

GLOBALIZATION AND THE FUTURE OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Globalization of the world's financial systems in particular has given rise to an extensive literature on other aspects of the phenomenon, including its effects on culture and political behaviour. This article argues that globalization itself is not as new as is sometimes supposed, not least in that even the world's most isolated societies have always been constituent, permeable, parts of wider networks. Hence, the notion that anthropology is challenged by globalization because of its tradition of viewing local societies as 'closed', to be viewed by specialists in the role of participant observers, is to forget that anthropology, before the influence of Malinkowski, was itself once comparative and diffusionist. The discipline needs simply to recover its earlier bearings and to rethink an emphasis that made a far too emphatic distinction between the universalizing force of the 'modern' and the isolation of 'primitive' societies.

AS WE WELL KNOW, ANTHROPOLOGY TRADITIONALLY DEFINED ITSELF as the study of 'primitive' or 'exotic' societies, including such sectors of Western societies as rural communities or ethnic minorities. Ever since the revolution effected by Malinowski, the legitimacy of the discipline has rested on a single foundation: the technique of long-term participant observation within a clearly bounded field site. And although there are many who believe that an anthropology of the contemporary world is indeed possible,¹ there are those who argue that the very uniqueness of anthropology's object — and thus its very existence as a discipline — are today imperilled. This argument is based on a particular reading of the current process of globalization and of its consequences for the world's cultures.

Bearing in mind that the theory of globalization has its origins in economics and political science, I am concerned here only with the implications of the paradigm's extension into the domain of culture. By examining globalization as both an empirical phenomenon and a theoretical construction, I shall attempt to unpack the set of assumptions underlying the idea that globalization represents a mortal threat to anthropology.

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1. Marc Augé, *Pour une anthropologie des mondes contemporains* (Aubier, Paris, 1994).

At the close of the last millennium, with its proliferation of cultural, ethnic and religious conflicts, anthropology had a very real, if perhaps unexpected, future. Yet in order to maintain the uniqueness of our discipline, anthropologists must avoid two theoretical pitfalls: first, to embrace uncritically the hypothesis of the cultural homogenization of the contemporary world, and second, to cling to the corresponding illusion of the isolation of the so-called 'primitive' societies anthropology was created to study and of the past with which they were so readily conflated. I shall also attempt to demonstrate that the dichotomy between a globalizing modernity and a localized pre-modernity is but a recent reformulation of the old dichotomy between 'civilized' and 'primitive'.

The homogenization of the contemporary world

The idea that our planet is undergoing a process of economic and cultural homogenization began in the United States. The reality of the general and increasing interconnection of all the inhabitants of our planet would seem to be a matter of common sense. With the growth of economic exchange, the extension of multinationals throughout the world, the process of 'Coca-Colonization' and most recently, the Internet, who could deny that we have truly entered the era of McLuhan's 'Global Village' and Hannerz's 'Global Ecumene'?² The title of Barber's 1995 book, *Jihad versus McWorld*, neatly captures this idea in the simultaneous evocation of two of globalization's most ubiquitous symbols: the Mac computer and the Big Mac.³

The theory of globalization can be traced back to the Marxist idea, developed by Rosa Luxemburg, of the world market and imperialism, with the major difference that, instead of class or territorial struggles, it posits identity struggles. Far from promoting the uniformization of culture, some American theorists see economic globalization as the cause of the current rash of identity and religious conflicts. Barber, for example, reads the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as a response to the universal imposition of particular modes of production and consumption, and Huntington imagines conflict in the twenty-first century evolving into an opposition between 'the West and the Rest' (by which he means Western civilization and an agglomeration of the Islamic and Confucian worlds).⁴ Islam, particularly in its more militant forms, plays a critical role in both cases. The bleak picture that these thinkers paint of the future tends, however, to ignore the numerous ethnic and religious conflicts in other regions of the world, such as

2. Ulf Hannerz, 'The global ecumene', in *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the social organization of meaning* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1992), pp. 217–67.

3. Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs McWorld* (Times Books, New York, 1995).

4. Samuel H. Huntington, 'The clash of civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs* 72, 3 (1993), pp. 22–49.

Africa, that fall outside of its binary framework. What we get instead is a vision of twenty-first-century politics in terms of Crusades.

The globalization theorists themselves admit that they are attempting to fill the gap opened by the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, which some see as the 'End of History', to use Fukuyama's phrase. This eschatological vision is inscribed in a conceptual space in which there is no possible alternative to the existing economic system, and in which only questions of culture, ethnicity and religion remain to be debated. While these theorists agree on the evidence for globalization, they disagree on the nature of its effects. If some, like Barber and Huntington, foresee an increasing 'clash of civilizations', others prophesy the growing interpenetration of cultures in a world-wide process of 'creolization'.

James Clifford suggests in his latest work that the cultures of the planet are transforming into mobile and diasporic 'traveling cultures'.⁵ Hannerz and Glissant express similar ideas in their postulation of a global process of 'creolization',⁶ an idea borrowed from linguistics and bearing affinities to the biological concept of 'acclimatization'.

Glissant — who, as both a Caribbean writer and a trained anthropologist, is in a good position to compare creole language and culture — makes a case for the parallelism of linguistic and cultural processes of hybridization. His concept of creolization is heavily freighted with issues of identity. He sees Caribbean identity as born in the slave ship and the ensuing genetic and cultural mixing of the plantation. And yet, this form of identity so intrinsically tied to a particular historical experience provides for him the very cultural paradigm for the future global culture.

Glissant distinguishes between 'composite' and 'atavistic' cultures, by which he means both nation-states such as France and cultures in which collective identity is defined in reference to a particular ancestor, as in many parts of Africa. Yet, while this does recognize the specificity of Caribbean societies and explain the emphasis in Caribbean studies on issues of identity, it has the disadvantage of racializing other societies, and particularly those of Africa; for to define these societies in terms of atavism is to ignore their intrinsically composite nature.

It would be wise to exercise some caution in employing such ideas as creolization or global mixing as formulated by Hannerz in his 'global ecumene'. In imagining the contemporary process of homogenization as a union of discrete entities, such theories transpose a biological metaphor that makes of them anthropology's answer to the theory of globalization in economics. The concept of creolization represents a conception of human

5. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1997).

6. Hannerz, 'The global ecumene'; Edouard Glissant, '*Traité du tout-monde*', *Poétique IV* (Gallimard, Paris, 1997).

demography in which different species interact in a process of hybridization. Such an idea of cultural cross-pollination takes the biological thinking of American anthropology to its logical conclusion.

The very idea of a hybrid post-colonial or post-Cold War world is itself based on the assumption that there exist discrete entities that might be called 'cultures'. In order to avoid such ideas of mixing, whether through homogenization or hybridization, we might try starting from the opposite position, by suggesting that every society is mixed; that any 'mixing' one can observe is the product of the mixing of already mixed entities; and that this continuous process of cultural exchange is as old as human culture itself.

Globalization can be conceived neither in terms of the dilution nor of the confrontation of distinct entities emerging from a long past of mutual isolation. Instead, we might attempt to examine globalization as engendering or rendering possible the differential production of cultures. Let us now examine the modalities of this process.

The ineffectiveness of globalization

One good place to observe this cultural engendering is in patterns of marketing and consumption of international products. In the case, for example, of Barber's idea of 'McDonaldization,' one finds, in contrast to the hypothesized homogenization, a *feta* salad in the McDonalds in Athens and a *salade niçoise* in the McDonalds in Paris, indicating a certain adaption to local culinary traditions.

A single product may also be subjected to radically different patterns of consumption in different socio-cultural contexts. While in the US, for example, Coca-Cola is primarily consumed by young people as a part of daily life, among the Luo of Kenya it is consumed only during marriage ceremonies and could be considered a ritual item.⁷ And while the unpopularity of the Macintosh computer in America is legendary, the Mac has virtually become a symbol of national identity for the French. One could cite many more examples of this type, such as the adoption of baseball as a national sport in Japan or the Dominican Republic, to demonstrate how a given signifier can be adapted to different signifieds in different cultural contexts.

Thus it is through the consumption of imported commercial products or foreign ideas that we can sometimes observe the strongest manifestations of cultural or national identity. One could even say that, rather than leading to a levelling of the world's cultural diversity, the growth of global exchange may actually be a condition of their very existence. The system formed by the planet's cultures allows various social actors to choose from the vast array of products and ideas available in the global market of identities.

7. M. Dietler, personal communication.

Because of its economic origins, the theory of globalization also tends to ignore the role of states and international organizations which, even in this age of the dictatorship of the market, still play some role in international affairs. The free market policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank tend to expect the state to disengage from the economy and to cede part of its power to so-called 'civil society'. The result is a proliferation of non-profit organizations attempting to fill the void, the rise of special interest groups and a hardening of identities. If there is indeed a link between free market capitalism and multi-culturalism, economic globalization should eventually lead to the flourishing of a wide spectrum of non-national identities, based on ethnicity, religion, class, age, gender, sexual preference and so on.

At the same time, the shift in emphasis of international organizations from individual rights to collective ones — and particularly those of 'indigenous peoples' — encourages social actors who feel deprived or excluded to give a collective form to their demands, and may even lead to the emergence of new *ad hoc* ethnic identities from the common defence of a cause.⁸

Instead of Barber's Macworldization mechanically leading to counter-hegemonic — or, in Wallerstein's terminology, anti-systemic — reactions, globalization appears in practice to allow different cultures to express themselves indirectly through the state. Yet at the same time, the international language of consumerism puts major constraints on different cultural systems, and could be seen as the medium through which they are now obliged to express themselves.

Coca-Colonization, for example, like any other item of communication, is a signifier or a semantic framework through which any culture may express itself and thus exist. As we shall see, the translation of a planetary signifier into a local language may also be a means through which a given movement participates in the international forum of identities. The adoption of a common medium of communication provides a sort of communicational leveller that destroys the illusion of cultural relativism. For if the world's various cultures are indeed equal in terms of the values they uphold, they are nevertheless, perhaps more than ever before, clearly unequal in terms of their power in the new international market of culture. The choice of a common standard, be it the Bible, the Koran or Coca-Cola, could be said to represent the price that a culture must pay to enter the global market of identities. Thus, globalization may not represent the disappearance of cultural specificities, but rather their maintenance, or even reinforcement, by means of a system of cultural free exchange.

8. See on this theme S. Nonnenmacher, 'La question autochtone dans le système des Nations-unies: une approche anthropologique' (DEA thesis in anthropology, EHESS, Paris, 1997).

Fieldwork in the age of globalization

The theory of globalization is deployed by contemporary anthropologists such as Clifford, Gupta and Ferguson⁹ in an attempt to question the fieldwork method that has for so long constituted the very heart of the discipline and the theory of culture implicit in its use. In place of the traditional white male observer at a pristine foreign site ('fieldwork'), these authors propose de-localized research within the intrinsically diasporic context of contemporary culture ('network'¹⁰). The distinction between 'here' and 'there' (between 'home' and 'the field') that was from the start the basis of Western anthropology's project of domination over other cultures appears today to be breaking down. The former state of affairs is now seen as the result not only of geographical barriers but also of social, ethnic and cultural ones, and the only way to destroy these barriers is to admit into the profession members of the groups that have hitherto tended to be its object of study rather than its pool of applicants. Fieldwork — traditionally conceived as the activity of a foreign observer in a given community — is thus now called upon to include members of the observed community itself and to encourage the written production of local anthropology ('homework').

This project is clearly based on a form of culturalism, which is one of the very foundations of American anthropology that today informs such phenomena as Political Correctness and Affirmative Action. And, in spite of its good intentions, this 'anthropology for everyone' has two major drawbacks. First of all, such a multiculturalist vision tends to ignore anthropology's roots in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and the universalist vision of human knowledge. The discipline was virtually founded on the idea that, regardless of the culture to which they are applied, the categories used by the anthropologist remain constant, since they are the product of a common corpus. The very idea of an anthropological pluralism (beyond the existence of different schools) thus appears to be in contradiction with the very essence of the anthropological project as the comparative study of human culture.

That local anthropologists are well aware of this is evident in the fact that, instead of criticizing the culturally specific nature of anthropological tools, they tend to focus on their own position as local observers.¹¹ Rather than insisting on the distinctiveness of their analytical approaches to the study of their own cultures as opposed to those of their Western colleagues, they emphasize the differences in the attitude of their countrymen towards them.

9. Clifford, *Routes*; A. Gupta and J. Ferguson (eds), *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and grounds of a field science* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1997).

10. This term is my own.

11. See, for example, S. Bagayogo, 'Un africain aux champs: leçons d'un stage,' *Cahiers d'études africaines* 66-7 (1977), pp. 365-8, and M. Diawara, 'Les recherches en histoire africaine menées par un autochtone, ou l'inconvénient d'être du cru,' *Cahiers d'études africaines* 97 (1985), pp. 5-19.

This is the reason for the failure of projects such as 'Transcultura' and 'Regards Croisés' that attempt to counterbalance the massive movement of Northern anthropologists to Southern sites; for whatever direction a researcher may choose to take, the analytical tools being used remain constant. The final outcome of such post-modernist anthropological multiculturalism, were it to succeed, would be nothing less than the field's dissolution into a myriad particular visions. And, whether we like it or not, the defining characteristic of anthropology is that it is one.

A second critique that one may make of the globalization theorists concerns a contradiction at the very core of their reasoning. For, how can one reconcile the deconstruction of anthropological fieldwork as a mechanism of Western domination with the reproduction of the distinction between 'primitive' and 'modern'?

If the general interdependence of all the cultures of the globe represents a radical break with the past, as the post-modern anthropologists assure us it does, this is to assume that there was once a time when societies existed in virtual isolation from one another, a time when Malinowski's intensive localized method would have been perfectly justified. Yet even in Malinowski's time, it was impossible to describe the Trobriand islanders without taking into account the colonial situation, and Radcliffe-Brown's frustration at having to gather his data on the Andaman from prisoners completely ignorant of local custom is well known.¹² Yet the exclusive focus on the colonial period in contemporary critiques of Malinowski presupposes a pre-conquest period that truly conformed to the situation postulated by his methodology. Such scenarios trace the beginning of non-Western local histories to the colonial conquest and reduce pre-colonial history to a mere prologue to that momentous event. This is to imagine non-Western societies as stuck between the rock of pre-colonial lack of history and the hard place of their own destruction under colonialism: this is an approach that does not do justice to the deeper meaning of Malinowski's methodology. For, in his eagerness to contest evolutionism and because he conceived of participant observation as stemming from the tradition of naturalist zoology, Malinowski did indeed contribute to the artificial closing of so-called 'closed' societies. And yet, the rich ethnographic material and detailed attention to historical context in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* can still disclose to us something of the truly open nature of Trobriander society.

'Closed' societies dis-closed

Inspired by the idea of the world economy, globalization theorists make qualitative distinctions between our era and all that has gone before it. For,

12. Gupta and Ferguson, *Anthropological Locations*, pp. 6, 20.

while they admit that other epochs have known some form of cultural interaction between societies,¹³ they see such exchanges as incomparable in intensity with the current phenomenon of globalization, and even question their very existence. One might argue, in contrast to globalization's implicit reproduction of the old anthropological distinction between 'primitive' and 'modern,' that there is not, nor has ever been, such a thing as a closed society.

The idea of the 'closed society' occupies an important place in Western social thought and is part of the complex of concepts by which Western civilization constructed its identity in opposition to a fictive radical alterity.¹⁴ Contemporary anthropology has inherited a whole series of canonical oppositions of socio-political thought, such as *ethnos-polis*, *gemeinschaft-gesellschaft*, holism-individualism, and so on. By imagining the existence of societies radically different from their own and labelling them 'primitive' or somehow closer than their own to the societies of animals, anthropologists succeeded in making operational the concept of the bounded research space known as the field site, in the image of the biotope that replaced the zoological garden as the privileged field of observation in the study of primates.

Kuklick has examined how at the end of the nineteenth century anthropologists, such as Haddon, adopted the idea of fieldwork as 'the detailed study of a single tribe or a natural assembly of peoples'.¹⁵ This concept of the field site as a bounded space was reinforced by Rivers' genealogical method, which was in turn inspired by the eugenics of Galton.¹⁶ This double invention, first applied in an expedition to the Torres Straits, was to mark the victory of fieldwork over comparative historical analysis as the privileged anthropological method. The intensive localized study of a single population and the focus on kinship relations of the genealogical method gave priority to synchronic relationships and internal relations of a given society. More than the functionalism attributed to Malinowski, it is this conception of fieldwork that is directly responsible for the denial of the political nature and historicity of non-Western societies. And this is why the epistemology of the history of intensive localized ethnographic research is essential to the project of identifying contemporary anthropology's false obstacles and eventually overcoming them.

13. See Arjun Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and difference in the global economy,' *Public Culture* 2, 2 (1990), pp. 1–24.

14. One thinks, among others, of the work of Bergson and Popper.

15. On Haddon's role in the genesis of the ideas of fieldwork, see H. Kuklick, 'After Ishmael: the fieldwork tradition and its future,' in Gupta and Ferguson, *Anthropological Locations*, pp. 47–65.

16. For more on Rivers' development of the genealogical method and its ties to Galton's eugenics, see G. W. Stocking Jr, *The Ethnographer's Magic and Other Essays in the History of Anthropology* (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI, 1992), pp. 32–3. On Galton's eugenics, see J-P. Thomas, *Les fondements de l'eugénisme* (Que Sais-je? Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 1995).

The Malinowskian legacy taught that the very choice of the fieldwork method was a function of the intrinsic nature of the object. For the Africanist anthropologists trained by Malinowski, and particularly Nadel, the functionalist method was a response to the insularity of the Trobriand society studied by Malinowski and not to any project to revolutionize anthropology. Nadel found among the Nupe of Nigeria a society whose size and complexity precluded the intensive, localized method, and, at the same time, one whose orality made equally impractical the use of the traditional methods of the historian.

Twenty-five years after Malinowski's experience with the Trobrianders, Nadel thus found himself confronted with the anthropological study of a linguistically and ethnically plural society in a cultural community of the West African savannah, united by a common religion, Islam, which they represented as indicative of a 'family resemblance'. This situation of cultural plurality, which seems to have been the result of an historical process of ramification or derivation from a common cultural pattern, should have compelled Nadel to abandon functionalism and seek a new approach. Yet, because of his deep personal and institutional ties to Malinowski, his analysis of the embedding of Nupe society in larger structures was accompanied by an unfortunate conflation of 'tribal culture' and the 'culture area'.¹⁷

The new diffusionism

Although it seemed for decades that Malinowski's concepts of fieldwork and participant observation had become canonical, we are now witnessing a dramatic return of diffusionism and a re-evaluation of some of that doctrine's most controversial aspects. Some anthropologists see the maelstrom of globalization as demanding a re-examination of the Malinowskian method's triumph over the itinerant method and of the resulting theoretical deficit. Thus we see an apparent resuscitation of the very historical approach that Malinowski dismissed as based on the pure conjecture of evolutionist theory and impossible to verify through an examination of myth, which he defined as a social charter. Yet it is the very reality of the embedding of the micro-societies posited by the fieldwork methodology in larger contexts that has led Gupta and Ferguson to ask, in paraphrase of Elliot Smith, if 'the sole method of studying mankind is to sit in a Melanesian Island for a couple of years and listen to the gossip of the villagers'.¹⁸ Here we find an anthropological preoccupation dating back to the discipline's birth at the dawn of colonialism and Rivers' concern at the 'depopulation' of Melanesian societies.

17. S. F. Nadel, *Black Byzantium* (Oxford University Press, London, 1942), pp. vii–viii.

18. Gupta and Ferguson, *Anthropological Locations*, p. 20.

Yet the anthropology of globalization is very reminiscent of the anthropology of colonialism in the tradition of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute¹⁹ and Georges Balandier, with the important difference that it perpetuates the dubious distinction between an anthropological past and a post-anthropological present created by globalization. The musings about an end to anthropology that we find in the writings of Clifford, Gupta and Ferguson rest on the double postulate of an endangered or extinct 'primitive' world and a globalizing modernity that is increasingly squeezing anthropologists into the territory of literary critics, semioticians and social science specialists.

And yet, the hypothesis that the global village has displaced a world of disconnected localities has long haunted historians such as Braudel,²⁰ who refused to apply the notion of the world economy to pre-colonial Africa, because of its imagined isolation, and Iliffe, who explained the underdevelopment of Africa by its exclusion from the larger systems of international trade.²¹

To say that anthropology is dead because the societies it was invented to study are undergoing large-scale transformations marked by a disappearance of 'tradition' is to reduce the discipline to a study of the past, and those societies to a mere rejection of Western capitalism. The contemporary revival of diffusionism and the idea of the global village or 'Ecumene' appears to be little more than a mask behind which anthropologists attempt to hide from the question of the nature of non-Western societies before their recent contact with Europe.

Africanists have much to offer the understanding of non-Western societies, for they have always tended to think about the societies they study in comparative terms, either in merely speculative terms (Griaule²²) or in a more scientific way (Delafosse²³). What I call 'pre-colonial globalization' is in fact a reformulation of an old question among Africanists and anthropologists in general, and one that concerns both Africa's history and its contacts with the rest of the world. Africanist anthropology's heuristic nature is largely a result of the fact that, since the earliest written accounts by European explorers, Westerners have always tended to think about African societies in terms of networks. While such reflections are undoubtedly due

19. Cf. the works of Gluckman, Mitchell, Watson, etc.

20. Fernand Braudel, 'Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme: XVème-XVIIIème siècle' in *Le Temps du Monde* (Armand Colin, Paris, 1979), p. 14.

21. John Iliffe, *Africans: The history of a continent* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995).

22. Thus Griaule could compare Bambara to Hindus and Dogon to Chinese. See V. Monteil's preface to the reprint of Charles Monteil, *Les Bambara du Ségou et du Kaarta* (Maisonnette et Larose, Paris, 1977), p. x.

23. For more on the work of Delafosse see J.-L. Amselle and E. Sibeud (eds), *Maurice Delafosse: entre orientalisme et ethnographie; l'itinéraire d'un africaniste* (Maisonnette et Larose, Paris, 1998).

in part to the nature of travellers' accounts, they are also due to the long presence in Africa of world religions such as Islam and of the writing systems that accompanied them, which inspired a certain Orientalist slant in the work of such early Africanists as Barth and Delafosse.

Unlike India or China, Africa has had its historicity utterly denied by such Western thinkers as Hegel, and at the same time carefully studied by a lot of eminent researchers. The history of Africanism could well be written as the alternation between the two poles of contextualization of African societies in larger socio-historical units — as in the work of Frobenius, Delafosse, Baumann and Westerman — and ethnographic specificity — as in the work of Griaule, Evans-Pritchard and Fortes. Goody, though a student of Fortes, challenged from the perspective of his literary background the Malinowskian conception of oral tradition as a mythical charter, and reintroduced elements of a diffusionist perspective.²⁴ In short, there has always been a counterpoint between the Africanist approach and a latent diffusionism, whether in the disincarnated form one finds in Griaule, or in the more historical form of Delafosse and Goody.

While Dieterlen, in 'Mythe et organisation sociale au Soudan français',²⁵ attempts to contextualize West Africa in a Mande world that, if not his own invention, was certainly in part that of his *griot* informants, Delafosse, in his *Haut Sénégal-Niger*,²⁶ carefully combines oral accounts with Arab chronicles in his work on the great medieval empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai. In the first case, there is an arbitrary extension and uncritical utilization of data supplied by local informants, and in the second, a patient reconstruction of great political and cultural units that foreshadows the later work of Goody (who himself praised Delafosse's spirit of synthesis).²⁷

But even Goody's emphasis on the permeability of non-Western societies is based more on second-hand materials than on his own work with the Lo Dagaa and the Lo Wiili, that was so clearly in the structural-functionalist tradition of his teacher Fortes. In spite of all of the externalizing in his work — particularly evident in his reaction to Kucklick's book²⁸ — Goody ultimately proves incapable of completely abandoning an approach emphasizing the isolation and specificity of African societies. It is almost as if, at the end of his career, he felt himself obliged to represent the entire Malinowskian tradition.

24. Jack Goody, *The Expansive Moment: Anthropology in Britain and Africa 1918–1970* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995), p. 134.

25. G. Dieterlen, 'Mythe et organisation sociale au Soudan français,' *Journal de la Société des africanistes* XXV, I and II (1955), pp. 39–76.

26. Maurice Delafosse, *Haut-Sénégal Niger*, new edn., 3 vols. (Maisonnette et Larose, Paris, 1972 [1912]).

27. Goody, *The Expansive Moment*, p. 40.

28. H. Kucklick, *The Savage Within: The social history of British anthropology, 1885–1945* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991).

Without pretending to retrace every step of anthropology from the localizing turn taken by Malinowski through its reversal as preached by the converts of globalization theory, it is perhaps time to begin studying non-Western societies from a wider perspective in order to relativize the dangers that appear to be looming on their horizons. It is ultimately neither globalization nor the historicity of non-Western societies that is new in anthropology, but rather the methodological shift that has been brewing for decades under the combined impact of the history of anthropology and post-modernism. Since we have begun historicizing the field itself, placing anthropologists in their socio-historical contexts and examining the dialogue (or non-dialogue) between them and their informants, we have exposed the illusion that the communication between the societies of the *Ecumene* somehow represents a definitive break with the past.

Rereading anthropological fieldwork

A careful examination of the anthropological literature reveals that societies have always communicated, including even in their occasional refusal to communicate. It is rather the very invention of the anthropological isolate that has obscured our view of the relations between societies. Anthropologists interested in making a serious assessment of globalization's impact on the societies they study must first be able to contextualize those societies in their larger environment.

To take but one example, the very society that came to incarnate the archetype of the 'primitive' — that of the Trobrianders — is one in which trade plays a critical role. For although Malinowski insisted that the *kula* system of ceremonial exchanges formed a closed circle,²⁹ other data have shown that the network of transactions extended as far as the highlands of New Guinea.³⁰

Reading Malinowski's masterpiece today, we are confronted with what was manifestly an open international system of trade covering a vast array of societies that form a linguistic, cultural and political continuum. In a context characterized by physically bounded social units, the *kula* appears to function as a political agent regulating a complex system of rank and status. Despite Malinowski's thesis of a-historicity, historical information is in fact sprinkled throughout his book, and one is perhaps struck less by his artificial characterization of these maritime communities as 'closed' than by his privileging of magic and psychology over the political.

29. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An account of native enterprise and adventure in the archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (Routledge, London, 1922).

30. A. Devyver, preface to the French translation of *Argonauts*, *Les Argonautes du Pacifique occidental* (Gallimard, Paris, 1963), p. 28.

Using the intensive, localized fieldwork method, Malinowski chose to describe the *kula* as a system of ceremonial exchange, in an attempt to contest his teacher Seligman, who saw in the *kula* a purely economic system of commerce. Yet by renouncing the itinerant method in favour of the sedentary one, Malinowski deprived himself of a means of investigating the geopolitics of the *kula*. This failure has been noted by commentators on his work such as Uberoi, whose rereading of Malinowski's data in his *Politics of the Kula Ring* substitutes for that masterpiece in the Frazerian tradition a political anthropology in the spirit of Evans-Pritchard, Fortes and Gluckman.³¹ Uberoi demonstrates how this international system of trade, which covers such a wide geographical space, is essential to the maintenance of local social units, and showed Trobriander society as essentially ranked with no discernible institution of kingship. Uberoi's reinterpretation of Malinowski's data opens up the possibility of a comparison of the *kula* ring with other international networks of exchange, such as that of the pre-colonial Congo.³²

Argonauts was in fact the first anthropological work to demonstrate the importance of the ceremonial aspect in long-distance exchange, a theme that has since been studied by others in many other cultural contexts.³³ The *kula* system is an example of a phenomenon of globalization that is utterly independent of Western Europe, and clearly illustrates the dangers of applying concepts of self-subsistence to non-Western societies. Malinowski's work showed the potential of such economies to encompass vast distances while at the same time retaining a specifically local character, and Levi-Strauss's work on marriage patterns showed that the *kula* ring never really closes. Uberoi describes the *kula* as an instrument in a vast political system in which local rank and status may be read as a micro-level aspect of a macro-system. Weiner emphasizes the critical role of women in the reproduction of Trobriander social units.³⁴ Thomas takes the next step in his book *Entangled Objects*, by analyzing Melanesian and Polynesian social systems in terms of the problematics of Balandier, and thereby demonstrates the futility of any attempt to analyze the earliest descriptions of gift exchange in the Pacific independently of the colonial situation.³⁵

31. J. P. Singh Uberoi, *Politics of the Kula Ring: An analysis of the findings of Bronislaw Malinowski* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1962).

32. See G. Dupré, *Les Naissances d'une société: espace et historicité chez les Beembe du Congo* (ORSTOM, Paris, 1985).

33. One thinks, for example, of the differences in approach towards medieval exchange patterns between 'economic' analyses, such as that of Pirenne, and the more 'Maussian' analyses of Duby.

34. A. B. Weiner, *Women of Value, Men of Renown: New perspectives in Trobriand exchange* (University of Texas Press, Austin, TX, 1976).

35. N. Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, material culture and colonialism in the Pacific* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1991).

Yet the focus on the colonial period does have the drawback of rendering nearly impossible an investigation of local situations preceding the contact with Europe. *Argonauts* is in fact full of references to the pre-colonial period, and Malinowski's denial of history was directed rather against evolutionism and diffusionism than against micro-history. At the time when he was developing his method, he felt obliged to combat both speculative history and the geography of cultural traits and thus chose to concentrate on the internal relations of a given society. Yet he would later rediscover history in Africa in the form of cultural change.³⁶ It was ironically at the meeting between Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski at the end of the First World War, which might be called the anthropological equivalent of Yalta, that the former was to find himself representing 'salvage' anthropology and the latter, for essentially practical reasons, representing culture contact.³⁷ But here again, Malinowski's focus on the colonial experience made it effectively impossible for him to repeat what had been one of the great strengths of *Argonauts* — the contextualization of Trobriander society in a regional system of exchange.

Condominas reflects a similar spirit in proposing the replacement of the term 'culture', which he finds inadequate to the expression of South-East Asian social reality, by that of 'social space'.³⁸ He dismisses the term 'culture' as derived from the genetic concept of the isolate, and thus heavily freighted with assumptions. For in the final analysis, all human communities are traversed by a multiplicity of ecological, economic, linguistic, parental and political networks that inscribe them in a series of concentric or overlapping social spaces. Like West Africa, South-East Asia appears to juxtapose such great civilizations as the Thai, Laotian, Vietnamese and Chinese with relatively simple societies of older populations, thus creating an uneven political and economic landscape with centres and peripheries that could be called partial or even 'local' globalizations. It is precisely this type of heterogeneous social space that constitutes the true object of anthropology as a micro-study within a larger spatio-temporal context.³⁹

36. Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Dynamics of Cultural Change: An inquiry into race relations in Africa*, new edn. (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1961 [1945]).

37. See G. W. Stocking Jr, *After Tylor: British social anthropology 1888–1951* (Athlone Press, London, 1996), pp. 399, 401.

38. Georges Condominas, *L'espace social: à propos de l'Asie du sud-est* (Flammarion, Paris, 1980). See, in particular, the Introduction, pp. 11–94.

39. Embedded in a long and sweeping history, the Mnong Gar whom Condominas studied, like the Kachin studied by Leach, appeared from this perspective as the extremity of an extensive trans-ethnic political network. See Edmund Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A study of Kachin social structure* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1954).

The stretching and hardening of identities

The mixing of societies, cultures and civilizations is a constant in human history and does not only apply to the diasporic and mobile nature of contemporary societies. The paradox of the new globalization, however, is that, instead of making identity more fluid, as Michaud has argued,⁴⁰ it seems to be doing exactly the opposite, for everywhere we see identities hardening into ethnic, national and religious fundamentalisms.

Four hundred and fifty years ago Leo Africanus wrote:

wherever a man sees an advantage, he endeavours to go if he may. That is why if you speak poorly of Africans, I will tell you that I was born in Granada, not in Africa. And if it is the land of my birth that I hear you criticize, I will assure you that I was raised in Africa, and not in Granada.⁴¹

If one could play with one's identity as freely as this in pre-colonial Africa, it is no longer quite so easy today. The borders between African states of the past enabled the marginalized groups of a particular polity to seek refuge beyond its territory and to reconstitute themselves in small segmentary groups and eventually form new states. Thus, dissidents could recreate an identity at a safe distance from the powers that they had fled. Even today, such situations may still be found, as in the case of the Tutsi refugees from Rwanda who overthrew the teetering Zairean government and installed a political leader of their own. That the current process of political recomposition in Central Africa is intrinsically trans-national indicates the porousness of current political boundaries and reveals the continuing relevance of pre-colonial realities. If the presence of homogeneous nation-states is indeed, as Arendt argues,⁴² a defining characteristic of modernity, then Africa may be the only place where refugees (who are an almost inevitable product of such states) are still not condemned to eternal exile. Such a relative plasticity of identity contrasts sharply with the case of Western Europe, where the increasing constraining of individuals within categories of identity that are defined as much by ethnic and religious fundamentalisms as by states and international organizations makes the negotiation of identity ever more difficult.

The institutionalization of capitalist economic policies at the international level has not resulted, as one might have thought, in the triumph of individualism but, quite to the contrary, in a proliferation of collective identities. By disengaging itself from civil society and calling upon the 'private sector' to take care of itself, the State — or what is left of it —

40. Y. Michaud, 'Des identités flexibles,' *Le Monde*, 24 October 1997.

41. Jean-Léon l'Africain, *Description de l'Afrique*, new edn. (Maisonneuve, Paris, 1981 [1550]), p. 66.

42. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt, New York, 1951).

encourages the burgeoning of a whole series of associations, non-governmental organizations and other structures charged with doing the job in its place, and these structures are often based upon communitary forms.⁴³ The decentralized management of social actors thus expresses itself through the individual needs of community structures designed to serve the needs of local or special interest constituencies.

Does this mean that we are now witnessing a retribalization of contemporary societies? If one imagines a globalization that necessarily leads to the reduction of the state's sphere of intervention, the answer is yes. If, on the contrary, it is, rather, assumed that some intrinsic essence of individual societies is destined to return them to their state of nature, the answer is no. Just as African ethnicities are the product of a history, and thus of modernity, since they represent the intermixing of local and imported categories, so the new tribes of the marginalized sectors of Western society are the product of a history in which the disengagement of the state has played a decisive role.

Whether examining Western or non-Western societies, anthropology is always and everywhere faced with modernity and globalization, for each and every phenomenon we choose to study is but a link in a single chain. It is therefore time to discard the notion of some fundamental difference between anthropology's past and present object of study.

Globalization, which is merely a new word for the universalism of the Enlightenment, has always been the true object of anthropology, for the societies that anthropologists study have always been mixed. It is Malinowski's conception of the field site as a bounded space that led certain anthropologists to believe that their object of study had changed or been destroyed by globalization. But anthropology's object has always been contemporary. It is only with the invention of the field site as an imaginary sealed laboratory in which the anthropologist could get head to head with 'his' people, that the modernity and historicity of non-Western societies disappeared from the field of analysis.

Yet it is this very choice to ignore the environment and the larger context of relationships in which all human societies are inscribed that allowed anthropologists simultaneously to define the people whom they studied and themselves as dominant Westerners. Let us not forget that this discipline was from its very beginning an arm of knowledge-as-power whose mission was to infiltrate and study the 'savage', both at home and abroad. This project, emanating from a technology of power that had been created to discipline and exclude the working classes of Europe, was simultaneously exported to the colonies where it served as an analytical model.⁴⁴ In this

43. I treat this question in greater depth in *Vers un multiculturalisme français, l'empire de la coutume* (Aubier, Paris, 1996).

44. See Kucklick, *The Savage Within*.

sense, the history of anthropology is less the study of a series of theoretical models than of theoretical and methodological tools of domination over both local and foreign populations.⁴⁵

In the final analysis, it is not the radical transformation of non-Western societies and the destruction of the anthropologist's object of study by globalization that is truly new, but the attitude (or more precisely the questioning of the attitude) of the researcher towards the researched. A re-examination of the earliest anthropological data that is sensitive to the political and historical nature that the early analyses failed to take into account might help to dispel the illusion of the utter novelty of the current phenomenon of globalization.

In sum, the anthropology of globalization gives a false answer to a badly posed question that implicitly reproduces the failings of the acculturation or colonial situation concepts. The exaggeration of the scope and importance of current phenomena of change implicitly revives the fantasy of a golden age of primitive society. By abandoning a methodology inspired by the natural sciences and focusing on the study of documents and images, anthropology has increasingly come to resemble such fields as literary criticism and semiology. However, its long experience with dialogue will continue to serve in the contemporary context of increasing mobility and will in no sense be hindered by the existence — less novel than the anthropologists of globalization may think — of a category of local anthropologists.

45. On this point, I completely agree with the viewpoint of James Clifford in his latest work *Routes*.