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Indian identity and hybridity: Towards a global culture

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RESUMEN:

El proceso de globalización que experimenta nuestra sociedad afecta de formas muy diversas tanto a nuestra vida diaria como a nuestras rutinas. Comprobar el correo electrónico o comunicarnos a través de aplicaciones como whatsapp se han convertido en hábitos que, ayudados por el incremento en la velocidad de las comunicaciones, propician una reducción de nuestra concepción de los conceptos de tiempo y espacio comparados con hace un par de décadas, provocando la sensación de una compresión o reducción del mundo y una intensificación del entendimiento del mundo como un todo conectado. En este sentido, los medios de intercambio de comunicación actuales afectan la forma en que entendemos la cultura. Por ello, mientras que hace algunos siglos la cultura se veía como un compartimento estanco que cambiaba dependiendo de la localización geográfica, hoy en día y debido al proceso de globalización culturas que se encuentran muy separadas se acercan y conviven en el mismo lugar.

El contacto cultural produce hibridismo, cuyo origen se encuentra en las ciudades globales. Aunque podemos apreciarlo en diferentes contextos y lugares, es en las cosmópolis o ciudades globales donde su presencia es mayor. El contacto cultural se transforma entonces en una experiencia de primera mano y tanto los flujos migratorios como el turismo cultural propician intercambios culturales en esos lugares. El intercambio y las corrientes presentes en el contacto entre culturas distantes y diferentes crean un hibridismo que más tarde se manifiesta en la cultura global, donde la cultura popular es la verdadera fuerza motriz.

Inmersa en esta condición de globalización, la sociedad india ha sido capaz de reforzar su identidad en diferentes periodos históricos, incluso durante el proceso colonial. Como resultado, en la actualidad esta cultura combina sus tradiciones pasadas con el desarrollo presente, siempre buscando un futuro esperanzador e inspirador. Por tanto, este artículo intenta demostrar por qué la cultura india puede entenderse como un ejemplo de cultura híbrida por excelencia en un contexto donde la tradición está abierta a la globalización y la identidad se encuentra en un proceso continuo de remodelación para encajar en el entorno global híbrido actual sin perder un ápice de su esencia heredada a lo largo de toda su historia.

Palabras clave: hibridismo, proceso de globalización, contacto cultural, intercambio cultural, identidad

ABSTRACT:

The globalization process our society is experiencing affects our daily lives and routines in several diverse ways. Checking the e-mail or communicating through WhatsApp have turned into habits helped by the increasingly speed of communication, which propitiated by the narrowing of time and space, produces a compression of the world and an intensification of the consciousness of the world. The current means of information exchange affect the way we understand culture. Thus, while some centuries ago culture was perceived as a delimited block which changed depending on the geographical location, nowadays and due to the globalizing process distant cultures become closer and inhabit in the same setting.

Cultural contact produces hybridity, whose cradle can be found in global cities. Although we can appreciate hybridity in different contexts or locations, it is in the cosmopolis where its presence is greater. Cultural contact turns then into a first-hand experience and both migratory fluxes and cultural tourism propitiate cultural exchanges on these locations. The interchange and flows present in the contact between distant cultures creates a hybridity which later develops into a global culture where popular culture is the real driving force.

Immersed in this globalizing condition, Indian society has been able to reinforce its identity at different historical periods, even during the colonial process. As a result, nowadays this culture combines its past traditions with a present development which is always looking to an inspiring future. Thus, this paper tries to demonstrate why the Indian culture can be understood as an example of hybrid culture per excellence in a context where tradition is open to globalization and identity is continuously being remodelled to fit into a global hybrid environment without losing its inherited essence.

Keywords: hybridity, globalization process, cultural contact, cultural exchange, identity

Our contemporary society is characterized by experiencing or suffering the fluxes of a world going through a globalization process. This reality cannot be avoided as we as citizens get influenced in a higher or lower degree by its effects, depending on our location and involvement with the advances of humanity. The ways of describing the world have been changing in the last decades and thus, among the new reality we experience, globalization has become part of our current concept of living, appearing as a "set of social processes that appear to transform our present social condition into one of globality" (Steger, 2009: 9).

Different authors from different disciplines understand globalization in a guite variety of ways. For Arjun Appadurai, "it is the broadening of risk-taking and riskbearing as properties of human life that link distant societies, cross national and market boundaries, and connect both the institutions of power and the agencies of ordinary human beings worldwide" (2013: 3). Steger emphasizes the essence of the concept, by referring to "the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-space" (2009: 15). Ritzer approaches globalization as "an accelerating set of processes involving flows that encompass ever-greater numbers of the world's spaces and that lead to increasing integration and interconnectivity among those spaces" (2007: 1), since "a global [relation] ... can link persons situated at any inhabitable point on the earth" (Scholte, 2005: 59).

Robertson defends that "globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (1992: 8). Meanwhile, in Lechner's view globalization is developing "a new world society" (2009: 5) because

> as more people become more connected across larger distances in different ways, they are creating a new world society in which they do more similar things, affect each other's lives more deeply, follow more of the same norms, and grow more aware of what they share. [...] Globalization refers to the growth of ties than span space. [...] (It) occurs in many fields, world society has many dimensions. [...] (It) is not a single thing or force but rather a set of human actions that share a similar quality and point in the same direction. (2009: 1)

Globalization also involves the revision of existing social networks and activities that cut across traditional, political, economic, cultural, and geographical boundaries, as well as the intensification and acceleration of social exchanges and activities. Moreover, it refers to the expansion and the widening impact of social relations, activities, and interdependencies and so it involves the subjective perspective of human consciousness. Thus, the compression of the world into a single place increasingly makes global the frame of reference for human thought and action (Lechner, 2009: 14-15).

Following George Ritzer research, globalization is increasingly omnipresent, as we are living in a "global age" (2010: 2) reflected in social relationships and structures, especially in those widely dispersed geographically. Besides, we are experiencing an important process of change which involves the increase of multi-directional flows of people, objects, places and information, enabling the expansion of culture. Due to its interdependent nature, globalization establishes common links among cultures and societies as a direct consequence of tightened global interconnections, which motivated by the speed of information exchange, produce, according to Ritzer, three different approaches to the concept of culture.

The first of them, cultural differentialism, emphasizes that cultures are essentially different and only superficially affected by global flows. It focuses on those barriers which prevent flows that would serve to make cultures more alike. Thus, cultures tend to remain different from one another as they remain much as they have always been. Following this theory, cultures are not only closed to global processes, but also to the influences of other cultures (Ritzer, 2010: 245-254). In Huntington's words, "cultural differentialism emphasizes the barriers to cultural flows and the ways in which those barriers lead cultures to remain largely distinct from, and potentially in conflict with, one another" (248). Opposite to this idea, we find cultural convergence, which highlights the homogeneity introduced by globalization through which cultures are deemed to be radically altered by strong flows. Hence, globalization tends to increase similarities around the world as there are dominant groups and societies which lead a global assimilation. Cultural imperialism, as well as world culture, back up this theory with ideas of uniformity around the world and the destroying of local cultures by external fluxes (258-266).

The third theory related to global culture is that of cultural hybridization, referring to those "external flows which interact with internal flows producing a unique cultural hybrid that combines their elements" (255). The focus is, then, "on the integration of global processes with various local realities to produce new and distinctive hybrid forms [...] advocating for the integration of local and global cultures" (255). This is the most positive view on globalization, as it is considered a creative process giving rise to entities not reducible to the global or the local, out of which emerge "new cultural realities producing new and distinctive hybrid forms indicating continual global heterogenization rather than homogenization" (255), propitiated at the same time by "the mixing of different cultural forms and styles facilitated by global economic and cultural exchanges" (Steger, 2009: 6). Reinforcing Ritzer's idea on cultural hybridization, Appadurai identifies the existence of five different landscapes whose inter-relationship can be termed as global cultural flows, labeled as ethnoscape, techonscape, financescape, mediascape and ideoscape.

When we talk about ethnoscapes, we are referring to "the landscape of tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals who constitute our current world a turn into an essential feature of our society" (1996: 33). In our globalized times, the "persons and groups dealing with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move" (1996: 34) are rising continuously. That rise is facilitated by technoscapes, this is, "the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology and the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries" (34), which enables those communities geographically separated from their homelands to keep in touch with the local events of their places of origin, as well as with their relatives.

Financescapes are directly related to the global economy, since "the disposition of global capital is now a more mysterious, rapid, and difficult landscape to follow than ever before" (34) due to the technological advances and agility which characterizes financial exchange nowadays. In Appadurai words, "the global relationship among ethnoscapes, technoscapes, and financescapes is deeply disjunctive and profoundly unpredictable because each of these landscapes acts as a constraint and parameter for movements in the others" (35). Thus, the interdependence between these three landscapes is fundamental for their development and improvement. Mediascapes "offer to those who experience and transform them a series of elements ([...] characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places" (35). Their presence is fundamental as "they help to constitute narratives of the Other and protonarratives of possible lives" (36), increasing the movement of people around the world and provoking the need of improvement to the inhabitants of different societies. The last of the landscapes suggested by Appadurai, the ideoscapes, are directly related to images which "consist of a chain of ideas, terms, and images, including freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation, and the master term democracy" (36). Those images are worldwide distributed by meadiascapes and technoscapes, promoting a global awareness on the foundation of a global society who will encourage the appearance of a global culture.

Current global flows occur in and through the disjunctures among these five landscapes. Their mixing and flows bet on hybridization since it emphasizes the mixing of cultures as a result of globalization and the production of new and unique hybrid cultures (Ritzer, 2010: 255-256). Thus, through the cultural flows produced by people, information and images moving, globalization is considered as a creative process which gives rise to hybrid entities emerging from the integration of the global and the local, that is, the glocal. In this line, if the concept of global or globality "is linked to the notion of a world society [...] characterized as being: multidimensional, polycentric, contingent and political" (Back, 2000: 87-88), localization refers to

> both perspectives and practices which prioritize the particular and local rather than the global. In terms of perspectives, it recognizes that while the world is to some extent globalized and interconnected, people still live in particular places and have particular practices because of that. This does not mean that the local is immune from outside influences. [...] There is a constant push-pull of flows and influences. Thus localization also refers to concern for and investigation into the local effects of global policies. (Mooney and Evans, 2007: 156-7)

Moreover, any global event has a local manifestation and vice versa, as "around the world, local events bear the imprint of alobal processes. Local and alobal events become more and more intertwined (since) the local feeds into the global as well" (Lechner and Boli, 2015: 4). The merging of the global and the local, the glocal "refers to the increasing entanglement of these two spheres" (Mooney and Evans, 2007: 117). Glocalization, which can be defined as "the interpenetration of the global and the local resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas" (Ritzer, 2010: 255), inherently involves heterogeneity since a custom or idea on one setting will be different to that very custom or idea at another location. If we focus on this concept,

> the world is growing more pluralistic, as glocalization theory is exceptionally alert to differences within and between areas of the world; individuals and local groups have great power to adapt, innovate, and maneuver within a glocalized world, as glocalization theory sees individuals and local groups as important and creative agents; social processes are relational and contingent, thus globalization provokes a variety of reactions that produce glocalization; and commodities and the media are not seen as totally coercive, but rather as providing material to be used in individual and group creation throughout the glocalized areas of the world. (Ritzer, 2010: 255)

The understanding of the relevance of the connection between the local, the global and the glocal is facilitated by the relationship between globalization and postcolonialism. We must perceive postcolonial societies as an example to follow in our globalizing context, especially when relating to the connection of local engagements with global culture, as they have developed in ways that reveal a remarkable capacity for change, adaptation and resilience. Following Ashcroft ideas, postcolonial theories and postcolonial literatures can provide very clear models for understanding how local communities achieve agency under the pressure of global hegemony. Besides,

> the diffusion of global influence makes the relationship between the local and the global all the more complex, because when we examine global cultures we find

the presence of global within the local to an extent that compels us to be very clear about our concept of the local. Robertson suggests (1995) that the term "glocalization" more adequately describes the relationship between the local and the global as one of interaction and interpenetration rather than of binary opposites. (2001: 214)

The historical ways in which the formerly colonized societies have impacted on global culture help us to understand the transformative impact of postcolonial cultural strategies on global culture. Those societies have appropriated and transformed the colonizing culture into culturally appropriate vehicles to re-inscribe and represent their postcolonial cultural identity, including issues of cultural diversity, ethnic, racial and cultural difference. One of the characteristics of postcolonial societies is their refusal to be absorbed by the dominant forces. Besides, in Ashcroft words,

> ...the capacity, the agency, the inventiveness of postcolonial transformation help us to explain something about the ways in which local communities resist absorption and transform global culture itself. In the end the transformative energy of postcolonial societies tells us about the present because it is overwhelmingly concerned with the future. (2001: 17)

Culture, in a global sense where different cultures are in continuous interaction, is not immune to appropriation and adaptation by local communities for their own benefit, since "globalization is seen as a powerful, complex and essentially indeterminate and open-ended transformative force or process responsible for massive change within societies and world order" (Hopper, 2007: 8). Then, it is the postcolonial appropriation model which is of most use in understanding the local engagements with global culture, as identities are constructed in a globalized world by a process of interaction, appropriation and change. The postcolonial experience demonstrates that the key to resistance or adaptability of the global by the selfdetermination of the local lies in engagement and transformation. The issue of globalization reconstructs the question of postcolonial identity as the engagement of imperial or colonial culture by these (post) colonialized societies and offers a convincing model for the relationship between the local and the global today. Thus,

whereas 'development' acts to force the local into globally normative patterns, 'transformation' acts to adjust those patterns to the requirements of local values and needs. This capacity to adjust global influences to local needs disrupts [...] the idea that globalization is a simple top-down homogenizing pressure. (Ashcroft, 2001: 16)

The adjustment of global elements or patterns to the local needs originates a new global culture which owes its appearance to the intermixture of traditional symbols and values with those offered by diversity. The outcome of that combination promotes the emergence and manifestation of hybridity, "a concept that emerged from postcolonial literary studies" (Mooney and Evans, 2007: 127) since it is crucial on literary and cultural postcolonial creation, referring to mixing at different levels.

Understood as the cultural logic of globalization, hybridity implicates that fragments of different cultures are present in every culture creating a global cultural continuum. The fact that contact between different cultures characterizes hybrid societies is not a new reality, since in 1927 Boas defended the idea that "we see [...] customs in constant flux, sometimes stable for a period, then undergoing rapid changes [and] are remodeled according to the changing spiritual background that pervades the culture and that transforms the mosaic into an organic whole" (Boas, 1927: 7). Those surviving elements within society create hybridity, which eases the problematic between the local and the global. Pieterse advocates for a global mélange as, in his words, "hybrid formations constituted by the interpenetration of diverse logics manifest themselves in hybrid sites and spaces" (2015: 75), this is, in global cities.

Hybridity also means in-betweenness, since "new hybrid forms are significant indicators of profound changes that are taking place as a consequence of mobility, migration, and multiculturalism" (Pieterse, 2015: 101). Those suffering or experiencing the vicissitudes of the appearance of a global culture are the inhabitants of the world, especially those of metropolis. Propitiated by the existence of multiculturalism in the global cities, people experience a changing period in which their cultural identity is redefined in order to fit in the global whole. This reality also works "as part of a power relationship between center and margin, hegemony and minority, and indicates a blurring, destabilization, or subversion of that hierarchical relationship" (81). In Sanghita Sen words, "through acquiring a specific cultural affiliation [,] [...] 'peripheral members' are promoted to the level of 'core members' and are included at the cost of loss of a linguistic/cultural identity indexed in one's socio-economic space such as ethnicity, class and language" (Shina and Reynolds, 2009: 101). Thus,

> hybridization is the making of global culture as a global mélange. Hybridity serves a purpose based on the assumption of difference between the categories, forms, beliefs that go into the mixture. Yet the very process of hybridization shows the difference to be relative and, with a slight shift of perspective, the relationship can also be described in terms of an affirmation of similarity. (Pieterse, 2015: 86)

Appadurai's scapes clarify this interpretation of the world as a global whole where a cultural compression of the world is taking place, since "while the flows homogenize the world to some extent, the disjunctures in globalization also produce heterogeneity" (Lechner and Boli, 2015: 54). All the concepts exposed above can be easily found and recognized in the cosmopolis or global city, as they consist in fluid and variegated populations and an intermeshing of racially and ethnically defined populations alongside segregated spaces. These cosmopolis are seen as cultural locations, understood and presented in the media and literary narratives as microcosms of the world at large. They are likely to be attuned to what may be regarded as a global consciousness, this is, a mosaic of diverse populations coexisting and cohabiting in the same location.

> The city, the contemporary metropolis, is for many the chosen metaphor for the experience of the modern world. In its everyday details, its mixed histories, and cultures, languages its elaborate evidence of global tendencies and local distinctions, the figure of the city, as both a real and an imaginary place, apparently provides a ready map for reading, interpretation and comprehension. (Chambers, 1993: 188)

Contemporary metropolises are a major symbol of the changes we are experiencing in our contemporary era. Some of the features of global cities are their high level of population, the variety of its inhabitants, their role in a global context and their cultural relevance. However, one of the most distinctive attributes is that of diversity, since

the large Western city of today concentrates diversity. Its spaces are inscribed with the dominant corporate culture but also with a multiplicity of other cultures and identities. The slippage is evident: the dominant culture can encompass only part of the city. And while corporate power inscribes these cultures and identifies them with 'otherness' thereby devaluing them, they are present everywhere. (Sassen, 1998: xxxi)

Cultural diversity promotes that "multiethnic, multi-racial, and multi-national populations are becoming a dominant characteristic of cities and regions across the globe" (Sandercock, 1998). There is more diversity in world cities than in small places. Besides, "the double vision of the world city as both a place in itself and as a source of culture flowing from it, [...] represented by the members of the various transnational groups, seems necessary to understand fully the contemporary cultural role of the world cities" (Hannerz, 1996: 139). Due to globalization, "the symbolic parts of a society no longer fit together well" (Abrahamson, 2004: 122). The anthropologist Gordon Mathews throws light to the new cultural reality by introducing the concept of global cultural supermarket, a view presenting "people with an array of possible choices concerning the values they want to live by and the identities they wish to cultivate. As people within the same society take different paths, culture as a coherent way of life becomes unrecognizable" (Abrahamson, 2004: 123). That collection of values and symbols is possible due to the diversity ruling in global cities, where people "see themselves as citizens of the world rather than as belonging to any one place" (Abrahamson, 2004: 125). Thanks to their hybrid character, cosmopolis are the places where the global or universal gets localized and the local or particular reaches a global scope, turning into the focus and main driving force of cultural globalization, which

> refers to the mixing of Asian, African, American, European cultures: hybridization is the making of global culture as a global mélange. As a category, hybridity serves a purpose based on the assumption of *difference* between the categories, forms, beliefs that go into the mixture. Yet the very process of hybridization shows the

difference to be relative and, with a slight shift of perspective, the relationship can also be described in terms of an affirmation of *similarity*. (Pieterse, 2015: 86)

As a concept, global culture or cultural globalization describes "international, transnational, regional, local and global developments that have a cultural dimension. It is a multilateral set of interrelated and interpenetrating processes and tendencies" (Hooper, 2007: 186). The birth of global culture is the result of several long-term processes in which different cultures take an important role. Its nature is compulsory hybrid as it is made up of the different cultures that set up our world, in which

> a convincing analysis of the unevenness of global interconnectedness should go beyond a global-local binary opposition. The operation of global cultural power can only be found in local practice, whereas cultural reworking and appropriation at the local level necessarily takes place within the matrix of global homogenizing forces. (Iwabuchi, 2002: 44)

This reflects the cultural dynamics of globalization, emerging from different flows and interconnected interactions which provide heterogeneity and complexity as the predominant characteristics of our globalizing era. Those flows of the globalizing process shape cultures, standing as the most direct way through which we, as human beings who create and experience culture, are exposed to globalization at different contexts and levels. Since cultural spaces are complex and inseparably interconnected, icultural globalization should more accurately be viewed as a multi-centered phenomenon contributed to by a range of sources, powers and influences (Hopper, 2007: 5), where Appadurai's scapes and its globalizing flows play the most relevant role. The anthropologist Roy Wagner advocates the continuous change and recreation of cultures as part of an ongoing process where, by overlapping and drawing from other traditions, cultures are continuously evolving, being neither static nor stable (Hopper, 2007: 40). Thus, while "cultures are not immune to globalizing processes" (8), the clusters and webs which constitute a culture "are still being reproduced within a myriad of social contexts, providing us with interpretative frameworks, value-systems and sources of identity" (36). By relating the notion of webs and networks to culture, it is stated the expansion of culture across

distances as well as its overlapping and merging into other cultural networks. Through this action or movement is guaranteed the perpetual mixing of cultures, which at the same process ensure and unveil new hybrid cultural forms as part of the continuous flows. These flows imply the cultural globalization of local cultural elements which are appropriated, adapted and even resisted through a reciprocal mélange of cultures in a period when "cultural studies are stressing mobility and fluidity in relation to globalization" (47).

Roland Robertson states that this global culture "emerges from the interplay between the particular and the universal, the local and the global" (98), which are bounded on a continuous interaction. He maintains that "global culture is partly created from interactions between national societies" (Robertson, 1992: 114) and his view strengthens the idea that culture is at the heart of globalization since "we are constantly applying our particular -localcultural frameworks during the course of our everyday interactions with the global" (Hopper, 2007: 99), where the coexistence of heterogeneity and complexity propitiates diversity and hybridism. The challenge is, then, to find elements which can constitute a unique global culture born out of hybridism and diversity following the model given by the Indian society as it is portrayed in the contemporary Indian English narrative. Indian culture must be understood as an example of the coexistence of tradition and modernity in the same location and at the same time due to its historical ability to incorporate and accommodate its traditional past in the field of the contemporary and global society. "India, in short, is a microcosm of the modern world, lunging forward toward still unattained possibilities while selectively trying to retain elements of its storied past" (Clothey, 2006: 195). Hence, without refusing to a developed global identity, India has found its way in the global context from and with its already developed local identity.

Even though it can be thought that India lacks of certain basic elements to be proclaimed as a model to follow in the cultural globalization process, analysing the swathes of elements that the subcontinent offers gives tools to decline this idea. Historically, India has survived to different invasions which have shaped its character but have never been able to change the nucleus of its identity. Thus, Indian culture and society have always shown a plasticity which has allowed the country to adjust itself to different crucial historical moments without losing a speck of its inner essence. During the English colonial period India had been able to appropriate and abrogate certain elements of the English culture while, at the same time, introduced aspects of its traditional culture to the English one which became essential for naming certain realities.

Another argument in favour of proclaiming India as a model to follow in this cultural globalization is its postcolonial heritage. Nowadays the postcolonial can be seen as the "new-global", since those societies have been experiencing the effects of the cultural contact for several centuries. Thus, historically, India inhabitants are more used to the sharing and appropriation of cultural elements and values than people from countries which have always been closed to cultural contact or which have experienced it in an extremely minor degree. If hybridity as the essential and principal element of the global culture is originated in global cities, India also has a rich contribution in this respect. Mumbai, Calcutta and Delhi are between the most populated cities in the world. Thus, it would be a great mistake not to consider the Indian megalopolis as active elements in the creation of global cultural elements since these global cosmopolis are the location for the flows and mobilities of globalization and so prime sites of cultural interaction and exchange for intercultural encounters. They must be understood as microcosms where the local or particular elements are originated, which would later become global or universal ones when extrapolated to the macrocosm.

Indian English literature, and the society portrayed on its contemporary writing is then chosen as an example to follow in the globalizing context due to several reasons. First, because this society has been able to combine tradition and modernity in harmony in the same location for centuries. Second, because its postcolonial past has made of this society an example for contemporary global cities even since the colonial period. Third, because due to the capacity to adapt global elements to local customs and manners from colonial times India has developed a global identity without refusing to its heritage and legacy. And forth, because the Indian local identity is characterized by its resilience to manipulation since colonial times so that it can "survive" in this globalization process. Thus, it could be proposed a new globalization from the East which finds its foundational basis in the contemporary Indian English narrative. The elements conforming the global culture can be

found through the analysis of local or particular elements which are portrayed in this literature. Hence, literature acquires the status of cultural tool in the globalizing process while the literary text must be understood as a cultural object and a relevant piece of a culture.

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