

CULTURE TRANSFORMATION: ENDANGERED INDIVIDUALITY WORTH

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Abstract

Culture is one of those ideas that have been defined in the most diverse ways. In this paper we attempt to address some elements that we believe should be taken into account when attempting to deal, in an adequate way, with the subject of cultural diversity and need for international cohesiveness in the globalised and globalizing world. Specifically, we in most cases deal with the need for a non-reductionist idea of culture in addition to the assumption of different levels of articulation, both on structural and on ontological and value-based levels. This approach, as much as attractive and convincing as it may seem, favours trends to lean towards the so-called industrialized or developed worlds at the expense of the so called worlds in a progressive fluxion age. And with this lacuna, culture and its progressive fibres is perpetually mirrored within the microscopes of this misconceived complex.

KEY WORDS: Culture, Transformation, Cultural diversity, Acculturation, Enculturation

INTRODUCTION

As an important component of our society, culture is a term which is difficult to define because of its complexity and its ever-widening scope of application. In such a situation, however, the different notions employed always fall into the reductionist trap, as they are definitions that only include one part of what the notion of culture represents and expresses especially when the debate on globalization arises. Etymologically, we take the expression 'cultural identity' to mean the sum total of the cultural interferences through which persons and groups of people are defined, manifested and wish to be recognized. Cultural identity, therefore, implies the liberties which are inherent to the dignity of the person and integrates in a permanent process cultural diversity, the personal and universal background, memory and the projections of any given society, regardless of its industrial advancements or achievements.

One main concern has nothing to do with tracing the genesis and evolution of culture but rather those value issues related to the process of globalization and how they impact on and or affect the diverse cultures in the global world order. Globalization as an economic, social and cultural phenomenon expresses an increased mobility of goods and services, information and people, but at the same time their performance is always practiced within local contexts. A number of problems arise in this tension between the global and the local. Questions that can be of social, cultural and political character emerges. Central issues are about how the meaning of physical distance change and gain new meanings for the development of knowledge consumption, family and friendship, social identity, political control and cultural representation. These issues can be analyzed in form of local strategies to cope with global mobility; social marginalization and local cultural conflicts and of the construction of places and local identities under changing social conditions. Such issues ought to be central to the theme of globalization and their analysis need to be supported by theories about spatiality and spatial organization, the problems of scale and the meaning of distance, flows versus territoriality, embeddedness and contextuality of least to mention cultural conflicts, diffusion and management.

The most important to note here are values and virtues of a given people which set the pattern of their social life through which freedom of the same is developed and exercised. In the development of values and virtues and their integration as a culture of any depth or richness, it takes patience and time and hence depends upon the experience and creativity of many generations. As a result, the culture which is handed on or *tradita* comes to be called a cultural tradition and as such it reflects the cumulative achievement of a people in discovering, mirroring and transmitting the deepest meaning of life. This cultural tradition, in its synchronic sense, is a body of wisdom, with localities notwithstanding. Yet the globalization of economies, migration, culture and communications combined with a worldwide reassertion of diverse cultural affiliations are producing intense pressures on the co-existence of different national, ethnic, religious, racial, and linguistic groups who share the same cities. In cities throughout the world, social tensions and open conflict over culture and identity are overwhelming all other aspects of normal urban life. 'Divided cities' suffer from different degrees of social disintegration and physical destruction, in some cases so severe that the future possibilities for peace, security and sustained development cannot be foreseen. The term 'Cosmopolitan Development' has of late been coined as a new approach to addressing the identity of culturally diversity in urban populations. It is founded on the principle that cultural diversity is a characteristic condition of cities that add value to the 'cultural capital' that is now widely recognized as important to city economies and society. It is directed at resolving conflict in both 'divided' and 'segregated' cities and securing and celebrating conditions of cultural co-existence. Cosmopolitan development in practice works through a varying combination and conflict

management. With a cultural crisis looming due to globalization propaganda perpetuated by the global agents, what could be the rational exit to the lacunae? This paper looks at some of the pertinent issues.

THE ISSUES IN CULTURAL IDENTITY

Multiculturalism does not prosper in many regions because the process of creation of nation-states is the dominant feature. The fact that a number of the post-colonial communities in Africa and post-socialist societies in Eastern Europe are undergoing an identity crisis and ethnicity, a process which is a very dynamic category in them while the state borders are static. All multicultural societies are unstable and dynamic and where there is no dialogue, democracy and communications among various communities, conflicts may develop. Neither the African, Mediterranean nor South Eastern Europe are regions boasting democracy and tolerance. For this reason, the mediation of the international community has become the norm of the day. Thus, the search for 'cultural responses to challenges of war', even when cultures stimulate tolerance and awareness of the global context in which individual tragedies unfold, look far more like a fig-leaf than a cultural catalyst.

Yet in talking about cultural diversity we must work with a broad and global notion of culture that makes in and articulates the different ambits of human experience. Many conflicts arising from such human interaction are a result of universal cultural crisis could be arrested if this broad-based understanding is integrated and championed by the global managers through a way of thinking and reflection. In addition to the etymological definition, let us take culture to be the sum total of beliefs, myths, knowledge, institutions and practices whereby a society or group affirms its presence in the world and assures its reproduction and persistence through time. In other words, granting culture to be a style of life that takes into account the whole existential reality of the persons and communities in a society, and not only arts, folklore and beliefs.

Should this be sensible, we then abandon the notion of culture that is separate from politics, economics, education, religion, science, justice, social organization and relations with the environment, territorial occupation or one that is reduced to artistic and folklore statements or to the area of only values and beliefs. Thus, as a logical result of this perspective, we may no longer talk of politics and culture, economics and culture, religion and culture, education and culture and so but political culture, economic culture, educational culture, religious culture, social culture, etc., in order to refer to the sum total of particular values, knowledge, institutions and practices that one specific culture develops in each one of the areas of experience at any particular point in time and space.

This definitely involved speaking of cultural diversity as taking in each and every one of these basic ambits of any human community, to the exclusion of none. But as we talk of cultural diversity, what criteria can we propose to use as a measure-tape to gauge the success of integration in order to be at peace in talking of unity in diverse? In such a situation there are three structural levels of any culture. First, all cultural identity is shaped by the articulation of values, institutions and practices in all the areas of experience. It is important that when we talk of culture and cultural identity we know how to situate in their proper place the elements that we identify and analyze. By way of analytical proposal, we believe that we can talk of the existence of three levels in all culture, based on which cultural identities take shape. Take the analogy of a tree as an evolutionary measure-table for cultural development. We may talk of a first level in which are situated the values, beliefs and deepest myths. These are the roots of all cultures which provide us with both stability and solidity in

addition to sustenance. This is a highly stable level which does not change, either easily or rapidly, but at a very slow-gradual rate of change. Its visibility is greatly reduced, more particularly for those who form part of it. A second level would be the institutions, formal or informal by which these values and beliefs take shape in diverse areas of experience, structuring the behavior and ways of acting of the members of the society in question, by the fact of offering a framework in which the values take shape in different areas of experience. By analogy, we may say that this is the trunk of the tree. Its visibility is greater than that of values and beliefs. A third and last level would be formed by particular practices included in their corresponding institutional framework and which are the most visible and evident dimension from outside of the culture in question. By analogy, these would be the branches and foliage of the tree which can experience very important changes and modifications much more than at the level of the trunk and, above all, at the level of the roots. This is the level that we may perceive first of all when we enter into contact with another culture.

Following the analogy, we may also say that, just as it happens with trees which have a denser and more visible foliage in proportion to the number of roots, all cultures, when they have stronger roots – myths, beliefs, values – can develop their whole branch structure and foliage practices to the full. This analogy of tree, with all its limitations, serves to make us realize that when talking of cultural diversity and globalization we must locate on which level the latter is operating – are values globalised? Institutionalized and Practices? All three together? Answering these questions is essential for any understanding of the homogenizing scope of globalization and thus enables us to define better the strategies to redirect it with a genuinely pluralist orientation devoid of miniature biases. With these, however, it should also be borne in mind that this analogy serves to make us aware of the different degrees of ‘visibility’ and ‘invisibility’ of the different elements that shape all cultures, Practices together with institutions, to a lesser degree, are more visible and evident than the values and beliefs which, while they provide them with sustenance, remain less evident and visible. Furthermore, in order to bring the analogy to a close, the strength and vitality of the culture depend, on a larger degree, on the concern shown by the people who experience and live it.

THE IDENTITY AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The fact that we are all born and shaped by a particular cultural matrix is undisputable – no one can exist outside a particular culture to the extent that stating, as some people do, that ‘man has free himself from the imposition of his culture’ is already a form of cultural definition. Cultural identities are not strictly individual despite the fact that each person articulates one in a particular manner, but collective which means that we can talk of the cultural diversity of the world in terms of collective and not individual identities. We all possess a cultural identity that shapes us and gives a meaning to our lives. In fact, we may state that we do not have a culture, but that we are a culture. We can think, feel, believe, do... from a particular cultural standpoint.

It is true that cultural identity is not something static or fixed forever and ever but a dynamic reality that is constructed and at the same time that it can construct our cultural outlook. Of course, if cultures are not static nor are they simple instrumental conventions that can be denied and/or modified from one day to the next cultures are not shirts that we can take off and put on easily. The desire not to fall into cultural essentialism the belief in the Immutability of a culture need not presuppose the negation of certain more constant and less changing aspects or values that constitute the deepest nucleus of all cultures. Thus becoming aware of the omnipresence of culture and cultural identity is essential to understanding the behavior of others not from one’s own cultural matrix, but to the degree that this is possible from that of others. With these assessments it should

be taken into account that all cultural identity is not something static, either on the individual or on the collective level that it changes and adapts to new situations. In this sense, we should ask ourselves how different cultures adopt themselves to the new situations raised by globalization.

Sometimes it is only reasonable to explain what appears obvious in order not to end up advocating things what do not make sense. But with regards cultural diversity we should ask ourselves and try to respond why it is important to preserve it and strengthen it in the face of homogenization that may result from the present globalization process. In an article submitted to the Millennium Forum of the United Nations for the reflection on culture, it was observed that the importance of cultural diversity lies not in the phenomenon itself, that it does not justify itself as an end in itself, but as a means and instrument for something that is found outside itself. Cultural diversity as such is not, nor ceases to be, important if it is not related to the persons and communities which are the expression and incarnation of it. To talk of cultural diversity as such is not, nor ceases to be, important if it is not related to the person's communities which are the expression and incarnation of it. To talk of cultural diversity, therefore, involves talking of human beings and communities which, for the most diverse reasons and motives, have developed specific ways of life not only material, but also spiritual, not only individual but also collective. In other words, cultural diversity is the expression and genuine representation of the deepest human creativity that attempts to construct itself at a specific point in time and place, without which the fact of being a person makes no sense whatsoever culture diversity is the expression of the will to be, the representation of the realization of a full life in communion with the whole of experience. These principles are in full accordance with the conclusions of the Round table of Ministers of Culture of UNESCO which was held in Paris in November 1999 on 'cultural diversity in a globalised world'. In this aspect, the defense of cultural diversity is not merely the defense of certain rights, but the defense of a reality which is in itself human creativity in search of self and fullness which in the last analysis are not only anthropological but also divine and metaphysically derived and constituted by the people. Yet it should be borne I mind; moreover, that cultural diversity finds its place, not so much in the individual and collective ambit as in the personal and community one, in spite of all the individualizing socio-political culture that as prevailed in the contemporary west, especially from the French Revolution to the present.

The importance of the defense of cultural diversity lies, therefore, in the fact that it expresses a profound respect for what persons and communities really are and not so much an unhealthy obsession for what people think they should be. A respect for human complexity that does not accept unilateral visions or reductionist imposition in which life will never allow itself to be 'corseted'. To accept cultural diversity is not an act of tolerance towards 'the other', but a recognition of this 'otherness' – personal or communitary – as a full reality, contradictory, like ourselves, the bearer of wisdom, knowledge and practices through which it is, and tries to be so, in all its fullness. We should, however, not forget – coherent with what we have said regarding the integrating notion of culture – that to talk of cultural diversity means not only diversity of customs, folklore, language or cultural expressions, but diversity of economic cultures, political cultures, juridical cultures, ecological cultures and many more. Acceptance of the formative derivation of these variations is the only logical catalyst for the achievement of a cohesive union of diversities in the global unit and not the contrary.

CONCEPTIONS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE WORLD CONTEXT

Faced with the culturally pluralist reality of humanity, we can point out in one word to the existence of three differentiated points of view, which are not always presented in a clear and unequivocal

manner, but which often appear mixed together and overlapping. The first point of view which we can call the hard uniformising model would state that contemporary western culture is the vertex of human evolution towards which all remaining cultures should orientate themselves. That is sooner or later we should aim at a state of uniform world culture. This view is currently at a low ebb at least in its political manifestation is the one that has dominated Euro-American thought since the beginning of the period of colonial expansion and up to the end of the Cold War, with the American way of life as the latest 'uniformising' proposal. But despite the fact that it continues to be present in the thought of many western politicians and some intellectuals, it is no longer publicly defended largely due to the fact that it is considered to be anachronistic and politically incorrect. Similarly we might as well say that it is the version of a monochrome world. In this respect, globalization would be limited to a simple process of cultural homogenization from the civilisational matrix generated by the contemporary Western culture. There would be no exchange and only one culture would have both 'voice and vote' in this world.

A second point of view is that which we might term the plural universal model affirming the security of a single world model with an original Euro-American matrix, but with room for cultural adaptation that may be 'required'. This is a pragmatic derivation of the first point of view once we have accepted the impossibility of total and absolute homogenization. In this case, homogenization would be fundamentally economic – Universal market-orientated – political democratic nation-state and with fundamental values – universal human rights. From this position it is stated that the recognition of cultural identities and the respect for culture diversity must necessarily be inserted into the framework of universal values, by adapting them and assuming them as single integral whole of free market world economy, individual human rights, representative democracy, individual liberties and many more which may enable us to understand that cultures that do not adjust to these parameters are intrinsically perverse and totalitarian, a fact that would justify, were these parameters not to be adopted, their dissolution and disappearance. It is taken for granted that these parameters are culturally universal and neither conditioned nor inserted into any particular cultural matrix. Intercultural dialogue is stated a posteriori on the basis of pre-existing universal values. In this case, a single multi-colored world comes to focus. In this perspective, globalization would be a process of cultural exchange, but one based on the parameters determined by contemporary western culture it would be an asymmetrical exchange in which all cultures would have a 'voice' but not all have a 'vote' in the process of determination of the globalization process.

A third view which we might term a pluralist one states the existence of radically different cultures, with their own value, institutions and practices which are not reducible from one another. A debate on intercultural dialogue without predetermined universal values are affirmed. Notwithstanding this, values of these characteristics may emerge from the fruit of this dialogue. From this point of view we might say that a world containing many different worlds come into focus. Here again this perspective, globalization would be oriented towards establishing a genuine symmetrical exchange and communication among the different cultures and civilizations in the service of a genuine interculturality in which all cultures have 'a voice and a vote' at the same time.

LANGUAGE, NATIONAL BOUNDARIES AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

The burden of national languages in postcolonial Africa is an outcome of multiple changes, national boundaries, patriotism and vehicles of cultural importation historically traceable to colonization. In Francophone countries that border English speaking countries, French as a national language has played major role in cultural transformation while alienating communities with the traditionally

similar cultures in their English-speaking neighbourhoods. The English-speaking neighbourhoods have experienced cultural transformation with dominance of language donor. The donor continues to perpetuate this process of strained cultural transformation through popular music, tours and travel, literature, oral performances and architecture, to name but a few means.

Issues surrounding cultural transformation are not limited to linguistic boundaries, whether languages are donated, inherited or imposed on a people group. In Pakistan, a postcolonial culture was formed through a more integrative force of intermarriages between Mongolians and Caucasians, bringing into being a shared culture rather than cultural transformation. The hybrid called Balti people of Pakistan are therefore an example of one of the versions of cultural identities prevalent in postcolonial nations in the postmodern world.

CONCLUSION

An attempt to conceptualize the concept of and meaning of culture and how it shapes and is shaped by the changing global order has been made. At the same time, cultural indicators and evolutionary phases of culture have been examined, showing the desirable and the undesirable aspects of the same. This was done to the background that the concept of globalization is both self-defining and manifesting.

Our concern for identity of the self and cultural diversity led us into examining various issues, among them that of culture, its structural levels, pros and cons for cultural diversity, cultural identity within diversity, and the possible conceptions of culture diversity in the world context today. Our arguments rest on the premise that the cultural value conflict persistent in the world today derives from the fact that architects of globalization tends to be myopic in their recognition of the intrinsic value definitive and inherent in each and every culture world all over.

The result of our investigation is twofold; the problem created by the movement (Global) and the rational solution to it. First, it is evident that if the trend of globalization continues without being principally guided then it will have a severe impact on human society. This is true because its effects are already being felt, and to a large extent, at least in the context of divergent cultures, negatively.

Both pro and anti globalization theorists agree that globalization has become more connotative of dissolution than of assimilation and harmony. The inexorable process seems to bring with it an inevitable corollary of minorities rebelling against majority rule and demands for a multitude of petty states, each with its own ethnic identity. The phenomenon has cast the right to self-determination in a different light, particularly given the increase in outside intervention to defend minority rights from 'the power of the state'. The state is besieged increasingly by demands to ignore the principle of national unity based on a shared culture, history and fate, and, with a stroke of the pen, to adopt the principle of cultural plurality. The powers exerting these pressures are well aware that Third World governments cannot easily sustain rapid transformations. On every continent, we can find an example confirming the rule: international forces have intervened everywhere to remedy the disasters resulting from relentless pressure to introduce plurality prematurely and under unfavorable circumstances.

At the same time, the growing gap between the preaching and the practice of globalization has begun to wreak havoc on domestic political arrangements in many societies. Globalization crusaders contend that their fundamental tenets are political plurality, freedom of expression and

respect for diversity of opinion and belief. They overlook these tenets, however, when preaching the inevitability of globalization. The world is racing headlong towards a new monolithic ideology, which heralds a new totalitarianism far more dangerous than all those of the 20th century.

The strident and aggressive campaign for globalization brooks no resistance, no dissenting ideas, no constructive criticism and, indeed, no free and open global dialogue on the notions of political and cultural plurality. As such, it has come to depend on a propagandist style that the West viewed with derision as long as it profited the communist machine. Propaganda was grounded in endless repetition: the new capitalist system has discovered this method serves very conveniently as the ultimate proof of its superiority.

A further challenge to the new world order is the increasingly marginal role played by human beings in the process of production due to technological advances. Less people are needed to run farms and factories and even to fight wars. As a result, many people are marginalized despite the exponential growth of the service sector. Illegal activities such as arms smuggling and drug dealing have witnessed considerable growth. The magnitude of illegal trade is difficult to gauge, but it is estimated in the hundreds of billions of dollars each year.

The globalization of investment has failed to bring about a globalization of prosperity, countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, Somalia and Rwanda have fallen by the technological wayside. The pace and direction of the development of the global economy have made many people in the industrially advanced world disgruntled. A sizeable number of those have taken their discontent to the streets of Seattle, Genoa, Nairobi, New York and Washington. The ideological vacuum created by capitalism led to the rise of fundamentalism worldwide. From Israel to the Gulf States, from Pakistan to India and even in the United States, religious fundamentalists are reshaping the structure of vital sections of the state like the judiciary and key services like social security, health care and education.

Among the so called urban communities, the cultural fibres which form the ancient times gave meaning and worth of a people threatens to break loose. The mixed grill 'new urban culture' combined with challenges created by advanced information technology, media propaganda and incessant culture mutation have all led to creation of localities that are blurred to visualize. The situation created is that of confusion, imitation, self-shame, lowered self-esteem, debased self-identity and a culture identity vacuum to the majority of town-borne.

However, there is still hope for reforming the new world order. This can be achieved through a recreation of a new phase of the "age of reason", the separation of church and state, acceptance of unity within diversity and to affirmative action on behalf of the less powerful sections of the international community. In one sentence, by infusing a sense of rationality, credibility, recognition, value and humane acceptance that all cultures bear meaning and give sense to the worth of life. It is by so doing that globalization will pride of attaining peace via culture mutation.

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