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**Culture, Globalisation and Communication:
Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives**

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Although Paul Valéry noted as early as 1931 in *Regards sur le monde actuel* that “the era of the finite world is beginning”, the construction of systems theorising the relationships which unite globalisation and culture is relatively recent; so much so that what is called “globalisation theories” in cultural anthropology and cultural sociology has very rarely been systematically studied – and this in spite of the massive increase in published works which have the word “globalisation” in their title. Notable exceptions are the anthology written by Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Ronaldo¹ and the typology of cultural globalisation patterns, seen from the point of view of cultural sociology, presented by Diana Crane². She identifies four principal theoretical patterns: the theory of cultural imperialism, cultural streams or network patterns, the theory of reception and, lastly, a pattern of urban and national strategies oriented towards cultural globalisation, whether in order to preserve local cultures or to allow them to access global networks. According to Diana Crane, each one of these patterns can account for certain aspects of cultural globalisation, but none of them can presume to provide an adequate and exhaustive theory.

For my part, I have chosen to present four principal patterns – two of them agreeing with the typology of Diana Crane: cultural imperialism and global streams. Besides these two patterns, which are the best-known and the most discussed, I will introduce the acculturation pattern, and the branching one, as conceptualised by Jean-Loup Amselle³. In relation to cultural globalisation, each of these four patterns has explanatory qualities but is based on specific hypotheses concerning the notions of both globalisation and culture.

¹ “Introduction: A World in Motion”, in Jonathan Xavier Inda, Renato Ronaldo, *Anthropology of Globalization: A Reader*, Malden, Blackwell, 2002, p. 1-34. They give the following definition of cultural globalisation: “**QUOTATION**” (p. 2). One should note also the publication of the book by John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999, as well as the book by Ted C. Lewellen, *The Anthropology of Globalization: Cultural Anthropology Enters the 21st Century*, Westport, Bergin and Garvey, 2002. An anthology of debates and theories of globalisation, in all its dimensions, notably political and economic, was also edited in Great Britain: Frank J. Lechner and John Boli (eds.), *The Globalization Reader*, London, Blackwell, 1999.

² Diana Crane, “Culture and Globalization: Theoretical Models and Emerging Trends” in Diana Crane, Nobuko Kawashima, Ken’ichi Kawasaki (editors), *Global Culture: Media, Arts, Policy and Globalization*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 1-28.

³ Jean-Loup Amselle, *Branchements*, op. cit., 2001.

THE CULTURAL IMPERIALISM PATTERN

The pattern of cultural imperialism⁴ is without doubt the most famous. It is also the oldest because, since the 1960s, Marxist theory criticised the spread of mass culture produced by Western cultural industries in the rest of the world. Whereas the initial version of this theory insisted on the strictly political role played by Western governments (the centre) – among others the United States in Latin America – in maintaining the Third World countries (the periphery) in a situation of dependence and domination, today it has evolved towards a criticism of economic and media globalisation. The establishment of majors in the field of media and cultural industries is the biggest threat to cultural diversity and respect for local traditions. As the leading political, military and communicational power, the United States are at the heart of this pattern. Which explains the ever accelerating Americanisation of world culture. Cultural globalisation is therefore a general process of homogenisation which, in return, can produce resistance and communitary withdrawal. Islamic terrorism, perceived as a reaction to cultural globalisation and at the same time produced by it, confirms this. This is for instance the theory defended by Benjamin Barber in *Jihad versus MacWorld*, published in 1995 in the United States.

The advantage of this modelisation is that it is relatively univocal, even if intellectuals are heedful of historical vicissitudes and future unpredictability. However, the theory of cultural imperialism imposes more often than not a single meaning to globalisation: the latter always has to be fought because it is the armed wing of economic liberalism. The partisans of this theory find forerunners in the Frankfurt School, through such notions as those of mass culture and cultural industries, and also in Althusser with the concept of ideological apparatus, and in Gramsci from whom they borrowed the term hegemony. The theory of the “world-system”, developed by Immanuel Wallerstein⁵, in the continuation of the work of Fernand Braudel, is part of the extension and theoretical elaboration of

⁴ Among the best-known works of the 1970s, one should name Herbert I. Schiller, *Mass Communications and American Empire*, New York, A. M. Kelley, 1971 and Armand Mattelart, *Multinationales et systèmes de Communication. Les Appareils idéologiques de l'impérialisme*, Paris, Anthropos, 1976. For a detailed presentation of this school of thought, cf. John Tomlison, *Cultural Imperialism*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991. More recently, American intellectuals have reactivated this theory, notably Edward Said with *Culture and Imperialism*, New York, Random House, 1993, Michael Hardt and Toni Negri with *Empire*, Harvard University Press, 2001, and Noam Chomsky with *Hegemony or Survival. America's Quest for Global Dominance*, New York, Metropolitan Books, 2003. In France, the work by the economist Serge Latouche stands out with *L'Occidentalisation du monde. Essai sur la signification, la portée et les limites de l'uniformisation planétaire*, Paris, La Découverte, coll. “Agalma”, 1989.

⁵ Immanuel Wallerstein, *Le Système du monde du XV^e siècle à nos jours*, Paris, Flammarion, 1992 (1974-1989). In his most recent writings, Wallerstein emphasises the mistake which surrounds the theme of globalisation: according to him, the debate and the eagerness caused by globalisation actually reveal the close ending of historical capitalism, which has reached its ultimate extension phase. The empire is now left to crumble with, first of all, its centre, that is to say the United States. Cf. I. Wallerstein, “America and the World: the Twin Towers as Metaphor”, in Craig Calhoun et al. (eds.), *Understanding September⁵*, New York, New York Press, 2001, pp. 345-360; *The Decline of American Power*, New York, New York Press, 2003.

the theme of cultural imperialism, while placing the contemporary phase of globalisation in the long term historical evolution of capitalism.

THE ACCULTURATION PATTERN

This pattern emphasises cultural connections, perceived as groups of cultural traits with a high degree of homogeneity. Contemporary thinkers in favor of reflexive anthropology based on a rereading of the founding texts of the discipline sometimes go so far as to regret the essentialisation resulting from this conception of cultures. This judgement seems excessive, especially when we read the writings of classic anthropological culturalists who took an interest in the phenomenon of acculturation, for example Ralph Linton and Melville Herskovits. In the classic definition given by Linton, Herskovits and Redfield in 1936, acculturation means “all phenomena resulting from a continued and direct contact between individual groups of different cultures and which engender changes in the initial cultural patterns in one or other of the two groups.”⁶ As a concept designating the meeting of cultures, acculturation shows both the full significance and the limits of culturalism, especially through such elaborations as the concepts of selection and re-interpretation. It is Roger Bastide who attracted our attention to the social frameworks in which the process of acculturation takes place and which contribute to determining its meaning and extent⁷. He has defined a typology of acculturation situations according to political and social criteria, highlighting in particular the degree of liberty with which it functions. It can be either spontaneous – that is to say not directed –, or forced acculturation – as in the case of colonisation or slavery –, or again planned, long-term acculturation.

This pattern of acculturation is also that of the intersection of cultures. It has contributed to completely renewing the concept of culture itself, bringing to light the fact that particular cultures originate in elements that are foreign as well as native, and that they are in relation with each other. In contemporary literature on cultural globalisation, the use of the term has become more blurred in the sense that it is sometimes used without a particular conceptual reference. Sometimes the pattern is used, substituting, however, for the term acculturation the more apparently neutral one of “cultural change”. In this subdivision of theories on cultural globalisation, two trends relative to theoretical perspectives concerning the nature of globalisation need to be distinguished. Indeed, it is necessary to add a hypothesis about culture diversity to the pattern: is cultural diversity diminishing or growing? The first hypothesis leads to the theory of Americanisation. This began in the 1920s following both the

⁶ Melville Herskovits, Ralph Linton, Robert Redfield, “Memorandum on the Study of Acculturation”, *American Anthropologist*, vol. 38, n°1, 1936, pp. 149-52.

⁷ Roger Bastide, “Problèmes de l’entrecroisement des civilisations et de leurs œuvres”, in Georges Gurvitch (ed.), *Traité de sociologie*, Paris, PUF, 1960, pp. 315-330.

rise in power of the United States on the world scene and the lessening importance of European colonial powers after the haemorrhage of the First World War, and also the large waves of immigration to the United States which have inspired numerous studies on the degree of assimilation of migrants into American culture, thanks notably to the first School of Chicago. There also is found the notion of cultural standardisation⁸ which is found in theories of cultural imperialism with, in this case, a Marxist orientation. The second hypothesis leads to the theory of cultural hybridisation⁹ and its numerous variances.

THE PATTERN OF GLOBAL STREAMS

This pattern disagrees on many points with the cultural theories preceding it. In the seminal book of this new anthropology of globalisation – actually, an article published in 1990 and included in the book¹⁰ – Arjun Appadurai formulates the hypothesis that globalisation is a process which introduces a fundamental rupture in history by initiating an unknown cultural dynamics which enable the Southern hemisphere to access to modernity “at large”, that is to say to alternative forms of modernity – as far as the Western pattern is concerned. It is based on criticism of primordialism and of the theory of modernisation inspired by Weber, which dominated American sociology and anthropology after the Second World War when area studies were created. The cultural dimensions of globalisation appeared with the birth of decentralised electronic communicational networks which distribute the global stream of images, sounds and ideas contributing to extensively modifying the modern subjectivity. The paradigm of this pattern is of course the Internet, the network of networks¹¹, because it is decentralised and can protect itself quite efficiently against efforts of forced standardisation.

The new global economic culture should be considered as an evolving and complex system, relying on global streams which circulate in and through the disjunctions before the five “-scapes” identified by Appadurai: ethnoscapas (individuals in movement, migrants, tourists, refugees, exiles, etc.), technoscapas (fluid configuration of technologies unevenly distributed), finanscapas (international

⁸ For a study on the phenomena of current Americanisation inside globalisation and an extensive discussion on debates, see Ulrich Beck, Nathan Sznajder, Rainer Winter (eds.), *Global America? The Cultural Consequences of Globalization*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2003. The authors write about the extension of anti-Americanism as well as, more generally, about the transformation of cultures and societies under the effect of transnational processes.

⁹ Apart from exhaustive list of studies, should be quoted the works by Jan Neverdeen Pieterse: “Globalization as Hybridization”, in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, Roland Robertson (eds), *Global Modernities*, London, Sage, 1995, pp. 45-68; *Globalization and Culture. Global Mélange*, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 2003 for his clear and precise views.

¹⁰ Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy”, *Public Culture*, vol. 2, n° 2, 1990, pp. 1-24.

¹¹ It is also the Internet which serves as a paradigm for the theory of a network society, developed by Manuel Castells, in which technological determinism is clearly expressed. Cf. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society. Information Age 1*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996.

markets, patterns of this new global economy), mediascapes (electronic means of producing and conveying information and images) and ideoscapes (state ideologies or counter-ideologies of non-governmental organisations). These disjunctions appear because of differences of fluidity between “scapes”. Ideoscapes are thus particularly fluid thanks to intellectual diasporas “who continuously inject new meaning-streams into the discourse of democracy in different parts of the world.”¹² Likewise, mediascapes convey information at the speed of light thanks to the communication revolution, while technologies and individuals cannot follow the same rhythm. However, the major characteristic of cultural globalisation is found in growing deterritorialisation, a phenomenon which, according to Appadurai, equally affects merchandises and symbols or individuals and cultural identities, and contributing to the weakening of the nation-states. And “it is in the fertile ground of deterritorialization, in which money, commodities, and persons are involved in ceaselessly chasing each other around the world, that the mediascapes and ideoscapes of the modern world find their fractured and fragmented counterpart.”¹³

However, global streams circulating at the speed of light create, on the one hand, generalised hybridisation and thus growing heterogenisation, yet, on the other hand, they also tend to reinforce instability and chaos in the complex game of deterritorialised identities. There is both the risk of increasing violence between communities, and the need to be rid of old concepts – primordialism, nation, culture, deep-rooted territorial identity – in favour of a science of the imaginary¹⁴, as this dimension plays a prominent role in social life. The transformations implied by the cultural dimensions of globalisation are far-reaching and affect all aspects of life: “Globalization has shrunk the distance between elites, shifted key relations between producers and consumers, broken many links between labour and family life, obscured the lines between temporary locales and imaginary national attachments.”¹⁵ This original theorisation of cultural globalisation emphasises the circulation of human beings, symbols and media products but disregards the way this happens. Besides, the pattern of global streams shares with that of cultural imperialism a strong technical determinism and gives more meaning to consumption and to communication than to the social conditions which lie at the core of the global circulation of cultural entities.

In many ways, the anthropology developed by Appadurai is an extension of culturalism but claims to break away from the essentialism which classical anthropologists are thought to have unduly promoted. This is why Appadurai prefers to abandon the concept of culture and substitute it with

¹² Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, op. cit., p. 37.

¹³ Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁴ Appadurai, on this point, clearly borrows from Cornelius Castoriadis' works, in particular from *L'Institution imaginaire de la société*, Paris, Le Seuil, coll. “Points Essais”, 1999 (1975).

¹⁵ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

“cultural forms”, without however extensively explaining the full epistemological significance of this change:

“If culture as a noun seems to carry associations with some sort of substance in ways that appear to conceal more than they reveal, cultural the adjective moves one into a realm of differences, ontrasts, and comparisons that is more helpful. (...) This point can be summarized in the following form: culture is not usefully regarded as a substance but is better regarded as a dimension of phenomena, a dimension that attends to situated and embodied difference.”¹⁶

At the same time, he does not seem to hold on strictly to this change in paradigm and is obliged, later on, to introduce a significant distinction between “hard” and “soft” cultural forms:

“Hard cultural forms are those that come with a set of links between value, meaning, and embodied practice that are difficult to break and hard to transform. Soft cultural forms, by contrast, are those that permit relatively easy separation of embodied performance from meaning and value, and relatively successful transformation at each level.”¹⁷

This distinction reintroduces, it seems, the concept of group culture. Indeed, a hard cultural form consists of a coherent system of facts, qualities and meanings, which corresponds to the classic culturalist vision. The fact that it is organised around a specific cultural trait – for example, cricket – does not fundamentally change its systematic character. In the notion of soft cultural form, Appadurai makes a distinction between fact and quality, allowing for easier circulation and therefore resulting in the possibility of a conception in terms of global streams. The fact that Appadurai feels the need for this distinction makes us think, however, that he has not succeeded in freeing himself entirely from the concept of culture.

Moreover, the theory of global streams lacks concrete examples, which constitutes one of the paradoxes of this call for a multi-sited ethnography. Yet, it only appears to be a paradox; indeed, in Appadurai’s pattern, the work of the imaginary gives shape to constitutive streams of cultural globalisation. It is no surprise, therefore, to find examples taken from literature, media and the arts: thus, the short story of Julio Cortázar entitled “Swimming in a Pool of Gray Grits” serves as an illustration of cultural construction in a deterritorialised world. What is more striking is the use of the film by Mira Nair, *India Cabaret* (1984), which Appadurai calls an ethnodrama instead of an investigation into the clients, dancers and orchestras of the Bombay night clubs. Identities are recomposed, in a deterritorialised manner, through Western music and Bollywood cinema, causing Appadurai to reproduce value judgements and stereotypes, notably concerning the dancers: “all of

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 12-13.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 90.

whom are simultaneously proud and ashamed, dignified and defiant *de facto* prostitutes who have fabricated identities as artists”, and the British-Indian musicians: “The second-rate band tries to work up its musical passions, which are fed by the aspirations of the Catholic community in Goa (Western India) to play European and American instrumental music well.”¹⁸ This obvious methodological weakness causes him, among other things, to view the “imaginary stereotype”, constituted by the attitude to drink and dancing in the cabaret, only as the result of classic sequences in Hindi films, and therefore to miss what is essential, that is to say the circulation of representations and symbols linked to dance and jazz music. This can only be revealed by a deep knowledge of people and places and frequent contacts with them.

Similarly, when Appadurai brings up the question of the circulation of Western popular music, he does so from an analysis of a book¹⁹ by Pico Iyer, a South-Indian English author raised in California. In this anthology of Asian travel impressions, from Bali to Japan, the author gives detailed accounts of the types of cultural hybridisation that he noticed, such as the Bollywood remakes of *Rambo*, shot one after the other. The book takes its inspiration more from Hunter S. Thompson’s gonzo journalism than from a compilation of ethnographical data, giving rise, however, to commentaries prompted by the Iyer’s explanation of: “the uncanny Philippine affinity for American popular music.”²⁰ The case interests us particularly because exactly the same affinity drew our attention in India. But Appadurai’s conclusions should be taken with a pinch of salt because, in spite of all their subtlety and of the intuitions of the experienced anthropologist, they cannot replace real ground work investigation. Appadurai does succeed, however, in characterising this very particular culture of taste as belonging to a global culture of the hyper real in the sense used by Baudrillard²¹. The reinterpretations of American songs played by these Filipino musicians are indeed more faithful to the originals than those that can now be heard in the United States. Which leads Appadurai to state that this is more than a simple instance of Americanisation – in the United States, after all, there are fewer Americans interested in these songs. This phenomenon of cultural appropriation is symptomatic of a globalised “nostalgia for the present”²² – Appadurai borrows the notion from Fredric Jameson. “American nostalgia feeds on Filipino desire represented as a hypercompetent reproduction”²³, Appadurai writes. Where the shoe pinches is when the anthropologist provides a rather unsubtle explanation for the

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁹ Pico Iyer, *Video Night in Kathmandu and Other Reports from the Not-So-Far-East*, New York, Knopf, 1988.

²⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, op. cit., p. 29.

²¹ Baudrillard is indeed one of the major influences for the theory of global streams, in the sense that he emphasised how crucial the symbolic dimension of consumption was in *Le Système des objets* (1968). He is also at the origin of the notion of hyper reality, whose aim – in his analysis of Disneyland – is to characterise the emergence of an unreal reality, a “simulacrum” which becomes reality itself. Cf. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et simulation*, Paris, Galilée, 1981.

²² Fredric Jameson, “Nostalgia for the Present”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 88, n° 2, 1989, pp. 517-537.

²³ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, op. cit., p. 30.

circulation of American pop music in the Philippines. According to him, it results from “the story of the American missionization and political rape of the Philippines, one result of which has been the creation of a nation of make-believe Americans, who tolerated for so long a leading lady who played the piano while the slums of Manila expanded and decayed.”²⁴ No doubt this assertion lacks subtlety, but especially, it does not rest on any sociological or anthropological work; yet this is crucial if one is to take into account the passage of cultural forms and the modalities of their appropriation in a historically and geographically situated local context.

The only exception to this lack of ground work in the book of Appadurai is the fascinating analysis of the decolonisation of Indian cricket, whose status has passed from an elitist and urban colonial sport to the vector of a virile Indian nationalism, notably exacerbated during the India/Pakistan matches. Appadurai accounts for the history of the circulation of cricket – seen as a hard cultural form – in the colonial empire by adopting the point of view of vernacularisation and indigenisation, enabled by the media and by the fact that cultural knowledge on cricket is broadcasted to a mass public in the subcontinent. He reverses the famous analysis of the anti-secularist intellectual Ashis Nandy²⁵, according to whom cricket could be indianised so easily thanks to its underlying affinities with Indian culture – meaning that cricket was, to a certain extent, already Indian before becoming so; this idea is consistent with the perspective initiated in *The Intimate Enemy*. The indigenisation of cricket, according to Appadurai, therefore depends on sports commentators, their use of vernacular language and their competence, the players and their relationship to the Victorian ethic conveyed by the sport, and the capacity of a male public to identify with the national team²⁶. That is to say this process is contingent as it depends largely on the conditions in which this cultural form travels. This is in contradiction with a disjunctive global stream travelling at the speed of light without being affected by historical circumstances: though detailed, the illustration weakens the heuristic extent of the pattern, and it prompts us to amend it extensively, rather than apply it directly.

THE BRANCHING PATTERN

The core idea put forth by Jean-Loup Amselle, already suggested earlier on, is that of an ordinary syncretism of culture. Cultures are all already mixed as they are never free of any borrowing. They are inscribed in a continuum at the heart of which certain traits may belong to different cultural groups. In this sense, contemporary globalisation was preceded by more ancient phases of contacts among societies and cultures, incorporated into various forms of ecumenes linked to market trading and

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ashis Nandy, *The Tao of Cricket: On Games of Destiny and the Destiny of Games*, New York, Viking, 1989; *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1983.

²⁶ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

colonisation. Therefore, it cannot be conceived as a radically new process even if the standardisation of cultural production and its control by a small number of multinational companies may cause legitimate worries. Indeed, a faster broadcasting of cultural products, enabled by industrialisation and networks of almost-instantaneous communication, tends to stretch and harden cultural identities by fixing them in stereotypical representations. Globalisation paradoxically tends to reinforce cultural differences, and contemporary theories, inspired by post-modernism, run the risk of reactivating the most substantialist concepts of racial, ethnic, religious and cultural categories. On the contrary, Jean-Loup Amselle's purpose is to create a real anthropology of the universality of cultures. In order to do this, he suggests that we conceive the continuum of cultures as a network of planetary signifiers with universal intent, on which local networks of particularistic signified will connect. This means conceiving culture as a reservoir of symbolic resources made up of objects, symbols and ideas which may circulate right along the network. The branching pattern does not imply giving up the concept of culture but rather substituting a weak usage of the word, free of any biological connotations carried, for instance, by the notion of hybridisation, for a strong usage dominating in the field of culturalist anthropology and its contemporary extensions.