

REPORTS

Evandro Agazzi¹

A SYSTEMIC WAY OF THINKING FOR APPROACHING THE PROBLEMS OF GLOBALIZATION

The notion of globalization has been originally introduced with an economic, or better a financial, meaning, that is, as stressing the fact that what happens, for instance, at the stock market of Hong Kong or Tokyo has almost immediate impacts on Wall Street, London, Moscow or Paris., and similar effects accompany the fluctuations of the different currencies (dollar, pound, ruble, euro, etc.). This phenomenon was (correctly) considered as the consequence of the astonishing progress in communication technology that allows for real-time exchange of information all around the world. In this sense, it was only a particular aspect of that ‘contraction’ of the geographic space produced by the increase of communications that Marshall McLuhan had qualified as the reduction of the world to a “global village” already at the beginning of the 1960s.

During the last decades the flow of information has been accompanied by a parallel and unprecedented flow of goods and commodities, thanks to which, for instance, all kinds of fruits are available everywhere at any season, or clothes and shoes produced in China or in Italy can be purchased at different prices almost in all countries, and so on. This second stage, which we can qualify as the improvement and acceleration of communication and transportation, concerns the movements of material things and services, and points towards the global village becoming a global market.

The improvement of communication and transportation facilities has also concerned the mobility of persons that has tremendously increased, not only regarding travels of business people, scholars and workers, but especially regarding the impressive development of mass-tourism: thousand and thousand of people visit foreign countries and make a quick and rather superficial acquaintance with sites and persons belonging to other cultures: their motivation is usually curiosity, but it opens the minds to the idea that there is much in common among humans in spite of several differences.

In the last years the phenomenon of human mobility has taken a different and more radical aspect, the aspect of migration, in which not single persons, families or small groups, but entire communities try to settle in foreign countries, to find there a life-space, a stable ‘home’. In the past

history this happened occasionally when nomadic populations ‘invaded’ with violence the territories of weakened states unable to defend their borders, or when certain communities were expelled from their homeland for religious or racial reasons and were accepted in other countries. Today migration has become a rather ‘regular’ phenomenon involving large groups of people, entire communities that abandon their native countries in order to settle in a new country that should become their stable homeland. The reasons pushing these people to migrate are often dramatic situations of war or political persecution, but very often simply the condition of extreme poverty at home that pushes them to go where they hope to find better life conditions, especially in those countries where they are ready to accept jobs or kinds of humble work that are socially needed but are disliked by local people. A significant difference in comparison with the past is that this migratory trend is ‘peaceful’: the migrants come to the unknown foreign country with no weapons, but simply relying on their condition of extreme vulnerability that should give them the moral right to be helped.

If the portrayal of the present migratory flow were sufficiently expressed by the above description no problem would appear: every country should open the doors to the incoming migrants. Unfortunately we know that this is not the case, and it would be superficial to attribute to an egoistic mentality or to an irrational feeling of xenophobia the increasing negative attitude regarding the acceptance of migrants that we note in our populations.

The real situation can be better analyzed from a systemic point of view. A given country can be considered as a system in which different subsystems are interrelated and mutually interacting, so that a global homeostatic equilibrium is preserved. If something ‘comes in’ from the environment of the system, this equilibrium is temporarily affected, but the internal ‘mechanisms’ are normally able to recover a new homeostatic equilibrium in which the external ‘input’ is so to speak ‘assimilated’. This input can be, for example, the introduction of a new technology that can negatively affect the exercise of certain jobs, or the opening of a new market that stimulates the production of certain goods for export, or can also be the arrival of foreign persons with their needs, their capabilities, their culture and customs. In this case too the internal social mechanisms can often ‘assimilate’ the new persons, if the number and frequency of the new incomers remain limited. Otherwise the situation becomes uncontrollable, and fierce competition with the ‘indigenous’ people can explode.

A way out of this difficulty that is often proposed or realized essentially consists in measures that prevent the entrance of the migrants (such as constructing walls) or try to send them away (by repatriation or by distributing them in different countries of a given political community). Both

¹ Professor of the University of Genoa (Italy), foreign member of the Russian Academy of Sciences and of the Mexican Academy of Sciences, Ph.D. Director of the Interdisciplinary Center for Bioethics of the Panamerican University of Mexico City. His publications include more than 80 books, of which he is the author and/or the editor, and about 1000 scientific papers and articles, including contributions to books, anthologies, encyclopaedias, and journals. He is the editor of “Epistemologia”, an Italian journal for the Philosophy of Science, and of “Bioethics UPdate” (an international journal for bioethics), a member of the International editorial board of the journal “Matters of Philosophy”, a member of the editorial board of several international scientific journals, and of dictionaries and encyclopaedias. Professor Emeritus of the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). He was President (and is now Honorary President) of the International Academy of Philosophy of Science (Brussels), of the International Federation of the Philosophical Societies (FISP), of the International Institute of Philosophy (Paris), and of several other Academies and educational institutions of different countries.

strategies are doomed to failure, because they try to solve a *global* problem through *local* measures and, in addition, because they follow the logic of ‘assimilation’ that is sufficient for the acceptance of single persons or small groups, but not for large groups or communities.

The correct solution must start from the awareness that nobody is normally willing to migrate, to leave his/her own homeland, unless one is forced to this choice by external factors that can be reduced, today, essentially to wars, political persecution and poverty. Therefore, if we want to eliminate or reduce the dimensions of migration (that is in itself not negative within certain limits), we have to remove its causes.

This needs the adoption of a systemic way of thinking, in which the whole world is conceived as a system that must attain a homeostatic equilibrium whose fundamental requirement is the absence of internal wars, but ‘internal’ with respect to the entire world simply means the serious promotion of a policy of *peace*. Progress in this direction has been made because the idea of a ‘global war’ comparable with the two world-wars occurred in the 20th century seems to be alien to the political way of thinking today. Local wars, however, are still active in different parts of the planet and are produced by a variety of ‘local’ causes. Nevertheless, it is well known that such ‘local’ wars can go on for a long while because ‘external’ political powers try to take advantage from those wars for their geopolitical strategies, and this means that only the sincere decision to avoid wars – taken at a global level – can cope with this phenomenon. Is this utopian? It is certainly utopian to a large extent, not so much because it is very difficult that big and powerful countries really give up any ‘imperialistic’ dreams, but especially because too many *interests* (industrial, economic, political) lie behind the military business all over the world. Again a huge problem that can be approached only globally and through a complex network of intra-systemic action of communication, education, moral suasion, passionate commitment.

Only a little less difficult is the issue of eliminating political persecution as one of the causes of massive migration. This has obviously to do with the problem of promoting the disappearance of despotic violent dictatorships around the world, and the development of more democratic ways of functioning of the political life. This is a slow process that, however, seems irreversible because the number of democratically ruled countries is increasing in the world and (what is very important) even those regimes that are concretely oppressive try to show the appearance of a state following the rule of law, and this is the effect of a systemic influence of general politically correct approaches on the single states.

The third major cause of massive migration, that is, poverty, is still far from being adequately approached, be-

cause poverty is perceived as a ‘local’ bad condition of single countries, whereas it is a global issue that can be managed only if a gigantic common effort is realized with the view of attaining a homeostatic equilibrium also as far as standard living conditions of populations are concerned. This requirement is certainly founded in a general ethical principle of justice, but it has also this systemic dimension which should impulse the wealthy countries to accept the economic burden necessary for such a redistribution of wealth from which a general benefit (including their own benefit) would follow.

We shall conclude our sketch of a systemic analysis by considering the problem of the ‘assimilation’ of the migrants, which we have considered positively in certain foregoing reflections. We have maintained that this assimilation is positive only if it concerns single individuals or small groups. The reason is that every human being requires a social environment for the display of his psychological, existential and relational needs, and – if he has left behind his original environment – has a great advantage if he can insert himself in the new environment. The situation of large collectivities is different: if they are essentially homogeneous, in the sense that they belong to the same culture, they rely upon a great amount of shared customs, moral principles, values, traditions, religious beliefs, conceptions regarding the family structure, apart from practical skills, historical memories and general worldviews. All this is the ground for the ‘identity’ of the community and also of its individuals and it would be a real loss if this genuine ‘wealth’ were lost due to a ‘dilution’ in the new environment of the foreign country. This simply because the original unity was in fact a *system* and no system can be dissolved and diluted without ceasing being what it is.

The consequence of this reflection is that the idea of a future global society as a ‘melting pot’ in which the ethnic and cultural differences should disappear is by no means recommendable as an ideal. Such a society would be one of disoriented individuals, without roots and values. The image of the future global world that deserves being promoted is rather that of a great system in which several subsystems – constituted by large geographic and cultural areas – interact harmoniously, like the different organs in a living organism (each having specific structure, properties and functions, but all interrelated and cooperating to the health of the whole organism) – The fundamental condition for the realization of this idea is an attitude of tolerance, the positive engagement in a dialogue, and the sincere disposition to recognize that pluralism is not equivalent to skepticism or relativism, but amounts to recognizing that we can learn much from what is different from us.