

# **Social Aspects of Globalization (From a Globalistics Viewpoint)**

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*By the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the process of globalization of social relations in the main has been practically completed in its due form. But with respect to the content, the humankind is still to become a global community. This assumes serious change in people's outlook, cultural traditions and values. There is no alternative to the united humankind and consequently, for the sake of preservation of the civilization on the planet there should be established not only common principles and rules of joint life, but also common responsibilities for every individual.*

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The contemporary globalization process is of concern to the lives and interests not only of humankind in general but also of particular individuals, irrespective of their social or ethnic status. That is why, now it is reasonable to add one more concept to the variety of philosophies and scientific theories where a human and her or his problems are of primary importance in connection with the philosophical understanding of nature and globalization trends. We already have a corresponding sphere of interdisciplinary fields of knowledge that has emerged in the last quarter of the last century, collectively termed 'Global Studies', or in Russian tradition – Globalistics (see *Introduction* to this edited volume). As a result, the contemporary world is considered as a complex dynamic system where human economic activities based on scientific and technological achievements (but not natural evolutionary forces of the biosphere) have become the main acting force.

Together with the growing understanding of how scientific and technological progress changes our living conditions, we also become aware of the many dangers it poses for human health as well as for the existence of life in general. The times have passed when science could be regarded as a value-neutral and indisputable human asset, beyond good and evil. Of course, science gives people the fruits of its revolutionary discoveries and attracts by new perspectives, but it also causes deep trouble for their future, demanding timely and adequate actions of scholars, philosophers and politicians. Having the possibility for complex study of the world, society and human beings, contemporary science orientates politicians and scholars towards a 'dialogue', the co-evolution of society and nature. This is the scientific way which acquires a new – human – dimension when people's interests are directly connected with the sustainable development of the biosphere; and an analysis of human activity gains primary importance for understanding of the contemporary world and its most important characteristic – globalization.

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It is worth noting that globalization is a result of centuries-old quantitative and qualitative transformations, both in social development and in the 'society – nature' system. That is why when trying to understand the essence of contemporary globalization, many scholars connect it with cultural and civilizational changes; thus, the terms 'culture' and 'civilization' are found in one line with the term 'globalization'. Being the most important categories of social philosophy, these terms are links of one chain, trends of the developing living language when it tries to reflect the human mental and material world, an endless diversity and essence of social relations as well as relations between society and nature. Supplementing one another in various aspects, they describe social organisms and reveal the most important stages of their historical development.

The concept of 'culture' occupies a special position in this range, since it first emerged back in Ancient Rome, to distinguish the artificial and the natural. The term 'civilization' is of later origin, dating back to early Modern Times when more complex social practices emerged, and both internal and external links of the emergent nation-states demanded a more precise language and, respectively, a new notion for their description. The deep understanding of the phenomenon of civilization came later, in the late nineteenth century when the processes of globalization started to be more and more definite. They were implicit in the theoretical works by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Soloviev, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Vladimir Vernadsky, Karl Jaspers, *etc.*

Globalization fully revealed itself only in the mid-1990s, having generated an additional interest in the phenomenon of culture and civilization. It is important to emphasize that globalization leads to the formation of a single culture and civilization which, however, does not abolish either cultural diversity or the peculiarities of civilizational development of this or that region. The notion of 'culture' expresses the internal and essential characteristics of a society; in its turn, civilization is a form, an external framework of culture, representing a society from the viewpoint of its management mechanism, functional links and relations. Since civilizational unity and cultural diversity are immanent for humankind, we could propose a new synthetic category '*cultural-civilizational systems*' to designate contemporary realities: this would provide an integral vision of different social systems (national, local, regional) as well as the world community as a whole and give understanding of their dynamics as an indispensable process (Chumakov 2005). Thus, considering globalization and global problems as an objective historical process, which includes (objectively involves) all really existing cultural-civilizational systems, one can speak about the formation from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century of both an all-human culture and a united world civilization which earlier revealed itself only at local and regional levels.

Culture embraces, – and more precisely, penetrates, – all spheres of society's mental and material life and so it is somehow involved into the process of globalization. In this connection, there arise many cultural problems appear, and this is observed more and more at an international and even global scale. For example, the increasing influence and broad expansion of 'mass culture', periodically emerging crises of morality, the growth of apathy, the sense of abandonment or defenselessness, *etc.* bring difficulties and contradictions.

The globalization started influencing culture in the epoch of the Great Geographical Discoveries when, for the first time in human history, cultural communications reached a planetary scale; although at first they were fragmentary and limited to contacts with sailors, traders, and conquerors. From that time we see the first signs, if not of unification then of borrowing and global diffusion of material and spiritual values, as well as cultural achievements due to the Europeans' expansionist aspirations and through in-

creasing world trade. Together with the items of material culture, the broad opportunities to spread worldwide were given to various elements of spiritual, mostly (but not only) European culture, such as, for example, the language (first of all, Spanish, Portuguese, English, French) and religions – Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, whose missionaries came to previously unknown regions and corners of the world.

Even greater opportunities for the wide spread of material and spiritual values emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> – the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when new means of transportation were actively developed: railways, automobiles, and aviation. Many contemporary means of mass communication were also invented at that time: the telephone, radio, cinema, and television. As a result, in the twentieth century the mutual penetration and assimilation of various cultures, being an objective and necessary consequence of globalization, led to the formation of all-human, planetary culture, whose outlines are rather obvious today practically in every country and continent.

Thus, the globalization of culture reveals itself not only in the fact that while keeping to their original traditions, living standards and peculiarities of everyday life, different peoples at the same time use the same cell-phones, radio, television, transportation means, *etc.* It manifests also in the fact that, for instance, the design of a car, item of clothing or home appliance (as regards their external qualities and composition) as a rule do not bear the signs of the producer's national culture – they differ from the design of other examples only by the label indicating the manufacturing country.

Due to cultural globalization, there are practically no limits for mutual influence of various ideas, doctrines, beliefs, *etc.* In fact, all the most significant scientific discoveries and outstanding literary works are immediately translated into many languages; popular songs and melodies, the best examples of fashion and dramatic art diffuse throughout the planet at an incredible speed. Most of them are easily subsumed into the context of traditional cultures which accept and assimilate such elements of the world culture and at the same time give new impulses for it: for instance, it was officially reflected in the 1990s slogan 'China for the world and the world for China'.

In the context of cultural globalization, one can point out the increasing diffusion throughout the world of the *unified norms of behavior*, free from religious and other ideological foundations. Such behavior may be found in airports, railway stations, supermarkets and other public places where individuals behave 'like everyone else', independently of their beliefs, ethnic and cultural origins, *etc.* In this sense, the youth is the best environment for the dissemination of global culture, because they are less than the elder generations influenced by traditional cultures and stereotypes of thinking and behavior formed in a community.

Due to this, the youth also become a main object of manipulation of mass media, political, religious, criminal and other groups, which, under the conditions of globalization, acquire additional opportunities to influence both separate groups and mass consciousness as a whole. Pointing to this fact, one of the leaders of 'the new left' – the mass social movement of the late 1960s – Theodore Roszak wrote that politics, education, leisure, entertainment, culture as a whole, subconscious symbols and even the protest against the technocracy become objects of a purely technical control and purely technical manipulation (Roszak 1969: 7).

Now, within total globalization, the problem of managing world processes, including world culture and world public opinion, becomes one of the central objectives of humankind. The examples of Turkish immigrants in Germany or Africans who have become

a part of French society show quite well, that it actually becomes impossible to identify the points of the interaction where they mutually assimilate. In this connection, the question arises: to which culture should one relate the assimilated emigrants and their children whose biographies do not fit the accepted categories? The problem is that new waves of immigrants, although they try to keep to the norms and principles of behavior established for the society, which they enter, nevertheless, in everyday life and customs they reveal and reproduce as a rule traditions and stereotypes of the way of life adopted from their childhood in their native cultures. And although at the meeting point of these different cultures some opportunities emerge for mutual understanding and mutual action, first of all, due to the globalization and unification of culture, yet a state of conflict and contradiction increases. Such conflicts and contradictions (both in the West and in the developing countries) attract specialists' particular attention.

Here one should mention that although globalization has at first sight economic forms and political consequences, it is in fact increasingly revealing the primary place of culture at the global level. Due to this fact, the mutual influence of culture and globalization, as well as a combination of the global and the local, becomes a subject of special attention for many scholars. Thus, a new term has been coined – *glocalization*, which was created by putting together the words 'globalization' and 'localization' and became widespread as a verbal reflection of a complex process of binding the local peculiarities of the separate nation cultural development and the global trends in the world community development.

Thus, cultural globalization exerts an increasing influence on the human world outlook, thereby provoking serious troubles, first of all for the representatives of underdeveloped and developing countries. While understanding globalization more as the 'americanization of culture', as the imposition of Western standards and customs, and, finally, as a modern form of cultural colonialism, they see it as a means to transform and destroy traditional values, to change traditional lifestyle and, hence, as a threat to national identity and cultural diversity. In other words, since globalization is uneven, the majority of traditional societies react defensively against it in the form of counteracting the process of integration as well as conducting the policy of localization and supporting local cultures in every possible way.

Some scholars, especially from Islamic, Arab and other countries of the Third World, consider globalization as a specially designed plan or a strategy aimed at invading other parts of the world, threatening local cultures through their unification. By this, the main threat to cultural identity is, as a rule, seen in the expansion of the mass media' influence sphere, the activity of international foundations, transnational corporations, *etc.* Such worries are not entirely groundless since globalization is indeed not only the flows of goods or shortening of distances, removal of borders or unification of production processes. It also tends to form a unified system of values, to create universal culture and thus to provide effectiveness of world economy, openness and objectivity of information and, finally, tolerance in world policy and intercultural communications. Thus, changes and transformations in the sphere of culture that are adequate with respect to globalization acquire priority, while economic factors turn out to be less significant.

Here arises the question of the trends of global processes and of the human future. We already have the term *postglobalization*, which is used as regards to the future condition of the global world. In addition, an absolutely new term may probably emerge to name the future world when issue of globalization will be replaced with another, more pressing topic. Now we can make the following suppositions. Within the period of 10 to 15 years,

‘a stratum of scientific researches’ under the title ‘globalization’ will be entirely ‘worked out’, and intellectual and emotional discussion of the topic will become fatigued. As a result, the scholars' creative interests in global studies will shift to the sphere of *the world constitution and search for practical steps of building a really new world order*. This follows directly from the fact that global studies objectively play an integrative role, making many scholars, politicians, public figures and the broader population take a new look at the contemporary world, stimulating them to understand themselves as a part of the integral world. That is why we think that the transition from understanding global problems to the real processes of globalization, which we now observe, must sooner or later be replaced with the primary interest in the question *how to form a new international order in the integral interdependent world in order to make it at last safe and stable*. However, a solution or even a right settlement of this task is ahead, since it is interlinked with another, much more difficult task – the problem of human being and ‘new humanism’.

Thus, the further development of global studies will have to end sooner or later in understanding *the nature and essence of humans themselves* as the main cause of all their problems and difficulties: what in the history of philosophy has not been mentioned once, in the works of all the great humanists from Antiquity to modernity. As Nikolai Berdyayev remarked,

Philosophers constantly returned to the understanding that to unriddle a mystery of man means to unriddle a mystery of being. Know yourself, and through this you will know the world. All attempts of external understanding of the world, without dipping into the depth of man, gave just knowledge of the surface of things. If we come from man to the outside, we will never reach the meaning of things, for the understanding of the meaning is concealed in the very man (Berdyayev 1989: 293).

Recalling in this connection Protagoras' words ‘*homo mensuras est*’, one should note that the human being is also the main cause of increase and escalation of the global problems of modernity.

From here it follows that human reason alone is the single hope to overcome the mentioned contradiction, for the human thinking and creativity are not genetic but cultural properties. People have no other way but to carefully build and insistently form a new thinking, way of life and an appropriate strategy and tactics of action, for, as some scholars believe, future evolution will be determined by survival not of the strongest but of the wisest. This fact gives reason to consider *the human nature and essence* as a main theme which with time should take the first place in Global Studies.

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