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Globalization and Intercultural Communication

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ABSTRACT: *Intercultural contact* and *communication* have allegedly increased in the context of *globalization*. Both terms are, however, little transparent, evoke a host of associations and carry ideological baggage. The present article proposes a framework to understand current socio-economic processes by recourse to a particular heterodox economic view (*Regulationism*). I will argue from this point of view that although there is no such thing as *globalization* there are some changes – dominated by neoliberal policies – that increase the gap between rich and poor inter- and intranationally. Since these changing structural conditions of distribution (*class*) impact fundamentally on issues of recognition (*identity*), i.e. the core of approaches to intercultural communication, I conclude that any theory of the latter has to take economic and political structures into consideration.

Keywords: globalization, Regulationism, class, intercultural communication, identity, power.

RESUMEN: El contacto y la comunicación interculturales se han extendido en el contexto de la globalización. Ambos términos, sin embargo, son poco transparentes, evocan un sinfín de asociaciones y contienen implicaciones ideológicas. Este artículo propone un marco para comprender los procesos socio-económicos actuales basado en una teoría económica heterodoxa (el regulacionismo), por medio del cual se argumenta que, a pesar de no existir la globalización como tal, sí existen ciertos cambios dominados por las políticas neoliberales que acrecientan la división entre ricos y pobres, tanto internacional como intranacionalmente. Puesto que las cambiantes condiciones estructurales de distribución (clase social) repercuten en las cuestiones de reconocimiento (identidad), es decir, el fundamento de los estudios sobre la comunicación intercultural, se concluye que cualquier teoría que la aborde debe incluir el papel de las estructuras económicas y políticas.

Palabras clave: globalización, Regulacionismo, clase social, comunicación intercultural, identidad, poder.

1. Introduction

> All vogue words tend to share a similar fate: The more experiences they pretend to make transparent, the more they themselves become opaque. (Bauman, 1998: 1)

In the most general sense, globalization discourses refer to changes beyond the confines of the nation state:

> Globalization, simply put, denotes the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of transcontinental flows and patterns of social interaction. It refers to a shift or transformation in the scale of human organizations that links distant communities and expands the reach of power relations across the world's regions and continents. (Held and McGrew, 2002: 1)

But that is as far as commonality reaches. The academic literature on globalization is vast, highly controversial and displays a multitude of different, often contradictory perspectives reflecting an actually rather heterogeneous group of topics in the domains of business and/or politics, society, culture, technology, media, the environment and others. Often, neither the respective focus nor the alleged interrelationship between these different spheres is made sufficiently explicit. Moreover, the causality for alleged changes towards the global scale are attributed to a range of factors or their combination, for instance, an increase in international trade, portfolio and foreign direct investment, the intensification of border crossings and migration, the emergence of new information and communication technologies and their impact upon the structures and processes in financial and other trading, the nature or transformation of capitalism, changes in the function and form of nation states, an increased reach and power of supra-national institutions, other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and/or social movements, the spread of consumerism and/or democracy, and many more. These different topics are inexorably linked to specific evaluations and political perspectives of the situation, and concomitant orientations towards or recommendations of particular courses of action.

In addition to this, the globalization debate has permeated all kinds of social strata and spheres. Lay people draw on globalization discourses as a resource in order to make sense of an increasingly complex and interrelated national and international environment. Business executives and managers do not only seem to have partly shifted corporate strategies and priorities to the international plane but to have likewise adopted references to globalization in order to legitimate forms of restructuring and reorganization, for instance through flexible specialization, diversification, downsizing, and outsourcing. The term has become especially popular with politicians, who often refer, sometimes in fairly unspecific ways, to

globalization as a non-negotiable, external (economic) pressure or logic that forces governments to take specific decisions and actions. For some, this invocation of globalization is strategic and rhetorical in nature seeking to displace responsibility for otherwise unpalatable reforms.

In general, it is fair to argue that the term *globalization* has become a weasel word carrying a load of associations and ideological baggage. As a rhetorical device it can be employed in a variety of vague and obfuscating ways to bring about the same socio-material changes that it is meant to denote in the first place. By gaining alliances and identifications through specific representations of social change and desirable outcomes, people's perspectives, dispositions and, ultimately, their actions are shaped in particular ways. As such it is important to subject the use of the term *globalization* in specific contexts to close scrutiny and careful analysis in order to reveal the stance the particular author takes in the realm of diverse perspectives and definitions.

2. Globalization. Emphasizing Complexities

The position I have adopted here could be characterized as *transformationalist* or *moderate*, strongly emphasizing the agency of political actors and the contingency of potential structural outcomes. I contend with Hirst and Thompson's (1996: 4) critical-normative message that the reference to globalization as a coherent and almost naturally occurring process or even end-state is a rhetorical means employed in order to «build up a community of usage when there needs to be strict differentiation of meaning». For them, globalization «[...] is a myth for a world without illusions, but it is also one that robs us of hope. Global markets are dominant, and they face no threat from any viable contrary political project, for it is held that Western social democracy and socialism of the Soviet bloc are both finished» (Hirst and Thompson, 1996: 6). Although I agree in dismissing the strategic use of globalization in the context of neoliberal discourse (*globalism*), I will nevertheless hold that there are *some* changes underway that would warrant a new terminology. I will mainly draw on work by Jessop (1997, 1999 *a*, 1999 *b*, 2000, 2002, 2003), who views current socio-economic processes in their historical context, thus catering for contingencies and the complexity of current international changes in the economic, political and cultural spheres and their interrelationship. Globalization is, as Jessop (1999 *b*: 1) has pointed out, not a single, coherent causal process but a «complex, chaotic and overdetermined outcome of a multi-scalar, multi-temporal, and multi-centric series of processes operating in specific structural contexts». In less abstract terms this means that there is, first of all, no primary *scale* (global, triadic, national, regional or urban) of current economic reorganization. Changes occur on all these levels and mutually influence

each other. This entails, secondly, that there are different *centres* of globalization, both on a national (the US, Great Britain, South East Asia) as well as a geographical level. These constitute, however, not a «[...] pre-given set of places, spaces, or scales that are merely being re-ordered. Instead, new places are emerging, new spaces are being created, new scales of organization are being developed and new horizons of action are being imagined – all in the light of new forms of (understanding) competition» (Jessop, 1999 *b*: 5; see also Dicken, 1998: 426). The author refers specifically to the emerging network of global cities, the restructuring of urban spaces and the growth of cross-border regions in order to enhance their international competitiveness, processes that might suggest the term «"glurbanization"» (Jessop, 1999 *b*: 4) instead of «globalization» (or the more sophisticated notion of «glocalization»).

Thirdly, different spheres such as culture, media, migration, technology, business, finance, education, etc. are characterized by their own modes, rhythms, developments, intensities and resistances. In sum, it is therefore

> [...] misleading to explain specific events and phenomena in terms of *the* process of «globalization», pointless to subsume anything or everything under the umbrella of «globalization», and unhelpful to seek to link anything and everything to «globalization» as if this somehow conveys more insight than alternative rubrics [for instance, *liberalization* or *internationalization*] could [...] (Jessop, 2000: 339)

Instead of attributing causal force to *globalization* itself, Jessop contextualizes contemporary processes historically from a Regulationist position.

After the crisis of the Keynesian National Welfare State (KNWS),[1] the historical arrangement or *spatio-temporal fix*[2] between national economies and the respective states, and its predominant mode of production, *fordism*,[3] a restructuring and renewal of the mode of accumulation[4] is currently underway. The KNWS has at least partially been replaced in many Western countries by another spatio-temporal «fix», the so-called Schumpeterian Workfare Post-National Regime (SWPN), a

1. The term goes back to the British economist John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) who had advocated that only a relatively equitable distribution of resources would strengthen the demand side and hence the capacity to consume which in turn would stimulate economic growth. Main responsibilities of national governments therefore included to ensure full employment and to regulate collective bargaining between employers and unions.
2. The term refers to the basic orientation of a state in a given period consisting of a specific accumulation strategy (for instance *fordism*) and a national political project (for instance the *welfare state*).
3. The fordist mode of regulation derives its name from the production paradigm first introduced by Henry Ford. It is based on economies of scale, standardisation, mass production and consumption and thus the need for a continuous expansion of the market, i.e. increasing demand. It is accompanied by a minute division of labour based on the time-and-motion studies of Frederick Charles Taylor (*taylorism*).
4. Buzzwords like the «information economy», «the knowledge society», «globalization», «the learning economy», «turbo capitalism» and others try to capture this development.

term that designates the shifting of state activities – albeit to different degrees in different national contexts – towards the promotion of greater flexibility, innovation (a *post-fordist* mode of accumulation) and the opening of national economies to international trade. The economic and political spheres have been re-articulated and transformed, a process that is still underway and, as a matter of fact, highly contested. The nation state still plays an important, albeit altered role, though the national is not the primary scale of economic policy or orientation anymore. As Jessop (2000) argues, state power has been transferred upwards (e.g. to supranational institutions such as the EU, the IMF or the WTO), downwards (through, for instance, decentralization and regionalization) and sideways (through the rise of international relations, cross-border and inter-local regions, etc.). Thus, 80% of international commerce is conducted between industrial nation states and regions, only 15% of world trade between continents, with the overall participation of Africa amounting to only 3% (Deutscher Bundestag, 2002: 50; Koopmann and Franzmeyer, 2003: 17). This development suggests the term «triadization» as the regional concentration in the three clusters, EU, USA and Asian Pacific, rather than «globalisation» (Dicken 1998: 116). Important to note here are the *continuities* in these processes based on the inherent conflictual relations in capitalism:

> Capital accumulation depends essentially on the market-mediated exploitation of wage-labour. For, while markets mediate the search for added value, they cannot themselves produce it. Moreover, the very process of commodification rooted in the spread of the market mechanism generates contradictions which cannot be resolved by that mechanism itself. For example, the commodity is both an exchange-value and a use-value; the worker is both an abstract unit of labour power substitutable by other such units (or, indeed, other factors of production) and a concrete individual with specific skills, knowledge, and creativity; the wage is both a cost of production and a source of demand; money functions both as an international currency and as national money; productive capital is both abstract value in motion (notably in the form of profits available for reinvestment) and a concrete stock of time – and place-specific assets in the course of being valorized; and so forth. These structural contradictions are always present in the capital relation but they can assume different forms in different contexts. They can also prove more or less manageable depending on the specific «spatio-temporal fixes» and the nature of the institutionalized class compromises with which they are from time to time associated. (Jessop, 1999 *b*: 6)

In both capitalist regimes or modes of accumulation – KWNS and the SWPN – these contradictions are present (continuity). The way they are dealt with, however, differs greatly (change). Neo-liberalism as the current predominant policy increases the first side of the contradictions, reinforcing «the abstract-formal

moment of exchange value» «at the expense of the substantive-material moment of use value» (1999 *b*: 7). The deepening and aggravating fundamental contradictions (including market failures, the uninhibited movement and accumulation of capital and the concomitant rising gaps between rich and poor and environmental degradation) might, in fact, prevent the full realization of something worth to be called globalization: «It is in disrupting past fixes and compromises without providing a new structured coherence for continued capital accumulation that neo-liberal forms of globalization appear to be so threatening to many capitalists – let alone other – interests» (Jessop, 1999 *b*: 8). Contrary to Hirst and Thompson (1996) then, who claim that current processes of internationalization are not qualitatively different from those before World War I and, thus, do not deserve a new terminology, Jessop (1999 *b*: 2) argues that there are crucial differences between these historical phases (as outlined above) including for instance a much wider asymmetry between largely immobile labour power and mobile capital today, whereas the last century saw an enormous movement of people crossing national boundaries looking for new opportunities:[5] «[...] the main forms of internationalization in trade, finance, indirect and direct investment, services, and R&D have been changing as has the relative weight of these different domains in overall global flows [...]» (Jessop, 1999 *b*: 2). Turning back the wheel of social progress is prone to either cause social conflict or intense efforts to make these changes more or less acceptable. The role of discourse in these processes of persuading citizens and workers of the beneficial effects of a neoliberal restructuring has therefore greatly increased.

Having outlined the general implications of the neoliberal project of restructuring, I will now tie these considerations more specifically to political-ethical questions any theory of intercultural communication should address as central issues in the field. The focus will be on questions of socio-economic distribution as a necessary precondition for the full participation and recognition of others in society and thus in communication.

3. Social Inequality and Misrecognition

A large part of the debate about the relation between processes of globalization and culture has centered on the effects of the spread of specific goods, services and patterns of consumption on different cultures. It is feared that a global consumer

5. See also Singh (1998: 6), who argues that in the 19th century citizenship was granted far more easily: «Since then, however, international migration has been reduced to a trickle because of draconian immigration laws and restrictive consular practices».

culture and its products might be invading, marginalizing, substituting or even eradicating local patterns of consumption, production and cultural practices.[6]

> Coca-Cola is not just an additional option for all the people around the globe that drink it, but an option that tends to force other options out of existence. And what counts as competition often ends up as a meaningless struggle between massive corporations selling identical products in different packaging. No one's quality of life is significantly improved by the ability to drink Coke rather than Pepsi. [...] Thus, finally, it is an open question whether removing barriers to trade will provide people with new options that they prefer, or rather remove pre-existing options that they would have preferred to the best that is now available to them. (Dupré, 2001: 111-112)

While there surely is an increasing convergence of patterns of consumption, commodities, entertainment and even systems of cultural beliefs and practices, differences in socio-economic positioning and hence «lifestyles» are widening. As has been argued in the preceding sections, current neoliberal policies work as a polarizing force generating and worsening economic, ecological and social distortions such as poverty, inequality and inequity in terms of opportunities and distribution of resources, both on a national and international plane:

> There is no doubt that globalization as currently proposed excludes a large part of the world and bestows on only a few countries significant purchasing power and a high level of productivity. Globalization is really a rich-country phenomenon and, to be more exact, something for the richest sectors within those rich countries. In other words, inside the North there is now North and a South, just as both exist within the South. (Ugarteche, 2000: 5)

The dissemination of a sophisticated global life style or culture is indeed very limited in scale while not in scope: national «elites» are becoming internationally increasingly similar in their forms of consumption and entertainment (ways of dressing, driving, eating, working, traveling, and so on), their mobility and access to technologies. At the same time, they become ever more disconnected[7] from other classes of the same nationality:

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6. The argumentation focuses on the influx of more or less standardized goods and services which lead to creating «particular types of demand and the shaping of consumer tastes and preferences» (Dicken 1998: 249). These tend to dominate regional markets rapidly and thus marginalize local products. This is not to be confused with the view that global practices and goods automatically lead to homogenization and elimination of difference. Global products do have to be appropriated and adjusted locally, a process that involves «localization» and finally generates a hybrid «glocalization».
7. In fact, many of these exclusive goods derive their value from being inaccessible to others. Consumption and possession of these goods and services become a status and class issue.

> Los habitantes de Beverly Hills y de los barrios opulentos de México, Lima, Johannesburgo o Bombay, a pesar de las distancias continentales que los separan, viven en condiciones de vida muy cercanas entre ellos, pero muy lejanas de los habitantes de los barrios pobres vecinos que los rodean. De Los Ángeles hasta Vladivostock y desde Río hasta Manila, más personas que no ven crecer sus ingresos, desempleadas y pobres, conviven con pequeñas élites que residen rodeadas de muros con su propia policía y consumiendo toda clase de preciosidades globales. (de Rivera, 1998: 113)
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> [The inhabitants of Beverly Hills and the opulent quarters of Mexico, Lima, Johannesburg or Bombay live, despite the continental distances that separate them, in very similar living conditions albeit very different from the inhabitants of those quarters that surround them. From Los Angeles to Vladivostock and from Rio to Manila, more people who either do not see their income rise or are unemployed and poor, live close to small elites whose residencies are surrounded by walls guarded by their own police and who consume all kinds of global luxuries.]

The argument put forth here is therefore that cultures are not assimilated into one global dominant culture through coercion, consent or a mix of the two, nor is it argued that the spread of modernizing elements automatically leads to a loss of traditional cultures.[8] Increasing inequality, however, is adverse to *any* form of communicative meaning making processes since it distorts systematically the interpersonal relationships at play.[9] Even though people can of course react to inequality in different ways (for example in a compliant or resistant fashion) depending on a variety of circumstantial and other factors,[10] unequal conditions are generally not favourable. Notwithstanding suffering caused by physical hardship and insecurity, individuals need «freedom from the arbitrary exercise of power, a measure of privacy and control of their lives, and opportunities for self-expression» (Parekh, 2000: 132). On a macro level, such scenarios are partly

8. As Sayer (2000: 7) argues, this perspective is often associated with the destruction and loss of somewhat idealized, traditional, small and intact communities and their systems of customs, values and beliefs. He points out that cultural values can also be oppressive: «At the same time as capitalism de-values some practices, its continued erosion of traditional relationships frees them up to be determined by actors through deliberation and choice rather than convention, thereby allowing the possibility of a re-moralization in some cases».
9. Intercultural miscommunication is of course not exclusively based on socio-economic differences. Increasing inequality, though, makes non- or miscommunication more likely. The politics of redistribution and recognition should thus not be treated separately.
10. When the gap between rich and poor widens and political and economic power is taken away from some groups, these might, as Castells (1998, 2000, 2003) and others have repeatedly argued, start to reemphasize local and ethnic identities which might in turn give rise to resistance, localism, fragmentation and, in its worst case, fundamentalism. This is often combined with the perception of powerful homogenizing forces, foreign values and practices generated by markets which endanger particular societies: «Unable to arrest the disintegration of their traditional cultures which have hitherto given meaning to their lives and held them together as communities, they experience a veritable moral panic and become vulnerable to pedlars of a fundamentalist return to an allegedly pristine past» (Parekh, 2000: 164).

created by the loss of equal democratic participation in political processes – decisions about how to organize society and the social good – through an ever greater political power of unelected entities, the concomitant exclusion of more and more stakeholders in debates and decisions, and a general reduction of citizenship to consumer choices.[11] On a different level, the increasing interrelatedness of some («elite») social circles at the expense of others undermines social cohesion, dissects solidarity and trust and, thus, the very structure and processes of democratic societies.

Apart from the structural preconditions for communication and participation, though, inequality impacts also on the micro-level of situated communication. As Sayer (2000, 2005) argues succinctly, recognition is based on evaluative judgments. With little control over the conditions of their lives and work, lack of knowledge and resources recognized as valuable by society, individuals, their practices, values and experiences may become devalued in the eyes of the others:[12]

> Identities are valued or devalued because of the place of their bearers in the prevailing structure of power, and their revaluation entails corresponding changes in the latter. Women, gays, cultural minorities and others cannot express and realize their identities without the necessary freedom of self-determination, a climate conducive to diversity, material resources and opportunities, suitable legal arrangements, and so on, and all these call for profound changes in all areas of life. (Parekh, 2000: 2)[13]

At the same time, social misrecognition tends to impact upon people's identity and sense of worth. Given the fact that reciprocal recognition is institutionally embedded and interactions often occur under grossly unequal conditions, Sayer (2005: 219) argues that only «in a relatively equal and free society can all develop their capacities, achieve something and thereby gain recognition». Subjects have to be «[...] in a strong sense equal and free to exercise autonomy, not merely formally in terms of their rights but in terms of their capabilities for living in ways they have reason to value» (Sayer, 2005: 219). Any form of market fundamentalism is thus prone to contribute to the diminishing of cultural diversity either through exclusion, marginalization or intervention: «The fear is that the

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11. García Canclini (1995: 208) for instance argues that today nation states are less characterized by solidarity between citizens, but have increasingly become communities of consumers differentiated by income (but unified, inside their socio-economic class by similar tastes and «lifestyles»). Consumerism, however, is devoid of any moral or civic substance.
12. I am arguing here in terms of conditional recognition (based on achievement), albeit unconditional recognition is even more distorted by relations of domination (Sayer, 2005: 225).
13. See also Sayer (2005: 222): «Differences in the distribution of respect, contempt, envy, resentment or condescension and deference are partly a product of inequalities in economic distribution, not merely because wealth is often taken as an index of worth, but because economic inequalities make objective differences to people in terms of their chances of achieving things that are likely to win conditional recognition».

different cultural standards could lead to an international "race to the bottom", down to conformity to the more "cost-effective" norms and values of other cultures. All those who are too inflexible to adapt to these cost-effective standards would be wiped out in competition» (Löhr and Steinmann, 1998: 11).

Surely, capitalism itself is difference blind, meaning that as long as differences do not disturb the smooth running of business they can potentially be integrated.[14] Although the functioning of capitalism is not dependent on gender, ethnic or other differences «its concrete practices are usually gendered» (Ray and Sayer, 1999: 14). Social stratification and «order» often build upon and follow ethnic, cultural, gender and/or age markers of difference.[15] A further increase in economic inequality thus deepens unequal conditions for cultures, societies and regions entailing a «progressive spatial segregation, separation and exclusion» (Bauman, 1998: 3; see also Castells, 2000: 67).[16] Bearing in mind that there is hardly a «full structural integration and strategic coordination across the globe», Jessop (1999 *b*: 4-5) argues that «[...] the various processes involved in globalization actually re-order – across economic space on different spatial scales – place-based differences and complementarities as the basis for dynamic competitive advantages [...]».[17] Regional cultures are thus not only exposed to the embedding effects of the market, but are often seen as not useful, problematic or even at cross-purposes with capital accumulation, and not being compatible with consumer or enterprise culture:[18]

> Nicht mit ökonomischer, finanzieller und politischer Macht ausgestattete regionale Kulturen sehen sich z.T. einem *Abwertungsdruck* ihrer humanen und ökologischen Ressourcen, ihres Sozialkapitals und ihrer Institutionen ausgesetzt, der einer Kapitulation vor dem politisch-ökonomischen Expansionszwang der Stärkeren gleichkommt [...] (Elsner, 2000: 8)

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14. In fact, markets need, address and construe different target groups and their concomitant tastes.
15. As Dicken (1998: 268) points out, different groups are differently hit by economic crises: women more than men, black and Hispanics more than whites, and blue-collar more than white-collar workers.
16. De Rivera (1998: 18) even speaks of an «apartheid socio-económico mundial».
17. In Mexico, for instance, the marginalization of indigenous communities has severely increased during the ten years the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has been established and so have, consequently, multicultural conflicts: «Estos conflictos se intensifican en tanto la política económica neoliberal, al acentuar en la última década la pobreza y la marginación de los indígenas y mestizos, agrava la migración y el desarraigo, los enfrentamientos por tierras y por el poder político». (García Canclini, 1995: 169) [These conflicts have intensified in the last decade since the neoliberal economic politics accentuated poverty, the marginalization of indigenous people and mestizos, and aggravated migration and uprooting, the conflicts about land and political power.]
18. As Lo Bianco (2000: 94) observes, some differences become more accentuated through an increasing socio-economic inequality whereas others diminish: «Paradoxically, in the same moment of cultural, civic and personal diversity brought about by globalisation, with its hybrid language and cultural forms emerging from new population mixes, there is also a massive contraction of diversity».

> [Those regional cultures which lack economic, financial or political resources are faced with a devaluation of their human and ecological resources, their social capital and institutions, which equals a capitulation in the face of the political-economic force to expansion of the stronger [...]]

Elsner speaks here of a double tendency to uniformation / homogenization and hierarchization / structural heterogenization. The first refers to the reduction of diversity through the orientation and subjugation to a single value or standard, namely success or «use-value» in the global market.[19] In turn, the term structural heterogenization describes the increased social stratification and disintegration often enmeshed with ethnicity and the marginalization of specific cultural groups:

> Mit diesem Begriff wird eine Gesellschafts – und Wirtschaftsstruktur gekennzeichnet, in der sich unterschiedliche Produktionsniveaus und Produktionsweisen abgeschichtet gelagert, miteinander verschränken – gewissermaßen im Spektrum von den hoch produktiven Tochterfirmen multinationaler Konzerne einerseits und einer kärglichen Selbstversorgungswirtschaft andererseits. Die bekannte Folge dieser Struktur besteht in einer Akzentuierung der Kluft zwischen Reich und Arm, zwischen Privilegierung und Marginalität in ein und derselben Gesellschaft. (Senghaas, 2002: 6-7)

> [This term designates a social and economic structure in which different levels and ways of producing are hierarchically interrelated and layered – ranging for instance from highly productive subsidiaries of multinational companies on the one hand to a miserable self-reliant economy on the other. The well-known consequence of this structure is the accentuation of rich and poor, of privileges and marginalization in one and the same society.]

4. The Concept of Tolerance

Hardly any author writing in the area of intercultural communication would disagree with the view that ethical questions are fundamental to the field and lie at the heart of every theoretical and practical approach. Very little attention, though, is given to the complexities of those questions in relation to *globalization.* Instead, many authors refer vaguely to some «ethical imperatives», such as social

19. «Während Diversität echte Verschiedenheit auf vielen kulturellen Dimensionen meint, bedeutet hierarchische Uniformierung die *Vergleichbarmachung* der Kulturen nach dem *einen Maßstab*, dem des "Erfolges" auf dem "Weltmarkt"». (Elsner, 2000: 8) [While diversity means authentic diversity on a number of cultural dimensions, hierarchical uniformity means the comparability of cultures along one measure, «success» in the «global market»].

justice, that require «addressing white privilege, racism, and other forms of prejudices» (Bennett, 2000: 20), showing their good-will without, however, addressing the intricacies these claims entail.

The concept of tolerance is one of the most commonly used terms to describe the ethics behind intercultural approaches, but it is far from being unproblematic. Tolerance might actually imply asymmetrical power relations:

> It is the knowledge of the possession of power on one's side and of powerlessness on the other side, which makes communication difficult. In such a context, the possibility of an «equal exchange», or «establishing co-membership», of «empathy and rapport» – all of which are seen as essential to a good communication's environment – are remote, for reasons which have little to do with language or accent, little to do with culture or with culturally derived speech conventions, but a great deal to do with **structure**. (Murray and Sondhi, 1987: 30, in Chang and Holt, 1997: 208)

The plea for tolerance thus «implies conceding the validity of society's disapproval and relying on its self-restraint» (Parekh, 2000: 1). The structural advantage of one group over another or of one individual over another might lie at the root of misunderstandings, misconstruals, divergent interests or values and resulting conflicts. In fact, unequal power relations are a necessary even if not sufficient precondition for the idea of tolerance to arise as a solution. Tolerance implies that the tolerator has the power to interfere with, «[...] influence, or remove the offending practice, but refrain from using that power» (Mendus, 1989: 8). The appeal to tolerance is thus generally made towards majorities with the resources to exert influence on minorities in the hope that they will refrain from doing so. The problematic nature of «tolerance» is particularly salient in the case of foreign and second language learners and speakers who have not yet fully «mastered» the language and discourses of the target speech community. They might be subjected to stereotyping processes (Giles and Coupland, 1991: 118) and, ultimately, dismissed as incompetent communication partners on the basis of their lower social status as immigrants.[20] A quest for tolerance in this situation is an appeal to the goodwill of the native speaker diverting attention from the asymmetrical social structure of majority-minority relations that systematically distort the process of communication.

Apart from the difficulties with this concept, the hope that is connected with the promotion of tolerance is in danger of failing in exactly those situations which are problematic, that is, in circumstances where diversity is «coupled with

20. This phenomenon has been investigated under the heading of «host-gatekeeper» interaction.

dislike, disapproval or disgust» (Mendus, 1989: 18-19) and, I would like to add, conflicts of interests. If not combined with a deeper *understanding*, the «other» is in these situations usually regarded as simply being wrong, with the result of tolerance ending quickly and sharply. The suspension of good will can entail further exclusionary practices and transport us into a sphere of indifference (Wuthnow, Hunter, Bergesen and Kurzweil, 1984: 239). The concept of tolerance can potentially mislead us into harmonious thinking, fictitious neutrality and false ideas about real-world conflicts intertwined with issues of power and structure. It remains on the individual plane with no political message.

5. Conclusion

Following from the above, I contend that a theory of intercultural communication is only of interest and relevance if deeper seated conflicts are addressed that arise out of different values, worldviews, interests *and* structural inequalities. If conflicts between members of different social and linguistic groups were simple misunderstandings about issues nobody has a stake in, these could easily be resolved. It is therefore «long overdue» (Paige and Martin, 1996: 37; see also Blommaert and Verschueren, 1991: 10) to recognise that «power and power differentials inherent in the social and political context play a critical part in intercultural education». The analysis of ethnicity (and by implication culture, gender and other markers of difference) should be set «squarely within the context of economic and political structure and process» (Fenton, 1999: 236). As Parekh argues succinctly, misrecognition cannot be abolished by rationally persuading the dominant by intellectual argument and moral appeal:

> This is to misunderstand the dynamics of the process of recognition. Misrecognition has both a cultural and a material basis. White Americans, for example, take a demeaning view of African Americans partly under the influence of the racist culture, partly because this legitimizes the prevailing system of domination, and partly because the deeply disadvantaged blacks do sometimes exhibit some of the features that confirm such stereotypes. Misrecognition, therefore, can only be countered by both undertaking a rigorous critique of the dominant culture and radically restructuring the prevailing inequalities of economic and political power. Since the dominant group welcomes neither the radical critique nor the corresponding political praxis, the struggle for recognition involves cultural and political contestation and sometimes even violence, as Hegel (1960) highlighted in his analysis of the dialectic of recognition and which Taylor's (1994) sanitized version of it ignores. As we have seen, the politics of culture is integrally tied up with the politics of power because culture is itself institutionalized power and deeply imbricate with other systems of power. Cultural self-esteem cannot be developed and sustained in

> a vacuum and requires appropriate changes in all the major areas of life. No multicultural society can be stable and vibrant unless it ensures that its constituent communities receive both just recognition and a just share of economic and political power. It requires a robust form of social, economic and political democracy to underpin its commitment to multiculturalism. (Parekh, 2000: 342-343)

Any theory of intercultural communication requires a discussion of the nature of well-being and an explicit commitment to values such as social equality, fair distribution of resources, and social welfare. It should take into consideration the diverse modes of disaggregating people and generating inequality and relations of domination. Only by raising «[...] the question of the social costs of economic violence; and thus try[ing] to lay foundations for an economics of well-being» (Bourdieu, 1998: 29) can processes of misrecognition and misunderstanding be understood.

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