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**MYTH AND GLOBALIZATION, COSMOPOLITISM AND  
COSMOPOLITICS: HANNERZ AND SAHLINS MODEL FOR A  
ANTHROPOLOGY OF COMPLEX SOCIETIES**

*MITO E GLOBALIZAÇÃO, COSMOPOLITISMO E COSMOPOLÍTICAS: O MODELO DE  
HANNERZ E SAHLINS PARA UMA ANTROPOLOGIA DAS SOCIEDADES COMPLEXAS*

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**ABSTRACT:** The present work intends to discuss, based on a collection of texts by Hannerz and Sahlins, the unfolding of the epistemological, ethical and political crisis that characterizes actually anthropological thinking. In general terms, since the 1970s, when the last theoretical-methodological and thematic shift in Anthropology took place, anthropologists have sought ways to equip the discipline for the analysis of an increasingly globalized and urban societal space. Hannerz and Sahlins present a theoretical-methodological tool, as well as a relevant vocabulary for the study of complex societies, the World System or the World Culture of Cultures. The authors are concerned with overcoming the epistemological crisis of Anthropology, here embodied in the theoretical deficiencies of British Social Anthropology, the French Sociological School, the Writing Culture movement and the discourses around the Theory of Modernization and Dependency, demonstrating that the City, the Global Ecumene, New Cultural Synthesis, Flows, Hybrids and Borders, resulted in the phenomenon of plural, distributive culture. Far from having to lament the lack of an empirical object to be analyzed, - the isolated primitive, - it is up to the Anthropology to celebrate the 'indigenization of modernity', for Sahlins, and the understanding of 'transnational culture', for Hannerz. **Keywords:** Hannerz, Sahlins, myth and globalization, cosmopolitism and cosmopolitics, transnational culture, indigenization of Modernity.

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**RESUMO:** O presente trabalho pretende discutir a partir de um apanhado de textos de Hannerz e de Sahlins os desdobramentos da crise epistemológica, ética e política que caracteriza o fazer e o pensar antropológicos atualmente. Em linhas gerais, desde a década de 1970, quando do último deslocamento teórico-metodológico e temático na Antropologia, os antropólogos buscam formas de municiar a disciplina para a análise de um espaço societal cada vez mais globalizado e urbano. Hannerz e Sahlins apresentam um instrumental teórico-metodológico, bem como um vocabulário pertinente para o estudo das sociedades complexas, do Sistema Mundial ou da Cultura Mundial de Culturas. Os autores se preocupam em superar a crise epistemológica da Antropologia, aqui encarnada nas deficiências teóricas da Antropologia Social Britânica, da Escola Sociológica Francesa, do movimento Writing Culture e dos discursos em torno da Teoria da Modernização e da Dependência, demonstrando que a Cidade, o Ecúmeno Global, as Novas Sínteses Culturais, os Fluxos, Híbridos e Fronteiras, redundaram no fenômeno da cultura plural, distributiva. Longe de ter que se lamentar pela falta de um objeto empírico a ser analisado, o primitivo isolado, cabe à Antropologia a celebração da 'indigenização da modernidade', para Sahlins, e a compreensão da cultura transnacional, para Hannerz. **Palavras-chave:** Hannerz, Sahlins, mito e globalização, cosmopolitismo e cosmopolíticas, cultura transnacional, indigenização da Modernidade.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The present work intends to discuss, based on a collection of texts by Hannerz and Sahlins, the unfolding of the epistemological, ethical and political crisis that characterizes actually anthropological thinking and doing. In general terms, since the 1970s, when the last theoretical-methodological and thematic shift in Anthropology took place, anthropologists have sought ways to equip the discipline for the analysis of an increasingly globalized and urban societal space. The dynamics of material and symbolic exchanges in this scenario of complex and plural semantics truly differs from the empirical object that first guided the production of knowledge in anthropology: 'the isolated primitive', inserted in a societal logic of very low differentiation, most of the times ending in face-to-face interactions, and apprehended as a 'living fossil' of the past of western societies. Hannerz and Sahlins present impulses and proposals to bring ethnography to the study of complex societies. In this sense, the authors dialogue with theoretical-methodological projects in vogue in the 1970s, such as the Modernization Theory, the Dependency Theory, Wallerstein's Theory of International Systems, and the Writing Culture movement itself.

## **TRANSNATIONAL CULTURE AND INDIGENIZATION OF MODERNITY**

In his analytical model, Hannerz proposes the apprehension of the complex society as a societal space intersected and shaped by flows of people, things and symbols, so that a violent process of hybridization of the most diverse symbolic repertoires is verified. The author postulates that the local and the global would consist of outdated notions to conceive the limits, the frontiers of a transnational culture in constant remake of itself through the most curious and unusual processes of 'creolization', such as what happens in meeting of races, continents and cultures in the approximation between Kirsi and Pedro Arcanjo in the Bahian scenario imagined by Jorge Amado.

In Hannerz's anthropology, an image of the city, of the modern metropolis, is theorized as the locus of new cultural syntheses, of the formation and emergence of transnational hybrids and of figures and characters that border the borders and beaches

of complex societies. It is worth noting Hannerz's effort to analyze and propose a basic vocabulary for current anthropological and ethnographic work, whose methodological importance cannot be ignored.

By placing concepts, rubrics and notions such as flows, borders, hybrids, global ecumene, transnational culture, interconnectivity, Creole continuum and others, the author shifts anthropology from the studies of primitive societies to the study of the daily life of the common man in complex societies of a macro and micro-anthropological and medium-time perspective. Hannerz promotes a theoretical-methodological discussion within the scope of urban anthropology, cultural theory and the most current debates on the expansion of capitalism and western culture across the globe, as well as on transnational themes in general. From the material analyzed here, a hierarchical view of the author stands out regarding the organization of societies within the limits of a transnational culture: there would be a center-periphery structuring channeling cultural flows in this direction, which, concretely, means the projection of Western emotive culture to colonized spaces.

Creolization, in a second moment, imposes a particular appropriation of these flows by local cultures. Thus, for Hannerz, diversity and local and long-distance relationships constitute the empirical object of his Urban Anthropology and of his analyzes of complex societies. Within this proposal, the author places his distributive concept of culture, also understanding that the social and cultural dimensions make up different and relatively autonomous spheres of a given sociability.

The Sahlins' texts discussed here deal with the process of 'indigenization of modernity', which would have accelerated from the mid-twentieth century onwards, when the decolonization of peoples colonized by the West began. The author supports this thesis in order to affirm that 'culture', in a plural and distributive sense, remains the empirical object par excellence of anthropological knowledge and ethnographic practice, given that the capitalist expansion promoted by the West does not destroy the symbolic organization of human action and experience, their values and meanings, locally grounded.

Indeed, argues Sahlins, the global ecumene crystallized in dense and complex networks of flows has not managed to homogenize in the sense of extinguishing the local reality that heterogenizes, resignifies and appropriates these same flows. Sahlins, unlike Hannerz, does not propose a center-periphery model of global ecumene, but presents three strategies, on the part of the peoples who survived the impact of Western culture, supposedly verified in the field in the sense of 'indigenizing modernity': the transcultural society and translocal; contemporary culturalism; and developman.

These strategies consist of aggregating categories of ways found by each people to culturally organize unique experiences of the World System, so that a 'World Culture of Cultures' emerges and can be strengthened as a project of human cultural diversity. In this sense, Sahlins makes a theoretical and historical tour of the anthropological heritage with the aim of sustaining that the concept of culture managed to emancipate itself from notions such as intellectual refinement and civilization and from racist, capitalist and imperialist political projects. Furthermore, the concept of culture is not reduced to a 'marker of differences' that operates 'identity politics' or even 'oppression politics'.

In Sahlins' view, the functionalist understanding of culture as a marker of differences led Anthropology to a discourse and a victimist posture, of deep sentimental pessimism, since it would only be able to project the future as a fatality: the expansion of

capitalism and western culture would result in cultural homogenization (a scenario close to the one desired by the Theory of Modernization). The past, in turn, starts to be told from a conjectural story that situates the discriminatory effects of the concept of culture as the very reason for its appearance.

Sahlins takes care to demonstrate how the concept of culture appears in opposition to the Enlightenment civilizing project: *Kultur* appears as the antipode of *Zivilisation*. It is originally a political project that opposes the bourgeois myths of State and Social Contract as products of universal human reason, given that between selfish subjects that maximize their individual advantages, only the rational calculation founding a collective order can make up for the absence of solidarity that the German Romantics postulate exists within the people, the *Geist*, which guides the collective feeling of belonging and is, in the final analysis, the culture of a people.

This German tradition would have arrived in the USA through the influence of Boas, which would have led American Cultural Anthropology to distance itself from the misunderstandings of British Social Anthropology and the French Sociological School. Social Anthropology deprived itself of apprehending the cultural dimension of human life, reducing itself to a sociology of primitive peoples that located culture as an ideological moment in the preservation of a given social order or structure. The French Sociological School, in turn, could only have paid attention to the mistake of ignoring the cultural dimension of human life when Lévi-Strauss approached American Cultural Anthropology.

This set of arguments proposed by Sahlins not only points to the rediscovery of culture as a political proposal and alternative to modernity, contrasting with the theories of despondency and despair (as the author understands the Theories of Modernization and Dependence) that would have led to Anthropology to 'sentimental pessimism' and a discourse identical to colonialism. But this chain of ideas that ends the thesis of the 'indigenization of modernity' also means a heavy criticism of the Writing Culture movement and its insistence on the impossibility of understanding otherness, which would implode the epistemological foundations of anthropological science.

Sahlins emphasizes, in this sense, that one of the anthropologist's tasks is to 'deflate' the 'Great Narrative' about capitalist world domination by understanding and even celebrating the inventiveness and resistance of formerly colonized peoples. This time, it is up to the anthropologist to understand and present the dialectical relationship between cultural forces that act globally in the sense of homogenization and life locally organized under the sign of the indigenization of modernity.

In this sense, the author presents the 'Diveopman' as a collective way of appropriating the Market Economy to strengthen the Gift Economy among the Anganem. Here we have capitalism, the greatest symbol of Western domination, reversed in its societal logic according to native cultural grammar. The sense of self that guides a people in their daily life is not necessarily lost due to contact with the World System, but if the meanings of the social and cultural transformations that result from it can no longer be operated within the codes of the native tradition.

Translocal and transcultural society, for Sahlins, is an example of how a native culture can maintain itself as a way of organizing the symbolic action and human experience of a people, even operating from a dispersed and multicultural territorial base, but connected by flows of people, things and ideas from the global ecumene. Thus, there is a deep dissociation between economic reproduction and symbolic reproduction,

but that does not imply acculturation or symbolic domination for the native, given that the symbolic power of his 'village' continues to guide the construction of his projects and individual identities and collectives.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Hannerz and Sahlins present a theoretical-methodological instrument, as well as a relevant vocabulary for the study of complex societies, the World System or the World Culture of Cultures. The authors are concerned with overcoming the epistemological crisis of Anthropology, here embodied in the theoretical deficiencies of British Social Anthropology, the French Sociological School, the Writing Culture movement and the discourses around the Theory of Modernization and Dependency, demonstrating that the City, the Global Ecumene, New Cultural Synthesis, Flows, Hybrids and Borders, resulted in the phenomenon of plural, distributive culture. Far from having to bemoan the lack of an empirical object to be analyzed, the isolated primitive, it is up to Anthropology to celebrate the 'indigenization of modernity', for Sahlins, and the understanding of 'transnational culture', for Hannerz.

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