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DIALOG OF CULTURES AND DEFORMATION OF THE NOTION OF TOLERANCE IN TODAY'S GLOBALIZING WORLD

The processes of globalization taking place in the world today have permeated all the levels of culture, affecting our civilization in a way so dramatic, that we often hear about it being a start of the new era in the history of humankind.

This is, in particular, the position of researchers who take the so-called hyper-globalist position. It absolutizes the positive character of economic integration, which gradually leads to national states getting rid of national priorities in order to allow the global economy to function. Consequently, this spreads to understanding of culture, or, more precisely, the national culture and its right to existence as a localized system. "Since national economies are increasingly becoming elements of international and global flows that oppose the national socio-economic activities, the authority and legitimacy of nation-states is being questioned: national governments are less able to control what is happening within their own borders, or to independently satisfy the demands of their citizens"².

It is this premise that lies behind the justifications for interference of globalism leaders into sovereign affairs of other countries to establish the new world order.

At the same time, precisely because of the aggressive nature of globalization ideas being pushed on the international community, there emerges a definite opposition to this trend. It denies the very possibility of creating a supranational economy and the practicality of the "world government" running this economy. The real practice shows that even relatively limited systems that included the necessity of international management, development of the unified law for a number of countries, find themselves to be quite ineffective and lead to new contradictions, exacerbating the inequality of countries within such a system, and leading to disintegrative processes that may lead to real, even military altercations. All these developments will not bring the states closer; they will instead make them more remote from each other.

It might appear that both positions examine, above all, the economic and political structure of states, not taking into account their cultural components, which in many cases proves to be critically important, and capable of blocking globalization processes imposed from the outside, if it threatens the existence of a concrete culture. The processes of globalization and disintegration are component parts of cultural development that do not necessarily contradict each other but, to the contrary, serve as limiting factors retaining the relatively stable state of the world system. It is for this very reason that political dominance of a particular state or a particular local culture cannot be justified by its supposed adherence to globalization processes.

Therefore, the analysis of development trends of the modern culture is necessary as a type of philosophical reflection over existing problems within new realities and new conditions in which the humankind functions. It changes the meaning of factors that had always affected culture and the newly formed factors.

In this article we will be unable to analyze the entire range of changes taking place in the culture so we will touch briefly on just one aspect of cultural interrelations, which, as Dmitry Likhachov had repeatedly stated, is implemented in the process of "cultural dialog". Within this dialog we will inevitably need to understand the other individual as a unique person and as a representative of a different community, a different culture.

Without trying to analyze innumerable definitions of culture, let us define it as a collective result of human activities aimed at creating a set of material and spiritual values traditional for the humankind. The created cultural values are always a collection of material or spiritual artifacts that obtain special value and meaning as a result of their functioning in a particular cultural community. It is here that we should introduce a sort of qualification. The system of cultural values contains what is known as the "museum part". Material values within this category are often found in museums where they acquire a corresponding status. But we often do not understand or appreciate the fact that more ethereal entities – spiritual values – also belong to museum values. These include the totality of "supreme" human values that define and determine the end purposes of human existence in history (kindness, truth, beauty, justice, etc.). They cannot be touched but they are still quite real, although created by people's consciousness. In this sense the notions of kindness, truth, beauty and justice are artifacts, albeit spiritual, which are not unlike museum exhibits. These cultural references define the specifics of culture because they are implemented in the form of norms, principles, traditions and even stereotypes of behavior, which render a considerable influence on real activities and existence of the individual. So this ethereal character only seems to be as such.

Spiritual values are fairly stable, in some sense, more stable than material artifacts in museum that could be destroyed or broken in a very material way. Spiritual values define the characteristics of functioning of a concrete national culture. Over a certain period the changes in this

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² Global transformations. Politics, economy and culture / D. Held (et al.). Moscow: Praxis, 2004. P. 5.

sphere were so slow that they seemed to be an existential constant and a factor of cultural stability. Human beings were immersed into this system of values from the moment of their birth to their death, and it seemed to them that these values did not change at all.

However, culture had always been a developing system in its every component, which allowed it to adapt to new conditions of existence, giving new cultural meanings to new values that aspired to reflect the status of spiritual guidelines. This unique part of culture is implemented within the system of operational values as “means of practical adaptations, which characterize not the culture but the civilization”¹. Therefore, culture combines two opposing tendencies. One is to have a set of fixed values, and the other – to adapt these values to changing conditions of everyday being.

In addition to the aforementioned peculiarities, culture also serves as a system of sustainable, reproducible, subordinated and coordinated interrelations between the symbolic programs of human behavior, objectified through sign systems”². From this point of view one of the most significant attributes of culture is the ability to store (accumulate) and distribute (retransmit) information. This process becomes a condition for adding to cultural values, the amount and quality of information the culture possesses. Therefore, the aforementioned cultural dialog is implemented first and foremost as a dialog of cultural texts, since in the broadest sense any culture is Text with a capital “T”.

Therefore, culture developed as a set of local entities, based on the system of domineering values that defined the identity of the individual. The cultural individual that defines the system of cultural values, including spiritual values, therefore, was not an abstraction but a subject of a concrete historical community. This defined the national essence of culture. Anything that appears in the culture, be it science, economic, art, architecture or forms of public or political setup, is affected by “national hues” to that or other extent. Therefore, the dialog between cultures is a dialog of local (national) cultures that represents a very complex process of cultures penetrating each other and forming a common space of meanings across a multitude of cultures. This represents the principle of unity in what is diverse, not total. It is in this sense that culture has no borders and is enriched through development of its particular features and interaction with other cultures,” Dmitry Likhachov had said. He did stress, however, that “national confinement inevitably leads to the culture becoming poor or degenerated, and its uniqueness disappearing”³.

Until about the middle of the past century communication was seen as a dialog within the semiosphere (J.M. Lotman) or cultural sphere (D.S. Likhachov), as a special communication space where, like the biosphere is for living nature, language serves the living element. To be more precise, these would be different languages with their different meanings and a diversity of socio-cultural forms of presentation⁴. The language is not simply a way to transmit information because it includes such a component as memory.

¹ *Momjian K.H.* Philosophy of the Society // Philosophy / V.G. Kuznetsov (et al.). Moscow, 2004. P. 377.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Likhachov D.S.* Selected works. Thoughts on Life, History, and Culture. Moscow: Russian Culture Foundation, 2006. P. 104.

⁴ *Lotman J.M.* Inside Thinking Worlds. M.: Languages of Russian Culture, 1996. P. 194.

As Juri Lotman had rightly said, “The language is its code plus its history”⁵. Memories reflect the essence and peculiarities of a concrete culture, preserve and retransmit its meanings and symbols, giving them their unique nature and working to preserve the continuous nature of historical stages of cultural development. The memory is not just a certain coded set of meanings (related not only to the language but also to the history of this culture); it is more accessible to representatives of one’s own culture.

This can help explain the meaning of the national language that serves as the foundation of culture. Giving up on the national language in favor of the dominating global language will inevitably lead to conversions in the meanings of one’s own culture. This can lead to destruction of the national culture since not all of its meanings could be translated into a different language. “The languages that fill the semiotic space are different in their nature, and relate to each other differently, from full mutual transferability to mutual intransferability of the same kind”⁶. While working with the same language can appear to be convenient, it will lead to the tendency of global totality with far-reaching consequences, all the way to the model of total unanimity, which will then be transferred from the sphere of the language to the society. To the contrary, the pluralism of cultures and languages underscores differences and highlights the necessity of understanding that provide for mutual permeation of cultures.

Therefore, the main mechanism of the dialog between the cultures is the dichotomy of “mine vs. theirs”⁷, which describes the aforementioned contradiction that appears in cultural interactions. “Mine” (arising from inside the culture) is considered more valuable than “theirs” (which denies what is “mine” and is therefore considered alien or even antagonistic in some situations. The culture therefore develops some sort of an immunity for perception of some meanings of a different culture. The external culture for us is a coded system that we need to decipher to understand. The mutual adaptation of cultures, therefore, can only be implemented if meanings are not identical; whatever common exists is only a pre-requisite for entering the area that is not shared. The value of the dialog lies not in the common area but in the process of transferring information between differences; we are interested in communicating about the situation that makes the process more complex, if not impossible in some cases”⁸. Therefore, it is the admission of equality between all cultures that serves a condition for development of the human culture overall; absolutizing the values of one culture is therefore related to subjugation and weakening of cultural diversity.

As a result of globalization we experience transformation of the dialog process between cultures as an important mechanism of their coexistence. The cultures are immersed into the global communication space, which functions according to the scientifically and technically domineering na-

⁵ *Lotman J.M.* Culture and Explosion. Moscow: Gnozis. Progress Publishing Group, 1992. P. 13.

⁶ *Lotman J.M.* Inside Thinking Worlds. P. 166.

⁷ There are other dichotomies out there that we do not take into account, such as the opposition between “top” and “bottom” of culture (see *Bakhtin M.M.* Creative works of Francois Rabelais and Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. 2nd ed. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura, 1990. P. 12–13), and the opposition between closeness and openness (see *Knabe G.S.* Materials for lectures on the general theory of culture and the culture of ancient Rome. Moscow: Indrik, 1994).

⁸ *Lotman J.M.* Culture and Explosion. P. 15.

tion's principles, and the human being turns into a member of the global supersociety, in which the cultural thread connecting him or her with their own culture is deformed.

This is clearly seen in the certain metamorphosis of understanding of the notion of tolerance, which has evolved toward absolutization of total tolerance, even when it contradicts the interests of the individual and the society, albeit in reality this term is more multidimensional.

For instance, in medicine tolerance can be viewed as tolerance to medication, the way of the body to adapt to influence of medications by means of increasing internal resistance of microorganisms and the body as a whole. In other words, the body becomes for stable as a base system, it is not being destroyed. Unless the body can adapt in such a way, it perishes. On the biological level overall the tolerance of the body fluctuates within the optimal zone of stability, with certain upper and lower borders. Therefore, on the one hand, the larger the range of tolerance, the higher are the chances of the body to survive, yet on the other there always are some limitations when it comes to outside influences.

While I understand the conditional nature of analogies, I must note here that the society as a complex system also has a certain range of tolerance levels, with their upper and lower borders. As in the biological world where the conditions of the environment or physiological processes inside the body can lead to narrower range of tolerance, in the society with individuals and social groups with different goals and values, "general tolerance" is impossible. Culture also has its limits of tolerance, beyond which the patience of individuals, groups, or the society overall, will end. This is why tolerance in the society cannot be limited to just the kind of tolerance as a certain definite component of the social system. Tolerance is a rather uncomfortable psychological state for those who tolerate and those who are being tolerated. Goethe had said that tolerance (*Toleranz*, Ger.) must be just a temporary belief, followed by recognition. To tolerate means to insult¹. Tolerance exists until something is either fully rejected or fully recognized. Tolerance as a social principle must conclude with the recognition of the other as equal to oneself and one's own culture. Which is only possible in dialog. Absolutized tolerance is, in effect, indifference which solidifies the consciousness of permissiveness.

True tolerance can and must be based on the values of one's own culture, while being also cognizant of the interrelationship of these values with the values of other cultures

and their different roles in cultural consciousness of the individual. "...universal tolerance will be achieved only when we allow each individual or a whole nation to preserve their own characteristics; however, they must also remember that distinctive features of true virtues is the part they play in the system of universal values"².

Multiculturalism, which is being offered today as a state-of-the-art matrix for the contemporary society and the dominating principle of tolerance is, as paradoxical as it might seem, a tool for implementing anti-democratic and anti-liberal trends, which are quite remote from the European traditions of recognizing and understanding other cultures and the other person as such. It is based on the simplified model of recognizing all cultures as equal only in a legal sense rather than as recognition of the fact that cultural dialog is required. The cultural dialog is a more complex form of coexistence as compared to legal declaration of equality before the law. The values of other cultures must be truly recognized, which is a very lengthy and complex process. Moreover, the system of base values of any society must remain unchanged. G.S. Knabe, analyzing the Roman culture, said that the "key attribute of the Roman civilization is to absorb the experience of other cultures but never be absorbed by them..."³.

The dichotomy of "mine vs. theirs" has blocked the absolute nature of the principle of tolerance, opposing to it the principle of equal dialogue. Today it is being proclaimed obsolete, and is substituted with multiculturalism, which is based on the principle of general tolerance. The world is viewed through that lens as a global whole with the same legal and moral principles regardless of national peculiarities of each of the separate cultures. However, as the notion of what is alien is lost, the values of liberalism and humanism are explicitly recognized. Denying what is alien, in essence also means denying what is inherent to the culture; as a result we lose individual and collective cultural property of being ready and able to accept the other, while "true liberalism means recognition"⁴. This leads to "losing the basis of any kind of liberalism or humanism – the notion of an autonomous person and the universal, philosophical and existential principle behind it – the principle of individuality"⁵. In fact we move away from the process of the dialog between cultures and recognizing the other to choosing and absolutizing the notion of the other, which is first and foremost alien to us, something that we cannot understand yet must recognize.

¹ *Goethe J.W.* Maximen und Reflexionen // *Goethes Werke in zwölf Bänden*. Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1974. Bd. 7. S. 493.

² *Гёте И. В.* Собрание сочинений: в 10 т. М.: Худож. лит., 1980. Т. 10: Об искусстве и литературе. С. 411.

³ *Кнабе Г.С.* Местоимения постмодерна и обязанность понимать // *Избранные труды. Теория и история культуры*. М.: РОССПЭН, 2006. С. 921.

⁴ *Goethe J.W.* Op. cit. S. 493.

⁵ *Кнабе Г.С.* Местоимения постмодерна и обязанность понимать. С. 922.