

MISUNDERSTANDING GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract

In the following text I should examine the most common attitudes towards globalization, in order to depict some of their presuppositions and common places. I will follow Bernhard Waldenfels conception, whose central idea is that there is no possibility for generalized order. Consequently, any project with such an aim, or any attitude based on this idea, must be seen as problem rising. Who thinks that everything around him/her can be ordered by means of one set of rules, the only that is right, will have an aggressive behavior and a superficial understanding. Working with these ideas, I will examine some of the contemporary attitudes towards globalization.

Keywords: globalization, order, normality, rationality.

In order to understand the real implications of globalization, events that take place in economy, technology, culture and other domains, should be concomitantly studied. However, Samuel P. Huntington, in his *Clash of Civilizations*, maintained that, in future, culture will constitute the main source of conflict¹. The same opinion is upheld by authors who analyze the type and intensity of the opposition regarding the idea of globalization in different societies². So, reactions towards globalization in modern societies are presented as rather symbolic, while in traditional societies these reactions are very intense. Also the fact that cultural contestation of globalization is many times equivalent with resistance regarding American culture is worth mentioning.

The fact that intense reactions come from traditional countries, developing countries, determine the researchers to interpret the reaction as rather expressing deep identity problems and frustration than dissonance regarding fundamental values. This idea is sustained by the fact that in contesting groups one can also find toleration for certain aspects of American culture, that the impulse towards differentiation is simultaneous with the one towards assimilation³.

Anti globalization discourses are built as if USA would force someone to buy products and follow the specific attitudes. But this is not the case. The products and the associated attitudes have a big power of attraction on us, who are free to follow them or not. Anyway, there is idealization regarding American products, as well as the traditional ones. For both of them, a history of influences that has nothing to do with the tradition which they are considered to represent can be emphasized. All the products are a cumulus of transformations, are in fact dynamical processes. But, the people whose life and understanding are imbued with elements considered traditional, live only to experiment the latest change in these products and attitudes, the one contemporaneous with them. Consequently, they have the tendency to consider the conglomerate prior to this change pure, representing the essence of their specificity. Contestation attitudes, that can take extreme forms, are explained by the fact that "cultural characteristics and differences are more difficult to change; consequently it is harder to compromise in this area, as in the area of the economic and political characteristics."⁴ Cultural characteristics and differences represent the perspectives through which a person understands the surrounding world; they represent the horizon of his/her life. The more traditional a society, more the specific differences are considered to represent pure rationality and legitimate order. To put these into question means to embark upon an area of uncertainty and instability, uncomfortable for anyone.

Attitudes like cultural contestation and veneration of tradition the idea of globalization. Throughout the time, different cultures have been more influential and attractive than others,

which eventually they got to subdue by being attractive. Cultural contestation does not take place only on global level, but also on a local level. These are dynamical, impersonal processes, which most of the times, do not lead to abolition, but to transformation. The discourses that generalize referring for example to "Americans" or "Americanisms". This is a culture with its good and its bad, like any other culture, and by generalizing one are meaningless but adopts a cliché and misses all the nuances.

Bernhard Waldenfels signalizes that social sciences have a pretty superficial way of explaining what appertaining to a culture means, using in most of the cases, generalizations. This gives us only the methodical alternative of individualism and holism. "Wide systems, like class, or the spirit of the people, are replaced by individual speakers, who are endowed with social or cultural characteristics and attitudes. (But) there is no such thing as «the German people» or «the Polish people», but only persons who perceive themselves and act as «germans» or «polish», and whose behavior is traditionally and institutionally anchored. The methodical alternative of individualism and holism cannot account for the intertwining of the personal with the strange."⁵ The general attitude is to oppose the cultures and their exponents. Expressions like "we Romanians", "you Africans", by which someone speaks in the name of another are being used. These expressions, rather than describe what already exists, produce something - they are performative speech acts. This way, an artificial reality is produced, to which many, adhere out of superficiality.

Opposition to the idea of the possibility of a single order, function of which everything that exists can be ordered is central for the philosophy of Bernhard Waldenfels. The way of thinking that has the idea of unique order as paradigm, will comprehend what is different, what is strange, as an exception. Thus what is different can be set aside and ignored, so that understanding can continue along the norms of the all encompassing order. For the possible sense, that presupposes possible worlds and

forms of life, one can find no place in an order that sets up clear-cut borders between what is true and what is false, what is right and what is wrong. But, according to waldenfelsian theory, the difference affects the very structure of the order itself. The birth of any order occurs by intertwining the personal/individual with the strange; it is a new interpretation of what already exists. Something new (proper) cannot appear without a bond to what already is.

As long as what is strange is not understood properly, the author highlights the fact that unfaithfulness and violation, which lead to totalitarianism, will occur. This happens every time the different is determined by reference to a potential all encompassing horizon, and consequently it is understood as a shortcoming that must be overcome. The different must be understood by reference to itself, as absence impossible to overcome, because it heralds a new order that does not continue the one we belong on. As long as we understand the different in a relative way, by reference to ourselves, we will do injustice to the difference, attempting to rule it over by means of political, religious, philosophical or cultural ways in general. This manner of understanding occurs when one considers the order he/she is part of, to the legitimate one. But there is no such thing as legitimate order.

Order can only be used in the plural, says Waldenfels. There are only many different orders, expressing different ways of understanding life and different modes of existence; they are not closed or isolated orders, but they cross each other. What is more important, none is more legitimate than the other; their relation cannot be thought of in terms of superiority and inferiority. So, one does not speak of lacking order, but of the coexistence of many orders. This means that we should get used to not understanding everything from the perspective of our own culture, or to trying to set up a hierarchy of cultures.

Preferring and furthering one's own culture is considered natural and even welcome. "Tradition is the one we start from in everything that we say, do and feel". Preferring and

furthering one's own culture is to be sustained, because this way diversity of understanding, and consequently depth of understanding is ensured. The attitude that Waldenfels rejects is justifying preferring a tradition by means of that very tradition. This would presuppose rational foundation of tradition, which will make of it *the* "legitimate" way of understanding the world, consequently, superior to others. Tradition is to be sustained only as *a* way of understanding.

According to his conception about order, the author in question does not accept the idea that globalization will standardize the sense of our experiences. It is not possible for a new, unique order, to replace the old orders, because this new order will be different integrated by every already existing order differently. The result will still be several orders, globalization not being able to change anything about the fact that the personal and strange appear always simultaneously. "Globalization means only that, under certain aspects, one makes abstraction of differences". If for the commands and announcement made in a plane, the English language is used, this has nothing to do with reasons of principle, but with practical ones. Globalization occurs in situations where one's own idiom is not very important. If globalization occurs in the case of concrete, historically determined experiences, an artificial unification leading to impoverishment of experience, which also means atrophy of reasoning, would result. For Waldenfels it is not for sure, that if people from different cultures watch the same movie, they watch it in the same way and all have the same experience. People from different cultures experiment differently and are differently transformed by the same experience.

Cultural reactions, many times extreme, against those that are presupposed to be willing this uniformity considered we testimony to the fact that the world is not so easy to standardize. The author calls these reactions against assimilation "returns of the stranger". They can be understood as attempts to reestablish an order corresponding to tradition. These reactions are psychologically justifiable, as long as "in a fluid world, people are searching for identity

and security. People are in search of roots and connections to protect them from the unknown."⁸ Due to this need, habits, acquired in the family, society, culture and tradition that were born in and we live in, are invested with the status of nature. The rules of these habits become legitimate norms, according to which life has to be ruled, as long as it is to be good and right. There will be reticence towards what is strange, towards artificial and technical discoveries. Thus, the reaction of tradition, which pretends to work against the threatening uniformity of globalization, are still a process of standardization.

Accepting contingency in what regards one's own culture and way of life is pretty difficult, because the effect of psychological contingency, where the conviction of a unique, legitimate order is at work, is disintegration. There is the impression that, giving up the idea of universal rules, nothing will work properly anymore. But for tradition not to respond aggressively, it is necessary that understanding that every order has its limits, and that the noun order should be used only in the plural.

The norms that determine the functioning of an order, decide what is normal and what is not normal, according to the order they are active in. If these norms are understood as natural, what is strange or different will be excluded and its existence almost refuted. Therefore, normalizing attitudes go hand in hand with oppressive strategies. This would not be possible if the fact were admitted that every normality has its blind spot, being mandatory to refrain itself constantly from something that eludes normalization. The concept of normality, a dynamic, polemical one must not be idealized. Only an attitude aware that its own way of understanding has limits of validity is to be encouraged.

References:

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2. Samuel P. Huntington, *Ciocnirea civilizațiilor și refacerea ordinii mondiale*, translated by Horia

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3. Robert J. Lieber and Ruth E. Weisberg, "Globalization, Culture, and Identities in Crisis" in *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol.16, No. 2, Winter 2002, 273 - 296.
 4. Irina Rotaru, "Die etische Priorität des Außerordentlichen: Interview mit Bernhard Waldenfels", in *Studia Phaenomenologica, Romanian Journal for Phenomenology*, X (2010) 253 - 269.
 5. Bernhard Waldenfels, *Grenzen der Normalisierung*, Surkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Mein, 1998.
 6. Bernhard Waldenfels, "Între culturi", in *Schița unei fenomenologii responsive*, translated by Ion Tănăsescu, Pelican Press, București, 2006.

Endnotes

- 1 Samuel P. Huntington, *Ciocnirea civilizațiilor și refacerea ordinii mondiale*, translation Horia Ciurtin, Antet Press, 1997.
- 2 Robert J. Lieber and Ruth E. Weisberg, "Globalization, Culture, and Identities in Crisis" in *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol.16, No. 2, Winter 2002: 273 - 296.
- 3 Taking the example of Muslim countries, it is shown that, while their biggest enemy is considered to be the American people, („The killing of Americans and their civilian and military allies is a religious duty for each and every Muslim to be carried out in

whichever country they are found," Patrick E. Tyler, „A Nation Challenge; Evidence:British Detail bin Laden's Link to U. S. Attaks," *New York Times*, October 5, 2001), the most popular television show, for the youngsters who shout death to America, is *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, of American inspiration. The same youngsters illicitly buy magazines from Hollywood. Another example may be the fact that, on September 11, the owners of a modern café in Beirut applauded the falling of the twin towers meaning, dressed in American clothes. (Robert J. Lieber and Ruth E. Weisberg, *op. cit.*, p. 289) This makes the authors to say that Muslim hatred has a historical component, as well as a modern one. There exists the frustration caused by loss of the grandeur that this civilization once possessed.

- 4 Samuel P. Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Summer 1973): 22- 49, p. 27.
- 5 Bernhard Waldenfels, "Între culturi", in *Schița unei fenomenologii responsive*, translation Ion Tănăsescu, Pelican Press, București, 2006, p. 76.
- 6 Bernhard Waldenfels, *Grenzen der Normalisierung*, Surkamp Verlag, 1998, p.22.
- 7 Irina Rotaru, "Die etische Priorität des Außerordentlichen: Interview mit Bernhard Waldenfels", în *Studia Phaenomenologica, Romanian Journal for Phenomenology*, X (2010) 253 - 269, p. 255.
- 8 Samuel P. Huntington, *Ciocnirea civilizațiilor și refacerea ordinii mondiale*, *op. cit.*, p. 181.