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Media Globalization and the Debate on Multiculturalism

Josu Amezaga-Albizu

*Department of Audiovisual Communication and Advertisement;
University of the Basque Country, UPV/EHU
The Basque Country*

1. Introduction

When in the mid-1980s, Joshua Meyrowitz proposed the concept of 'placeless cultures' to draw attention to the consequences of the transmission of information becoming freed from spatial limits thanks to the electronic media (Meyrowitz, 1985), he was pointing to a key aspect for understanding the globalization of the following decades. Following situationist postulates, Meyrowitz said that our social behavior is based on the definition we make of the situation, which in its turn is based on the information we receive about it. In this way, when the electronic media modify the relationship between the transmission of information and physical space, they are also affecting the relation between the latter and culture, giving rise to those cultures that do not depend on the physical and social setting that surrounds them.

This idea, which is increasingly relevant in my opinion, is interesting for us to be able to gain a better understanding of the globalization of communications, understood for now as the diffusion of the media and their content at the planetary level. And it also helps us to see how it is affecting not only our societies, but even our way of understanding them. It is not in vain that sociology has developed historically on the basis of a national scheme, according to which the very term society is defined on the basis of a territory, delimited by a state and constituted as a nation (Robins, 2006). That is how we speak of North American society, Indian society or Arab society, usually in order to refer to the structures and populations resident in a determinate and delimited physical space.

In those countries where history, economy and political power have given rise to the existence of a state with a great implantation in the society and a strong system of communications media, the tendency of the latter has been historically to reproduce an idea of the nation as a culturally homogeneous society. This has been the most habitual manner, at least in those states that have had more opportunities to be successful as such, in order to manage cultural diversity with the aim of building the political community; the management of multiculturalism is a question that has accompanied the modern nation-state from its origins. That is due to the need that states have had of building a nation around themselves, that is, a political community that would share a feeling of belonging so the state would appear as a socially legitimate power (Letamendia, 2000). To the extent that the community of culture has traditionally been one of the most important bases for collective identity, the construction of the nation thus had need of a national culture, that is, a cultural

basis common to that community. In this way, anything that might represent a risk for the cultural unity of the nation was considered as a threat. This was very well expressed in the midst of the French Revolution by the Committee of Public Safety, which, in 1794, affirmed that

'Federalism and superstition speak low Breton; emigration and hatred of the Republic speak German; counter-revolution speaks Italian and fanaticism speaks Basque. Let us break these instruments of injury and error. We have a duty to our fellow-citizens, we must strengthen the Republic and ensure that the language in which the declaration of the Rights of Man is written is spoken throughout its territory.' (Barère-de-Vieuzac, 1794).

Following this declaration, the decision was taken to send teachers of the French language to all the schools of the territory where French was not the habitual language.

That is how cultural exclusion is found to be at the basis of the formation of the political community. But this exclusion, as Robins has rightly indicated, does not refer exclusively to those considered to be minorities affected by the hegemony of the state; it also directly affects those considered to be foreigners: immigrants fundamentally. Starting from this need to unify the nation culturally, and with respect to immigrants, different policies have been developed to deal with diversity. Thus we can basically speak of three models or ways of dealing with this question (Castles, 1995). In the first place, there is the model of exclusion, in which immigrants are treated as a group separated from the political community and therefore from the rights that this involves; one example of this would be the German policy with respect to immigration of Kurdish or Turkish origin. In the second place, we have the policy of assimilation, which makes an effort to integrate culturally, or acculturate, those who are different, in order to achieve the homogenization of the nation; the model here would be the French one with respect to immigrants proceeding from the former colonies. And in the third place, the pluralist model, where what is sought is to build a political community that is compatible with a certain level of cultural diversity, an example found in some of the principal Anglophone countries. This latter model is the one that least affects the nation as a cultural unit, although it is necessary to point out that even in its main variant, multiculturalism, a minimum common denominator has been considered indispensable for the existence of the political community itself, with this denominator normally being the language; this would be the case in Quebec, for example (Kymlicka, 2001).

While, as we have noted, since the creation of modern states the school has been one of the big paths of cultural unification, the mass media have been the greatest instrument in that undertaking. Starting from the printed press of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with its importance in the formation of national public spheres, up to the audiovisual media like the radio, cinema and television, which broadened those public spheres and constructed cultural spaces, the media have without doubt been the greatest element of cohesion of national societies, in so far as they are privileged agents of civil society (Castells, 2009b). Things being that way, we must now ask ourselves about the manner in which the delocalization of communication, that *'no sense of place'* of which Meyrowitz speaks, might be affecting the construction of cultural or political communities, formerly more closely linked to the territory.

2. From cultural imperialism to globalization, via cultural exception

Concern about the unifying pressure of the media and efforts to adopt measures in this field to defend communities excluded in the formation of nations is an old phenomenon in many

communities of this type. The attempts by national minorities to provide themselves with mass media of their own, or in their language, are a good example in this respect. Nonetheless, this concern took on a new dimension in the 1970s, with the debate on the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). Thus, in an atmosphere enriched by the processes of decolonization in Africa and Asia and the national liberation movements in numerous regions of the world, it became patently necessary to confront in a different way what was by then a tangible fact, that is: the spread at a world scale of cultural models and communication agents that, proceeding from the richer countries – and especially the United States – were increasingly penetrating the rest of the societies. This penetration prevented the less wealthy (developing or underdeveloped, according to the terminology of the time) countries from attending to their own cultural and communicative needs, by which means they became dependent countries in these fields (MacBride, 1985). Similarly, cultural homogenization was perceived as a growing threat for the great majority of the peoples and cultures of the world.

The concept that would best describe that state of affairs was to be, in the 1970s, that of cultural imperialism:

'The concept of cultural imperialism today best describes the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system. The public media are the foremost example of operating enterprises that are used in the penetrative process. For penetration on a significant scale the media themselves must be captured by the dominating/penetrating power. This occurs largely through the commercialization of broadcasting' (Schiller, 1976, p. 10).

This penetration of the communicative and cultural models proceeding from a few countries was increasingly perceived as a threat not only in the less wealthy societies, but also in those that had, apparently, enjoyed a good status as a nation and had even been protagonists of cultural homogenization towards their interior. This fact is clearly observable in the negotiations that, almost a decade after the debate on the NWICO, gave rise in 1995 to the World Trade Organization, one of the international agents that has most contributed to globalization. Thus, in a context in which the state, as a major player in the cultural field, had already lost much of its effective power facing the private cultural industry, the former demanded for themselves the right to 'cultural exception': that is, the right to exclude cultural and communicative products from the free flow of goods at the planetary level. This right was, in 2005, to be ratified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2005), and was to be claimed by states that feared that the liberalization of the communication and cultural market would end up by weakening their project of cultural unification around the nation.

However, this more or less orderly debate about the pre-eminence of the media and cultural industries of a few countries over other communities, whether these were national minorities (the debate on peripheral nationalism), developing countries (debate on the NWICO) or non-Anglophone rich countries (cultural exception), was deeply transformed with the advance of globalization. Not in vain, John Tomlinson points out, is imperialism followed by globalization. And one of the characteristics of the latter, in relation to communication, culture and the nation-state, is precisely that far from being a more or less orderly process, where a few powers impose their cultural models on the rest, it is a much more complex process in which even the formerly dominant powers find themselves affected. To the point, Tomlinson indicates, that *'the effects of globalization are to weaken the*

cultural coherence of all individual nation-states, including the economically powerful ones - the "imperialist powers" of a previous era' (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 175).

Nowadays there is abundant data in support of Tomlinson's analysis. If the French revolutionaries of the late eighteenth century considered the existence of regions of the state where French barely had any presence to be an obstacle to national unity, how should one today evaluate the fact that the number of people in the United States who use a language other than English in their homes rose from 11% in 1980 to 20% in 2007 (USA Census, 2010)? Or that the tendency amongst the immigrants of this country to maintain their domestic language is growing (Siegel, Martin, & Bruno, 2000)? Similar figures for Europe are not available, but partial works on the presence of languages of the immigration in the metropolis of the old continent (Baker & Eversley, 2000) or on the level of family transmission of these languages (Extra & Yagmur, 2004) suggest similar conclusions. We do have data available for Australia, where the 2006 census showed that 22% of the population spoke languages other than English at home, against 17% in 1991.

In addition, reactions to the changes taking place as a result of globalization in countries that appeared to have achieved a certain level of stability as national communities appear to indicate that globalization is indeed affecting their cultural coherence. The creation in France of a Ministry of National Identity and Immigration; the fact that a growing number of countries of the European Union, 23 over 27, require that immigrants should know the official language to obtain rights such as residence, family regrouping or nationality¹; or the debate over whether some cultural groups really can form part of the national community (Sartori, 2000), are all elements that seem to confirm the same idea.

3. Television and transnational communication spaces

The coming of globalization as a set of disordered and undirected processes does not in any way mean the disappearance of the previous stages, at least with respect to the cultural predominance of certain hegemonic agents. Thus, we can observe that barely half a dozen companies possess the greater part of the communications market at the world level. These companies are besides concentrated in a few countries, such as the USA (Time-Warner, Disney, Viacom and News Corporation), Japan (Sony) and Germany (Bertelsmann) (Thussu, 2006, p. 99).

Nonetheless, at the same time as we can observe that domination, which confirms many of the concerns that had been expounded from the approach of cultural imperialism, other tendencies are also tangible that, as Tomlinson said, show the disordered character of globalization. Television is a good example of the coexistence of the cultural power of certain big actors at both the planetary level and the local level with other new agents. With their presence, these new agents are undermining the near exclusiveness with which the former had been acting in their national territories until very recently, and by which means they had imposed their cultural models and created their own public spheres. To put this graphically and in figures, we can say that at the same time as over one thousand television broadcasts are directed, via satellite and in English, from the Anglophone countries (fundamentally the USA) towards areas of the planet where that language is not official, a similar number of broadcasts is directed towards the USA in languages other than English

¹ Sources: Extramiana (Extramiana 2008) and our own account.

(Amezaga, 2007). Economic potential is the driving force in both cases, in the former that of the big television companies seeking to widen their markets in different areas of the globe, and in the latter that of immigrants who have acceded to the standard of living of the receiver country.

Turning our attention towards the latter case, we must consider the economic importance of immigrants in rich countries as one of the principal underlying factors in the development of satellite television in the world. In this respect, John Sinclair speaks of geolinguistic regions to refer to communication spaces that are dispersed in physical space but united by language, thanks to satellite television broadcasts (Sinclair, Jacka, & Cunningham, 1996). These spaces are considered in many cases as genuine niches where broadcasters who broadcast in that language beyond the frontiers of their state are seeking markets, given the significant economic potential that immigrants represent for many countries (Karim, 1998). We must bear in mind that while the number of immigrants² at the global level has risen from 150 to 214 million in the last decade (United Nations, 2008), the volume of remittances that they have sent to their countries of origin has grown from \$132 billion to \$414 billion in the same period. Besides, three quarters of this sum has been directed towards developing countries, which today represents an income three times higher than international development aid as a whole (International Organization for Migration, 2010).

This interest in attracting the remittances and investments of immigrants who have achieved a greater economic capacity in other countries, in converting them into consumers of goods and services generated in their countries of origin, or in using them as a bridgehead for expanding the economies of the latter, is joined to other interests of a geopolitical, cultural or even religious type. The result is that diasporas and immigrants have become a significant target for broadcasters, both private and public, of their countries of origin.

That is how the mass media of the diaspora are also becoming globalized. Indeed, an historical analysis would show us the importance that the media, first printed, then audiovisual, and today online, have had for diasporas, both for the relationship of their members amongst themselves, and for the relationship with the country of origin or reference. And, to the extent that the media have overcome geographical distance, the tendency seems to be towards a strengthening of the relationship with the countries of origin.

Thus, Jean Chalaby distinguishes amongst three types of media for immigrants (Chalaby, 2009). In the first place, there are the *local migrant media*, basically those created for the immigrant community. This would be the case, for example, of the numerous newspapers that circulated amongst the different immigrant groups in the USA in the nineteenth century. Nowadays, printed media of such characteristics continue to be published in many of the receiver countries. Another example of these local media would be those programs, on both radio and television, which were set up by the public powers of the receiver societies and are directed towards the immigrant population in their territory, fundamentally with the aim of integration, and that underwent a big growth until the 1980s. A second type is that of the *transnational migrant media*, made up of the radio and television broadcasts from the countries of origin towards the diasporas. This model expanded rapidly from the mid-1980s onwards, thanks to the development of satellite television. Behind these

² Following the terminology of the reports on migrations of the United Nations, we understand an immigrant here to be a person who lives in a country different from the one they were born in.

broadcasts were the interests, already referred to, of both private companies and public organizations, to maintain contact with immigrants and their descendants. Besides, the rise of these broadcasts resulted in a reconsideration of local programs, especially those directed by receiver states with the aim of integrating immigrants, and in some case even led to the abandonment of this type of program, which were at a clear disadvantage facing the competition of programs proceeding from the exterior.

Nowadays, to continue with Chalaby, we find ourselves in a new phase, which he calls the stage of the *trans-local migrant media*. The main characteristic of this phase is that the immigrants can access not only the broadcasts specifically realized for them, but also the everyday content of the media of their countries of origin. This is due both to the growth of the offer of satellite television (giving access to broadcasts originally emitted in those countries) and to the possibilities offered by Internet, thanks to which anybody can read the newspaper, listen to the radio or – increasingly – watch the television of his/her country of origin or reference. We have thus moved from transnational broadcasts to transnational audiences.

Having reached this point, we can raise the following question: how is access to the media of their places of origin or reference by the immigrant populations affecting multiculturalism?

Besides dealing with this question, it will be useful to make an estimate of the real dimension of the media for immigrants and diasporas. This estimate will give us an idea of the real importance that this aspect of globalization could hold. To this end we will concentrate on satellite television, as one of the indicators of those dimensions. In 2004, I made a count of the distribution at the world level of satellite television broadcasts according to the language of those broadcasts, the area of the planet to which they were directed and their encrypted or Free To Air (FTA) character (which normally indicates a diffusion that is more centered on national markets, or more directed towards transnational audiences). In that count I found that English was clearly dominant amongst the almost 80 languages that had by then acceded to satellite television, with over 40% of the broadcasts. It was followed by Spanish with 11% (Amezaga, 2007). However, a detailed analysis of these broadcasts showed that the great majority of the broadcasts in these two languages were directed, through encrypted pay-to-view broadcasts, to national markets, fundamentally the USA. On the contrary, broadcasts in languages that have significant numbers of speakers amongst the immigrant populations around the globe, such as Chinese, Arabic or Turkish, for example, show a clear tendency to be broadcast on FTA signals; that is, to be broadcast to wider regions of the planet, since their reception is not conditioned by the existence of a national market which limits the geographical field in which that signal can be decoded – through payment systems.

Another interesting fact emerging from that count was that in the USA more than 90% of the population that speaks a language other than English in their home had access to satellite broadcasts in their language. I am obviously speaking here of the possibility of accessing signals, not their real use. This is a result of the already mentioned phenomenon of the importance of the United States television market for broadcasters seeking audiences in their language in rich countries as well. A similar count to the foregoing one, this time carried out in Australia in 2006, showed a comparable panorama.

We do not have homogeneous figures available on the number of speakers of languages of the immigration in Europe and other parts of the world. However, a more recent count shows a significant increase in the number of broadcasts directed to the groups of immigrants in the old continent. Table 1 offers the main data of that count.

Language	Encrypt	FTA	Total	Language	Encrypt	FTA	Total
English	1.474	535	2.009	Latvian	12	1	13
Arabic	164	800	964	Azerbaijan	1	11	12
German	326	275	601	Estonian	10	1	11
French	396	144	540	Macedonian	-	10	10
Italian	240	226	466	Luxemburgese	-	9	9
Turkish	195	237	432	Tamil	6	2	8
Spanish	252	131	383	Pashto	3	5	8
Romanian	255	67	322	Korean	1	5	6
Hungarian	260	12	272	Japanese	4	2	6
Polish	222	27	249	Sinhala	-	6	6
Russian	153	87	240	Bengali	2	4	6
Portuguese	136	41	177	Philippine	5	-	5
Swedish	139	6	145	Malayalam	2	3	5
Bulgarian	77	42	119	Armenian	1	4	5
Czech	100	11	111	Georgian	2	3	5
Norwegian	103	3	106	Galician	1	3	4
Dutch	77	13	90	Punjabi	3	-	3
Serbo-Croatian	69	20	89	Hebrew	3	-	3
Danish	79	1	80	Gujarati	3	-	3
Greek	50	19	69	Breton	3	-	3
Ukrainian	18	44	62	Maltese	3	-	3
Finnish	56	1	57	Thai	-	2	2
Albanian	47	8	55	Icelandic	2		2
Hindi	39	12	51	Belarusian	-	2	2
Farsi	1	44	45	Welsh	-	2	2
Slovak	33	10	43	Basque	-	2	2
Chinese	12	13	25	Kazakh	-	2	2
Kurdish	1	22	23	Vietnamese	-	1	1
Croatian	17	5	22	Uzbek	-	1	1
Urdu	14	5	19	Somali	-	1	1
Slovenian	11	7	18	Nepali	-	1	1
Lithuanian	14	1	15	Amharic	-	1	1
Catalan	7	8	15	Frisian	-	1	1
Bosnian	8	5	13	Gaelic	-	1	1

Table 1. Satellite Television Signals in the European Union (2008)³

³ Source: Prepared by the author based on the data of Lyngsat (Lyngsat, 2003), Satco (Satco, 2002), King Of Sat (KingOfSat, 2008) and other minor sources. It should be pointed out that television signals were

As can be seen from the table, the presence of broadcasts in languages lacking any official recognition and that are not covered by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is frankly significant. Even more significant is the tendency towards concentration in national markets of the official languages of Europe to remain steady or even increase, facing the greater openness in the diffusion of the non-official languages, those of a large part of the immigrant populations in the continent. Thus, while English once again appears as the main language of the broadcasts in total numbers, if we attend to open broadcasts (Free To Air, or FTA), Arabic is the language that appears in the first place. That is due to the combination of two overlapping factors: the fact that many of the broadcasts mainly directed towards the countries of North Africa reach a large part of Europe in non-encrypted form; and the presence of numerous broadcasts that are specifically aimed beyond the northern shore of the Mediterranean.

On the other hand, if we compare these figures with those of 2004, we can highlight the fact that while the number of satellite broadcasts in official languages of Europe has grown by 33%, the number of broadcasts in non-official languages has increased by 72%, which shows the importance of this type of broadcasts in the development of this global range medium.

We do not have audience figures available for these broadcasts at the European level. The growing evolution of the offer, or the fact that in the European Union there are more than 30 million people proceeding from non-member states (Eurostat, 2010), leads us to suppose that they certainly have a considerable projection. Audience studies carried out in the USA strengthen this opinion. Thus, a recent survey amongst the Latin population of this country, showed a significant use of the media in Spanish (Nielsen, 2010). According to the same survey, amongst the population that mainly speaks Spanish in their home, this language surpassed English when it came to watching television. On the other hand, Spanish is also a habitually used language in the consumption of radio, the printed press and Internet. The fact that a third of those who speak Spanish in their homes never watch television in English is notable.

I am aware that the number of languages which have acceded to satellite television, about 80, is certainly limited in comparison with the number of languages estimated for the whole planet, between 3,500 and 7,000, depending on the source. It continues to be a small figure even if we compare it with the 389 that, according to the Ethnologue database, have more than a million speakers (Grimes, 1992). And it is highly significant that amongst those that have not yet acceded to this medium, there are 30 that have more than 10 million inhabitants, basically in Africa, although also in Asia and America. However, if we consider not only satellite television but also the presence of languages on Internet (whether in written or audiovisual formats), there is a clearly observable tendency of languages having access to this medium that, until now, had not had any mass media of their own. Given the technical difficulty of combing the net in search of languages, we do not yet have precise data on the number of languages present in the digital setting. However, a recent report of the intergovernmental agency *International Telecommunication Union* (International Telecommunication Union-ITU, 2010) estimated that there were 500 languages that, technically, can now accede to this setting thanks to the codification of their systems of writing or *scripts*. The question of the content that can be accessed in each of these languages

counted, not channels. The same channel can be broadcast on several satellites, or even in different packets of the same satellite, thus generating different signals.

is obviously a different matter (the number of languages that have entries in Wikipedia is nearly 300). On the other hand, it should be recalled that, in a world where three out of four people do not have Internet access, the presence of a language on Internet does not mean access to the net by all of its speakers. However, such access is much more habitual amongst emigrants due to both the increase in their spending power and the observed tendency of a high use of telecommunications by these populations. All of this strengthens the idea that the great majority of the over 200 million immigrants (especially those who have settled in the richer countries) can access, through satellite technology and/or the net, communication spaces that go beyond national borders. That is, in my opinion, one of the aspects of media globalization that must be analyzed, in so far as it could hold significant implications for the way of understanding societies and nations in the near future.

4. Multiculturalism, multiple identities and restructuring of the public spheres

When speaking about how this aspect of globalization, that is, the shaping of transnational communication spaces, can affect the ways of understanding and constructing national societies, it becomes necessary to distinguish amongst at least three different levels: the cultural level, the level of identity, and the level of the public sphere.

With respect to the cultural level, it can be pointed out that the societies of the age of globalization appear to be increasingly similar to each other. The great cultural and economic flows at the planetary level mean that the ways of life and cultural models proceeding from the richer countries are spreading to the rest⁴; and the fact is, as I have pointed out above, globalization does not replace the previous stage of cultural imperialism, but is added onto it. On the other hand, those societies – especially in the cities – appear increasingly diverse in their interior, due to the flows of migration and information, as I have indicated. While, as we have seen, cultural homogenization was, in the majority of the cases of strong nation-states, a condition for the creation of the political community or the nation, is it possible nowadays to construct that community on the same foundations?

At this point, the debate on multiculturalism arises as a way of organizing societies on the basis of different cultural communities. The solemn declaration by the German prime minister Angela Merkel, announcing the failure of multiculturalism in a country with an Islamic population of 4 million (The Guardian, 2010), or the revolts by the descendants (children and grandchildren) of immigrants of Maghrebi origin in France during the autumn of 2005 seem to indicate that two of the main models for the management of cultural diversity within nations (that of exclusion and that of integration) are being placed in doubt. The academic debate is also open, with works like those of G. Sartori that put into question the possibility of constructing a national community on a multicultural basis (Sartori, 2000). Thus, this author wonders whether a democratic society, based on a series of shared values (values that imply the acceptance of certain principles of equality, rights and obligations), can accept groups within it whose culture does not include those values. That, obviously, leads him to reject policies of multiculturalism that promote the reproduction of those ‘other cultures’ inside the receiver societies. And those ‘other cultures’ are, in the

⁴ This tendency is not free of contradictions either. As Manuel Castells indicates, in the age of globalization there is also taking place, by way of reaction, an increase in religious fundamentalism – not only Islamic but also Christian and other types, which in its turn entails great cultural implications (Castells 2009).

present context of international tension, principally those identified with Islam. The question here resides in the fact that nowadays the reproduction of those other cultures does not depend so much on the policy developed by each state in its territory, since, as we have seen, the transnational communication spaces are realities that surpass the capacity of action of those states. It is therefore not so much a question of discussing how states should act in the face of diversity (multiculturalism or pluralism, promotion or negation), but of rethinking the nation itself on the basis of that evident reality. That is the line that authors like Kymlicka propose, in defending the possibility of certain minimum foundations on which to construct nations while maintaining cultural diversity (Kymlicka, 2001).

On the level of identity, too often consumption of the media of their countries of origin by immigrants or their descendants has been confused with identification with a national community external to the host society. Moreover, if this analysis is made from the classical perspective that national identities are by definition exclusive with respect to each other, we obtain the equation that recourse to the media of the diaspora is associated with a lack of integration in the country where one lives. Thus, Christiansen points out how the consumption of news proceeding from so-called 'countries of origin' by immigrants, or even by their descendants, appears linked, on numerous occasions, to a concern about the lack of integration of the latter in the host society. This lack of integration would, besides, be closely related to the fact that immigrants prefer to have recourse to the media of those countries rather than those of the receiver society (Christiansen, 2004, p. 187). For her part, Caglar points to the debate and controversy that, both in the public and academic spheres, is taking place around the possible negative impact that access to the mass media proceeding from Turkey might have on immigrants from that country in Germany (Caglar, 2004).

Nonetheless, we should not confuse identity with culture, nor think of identity in an exclusive way. Culture is no more than one of the foundations on which collective identity has been based historically, but nothing leads one to think that it will continue to be so in the future, or that it will not be constructed on other equally solid foundations. On the other hand, in a complex world like the one we live in, identity is becoming less structurally determined and is increasingly the product of our own decision (Melucci, 1989); and it is increasingly less exclusive and more shared (Robins, 2006). A. Askoy, in a work on young Turkish-speaking immigrants in the United Kingdom, shows how following the 9-11 attacks the dominant political scheme put their loyalty to the test, obliging them to choose between 'us' and 'them' (Aksoy, 2006). And how their answer consisted in developing a type of 'transnational sensibility', which challenges that scheme and opens up the perspective of a new way of understanding identity and loyalty towards the community in which they lived, as well as towards other communities with which family, historical, cultural, religious or linguistic relations are maintained. In this way, there is a break with the idea that identity is what leads immigrants to consume certain media: it was precisely the ambivalence of this population, with access to media in different languages and the pragmatic use made of them, which made it possible to construct that transnational sensibility and to overcome a dichotomy whose imposition was being attempted.

Finally, the level of the construction of transnational public spheres is another important aspect of media globalization. I will here make use of the concept of the public sphere as it is analyzed by J. Habermas (Habermas, 1962). Thus, the bourgeois public sphere, based at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries on limited communication spaces such as Parisian salons or London coffee-shops, and later on the broader spaces built by the media, was the place where discussion of public affairs took place and a political subject

was generated that gave rise to the modern state. In my opinion, there is no room for doubt that this public sphere, which later became a space for the construction of identities, is to be found at the base of civil society with a national foundation. Nowadays, the question resides in determining whether the globalization of the mass media is permitting the construction of new public spheres, this time going beyond the nation state.

The evidence seems to confirm this. To cite a few cases, M. Milikowski studies how access to Turkish-language media by immigrants in Europe, far from contributing to the formation of ghettos, is generating a model of de-ethnicization of Turkish culture. Indeed, the culture that accompanied the immigrants in their journey towards the host societies was transmitted in an almost static way to the new generations born in the diaspora. Access by these new generations to the Turkish commercial television channels, however, has enabled them to bring those cultural models up to date and to keep their transformation in step with transformations taking place in the country of origin, with the result that in a certain way they are being de-ethnicized (Milikowski, 2000). I found a similar process in a work on the Basque diaspora in Latin America (Amezaga, 2006). Access to satellite television by the descendants of Basques in the continent was producing what we understand as a displacement of the object and, therefore, of the subject. Displacement of the object because the Basque Country, thanks to the daily consumption of news about what was happening there, ceased to be something related to the past and became part of the present: the subject of conversation in the meeting centers of the diaspora ceased to be 'what the country was for our grandparents' to become 'what is happening now'. And displacement of the subject, because while the only role that one can have with respect to the past is that of its transmission, the subject who situates him/herself facing the present has the option of taking part in it; and in this way contributing to the future of the country of origin, as in fact many members of the diaspora try to do through different activities: as a lobby, through political participation, economic investment, the creation of networks, etc.

Another case in which the construction of transnational public spheres can be observed is provided by P. Mandaville (Mandaville, 2001). Observing the use that Islamic immigrants make of the new information technologies, he finds that these are used, amongst other purposes, for reinterpreting and updating the practice of Islam. Living in non-Islamic contexts, these immigrants find themselves needing an interpretation that enables them to combine their religious practice with the concrete conditions of the place where they live, which leads them to use IT (CD-Rom, Internet, etc.) to that end. In this way, far from traditionalist readings, new readings are made of Islamic texts and practices. This takes place, besides, in a communication space where those who live in the diaspora coincide with those who inhabit the country that exports emigrants, a space in which the former are more active in the use of the new technologies both through need and through opportunity.

Finally, mention must be made of the contribution that the new social networks based on Internet (the so-called web 2.0) are making to the construction of transnational public spheres, with consequences not only for the rich countries that receive immigrants but also for the rest. Although we are dealing recent facts that require greater analysis, the social movements taking place at the start of 2011 in North Africa suggest a great importance of these networks in some social mobilizations. The development of that dimension of the net, which is at the basis of what Castells calls 'mass self-communication' (Castells, 2009a) and is characterized by the generation of content by multiple users, does no more than multiply the effect of disorder brought by globalization.

5. Conclusions

The history of the construction of the national states has been the history of the creation and reproduction of a political community, the nation, based on a shared identity. That identity has been based on different elements, depending on the socio-historical and geographical context of each case: culture, religion, ideology, political structures, territory, etc. The mass media, like other actors such as the educational system for example, have played a leading role in the construction of that shared identity: on the one hand, as agents for the reproduction of certain elements around which this identity is structured, as is the case of language, culture, etc.; on the other, as a basis for the creation of the public sphere, the privileged place for the development of civil society, understood as the bridge mediating between political power and the individual. This public sphere is where the nation is constituted as a subject formed by people who share certain values and a will to live together in society. I thus understand the public sphere in the Habermasian sense indicated previously.

The importance of these spaces of communication in the formation of the national communities has meant that the states have historically been very jealous in their creation and maintenance. Policies have thus been developed to secure those spaces, in both the first modern nation states that emerged in Europe and America, and those created more recently; in both the most powerful and the most dependent in terms of communication. That importance can also be observed in the positions defending their own communication spaces in the case of those states that perceived their communicative and cultural sovereignty to be under threat. From state control of audiovisual media to the protectionist policies of the GATT negotiations, there are numerous examples of this jealousy.

The globalization of the media, coinciding in time with other factors, is placing those communication spaces in question. We must not lose sight of the fact that globalization is taking place in a context in which other elements are appearing, to a large extent related to the globalising processes themselves, such as: the development of new and powerful communications technologies, which are making possible a formerly unknown flow of information to any part of the planet, together with a unification of formats under digitization; the flows of population, goods and capital, which are facilitating situations of contact amongst cultures and public spheres that had been relatively isolated until now; or the loss of power of the states facing the industries in the field of communication and culture, which interferes with their possibilities for action and regulation in maintaining their national spaces. All of this is giving rise to the generation of new communication spaces, based more on telecommunications and networks than on physical proximity and adscription to a national territory.

B. Anderson said, in a formulation that has enjoyed considerable success in the sociology of identities, that nations are imagined communities; that is to say, communities in which we do not directly know the majority of the members, but we know of their existence and we identify with them (Anderson, 1983). The media are leading mediators in this identification, to the extent that it is through them that we can see that community formed of unknown people represented. That is why this author, together with many others, attributes such importance both to the access of people to literacy in vernacular languages and to what he calls printing press capitalism, as some of the determinant elements of the birth of nationalism. This importance of the media for the nation is the hypothesis underlying a large part of the research on transnationalism and globalization of the media.

Even taking into account the criticisms levelled at the excessive use of Anderson's concept of imagined communities, there should be no doubt, in my opinion, about the fact that the globalization of the media is going to affect the very concept of the nation. Especially when other factors are added to the possibility of access to transnational media spaces, such as the flow of goods and capital at the planetary level, the greater facility for direct personal relations through space (Internet, telephone), greater mobility of the population, etc. All of this obliges us to think about how our societies are going to evolve in the near future.

The separation between physical space and the transmission of information is conceivably taking us towards the placeless cultures of Meyrowitz; which would result in an increase of cultural diversity within each national society. This leads us to reflect on how we can build a political community on the basis of cultural diversity. The proposals on multiculturalism as a form of managing diversity can contribute elements to the debate. On the other hand, we should flee from the temptation of identifying the presence of diverse communication spaces with the disintegration of common loyalties and identities. In this respect significance is acquired by the fear – especially present when an attempt is made to analyse the uses of the Net by some immigrant collectives in the rich countries – that immersion in communication spaces other than the national one occasions disaffection with the host society. Instead we should think that, in a world traversed by great North-South and East-West tensions, the possibilities of access to the media of other places should be seen as a rupture of the monopoly of communication and culture, which until now had been cloistered within the national space. Seen in this light, the globalization of the media represents an advance in plurality, similar to that brought in its time by the freedom of the press – with all of its limitations, which Lenin pointed out.

That does not mean that we can consider globalization as an element that democratizes the media. I have already pointed out that this phase does not annul the previous phase of big agents that are hegemonic at the world level. But the appearance of new agents with a planetary presence, and the facility with which any medium, no matter how small, is available in any corner of the globe thanks to the Net, widens the possibilities for democratic debate and for the creation of new public spheres.

This will not only affect the way in which the rich societies will have to face their processes of national construction in the future. It is also affecting the societies of origin of the emigrants, which see how the latter become, thanks to global communication, points of contact between different cultures and public spheres. Similarly, these changes must also affect the emergent states (those that have recently obtained their independence), those states that attempted to follow the model of the nineteenth century European nation-state after the processes of decolonization, and even national minorities that, when demanding their rights, saw in that model a course to be imitated in order to satisfy their desires for independence. All of them must confront the need to combine differentiated communication spaces with common political structures, at least while the latter continue to be linked to the territory. Nor should this be something unmovable, although, at present, it would appear to be difficult to articulate some type of virtual state above physical space. Indeed, if we consider, from a very long term historical perspective, the extent to which changes in the systems of communication (birth of writing, development of the printing press, implantation of the press, spread of audiovisual media and of the cultural industry in general, etc.) affected the form of constructing both the old societies and the present-day nation states, we can begin to imagine how the current changes in communication (convergence between globalization of the media and technological development, together

with other factors) are going to affect our world. I myself do not hold many certainties about what the near future will be like, but I have little doubt that it will be very different from what we know.

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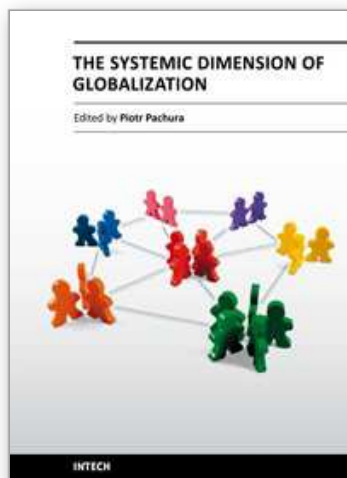
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