



THE 9TH EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION  
REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

## Globalization and its Impact on Contemporary Culture

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**Abstract:** For the last decades, the contemporary society is fussed, inter alia, by globalization. Globalization has inevitably a cultural dimension and a religious one. More than material indicators, the cultural factor can be considered a pivotal one to globalization. The main features of global culture are: lack of memory, universality, uniform technical basis, lack of historical background. There is nowadays a globalization of culture in the sense of complex connexity. Globalization is examined in relation to economy, to technologies (especially with the computerized ones). However, in its essence, globalization renders the state of our world in its entirety. And what this process reveals to us is the fact that man became truly “homo universalae”. The cultural dimension of globalization is unquestionable and more than material coordinates it can be considered a fundamental one of globalization. Globalization lies is the center of modern culture; there are cultural practices which affect the way we understand what culture really means in the modern world. In the context of globalizing scale discussions, the question is whether global modernity gives us a global culture as well. That because many concede that such a culture does not yet exist and probably will never exist. However, it can be argued that there is already such a culture, as anthropologist Ulf Hannerz expressed it already in the 90’s.

**Keywords:** globalization; culture; society; identity; trends; politics, economy

### 1. Preliminaries

The world we live in is still so strongly rooted in hedonistic materialism. In such world, man “devoid of roots” (Popescu, 2001), has become estranged from God and the idolatry of consumption along with ideologies is the leitmotif of everyday life. Likewise, inclination towards the bodily, the desert of passions and the pride that disfigure human face distort the lives of many. (The passage of the European world, from medieval to the modern era or the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century entailed considerable mutations on the European culture scene. From God the focus has shifted to human, from Theology passed on to science and from spiritual values has moved to material ones, as so many expressions of secular culture.) The autonomous man, proclaimed by the Enlightenment, is imagining himself alone in the world with his powers which, in the long run prove to be nothing but impotencies of late outcome and only this delay may explain the illusion that blind, in all ages, the mighty men of the world. (Bădescu, 2009, p. 6)

For a while now, the contemporary world is worried, inter alia, of globalization. Outstanding intellectuals, from Alvin Toffler (*The Third Wave*), to Francis Fukuyama (*The End of History*), Jürgen Habermas (*Theory of communicative action*) and Marshall McLuhan (*Global Village*) have placed the phenomenon in the ideological movement or information progress area, into “knowledge-based society”. In Romania, the discussion reached to the point especially under “Euro-Atlantic integration” form, minorities and privatization becoming the headlines of public life.

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Until September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, it was believed that globalization is generally an almost exclusively benign phenomenon, focused on borders, business, movement of people and funds opening. From this perspective, globalization was built on the quasi-myth of the open society (Karl Popper, *Open Society and its Enemies*) and that of neoliberal economic theory of market self-regulation rule. This is where the topic of Islam is back in force, terrorism being regarded as a failure of globalization – particularly from the side of advancing civilization, of American type. (Since 2001 onwards there have been occurring in pressed touches more and more operationalized “evidences” concerning the failure of the neoliberal paradigm in managing of trade and capital flows – considered the main vectors of globalization. If until now the International Monetary Fund and World Bank views had appeared as compelling and obligatory for all countries that wished to develop, today history of these international financial organizations is reinterpreted and their economic doctrine is seen as a series of statements ideologically valued rather than economically. (Băltasiu, 2009, p. 10)

From a spatial or geometric standpoint, *globalization* is a phenomenon that may be analyzed from two perspectives: horizontal and vertical one, respectively outside or inside human, as a being. Globalization on *horizontal* (or as external process) refers to the geographical expansion of the modern world system, commenced already in the sixteenth century (Wallerstein, 1986). The process begins once with the affirmation of capitalist Venice in early European Middle Ages, especially in the Mediterranean and Black Sea, and encapsulates the expansion at the known geography scale of an organizing rational system of capitalist work.

Globalization on *vertical* refers to the unification of space, driven by the spiritual integration of societies, in other words to man's spiritual conquest. Such recoveries of humanity are linked with major faiths, and the last and most powerful form of union of large masses of people on large spaces is the Christian faith. Classical Roman world had reached to an impasse and reborn itself as Byzantine world on Christian pattern for the next thousand years. According to Arnold Toynbee (“Theory of History”), society was divided between a proletariat (the common man) increasingly exploited and a more dominant elite (even parasitic). This is the point when the solution offered by Christianity to the social problems of the time springs out: the reunification of society by releasing the full potential of man. In other words, the community, from the scene of “satisfying the interests place” becomes *communion*, that means place of rediscovering the individual through the other. And the space where meeting happens presents itself as ultimate (sacred) value and is called Church. (Phenomenon that represents the last significant synthesis of universal spirituality – with the aid of unification of the three major centers known: Athens, Rome and Jerusalem –, Christianity gave birth to the new man, found himself through the revolutionary concept of love of neighbor, considered as condition and source of all things.) (Băltasiu, 2009, pp. 12-13)

Thus, we understand globalization through its both planes of analysis, referring to it as to a relationship of coexistence. Moreover, the expansion on the horizontal of physical geography once performed at the expense of other communities (nations, fellows), reflects an weakening of the spiritual component; and vertical expansion of man accomplished by his interior restoring is one that has reformed the Roman Empire and rewrote the type of reporting of human to the world includingly.

Regarded in terms of horizontal expansion especially, globalization can be defined as a process of unifying or interpenetration of spaces under a single socio-economical coordination. In other words, it refers to the integration of the output on states horizontal geography, to the movement of financial capital and to the vitality of international trade, processes that can be understood (but not obligatory) in relation to the idea of success that is measured in particular in terms of poverty reduction in the world. For some scholars, globalization is the advance interest on behalf of social justice, and the main

result or effect of that is Islamic terrorism (Hoffmann, 2002, pp. 103-115). Thus, globalization gets a cultural dimension as well.

## **2. The Cultural Impact of Globalization on Contemporary Society**

### **2.1. Aspects of Globalization**

The term “globalization” (This concept is first used by Theodore Levitt in his *Globalization and Market*, Harvard Business Review, May-June, 1983. The French prefer the term mondialisation) could not be included in a sufficient definition, complex and elaborate. Generally, globalization refers to the development of universal connection, integration and interdependence of economic, social, technological, cultural, political and environmental spheres. Affecting all these industries, globalization has succeeded to affect mankind in several respects:

*Industrial*, which identifies itself with the development of a global manufacturing market and with the importing of products for companies and consumers;

*Financial*, translated as financial market development throughout the world and facilitating the access of external funding to national and multinational corporations;

*Economic*, i.e. achieving a common global market, based on the exchange of goods and capital;

*Political*, meaning the creation of a government of the world, which regulates relations between nations and guarantees the rights arising from social and economic globalization;<sup>1</sup>

*Informational*, related to the development of media of different geographic locations; media and especially the Internet contribute decisively to the information almost instantly of a good portion of the world population about whatever happens in any corner of the planet when a free access to information is allowed;

*Cultural*, i.e. the developing of cultural communication throughout the planet, capable of giving rise to a new global consciousness and identity, through the desire to consume and to have access to foreign products and ideas, adopting of a new technology and practices and participating to a worlds culture.

*Ecological*, which lies in protecting the global environment, which may not be possible without the support, intervention and collaboration of international corporations; climate change, pollution, rising sea levels, ocean fishing ban and the rise of predatory fish species, are only a few examples.

*Social*, regarding the free circulation of people in the territories of other nations. (Dumea, 2010, p. 46)<sup>2</sup>

What makes the difference between the old (sixteenth century onwards) and the new globalization process is the industrial revolution. We can affirm that globalization, in terms of expansion of the modern world system is marked by the revolutionizing of Western civilization phenomenon by the mechanization of eighteenth-century and the British state administration (domestic market and colonialism) (Baltasiu, p. 22). In a short definition, it refers to the overall transformation of social relations, political, cultural and economic by spreading mechanization and mass production.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, we can talk about the empires in the mirror, American and Russian, which conduct a large part of people's life of our planet. (Chaudet, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> See website: <http://emildumea.ro/carti.html>.

Unlike other periods, the industrial revolution marked the interplay between society and the machine at all levels of social life, either directly in the industrial production – thus becoming mass production – or indirectly, to the rest of society level, especially through democratization of access to products. The phenomenon of industrialization occurred firstly in England at the end of the eighteenth century until the first half of the nineteenth century. Mass production has become possible due to the expansion rate of the steam machines technology, which made both spread and transport speed at a scale never seen before. In Romania, the industrial revolution occurred abruptly, by the first part of the twentieth century, by burning evolutionary phases (Stefan Zeletin) that went through Western societies, so that Romanian society has suffered from what Maiorescu and Eminescu called forms without substance. “Forms without substance” social malady refers to the contradiction between modern institutions imported from the West, and the real needs of the country that stands further in poverty. (An important feature of the industrial revolution in the West, which even today is precariously achieved in less developed countries such as Romania, refers to the integration of agriculture in the industry and banking circuit, in the national and international market. Globalization can mean, from this point of view, the expansion of the industrial world towards the village, the disappearance of peasant and anthropological pattern of rural policy.)

On the other hand, the thesis of history as progressive triumph of reason, so the coverage of globalism through a human reason having the center in itself, devoid of transcendent dimension and free of eschatological tension is a later idea. Fukuyama's theory, i.e. the end of history is part of this kind of understanding. There are also many other ideas and theories fitting the same pattern of understanding such as: b) theories of modernism; c) the theory of Oswald Spengler, of the Western civilization universalisation simultaneously with its decline (In his celebrated *Decline of the West* Spengler believes that on the basis of the evolution of history there is a cyclical pattern. Thus, he replaced the linear paradigm of universal history representation with the cyclic one and denied the existence of a general sense of history, disavowing firstly the validity itself of the term *general history* and proposing instead the concept of “private histories”. The central theme of the book *Decline of the West* is that all cultures are following a development cycle similar to that of organic evolution: birth, maturation and death/decline. He sensed also the analogy with the four seasons: spring (birth and childhood), summer (youth), autumn (maturity) and winter (old age and death). German philosopher identifies eight cultures that present their own “style” or “soul”: Egyptian, Classical (Greco-Roman civilization), Chinese, Babylonian, Indian, Arabic and Western culture (Faustian), each of them going through an identical life cycle for several hundred years. Thus, history is general biographies of these cultures which are like organisms.<sup>1</sup>); d) theory of human-mass of Ortega Y. Gasset; e) transition theory: community-society; f) socialist theory – Marxism; g) mondialist theory.

As against these theories one has to notice the hidden face thesis of globalization as in: a) huntingtonian theory; b) theories of dependent capitalism; c) the theory of the four laws of count A. Sturdza; d) corporate theory of Emile Durkheim; e) ethnohistory theory of Adam Smith; f) ethnocentrism theory of Nichifor Crainic; g) Mircea Eliade's theory, on replacing “knowledge of the outside with the experience of inner growth”. Such a perspective is based on the following requirements: look for “ascent and not circumference”; human must look for secrets of life inside his experience, not outside. (Such perspective warns us that totality of concrete life is mediated by the frameworks of profession, i.e. natural law of property in Sturdza; frameworks traditions i.e. Sturdza's positive law and frameworks of faith, i.e. supernatural law. Instead, globalization and modernity make

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<sup>1</sup> See website: [http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oswald\\_Spengler](http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oswald_Spengler).

parties, classes, conflict, struggle, thus emptying life formulas of their spiritual content and what remains are the needs and interests that is the law needs.) (Bădescu, 2009, p. 106)

Globalization is examined in relation to economy, to technologies (especially with the computerized ones), etc. However, in its essence, globalization renders the state of our world in its entirety. In the sense we identify to this process, what reveals to us is that man became truly “homo universalae” but that this has occurred through an extraordinary compression of spiritual dimension and a suppression of concrete space. Global man, as a man who lost his eschatological tension and therefore the religious dimension, has neither spiritual interiority (inner dialogue with God) nor “real space”. (Bădescu, 2009, p. 106)

### **3. Towards a Global Culture?**

Globalization process had as starting point the transformation of economic relations, but so far it got to be felt and influence all areas of our life, including cultural specificity of each country. Culture is the indispensable element to be included and analyzed in any process of characterizing the identity of a nation. It can unite and divide at the same time appearing as the factor to which members of a community are reported consistently. If national identity is reflected in the unit based on a common language, culture and spiritual life, then the answer to the possible vulnerability of this identity will have to aiming just at keeping or preserving this community.

The cultural dimension of globalization is unquestionable and one can even affirm that more than material coordinates, cultural factor can be considered a fundamental one – though perhaps less noisy and visible – of globalization. John Tomlinson argues that “*globalization lies in the center of modern culture and in the center of globalization there are cultural practices (meaning that all other forms of globalization can be addressed by using the conceptual vocabulary of culture only), and these, in turn, change the very texture of cultural experience and affect the way we understand what culture really means in the modern world.*” (Tomlinson, 2002, p. 9)

The issue of a global culture is an extremely complicated one and in any case its definitions are quite confusing. It seems that a “culture” of the global type has a history (although some contest it), referring to the “universal empires” (of Hammurabi, Alexander the Great, Justinian, Harun al Rashid, Genghis Khan, Charles V, Napoleon, the British, etc.), who proclaimed themselves carriers of civilization, were considered “sacred civilizations” reaching the then world domination and exercising it through the “*language of the elite and high-culture without borders. These «universal empires» were dashed, invalidated and lowered by offensive nationalism, even if they were not completely abolished.*” (Bădescu, 2006, p. 38)

We try an examination of the features of this “global culture” in order to detect human patterns they generate (or at least support them). In this endeavor we refer at British authority in the field of nationalism and ethnicity, Anthony D. Smith (especially in his famous work “Nations and nationalism in a global era”).

A *first* feature distinguished by A.D. Smith refers to “*lack of memory*”. Global culture is a “culture devoid of memory” (memoryless culture). Global culture is “without spatial and temporal links”, a “juxtaposition between globalism and postmodernism,” a “cultural eclecticism”. (Smith, 2000, p. 19)

*Another* feature of global hybrid culture is that of *universality*. Not even the largest empires – Chinese, Roman, Buddhist, Islamic – would be able to portray a universality as that of the current global culture. Its universality, meaning its ubiquity is unquestionable. “Mainstream American culture,

English language, pop culture, visual media, computer technology of informatics” are conspicuous features of this “global culture”. These trends will persist for a while. “Global Culture” notwithstanding (even if it is more advanced in Europe or in America) “can not be easily rooted in time and space.” “It really becomes a planetary”. (Smith, 2000, p. 21)

*Thirdly*, “its cosmopolitan trait reflects the uniform technical basis” with its multiple communications systems that create social networks, expressed themselves through a very standardized speech, identical, often technical and quantitative. This explains why technical intelligence became so crucial in late modernity and the reason why it replaces humanist intellectuals and nationalists.

*Fourthly*, this culture does *not have time*, “is void of historical background, has no pace (of development) and has no sense of time and of sequential.” Timeless and lacking in context, it can “stir the past to use it cynically or illustrative” as an “eclectic caprice” but “it refuses to locate itself in the history” (Smith, 2000, p. 21). (In the light of *noopolitics* – translated as policy of spirit – one states and other features as well: global culture is culture without limits and so without inner measure, a non-personalist culture and therefore with no soul, no gender patterns, by and large without personalist patterns, an artificial culture, so without any link with the land and therefore implicitly anti-peasant-like, a culture without specifying and therefore with no national specific.) (Bădescu, 2006, p. 39)

Unlike this demythologized, ambivalent and cosmopolitan culture promoted by globalization, cultures of the past were formed on the foundation of archetypal myths and symbols, of uttered, re-uttered and updated values and memories by successive generations of each cultural community. Against this future, global, axiologically neutral and traditionless culture, many particular cultures of past and present have always sought to preserve what Max Weber called “irreplaceable values of culture”: the symbols, myths, ideals and traditions of those who have wrought and shared them.” (Smith, 2000, pp. 22-23)

In contrast to the global, memoryless, historically superficial culture, based on an actant speech, proper to everyday life practices, the cultures of past were built around shared memories, traditions, symbols and myths belonging to successive generations of cultural or populational political units, of class, region, citadel, ethnicity and religious community, which aim to crystallize and express them.”

Compared to all these aspects, A.D. Smith asks rhetorically if we can imagine that we were able to “get rid of our lively past along with all its beliefs and postulates” and to pass “purified” in the act of “building a global culture without time, without localization, technical and universal.” Remain out of doubt, says Smith, that all cultures are “historically specific and so their imagery (Bădescu, 2006, p. 42). (Smith's conclusion is that the world historical process keeps both sides simultaneously: on the one hand, impulse to a cultural imperialism, to a mass commercial cosmopolitanism, and on the other, constant resurrection focused on national autonomy.)

Furthermore, on the modern world it can be said, with obvious reason, that is, paradoxically, the most secularized and, at the same time the most religious in relation to the worlds or societies experimented ever by mankind. The world society is entirely secular, dominated by a global rationality of instrumental consciousness and power, yet this society is flooded everywhere by identities, practices, rebirths or revivals and religious strife. Globalization delivers, within the global culture, opportunities and challenges for religion. For beliefs and religious practices in society take the form of an explicit collective action that employs global rationalism. This since for many specialists on globalization phenomenon, world culture identifies itself or is seen as a global rationalism (Beyer & Beaman, 2007, p. 608). (An additional emphasis on culture signals the inclusion of religion relation in cultural broader social context and allows also the questioning of the boundaries of religion, so as to avoid an obvious

bias in favor of analysis of institutionalized religion. However, the main emphasis of the book edited by Peter Beyer and Lori Beaman: *Religion, Globalization and Culture* is on specifically focus on religion, a subject that is still largely ignored in the so flourishing scientific literature, about globalization.)

In the context of globalizing scale discussions, the question arises whether global modernity gives us a global culture as well? This interrogation is significant since many concede that such a culture does not yet exist and probably will never exist. However, in a way it can be argued that there is already such a culture. As anthropologist Ulf Hannerz expressed since the early '90s, “*there is nowadays a global culture, but it is advisable to understand what that means. [...] The complete homogenization of systems of meaning and expression has not occurred yet and does not appear to foresee in the future. But the world has become a social relations network and, among its various regions, there is a movement of meanings just as there is movement of people and goods.*” (Hannerz, 1990, p. 237)

Hannerz means, of course, that there is now a globalization of culture in the sense of complex connectivity.<sup>1</sup> Thereby globalization refers to the larger and denser network of interconnections and interdependencies that characterize modern social life. This context of integrating cultural practices and experiences in the network (networking) throughout the world can be broadly understood as representing a “world culture”.

Hannerz suggests that this meaning must be distinguished from the one most widely used and powerful, according to which global culture is understood as a single, “homogenized” system of meanings. In this strict sense, global culture is equivalent to the emergence of a single culture that would include all the inhabitants of the planet and would replace the cultural systems diversity so far. However, obviously, such culture did not yet appear.<sup>2</sup>

#### **4. Conclusions**

Globalization refers to the historical process through which all people in the world come to live increasingly much into a single social unit. General paradigm underlying the perspective on globalization assumes that lately we are witnessing an unprecedented expansion of communication and communication techniques without capability of recording a similar increase of encounters between people, i.e. contacts in which human individuals recognize one another. Conversely, the area of unfamiliar (foreign) meetings is enhanced by new communication techniques. And the immediate implications are the so-oft discussed increased stress due to the multitude of unwanted contacts (Dunbar, 1993, pp. 681-735)<sup>3</sup> but especially the growth of aggressiveness potential. Duplication of contacts does not mean in the same time their assimilation. Volubility becomes an indicator of the growth potential of the aggressiveness rather than an offspring of social harmony increase.

In its turn, national identity is in peril to disappear not through competition with globalization, but in competition with individual passion to claim an identity of difference. As the economy goes global, collective identity crumbles. The *social*, which was the ultimate transcendence of classic modernity,

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<sup>1</sup> We resort to the word *connexity*, in a broader sense, with respect to the translation of the term connectivity (“quality or state of connection, especially the capability to connect or communicate with another computer or information system” according to Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary.), which we used to define all the specific connections of modern life.

<sup>2</sup> Even though Hannerz is rightly skeptical on the appearance of such culture in the future, he did not completely rule out this possibility. Since discussing the emergence of a global culture, in the strict sense, we enter the realm of a fundamentally speculative discourse. We are facing problems of the possibility and probability genre and with interpretation of trends and indicators. See (Tomlinson, p. 105).

<sup>3</sup> The maximum number of persons that can be stored by a person throughout life is about 150 – “Dunbar’s number”.

loses its transcendent aura. It has no more *natural* authority to impose a collective identity. Fully desecrated or desacralized, that is, from metaphysical point of view, the state, society and politics are now hitting the same refusal that swept out of history, through human action, religion and the Church. (Patapievici, 2001, p. 330)

One might assert, sometimes unequivocally, that the target of this age is *no-identity-generation*. American humanistic psychologist, Stuart B. Hill investigated the malady of this human pattern through what he called “sand-box syndrome” – i.e. induction at nations’ scale of some life models that mingle self-oblivion with playful mood, able to nullify the realistic, serious and mature perception of things. Therefore, the worst threat is the one directed against identity property of individuals and to the nations themselves. Modernity has triggered a massive des-allotment of identity process (Patapievici, 2001, pp. 330-331), which worsens the current global crisis.

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