuals into clear-cut entities (even multiple entities), researchers create neo-culturalism/neo-essentialism. Besides the concepts of nations and cultures are still in use in such approaches (or dichotomies such as the imaginary Western/non-Western). N.P. Pieterse has coined the phrase “pluralised” “double monoculturalism” (Pieterse 2004) to label these approaches. Wimmer & Glick Schiller (2002: 324) share similar views in their criticisms of transnational studies:
“Strangely enough, the neo-communitarianism of transnationalism studies also reproduces the standard image of a world divided into nations and thus naturalizes this vision of the world in new forms” (Ibid.). They add that: “Much of transnational studies overstates the internal homogeneity and boundedness of transnational communities”; they “overestimate the binding power for individual action”; they “overlook the importance of cross-community interactions as well as the internal divisions of class, gender, region and politics…” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002: 324). Finally, the research methods that are used tend to be very static and modernist: content analysis (which takes discourses proposed by participants at face value), uncritical and descriptive ethnography but also statistics.

Let us now look at a proposal, which may allow the researcher to go beyond the problems presented by the first two paradigms in working on identity and interculturality.

3. Identification

In order to escape the magnetism of established methodologies, ways of defining the object of analysis and algorithms for generating questions, we may have to develop (or rediscover?) analytical tools and concepts not coloured by the self-evidence of a world ordered into nation-states.

Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002: 326

As asserted at the beginning of this article, identification (which translates a process, cf. –ATION), equates “Methodological fluidism” as proposed by Wimmer et al. (2002). I call this way of working on identification Mixed Intersubjectivity. Let us start with a quote from the anthropologist K.P. Ewing:

“I argue that in all cultures people can be observed to project multiple, inconsistent self-representations that are context-dependent and may shift rapidly. At any particular moment a person usually experiences his or her articulated self as a symbolic, timeless whole, but this self may quickly be displaced by another, quite different “self,” which is based on a different definition of the situation. The person will often be unaware of these shifts and inconsistencies and may experience wholeness and continuity despite their presence”.

K.P. Ewing (1990: 251)

For the anthropologist and many other scholars from different fields, people represent themselves, not as truths but as constructs. People are thus often in the midst of identity “inconsistencies” and “shifts”. For this third paradigm, identity is thus taken as a discursive phenomenon and by no means a given. In order to grasp fully what this means, the central concept of representation must be dealt with. For Jovchelovitch (2007: 11), “the reality of the human world is in its entirety made of representation: in fact there is no sense of reality for our human world without the work of representation”. She adds (2007: 25): “we use representations to position ourselves, to claim common identities and to defend ourselves against stigmatizing or marginalizing practices”. In other words, we now agree that identity – just like reality - doesn’t exist in itself but is constructed, through representations that are either
shared by individuals or “invented”. But how do we then work with the concept of identity through identification and what does mixed intersubjectivity mean?

First of all, we need to move from the idea that identity is an Object to the hypothesis that identity (identification) is a process. Thus instead of asking the question “What is somebody’s identity?” in front of some data, we should be more interested in “How do they construct what they present as their identity?” or “how do they identify themselves?” In other words, instead of collecting the “identity/ies” which are found in a corpus (interviews, blogs, focus groups, novels…), we should look at the identity markers that are used to indicate shifts and inconsistencies in identification. These identity markers can still be related to MN and TR as we deal with interculturality, but they are not taken for granted or used to “fasten” the presented discourses. Let us look at one example of identification. This is taken from a podcast recorded by a young British man, whose mother was Brazilian and dad English, who lives in France. In the episode, he tells us about the confusion concerning his accent – and how he himself is confused about himself:

I always feel a bit of an outsider because for instance Scotland people would say I was English because they heard my accent and it sounded English to them it wasn’t definitely Scottish in any case and euh when I was in S... in England I was even more surprised when people said to me I had a Scottish accent so in way the accent made me feel different and when I am in France I speak French and people say I have an accent I don’t necessarily sound like an English person speaking French that’s what I am told but they can tell I am not French you know they say you have got an accent when you speak so that makes me feel different again

It is clear from the elements in italics that the way he identifies his accent(s) in English is influenced directly by what other people have told him. Yet, it doesn’t mean that any of these “definitions” are true or correspond to a “reality” to him. The speaker uses these voices to provide proof of his complex linguistic identity nut not of who he is. It is easy to see in similar cases (being in relation to languages, nations, sexes, feelings…) that confusion and instability are normal. This case might seem extreme to the reader, yet it is important to bear in mind that such variations in identification can occur daily through questions on one’s sex, generation, profession, faith, partnership…

Now let us try to see how one could approach identification in terms of analytical tools. In other words, is identification researchable? And how to propose a less neo-essentialist vision of identity than those proposed by the two previous approaches in our results?

Since the beginning of this article, it has become clear that scholars need to go below the surface of discourse in order to work towards more complex identification. If the individual is plural, complex, etc. repeating what she asserts as evidence is not enough. This is why it seems important to concentrate on what is hidden behind what is presented by the speaker, in terms of identification strategies: do they contract themselves, manipulate, lie, do “facework” (or protect themselves because they feel “attacked”), etc. In order to propose such analyses, it seems interesting to look at how visible and invisible voices contribute to construct experience, identity, or the speaker’s “Truth”.
Critical and reflexive ethnography, Conversation Analysis, but also linguistic discourse analysis (theories of enunciation/dialogicality) are excellent tools to work within such a paradigm.

Because of space limit, only the concept of dialogicality will be looked at here. Dialogicality is now worked upon – in many and varied ways – by many scholars from different fields. Two sub-branches of linguistics are particularly interested in dialogicality: theories of enunciation (Mainguena, 2002; Marnette, 2005) and pragmatics (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2002). According to scholars who work within such methods, discourse is always heterogeneous and unstable; Otherness is constitutive of discourse and meaning; Discourse is thus always co-constructed and co-enunciated by interlocutors; Discourse is constructed in a certain situation. It is important to be able to either identify as many of these elements when analyzing data or laying down some hypotheses as to how they contribute to what is being said by research participants. Dialogicality is interested in the voices that are introduced by speakers int heir discourses as they indicate plurality and thus identification. By palcing a voice in what one has to say, a strategy is always to be found. In order to do so, researchers should identify linguistic traces of otherness in discourse:

- Presence of identifiable others
- Presence of unidentifiable others
- Presence of “real” interlocutors
- Presence of self/selves
- Presence of hidden self/selves (manipulation, lies, silence, contradiction…).

After having identified these voices (which again contribute to identification), it is important to propose some hypotheses as to what impact these voices have in terms of strategies and identification. This is what I call Mixed Intersubjectivity: the fact that interlocutors “play” with different voices (their own and those of others), goes well beyond what appears at the surface of discourse.

What follows is an illustration. The following three excerpts are taken from two international students based in Finland, who are talking about their daily lives with the same researcher. The students were interviewed separately at a Finnish university by a scholar who shares the same first language. In the sequences below, the students are asked to talk about their apartment and their feelings towards the fact that they both share an apartment together with another French student in Finland. The first student gives a very communitarian image of the three flatmates and uses the voice of one of them to express the fact that they do everything together (“three captains onboard a ship”):

A: (...) de toute façon la Finlande c’est un bateau, on dit souvent d’ailleurs que la **Finlande c’est un bateau**… dans le sens où … bon on est les 3 capitaines à bord. C’est B qui aime beaucoup utiliser cette expression, c’est un bateau, on fait tout ensemble.

The student who is mentioned by A. was also interviewed and what she has to say about flat sharing with the two other French students differs from the image given above:

B: (...) ben moi de manière générale je supporte très bien de faire les choses seule tandis que je vois… en comparaison mes deux colocs font toujours tout
ensemble à quelle heure on prend le bus ? à quelle heure on mange ? C’est toujours on mais moi c’est je quand je parle déjà. (…).

The student clearly des-identify herself from the two other flatmates and she even uses a direct quote uttered by them to show how different she is from them (“What time shall we take the bus? What time are we eating?”). The image that she wants to give is that of an autonomous, group-free person who always says “I” when she talks about what she does. Yet during the same interview, especially at the beginning, she talks in the plural form “we” when she describes what she does on a daily basis:

B : bon je me lève en général à 10h bon ça c’était plus au premier semestre je me levais vers 10h30, j’avais cours de finnois à midi jusqu’à deux heures ensuite on allait manger à la cafétaria avec des internationaux on restait discuter on allait à la BU, on vérifiait nos mèls et le soir … hum on allait faire nos cours et là donc je retrouvais les Français et j’arrivais chez moi vers quelle heure ? vers 9h du soir en fait.

It is easy to see from these three excerpts that it is very important to work not only across data (within interviews and between interviews) but also on identity markers such as pronouns (which indicate voices) and quotes. In the excerpts supra, three layers can be identified: first of all, there is a difference between what A says B said and what B says during her interview; a difference between what B says and A says; a difference between what B says at moment 1 and at moment 2. Through such cross-analyses, the researcher can note shifts and inconsistencies and thus identification – not to find the “truth” – but to highlight the complexity of human experience.

Conclusions

This article aimed at reviewing three ways of working on identity within the context of interculturality. I have linked Methodological Nationalism, which relies mostly on Nations/states to Solid Identity and culturalism in the case of interculturality. The second approach, which is a direct criticism to MN, is entitled Transnationalism and Façade Identity. Though critical of MN, it became clear in our deconstruction of the concepts that even if they seem to move beyond Nationalism, they still remain within static boundery-ful entities which pluralise the self and the other but still limit them to countable and even programmable identities. Façade Identity has not done enough to allow ‘fluidity’ in the expression, construction and enactment of identities to emerge fully. The third approach that was proposed is Mixed Intersubjectivity which relies on identification, or processes rather than objects. What this last approach suggests is that it is important to work on several layers of identity at micro-levels to be able to give a more balanced and a more mixed and complex vision of research participants. What MIR also puts forward is that both MN and TR, though flawed and somewhat anachronic, should be discarded but included in complex analyses of identification, not in a naïve “truthful” sense but in a constructivist fashion which reflects the fact that postmodern individuals are torn apart by contradictory discourses about belonging and not belonging.
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