

Public Area and Globalization Antinomy

Abstract

The paper tries to carry on a philosophical analysis of some antinomies of the process we describe as globalization. We point out the disagreement between the expert and post-modern definition of globalization, the trend to drive out the post-modern conception of globalization from the public area. The globalization process is set in a broader context of social and political changes the liberal democracies went through in the second half of the 20th century. The examples presented by the author put emphasis on some negative externalities.

Key words: *globalization, globalization antinomy, public area, social and political changes*

I.

Fewer and fewer global players compete for all the places in the world and always win. They have their own rules agreed on in palaces and luxurious city hotels converted into fortresses where the citizens are sifted, screened, threatened and manipulated. Outside the walls of these fortresses an increasing periphery of the defeated demonstrates, whose voices are called “the violence of the psychopathic elements discontented with the state of the world” by the media. The contest for the media was won by the global players long ago (S. Amin, 1997, pp. 3–10; S. Amin, 1998). Milan Knížák cannot stand mass demonstrations, because “they are not a dialogue, but an exaction” and because “being part of a crowd arouses the lowest instincts in a person”. However, he wrote about the financiers’ convention held in Prague in 2000: “A financial company had dinner in Kinsky Palace yesterday... They bought black suits with bowties for our staff, gate-watchers and various by-standers, so that their plainclothes should not offend sophisticated aesthetic feelings of the bankers.” This remark is the most profound warrant of mass dem-

onstrations held at the time of the convention. Globalization is not only represented by mobile phones, English, NATO, McDonald's, flexible job market, WTO or the Internet. Globalization is also liveries. Some of our fellow citizens are already polishing the buttons on the liveries that have been allotted to them and call it "the integration into Euro-American structures". And the history has taught us that footmen have always been the most devoted defenders of the order represented by their livery. At the time of world-wide neonormalization it is difficult to live without a livery, just as it was difficult in the past not to be a member of the communist party. There are no more places in boiler rooms where the dissidents read Plato while banking up. What are liveries? What are demonstrations? Let us say that a livery means accepting without reserve a place in the world defined by somebody else. Others demonstrate. Each of us sometimes wears a livery, each of us sometimes demonstrates.

At present two conceptions of globalization sharply compete within the public area. The *first* one defines globalization as liberalization of the world market, lowering costs, removing all historical, cultural, moral and political barriers limiting the capital, growth, speeding up the flow of information, etc. This conception of globalization is characterized by the hegemony of economic experts' vocabulary strictly avoiding ethical questions connected with an untenable unbalance of power inside the globalizing institutions (Monetary Fund, World Bank). We can call this definition of globalization an expert one. Mats Karlsson, a high officer of the World Bank, characterizes globalization as a process that has not been invented by anybody... and that will increase the living standard of all those who are able to adjust to it. The plot of the story the economic experts offer us could be summarized like this: the industrial society *absolutely naturally* develops towards humanization of the system as a whole, towards overcoming alienation and valorising specifically human qualities. The market economy rules are not a product of the people who expect to profit from them, but, as the former minister of privatization, Tomáš Ježek writes in his book called *Building-up Capitalism in Bohemia*, a system suited for a man as he was created by God. It is exactly this blind faith in the conception of capitalism tailored by the Creator to the man that is so dangerous. *Such a system can only be opposed and criticized by dreamers, communists, criminals, post-modern relativists, extremists or the enemies of the objective moral order, as capitalism is characterized by the activists of the liberal institute and journalists aiming at denouncing the communist past of the Czech society.*

The *second* conception of globalization can be defined as postmodern. For many people it is symbolized by an Italian globalization opponent Carlo Giuliani, who was shot by two carabinieri at the summit in Genoa. Do not judge anybody according to his or her hair or shirt, because the heart of a person fighting for

a better world can beat under it – these are the words uttered by the victim's father, who was the only speaker at the modest funeral. This second conception defines globalization as a process in which “the economy got out of the democratic control it was subjected to at the time of the national state.” We are more and more often confronted with the problems that can be solved only if we are able to revise our elementary civilization data and integrate them into the process of political decision-making. It is an experiment how to restore sense to the word responsibility at the time of ecological crisis, world-wide communication and irrevocable disintegration of national traditions.

The second conception of globalization shows that responsibility, moral as well as political, can only be restored within modernity, i.e. within the conviction that there are universal norms, objective knowledge and neutral judges we can refer to and thus get rid of our personal experience for the consequences of our behaviour for the historical worlds that have been built up for centuries. The disagreement between the economic and post-modern conception of globalization confronts us with an urgent question. Is there any philosophical or political vision than can comprehend a check on our civilization data into political decision making? I am not sure. However, we can be sure about one thing. A long-term goal of the demonstration in Seattle, Prague or Genoa is not to bring a stop to globalization, but to reverse its apologetic definition. However, driving the post-modern conception of privatization out of the public area leads to two-way working of the arguments concerning globalization.

II.

Many of you probably remember Miloš Forman's film *Masses versus Larry Flynt*, which was awarded Gold Bear at the Berlin festival in 1996. The main motto of the film is – freedom for unpleasant ideas. It is a life story of the porno-king, the founder of the magazine *Hustler*. This magazine (and many others), which is full of sexual obscenities according to many Americans' opinion, is for Flynt, on the other hand, the means of fighting against the censorship and prejudice exerted both by the government and the churches trying to force their own morals on people. Flynt who is paralyzed after the attempt on his life in 1978 and moves on a gilded wheelchair says in one of the key scenes of the film: If you protect my freedom to utter unpleasant ideas and opinions in public now, you will protect yourselves. Because I am the worst one now. It is just the unpleasant opinions that need freedom, the conform ones surely do not need it. This could be the message – scandalous for many people – of Forman's film. American director Michael Moore reminds his co-citizens in his bestseller *Stupid White Men* (more than five million sold copies) of the fact that their “idiot nation“ heads the statistics in the

number of people killed by a gun, in greenhouse gasses emission, in toxic waste production, in daily consumption of calories, in rape and traffic accident numbers, in unsigned agreements concerning human rights and that the United States where half of all the scientists work on military commissions own also the highest number of all the nuclear weapons.

The fundamentalism of the Growth's growth, continual mobilization of forces for further mobilization of forces is the most disastrous of all the vestiges of the cold war; it is a way "war is established by permanent peace means" in Jan Patočka's words. The Growth's growth has no sense in itself, it only derives benefit from the sense of our historical world in a similar way as advertising. It needs war to flourish – either hot or cold, because the advantage of the war is the fact that the troublesome question of the sense can be postponed to the distant victorious then. The religion of the Growth's growth contradicts everything we call culture and we have learnt to understand at school, it tolerates no limits, no delays. The people, demos, are not efficient or obedient enough as consumers for these fundamentalists, so they are going to be replaced by some biotechnologic-electronic hybrids.

Who is demos as part of the word democracy? Working class, according to socialists, farmers, according to the clerics' warning murmur, scientists and managers, as the technocrats in made-to-measure clothes point out, masses, as the revolutionaries shout clenching fists, incarnations of immortal principles, general will, sense overcoming dark superstitions, as the enlightenment philosophers preach. Demos is the community established when understanding historical contradictions of our own culture, its randomness, fragility, relativity and mortality becomes the strongest bond among people and nations (R. Rorty, 1999, pp. 229–241). Each subculture, even the most fanatic one is nothing more than (more or less desperate, more or less successful) attempt to solve unbearable contradictions of the culture in which the subculture was established. The contradictions of the global culture generate global subcultures of the protest.

III.

On TV we can often see shots of crowded old hookers on which the Third World immigrants try to get on the Italian coast. They die in tens, bosses in the background with mobile phones in their hand order to throw them in the water when the police appear. The cemetery on Lampedusa island is full of bodies of the drowned and crosses numbered 001, 002, 003... Are we open enough to see the castaways from the old hookers as a polemical picture of ourselves?

Modernity is a faith devoting two ways. The first one is apologetic: this way identifies Modernity with the industrial society and considers it to be a religion which should be professed by all mankind, economic growth should be started in

all parts of the world and its enemies should be destroyed. Joe Lieberman, a democratic candidate in presidential election, stated of the American occupation of Iraq: “This is a battle against Al Qaeda, Saddam and all the enemies of freedom and modernity who would like to change the 21st century into a global religious war.” This conception of modernity is nothing more than a global religious war against the old world, the world before revealing the truth about the economic growth (S. Latouche, 1996, pp. 78–81). Modernity professed in an apologetic way is nothing more than one of fundamentalisms which changed the 20th century into “a century of extremes”. Its most devoted followers are now former enemies of modernity – conservatives calling themselves neocons (neoconservatives) are building up the Temple of Global Economic Growth on Earth. The most favourite text of this sect many Europeans have converted to is said to be Thukidid’s History of Peloponnesian Wars, as I have recently read in weekly Standard. “Whoever has such power we have,” the article states, “must find legitimate reasons for using it..”

The process called globalisation involves the public opinion of western societies in non-solvable antinomies. It was I. Kant who gave the status of a philosophical concept to the word antinomy. Questions such as: does the world have a beginning or is it ageless, is it simple or complex, is it lawful or accidental can never be answered in a definitive sense, because both thesis and antithesis are possible. It only depends on how we understand the question. Thus, according to Kant, a liberal state plays its own, irreplaceable part. It must guard the citizens against the fanaticism of those who search for the definitive solutions, who are not able to bear the disputableness of the situation of mankind. Therefore the promise of “the final solution” is the archetype and the most intellectual temptation of modernism.

Antinomies pointed out by the public area cannot be definitively solved then, they can only be stabilized, i. e. deprived of their potential destructiveness. An attempt at their final solution would lead to unbearable cultural, political and social conflicts at the present paradigm. Therefore, the conflicts of the late industrial society cannot be overcome, but the faith in positive results of their promotion in the public area of democratic societies is still the goal and sense of the western cultural tradition and maybe the last legitimate source of the intellectuals’ authority.

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