NAMES AND MULTICULTURALISM. BLENDING IN STEPHEN HENIGHAN'S THE STREETS OF WINTER *AND* THE PLACES WHERE NAMES VANISH

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Abstract*: The process of globalization has brought about some diverging tendencies in shaping the so-called "geographies of identity". On the one hand, monocultural societies (ethnic nations or nations of the majority ethnic group) have gradually become more eclectic, if not in ideology (less prone to accept and adopt a policy of cultural and political pluralism) then at least in anthroponymy (people's choices in name giving being influenced by an unprecedented exposure to a relentless media bombardment – varying according to fashion, TV series, ethnicity or religious affiliation), whereas multicultural societies have been in the position of facing the creation of different ethnic enclaves which, in spite of being subjected to a real or subliminal tendency of levelling, have fought to preserve their own traditions, customs, language and religion, the names, as an identity component, being strongly related to the idea of ethnic belonging. Under these circumstances, my paper starts from identifying the characteristics of Stephen Henighan's multicultural environment and engages into an anthroponimical analysis of the characters' first names in the author's novels The Streets of Winter and The Places Where Names Vanish in order to emphasise their role in identity preservation and belonging.*
Keywords*: name, multiculturalism, glocalization, identity preservation;*

A few considerations on multiculturalism

Multiculturalism, as a concept, has been so long debated and taken into discussion, defined from different angles (political, social, educational, or cultural and so on) that it seems to have reached its theoretical limits. Indeed, what can one say that hasn't been mentioned before? However, in spite of the theoretical plenitude it (i.e. multiculturalism) has benefited from (being it negative or positive, pro or against), the reality has, most of the time, proven its complexity and impossibility to be rightly categorized, analysed according to some specific patterns, and cast in pre-established moulds. *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's English Dictionary* defines multiculturalism as a situation in which all the different cultural or racial groups in a society have equal rights and opportunities, and none is ignored or regarded as unimportant (2003: 939), while the online *Oxford Dictionary* speaks about the presence of, or support for several distinct cultural or ethnic groups within a society. According to these definitions, the term 'multicultural' is often used descriptively to "characterize the fact of diversity in a society" (Song 2017), as well as to understand and respond to the challenges associated with cultural and religious diversity. As far as Jeffrey Reitz (2009: 1) is concerned, multiculturalism can be seen as an alternative to "assimilation", a policy meant to shape a "cohesive society from diverse ethnic and cultural groups".

Multiculturalism can be analyzed as a state policy, and Canada, as the founder of multiculturalism as a formal government policy can be taken as an example in this respect, but it can also be interpreted at a larger scale, worldwide basically, due to the process of globalization and its inherent immigrational movements which have, sometimes, inevitably led to "significant inter-ethnic tension" and "violent discord" (Reitz 2009: 1). Pursuant to Hugh Donald Forbes (2007: 27), Pierre Elliott Trudeau was the one that initiated Canada's official multiculturalism with a statement he made in the House of Commons on October 8, 1971. What he claimed was that "a policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework commends itself to the government as the most suitable means of assuring the cultural freedom of Canadians." According to the same author, Trudeau considered that the aim of this new policy was "to break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies." What Trudeau was trying to explain was that he wanted to create equal legitimacy of all cultures in Canada and that every ethnic group had the right to preserve and develop its own culture and values within the Canadian context. He also wanted to emphasize the fact that no particular culture was more official than the others and that multiculturalism was to have both preservative and assimilative elements, individuals and groups were to be helped to preserve their own identities, and they were also helped to blend into the Canadian society. Thus, the main objectives of the Multiculturalism Policy, as noted by Michael Dewing (2009: 3) were to assist cultural groups in their attempt to retain and foster their identity, to help them overcome barriers to their full participation in Canadian society (the full involvement and equal participation of ethnic minorities in mainstream institutions being consequently advocated, without them being denied the right to identify with elements of their cultural past if they chose to do so), to promote "creative exchanges" among all Canadian cultural groups, and to assist immigrants in acquiring at least one of the official languages. According to Jeffrey Reitz (2009: 6), multiculturalism in Canada was first rooted in the English-French duality which meant that the "enduring presence of two national groups, neither of which could expect to assimilate the other, required the acceptance and institutionalization of diversity in Canadian society to prevent its dissolution", and secondly, in the "impulse for the recognition of the "other" ethnic groups" which thus avoided being called "second-class citizens".

As far as Will Kymlicka and Raphael Cohen-Almagor are concerned (2000: 90-92), some degree of ethnocultural diversity can virtually be encountered in all liberal democracies, the authors distinguishing between two forms of cultural pluralism: 'multination' states and 'polyethnic' states. The former category refers to countries that contain more than one nation (as a result of colonization, conquest, and confederation, good examples in this respect being Israel, Belgium and Switzerland), while the latter has in view the process of immigration as the main source of diversity (large numbers of individuals and families being admitted from other countries and allowed to maintain some of their ethnic particularities). Although an increasing number of countries do contain "sizeable immigrant communities" nowadays, as the authors (2000: 92) claim, it is mostly the New World 'countries of immigration' that have the greatest experience in that area, namely Australia, Canada and the United States. If until the 1960s, these three countries adopted an 'Anglo-conformity' model of immigration which supposed the assimilation of the immigrants to existing cultural norms in an attempt to make them "indistinguishable from native-born citizens in their speech, dress, leisure activities,

cuisine, family size, and so on" (2000: 92), beginning in the 1970s the assimilationist model began to be seen as unrealistic and unjust, a more tolerant and 'multicultural' approach being adopted, this allowing and encouraging immigrants to preserve different aspects of their ethnic heritage.

In his study "Multiculturalism: Success, Failure and the Future" Will Kymlicka (2012: 3) speaks about two trends that were adopted by multiculturalism in Western democracies, that is a series of policies meant to accommodate and recognize diversity and human rights (from the 1970s to mid-1990s) on the one hand, and then a drawback from multiculturalism accompanied by a reiteration of national values and unitary citizenship (from the mid-1990s to the present moment), on the other. Indeed, there are voices which claim that multiculturalism does, in fact, undermine the main cultural identity of a state, endangering social unity and cohesion, being thus a constant cause of conflict. The best example in this respect is the European retreat from multiculturalism, this fact leading to a reconsideration of Canadian positions, too, although Canada has a long multicultural tradition, being the first Western country to adopt an official multiculturalism policy toward immigrant-origin ethnic groups, and it still remains the only country in which multiculturalism is "enshrined in the constitution" (Kymlicka 2012: 10). The European agenda, however, presents multiculturalism in a dark light, making it responsible for a series of "ills" (Banting and Kymlicka 2010: 45) such as: segregation, marginalization, stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, political radicalism and residential ghettoisation, this idea leading to an increase in criticism towards Canadian multicultural policy, too. In their 2002 book *Engaging diversity: Multiculturalism in Canada,* Augie Fleras and Jean Elliott attempted to summarise the critiques of this much debated and highly controversial phenomenon, organizing them on five directions. Thus, according to their findings, multiculturalism is: 1. *divisive*, placing an emphasis on cultural diversity to the detriment of national unity; 2. *marginalizing*, segregating and ghettoizing minorities; 3. *essentializing*, namely accentuating differences and presenting Canada as a union of distinct, independent ethnic groups; 4. *a hoax*, distorting the reality and selling illusions; and 5. *hegemonic*, exerting influence and authority over others (qtd. in Guo and Wong 2015: 6).

Nevertheless, multiculturalism has its supporters, too, they underlining its role in accepting and integrating different cultures in a given society. Multiculturalism is, if we are to quote Will Kymlicka's words, first and foremost about "developing new models of democratic citizenship, grounded in human-rights ideals" (2012: 8), and "reducing the barriers and stigmas that limit the ability of individuals to freely explore and express their ethnic identities" (Kymlicka 2015: 20).

Multiculturalism versus Naming as a Mark of Identity Preservation: *The Streets of Winter* and *The Places Where Names Vanish*

Along with many other things such as religion, ancestry, ethnic tradition, gender, social class, physical appearance, time and place of birth and rearing, names have a huge contribution on constructing and defining one's identity. In spite of the complexity carried on by the term identity, many of its attributes can be "telescoped into a single morpheme, the name given to a child at birth," says Mary V. Seeman (1980: 129). The same thing is claimed by Valerie Alia in her book *Names and Nunavut*. What the author attempts to demonstrate is the fact that, irrespective of whether they are seen

as representations of people or as people, names "are always central in defining identity" (2007: 10). After analyzing two of the most important determinants of naming, i.e. ethnic tradition and the gender of the child, Seeman (1980: 136) reaches the conclusion that identity can be "encoded in a name", the latter bearing the stamp of the namers' traditions and their hopes for the child. According to Alia's confession (2007: 3),

> I grew up hearing naming stories. I knew I was named Valerie for a place called Valeria where my parents met, and Lee to commemorate a relative named Leah. I knew I was a giver as well as a receiver of names when, at age six, my parents invited me to help name my sister. I also knew the limits to my power, as my original choice of Susannah (which I thought 'fancier' and prettier) was shortened to my parents' preference of Susan.
>
> My next name-giving experience was as a mother. My sons David and Daniel Restivo (who now call themselves Dave and Dan) were named to commemorate the different families and cultures they inherited (Italian-Catholic, Hungarian-Jewish).

Names are marks or symbols of identity. They are ascribed to a person the moment he or she is born and represent the choice/preference of the person in charge with offering the bearer a certain layer of identity. Obviously, there are also instances in which a person chooses to change his or her name, thus contributing to ascribing himself/herself another identification code. A human being's identity is constructed on various layers, depending on a series of conditions: ethnic and social background, religious influences, personal desires, etc. There are plenty of examples in which parents or legal guardians choose a child's name according to their likes and in total dissonance with the tradition of a certain area. One can call a girl *Esmeralda* (a name with Spanish or Portuguese origins that might not be familiar in some regions of the world) just because soap operas are the kind of TV entertainment one is fond of or *Ronaldo* (a mostly Portuguese name) as one might be a great fan of football. Religious families have the tendency to choose names of saints as there is the belief that the saint whose name one has been ascribed will definitely protect and guide the carrier and maybe influence the way in which that person conducts his or her life.

When it comes to ethnicity or ethnic background names are used to suggest belonging to a certain group. Definitely, they are influenced by the language spoken in a certain community and the spelling and pronunciation rules of that group (be it ethnic in multicultural societies or national in societies that claim a monocultural background – even if nowadays monocultural societies are difficult to find). For example, the name *Mary*, which is the usual English for of *Maria*, the latter being the Latin form of the Greek names *Μαριάμ* (*Mariam*) and *Μαρία* (*Maria*) which came from Hebrew מִרְיָם (*Miryam*) - a name borne by the sister of Moses in the Old Testament, became very popular in the Christian world due to a series of characters in the New Testament that bore it, the most important being the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus ("Mary"). However, this name is not unique, used exclusively in its initial, unaltered form; it varies according to different languages and cultures, depending on their spelling rules and intonation patterns: *Mariam*, *Maryam* (Arabic), *Miriam* (Biblical Hebrew), *Maria* (Biblical Latin), *Marie*, *Myriam*, *Manon*, *Marianne*, *Marielle*, *Mariette*, *Maron*,

Marise, Maryse (French), *Mária, Marica, Marika, Mariska* (Hungarian), *Maria, Miriam, Marianna, Mariella, Marietta, Mia, Miriana* (Italian), *Maria, Maricica* (Romanian), *Maria, Maryia, Maryica, Marusya* (Ukrainian), etc. ("Mary")

If we take these points of view into account, we cannot deny the strong relationship between names and identity (personal, cultural or ethnic), even if there are authors that do not give too much credit to them, considering names simple "words used to call someone or something by" (Algeo qtd in Alia 2007: 8). Others, however, acknowledge their importance, either at a personal level or at an ethnic level, underlying the idea that a person's given name is the focal point around which he/she organizes their personality (Allport qtd in Windt-Val 2012: 275), names and naming also constituting an important part of the work of building a nation (Windt-Val 2012: 275).

Stephen Henighan's books *The Streets of Winter*, published in 2004 and *The Places Where Names Vanish*, published in 1998 provide the best field of analysis in terms of multiculturalism and names as marks of ethnic belonging. The main character of *The Streets of Winter* is Montreal, the huge, teeming metropolis which offers its inhabitants a vast palette of possibilities, ranging from the anonymity that most of the characters long for to the bewildering spectrum of activities that animate each and every day.

> This was the frustration of Montreal: beautiful women flaunting themselves with Latin flamboyance on every street, yet so many barriers to meeting them: language, neighbourhood, the walls dividing cultures. And this wasn't just true of women; it was true of communities, restaurants, bakeries, museums. Montreal simultaneously showcased its wares and kept them under wraps (Henighan 2004: 122)

The challenges that characterize the Canadian society in general, namely its cleavages between French, English, and other ethnocultural and linguistic groups, are very well captured by the author, Montreal itself becoming the epitome of Canadian multiculturalism, perfectly exemplifying the still deep, persistent divisions of the Canadian landscape. An amazing panoply of vivid characters come together to animate the pages of this novel. There is *Marcel* (a name derived from *Marcellus* – Roman family name that was originally a diminutive of *Marcus*) ("Marcel"), a young Jewish entrepreneur who contrary to all expectations speaks French and is married to a French Canadian, *Maryse* (the French diminutive of *Marie*) ("Maryse"), who is so absorbed into her artistic dedication that seems to be lacking a rational discrimination of reality. Torn between duty and desire, Marcel is the prototype of the immigrant who refuses the idea of identity preservation, willingly embracing assimilation, at the same time rejecting everything that might connect him to his previous life. On the other hand, Marcel's brother-in-law, *Abitbol* is the embodiment of a Jew who respects traditions and rejects assimilation, constantly trying to preserve his identity. *André* (the French form of *Andreas* ("André"), another picturesque character of the book, is the prototype of the Quebecoise intellectual animated by nationalistic impulses. He detests English and the Anglos who were, according to his point of view, constantly engaged in undermining Quebec's attempts to protect its cultural heritage. In addition to this, he is also a homosexual experiencing the pleasures of life. His xenophobic attitudes can be easily

detected in every dialogue he gets engaged in. The following discussion between André and his old friend *Marie-Christine* demonstrates the character's patriotic ideology, as well as his constant display of separatist preferences.

> – I'm very, very proud of being Québécoise, Marie-Christine said, but there are so many ways of being in touch with the world. Look at all the different cultures the immigrants bring us– – –The immigrants! We should send half of them back to where they came from! – –*C'est pas possible*! Marie-Christine said, shaking head. – *Tu es con!* - – You're like the Anglos who write for *The Gazette*. If I defend my language I am a reactionary, if I defend my culture I am a racist. Listen: every culture needs a homeland. This is our place.– – Without immigrants, Marie-Christine said, stealing the pickle he had left untouched, we wouldn't have smoked meat sandwiches. With our birthrate, we'll disappear without immigrants.– – We're more likely to disappear because of them. – (Henighan 2004: 66)

As it can be easily inferred from this dialogue, Stephen Henighan's novel does not only abound in cultural details, but it also engages in discussing multicultural issues. The characters are not only experiencing multiculturalism; they are also debating it.

But the list of characters that have joined to populate the pages of this novel is far from being complete. There is *Adriana*, a Greek student who ran away from home in order to be able to assert her freedom and independence; *Teddy* (the English diminutive of *Edward* or *Theodore* ("Teddy")), a young, idealistic Canadian born in Ottawa who spent a few years in the States and who feels dissatisfied with his job and the society he's currently living in, or *João*, a Portuguese immigrant maltreated at work due to his position of a migrant, *Vitória* Wong, a girl from Mozambique who needs João to escape the constraints of a culture that does not represent her wishes and desires, and many other characters whose names can be encountered on the pages of Henighan's novel. The city itself displays a magnificent and impressive array of cultural details, the very image of multiculturalism in action. Nevertheless, what seems to prevail is a bitter feeling of dissatisfaction and disappointment. More than a metropolis, Montreal becomes a labyrinthine network of identity searches and a devourer of human destinies. In relation to this harsh reality, multiculturalism, as a much contested but equally praised phenomenon, remains a tentative project that can be both enjoyed and rejected depending on the angle and position of the experiencing individual.

In what concerns the names of the characters, one can easily notice the multitude of ethnic groups they belong to, namely French (see *Marcel*, *Maryse*, *André*, *Marie-Christine, Lysiane, Jacques, Nicole, Céline, Anne*), English (see *Teddy*), or Portuguese (see *João, Agostinho, Marco, Vitória*), this fact being easily justified by the multicultural context they all live in. However, these names with etymologies from different languages are a perfect representation of unity in diversity because they best exemplify the saying "birds of a feather stay together". Even if they belong to different ethnic backgrounds, they live in very close-knit communities which offer them the possibility to share the same language, traditions and customs. They help and understand each other, especially if we speak about immigrants. As a whole, there is one huge array of names of different etymologies, but inside this variety, one can spot certain unitary ethnic groups that fight

preserve their ethnic and cultural identity, the names being a real proof in this respect. When Canada is to be taken into discussion, one cannot ignore the everlasting anglophone-francophone dichotomy, to which the problem of the immigrant minority groups can be added. One of the characters' confessions (namely Teddy's) manages to register the perfect image of a fractured city:

> Since he had returned to Canada, everyone felt they knew him; everyone slotted him into a category. He was a cadet because he had short hair, he was incapable of speaking French because he lived in N.D.G., or he was a snob because he spoke French in a certain way. Man, he thought, in California I was just *me*! He had expected to find in Montreal a wide-open bilingual city whose residents shuttled contentedly from English to French. He had discovered instead a fractured wheel of a metropolis, with the tree-shaggy Mountain at its core pushing the neighbourhoods out and away from the centre, until each district flaunted its own accent and idiom, its own version of English or French, that indelibly marked people from a few blocks away as foreigners. What hope did he have of fitting in? Real immigrants – the ones who came from Italy, Greece, Portugal, China, Vietnam, Haiti, Jamaica or Morocco – created their own village-like neighbourhoods; but Teddy, being neither ethnic nor a lifelong Montrealer, was looking for a Canadian city. A place where he could get back in touch with everything he had forgotten in the States. (Henighan 2004: 27-28)

Stephen Henighan's book *The Places Where Names Vanish* brings in front of the reader the story of an Ecuadorean girl, following her in her desolating, painful odyssey from her village to the urban paradoxes of Montreal. She leaves her home country, the Republic of Ecuador, and emigrates to Canada (even if they would have wanted to get to California) in pursuit of a better life with her husband Gonzalo, a soldier who dreams of becoming a successful musician, but the experience, instead of releasing her from the constraints of a miserable life, becomes a torturing confrontation with the costs of immigration. She's in the position of struggling to find her own way in the linguistically and racially divided society of Montreal, where the imposition of a new language, along with constant Anglophone-Francophone conflicts, her state of poverty and the inter and intraethnic tensions have the effect of creating a cultural *other*, a marginalized, confined, and silenced individual, deprived of his or her selfhood.

> She thought they were moving to a land where people looked like the actors on gringo television shows they watched with Gonzalo's father in Quito: white, rich, eternally grinning. The crippling cold, the throngs of black and brown and Chinese people, the terrifying hippies and the strange, brusque frowns with which shopkeepers serve her, make her tremble. What will happen to them here? How will she raise her daughter? (Henighan 1998: 88-89).

Abandoned by her husband, she, nevertheless, finds herself in the position of being forced to learn a language. She chooses English initially but she cannot cope with her

teacher's liberal and nonconformist methods of teaching. Asked to role-play a 25-year-old research scientist who is working on a cure for cancer and who is also a gay-rights activist she feels humiliated, refusing to return to school the next morning.

> I will kill myself. My family will be tan avergonzada de mi." She will never tell anyone about this exercise. Never. If the guanacos find out that she has been saying such things, they will kick her out of the apartment. She will never be able to look Alfonsina in the face again. "if you kill yourself," the teacher says, "there's no role-play. You must argue for the point of view of – " - He thinks I'm a disgraceful degenerate, she says to the Honduran boys, hoping to stifle their shocked sneers. – Any decent person who found out he was like that would kill himself. – Not in this country, one of the boys replies. – Here everybody is crazy. – "We have to respect each other's values," the teacher says. "You must imagine what it feels like to be a gay-rights activist." "I will kill myself." – No permito que este muchacho me digagroserias. I won't allow this boy to speak to me with such outrageous rudeness. – Next morning she does not return to the school. (Henighan 1998: 117)

In what concerns the names, one can identify the same situation that was so well presented and described in *The Streets of Winter*. On the one hand, there is the Spanish group including *Marta*, her husband, *Gonzalo*, Gonzalo's brother, *Rodrigo*, the *Ochoas*, a family from the Republic of El Salvador who have four children: *Cayetano*, *Ana María*, *Roque*, named after martyrs of the Salvadorean resistance and *Brian* (an English origin name that might point towards the family's desire to become part of one of the large ethic groups into which the Canadian society as a whole is divided, i.e. French and English), named after the Prime Minister of Canada, and with whom Marta shares a four-room apartment; on the other there is the French group whose best representative is *Henri Laberge*, "a man breathing the air of this city, not a vision from my village", as Marta says.

The ethnic based differences are obvious when we think about Marta's daughter whom the mother addresses with the name *María* (Spanish) while Henri chooses to call her *Marie* (French), or the way in which Marta tries to understand and deal with these linguistic and cultural differences that she feels surrounded by: instead of calling her new Canadian acquaintance *Henri*, Marta changes his name into *Enrique*. For her, the difference is obvious, she feels it and experiences it each and every day from her position of an immigrant. Names define identities and the dialogue between Alfonsina and Marta when the latter expresses her desire to go with her Quebecoise friend to a corn roast is quite suggestive in this respect: "You'll always be a Latina, Marta. […] Your name is still Marta, it's not Marthe." (Henighan 2004: 160) So, names make all the difference in the world. A simple pronunciation pattern and a small alteration in spelling can underline the idea of belonging better than other marks of identity, especially when the bearers are aware of the difference. Names define people and categorize them. They are a mark of unity in diversity, helping us distinguish people on linguistic, cultural and ethnic grounds. They also make reference to ideas such as inclusion or exclusion, acceptance or integration, preservation of identity or identity construction. When Henri calls Marta's

daughter *Marie*, it means that he sees her and treats her as a Canadian citizen; when the Ochoas named their first three babies after martyrs of the Salvadorean resistance, they wanted to suggest that they had never lost their identity, they kept on fighting to preserve it, they rejected assimilation, but the choice of a different name (*Brian*) for their fourth child suggests a possibility of change, as identity is not a stable construct but a constantly changing one, developing in time – so the new generations are becoming more Canadian that their parents. When Marta, on the other hand calls Henri, Enrique, she actually tries to erase the gap between them, she tries to get him closer to her, to make him part of her world.

Conclusion

In addition to giving the perfect representation of a multicultural society that in spite of its inherent pitfalls still encourages immigrants to "retain and foster their linguistic heritages and ethnic cultures instead of abandoning them" (Dyck 2009: 86), the characters of Stephen Henighan's novels can be easily subjected to an anthroponimical analysis meant to to emphasise the names' role in identity preservation and belonging. The choice of a certain name can signify different things, on the one hand cultural or identity preservation, on the other openness towards a new culture, but all in all, the names that make up a multicultural society are nothing but a vast panoply of identity stamps working together in an attempt to create and recreate, accommodate and re-accommodate their bearers' state of belonging.

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