

GLOBALIZATION AND WORLD ORDER: SOME NOTES

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Abstract: Globalization conceived as the maximum compression of time and space “pulls away” from the nation-state while, at the same time, also “pushes down”. In other words, under the process of globalization, the system of local and parochial identity and loyalty is gradually supplemented with the system of multi-identity and multi-loyalty. The axial question concerns the compatibility/non-compatibility of the current unprecedented global system with a world made up of a plurality of civilizations – where civilization is defined as a junction between a world vision and a historical formation. In other words, can the world become economically global without having any substantial impact on civilizations?

Keywords: globalization, civilizations, world vision, historical formation, world order.

According to Anthony Giddens, globalization is the “intensification of worldwide social relations which link distinct localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring miles away and vice versa” (Giddens 1990: 64). To cut a long history short, globalization is the maximum compression of time and space.

It is true that globalization “pulls away” from the nation-state, but at the same time, globalization also “pushes down” – “it creates new demands and also new possibilities for regenerating local identities” (Giddens 1999: 31-32). The upsurge of nationalism in Scotland as well as in some other regions like Catalonia, Corsica, Quebec and Hong Kong are indicative of people’s attention to their own identities. At the same time, these people are becoming progressively globalized and planetary, taking positions on questions such as child labor, air pollution, and gender discrimination, international money laundering, asking for more dignity, claiming real participation of citizens in the democratic process. In other words, under the process of globalization, the system of local and

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parochial identity and loyalty is gradually supplemented with the system of multi-identity and multi-loyalty.

Civilization is often defined in vague and ambiguous terms: “the inevitable destiny of a culture” (Spengler, in Huntington 1996: 42); “the kind of culture found in cities” (Bagby 1958: 162-3); “civilizations are invisible, just as constitutions” (Toynbee 1995: 46) etc. In reality, such definitions say nothing tangible and workable about civilizations. I define civilization as a junction between a world vision and a historical formation.

A “world vision” may be a set of cultural systems, an ideology, or a religion. A “historical formation” may be a coherent political, military, and economic system often concretized as an empire. A historical formation without a comprehensive world vision shapes tribes, empires, states, and other forms of political entities, but not a civilization. The adherence of Communist China to capitalism without adapting the world vision compatible with a genuine capitalism seems an anomaly, which will, *nolens volens*, become more coherent in the future. Similarly, a world vision without a body – a physical shape – is merely ideology, culture, or religion.

Now, the axial question concerns the compatibility/non-compatibility of the current unprecedented global system with a world made up of a plurality of civilizations. In other words, can the world become economically global without having any substantial impact on civilizations?

There was a time when different civilizations could coexist, separate from each other. They confronted each other and they learned from each other. Seven centuries ago, Marco Polo, a citizen of the Republic of Venice, brought pasta from China to Italy, and now, the new Kublai Khan brings the new Silk Road to Italy.

At that time, each civilization was unique in the sense that it had its specific set of values, applicable social and political concepts, and a specific idea of its own identity as well as of that of other civilizations. The characteristics of each civilization constituted its standard of civilization. Globalization is now progressively blurring characteristics among different civilizations. There is a



direct correspondence between the real power of a civilization and the extension of its standard. When one civilization becomes stronger than another, its standard will prevail as the dominant standard. The dominant standard is often imposed on others (e.g. “capitulation”, “unequal treaties”), but it can also be “interiorized” and voluntarily accepted (conversion to a religion, adherence to democracy etc.).

Continuing our discussion on civilization, there is no historical evidence that the primary aim of civilizations is the establishment of internal peace. Historically, all civilizations have been subjected to severe internal conflicts resulting in war. In fact, internal conflicts have been the main source for the decline of civilizations. In other words, a clash within a civilization has been more frequent and more damaging than a clash between civilizations.

Now, the question is why the horrifying war history of the Western civilization did not cause its decline? Why did the West become paradoxically stronger, and why is its civilization still shining, not like a dying star but as a dominant and unchallenged civilization? Which characteristics of this specific civilization make it so unique? As any other civilization, the current Western civilization could of course also be subject to decline. This has not happened yet. There is no tangible sign of decline in the horizon, just yet. Essentially, because what characterizes this civilization and differentiates it from all other previous civilizations resides in the fact that the Western civilization represents a unique and unprecedented example in the history of humankind in that it is a democratic civilization. Questioning the identity of Europe, Fernand Braudel answers as follows:

imagine that it might be possible to assemble the sum total of our knowledge of European history [...] and to record it [...] in an electronic memory. Imagine that the computer was then asked to indicate the one theme, which occurred most frequently, in time and space, throughout the lengthy history. Without a doubt, that theme is liberty, or rather liberties. The word liberty is the operative word (Braudel 1993).



Consequently, as long as the West remains fully democratic, Western civilization will be capable of avoiding decline. Contemporary state orientation moves roughly in the direction of capitalism and liberalism, however in different forms and degrees. This is a fact, and not my personal point of view. This trend is visible even in countries such as Russia, China, and Vietnam. This factual observation does not necessarily imply that all these countries fully share the same ideas and values and have similar approaches to human rights, democracy, and liberalism. These countries have yet to “internalize” the norms associated with the Global Standard of Civilization; they are at the stage of pre-internalization or “norm cascade”. However, it is undeniable that, in a historical sense, the gap between different world visions is now as narrow as it has ever been. Globalization has considerably reduced the differences between various world visions. Not yet complete convergence, but not complete divergence either.

Furthermore, there is neither a tangible sign indicating China’s possible return to Maoism, Russia’s to Stalinism or Vietnam’s to the Hô Chi Minh era. On the contrary, numerous indicators show that these countries intend to pursue policies of reform, although in a zigzag trajectory. On the other side, the rise of an Islamic world empire, a new Caliphate, based on Koranic values (Mozaffari 2017) seems rather inconceivable. Islamism is challenging the existing world order, but it does not have enough capabilities to change it.

There is a permanent interaction between the trend of globalization and the rising claims for recognition of personal and collective identities. These two trends do not run parallel to each other. They are crossing each other permanently. Globalization provides a sophisticated technology that permits individuals and collectivities to take “selfies”. Cultural, artistic, ritual, and culinary selfies. Never has humanity had so much information about each other’s identities as today.

There is no clash of civilizations. It is rather a clash of ambitions. Because of the simple fact that since the information tech-



nology revolution and the restructuring of capitalism have induced the networking society, the very existence of different and multiple civilizations is questionable. Civilization, of course, in the terms that I have defined. Unless we define civilization purely in terms of culture and rituals; abstracting it from its hard elements of political, economic, and military power.

The third and perhaps most significant consequence of a global economy is the time-conditioned gap between finance and production. Money is fungible and extremely mobile. New technologies allow billion dollars-worth of transactions to take place in seconds in the electronic circuit around the globe. Capital flows become global and are operating in synchronic dimensions. The development of production takes place in a diachronic dimension. Because of this gap, global finance has come to dominate production.

The problematics of global warming and climate become increasingly critical. They require global solutions.

Finally, and more specifically related to Europe, there is the question of massive immigration of non-Europeans, particularly Muslims, to Europe. Europeans are facing a challenge on which the future of Europe as a fully democratic continent will probably depend.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

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