

MEMORY AND TRADITION IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

KOSTAS THEOLOGOU

Local Tradition and Local Values as Contributing Factors to Paneuropean Civilization

The subject of this paper is about the value of contributing of local tradition to global tradition (cultural heritage) and to the value of “regional heritage” in the age of globalization and pan-europeanization. We’ll try to point out the importance of memory as an inseparable part of creative progress for a society in an age of rapid developments in communication and in diffusion of information. We’ll focus our attention on the following notions and at the end we’ll make schematically our point.

We’ll refer to multiethnic and (supranational) society of knowledge underlining

- cultural heritage and identity
- cultural otherness and identity
- interaction of those partialities
- the contribution of the notion of tradition to peaceful and creative coexistence and progress.

1. the society of knowledge and technology of information

Knowledge that has been accumulated by humankind, the spectacular developments in the field of technology, wonderful chances presented by the society of information in our age, all these marked to a large extent the only at first glance unlimited economic development, the exploitation of the weak, the destruction (spoiling) of natural environment. We created a society founded on knowledge (rather on ephemeral knowledge under the notion of news or of elementary information), We didn’t root its fundament in the respect of nature, environment and fellow human beings. On every occasion or manifestation our knowledge leads, I think, to comprehending the meaning of tradition. As centuries pass by local traditions have developed useful experience, techniques of environmental protection and managing skills regulating social conflict¹. that comprise together a treasure of knowledge shared by all mankind.

At first glance globalization with its ways of developing communication at high technological level seems to contribute to international cooperation and to conflict prevention. But it’s obvious up till now that globalization is a form of economic and *cultural neocolonialism* not only for Third World countries but wherever it has been able to uproot and extinguish local traditions. Actually it doesn’t extinguish them but assimilates them into a homogenized mass culture,

¹ Theatre, sports, local customs, rituals and traditional methods of therapy, are only to mention but a few of them.

obliterating them through *informatization* and through the introvert everyday life of the individual citizen².

The danger ambushing here is that this kind of development ignores the cultural identity of local society (*collectivity*, minorities included), restricts their right to their own cultural heritage, their right to use their own language, their right to wear their traditional costumes, to practice their ritual customs, to believe in different moral values, to have different myths. So to put it in a nutshell, we are speaking about unset (non-formulated) negation of collective cultural rights and freedoms.

The fact that only but a few years ago UNESCO suggested to its member states and they started joint procedures for protection of lots of cultural monuments and sites of natural beauty of the world cultural heritage is not a coincidence.

2. Tradition and cultural heritage

Although the notion of “tradition” is commonplace in social science, it has not been awarded the due analysis and attention. Cultural heritage is perceived as a source of constructive democratic commitment and as sustained development and and subsequently as a platform for the well-being and unity of the diverging variety existing among the peoples of Europe (among nations and their communities).

A serious problem for peaceful coexistence between different national groups, besides human rights, could be traced in the freedom to express and to proclaim their collective or religious identity. I wish to remind you the major problem that emerged in French society when the issue of forbidding the burkas (the Muslim veil) worn by Muslim schoolgirls.

In his book “The Interpretation of Cultures” Clifford Geertz supports that it is impossible to suppress the urge that emerged in certain peoples to become unique and respectable in the world with their own rights. Increase of newspaper circulation , expanding of university education not , reformulating of hereditary right, proliferation of folkloric connections comprise elements which define collective behaviour labeled as nationalism.³ “Nationalist ideologies make use of cultural inventions to prove the procedure of collective self-defying, to cultivate the feeling of proud and hope related to symbolical persons so that it becomes possible to describe themselves at a conscious level, to develop and to celebrate their own selves.⁴

3. The Culture of the Other

Neither it is possible to evolve without getting to know the *cultural traditions of others*. Events of the last years make it evident that exactly this “abstract” aspect of culture is the one undergoing slow but steady change. Objects of the material world are spoiled and destructed with time, we neglect them when they stop being useful to us. But we like preserving sayings and proverbs, beliefs, myths and convictions. Although they might have not utilitarian value in our everyday

² For a very interesting analysis Neil Postman, 1992, *Technopoly* is recommended.

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lives. Those between others are the cultural factors that influence our sentimental decisions, prejudices that develop vis-à-vis *others*, the image that we construct about the enemy, patterns of national identity and types of behaviour in case of conflict: demonstrating heroism and courage, claims of honour or counter-vengeance (as vendetta on Crete and in the Mani) are activities always performed and guided by the compass of the law of local tradition.

But we must understand that there are cultures in the frame of which respect of the community, of the tradition and of the past have priority compared to the individual and the present. In a society deeply rooted in tradition it's not short-term but long-term goals that are important, not rapid development (usually accompanied by catastrophe), but the slow process of constructing and preserving certain equilibrium.

Obviously cultural traditions have preserved the necessary elements so that a multitude of national groups could express their identity. These elements are not simply comprised of the brick and stones of ancient ruins or by other traces of the rest of material cultural heritage. These elements belong to the field of "abstract" heritage as well.

In many cases these non-material spiritual traditions that are constructed in a difficult manner - sometimes they could only be sung or danced - are of greater importance than anything else, because people feel deeply attached to them. So it is precisely wars and national conflicts between our leaders that have made us suddenly realize what intellectual tradition means to some peoples the myth about whom has been created by a story or it's the very myth that generates history. It is of less importance to which extent these myths are true or not. They are able to mobilize human masses to trigger a war and to construct ideological bastions which are not rooted on any material foundations.

4. The creative interactions

5. Interactions between and through different cultural heritages, communities and environments should be perceived more as sources of creative dialogue than as reasons for clashes while mutual knowledge and understanding of specific cultures and inherited traditions could expand and deepen our common prospect for coexistence in the frame of our common European values.

Or to put it in a simple way: local value systems of faith (or conviction), or mythology, or prejudice and differences in customs and religious confessions could potentially comprise a field for clashes.

Thank you for your attention but allow me please to take advantage of your patience for five more minutes.

I'd like to explain my persistence today on peaceful coexistence in creative dialogue between peoples too.

May 1945, 60 years ago was the date when WWII ended, a war which was a manifestation of most inhuman and painful disrespect and hubris. It was a hubris vis-à-vis nature, man, otherness, the *other*, the *different*, to tradition and the past that was accompanied with the most humiliating treatment of a certain religious community (the Jewish), but of "non-clean" races as well (Gypsies, Semites).