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CULTURAL PLURALISM AND THE ISSUE OF AMERICAN IDENTITY IN
RANDOLPH BOURNE'S "TRANS-NATIONAL AMERICA"

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Abstract: Rereading Randolph Bourne's most known essay "Trans-National America" (1916) provides the nowadays reader with a more accurate view perception of the cultural transmutations occurring at the beginning of the last century in America. Reflecting on the contrast between the ideals of liberal republican America and the reality of the assimilation policies, Randolph Bourne disagreed along with other intellectuals of his time with nativist attitudes and policies disfavoring or slighting immigrants and their heritage in twentieth century America. Wrestling to establish a more equitable meaning of the cultural heritage in the actual making of American citizenship, other than the Anglo-Saxon one, Bourne employed William James's concept of 'consciousness', mapping a new cultural content for the idea of 'nation', contributing to the public debate on pluralism. Arguing that American idealism was imperiled by the consequences of melting pot policies, Bourne envisioned modernist America as a 'trans-national' entity holding together a variety of ethnic communities lead by the same lofty democratic goals, assuming that equality of individuals should be paralleled by the equality of ethnic communities. "Trans-National America" appears as a landmark in the further evolution of pluralism, combining reformism with the intellectual utopianism in an attempt to enrich the meanings of American exceptionalism in a newly fashioned form. Apparently, the term 'postmodern' occurred for the first time in this early twenty century writing.

Key Words: Cultural Pluralism, American Identity, ethnic communities, trans-national America, Randolph Bourne, American democracy

At the beginning of the 20-th century, men and women in America found themselves on the brink of an unprecedented change. Eager, and yet fearful of stepping on a new cultural threshold, they were both enthused and disillusioned with the advent of a new epoch. Authenticity and uniqueness of life came in the limelight of the private sphere as well as of the public one, with an keener taste for secularism, technological improvement, social action and artistic experimentation, last but not least, with a greater interest for civic and political involvement. The already developing urban culture prompted Americans to find new forms of social and political representation for the individuals as well as for communities, an eventually did not delay on taking its toll on the heritage of traditional America.

Expansion of knowledge and a social transformation blended into a heroic effort to surpass the heritage of tradition. As novelty and its almost religiously acclaimed reign was embraced by those who sought for the diminishing, or even the doing away of social barriers and cultural separations, modernist artists and writers attempted in America, as in Europe, to redefine the goals of aesthetic experience, cultural and social innovation and to increase social awareness, ultimately evincing in relevant outlooks about immigrants' culture. A desire to recapture the sense of the 'lost' life was entertained not only by those who militated for a nativist America imagining a possible 'return' to the primeval times, but also for those who praised America as their abode and homeland, dreamed about and fought for. "A desire for wholeness" or for an "integrative" mood¹, burgeoning in the artistic and literary experiments, spread in the social and political realm. The manifested wish of people living in the midst of change to become "subjects and objects of modernization" set for a new definition of freedom and an appeal to undertake change as an instrument ascertain both the individual's and the community's capacities to build "a home in a changing world"².

The Progressive Era refashioned the scenery of the cultural stage and of the political symbolism in America. Before long the complex reality of American democracy needed to be readjusted according to the commandments of a new age, devised and implemented by modernist intellectuals and activists. No matter how diverse and eclectic the definitions of modernism were, it was obvious that modernism was thought as "a new form of self-consciousness to intervene in history, not only as a mode of newness, but as a mode of power"³, and that representing the newness or rather the "renewal" of culture in America was bound to the capacity of expressing pluralism. Modernism in America, more than in Europe, resulted in the thriving of cultural pluralism, making it more pervasive and eventually influential, forging forms of a new American identity by summoning intellectual insurgency and artistic rebellion against traditional values.

At the outset of the last century, modernist times signaled that self-confident convictions buttressing American exceptionalism were challenged by new issues: world war and interventionism, nativism and intellectual dissent, assertion of black consciousness, women's cultural and political self-representation, the need of redefining social relations in America in the twilight of genteel culture. The traditional identity of the American was no longer contemplated as suiting with the rapid alterations which accompanied immigration, inner migration, urbanization, artistic and social avant-garde. The emblematic *E pluribus unum* was heard to sound hollow under the increasing weight of immigrants' cultural memory. The symbolical oneness into which American diversity had been traditionally anchored, was perceived as no longer holding true for a great many Americans who did not feel equal to other Americans. Melting pot policies were perceived as defying, or even running against the liberal and democratic promises of the American way of life. Whether some continued to see in the melting pot social and cultural practices the renewal of the American myth, as Israel Zangwill did, Crèvecoeur's pastoral image of America did not address any longer to all Americans. Beyond race and class, Americanization was deemed to fulfill the promises of the *Declaration of Independence*. Writers, intellectuals, social religious activists acted in order to implement the provisions of the Jeffersonian vision of democratic American against the dominant prejudices nourished by the "tyranny of majority", and allow "others" be equal participants in carrying out the promises of the American Revolution. Before becoming a matter of political organization, the urge to bring into life the pragmatic legacy of democracy, was perceived as a inspiring feeling calling forth people of different cultural heritages, who found themselves not only kindred, but also identified themselves as equal citizens.

It has been long since cultural pluralism ceased to be regarded as an exclusively American political and cultural accomplishment, even if nowadays the number of countries currently observing the concrete standards of cultural pluralism has not grown considerably. There has been, as known, a steady rise of interest for cultural pluralism in Europe and in other parts of the world, since the beginning of the 20-th century, which underscores the relevance of the American former experiments in cultural pluralism. Cultural diversity in America was remarked from the very 'discovery' of the continent, under various facets, drawing attention on the tragic exclusion of the "two forgotten peoples", the blacks and the Indians, as Tocqueville referred to them, pointing at that time to one of the major sources of crisis within the frame of the American democracy. Though traditionally, a great deal of authors praised the symbolism of the frontier as a catalyst which freed Americans from compelling social conventions, religious and ethnic enclaves, accentuating their "the passion for equality", cultural separations did not vanish from among communities. Quite on the contrary, modernist times strengthened

patterns of cultural differentiation, yielding into a new relationship between individualism and communitarianism. Religious activists, conservatives, liberals, socialist or anarchist ideologues, or simply adventurers strove to embody their own visions and perceptions about America. During the first decades of the last century, intellectuals and artists created different blueprints of the future of their country, bringing together competing and conflicting representations of the State, nation, nationality, artistic tradition, political doctrines, religious sects, and eventually culture itself. W.E.B. Du Bois, Ezra Pound, Eugene Debs, Walter Lipmann, Edmund Wilson, Sherwood Anderson, Eugene O'Neill expressed different tendencies rising from the current social and aesthetic experiments.

The present paper deals with Randolph Bourne's *"Trans-National America"* (1916), a seminal writing mirroring the beginnings of cultural pluralism. William James's influence on Bourne, in respect to the notion of 'consciousness' and the intellectuals' standpoint in a critical moment as the one America was going through at the outbreak of WWI illustrates the cultural consequences of pragmatism. At the same time, learning about Horace Kallen's and Du Bois's viewpoints on the cultural adaptation process, Bourne accentuated the particularities of assimilation vs. non-assimilation aspects, wishing to set a different perspective, breaking up with the current melting pot policies.

The intention of the paper to approach Bourne's essay as a *locus* of American modernism, in the sense of enhancing the interplay of rationalistic and subjective blended in a prophecy-like appeal, or rather a counter-prophecy meant to shape the "conscience" of a new century. Change of the traditional cast of mind, respectively the traditional view of assimilation and the melting pot explanation regarding the birth of the American, was impending for Bourne. The fervor of asserting the necessity of converting the Americans' identity into a "trans-national" identity showed the modernist perception according to which time experienced by individuals ought to be acknowledged as a personal and authentic personal experience rooted in traditional culture, determining cultural diversity appear eventually as a benchmark of American democracy.

"As the unpleasant truth has come upon us that assimilation in this country was proceeding on lines very different from those we had marked out for it, we found ourselves inclined to blame those who were thwarting our prophecy. The truth became culpable ... And then we discovered with a moral shock that these movements had been making great headway before the war even began. We found that the tendency, reprehensible and paradoxical as it might be, has been for the national clusters of

immigrants, as they became more and more firmly established and more and more prosperous, to cultivate more and more assiduously the literatures and cultural traditions of their homelands.”⁴

The notion of the “trans-national”, as used by Bourne, combined two contradictory tendencies, namely that of asserting the idea of nationality, and at the same time of out-stepping its borders, in the attempt to contain the essence of the “present” cultural processes of assimilation or rather resistance to assimilation in an intellectual blueprint of modern America. It noteworthy to mention that ‘nation’ as a concept was not abandoned in order to reach the ‘trans-national’, and that Bourne considered the particular characteristic of the American nation as a natural heirloom allowing the possibility of change, respectively of turning into a ‘trans-nation’. The comparison with Europe stood out as a relevant backdrop against which pluralism developed in America, considering the role of the intellectuals as well. Intellectuals were not only the ‘elite’ of social and political change, but also public agents called to unravel the dilemmas of the moment, set examples of achieving and performing a new spiritual bond coalescing the diverse facets of America. Behind the term ‘trans-national’, Bourne drew the map of unity and at the same time disunity of cultural America. A dangerously divided America was looming in future prospects on condition melting pot policies were to last. The failure of assimilation turned into an unexpected occasion to search for a large base of mutually felt unity for the citizens of American, regardless of their duty to become perfect copies of “native” Anglo-Saxon Americans.

If the failure of assimilation policies turned into the moral engine of a cultural transformation, one could witness in Bourne’s case, an attempt to revive an organicist model of culture according to which unity could be regained and actually lived as a harmonious social pattern in spite of the increasing ethnic diversity of the country. “Trans-national America” is indebted to the nascent ideology of cultural pluralism, beyond doubt, but it does not disregard the past, or rather, as it was the ‘reusable’ past, as it was imagined by Van Wyck Brooks. In the same line, it is interesting to observe that to the same extent it attempts accentuate the new cultural setting, characterized by diversity and reactive adaptations to the ethnic “core” of the American world, Bourne’s pleading for the ‘trans-national’ tends to accustom the idea that once the its spirit is recognized, social harmony could be naturally revived, as if it had been interrupted only by the melting policies practices. *Consciousness* stood for Bourne as the modernist acquisition of the times, a departure and not a denial of *nature*, (nature of the American nation and American exceptionalism), in search for the unity of American life rendered as a whole. Seen as a reflective personal and also public forum, consciousness acknowledges in Bourne’s essay (under the image of a unifying accolade of divisive experiences) the

place of reflection in the “nature” of democracy, in the sense of making democracy accessible to the one and to the many.

William James’s definition of “consciousness” inspired Bourne’s criticism of the American melting-pot policies. In 1904, in “Does Consciousness Exist?”, James upheld that “consciousness stands for a function and that function is knowing” and that within consciousness “things not only are, but get reported, are known.”⁵ Without developing the arguments of the Jamesian demonstration, it is important to underline the consequences which prompted the appearance of the “fact-of-consciousness” on whose basis Bourne relied on this essay in particular. A special remark should be made in regard to the permeating principle of the unity existing in the pragmatic definition of the ‘spiritual activity’, where content and form are blended together:

“Consciousness, flowing inside of us in the forms of conception or judgment, or concentrating itself in the shape of passion or emotion, can be directly felt as the spiritual activity which is, and known in contrast with the space-filling objective ‘content’ which envelops and accompanies ... There is no thought-stuff different from thing-stuff, I said; but the same identical piece of ‘pure experience’ (which was the name I gave to *materia prima* of everything) can stand alternatively for a ‘fact of consciousness’ or for physical reality. According as it is taken in one context or in another.”⁶

William James’s towering intellectual stature influenced the perception of the notion of the intellectual as well. In upholding the development of an urban culture, James provided his contemporaries with an inspiring view on the role of the intellectual regarded as a builder of society, as he mentioned in his *Chautauqua* lectures. As Pierre Bourdieu wrote later, in the other half of the last century, the intellectual was born, or to use the author’s expression, ‘invented’, in the name of “the autonomy, and of the specific values of a cultural production field reaching a high degree of independence as to different sorts of powers”⁷. The intellectual emerged as the “defender of some universal principles which are but the product of making universal the specific traits of his own field of literary or cultural production”⁸. American identity and the challenge of the cultural pluralism were interrelated in the new meaning of the intellectual at the outset of a new century, not only because the intellectuals were those who sought for a new vision of Americaness, but also because their approach idealized reason and a certain ‘esprit de corps’ dedicated to transpose modernization into practice. The intellectualistic drive, were I to note on this peculiar feature of the Euro-Atlantic avant-garde, is definitely more poignantly illustrated in Bourne’s articles, rather

in James's above quoted essays. Whereas for the former one, the pride of asserting their being intellectuals exceeded in exhortative appeals to his peers or to humanity, alerting the readers about the moral aspects of their dilemmas, for William James, the recognition of the intellectual's condition consisted in a careful examination of his tasks and responsibilities, especially when he thinker pondered on difference between middle class ethos and the dissident spirit of intellectuals. In other words, James warned his readers about the danger of what he named the "Mandarine disease".

"America is thus as a nation rapidly drifting towards a state of things in which no man of science and letters will be accounted respectable unless some kind of badge or diploma is stamped upon him, and in which bare personality will be a mark of outcast estate. It seems to me high time to rouse ourselves to consciousness, and to cast a critical eye upon this decidedly grotesque tendency. Other nations suffer terribly from this Mandarin disease. Are we doomed to suffer like the rest?"⁹

William James's nuanced description of the intellectual's condition in a changing world rejected a simplistic interpretation of the intellectual's 'tasks', other than those arising from his own professionally innovative experiments. James avoided playing a radical chord in his pragmatic thinking. Warning intellectuals about running the risk of acquiring the status of Mandarins, or about becoming state bureaucrats, James was ahead of other authors, as for instance of Julien Benda, who in his denunciatory "betrayal" of intellectuals in France, raised the question of the ethics of the learned ones in their relation with power. The American philosopher warned intellectuals about the waylaying perils of going to the other extreme, namely of being lured by nativist or nationalistic ideologies. Unmasking the false morals of war, William James was at the same time, knowingly or not, playing a leading part in a 'cultural war', by flagging his self-confident idea that intellectuals' rationality and autonomy might be usefully employed in breaking the deadlocks of modern society. Denouncing the bellicose passions which inspired political interests in WWI and interventionism, James appealed to the moral function of reflection, not wishing at the same time to transform the necessity of public judgment into the functional attribute of any University diploma-holders. In this respect, W.E.B. Du Bois, Horace M. Kallen and Randolph Bourne, were influenced by the Jamesian description of the play of 'consciousness' in implementing a modernist American identity.

"Patriotism no one thinks discreditable; nor does any one deny that war is the romance of history.

But inordinate ambitions are the soul of every patriotism, and the possibility of violent death the soul of all romance. The military patriotic and romantic-minded everywhere, and especially the professional military class, refuse to admit for a moment that war may be a transitory phenomenon in social evolution.

Reflective apologists for war at the present day all take it religiously. It is a sort of sacrament. Its profits are to the vanquished as well as to the victor; and quite apart from any question of profit, it is an absolute good, we are told, for it is in human nature at its highest dynamic “¹⁰

In “*Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot. A Study of the American Nationality*”, published in the “*The Nation*”, February 25, 1915, Horace Kallen refers to two key elements in his criticism of the American civilization: like-mindedness and self-consciousness. The two notions underscored for Kallen the insufficiently accounted for role of the immigrants’ culture, of their deeply felt differences, among which special attention was given to Jewish immigrants. By underlying the cultural features distinguishing the Jewish immigrant in American, Kallen did not simply extol the cultural behavior of the American Jews, but beheld the manner in which the Jewish community reacted to Americanization. In this respect, Kallen drew a clear cut distinction between what he named the “environmental” Americanization and the “hereditary” one, suggesting the diversity of the ways in which Americanization occurred, in contact with different ethnic and/or racial traditions, under the provisions of a liberal and eventually democratic state. The inherent capacity of developing a cultural behavior different from that of the then majority of Anglo-Saxon representing the ‘population native stock’ was enhanced by the process of achieving equality as the main attribute of a democratic society.

“Other things being equal, a democratic society which should be the realization of the assumptions of the Declaration of Independence, supposing them to be true, would be a leveling society such that all persons become alike, either on the lowest or the highest plane.”¹¹

Writing about an existing dynamics of the immigrant’s transformation within the process of Americanization, Kallen contrasts the assimilation process as a wishful goal entertained by the majority of the American population and the right to equality of the newcomers, whose cultural traditions should not however be undervalued while acquiring an American identity. Kallen wished to demonstrate that

actually assimilation was but an ever going process of confrontation, a sort of 'cultural frontier' in a survival struggle, and not a sheer fulfillment of the immigrant's desire to become an American, once English language and American manners were mastered. The implementing of American manners was not only a superficial sign of Americanization, but also a misleading symptom, hiding the possible estrangement from the mainstream culture of thousands of newcomers in America. The immigrant was no longer viewed as an abstract entity automatically absorbing the novelty of the American civilization and consequently embracing its ethics, but a cultural being in search of social, political and cultural recognition.

At the same time, it was highly unlikely that the majority of immigrants had wished to preserve their cultural past and not leave behind it for the new ideals of a country which respected their religious liberty and economic ventures. The modernist age alleviated the conditions of immigration and along with the omnipresent media information about immigration as a possibility to reach for higher living standards, it rendered national self-esteem of would-be or future immigrants less meaningful, especially when human rights were overlooked in latter home countries. When talking about the cultural experiences of the Jewish community, Kallen referred to a small community of educated immigrants, for whom traditions were haloed by a sacred sense of living in community, wherefrom they obtained their status recognition more easily than other communities. Internationalization as a trait of modernism subverted the monopoly of national culture, yet, according to the immanent techniques of expressing innovation, it re-enhanced the "national" under new constraints, which actually reappeared in nationalistic ideologies.

It is the shock of confrontation with other ethnic groups and the feeling of alienity that generates in them an intenser self-consciousness, which militates against Americanization in spirit by reinforcing the two factors with to which the spiritual expression of the proletarian has been largely confined."¹²

'Like-mindedness' and 'self-consciousness' are Kallen's key terms arguing for a different type of Americanization, a more nuanced process of cultural integration with the prescriptive norms of representing the Americanness, American citizenship and nationality. For Kallen, it was essential to enhance that within Americanization, the immigrant could benefit on an equal footing of political rights of the Anglo-Saxon majority. Kallen remarked that the American society would not develop its democratic course unless it recognized the cultural rights of others 'types' of Americans. However, the cultural identity of the immigrant was not

wholly remade in America in accordance with the leveling of Americanization, so that the immigrant's cultural ancestry grew in time optional. Nevertheless, Kallen's underlining the importance of language and religion in buttressing the 'old' identity versus the 'new' one remained a crucial feature in articulating the cultural fountain of cosmopolitanism, seen as an America brand rather than a European one. America turned into the very place where the idea of cosmopolitanism has been kept alive through the whole of the 20-th century, in times when Europe descended in the pit of nationalisms. It is Kallen's merit to have observed that language and especially religion would transform the process of assimilation into a surprisingly different process as compared to the prior cultural assumptions of the traditional majority of the Americans. One of the paradoxes of the American culture consists in having let nativism coexist with cosmopolitanism, allowing different interpretations of the balance between the one and the parts in the *E pluribus unum*.

"It became a principle of separation, often the sole repository of the national spirit, almost always the conservator of the national language and of the tradition that is passed on with the language to succeeding generations. Among immigrants, hence, religion and language tend to be coordinate: a single expression of the spontaneous and instinctive mental life of the masses, and the primary inwards factors making against assimilation."¹³

Attempting to oppose American exceptionalism and its repercussions with the immigrant's hereditary culture, Kallen employed however an 'exceptionalist' view of the immigrant's strength and resilience to interact with American culture. But the exceptional character of immigrants', (or rather of the Jew immigrant) and their resisting to the melting down of the cultural traditions under the baptism of American citizenship, an idea reinforced in Bourne's idea of 'trans-nationality' was an indirect appraisal of the American context, in its double role, of coming to the succor of the world menaced by "the European debacle", and at the same time to redefine their cultural memory. Kallen and Bourne were undeniably attuned to the feverish debate on the prevalence of culture over civilization. For them, it was clear that a 'democracy of nationalities' as Kallen dubbed the possible course of American democracy could redefine the concept of civilization and its particular development in America, favoring civilization to refashion the culture of new century. It is worth mentioning that for Bourne the pinnacle of the American civilization constituted the chance of a 'new' culture, an exceptional undertaking for which Americans, irrespective of their ethnic roots were called forth.

“Thus ‘American civilization’ may come to mean perfection of the cooperative harmonies of ‘European civilization’, the waste, the squalor, and the distress of Europe being eliminated – a multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind. As in an orchestra, every type of instrument has its specific timbre and tonality, founded in its; every type has its appropriate theme and melody in the whole symphony, so in society each ethnic group is the natural instrument, its spirit and culture are its themes, and the harmony and dissonances and discords of them all make the symphony of civilization, with this difference: musical symphony is written before it is played; in the symphony of civilization the playing is the writing, so that there is nothing so fixed and inevitable about its progressions as in music, so that within the limits set by nature they may vary at will, and the range and variety of the harmonies may become wider and more beautiful.”¹⁴

The metaphor of ‘symphony’ bathes Kallen’s America in a mediocre echo of the Kantian universal peace, which resumed a year later, in 1916, in Bourne’s view of the ‘trans-nationality’. Mediocrity means here the sudden transformation of diversity anchored in language and religion into the angel guardian of the unity of all Americans. Kallen upheld that the more the ethnic layers would be woven into the ‘national’ tapestry, the richer that civilization would be, meaning that its fabric will be more lasting and enduring due to its racial and ethnic diversity. The streak of ethnic radicalism present in Kallen’s attempt to redefine American cultural symbolism within the “music” of cosmopolitanism, was not borrowed by Bourne’s refusal of the melting-pot idea, and appraisal of a ‘new’ nationally diverse America. The author of “trans-national” America saw cultural pluralism only as a condition to establish the status of Americans as a “hyphenated-nation”, setting for the acceptance of different cultural roots, in the same equal cultural status.

The beginning of “Trans-National America” suggests Bourne’s familiarity with Kallen’s ideas. Salient differences are to be remarked from the beginning, though. Bourne regarded the outcome of the melting policies as failing cultural experiences undermining the “great alien population” in the United States. Speaking for the recognition of the many and diverse cultural traditions of the immigrants, Bourne deplored the waning of the American beliefs about democracy and freedom, perceiving in it a rising menace driven at American identity.

“No reverberatory effect of the great war has caused American public opinion more solicitude than the failure of the ‘melting-pot’. The discovery of diverse nationalistic feelings among our great alien population has come to most people as an intense shock. It has brought out the unpleasant inconsistencies of our traditional beliefs.”¹⁵

Deeply contrasting with Europe, the American civilization was already experiencing a different pattern of linking immigrants’ culture with the symbolism of liberal and republican America. The novel view on the American nation upheld the exceptional resourcefulness of the symbolism of democracy, an inner power to reform itself miraculously kindled especially in times of need, as those of the WWI had been, supporting the indefatigable struggle for “a clear and general readjustment of our attitude and our ideal”, as Bourne put it. Bourne wrestled with the remnants of genteel culture, and from this angle he borrowed the rhetorical accents of a moral crusader. His idealism engaged in prospects, permeated by humanitarian or socialist utopianism, fighting sometimes against hope to change the habits of his times. In this respect, it was obvious that Bourne’s convictions were shaped by the Marxian prevalent idea of the end of history, or rather of the necessity to comply with the secret ‘reason’ of historical events. Facing history, intellectuals should wield their “creative intelligence” not only in their worshipping ideals but as a weapon to accelerate reforms, in this particular case, to intuit the relations between different cultural heritages and their consequences in achieving democratic standards for all Americans.

Bourne’s stand against American intervention in the WWI and against the idea of democracy as it was professed by the Woodrow administration, his public disagreement with John Dewey’s especially on the intellectuals’ support of intervention were non-equivocal about his political bias. His belief in the Utopia of socialism sustained the possibility of changing the notion of the nation into a ‘trans-nation’, a sweeping feeling grounded on a sort of politically ripe citizen’s consciousness, rejecting religion or other forms of cultural traditions. Bourne believed that the Anglo-Saxon pattern of the American culture should eventually wane, being replaced by a ‘hyphenated’ identity, allowing Americans of different ethnical origins live together, benefit from the legacies of their traditions without repressing them, and thus do away with the constraints of the melting pot. Bourne did not provide however with a more elaborated explanation of his forecast of racial and ethnic change, contenting to reiterate the idea that the process was already following its course, a rather hasty remark for that moment, which was counterbalanced by powerful nativist outbursts.

Bourne was persuaded that Anglo-Saxons’ claim for a primordial status in making the American nation could no longer hold true, giving

justice to the reality of the immigrants' cultural survival and eventually subsequent consolidation of the American democracy. The explanation of the alchemical relation between different 'foreign' cultures and the American oneness was only superficially explained, mainly relying on the metaphor of America's being a 'transplanted' Europe. The hovering image of the successful 'transplant' was for that moment a manner of explaining how the idea of the cultural inheritance worked through the years, underlined chiefly similarities between Americans and Europeans, rather than dissimilarities. At the same time, the 'transplant' argument was employed in order to assess non-Anglo-Saxon cultures as being equally important with Anglo-Saxon one, since most of them (especially the German one) originated in Europe. The 'transplant' motif underlines a historicist type of argumentation, prevalently employed by Marxian ideology. Bourne attempted to create a sort of 'equal' plane of ancestry ('cultural recognition') for all immigrants, so that the symbolism of the newcomers could not be treated as lacking in cultural significance.

"America is transplanted Europe, but a Europe that has not been disintegrated and scattered in the transplanting as in some Dispersion. Its colonies live here inextricably mingled, yet not homogeneous. They merge but not fuse." ¹⁶

The rather outmoded romantic image of the "transplanted Europe", seen as a sort of a cultural trans-substantiation of the Hegelian idea of history into a new form, accelerating at the same time the rhythm of history seemed artificial or outmoded in rendering the genuine preoccupations of the Americans, if any, with their European hereditary lines. Quite on the contrary, the beginning of the 20-th century witnessed an unprecedented interest shown in Europe especially for the genuine experiences of Americanness, in the sense of demonstrating America's growing differences, not only culturally but also politically. At the same time, "transplanted Europe" was an insufficient ideological strong argument to combat American nativism, unless it worked as a perverse effect, showing that European nationalism and racism found an outlet on American soil. When criticizing the arrogance of the Anglo-Saxons' pretense of having forged American symbolism as a cultural invariant, Bourne did not seem to pay attention to the emergence of another form of invariance, that of the legendary European founding of America.

Bourne did not elaborate a solid argumentation sustaining his rather common place metaphor of the 'transplant'. Instead, he contented himself to suggest that the 'transplant' succeeded because there was not only one ship bearing the name of 'Mayflower' ship, but other ships crossing the Atlantic, under the flags of "Maiblume", "Majblomst", "Fleur de Mai", "Fiore di Maggio". As in Kallen's instance, Bourne did not seem to be aware of the immigrants' evident wish to flee not only from their past, but

also to dissolve it in acquiring a new cultural identity. In “*Our Cultural Humility*”, (1912), Bourne dealt with the overpowering feeling that American culture is profoundly indebted to the immigrants’ cultures, and as far as Europe was regarded, one had to acquiesce to its dominance in engendering the ‘cultural humility of Americans’. It is useful to see to what was the outcome of this idea in the author’s own terms:

“Our cultural humility before the civilizations of Europe, then, is the chief obstacle which prevents us from producing any true indigenous culture of our own. I am far from saying, of course, that for our arts to be fertilized by the civilizations of other nations past and present. The culture of Europe has arisen from only from such an extensive cross-fertilization in the past. But we have passed through that period of learning, and it is time for us to set up our individual standards...”

The only remedy for this deplorable situation is the cultivation of a new American nationalism. We need that keen introspection into the beauties and vitalities and sincerities of our life and ideals that characterizes the French.”¹⁷.

The idea according to which American culture is actually a successful cultural graft was not new in Bourne’s time, as far as the demonstration contained in “*Trans-National*” America amounts to the necessity of a new type of cosmopolitanism. Bourne and other intellectuals endorsed the spirit of a revolutionary and socialist radicalism wedded with the idea of purging nationalism and its religiosity with the harmony of a cosmopolitanism. He bounced between the past-ness of the future construct of nation, pointing obviously to Europe, yet disagreeing with its precedence, foretelling the birth of an American cosmopolitan community, where ethnic difference will be subdued and eventually disappear, due to the political awareness of modernist citizens. His utopian thinking confounded willingly democratic idealism with the practices of European socialist internationalism. Paying tribute to socialist ideas, so popular at the beginning of the 20-th century, Bourne gave in “*The Intellectuals and the War*”, a free rein to his exhortations pleading for the unity of intellectuals and Americans in a selfless spirit of human brotherhood.

“Our intellectual class might have been occupied, during the last two years, in studying and clarifying the ideals and aspirations of the American democracy, in discovering a true Americanism which would not have been merely

nebulous but might have federated the different ethnic groups and traditions. They might have spent the time in endeavoring to clear the public mind of the cant of war, to get rid of old mystical notions that clog our thinking ... They might have turned the intellectual energy not to the problem of jockeying the nation into war, but to the problem of using our vast neutral power to attain democratic ends for the rest of the world and ourselves without the malevolent technique of war. They simply have failed.¹⁸

Given the renewed circumstances of the American exceptionalism, namely its attribute to remake the old humanity of Europe, “without that spirit which inflames it and turns all its energy into mutual destruction”, Bourne was persuaded that the old Continent could provide Americans with a sense of cultural modernization, and that subsequently, German-Americans could compete with Anglo-Americans, as an embodiment of the *E pluribus unum*. Being confident that America is the “world’s federation in miniature”, where history, so vengeful and reprehensible in other parts of the world, permitted ‘the miracle of hope’, Bourne not only reiterated the assertion of the cultural ‘merging’, yet not ‘fusing’ of different cultures, but he thought that cultural conflicts were beneficial for the American culture, in the sense of forging new horizons for change.

The symbol of war has with him a double meaning, in the sense that the violence of a “warrior of ideas” could be used against the propaganda of war, or it could be usefully employed in nationalistic warfare if subdued to reason’s goals. Bourne mixed the nostalgia for the knowledgeable and elitist Europe with the enthusiastic praise of the robust and provincial America, pleading for the success of cultural interbreeding in a democratic society. According to Bourne’s intellectual idealism, America represented a genuine new *possibilism*, as one in the romantic world and its organic transformations. In order to achieve the unity of mankind, the violence of separations could have been superseded, said Bourne, by rationally containing the world anarchy and nationalistic fervor. It is interesting to remark that Bourne was realistic enough to admit of the existence of parochial America, but he could not refrain from thinking that American provincialism could be eventually superseded by a modernist intellectual endeavor, so that Americans would be hopefully awakened from the slumber of their fatuous isolationism to look for “a new orientation of the American mind in the world”.

The reformist character lived in the very nature of the American culture, engendering an ‘intellectual sympathy’, spread in the hearts of all Americans as a sort of a cultural unity running counter to the melting pot policies, rooted in the modern man’s capacity to reason, and further on sublimated into another type of social rationale. Apparently, the key

transformation of man's cultural behavior was to be found in the forgetting of hate which fueled the passion of war, or in transforming barriers separating ethnic groups in America into bridges which could be freely crossed over, building a "trans-nationality of all nations". Resorting to a kind of 'ethos of change', Bourne addressed the young intelligentsia urging it to take part, so to say in the relay race of modernization of America. His prophetic vision of changing the frontier of the nationality reminds Saint-Simons's views about who should be entitled to reform the world, recasting it into a knowledgeable and socially predictable model.

In spite of all inadvertencies, Bourne's 'trans-national' America should not be gauged as an entirely utopian and highly intellectualist construct founded on the seductive influence of European socialism and romantic humanitarianism. His unflinching trust in intellectuals as agents of social and cultural change hid in its heart a Platonic idea of resorting to moral perfection. Bourne admired even when criticizing the 'the manifest destiny' of America, and accordingly, he appealed to intellectuals, to secure the future of America as a democratic, modernist and reformist pluralistic country.

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Notes:

¹ Adele Heller and Lois Rudnick, 1915. *The Cultural Moment* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 4

² Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air. The Experience of Modernity*, (New York, London: Penguin Books, 1981, 1988), 5-6.

³ Art Berman, *Preface to Modernism*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1995), 3

⁴ Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America", in *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, ed. Paul Lauter, et al., (Lexington, Mass. and Toronto, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1994), 1732-1733.

⁵ William James, *Writings 1902-1910* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 1142.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1206

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Regulile artei. Geneza si structura cimpului literar*, ed. Bogdan Ghiu si Toader Saulea, (Bucuresti: Univers, 1998), 181-182.

⁸ Bourdieu, 181-182.

⁹ William James, 1113.

¹⁰ James, 1284-1285.

¹¹ Horace M. Kallen, *Democracy versus the Melting-Pot, A Study of American Nationality*, 5, <http://www.expo98.msu.edu/people/Kallen.htm>

¹² Kallen, 9

¹³ Kallen, 9-10.

¹⁴ Kallen, 15-16.

¹⁵ Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America", in *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, 1738.

¹⁶ Bourne, 1739.

¹⁷ Randolph Bourne, "Our Cultural Humility", in *The Literature of America*, edited by Irving Howe, Mark Schorer, Larzer Ziff (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1971), 318

¹⁸ Randolph Bourne, "The War and the Intellectuals", in *Literature in America*, edited by Charles Kaplan, (New York: The Free Press, 1971), 158.