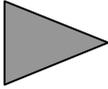


A SHORT ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL GLOBALISATION**Monica CONDRUZ-BĂCESCU**

Abstract

The main idea of this article is the concept of global culture as it is perceived nowadays due to the spreading of the American life style, goods and values worldwide. The idea of a global culture wasn't possible only during the global modernity time. The cultural writings can overcome the political and linguistic borders on condition that they are translated in the languages of the interested cultural communities. For centuries this process was hindered by the geographical distances and the technical difficulties. With the mondialisation development facilitated by mass-media and the contemporary means of transport, the writings' circulation becomes wider.

Keywords: cultural globalisation, values, symbols, communication, cultural writings, cross-cultural factors



Preliminary considerations

One of the most striking forms of globalisation is cultural globalisation. This concept of global culture is perceived nowadays in parallel with the spreading of the American life style, goods and values worldwide. If we take any catalogue from clothes to music, film, television, books or architecture, we will encounter at least a small part of the American culture. Some brands and symbols such as: Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Calvin Klein, Microsoft, IBM, CNN, MTV, became synonyms of the American hegemonic culture.

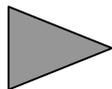
The idea of a global culture wasn't possible only during the global modernity time. The cultural writings can overcome the political and linguistic borders on condition that they are translated in the languages of the interested cultural communities. For centuries this process was hindered by the geographical distances and the technical difficulties. With the mondialisation development facilitated by mass-media and contemporary means of transport, the writings' circulation becomes wider.

Nowadays, the concept of globalisation finds its expression in all the languages of the world, while at the same time it lacks a clear definition. Globalisation has become today a cliché, namely the impressive idea that comprises almost everything, from the financial market to the internet, but that doesn't offer a substantial perspective over the contemporary human condition. However, the clichés catch very often lively expressions of an age. From this perspective, globalisation reflects a wide perception of the fact that the world changes rapidly in a common social space, under the influence of the economic and technological forces, and the evolutions from one side of the world can have deep consequences over people and communities from the other side of the world.

Few expressions of globalisation are so visible, widely spread and overwhelming like the world proliferation of the consumption brands marketed internationally, the increase of symbols and popular culture artefacts and the simultaneous communication of events with the help of satellite transmissions, towards millions of people from all the continents. "The most well-known symbols of globalization are Coca-Cola, Madonna and CNN news. No matter what the causal and practical significance of these phenomena, no doubt that one of the most directly perceived forms of globalisation is the cultural one." (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, Perraton, 2004: 372). Despite the cultural interactions complexities among societies in the last three millennia, the more and more intense movement of images and symbols and the wide variety of the ways of thinking and communication constitute special features of the XX century end and the new millennium.

The contemporary debates launched three categories of arguments concerning the type and the impact of cultural globalization. Thus, we can distinguish three schools of thought: “hyperglobalists, skeptics and transformativists” (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, Perraton, 2004: 26). Hyperglobalists describe and forecast the world uniformity under the auspices of the American popular culture of the western consumption. On the same level we find the skeptics, who emphasize the shallowness and inferior quality of global cultures in comparison with national cultures as well as the endless and increasing importance of the differences and cultural conflicts of the major civilizations worldwide. Transformativists describe the blending between people and cultures as generating cultural hybrids and new global and cultural networks. Therefore, we have three problems. Firstly, there is the tendency that the supporters of such positions either overreact, or minimize the extent and profoundness of cultural globalization contemporary forms. In the absence of a systematic framework that should describe the cultural flows among societies, we can not make an adequate assessment of cultural globalization. Secondly, few descriptions offer a satisfying conceptual pursuit of the historical problems. Most of them suppose a world in which the cultural global flows must be opposed to the flows and institutions from national level. Thirdly, the descriptions can not make the adequate differences between the impact understood as changes in the cultural identity and a nation values and the impact understood as change of the context and the processes of national and cultural forming.

The concepts of culture and communications do not lack ambiguities. Especially the idea of culture has a longlasting history in the discourses of aesthetics, of social and political theory and western sociology. We can state that the notion of culture refers to the construction, articulation and social perception of significance. Culture comprises the specialized and professional discourses of arts, the commercialized product of cultural industries, the spontaneous and disorganized cultural expressions of the day to day life and the complex interactions among them. In our case, communication refers to the ways in which these artefacts, beliefs and messages are located in time and space. Thus, communication can be divided in a number of distinct processes, as messages and significances have to be registered, kept and then conveyed or moved in another place and other moment.



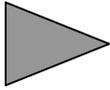
Space and time dimensions of cultural globalisation

The globalisation of culture involves the movement of objects, signs and people over regions and among continents. Thus, we pass from “a world in which cultural isolation prevailed to a world dominated by cross-cultural factors, from an age characterized by cultural autonomy of the traditional isolated groups to an age of communication and interrelations.”(Leclerc, 2003: 10) Our age has the great

historic privilege to pass from a world of isolated civilizations, based to a certain extent on spaces and different times, to an unique world, characterized by the same space (the world market) and the same time (the synchronism of all events), by the birth of a single communication and a world community. Community always preceded communication; the latter formed, first of all, inside the group: people speaking the same language, sharing the same religion, the same values, the same history, the same traditions, the same memory. Nowadays, we notice the passing from a planet of closed civilizations to a world open to all the people by travels and mass-media.

The fact that people proved to be the most important and influential agents of cultural transmission is obvious. It is true that, until the appearance of telecommunications in the XIX century, communication was linked to the means of transport; not even a person, writing, sign or message could travel independently of the people and horses, ships and carriages that transported them. Nevertheless, the globalisation of culture implies also the movement of objects, because, while the individual agents constitute important bearers of cultural practices, they are limited to communication by presence. Beside people, the forms and cultural ideas are spread in space by means of books, written documents and cultural artefacts of all types, from the profane to the erudite. At the same time with the appearance of telecommunications cultural transmission seen as artefact was reduced. Some flows, movements or objects are totally transitory and do not leave any social trace. It is unlikely for a traveller from an isolated community to create a permanent cultural change or a lasting network of interactions and mutual cultural influences. However, where such relations are established, we can regard globalization of culture as a spread and deepening of relations and cultural practices. This may be the main idea of Michael Mann's concept of transcendental cultural power, "where the movement of people and texts contribute to the establishment of a cultural beliefs' pattern shared on an extended area and, thus, to the establishment of mutual interaction patterns between different locations, where the cultural ideas from an area influence the others from another area." (Mann, 1986: 33)

Therefore, besides spreading, we can also talk about the deepening of cultural relations, where it is possible that changes, debates and innovations from an area to be transferred to another area or rejected in another area. This joining of places and people separated in time and space can be regarded as a way of space and time compression.

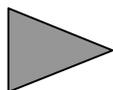


The organizational dimensions of cultural globalisation

Empires are an important example of the extensive spread of new cultural ideas. But history suggests that the process of cultural globalisation is more complex and diversified, both concerning the forms and the relations between producers and receivers. Thus, an important part of this process is emphasized by referring to ways of interaction, i.e. the main ways in which cultural globalisation works.

The idea of empire guides us to another part of cultural globalisation: the formation of production infrastructure, conveyance and cultural reception and the extent to which the cultural flows and processes are institutionalized, in time and space. As any form of power, cultural power can not be mobilized and exercised in the absence of the organizations that create, reproduce and receive messages or cultural practices. They include both the means of transport and the means of communication. All these types of communication suppose a certain type of minimal common linguistic competencies – the spread of a language, bilingualism and multilingualism, the translation facilities – that constitute beside technologies and organizations, a key element of cultural infrastructures. Therefore, we can talk about cultural globalization where there are infrastructure and institutions for conveyance, reproduction and cultural receiving at a global scale – transregional and transcontinental.

All these types of cultural globalisation – the spread and deepening of relations, the movement of signs, objects and people, cultural emulation, and the creation of infrastructures – can underline different patterns of stratification, i.e. hierarchy and disparities. In the case of telecommunications it is fairly obvious that the access to the global links of telecommunications is asymmetrical or unequal between societies and inside them. In the case of TV programmes, it is obvious that only a few countries and companies produce for export. It is also obvious that most of us are receivers and consumers of culture and not transmitters and producers (although the internet is beginning to dissolve this distinction).



Conclusion

All these concepts offer a flexible set of tools in order to explore the origins and consequences of cultural globalisation; they avoid a narrow concentration over the cultural globalisation impact and allow the exploration of changes and developments that make possible, first of all, such impacts.

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