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## Globalization – An Anthropological Approach

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### Abstract

My paper comprises an approach of globalization using some main concepts and perspectives of cultural anthropology, aiming at a clearer description of the phenomenon and its current trends. Concerning this topic, we can find a vast bibliography available to us in Romania which reflects three different perspectives on it: a positive and promoting one; a negative, rejecting one; and a neutral, merely informative one. None of these seemed to me profound and wide enough to offer explanations, descriptions, interpretations, argumentations, in order to objectively help the reader understand globalization, as it is increasingly affecting each of us nowadays.

In my view, cultural anthropology is the science that has the most appropriate theoretical and methodological background to contribute to the clarification of this phenomenon; among other scientific discourses on this topic (*e. g.* the economic, political, geo-strategic ones) its own should be considered. Therefore, I intend to resume the main opinions on this topic formulated by some Romanian and foreign researchers, and eventually to articulate one of my own.

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### 1. Globalization and the “indigenization” of its descriptions

In the last decades, globalization raised an increasing interest in many of our contemporary culture areas, from economics and politics to ethics and anthropology, and the opinions regarding this major phenomenon tend not to a unified vision. On the contrary, they tend to be as diverse and specific as the communities and countries which the thinkers belong to are. However, as I see it, three different categories of globalization approaches could be

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identified: a – the neutral, descriptive one; b – the prescriptive, positive one; c – the prescriptive, negative one. I'd give some examples of each:

a) Thus, here is a dictionary definition of globalization: „the rising and accelerated operation of economic and cultural nets, at a global level and on a global basis.” (O’Sullivan *et al.*, 2001, 156);

b) George Soros described it more specific, showing us a predictable path, from his point of view: „the free capital movement followed by dominance of global financial markets, and of multinational companies over the national economies” (Soros, 2002, 15); also, the American Professor Michael Mandelbaum sees globalization’s „upward path” as already belonging to today’s integrated world economy. He compares this economy with a powerful modern vehicle carrying, in one way or another, seven billion passengers (Mandelbaum, 2014, pp. 176-177); another example of a positive evaluation is the book of German authors Oskar Lafontaine and Christa Müller, who were optimistically arguing before the current crisis that globalization is not a disaster, that it offers to all countries more chances than risks, and they ended up with the exclamation: “don’t be afraid of globalization!” (Lafontaine & Müller, 1990, 325);

c) On the other side, their compatriots, journalists Hans-Peter Martin and Harald Schumann were worrying about many issues, among them being the articulation of two prominent future paths: the democratic one and the totalitarian one, of which we’ll all have to choose (Martin & Schumann, 1999, 391). Other French thinkers seem to worry about the big number of the excluded from the big globalized common house (Cordellier *et al.*, 2001, 81). Moreover, the Romanian scholar Adrian Dinu Rachieru skeptically remarked in our globalizing present „the nihilistic temptation” (Rachieru, 2003, 110).

These are but a few possible examples of the globalization approaches' diversity. My opinion is that their trend will be toward further multiplying and diversification, as more and more specialists from all over the world deal with it. Given this context, I believe the voices of anthropologists should be considered too, and I see two reasons for this: first, because they seem to be more coherent as regards the phenomenon of globalization, due to their scientific approach on different interrelated cultures in our common world; second, because the chances to clarify perceptions and make a distinction between objective descriptive aspects of the phenomenon and the subjective prescriptive ones will increase.

## 2. Globalization and the anthropological awareness

The initial image of a “global village” (McLuhan, 2011, 138) has been a fascinating mental pattern for all those living in the sixty’s who expected from the increased communication and interdependency among nations a boost of solidarity. The *familiarity* which a village provides was expected to exponentially spread through a world more and more connected, preserving and making different identities known to one another. This familiarity of so many cultural identities – in other words, this emerging multiculturalism – was supposed to be the origin of a global cooperation based on mutual respect and common ground values, such as democracy, prosperity, or the three famous “liberté, égalité, fraternité”. My guess is that McLuhan’s expression wouldn’t be so famous if he had been chosen for the new emerging world the image of a global metropolis, or a global state, or a global Westernization. All these are cold expanding trends, exporting too much and too far away some smaller, historical, or imperfect structures in economy, politics and culture. I share here Ralph Linton’s anthropological meaning of *culture* as “the configuration of learned behaviors and of their results, the components of which are shared and transmitted by the members of a given society.” (Linton, 1968, 72)

So, although nowadays the tendency of decreasing the role of states and of their national borders is obvious in international politics (Beck, 2003, 13), this would have been unconceivable 50 or 40 years ago. In spite of this, there has been an anthropologist who predicted, more as a result of a strange historical analysis<sup>1</sup>, the decadence of national states. Thus, the American researcher Leslie White wrote: “the cultures of the modern world are locked in by the cultural systems of sovereign states, and until and unless they can be «unlocked» – emancipated from the

<sup>1</sup> I have approached his analysis in my article “Cultural Anthropology between Evolutionism and Hermeneutics”, in *Spiru Haret University Journal. Philosophy Studies*, 11/2009, 29-38, ISSN: 1454-9506.

sacred bonds of national sovereignty – the prospects for the future of civilization are rather grim.” (White, 1976, 179)

In the meantime, a European specialist in political anthropology such as the French Georges Balandier was writing in 1967 about our world’s increasing communication and technology in terms of simple *modernity*, seeing it as a “self-aculturating”, mere objective process. (Balandier, 1998, 19)

Thirty years later, Marc Abélès and Henry-Pierre Jeudy were discussing the goal of political anthropology to study the effects of globalization (in French, “mondialization”) on the institutions and organizations governing economy and society (such as the new transnational European Union). The novelty of the situation was given by the fact that alterity is no longer remote, albeit connected or known to other cultures. Alterity, in the form of different cultural identities, tend to mingle nowadays, to interact to one another, or to spread and influence a certain culture, usually a Western one. So, when confronted with the phenomenon of interaction of different identities, languages and administrative traditions in common political structures, the anthropologist has to study the effects of the change in the scale of values, letting aside the territorial criteria. “The transnationalism isn’t only a characteristic of contemporary capitalism, but it is also conditioning the power relations and the cultural referents.” (Abélès & Jeudy, 1997, 18-19)

The American anthropologist Clifford Geertz brings at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> Century his critical point of view over an international situation which lacked the claimed consensus on fundamental notions such as shared values, conceptions and feelings. On the contrary, the author sees dispersion, disassembly, faults and fissures in all the transnational landscape: “Whatever it is that defines identity in borderless capitalism and the global village it is not deep-going agreements on deep-going matters, but something more like the recurrence of familiar divisions, persisting arguments, standing threats, the notion that whatever else may happen, the order of difference must be somehow maintained.” (Geertz, 2000, 250)

Geertz launches a worrying conclusion: in our globalized world, we have reached the point in which we don’t know how to handle these new, fast changing realities, on the background of old problems, conflicts and discriminations. His opinion seems to imply that we lack a consciousness of our times, maybe a collective selfhood, solidarity and understanding for all the complex phenomena we are witnessing nowadays. The old failures and prejudices seem to revive and contaminate the others, as if the negative aspects were more powerful than the positive ones, and as if differences were more decisive than resemblances and common ground.

“A scramble of differences in a field of connections presents us with a situation in which the frames of pride and those of hatred, culture fairs and ethnic cleansing, *survivance* and killing fields, sit side by side and pass with frightening ease from the one to the other. Political theories that both admit to this condition and have the will to confront it, to expose and interrogate the order of difference, rather than perfecting classroom visions of Hobbesian war or Kantian concord, only barely exist. Much depends upon their growth and development: you can’t guide what you can’t understand.” (Geertz, 2000, 250)

If we are to somehow name this vast change and intricate interdependence in our contemporary world – says Geertz –, then we will have either the name of “global village”, or the name that World Bank suggested: “borderless capitalism”. And the author’s irony continues, trying to imagine a fusion of the two: “But as it has neither solidarity, nor tradition, neither edge, nor focus, and lacks all wholeness, it is a poor kind of village. And as it is accompanied less by the loosening and reduction of cultural demarcations than by their reworking and multiplication, and, as I have pointed out above, often enough their intensification, it is hardly borderless.” (Geertz, 2000, 247)

### 3. Acculturation and the crisis of values

The anthropological meaning of *modernization* refer to the process of cultural, social and economic change whereby developing societies acquire some of the characteristics of the developed ones – that are the Western societies. (Haviland, 1990, 429) So we can think of globalization as having this objective trend: a sort of Westernization of the world, due to the higher development level of the western states as regards not only economy, but society and culture as well.

The Romanian researcher Mona Mamulea sees globalization as a type of *acculturation*. The meaning of this anthropological concept is the phenomenon of changing cultural patterns as a result of direct profound contact

between groups belonging to different cultures; the changes may occur only in one of the groups, or in both. (Mamulea, 2007, 106, 119-123, 135) Mamulea draws our attention on the fact that all nations have historical identities; in other words, they have memory. And the possible reaction of nations and of their cultures toward a historical uniformity is the battle for their *survivance*. (Mamulea, 2007, 117)

The American scholar William Haviland has an important remark concerning acculturation: “it always involves an element of force, either directly, as in the case of conquest, or indirectly, as in the implicit or explicit threat that force will be used if people refuse to make the changes that those in the other group expect them to make.” (Mamulea, 2007, 418)

So in the case of acculturation, one of the cultures is *dominant*, and the other (or the others) is (are) *submissive*. And furthermore, we shall observe that this phenomenon could be *positive or negative*, depending on the sort of cultural change that is being induced; there is a big difference between the acculturation whereby the Roman Empire imposed slavery upon the occupied groups belonging to other cultures, and the good modernist influence that the 1848 Revolution and its spiritual movement have had on the European retrograde pre-industrialized cultures.

In this context, it appears more clearly that the objective process described by Karl Marx and others as the “universalization of history” (*apud* Borțun, 2012, 24) is only one aspect of the complex phenomenon of globalization. But its forms of manifestation, its strategies, its ideologies are but subjective aspects which can lead the world to various directions, positive or negative. One thing is certain: that this acculturative process of globalization has its dominant cultural pole in the developed Western democracies, and the rest of the states and nations will have to submit to the western values, norms, perspectives, ideologies etc.

But, given these general conditions, one could deduce that, in order to obtain the expected cultural change in all domains (economic, social, political, environmental etc.), the dominant culture will show a certain amount of coercion; that, having accomplished the process of unifying all the transnational structures, institutions and organizations, its big power will end up in using force over any recalcitrant state, or former state. This isn't a very attractive perspective at all, but, based on the theoretical data provided by anthropology, it is a plausible scenario. Maybe this is the reason why the sceptical voices rise in the European Union today. For instance, the journalist François Lenglet, referring to the actual form of the phenomenon, wrote recently a book the title of which sounds, with a sort of Fukuyama echo, *The End of Globalization* (Lenglet, 2013); the French author explains it by the emergence of actual crisis and the persistence of old problems which globalization should have been solve for good, such as: the increasing tension between the rising connectivity of our world and the rising insecurity of our lives; the contradiction between the financial uniformity or simplification and the increasing debts of states, with the risk of losing territories in addition to that; the tension between liberty and protection; the crisis of national values that have been promoted and assumed for the last two centuries. (Lenglet, 2013, 245-250)

At present, the economic, financial and political issues seem to draw all the attention of the European institutions. They are the main subject of debates. But many European citizens resent the lack of responsibility, of ethical or democratic preoccupation at a transnational level. It is the case of many countries being in transition from a communist regime to democracy. It is the case of Romania, as well. As the Law specialist Stephen Young said, such countries haven't renew their set of values, but are dealing with a crisis of values and a “nihilist chaos”. (Young, 2009, 13) And the economic reality shows that the global markets have less to do with traditions and values. So, Young promote the solution of recovering old sound values, among which the religious ones are very useful in order to educate responsible citizens. (Young, 2009, 13)

A lucid mind of our epoch has launched a possible solution. The French philosopher Gabriel Marcel was claiming inside democracy – as being the best political regime, yet so imperfect – the existence of a “moral aristocracy” giving us a direction. (Marcel, 1996, 160) As I believe, without such a pattern of moral thinking, without assuming values like liberty and equality of chances, without debating over public interest, our civic consciousness would not flourish. Without replacing the former national pride with the pride of being European citizens, or citizens of the World – as the stoic philosophers argued 2000 years ago – we'll be fruitlessly expecting a cultural renewal. As long as we see sportspersons singing their national anthem with their right arm on the heart, the national pride will still have a powerful impact, and the satisfaction with what the European common house or the “global village” have to offer will be poor.

There is a dire need of lucid minds as regards the cultural major changes on our continent and in the entire world.

That's because we witness a change of civilizations. And, given the actual flows in transnational strategies, there is a significant possibility that we are heading toward future conflicts inside our big cold common house. As Clifford Geertz was saying, we can't guide what we can't understand.

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