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CULTURAL COGNITIVE DISSONANCE IN MIGRATION AND ETHNIC INTEGRATION

ABSTRACT: As they grow, all individuals acquire a cognitive-cultural heritage that enables them to integrate into complex cultural systems. The acquisition of knowledge, values and behaviours allows individuals to adapt and fit into the general social cognitive heritage. When members belonging to a particular cognitive-cultural heritage move to places where the host culture is diverse, there is a risk of clash. The outcome of these cognitive-cultural inconsistencies may give rise to internal or external conflict leading to divergent cultural behaviours vis-à-vis the dominant cognitive system. External conflicts stemming from cultural cognitive dissonance may even produce violent behavioural patterns, including so-called cultural crimes.

The search for a new cognitive heritage is a spontaneous attempt to restore personal wellbeing and social integration. Refusal to seek cognitive-cultural congruence within a new social value system consigns individuals to a condition of discomfort, instability and violence that may translate into behaviours defined as antisocial. Failure to achieve ethnic cultural integration is the outcome of a process of social and cultural incongruence known as cognitive dissonance.

KEY WORDS: *migration, integration, culture, identity.*

Cultural factors are becoming a key component in inter-ethnic social systems. In such systems, varying ethnicities and cultural backgrounds are interacting on an ever-increasing scale. The social system tends to homogenise this diversity through processes of integration, a lack of appropriate options and socio-integrative politics. Nevertheless, the understanding of certain criminal phenomena cannot, in this writer's opinion, be attributed solely to a pathological and/or social clinical psychology. Rather, the motives may be linked to cognitive cultural heritage found within their cultural sphere.

The question which we are therefore called upon to answer may be said to be related to the issue of certain differing, and on occasion even violent and criminal, patterns of behaviour which are the result of a cognitive-cultural incongruity between the original cultural heritage as compared to the new one.

In order to be able to analyse the above question, it becomes necessary to clarify and ground the hypothesis mentioned above regarding the theory of cognitive dissonance first disseminated in 1957 by Leon Festinger (1919-1990). An American cognitive psychologist, he was the one who first suggested the existence of an individual cognitive heritage, consisting of ideas, opinions, attitudes, knowledge and beliefs. This heritage, according to Festinger, is strengthened and fed by a socio-cultural system in which the subject is required to integrate himself until he reaches a consonance with his surroundings. The eventual disparity between one's words and one's actions creates a problematic situation which the subject attempts to avoid in order to alleviate the problems produced by this inability to synchronise and find consonance with the world around. This difficult situation is what is known as "cognitive dissonance". How can one bridge or mitigate this discomfort except by finding a way which allows one to eliminate this dissonance?

Festinger himself proposed two solutions: either a change of behaviour or a cognitive restructuring designed to help oneself adapt to a new surrounding cultural heritage. The conclusion of the hypotheses was that it is easy to understand the necessity on the part of the subject to re-organise, if not recondition, their knowledge, integrating it with the surrounding cognitive system. On a cognitive level, it is not possible to alter the surrounding system and so it is the subject who must adapt himself to the apparent characteristics of the new heritage.

The subject whose cognitive heritage differs from the contemporary surrounding heritage processes ideas, opinions and beliefs, for which s/he develops a strong conviction, and as a result of which s/he is convinced to disassociate him/herself from the previous set of beliefs which s/he comes to believe are mistaken or unjust.

The dissonance is expressed in several distinct phases:

- 1) The subject recognises the incongruity of his/her own views with those of his/her surroundings. Such recognition tends to produce clear behavioural changes.
- 2) The construction of a new cultural heritage, based on an introspective and cognitive personal journey, neither induced nor imposed by external stimulants.
- 3) The discomfort produced by the cognitive incongruence produces a physiological behavioural response.
- 4) The requirement to carry out the aforementioned behavioural adjustments puts the subject in a state of discomfort and suffering.

As a result of the above, the subject is brought to reduce his discomfort by taking paths that are unlikely to lead to a change in the new surroundings, but which are aimed at reaching cultural-cognitive understanding (through a change of ideas, opinions and attitudes) with the new surroundings.

The next step for the subject is to implement an introspective process of analysis, discussion, taking on the new arguments with the result of minimising the cognitive dissonance and maximising the integration of the dominant cultural cognitive system. It goes without saying that processes which entail cognitive reprogramming require a lengthy period of time.

This study derives its importance from the fact that if cognitive dissonance is untreated, it can lead the subject to carry out anti-social and/or violent behaviour.

It is no coincidence that subjects who do not engage in cognitive reprogramming tend to oppose the surrounding cultural cognitive heritage, tending to rationalise their existing behaviour, beliefs, opinions and attitudes. On occasion, the subject attempts to minimise their disconnect from the world around through use of alcohol, drugs and violent behaviour (physiological discomfort); sometimes imposing their own cultural cognitive identity, considering it superior to that surrounding them. On other occasions, mitigating factors and external circumstances which have led to enforced behavioural changes, which end up being perceived as justified and necessary, are asserted and lead to a reduction in the eventual cognitive dissonance.

Now we will attempt to apply this model to culturally affected behaviour:

I don't allow my children to go out because the surrounding society is immoral	Dissonance
I'm required to keep my family isolated in order to maintain my traditions which I believe to be better	External attribution

I firmly believe that, isolated, they will grow up in a way more in keeping with my religious beliefs	Activation/mitigation of dissonance
Even if I isolate my children from their surroundings, I know I am doing the best thing for them	Self-justification
To isolate them is the right thing to do	Reduction of dissonance (change of attitude)
I will no longer isolate them	Reduction of dissonance (change of behaviour)

Before proceeding with a process of reduction of cognitive dissonance (thereby convincing themselves that their actions are right, despite varying from previous dominant norms), the subject will attempt, through external stimulants, to assess whether to adapt their cognitive heritage. Alternatively, they may choose to maintain and reinforce their convictions that their actions were correct and necessary (change of attitude) with the consequential reduction in dissonance.

The subject knows that isolating their child is wrong, but believes it to be necessary for safeguarding morality and maintaining their beliefs. Therefore, their actions, despite being morally questionable, are considered right and proper, and are not seen as illegal and wrong.

The theory of cognitive dissonance can be applied to a study of culturally-motivated crimes; it fully satisfies and explains cognitive actions which, coming from traditions considered to be acceptable and justifiable, come to be seen as violent and deviating from the commonly-held views.

The process of mitigation of discomfort with the outside world can only succeed if the subject comes to accept the violent nature of his conduct; an interior process is characterised by criminogenic actions supported by a personal cultural heritage which

imposes safeguards on tradition and honour through violent and repressive means.

The lack of a politics of integration, acceptance and appreciation of cultural differences could potentially lead to subjects, proud and defensive of their cultural past, to protect what the surrounding society sees as obsolete, immoral and anachronistic. Nonetheless, the same subject believes said surrounding cultural heritage to be threatening and dangerous to his/her values and education and they come to see it as a challenge to be overcome.

New cultural norms can be seen as a discomfort by subjects loyal to their traditions. As a result of this, through a process of reducing and mitigating the external incongruities, they on occasion come to reinforce their conviction in their ability to safeguard traditions. This comes to the detriment of those to whom they can appear to be a threat, children and partner included.

SPOZNAJA KULTURNIH RAZLIKA KOD MIGRANATA I ETNIČKIH INTEGRACIJA

REZIME: Sa odrastanjem, svaki pojedinac stiče saznanja koja mu omogućavaju da se integriše u složene kulturne sisteme. Sticanje znanja, vrednosti i ponašanja omogućava pojedincu da se prilagodi i uklopi u opšte društvene kulturne tekovine. Kada pripadnici određene kulturne baštine migriraju u sredine sa drugačijom kulturom koja se razlikuje od njihove, postoji rizik od sukoba. Ishod susreta različitog kognitivno-kulturnog nasleđa može dovesti do unutrašnjih ili spoljašnjih sukoba, kao i do divergentnog ponašanja pojedinca. Spoljni sukobi koji proizilaze iz kulturne kognitivne disonance čak mogu proizvesti nasilne obrasce ponašanja, uključujući tu i tzv. „kulturne zločine“.

Potruga za novim saznanjima i prihvatanje novog kulturnog nasleđa neophodni su svakom migrantu za njegovu ličnu dobrobit i

socijalnu integraciju. Odbijanje da se pronađu kognitivno-kulturne podudarnosti u novom društvenom sistemu vrednosti dovodi pojedince u stanje neprijatnosti, nestabilnosti i nasilja – koje se može definisati kao asocijalno.

KLJUČNE REČI: *migracije, integracije, kultura, identitet.*