Culture in the Global World:
Between Dialogue and Conflict[*]

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Modern globalization is most brightly manifested in culture. It is confirmed by the existence of 'mass culture', as a rule, confronting national cultures. The relations between the Christian and Islamic World, between the East and the West, whose value orientations differ significantly, are also a serious contribution to international insecurity, and an obstacle to the processes of cultural globalization. Conflicts can take place within a culture as well; it is known as a counterculture, which becomes a culture's antipode. At the same time, human history knows rare cultures having no contacts with the outside world. Therefore, a dialogue of various cultures in the global world becomes a condition for their survival and the survival of the whole world community. Moreover, the age of globalization leaves no alternative to the problem of a dialogue; otherwise, the humanity has no chance to survive.

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Culture embraces, or, to be more precise, literally penetrates all spheres of society's spiritual and material life. That is why, it is in this or that way fully involved into the process of globalization. Many culture-connected problems emerged from this fact, and they more and more acquire an international and even a global character. The difficulties and contradictions engendered by an increasing influence and broad expansion of 'mass culture', periodically emerging crises of spirituality, increasing apathy, feeling of being lost, insecurity, *etc.* are the examples. In this situation the interaction, dialogue and mutual understanding of various cultures become more and more significant, although the modern world is not ready for such things. The uneasy relations between modern Western culture and traditional Oriental cultures play a special role. Indigenous cultures of the developing Asian, African, Latin American cultures, the relations built between the Christian and Islamic worlds, whose value orientations and socio-cultural patterns are radically different, are also a serious factor of international insecurity as well as the confrontation to the process of globalization of culture.

We can trace a real influence of globalization on culture already in the era of the Great Geographic Discoveries, when cultural connections and communications for the first time in human history became actually the planet-wide, although at first they were fragmented and limited to contacts between sailors, traders, and conquerors. Since that period, the first signs have emerged if not of a unification, but at least of global loaning and spreading of

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material and cultural values as well as of cultural achievements, which, as a result of expansionist aspirations of the Europeans and increasing world trade, expanded throughout the world. Through this, the best scientific and technical achievements of separate countries and nations, the most convenient and daily useful samples of manufactured goods, utensils and cloths, many agricultural crops started to expand over the world more and more actively, taking root in the other cultures.

That was how gun-powder and guns, mechanical clock and navigation equipment, silk and porcelain, tea and coffee, potatoes and corn, tomatoes and many other things, being initially born by local cultures, step by step won admission from the other nations and eventually became elements not of their cultures but of the cultural heritage of the whole world community. Along with the objects of material culture, various elements of spiritual, basically European, culture were granted opportunities for being expanded worldwide, for example, language (first of all, Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French), religions (Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism), whose missionaries started to penetrate regions and corners of the world unknown before. Thus, as a result of the starting globalization, which had opened principally new opportunities for communication and provided the ability to spread various ideas throughout the world, the religions mentioned above acquired their universal, in the full sense, meaning and became 'world religions'.

Even more opportunities emerged for a broad expansion of material and spiritual values in the end of the 19th – early 20th century, when new transportation means started to develop: railways, autos, and air transport; also modern mass communication means were invented: telephone, cinema, radio, and TV. As a result, mutual penetration and mutual assimilation of various cultures, being an objective and necessary consequence of globalization, led in the 20th century to the formation of the universal, planetary culture. Its contours can be already seen quite well in every country and continent, where the established way of life, traditions and daily peculiarities coexist, basing on complementarity principle, with the newest domestic appliances and mass consumption goods, sometimes manufactured somewhere in the other corner of the planet.

But cultural globalization is not reduced only to the usage by different people of the same cell phones, radio, television, transportation means, *etc*. It can also be seen in the design of autos, aircrafts or home appliances being practically indistinguishable from culture to culture. Their design and production, as a rule, already have no sign of any national culture of their manufacturers and differ from their analogies only by labels with country-manufacturer on them. The same refers to the products manufactured by transnational corporations with their branches in many countries of the world, where some factories produce component parts while the manufactured goods are worked up in some other place.

So, although in the human history one can find examples of existence of self-sufficient cultures having practically no contacts with the outside world, they would be, nevertheless, a rare example, not a normal case. In fact, almost every culture has an imprint of other cultures' influence, mostly of the neighboring cultures, but may be even to a greater extent, of the most developed ones and, due to this fact, more attractive from the viewpoint of exchanging experience, results and achievements. It is especially clear if we take loans typical nearly for all languages having as a rule words of foreign origins, as well as parables, sayings, and phrases, borrowed from other cultures. Broad expansion and transmission into the other countries and nations of ideas, inventions, scientific discoveries, religious beliefs, material and spiritual values, techniques and technologies, born by some particular culture, also proves cultural interdependence typical for whole world history.

It seems evident that interdependence plays an important role in cultural development. It has, in fact, a universal character and can be realized in various forms. It can be uninterrupted when we take, for instance, the development of everyday life culture, language, and interrupted as it took place in the case of the Renaissance when material values and sociocultural traditions of the past (the Antiquity) became visible after a significant period of obliteration.

Cultural interdependence can also be direct in case of loans taking place as a result of a natural evolution through choice and preservation of the most valuable and vivid elements, or indirect, when transmission of achievements is done not immediately but after some time via additional intercessors. For example, that was the case with typography that initially emerged in Germany and eventually expanded throughout the world; or with ideas and cultural values resurrected by the West European Renaissance and later adopted by other countries and nations.

It is important to mention that such loans are not always creative and taken easily; they often engender some social strains and critical evaluation. For example, a famous Russian philosopher Ivan A. Ilyin pointed out the originality of Russian culture and theorized that we should not mechanistically loan spiritual culture of the other nations and imitate them thoughtlessly. He wrote, that

> Each nation creates what it can, basing on what it was given. However, it is a bad nation, if it ignores what exactly it was given and panhandles at the doors of the others. Russia has its own spiritual and historical gifts and is called to create its own spiritual culture: culture of heart, of contemplation, of freedom and objectivity. There is no 'Western culture' obligatory for everyone, in comparison with which all the rest are 'obscurantism' or 'barbarity'. The West is not our law and not our jail. Its culture is not the ideal of perfection… And we have no need to pursue it and to make it our ideal. The West has its own misconceptions, illnesses, weaknesses and dangers. Westernizing is not salvation for us. We have our own ways and our own tasks (Ilyin 1992: 327–328).

It should be mentioned that Western culture has also experienced many problems and even shocks caused by intercultural antagonisms. Numerous religious wars in Europe or stubborn French defense of the priority and purity of their language under the pressure of English, which has already replaced French internationally as a language of diplomacy, evidently confirm the correctness of our statements.

Moreover, the history of nations of the other continents proves the same. In particular, the hard experience of establishing cooperation between the European countries and the countries of the Orient can be and should be a good basis for discussing a principle possibility of mutual influence and interaction of various cultures, as well as for finding principle and irremovable differences between them, that being underestimated may engender, in some circumstances, misunderstanding, strain or even a conflict situation. A well-known incident with a British ambassador in China Lord McCartney who in 1793 was refused an accreditation at the court of Jiànlóng can serve a good example. The Emperor of China wrote in this regard in his letter handed to a British king George III: 'We have everything and your ambassador can confirm it. I do not pay much attention to exotic or primitive things and we do not need the goods of your country' (Toynbee 1991: 83).

Less than two centuries have passed since those lines were written, and now China is not just open for the external world but has literally flooded the whole world with its

goods. These facts confirm an irrepressible force and communicative direction of modern globalization forcing even the most closed societies to open in the end. The idea is that China itself is not the point, but the objective of globalization processes. One can study the practice of other countries, such as Japan, which has completed nearly the same way from a full self-isolation to aggressive expansionist policy in the 20th century. Japanese military policy finally failed but the country became really effective in the sphere of manufacturing, especially in electronics, high technologies and motor-building. Contrasting experience in modern history, for instance, of North Korea and Cuba, is also of great interest because it clearly demonstrates that poverty and backwardness in socioeconomic development are, in fact, inevitable in case under the global mutual dependence a country chooses the way of self-isolation from the rest of the world.

And, nevertheless, the problem of intercultural interaction and even confrontation, antagonism of various cultural traditions and systems has not become less important. Moreover, it acquires new depth and new forms, intensively moving to the foreground the necessity for dialogue and cooperation based on mutual understanding and mutual respect of all numerous cultures representing modern humankind. It is just to mention that not only in the East but also in the West it is more and more perceived that the Eurocentric vision of the world order and world events, so widespread in the previous centuries, has evidently withered away in condition of increasing globalization process. One of the most well-known scholars of the problems of contemporary world, an American political scientist Samuel Huntington also admits that 'the West has conquered the world not due to the superiority of its ideas, values or religion (into which some members of the other civilizations were converted), but due to the superiority in using organized violence. It is often forgotten in the West; but it is always remembered in the non-Western civilizations' (Huntington 1999: 510).

Our position is confirmed by another, different vision of the Western culture, its values and generally of the possibilities of a dialogue and cooperation between significantly different cultural, political and religious systems. Now we talk about the position of the Islamic East, represented in the book by the former president of Iran Mohammad Hatami 'Islam, Dialogue and Civil Society'. Here he writes: 'Rejecting the West, we want to liberate ourselves from its political, spiritual, cultural and economic domination, for, being Muslims, we initially differ from people of the West in terms of our world vision, our values' (Hatami 2001: 217). Hatami writes, Western civilization is based on the ideas of freedom and emancipation. He suggests that generally it has had positive impact on the European culture after its liberation from many superstitions and prejudices enslaving thinking, politics and society. Nevertheless, the West, he mentions, has generally a wrong vision of freedom, humankind and the world as a whole. Hatami adds:

> We really disagree with the West on the issue of freedom. We do not think that the definition of freedom, accepted by the West, is perfect. Western vision of freedom cannot guarantee happiness for the humankind. Historically constructed organization of life and thinking of the West is so concentrated on itself that it is unable to see disasters caused by its wrong vision of the humankind and freedom (*Ibid.:* 218–219).

The above-brought examples seem enough to conclude: the relations of a dialogue and a conflict between various cultures are their natural attributes and even necessary forms of their existence, like, for example, a political struggle and political agreements are an inherent

part of any political system. The nature of this interconnection lies in natural laws, one of which – the unity and conflict of the opposites – for a long time has been a subject of philosophical speculations and can be applied to the sphere of culture, literally woven of the opposites and contradictions.

On the one hand, cultures cannot do without interaction and without mutual positive influence. It is so, because communications, existing for ages between nations in the sphere of trade and commercial exchange, always contributed to the broad expansion not only of material values, but also of spiritual, aesthetic norms, partly loaned and assimilated by other cultures in this or that way, becoming eventually their elements. Political relations also cannot be effective and cannot even be established without dialogue and mutual understanding of the contracting parties, independently of their culture. From this viewpoint, the contemporary world situation deserves special attention. It is characterized by increasing globalization principally changing the very idea of a dialogue and the forms of its existence.

Globalization has not just suddenly sharpened contradictions accompanying the humankind existence for ages and millennia. It has brought them qualitatively and quantitatively to a new level, having transformed formerly regional problems into the world ones and, at the same time, having engendered principally new, never existing problems and disagreements. The sharpness of modern contradictions is mainly caused by a clash of two trends – the integration process, including the cultural sphere, and the wish of national and local cultures to defend their originality and independence. One can conclude that any 'oppression', imposition or coercion in intercultural interaction cannot be successful.

In this regard a dialogue as a form of relations between individuals, communities and groups of people, between nations, states and, more broadly, between cultures (*e.g.,* the West and the East, Islam and Christianity) becomes not only an objective demand, but an absolute necessity. Professor from Jerusalem M. V. Ratz speaks about it, discussing the issue of tolerance and dialogue in the modern world: 'If we still keep our optimism and believe in the force of reason, we should not only count on tolerance, but to develop our dialogue ability. Tolerance is necessary, but not sufficient. The dialogue is not a panacea either, but, unlike tolerance, at least it provides a prospect for development' (Ratz 2004: 30).

Nowadays, when there is a significant number of countries having nuclear, chemical and bacteriological weapons in the world, the dialogue between these countries (it always takes place in a specific cultural, political and historical context) is the only possible way of resolving inevitable contradictions to avoid catastrophic consequences for both the conflicting parties and for the humankind as a whole, because the increasing intensity of globalization processes just leaves no other choice for people.

Apart from this, globalization not only expands opportunities for making the policy of a dialogue, but creates new conditions, engendering phenomena that have been obstacles to it. For example, every dialogue implies a clearly defined goal, distinctness and clarity of the parties' positions, and, consequently, the presence of a personal element and rationally based conduct of the participants of the dialogue. Such qualities are possessed by separate persons and responsible representatives, public and state figures, having relevant authorities for negotiations in question. At the same time, unorganized groups of people, spontaneously formed mobs, and, more than that, a mass of people being the basis of the 'mass society' is not sensitive to the dialogue. The conditions providing existence and reproduction of 'mass culture' do not contribute to the dialogue either. A respected scholar of this problem José Ortega-y-Gasset wrote, that 'a dialogue is the highest form of

communication allowing discussing the fundamentals of nowadays. But for a man of the mass to accept discussion is to fail inevitably, and he instinctively refuses to accept this highest objective authority' (Ortega-y-Gasset 1989: 144).

Thus, globalization, creating conditions for the emergence and expansion of mass culture and demanding, at the same time, an increasing and more effective dialogue, produces a highly contradictory situation. In other words, it plays a double role – on the one hand, it contributes to the developing dialogue, on the other hand, creates additional obstacles to it, engendering principally new contradictions and conflicts, the most of which directly affect the sphere of culture.

Cultural disagreements and contradictions mostly explain the fact that the modern globalizing world, implying transcending borders and eliminating obstacles to communication and human contacts, is still characterized by political, economic, spiritual and even material walls and barriers. Here we could point not only to the trade and economic wars permanently waged between, for example, Japan, the US, and the EU, or to the political and diplomatic conflicts emerging periodically with various pretexts, but also to the real walls still constructed in the modern world, what seems to be contradicting common sense.

For example, the Berlin Wall that used to be the result of ideological disagreements and a symbol of contradiction of different cultural and political systems, was in the course of time destroyed, but it has not become the last example reminding that in the global world it is impossible to be separated by either real or virtual wall from 'inconvenient' or 'incompliant' neighbors, whom, as we know, one cannot choose. And already in the 21st century Israel, after a desperate and constant war against terrorism, starts to build the same wall to separate from the Palestinian territories, while in the US, because of the increasing flow of illegal immigrants, the issue of building a wall at the Mexican border is seriously discussed.

Pointing to these rudiments of human antagonism, we should also emphasize that some obstacles to a constructive and effective dialogue between people can be found in the contradictory nature of human beings themselves. 'People value external form more than internal essence, they more value what differentiates them from the others than what unites with them. That is why I think that *the dialogue of culture has limited possibilities*' – Guseinov writes (Guseinov 1999: 20). Having in mind the above-mentioned circumstances, one can conclude that a dialogue between cultures cannot do without contradictions and even conflicts. And it is so both because of multi-faceted human nature, and of the contradictory nature of culture itself (a differentiated, dynamic phenomenon), and also because of the inevitable originality and difference of any particular culture from the others, with whom it establishes some contacts. And these conflicts should not necessarily be evident in an open or even exacerbated form; they are sometimes of a hidden, obscure or covered nature, appearing in the foreground only under certain circumstances. Sometimes they remain not actualized, losing in the course of time any ground for an open manifestation.

One can bring an unlimited number of examples of such conflicts, but war has always been the brightest expression of intercultural confrontations. As a rule, it is an external manifestation, an apogee of contradictions, which have been ripening for a long period covertly. When they become evident, they take various forms of violent struggle. Internal or hidden conflicts inevitably accompany all cultures, as well as intercultural relations (sometimes they are perceived as interethnic), and they can be externally displayed through,

for example, an ironical attitude to some ethnic way of life, ignoring its material and spiritual achievements, rejecting specific traditions and norms, becoming subject to jokes and mockery, *etc.*

Counterculture is one of the forms of a conflict manifestation inside a culture itself, which in this or that way becomes its antipode. Counterculture emerges, as a rule, on the basis of unresolved problems, accumulated contradictions and confrontation of various interests; it is fed by them and mostly becomes opposed to the accepted norms, established 'traditional' values, principles, ideals, calling for their new understanding, rethinking on the other grounds. Such movements directed towards modernization of cultures existed practically in all historical periods, and they always generated new ideals, providing impulse to change of the previous ideals. They performed, thus, on the one hand, an important function of renovating previous forms, relics of the past, overcoming everything what was stagnated, dogmatic, and non-viable. On the other hand, they performed a destructive function becoming extremist and violent. Counterculture becomes particularly strong in the period of social crises, accompanied by revolutions – social convulsions, affecting the deepest foundations of culture, which is usually, at such moments, in a deep crisis.

Countercultural examples can be found already in the ancient times, and we think, the brightest of them is the Greek philosophical school of cynics rejecting the accepted moral norms and principles of life and challenging the society by extravagant behavior of its representatives. The very term 'cynics' (meaning 'dogs' in Greek), used by them with pride, characterized their lifestyle and behaviour, based on neglecting traditional norms of living, denying laws of poleis and on a wish to live in accordance with natural laws, rejecting Fatherland and proclaiming themselves cosmopolitans. The essence of this counterculture is reflected brightly in many stories and fables about the legendary representative of cynical philosophy Diogenes of Sinope, who demonstratively lived in a barrel (*piphos*) and limited his demands to the minimum, thus expressing his aspiration for natural freedom and complete independence from external events.

The recent wave-like movements of the 20th century are, definitely, countercultural, such as hippies, Hóng Wèi Bīng, 'New Left', as well as the demonstrations of sexual minorities, various reformist or schismatic movements emerging periodically in this or that church or religious tradition; in particular, Protestantism, Baptism, Duhobory, Wahhabism, Krishnaism and many others that used to be countercultural phenomena. Counterculture is also represented by various protest movements against different forms of violence, exploitation, unjust relations in the sphere of economy, politics, social relations, *etc.* These are political parties and social movements of the Greens, international organizations like Greenpeace and Antiglobalists, widely known nowadays, who, in fact, are not against globalization as such. They actually protest against unjust relations, becoming more visible and acute in the modern world under the influence of the objective globalization process (Chumakov 2005).

In this respect, a curious phenomenon deserves special attention. Since the moment of 'discovering' in the late 20th century of the global problems of modernity and active searching for the ways to solve them, there have been, in fact, no principal disagreements among parties interested in their resolution. Actually, all countries and peoples of the world were interested in it, because global problems represent an equal threat for all people of the planet. Now, when we talk about globalization, no similar opinion can be heard. It is not the point that here in the most evident form one can see the true role and

'personal contribution' of this or that country into the emergence and enhancement of specific global problems. The point is that, having found the main causes of their emergence, we inevitably came to another question: who and how should make efforts for resolving these problems. And this infringes interests of several particular countries, or organizations and industrial groups they represent.

All this means only that in the near future we should expect only increasing confrontation and struggle between various interacting actors in the contemporary global world. This suggestion is confirmed by the fact that 'every world actor now has no permanent and "faithful" allies, they only have constant national interests, not coinciding with or contradicting interests of the others' (Tancher and Kazakov 2005: 65). In fact, Ratz means the same, writing that 'It is of special importance to find proper names for everything. We should admit that peaceful coexistence so far remains an unachievable ideal. Rationally thinking people understood long ago that it was not achievable practically. It is more difficult to agree that it is not grounded even in minds. It seems that it cannot be grounded theoretically…' (Ratz 2004: 30). In other words, universal consent and mutual understanding are so far away that seem to be principally impossible.

However, the history of many different social systems demonstrates that cultures isolated for some reasons, as well as those who oppressed multiculturalism, are prone to stagnation, poverty, monotony, and decline of creative activity of the significant part of the population. In the end they inevitably degrade. In human history we can find many examples proving that the most intense social, economic and cultural development took place in cases of promoting cultural diversity and in places where trade ways crossed due to favorable geographic conditions, expanding transnational cultural ties. There is no doubt that contacts, interactions, mutual influence and exchange between various local and national cultures were, for a long time, one of the reasons of active development, prosperity and progress of cultures at terrestrial cross-roads like the Middle East, or at the sea shore, like in the Mediterranean, or at the coast of the Indian ocean.

Evaluating modern situation, one should stress that the role and the meaning of the dialogue of cultures have grown up even more as the universal interdependence in the global world is so high that any attempt to resolve international conflicts and social problems with violence (physical, spiritual, psychological, ideological, and economic, *etc.*) or even 'pressure', for example, on behalf of the 'directing culture' should be excluded. Bestuzhev-Lada is right when writing that: 'A Sward is the worst tool for resolving the global problems of modernity' (Bestuzhev-Lada 1996: 80). The only result guaranteed by such methods is exacerbation of the past conflicts and emergence of new, often even sharper ones. The reason for this is the essence of culture that cannot be changed quickly and, moreover, by force. Hatami mentions: 'In real life neither religious decrees, nor fruitless dreaming can prevent the advancement of Western culture. But neither memorandums, nor doctrines can also log the tradition off' (Hatami 2001: 162). And this seems a serious argument in favor of multiculturalism and the dialogue of various cultures, the only alternative to which is, having in mind nuclear potential of a significant number of independent states, self-destruction of the whole humankind.

There are many historical examples of resolving disputes through a dialogue, but so far we can see no trend towards such relations among people and various communities to become deeply rooted and durable. Acute conflicts emerging here and there to be resolved

by force, threats and various forms of pressure demonstrate that attempts to a dialogue are still more episodic than consistent.

For a stable dialogue and, moreover, for its becoming the main method of human communication, we need to replace the power of force by the power of spirit. In principle it is impossible without a certain level of development of spiritual and material culture. The past epochs, for fully objective reasons, not just failed to provide such level of cultural development, but 'paid' although a sever but yet not mortal price for relatively low level of this development. The age of globalization has made the problem of a dialogue having no alternative, otherwise the humanity has no chance to survive.

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