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**Hybrid categories to define asymmetries across borders**

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*Abstract*

This article gives arguments contrary to the (glorious) establishment of One World, in itself homogeneous. The corollary of this conclusion, which is reached by recurring to some ‘hybrid’ concepts - such as *Glocalization* and *Global Culture* among others - is a more general premise of method, which invites scholars to exclude each kind of narrow mono-disciplinary approach, from the analytical tools used in characterising contemporary global phenomena. (International) political philosophy has the task of investigating new conceptual tools which enable it to deal with newly emerging *national and international* issues. Additional categories such as “moral minority” and “gender sensitivity” could be taken under more careful consideration from social scientists on behalf of a proper definition of emancipatory discourses and policies aiming to durable and cross-borders effects.

*1. For a change of paradigm*

A small part of the language and common consciousness of western democratic societies is the theory according to which globalization includes both long-lasting and ongoing processes of interdependent homologation and the asymmetric distribution of power, in all its variants (constriction, conditioning, creativity) and dimensions: territorial, political, social and last but not least, symbolic. It is precisely the impact of the interlacement between symbolic and material power that is actively and painfully reconfiguring regions, identities and cultures throughout the globe, but gradually and with diversified effects. Above all, this is assumed and more widespread today than ten years ago, and however we cannot forget the past effects and long-lasting consequences of the long period of neo-liberal vision. The belief in economic globalization in the western neo-liberist versions of the 1980s, as in the macro-regional contemporary models of Asiatic capitalism (from the Washington consensus to the Beijing consensus), has weakened and even today discredits the ancient common sense and age-old certainties according to which there is a strong and structural relation between the decisions of governments and institutions and the *economic policy* of states and *polities* to which the former refer. We should discredit the myth that economic globalization is politically ungovernable due to its independence *iuxta propria principia* of the original decisions of

political agencies, which are constraining and decisive along the lines of intervention projects, selected, voluntarily imposed, and then put into action. This burden of decision charged with responsibility and accountability of political policies in economics remains, even if due to the effects induced and stratified as from a particular moment – the demise of Bretton Wood and the choices of the neo-liberist governments of the 1980s – there is reduction in the measurability of successes and failures; the weight of constraints and the scale of suitability of the efficacy and incidence of policies have changed, at least on a national scale, and not even here in every case, due to variable geography and the mobile relations between centre and peripheries, local powers and regional agencies of supernational influence, and so on.

In order to credit common sense again in an innovative way by means of the disciplines that are more sensitive to recording and decodifying changes, we can define globalisation as a combination of interdependences and stratifications and social and political imbalancies.

If these processes occur on a global scale, they do so by dramatically highlighting the unequal and asymmetric repartition of global fluxes, in turn very heterogeneous amongst themselves due to the highly different proportions of material and immaterial factors that characterize them. The fluxes regard goods, services,

ideas, technologies, human groups, capital and direct investments. The absence of an all-inclusive project of propagation, possessing a clearly defined source and centre (the European west, Albrow 1996) enables us to distinguish globalisation from modernization (Featherstone 1990)<sup>1</sup>.

This latter point introduces the problem of global capitalism's effects on socio-cultural and geographically determined systems, and it outlines the opposite transformation of the global capitalism model originated by its being introduced into different contexts. It is necessary to talk of globalisation in plural terms (despite Bauman's (1998) pessimistic view), even when we exclusively consider the economic sphere, even if newly reconsidered in terms of cultural capitalism<sup>2</sup>.

Global capitalism's impact on national economies and societies is far from being neutral, or painless and its long-term effects are hardly foreseeable.

In general terms, from the 1980s until very recent times, as far as dominant economic management is concerned, there has been a

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<sup>1</sup> In comparison with previous analogous phenomena in the past of the globalisation of western modernity, it is characterised by: increasing number of foreign investments; 2 fragmentation of productive processes; 3 delocalisation of productive processes and outsourcing; 4 expansion of financial capitalism; (provisional and questionable) international division of labour.

<sup>2</sup> **Culture access**= commodified access to experiences, times and varied lifestyles, in the non-physical spaces and places of the global symbolic reservoir

**Cultural capitalism** = market-based homologation of life-style and experiences; commodification and planetary diffusion of northern society lifestyles; local lifestyle fetishisation aimed at attracting culture tourists/buyers willing to access the adventure, unpolluted environment, authentic tribal rites.

shift from *stakeholders* to *shareholders*. This turning point has been the standard till “yesterday”. This determined a change of regime which restructured political agendas by according priorities to the conditions and making the movement of *equities* easier.

In the long run, national economic and social settings will be deeply affected.

For instance, financial capitalism which would result in *free riding* processes on the basis of a national economy, in the global economy is regarded as *tax base foot loose*. Thus, those who want to attract financial capital unavoidably experience instabilities and difficulties in setting up a proper welfare system.

In any case, all these choices depend on political decisions. Political philosophy has the task of investigating new conceptual tools which enable it to deal with newly emerging national and international issues.

## 2. *New relevances, germinal webs*

The entire pathway of recent years, traced by scholars interested in the social and political aspects of globalization, has involved a kind of challenge in term of cognitive awareness. The social sciences today must cope with the theme of living together and of symbolic interaction of different groups within the same society,

or of contiguous and different societies, whose geo-political dimensions and consistency are geometrically variable. The use of hybrid categories, and of new representations is increasingly necessary. The local dimension cannot be interpreted simply in terms of opposition to the global dimension, be it impending both from the outside and from above. *We should rather resort to the notion of Glocalisation (Robertson, Batini)* in all those situations where it is not exploited to the full. These include research contexts in the field in politology, in the analysis of conflicts between social actors and in international relations. If we apply the volumetric dimension to the diffraction, we transform into a three dimensional and not univocally luminous vision the phenomenon of decomposition of the light originating from the impact of the flow with external obstacles. What results is a composite and striated flow of bands of energy oriented in different directions, potentially reactive to the obstacles, but with unpredictable effects, and without a precise plan or a predetermined focus. The above seems to sustain the affirmation that an exclusive interest in the economic aspects of globalisation is to be disputed; nevertheless, and despite appearance and trends, there is still a long way to go.

### *3. Some Revisions of concepts of culture and identity. Between local and global*

There is no evidence at all that a global economic interdependence would leave the socio-political stratification of the effects of interconnection in different places and contexts unaffected and untouched (Henry, 2002). On the contrary, it puts forward local-specific dynamics, unpredictable and often doomed to invisibility from the viewpoint of observers and actors, if they do not make use of some hybrid concepts and flexible methods. The core thesis of qualitative social studies is that ‘new’ and ‘old’ ties between identities and culture are born, proliferate and interact not only in a newly emerging economic framework but also in newly defined political and cultural contexts. In order to define culture/cultures human groups are relevant. In many cases there exists a "we", an aggregation of individuals that adopt the first person plural to define themselves, recognising themselves in a series of common features, but not without opacity and conflicts (Henry 2000, Friese 2002). “Culture”, and the identity of “we”, is not a substantial unity of convictions, of rules, of objectivised rituals or materials, but it is rather a combination of *routines* and symbolic practices, a mobile background of reference for the actions of the subjects (men and women) involved in cultural exchanges.

Culture does not express an essence, but a combination of played games. It is the interaction in a context, or various contexts.

Cultural identities are human aggregates in progress, *porous*, *permeable*, and definable as interlacements (*imbrications*, the French *géographie sociale*) between socio-cultural relations and spatial relations, in turn subject to germination through contact and impact. Identities outside of a social-cultural structure of spatial are not conceivable. Cultures, not to be condemned because they do not necessarily mean integralisms/sectarianisms, structure spaces also in the age of globalization.

If, therefore, we agree that cultures are neither essences that determine us, nor things that we possess, we could also dismantle the holistic myth of cultural belonging like the merely individualistic belonging of the global cultural consumer. Cultures are shared practices, they are routines, sets of played games, dynamic frameworks for culture-interchanging subjects. Therefore, we need to know how to play. Wittgenstein's language theory clearly exemplifies the relation among identity, belonging and culture that we have in mind: we have to take part in the game, to 'be' part of the game itself, if we want to play (namely, to be inside the language, to be part of the elementary interchange practices). If we were born and brought up enmeshed in these practices, in this game, it would not be difficult to follow them.



Equilibrium between strategic and creative action is needed in order not only to give birth to, but even to endorse and implement, the intercourse between each individual and his/her group. Given such highly specific conditions of being part of a so-called culture-game, in order- to make the players' circle more inclusive along the way - we need to produce similar complex conditions and processes of primary and secondary socialisation in the polities we all live in. What is at stake is the success or the failure of policies of integration and inclusion of outsiders in our liberal-democratic states; namely migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers. This is not to say games are closed to those who were not born within them, rather that in order to get a really generalised access to cultures we have to pay attention to the fulfilment of necessary conditions, constraints and paces of time. Places are themselves core elements of cultures and identity-shaping, and cultures for their part continuously shape places. Nation-states are involved not only in a merely passive way in such transformations. According to different contexts and situations depending on the welfare system adopted, and the degree of shared sovereignty and supernational integration reached, States and non-state polities like the European Union are guardians, gate-keepers of access to social capital, donors of benefits and facilities. In such a framework, the process of consolidation and definition, of putting into effect already

formally recognized rights makes the traditional approach to the subject of citizenship denser and specifically emancipates it from a mere reduction to the question of formal inclusion or exclusion, of being or not being endowed with rights. The question of the mere entitlement to rights should be retranslated into the rather more complex question of the quality and the relative importance of these rights with respect to the capacity to activate them on the part of the holders of rights, in other words of the question of real disparities, asymmetries, structural and potentially permanent inequalities. Let's look at the more familiar example of the European Union. Often immigrants and, even more so, the new citizens, who can exhibit the credentials of European citizenship throughout the territory of the Union, do not effectively enjoy the set of proclaimed rights (Henry Loretoni, 2004). As regards this problem, a general inhospitality must be considered as an additional bias. It is not just a matter of phenomena of racism and xenophobia spreading in certain regions of Europe, but equally of other manifestations of hostility and verbal and non-verbal discrimination. These can appear inoffensive, but are really quite pernicious and pervasive (because critically controlled by those responsible), and are potentially erosive of the bases of cohesion and liberal and democratic responsibility. The ordinary citizen is induced - by habits, attitudes, amply consolidated and accredited

messages of widespread consumption – to resort to biting, injurious stereotypes to classify ‘foreigners’ (even more so if not prosperous and therefore in need of benefits).

To resume, it should not be forgotten that stigmatisation and subalternity is not only a matter of symbolic use of words and negative stereotypes. It reflects or represents forms of material and symbolic subalternity, which become plastically visible through the urban shifting of the minority groups (slums, banlieus). Where one is allowed to settle and to be housed is, first of all, a complex matter of public choices, welfare, patterns of social justice, and not only of expected neutral urban planning. Several issues concerning cultures and identities are in fact matters of social discrimination. A target group is a group defined by negative stereotypes with a high grade of permanence at the social level which creates or stabilises banishment and movement to areas outside of social control (i.e. potentially dangerous and commonly represented as unsafe). This is the case of vulnerable groups as they are identified in urban and metropolitan studies (Certomà, 2008). Discrimination does not only pertain to the economic sphere; indeed, economic equality without rights endowment still implies social discrimination. The access (Rifkin, 2000) to social goods, education, information, political decision-making and economic possibilities are effective tools to avoid discrimination.

The definition of viable alternatives in terms of costs and benefits (depending on public policies and welfare systems) is a problem of conceptual clarification. The transformation or abolition of some welfare systems -or even “no welfare at all”- is still a matter of public choice. This is a political decision, not a technical issue. We must be aware of what is really at stake when we speak of integration and inclusion.

#### *4. For a gender-oriented renewal of the social sciences*

When different identities are adjacent they have to obey the same fundamental laws. They follow the same routines and unwritten laws that shape social existences in a given place at a given time. The metaphor of cultures as a set of played games shows in this respect its specific role. As we said at the very beginning, cultures are not “monolithic blocs” to be taken or rejected *sic et simpliciter*. They result from - not least gender-related - disparities of conditions and power among the subjects. Interactions among individuals do not take place on an equal basis. It is therefore necessary to let subordinate people express themselves, as well as to offer them the possibility of confronting their own preferences that often result from the interiorisation of power-related images of reality (“adaptive preferences”). In this respect the concept of gender-sensitivity is of primary importance; all the research

activities -and the related policies- should be affected by it and become gender-sensitive<sup>3</sup>. It will be of help to endorse and carry out equal opportunities for everyone. Gender-based issues clarify what gender is and why it is necessary to adopt a gender-oriented perspective in social analysis: women and men react differently to the events and situations of daily life and to subsequent policies. This premise is the necessary starting point to deconstruct and understand life-situations: what is the impact of architectural interventions, logistic organisation, road conditions and the restructuring of urban areas on women and men's living conditions? 'Gender' as a criterium allows the decoding of other forms of difference and (on the negative side) exclusion - namely, anti-integration factors and behaviours which stigmatize the 'different' by regarding s/he as 'inferior' and 'subaltern'. The point is: first of all we are women or men; other cleavages are added to this basic distinction (class, social role, culture, religion). More than this, the gender dimension is a contextual and asymmetric feature; it can be easily grasped by considering spatial metaphors and spatial experiences. Inside, outside, within, without are examples. The topography of the self (Taylor) can be therefore

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<sup>3</sup> Scholars and politicians need to adopt a *still not clear - cut definable* perspective, such as *Gender sensitivity* (an operational specification of *Gender Mainstream*). As in the case of prices sensitivity in matter of economic equilibrium, all social variables must *be observed as dependent* from changes occurring in the conditions of women.

considered as a gendered one. These are fundamental elements in opposing discrimination in the real contexts of life (cities, public spaces and private places). Such a common experience of self-submission to stereotypes helps us understand the mechanisms of interiorisation of negative attributes that are ascribed to us by others, i.e. to the phenomena of “labelling”, of the production of stereotypes that are addressed to the group I/we belong to. All the questions associated with stereotypes are relevant with regard to the policies of integration that are aimed at pronosticating, preventing, if not also mitigating, the more violent and pathological aspects of intercultural conflicts.

With this aim in mind, care is needed in the definition of culture and of varying relations between cultures. Also conflict is a relational form, even if the only one, which above all assumes different connotations, depending on whether it is intra- or intercultural. As a great deal of research suggests, they are not the outcome of balanced relations between individuals, but they are constituted by ideal and practical unbalanced relations of power and life-condition (the first of which is the gender-based difference).

This is the reason why cultures have to be internally deconstructed by giving voice to subaltern subjects and by providing them with a public arena where they can reflexively evaluate their preferences.

Furthermore, it cannot be forgotten that these preferences are the effects of a sort of mastering narrative ‘interiorisation’. From a critical point of view, it represents a descriptive and practical problem; it often impedes the political process of mitigation or prevention of intercultural conflict. Nowadays, Europe is a patchwork of rather homogeneous societies (if we regard them in terms of dominant cultures). However, strong minority groups are progressively emerging and establishing themselves. These groups claim for themselves the possibility of declaring and publicly practising their lifestyle and (despite their radical differences with respect to the host society’s) values. As a consequence, many think we democratic citizens should abandon the tolerant approach; this is not ambitious enough. Those who write of multicultural citizenship - such as Will Kymlicka, who seems merely to translate toleration in terms of international law; indeed, Kymlicka (1995) supports the proposal of treaties written by minority groups resident in a State. These treaties should be elaborated and adopted by institutional subjects - such as a State - within the general framework of international law. In my opinion, it is more necessary to abandon the multicultural lexicon in favour of categories as “intercultural learning” and similar notions. Interculturality for example, refers to a condition, that’s to say a modality, a condition, a state of affairs, a way of acting of the

subjects. It emerges where interactive relations among existing cultures are thought possible; it is oriented towards (explicitly beneficent) normative purposes, differently from multiculturalism, a both descriptive and normative conceptual category; it presents several sides and it is not univocally defined. It emerged in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s to replace the explicitly assimilationist model of ‘national integration’. (Crawford Young, 1999). By opposing the melting pot configuration, multiculturalism, in its most popular version, is based on the image of a culture mosaic (self-determined and self-based different forms of social living). Somewhere else I rejected the previous category of ‘multiculturalism’ as the most adequate definition of contemporary society, As an alternative to it, the notion of minorities in the plural is much more suitable. Minority(ies) is not to be solely ascribed to the relationship between territorial boundaries and the peoples’ right to self-determination, but it is related to the definitions commonly in use within the debate on identity and difference. It is open to the concept of “minority culture” or “subculture”, or vulnerable groups, which also includes “moral minorities” as well as every kind of identity-group underprivileged with regard to the access to resources within a given polity. In fact, in addition to it, by adopting the category of moral minority as key note analytical tool



we can transform into real policies the criticism by gender studies of multiculturalism. The terms stem from the opposite term of “moral majority”, which means an exclusive point of view concerning the (quantitative such as qualitative) requirements for inclusion and ascribes a minority status to all those who fail or refuse to fulfill such requirements. Minority status means: inferior, faulty from the point of view of the majority model (Besussi, in Becalli 1999, Henry, 2004, 2008). To question the current principles that shape the most widespread attitudes with regards to moral minorities is a difficult and urgent task. More than this, intercultural learning can have emancipatory outputs if actors and mediators ally with qualitative social scientists.

##### *5. A provisional, minimalistic kit of tools*

In order to favour this cognitive sensitivity, attentive to the changes and the multiform nature *of particular* oppression and *of particular* emancipations it is opportune to study cases, analyse situations from inside, to lend scientific dignity and importance to the single specificities. That is, make it possible for the particular truly to emerge not from within an over-ordered definition that conceals it, but in such a way that all the microscopic parts of which it is composed have or can have scientific dignity. Voice must be given to the fragment, also accepting, for example, the

challenge of the degree thesis on the “Regulations of an intercultural type of a tenement block with a Pakistani majority in the area of the Elephant & Castle, London”. Such micro-analyses have been possible since, at a certain point, anthropologists, ethnographers, scholars of cultural studies began to give legitimacy to the particular. It is therefore necessary to attempt to circumscribe the analysis, create an appropriate place of enquiry and, seeking for instruments that are as rigorously controlled as possible, analyse from the inside.

This obviously involves the risk of errors of various kinds. In so doing, moreover, something is realized that is not fixed, but undergoes that series of changes which, while controlled with reflexive and feed-back procedures, are not only epistemic, but impressionistic, emotional, emerging from the relationship of external subjects with a different culture and with the persons belonging to it. In language there is grammar, syntax, pragmatics; this last indicates and analyses the lived uses of the first two. Thus reflexively controlled social praxis is configured with respect to the theory of the social sciences. Praxis becomes therefore the arena for the new scientific research. The great teaching of praxis is that, if it becomes *pragmatics of vital language*, it is at the same time the object and the context of knowledge. This requires, of course, an infinity of cases, of possibilities, of microscopic pieces

of research. It is however necessary to confer dignity on the last of these and to avoid bringing with one a predetermined construct, which is the most extreme form of epistemic violence. This obviously does not mean not having pre-constituted concepts, but admitting having them, and being prepared for them to be demolished or deeply reformulated or even 'reset'.

### *Conclusions*

Asymmetries and material obstacles make minorities to constructions that are too complex which are opposite to whatever binary logic and deterministic attitude. Glocal dimensions and symbolic places are fitting images for them. This does not exclude but rather emphasises the disenchanting awareness of the distribution of power inside each single community, which is not a monolithic fragment contributing to the society as a whole, but a pluralistic, asymmetric assembly of levels and thicknesses. The lack of attention towards the vocabulary of gender-oriented deconstructionism weakens all intents to emancipate and recognize the several minority identities, producing ever more serious and lacerating social pathologies, which prevent a still unavoidable truthful rewriting of the nucleus of the modern project.

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