# THE HARBOUR AS A MULTICULTURAL CROSSROAD IN RADU TUDORAN'S AND JEAN BART'S WRITINGS

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**Abstract**

The harbours are fascinating places. Their colourful world, their bustle, and their ethnic mixture create the image of one of a kind universe. They are the meeting place of cultures and values, as one can read in Radu Tudoran's *Un port la răsărit* and Jean Bart's *Europolis*. The former novel takes place on the shore of Limanu Lake in Basarabia, and the latter is placed in Sulina. They both share the multicultural and multi-ethnic approach as the young engineer telling the story faces the crossroad between the Western world that ends at the Limanu shore and the Eastern Slavic world that starts there. In Jean Bart's novel, Sulina seems more cohesive, as the Greeks, who are in the centre of the story, master the town gathering together the other communities. Still, the feeling of a crossroad persists, as the harbour is the place where boats come and leave in a way that suggests that people come and leave. There are some characteristics that feature the harbours' communities: a state of emptiness combined with bustle, the stereotypes that describe the minorities and the destinies that end tragically in these communities where they can't find their space: Nadia dies tragically, leaving her lover in deep mourning, Evantia also ends her life, leaving an orphan daughter. The crossroad shapes their destinies, and stimulates chaos and confusion.

**Keywords**: harbour, multi-ethnic, stereotype, destiny

## Introduction

"Sulina, dropped into archaeology, will of course be a new race problem, for which thousands of volumes will be lined up on library shelves" [1], concludes the narrator of *Europolis*, predicting the death of the harbour and the most important feature of the place: the multiculturalism. And this could be the main characteristic of the harbour.

Unlike the crossroads, the harbours do not have a really bad name in Romanian literature. At first sight, their bustle, their vitality is an image of life itself. But behind this appearance, there are tensions and conflicts, broken destinies, like Evantia's, in Jean Bart's novel, *Europolis*, or like the engineer's in Radu Tudoran's *Un port la răsărit*. The shared feature of

the novels is the multicultural world as an image of the world itself with preconceptions and stereotypes but also with tensions and conflict control strategies. But even though the two harbours look the same, there are subtle differences between them. In the former, although the communities seem to be mostly remote, there are moments of connection and events that entail concurrence. The Sulina community is more intercultural, while the Limanu community is not. All the events that are meant to create cohesion fail to do it. In this place, the communities do not mingle, they live separately, therefore the question is what makes the two novels so different, although the time and place of the plot are the same and the inhabitants are similar.

## Methodology

This paper is a comparative reading of the two novels, using the lens of multiculturalism and interculturalism theory. Although the studies of multiculturalism and interculturalism and their debate have political implication, the harbours and their super-diversity shape a complex world that adds profound meanings to humans through the literary approach.

## Results and discussion

The debate on multiculturalism and interculturalism is not new, although the concept appeared around 1960, defining a world where each cultural, ethnic, and religious community could preserve its values and identities. As a political phenomenon, it implies the presence of two or more cultures in the same living space, "centred on the recognition of minority rights and cultural difference"[2], it is associated with „people who hold 'different' habits, customs, traditions, languages and/or religions live alongside each other in the same social space, willing to maintain relevant aspects of their own difference and to have it publicly recognized" [3], enhancing the "need to provide the same degree of respect, recognition, and accommodation to the identities and practices of ethnocultural minority groups" [4]. In other words, multiculturalism deals with concepts like recognition, equality, freedom from domination and justice. Thomas Seally [5] underlines that "what multiculturalism is about is citizenship" and the keywords of multiculturalism are identity, difference, civil rights, recognition. It presupposes minorities' demand for recognition, the person's understanding of who he/she is, and the conception of oneself as a human being, dealing also with misrecognition. He also establishes the characteristics of the concept, like contact zones, civil inattention, contact and power, and sensorial contact, that appear in everyday multiculturalism. Multiculturalism challenges collective/group identities, race/ethnicity, identity policies, and the "limits of the national space" [2].

Even if it meant a generous integration of minorities into a multinational aggregate, multiculturalism had to face a lot of criticism. It was said about it that it "created 'parallel lives'" [5], that multiculturalism as politics failed in the waves of the immigrant population [6], that it is a zombie concept [5], that became "disconnected from how diversity is lived and is therefore lagging behind contemporary social reality" [5], that it is "obsessed with cultural difference, thereby disregarding the importance of common values" [4]. Having a

different meaning in Europe as against Canada, multiculturalism forced the minorities to "retreat into ghettos", refusing to accept "the political ethic of liberal democracy itself" [7]. The Canadian Anglophone communities tend to understand interculturalism as a sub-species of multiculturalism, while the Francophone communities consider it a better solution.

In order to upgrade the minorities, identity politics, the recognition of difference, as well as enhance a new humanism, the concept of interculturalism engages other key concepts designed to enhance community cohesion and recognition. It was said that multiculturalism promoted tolerance, but not equality, social indifference, but not dialogue.

Interculturalism was defined as a political movement that promotes cross-cultural dialogue, shared community values, and interaction between groups of people with different values, ethnicity, religion, and so on. In this regard, "the intercultural idea aims to address a number of critical questions about how people relate to one another, and how these interactions are framed, shaped and enacted in everyday situations" [8]. Underlining the intercultural problems like racism, ethnicity, migration, minority and civil rights, diversity, cultures, acculturation, social cohesion, nationalism and transnationalism, dialogue, integration, and interculturalism is the European reaction to the failed multiculturalism, promoting "mutual cultural exchange with an emphasis on social cohesion and shared values" [8]. It "affirms cultural diversity and emphasizes communication and relation-building between different cultural, ethnic, and religious groups" [9].

According to scholars, there is an important difference between "everyday multiculturalism" [8], and super-diversity [5], often distinct from multicultural or intercultural policies. The super-diversity can be recognized by several criteria: "multi-ethnic arenas of interaction", "hypersegregation", "multi-layered experience' within unequal power structures and social locations", "differential rights and modes of incorporation among ethnic groups", "coexistence of multiple historical streams and the ways individuals in complex settings relate to each other from different vantage points" [9], while the everyday multiculturalism is connected to "lived experience of diversity in specific situations and spaces of encounter"[10]. Everyday multiculturalism deals with themes like "habitatus and cultural capital", "embodiment, reciprocity, gift exchange, and social solidarity", "humour", "everyday disjunctures and affinities", "cultural hybridities and 'togetherness-in-difference'", "everyday racism and tensions", "civility and incivility", "material culture and consumption" and the relations of power connected to them [11]. All these ideas deal with concepts of tolerance, identity, otherness, empathy, cosmopolitism, recognition of each other, civil rights, and historical coexistence in a shared space.

Two novels, *Europolis* by Jean Bart and *Un port la răsărit* explore multicultural shared spaces, two harbours, Sulina and Cetatea Albă. According to the 2011 census [12], Sulina was inhabited by a super-diverse population composed of Romanians, Lipovan, Greeks, Ukrainians, and others, but in the 19th century the structure of the population was different, the Greeks were the majority, followed by Ottomans, Russians, but also Austrians, Englishmen, Italians, Turks, and Tatars. Cetatea Albă was also multicultural: it was inhabited by Romanians, Russians, Hebrews, Germans, Ukrainians, and others. Both texts show this

super-diversity, their world is a multicultural one, there are shared spaces, events designated for social cohesion, and intertwined destinies. Cetatea Albă's population structure in the interwar time, when the novel is set, is 22% Romanians, 35-36% Russian-Ruthenian. There were also Hebrews, Germans, Bulgarians, and Turks [13].

ln *Europolis*, the central community is the Greek one: they have schools, hospitals, hotels, ships, and shops, and they rule their community through democratic procedures. The plot is built around Stamati Marulis's family, who receive a letter from Nicola Marulis, Stamati's estranged brother, notifying them that he returns from America. Everybody waits for the American, hoping to benefit from his fortune, but Nicola is poor and he comes with his black daughter Evantia. At first, everyone wants to be Nicola's friend, he is even accepted in institutions or groups that nobody from the community is, like the European Commission of the Danube. When the people find out that he has no money and that he is a former convicted man, he has to move to a poor suburb, unable to find a job. Evantia finds herself in a difficult situation, trying different jobs, being rejected by the community, having a baby, and finally dying.

The book was called "the novel of a Romanian harbour" [14], which "is strangely mixing one of the most unexpected swarming of nations and continents: Romanian and Levatines, Lipovans and Western" [15]. Ovidiu Papadima remarks the "medley cosmopolitanism" [15], Cosmin Ciotloș notices "the ethnic multicultural bustle, that can be detected in the Greek, Romanian, Russian, French, English, Italian linguistic amalgam" [16], "a fresco of the cosmopolitan life" [17], but "the author transgresses the particular targeting the archetype" [17]. This "nice novel of marine environments" [18] conceals an imago mundus, because the harbour has its order, the Greek community in the centre, as a metaphor for the civilized world. Pompiliu Constantinescu notices that "the exoticism in *Europolis* is only environmental, fatal to active ports that all have a cosmopolitan appearance" [19], which leads to an "image of the aboriginal cosmopolitanism" [20]. All the scholars notice the harbour life, with fishermen and smugglers, with a heterogeneous population, hidden dissatisfaction, and broken destinies. There is no difference from the small province places, but still, the harbour preserves its magic of remote worlds and stories meeting in the same place. One of them is the tragic love story in the centre of the novel, connected to the otherness of Evantia, the little black girl, as well as to the "uncle from America" myth. Both of them raise the issue of identity, otherness, and multiculturalism, in a novel that "brings to literature an unknown corner of the country, the Delta's world, the Romanian seaside and Dobrogea's world" [21].

In *Un port la răsărit*, the main motif is the stranger that reaches the harbour. Cetatea Albă is not named in the text, but one can understand that it is about this space. An engineer arrives in the place, he is posted to install an electric generator at the electric plant. He makes friends with Commander Maximov, who teaches him to sail, encouraging him to sail to the sea. He meets a young girl with whom he falls in love. The couple sail on Limanu Lake, take part in community events and try to help Nadia's brother whose bones are fragile and need surgery. But when the engineer decides to leave for Sulina, Nadia comes to him, they visit Bugaz, but on the second attempt to sail to Bugaz, they have to face a storm during which Nadia dies.

Although he wants to leave the place, the engineer returns to Cetatea Albă feeling guilty for losing the love of his life. The novel was described by Alex Ștefănescu [22] as a story of "the absorption of a Romanian by the Slavic world", "a history of waiting and a history of voluptuous disappearance in another time". The image of the white refugee" [23], Commander Maximov, whose family was massacred by the communists during the Sevastopol civil war was also underlined. It was considered an anti-communist novel, an "odyssey of the Bessarabian coast of the Black Sea" [24]. The novelist frames a "hallucinatory atmosphere, projecting in the contact space of our soul with the Slavic world, a strong erotic obsession" [25], where the people are "concerned with living" [26], in a nostalgic place, where nothing happens.

Beyond the two tragedies that give a slightly melodramatic touch to the stories, Evantia and Nadia's deaths, the novels explore two harbour communities, their dynamic life and their stories. Sulina is a mosaic of races, where a super-diversity can be found: all nations, all kinds, and all languages. "A miniature Europe" underlines the narrator. The harbour is inhabited by Greeks (Marulis family, Logaridis, Ahile, Spiru), Romanians (captain Deliu, Neagu, doctor Tomiță), Russians (Natașa and her pilot husband), Italians (engineer Marini), Polish (Lola, the wife of a judge), Hebrews (madame Simon), Englishmen and Frenchmen from the European Commission of Danube.

Cetatea Albă is also a multicultural place: it is inhabited by Russians (the visiting girls, Nagavișka), Romanians (the army officers), Polish (Ronsky), Turks (Nail), Ukrainians (Ifim Mihailuc), Germans (Walter). "All the races mingled here, all fruits crisscrossed, and bore fruit" [27]. Unlike Sulina, this harbour is charged with tensions, incidents take place, like the one in which Lieutenant Ilinca is killed.

The "super-diversity" leads to a form of "everyday multiculturalism" in both harbours. The people live together for a long time, they have their well-established role in the society. In *Europolis* all innkeepers are Greeks. Stamati Marulis has a coffee shop in the harbour, a Greek has also a pub, "Peter, the Grics", Pericle Papadachi owns "Engliterra". In *Un port la răsărit*, the innkeepers and pub owners are all Russians: Grișa owns the hotel where the engineer first lives, Pavel also owns a pub. The tailors and the watchmakers are Germans, like Freiberg or Klentzer, the pawn-brokers and the photographers are Hebrews, the icon painters are Romanian (Matei). Other businesses have diverse owners: the ship owners are Greek (Spiru Karaianis), Romanians, French, Americans, as well as the employees are, in *Europolis*. In *Un port la răsărit*, ship owners are Russians (Maximov), Romanians, Americans. The shopkeepers and the merchants are also of different nations, and the transporters, are the same. Both novels seem to show a well-established society, in which inside-community jobs and businesses are assigned only to some nations, while outside jobs and businesses are more democratically assigned to everyone. The people live separate professional and commercial lives, businesses don't mingle. Each of them has its own path and place in the community. But this hypersegregation only addresses the work and business, because, in many ways and moments, the communities meet and interfere.

The inhabitants of the harbour try to gather together, without discrimination. They organize social events like parties, dances, festivals. In *Europolis*, the ball of the Romanian Navy is an event that brings together all the people disregarding ethnicity, business, or nation. As it is written, "qualities of attention and tact were required to reconcile everyone, because according to an old democratic tradition, the agents of the trading houses in the port had to be invited, regardless of nationality or religion" [1]. But the people don't feel it like a social event: they notice the uncanny mixture of race, types, idioms, social conditions. They also notice how authorities, showing a fake smile, shake hands with adventurers and swindlers who once were boatmen and became millionaires. What disturbs the observer is not that much the mixture of minorities or races, but the blend of moral values, therefore the ball shows the nature of the place – a Levant slum.

For the Saint Mary feast in *Un port la răsărit*, the people prepare thoroughly: Ifim cleans the boat, the ladies buy dresses from abroad, the men buy beverages because the pubs are closed, and the authorities organize contests. During the ceremony, the streets seem deserted, the shops are closed, so the people try to find a place on the crowded shore. The narrator notices that the crowd tends to blend into a big "serpent" – the town. All destinies, all people, and all businesses are blended together into this ceremonial serpent reminding of the mythical Ouroboros that eats its tail. And it really does: an important intercultural moment is the Prefecture ball, where the people gather together not to socialize, but to drink. What really unites the people in this Slavic world is the beverage. When the young engineer arrives at the plant, Ronsky offers him a drink. The engineer refuses at first, but slowly he adapts to this habit, becoming a sort of friend with Ronsky so that when the Polish is about to die, he calls the engineer as someone would call an old friend. Drinking is the main concern of the citizens. The officers drink, and the locals drink too. The characters underline the quality of the beverage, searching for the best wine. The beverage reunites the Romanians with Russians and Polish, the free love does not recognize the boundaries. Apart from politics, the people feel free and equal. They are equal and together in their loneliness, sadness, and emptiness of the soul.

The authorities organize feasts and celebrations on special holidays. Still, none of these parties, balls, feasts, or ceremonies do achieve their goal, as the people do not feel that the events are designed for unity. In the former novel, the party looks more like a business event, while the latter, although starts with a religious ceremony and reunites all the place's authorities, enhances tensions and conflicts, the drink, and the gossip. The events do not contribute to the construction of a common culture.

On the other hand, everyday multiculturalism has its special forms of enhancing unity. The most usual of them are the common places where people meet. Among these, there are the pubs. In Stamati Marulis coffee shop people come and talk about the community issues. They have their own tables, the captains stay at one, the diplomats at another. Marulis's pub is a contact place. Not all pubs are the same: there are cheap pubs where poor people go, and there is "Engliterra" where the elite has fun. Segregation is not about ethnicity, race, religion, or values, but about social conditions and money. The pubs in *Un port la răsărit* have the same meaning as contact places. The young people go on the other shore of Limanu,

regardless of their ethnicity or nation, in the town restaurants the engineer meets locals, officers, girls, Russian, Romanian, and so on. Other contact places are workspaces, like the docks in Jean Bart's novel, Nicu Politicu's barber's shop, or the plant in Radu Tudoran's.

But the real intercultural encounters are hybrid marriages: in *Europolis*, a friend of Penelope, Marulis's wife is married to a Russian pilot, Nicola Marulis himself married to an indigenous woman and had Evantia, Pericle Papadachi is married to a Polish woman, the Romanian Tudorache has a Greek wife. In *Un port la răsărit*, family relationships are more complex. There are several mixed marriages, like Păuca, the bookkeeper and his Armenian wife, Agopian and his Georgian wife, and the captain of the harbour and his Greek wife, Mira. There are other forms of kinship relationships, like the one in which Leibu, Nagavișka's son, is christened by a Hebrew godfather,

Besides the feasts, common places, and mixed families, the people share the same work and life values, so they help each other. Doctor Tomiță helps Evantia when her father is wounded, Seceleanu helps Nicola face a mutiny of the harbour workers. Friendships are also forms of cultural dialogue, such as the one between the engineer and commander Maximov who teaches him to sail and offers the "Miladul" ship. The people respect the other religion. In *Un port la răsărit*, Ronsky visits all the cemeteries: evangelical, orthodox, Armenian, and Hebrew. The people have mixed origins: Nagavișka's ancestors are a mystery: they could be Hebrews, Armenian, Greek, or other, as the narrator underlines. At Ronsky's funeral, his wife Tamara wails her husband in three languages: in Russian, her idiom, in Romanian, so the people could understand, and in Polish, Ronsky's language.

The intercultural dialogue does not take place during the events organized by the authorities, even if the people gather there. They do not mingle there. But the pubs, the workplaces, mixed marriages, friendships, and love relationships, all contribute to the intercultural dialogue, building shared values, shared rituals, and customs. It suggests that neither multiculturalism nor interculturalism can be imposed by the authorities, top-down, therefore, people should be educated about tolerance, inclusion, minority rights, and cultural dialogue. The spaces where there is a historical cohabitation shape the cultural dialogue, building new hybrid cultures, with shared values and new rituals and customs.

Nevertheless, there are also forms of exclusion. Evantia is never welcomed in Sulina. Her black skin, her habits, her otherness create fear, even if she is par excellence a figure of interculturalism, "the incarnation of interbreeding, assimilation, the achievement of interculturality" [28]. She is a victim of rejection from the beginning. Even if the people accept her father at first, when they believe he is rich, the girl is not. The women envy her for her beauty, the men look at her with lust, therefore she is not a victim of misrecognition, but one of individualistic, particularly erotic passions. After Logaridis finds out that Nicola is poor, she hardly finds jobs. She tries to get one at Spiru Karaianis, but the man asks her to be nice to him, and the young woman feels offended. Tomiță, the doctor, tries to help her by giving her a job as an orderly. She is good with this work because she was taught in a catholic school, but the people reject her, refuse to eat when she gives them food and gossip about her. Then she tries to be a nanny in Marini's house, but she is banished by the man's

wife. After her father's death, she gets a job at "Engliterra", as a dancer. Everybody likes her, but she is pregnant with Deliu's child and, when Jak the pub's piano player, her protector, dies, she gets sick and ends up in the hospital. Evantia's destiny is tragic. Her mother died when she was very young. She left her homeland for an unknown country and community. She is naïve so she misses Neagu, whom she is in love with. She barely speaks the language of the country. For the people of Sulina, she is the unknown they reject, because the population tends to uncertainty avoidance, in Hofstede's terms.

Her father, Nicola has the same destiny. He is not the rich American uncle. He is a convicted murderer who served in prison for his mistake. After a long life in French Guyana, he returns to his country, but people look at him like he is an immigrant. As long as they think he has money, everybody wants to make business with him, but when they find out that he has nothing, they reject him, denying his right to work (the man can't find any job, so he has to smuggle), the right to medical care (as he was shout at, therefore he cannot go to the hospital), the right to a living place (when they find out about the American's poverty, his family members chase him away). His Greek relatives feel betrayed in their expectations of Nicola's wealth, the porters reject him because he is able to steal their jobs. It is the typical condition of the immigrant, whose rights are not recognised. Poor Nicola is not a human being anymore for the community he arrives in. People start avoiding him. Unlike Evantia's situation, where fear motivates people's attitudes, Nicola's destiny is shaped by the lack of shared values with the community. Marulis and the others render this lack of shared values a betrayal. His identity is constructed by the community [29], using stereotypes: Nicola comes from America, and the Americans are rich, so Nicola must be rich.

The reality is often perceived through stereotypes in *Un port la răsărit* as well: the Russians do not drink much, but often, informs Ronsky, the English get drunk, but the Romanians throw parties. Nail, the Turk, calls Ifim "a lazy Russian", and Ifim gossips about the Turk as being dirty. Drinking doesn't disturb anybody, but laziness does, so Ifim gets angry at the word. Apart from that the image of the drunk Russian is one of the most widespread stereotypes in the book. Some characters speak about themselves in stereotypes: Ronsky portrays himself as a haughty Polish.

There is another form of rejection in Europolis: the locals are not accepted by the foreign authorities, they are not invited to their events, and even in pubs they stay aside. French and English authorities do not participate in local ceremonies and parties. They do not feel like being a part of the community. Even if they would like to be invited on the Danube Commission yacht, the locals do not mingle with Western citizens. They do not perceive the English, Austrian, and French as uncanny, the way that they look at Nicola, but with some respect generated by power distance. In this regard there is a symbolic border between locals and foreign authorities: close to the Danube European Commission, there are two flags: the Romanian flag on one side, and the Danube European Commission's flag on the other side. The locals comment on the two flags as stressing a border, between the local community and the international community, represented by the European Commission. The border in *Un port la răsărit* is alleged by Ronsky: he notices that the young engineer comes from the Latin

world, serene and smiling even if restless, but the place he arrives is part of the Slavic world, gloomy even when rejoicing.

Rejection takes violent turns sometimes. In *Un port la răsărit*, Lieutenant Ilinca is killed during the Saint Mary feast, as a reaction of the Russian population to the Romanian army. It is a national and political rejection in an environment rather tolerant and multicultural. It is about the way people understand authority and otherness in the context of borders changing. As the novel is the story of an interwar harbour, the tensions between the Romanian and Russian population increase, materializing in bizarre incidents like the one of Lieutenant Ilinca. Even so, the life of the harbour's inhabitants is slow, the repressed tensions seldom erupt, and the people have nothing to do but drink. Evantia's and Nicola's death is somehow a violent turn of the community's rejection: when they find out that Nicola is a convicted murderer and a poor American, they do not let him work or take care of him and his daughter. Furthermore, the community isolates Stamati's brother to the outskirts of the harbour, in a poor slum, the only one that the 'American' can afford. The destiny that the community reserves for his girl is a peripheral one, from which she can't get out.

## Conclusion

Both novels explore the harbour life, with tragic destinies, with people that come and leave, with parties and events. The harbours are multicultural spaces par excellence. The people living in these places are used to tolerating otherness, to living their life alongside different people. Intercultural dialogue is built in the context of everyday multiculturalism. Even if different forms of rejection and fear can occur, the harbours are intercultural contact spaces. The rejection is the exception, not the rule in harbours, therefore their culture is protean: it can change easily and the people adapt. Only radical otherness, like Evantia's, can make them fearful and socially inattentive. On the other hand, even in a dynamic intercultural space, stereotypes can generate confusion. It is the case of Nicola, who is thought to be very rich, but the identity of the American – as he is called – is not the one that the community gives him, leading to a tragic destiny. *Europolis* could be perceived as a story of mistaken identity and fear of otherness in an intercultural environment because the tragic end of Nicola and Evantia is connected to rejection and misunderstanding. In contrast to *Europolis*, Nadia's tragic destiny in *Un port la răsărit* is not related to rejection, and neither is the young engineer's. On the contrary, he is welcome in the space, even, as Alex Ștefănescu mentions, absorbed in the Slavic world. But the people who live in the harbour multicultural environment hide suppressed tensions that sometimes erupt.

The super-diversity leads to everyday multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue, but it comes from the people's intercultural experience, from the dynamic history of the spaces, and even from the specific features of the harbours, as places that encourage differences, tolerate otherness, love to chat into common spaces, have a protean value system. The "interactions and experiences in everyday life are likely to cut across group boundaries" [30], especially in the harbours, where people come and go, the locals are subject to fast-changing environment as well as a value system that is constantly renewed. This is why literary harbours that shape an intercultural world could function as an image of a changing world.

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