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CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL
HEGEMONY. HIGH AND LOW IN CULTURE.
MULTICULTURALISM

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Abstract: The article examines the concepts of Cultural hegemony and Multiculturalism within the context of the XX and XXI century through different perspectives. In an era of post totalitarian literary landscape, the changes that literature is passing through are an important matter to be reviewed.

Keywords: Cultural hegemony, high and low in culture, multiculturalism

When scrutinizing culture and the associated concepts of cultural and intellectual hegemony, it is crucial to determine the perspective taken. Starting with cultural hegemony, it is important to underscore the perspective from which it is being examined.

In today's world, when cultural hegemony is being discussed, it tends to be mostly understood in terms of the western cultural domination above any other cultural and literary realities. In fact, it is present in all aspects of literature. Perhaps it is most noticeable in the commercial forms literary works sometimes take. For instance, the best cinema is the Hollywood one, the best lyrics – those of songs with Grammy, the best journalism (as much as that notion has changed recently) – the awarded with Pulitzer and so on.

Nevertheless, prior to examining this reality, it is necessary to consider from which perspective are we explaining culture. Whether it is cultural, intellectual or historical the most appropriate one is out of the topic of this research. Yet, considering the philological outlook, there are some brief linguistic and more specifically, geographical characteristics referring to it to be examined. The spread of the Indoeuropean group of languages in this sense has been a major keystone in humankind's language map. The main branches of the group Slavic, Romanic and Germanic are covering more than two thirds of the habitable land in the planet. That is, most of Europe, Eurasia and North and South America. Taking a second look, it can be stated that besides the traditionally highly pop-

ulated East Asia, there is no other major linguistic and cultural area that can overshadow indoeuropean and western languages.

While considering this perspective, there are others that need to be taken into account for the proper presentation of the issue. Antonio Gramsci framed that cultural hegemony has to be understood theoretically as the sum of prevailing cultural norms in a society, imposed by the ruling class on the rest *and* being presented as natural and inevitable. As he phrases it in his own review and research the “subtle and minor” circumstances are the critical ones that allow for the cultural hegemony manifestation. That is, regardless of status quo’s acceptance on individual level or the belonging to it, the latter is being maintained by her or him. In his more than 3000 pages written in prison, Gramsci left a priceless historical and philosophical account and records. Upon his death, the bipolar world emerging out of the ruins of World War II territorially formalized the divisions which have become previously exacerbated in many societies. On the one hand the Soviet-styled model with the hegemony of the proletariat. The model expanded beyond Europe and into Latin America, Africa and east Asia, where it was eventually abandoned with “The Great Leap forward” of Mao in 1958 and the subsequent broken ties between China and the Soviet Union. The peaceful fall of the Berlin Wall marked the end of this era, out of which the cultural model of the United States and the American way remained the sole unaffected one for the following decades gaining a strategic edge. The reasons and causes of the fall of the Soviet Union are multiple and while totalitarian systems are far from disappearing, the core economic performance is the one that seems to trigger the fall of the disassembled systems.

Out of the remnants of the former bloc, some new states appeared (such as Czechia and Slovakia) while others regained, to some extent, their pre-World War II status. However cultural and intellectual hegemony moved to west and, more specifically, to the United States in the next decade. The characteristics of the cultural and intellectual hegemony of the West in the following years came as a relation of the High and Low in Culture as determined by the new literary landscape. Writers and intellectuals such as Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov and Carl Sagan became landmark referrals for large part of the new avidly reading generations. Even some singers (Madonna being a notable example) published books.

The cultural hegemony of the West manifested itself through a series of values, such as Multiculturalism and the commercial literature. The former was a concept that was accepted, praised, refuted and denied subsequently in western societies until recently. It seems now that the old principle of *Si fueris Romae, Romano vivito more* has eventually prevailed over the idea of multiculturalist equality. The declaration of the “end of multiculturalism” by influential European leaders years ago was a mere formal step in this process of adjustment of values.

Turning back to the western dominance in literature, the following aspects are important:

There has been an adaptation of literature to consumerist culture. That is, books written with the only goal of attracting the most readers instead of making some cultural and literary contribution. This blurring of literature's frontiers with the XX and XXI century's new entertainment industries has taken devastating scale. At the same time, intellectuals and artists from all over the world who moved to the west are creating a new literary, cultural and philosophical legacy. Notable examples here are Tsvetan Todorov and Christo Javacheff and Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

On the other hand, during the XX century there were also dissidents in the West, particularly in the United States. Though Noam Chomsky and Michael Moore gained little attention in their own country, the impact of their works was global and contributed significantly to the preservation of cultural values during the transformation in this matter that occurred in the late XX and early XXI centuries. There is also a certain preconception that literary works published in the West should be understood as a representative of High culture. In the second decade of this millennium, other views of high and low in culture begin to take a bit more of a public credit for their validity. Here, there will be reviewed the following cases:

First of all, in Africa, the new intellectuals have surged in an era of post colonialism. Yet the constant cultural influence of former metropolis has caused the surge of continent-wide phenomenon of self-determination manifested in literature and post-modern culture. Afrocentrism takes a deep, multifaceted perspective on culture that inspired writers and intellectuals across the continent. In relation to the topic, there are two main kinds of writers. On the one hand are the local, residing in African countries authors.

On the other hand, there are those who have emigrated overseas or have spent time out of their countries. Most of them are either in Europe or in North America. There can also be established a third category: the one of African intellectuals who returned to their homelands from abroad and then left again. An example here is the one of writer Ngugiwa Thiong'o.

In East Asia, local intellectuals do not get high international attention with the notable exception of Ai Weiwei. He became an embodiment of the fight for human rights in China after becoming dissident. His open criticism of the ruling class in his country has led him to spend time in prison. However, he continues to be an art ambassador of his nation abroad challenging traditional western culture at its own premises. Through art, a new alternative version of High and low in culture is created in some of his works.

Last, but not least, the intellectuals of Latin America have been challenging largely traditional western cultural hegemony. It's interesting that the famous "Boom Latinoamericano" sprouted exactly in Europe, where a number

of important publishing houses in Barcelona brought to the international attention the first works of immortals such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, Julio Cortazar and Carlos Fuentes. These and many more authors of South America were consequently brought to the wider international scene and became a direct alternative to the western literary discourse and hegemony. Through their work, they also established not only new genres, but also a new way of understanding new literature. The way for a better understanding of the Latino culture was paved and its global reach on the intellectual scale was guaranteed. Subsequent generations of authors such as Mario Benedetti, Octavio Paz and Paulo Coelho kept building on these solid foundations of the ideal of a new cultural outlook. The direct clash with the west is particularly well visible in the works of Carlos Fuentes where he sheds light to the struggle for rights of Mexicans in the United States during his époque.

Perhaps exactly through the comparison with Latin American authors, the contrast of western cultural and intellectual hegemony is best displayed. To follow up, these differences can be better explained by the intercultural hermeneutics.

In conclusion, new centers of cultural and intellectual hegemony are sprouting or, rather decentralizing traditional concepts in that regard as mentioned earlier. Multiculturalism has had its role in the last decades. However, major changes have transformed the literary and intellectual landscapes ranging from dissent to intellectuals and writers living abroad. Last, but not least, the growing influence of Latin American authors constitutes a new cultural frontier on the literary landscape.

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