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Appropriation Processes between Center and Periphery

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In describing the development of civilizations Shmuel Eisenstadt and Immanuel Wallerstein unfortunately disregard cultural aspects like the communicative exchange between cultures. Therefore, the most important contribution to the theory of civilization is the work Ulf Hannerz has done on making the cultural factors and the exchange of meaning between cultures and their relevance explicit.

At the end of his article "The World in Creolisation" Hannerz gives the following résumé: "A macro-anthropology of culture which takes into account the world system and its centre-periphery relation appears to be well served by a creolist point of view. It could even be the most distinctive contribution anthropology can make to world system studies. It identifies diversity itself as a source of cultural vitality; it demands of us that we see complexity and fluidity as an intellectual challenge rather than as something to escape from. It should point us to ways of looking at systems of meaning which do not hide their connections with the facts of power and material life" (Hannerz 1987: 556). His Book "Cultural Complexity" can be understood as an elaboration of this short program. Unfortunately Hannerz bases his elaboration on a concept of creolization that, while helping to explain the exchange between cultures, cannot adequately evaluate nor reveal power aspects.

Hannerz, mainly interested in popular culture and mass media, refers to the enriching functions of creolizing effects as a result of the exchange between center and periphery. He states that the asymmetrical interactions by mass media can lead to an enriching exchange despite there being no dialogical interaction. Hannerz' use of the term "asymmetrical" thus only refers to the fact that the communication flow takes one direction: from the center to periphery.

I do not want to evaluate these conceptual decisions in detail, as it is the political processes which really interest me. Rather, I want to argue that the application of Hannerz' creolization concept to political processes leads to an inappropriate reduction of political processes to state actions directed to influence the national culture. Hannerz states: "The cultural apparatus of

the state, with its asymmetrical ordering of cultural flow, clearly has a major part in setting up the center/periphery relationships within a national culture, through media, schools, universities etc." (Hannerz 1992: 233). Hannerz neither contemplates the concept of civil society or other non-state actor possibilities to influence the state, nor can he draw from his concept any normative criterion to evaluate the asymmetrical center-periphery relations.

The lack of a normative criterion becomes visible when he describes the statebuilding process in Nigeria. He writes: "Like a great many Third World states, Nigeria is in large part a product of the global organizational process, especially as shaped by the rise and decline of colonialism. Because of the arbitrariness with which they were set up and their boundaries drawn, some observers would indeed argue that these are precisely states, not nations; local cultural traditions, as developed within the form of life framework, played not part in their definition" (Hannerz 1992: 233).

Provided that he does not want to draw a simple analogy between asymmetrical political relations and asymmetrical media relations between the western center and the non-western periphery, he does not have a normative criterion to argue why asymmetrical relations could be evaluated as inadequate or adequate when discussing intercultural exchange in the political sphere.

I want to argue that we need a concept that outlines which forms of exchange exist and when and why they could be adequate or inadequate in discussing power aspects. Hannerz, although very interested in meaning, does not pay attention to the fact that the institutional apparatus of the state is based on systems of meaning and semantics, for example democracy or rule of law. Instead of dismissing the problem that local cultures are not represented in the institutions of Nigeria by mentioning the asymmetrical possibility of creating a national culture through the state, it would be more interesting to take a look at the meaning systems on which institutions are based and to ask how they emerged, or if they were implemented by a colonial power or, as in the case of Afghanistan, by international actors. Further questions include how those meaning systems and semantics have been appropriated and from which actors, and which actors have been excluded from those appropriation processes and what effect this has on the processes of nation building and the public order.

Answering these questions requires a concept of creolizing aspects that allows more differentiations than the former linguistic concept of creolization as it is used by Hannerz. Therefore, I want to propose a concept that embraces different types of appropriation and a normative criterion to evaluate power asymmetries.

From Hegel to Gadamer

Already Hegel uses the terms appropriation and assimilation in his works. In his writings about education he emphasizes the necessity of an authority that can liberate the subject from the coercion that is created by a reaction to the existing (Hegel § 187; Jaeggi 2005: 242). For Hegel education means that the child appropriates the consciousness of his parents. But the child is not restricted to the amplitude of their consciousness. The ambiguities between the real world and the world of the parents call on the child to reconcile the ambiguities in an active process of reorganization. Self-determination is thought to be a process of liberation in which the subject has to appropriate the "just given" and make it his own. This idea has been picked up by Marx. Real appropriation for him means plentifulness, which extends beyond property and includes the appropriation of meaning. Marx describes the idea of self-realization as a process of appropriating the reference to the world. Alienation in contrast is characterized by the loss of control over products or doings.

The terms appropriation and alienation are also basic to the works of Kierkegaard and Heidegger. These philosophers also use the term appropriation as an active mode of reference to the world. In the hermeneutical tradition it was mainly Gadamer who picked up the term appropriation to refer to the need of an active handling of history (Gadamer 1990). Describing the process of appropriating history he faced problems, which are different than those faced in the discussion about intercultural communication processes. Nevertheless, scholars have criticized Gadamer for not differentiating between the terms appropriation and understanding because, when talking about intercultural communication this leads to the problem that every intention to understand the other ends up with the appropriation of the other (Kögler 1992: 120).

So if we want to draw on Gadamer's work, and this is precisely what I want to do, then it is necessary to indicate how it is possible to refer to the idea of an active process of self-realization without equating appropriation with understanding. Therefore, I want to propose a concept that allows a differentiation between appropriation and understanding.

Appropriation and Understanding

Although the term appropriation has been used to refer to many kinds of sensual appropriation, in the following I will use it only to refer to linguistic appropriation processes. Those, I will argue, are constitutive to the human ability to learn and to human self-realization. When those processes are disturbed or motionless this leads to experiences of alienation in the way we find them described in literature or political discourses in terms of experiences of heteronomy.

For a more precise definition of the term appropriation we can draw on Theunissen's definition of passive and active appropriation as two forms of apperception and Rahel Jeaggi's understanding of appropriation as a process (Jaeggi 2005).

Passive appropriation refers to an attitude and a type of learning that accepts the explication or the knowledge that is offered (Theunissen 1984: 108), for example by a teacher or the parents, without calling it into question. It is a constitutive element of learning a language or learning how to behave in our world, how to see the world, when we are children. Human actors learn all this through interaction with the people they live with. But they are not reduced to only this kind of learning. They also have the ability and necessity to create their own viewpoint and world description. This happens in an active appropriation process in which they reconcile the ambiguities between the real world, as they experience it, and their parents' worldview.

Active appropriation itself covers again two aspects: the alternative between refusal and reflexive adoption. Refusal refers to the possibility to reject the offered descriptions of the world; to decide actively not to be determined by these descriptions. This is the condition for the creative capability of self-determination, which is reached by reflexive adoption. Reflexive adoption is the capability to embrace the world descriptions or the knowledge that is offered human actors by other actors (Theunissen 1984: 108) in order to connect it with one's world description, though it might lead to some changes and re-organization processes in one's former world description.

Reflexive adoption can be divided into monological and dialogical adoption. Monological adoption is reduced to appropriation processes that take an idea or word from the other in order to connect it to one's own world description. Dialogical adoption in contrast initiates a

process that leads to an analogous restructuring process in the world descriptions of both actors.
In sum, although there are moments in which we need passive appropriation, and I will discuss some of them later, its dominance leads to alienation effects. So what has to be determined is how to put those two capabilities in balance.

The development of world descriptions and socially embraced appropriation processes
Leontjew, Piaget and many psycholinguistic approaches which are drawing on them take the development of world descriptions as an internalization of meaning structures (Leontjew 1971, Piaget 1975 and Hildebrand-Nilshon 1980). Human actors learn during the ontogenesis three basic things: First, they learn to interiorize the existing signs and to give them a psychological form of existence. Second, they learn to represent inside their thinking the attitudes of the people who surround them, and third, they learn to compose a world description by a creative involvement with the physical and social world. One of the most informative descriptions of this process is given by George Herbert Mead and his concept of the dialogical self (Mead 1934). It is missing some aspects, which I cannot discuss here due to lack of time, but I would like to highlight some of the aspects upon which I can draw.

Constitutive to Meads concept of the process of identity formation is the capability of human actors to take the perspective of the other. An actor does not only know how the other will react, he also knows that the other knows and so forth. In the situation where both actors can draw on a shared worldview, taking the perspective of the other leads to a shared site of interaction. Therefore, Mead describes the development of self-consciousness and the emergence of a shared language as the two sides of one developmental process (Mead 1934 in Kögler 2007: 358). The ability to take the other actors perspective implies first that the other actor's perspective is understood, and second that it becomes part of the objectifying attitude towards one's self. The attitudes of other actors are always connected with their understanding of the world. Therefore, the actor has to represent different worldviews inside his thinking in order to be able to anticipate and understand the attitudes of other actors towards him.

This type of representation is not yet an active appropriation of the other actor's world description. The representation only has the function of making understanding or an

anticipation of the other actors' actions possible. It is a passive form of representing the other actors worldviews inside us.
Active appropriation, in contrast, incorporates parts of the other actor's worldview into our own description of the world. The difference between passively representing and actively adopting is, for example, the one between a pacifist woman who understands the position of her friend who is a militant freedom fighter and a pacifist woman who adopts her friend's reasons and worldview and decides to become a militant freedom fighter herself.

In other words, human actors learn first to represent the expectations of the other inside their own thinking, and by doing so passively internalize the worldview of the other, and second, they learn to reconcile the expectations of the other or the resistance of the physical world with their own impulses and their description of the world. This process of reconciliation and connection can be understood as the active appropriation of history, language or semantics. Human actors are permanently confronted by the challenge of handling ambiguities which emerge when they accumulate new knowledge or new experiences. This process demands continuous re-organizations of the cognitive structures (Hildebrand-Nishon 1980: 227). In sum, this makes changes in their worldview and description necessary if the actor seeks to avoid ambiguities. Thus appropriation is an active process in which the actor creatively describes his view of the world (Jaeggi 2005: 56). This leads us to the assumption that self-realization is only possible if the actor learns not simply to passively understand and represent the other actors worldviews, but also to actively adopt some aspects of the other actors viewpoint in order to build on his own personal world description.

Nevertheless, there is no need to assume that the actor loses his capacity to passively represent the other actors perspectives inside his thinking by growing up. On the contrary, he needs both capacities, the active as well as the passive one. There are moments and situations in everyday life where we need the capability of passive understanding. This, for example, is the case when we learn a foreign language or accumulate knowledge or simply read a science fiction novel.

In sum, if the self is seen as emerging through perspective-taking, a widespread misconception concerning the problem of intercultural understanding can be overcome. This is so because the dialogical self is intrinsically open, which means it can never be identified with one closed-off set of beliefs and practices. Rather, it has to be seen as a culturally

situated one (Kögler 2007). Symbolic assumptions and social practices entail concrete meanings and establish particular attitudes, but the fact that they are appropriated by adopting them from the external source of social others implies that the self remains intrinsically tied to dialogical openness and a pluralism of perspectives, which the self represents inside himself.

Intercultural exchange is somewhat more difficult then intracultural understanding because it has to be clarified how actors who grew up in different languages and cultures can find or construct a shared site of meaning. My thesis is that human actors can represent in their thinking not just a plurality of worldviews but also a plurality of sign and meaning structures and social practices that are connected with them. Furthermore, this is possible without the immediate adoption of it into their own worldview, a condition that would lead to an instantaneous necessity of judging the validity of every utterance. How this is possible has to be explained in detail by a theory of meaning. I want to argue that Albrecht Wellmer can provide us with such a theory.

The coherence of worldviews

Wellmer's considerations help us to conceptualize intercultural understanding in a way that separates the meaning of speech acts from its truth (Wellmer 2007: 107). Speaking about intercultural communication, the interpreter has to interpret speech acts as true, in the sense of coherent to the shared social practices in the place the language is practiced. Without this assumption he cannot understand the foreign language as a coherent system of meaning. As soon as the interpreter can find some shared assumptions in the sense of appropriate speech acts about the situation, communication in a shared language becomes possible. Then speech acts can be understood, not because they are true in the eyes of the speaker, but because in the eyes of the interpreter, they fit coherently into the biographical, personal or social context of the situation.

To understand the intention of a speaker in another language and culture the interpreter has to not only learn the foreign language, but he has to "learn" the reasons a speaker can have for his utterance, in order to understand the context in which the speaker placed his speech act. This requires the ability to bracket his own perspective and reasons and to take the perspective of the other; this is similar to what we do when we read a fictitious novel. To understand a fictitious novel requires us to have the capability of bracketing our own justifications, reasons and normative benchmarks and following the indications the narrator gives us.

Not even a speaker and an interpreter who share a language and a cultural background will have a completely identical meaning structure on their disposal. The shared meanings are always only partial and have to be negotiated over and over again (Wellmer 2007: 108). Between a speaker and an interpreter of different languages this process is even more extensive and requires the disposition to learn not only the terms of a language, but also the reasons which go along with speech acts.

Intercultural understanding is only possible if the interpreter learns the conventional meaning of the term, its meaning as part of the structure of the sentence, and its context. He has to learn the new system of terms and sentence structures and the possibly varying belief structure and then represent them inside himself. Once he has found access to the foreign language, the interpreter can build on a meaning and belief structure that is relatively independent from his mother tongue. He can switch between the two languages and their context depending on the situation.[1]

I am referring to the relative independence of two languages and their context, because, as we have seen earlier, it is up to the interpreter how separate he keeps the two belief structures and languages. This is because the interpreter can choose between the active appropriation of a word or idea, meaning he can incorporate it into his own horizon, or he can simply represent it in his thinking and leave words and ideas in their context.

Assuming two creative and open conversation partners, there is a third possibility. They can build on a new, shared horizon in between the two languages and cultures, avoiding the sheer appropriation of terms and ideas into one or the other horizon by initiating a dialogical appropriation process in which they create a new shared world description.

Appropriation processes between centre and periphery

To present an alternative concept to Hannerz's approach of creolization and to indicate the differences of the two alternatives of talking about concrete situations is difficult in this very

[1] *Aneta Pavlenko has shown this empirically by her investigations of multilingualism (Pavlenko 2005).*

short time. Therefore, I will conclude with one commonality and one difference that result from the work with the concept of appropriation that I introduced.

In conclusion, Hannerz's assumptions about mass media exchanges stay, in a somehow more detailed way, valid. Because the addressee has a variety of possible reactions to the offers of mass media, we can speak of perhaps not enriching but stimulating aspects. The addressee can firstly actively refuse mass media as a whole or just parts of its messages, secondly he can actively appropriate words or ideas and adopt them to his own world description, thirdly, he can passively appropriate them and put them in the place of his former worldview, and finally, he can represent the perspectives transported by mass media in his thinking as one of many perspectives. Clearly this form of exchange is limited to a monological form of appropriation, and it does not permit a dialogical form of appropriation, which could enable societal learning processes and allow the emergence of not just self-determined but also shared world descriptions. Expecting this from mass media would mean expecting too much of the possibilities of mass media. But, in discussing nation building processes it is not enough to point to the vital effects of asymmetries the way Hannerz has done, and so we have arrived at the main difference that results from working with the appropriation concept I have introduced.

When we refer to nation building processes, we speak about the emergence of political institutions that are supposed to establish political order and assure its persistence. Institutions can meet this task only when they are connected with socialization processes, social practices, shared semantics (Göhler und Kühn 1999, Rehberg 1990), and therefore shared meanings. To provide these connections becomes even more difficult when the institutional settings come from another culture, because the normative benchmarks of the institutions and society may be very different. Therefore, I want to conclude that bringing, for example, western institutions to non-western countries has to be accompanied by a creative appropriation process which allows the society in question the creation of a self-determined perspective on the world and its institutions. If they are not given the freedom to do so, those institutions will not develop integrative functions, and they will stay a foreign body with perhaps their only function being to cover informal practices.

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