

GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURES: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND HUMANISTIC INSIGHT*

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Today we experience a crisis of the world, of all possible worlds. We also experience an extremely powerful technological revolution, as Cyberspace and Cyber future are incipient.

The social and cultural consequences of Infotech will be considerable and we cannot yet foresee all its impact and effects upon our lives as human beings, as citizens, as members of various cultural communities, as members of our respective countries.

We are somehow blind, unable to predict the transformations related to it, but we can be sure that it will affect human activities and lives, both personal and collective, intellectual, psychological and institutional; market and economy, as well as politics and geopolitics. So, we have to prepare ourselves mentally, intellectually and concretely.

The Global Era tends towards a domination of Technology and Economy. We are ineluctably moving towards an unprecedented way to relate between people and institutions, peoples and enterprises, a new mode of production and consumption, a new way to exchange, to buy and sell, a new infrastructure for health, for education, for culture and, of course, new ways to conduct politics and geopolitics. It will overpass national borders and natural boundaries.

This is the Third Industrial Revolution, after the invention of the steam engine in England (1776), after the first electric plant in the USA (1882). The revolution of electronics, the “e-revolution” is now breaking through, confronting us.

This is also the mark of a New Era in Communications, after the era of printing at the end of the 15th century and the telephone and simultaneous innovations like the telegraph, photography and cinematography at the turn of the 20th century.

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A new culture is emerging, a global culture. It is developing extremely rapidly as Infotech ties the world's people together in an unprecedented way. Scholars and teachers have to address this matter as early and as deeply as possible.

Education should also be a constant attitude of the mind in quest of new answers, new behaviors and new masteries in relation to the world we are living in. Education should also guard the ethical values—which are universal—from the incessant evolution of the Sciences, related Technologies and the situation they generate in different parts of the world.

Allow me to share and discuss with you some insights, as an anthropologist, as a linguist and as a humanist. These are my thoughts as of today, but I am sure they will evolve as time goes by, as new discoveries, implementations and adjustments are made, as crises are overcome and as I, myself, develop knowledge and mastery of it through practice.

However, I think it is necessary to foresee the impact of these new trends in society, the improvements, the problems and the threats they are generating. All of them vary with each culture and society, with each country from the North and from the South.

It is a must to think about them in anticipation, so that new ideas and new visions can arise and influence attitudes and policies, in a positive and constructive way, at the personal, the local, the national and the international levels.

The global era is characterized by a domination of Technology and Economy. This is not new in a way, but the devices and tools, together with the emerging related values and practices, are new and destabilizing.

As we adjusted in the past and are now using with pleasure and skill the previous developments in communication technologies, we have to learn how to enact this one.

E-technology was not a natural component of life in our childhood and university days. Today, the newest technological item is accepted in a friendly and playful manner. The accurate means to appropriate it are explored by youngsters. They even use the new tools as a way to learn about each other and to share ideas.

We cannot but appreciate the natural adaptive skills of our children. They immediately acquire the necessary intellectual skills to surf. Their attention is not one of a broad span as ours is, it is a multifaceted and multitask-oriented one, accurate in a fractal universe.

However, they also have to acquire a capacity for a long and lasting concentration, memory and thought. This is where education comes in.

Our generation is also intimidated. The logic at work is still unmastered by us, unknown to us at the conscious level. We are familiar with a linear thinking process and a memory by association.

Today we are confronted with an order made of discontinuity, multiplicity, random and chaos—which is not mere disorder, but a deeper order—all these notions are integrated by the “uncertainly principle.”

Contemporary physicists and mathematicians are facing the facts and they consider that nothing can be observed without being changed by the very act of observation.

It has been conceived that this paradigm in the Sciences reflects our current cultural experience.¹

The Internet is not center-based, it develops at random as a “web”—*une toile* as we say in French—and its millions of users worldwide are the ones building it up. It is not a given close system, it is an open universe constantly expanding, continuously moving. The metaphor of an ocean and waves, the discernment to select and capture the best ones to surf on, is quite accurate (channels or web surfing, navigating on the hypertext of a Cedrom, or “online,” etc.).

However, in order to navigate in this immensity of information, we need maps and compasses. It is precisely the same role of formal Education in schools, with trained teachers to provide the children with this guidance.

This is because knowledge is not a simple accumulation/compilation of data. Knowledge is the acquisition of instruments of understanding the world surrounding us, of thinking, relating, communicating in one’s life. It stimulates intellectual curiosity, critical faculty and independence of judgment necessary to innovate and discover, for the faculty of thought is the most precious part of ourselves as individuals and the supreme expression of our freedom. We shall go back to this later on.

In our adulthood, we have to enter the era of universal communication. This is a very new dimension to us.

Simple linear systems do not have these life-like unpredictable properties. Our thinking habits and intellectual qualities seem no longer operative in the same way. We are challenged, and it is quite a deal. Hence we have to adjust, we have to co-evolve with the new technologies and we have to develop new cognitive devices, abstract and manual skills.

This will lead to new ways to think, to capture and interpret meaning out of icons, these oversimplified drawings underlined by much more complex situations and

universal applications, and in discontinuity. It is necessary to develop new abstract attitudes, new skills to surf in a nonlinear, fractal universe. Mathematicians and musicians have already explored these mental aptitudes. They are also related to manual skills. These acquisitions need another type of training.

North and South: The Electronic Divide

In order to achieve genuine globalization, we have to find solutions to suppress the electronic divide.

The government of each country, together with international organizations, NGOs and the private sectors like SUN, IBM, MICROSOFT, have to work on this major problem urgently, and they have already started.

Let me first give you some recent data, as provided by *L'Espresso*.²

In the last ten years, the world's set of computers connected to the Internet increased, from 100,000 to 45 million.

Internauts were more than 304 million by March 2001, half of them are in the United States of America and Canada, and 83 million are in Europe. Asia has 70 million *internauts*, half of them are in Japan. Africa has only 2.5 million, 85% are in South Africa. For China, the jump was from 4 million to 10 million in the last eight months, with most of the users in Beijing, Shanghai and some large cities, but the Internet users double every six months in China.

Within this Cyberspace, the links that used to bind us together in so many different ways, in so many types of societies, are going to change very quickly and drastically. Our relationship to others is going to be different and we have to shift to a positive and a constructive attitude.

In the Realm of Culture: the Powerful West and its Eroding Capacities

One of the major threats is the decline of local cultures and the "vanishing away" of many languages. This is valid not only for the national cultural communities of Asia, Oceania, South America and North America, but also for all the various peoples of Europe.

"Vanishing Away" started long ago. Only a few people were aware of it and acted consequently. I would like you to know that a few years ago, an international program was set up to safeguard the endangered languages of the world under the auspices of UNESCO.

English will not become the only spoken and written language, but it will certainly become the dominant international language, the language of Trade and Commerce, the language of the Sciences, the “Latin” of the 21st century, if I may say so as a European.

However, it will not be the prevailing language in the realm of Life and Sentiments, of Literature and the Arts, or the language of Education in many different countries. In the Electronic Academy, the same courses are given in 61 languages already.

Confronted by these compulsory mutations, the people of the world will not accept without reacting. They will not accept being spiritually, intellectually and emotionally uprooted, their language and culture swept away. To them, to all of us I suppose, it is an obvious impoverishment and a striking loss of cultural identity to the benefit of anonymity.

It is our responsibility as scholars, and the responsibility of our respective governments, to struggle to maintain our national and local languages.

As of today in my country of France, no less than 15 commissions are working on the vocabulary of the various domains of science, medicine, economy, finance, communication, electronics, law and politics, so the French can adapt and translate to our national language all the Anglo-Saxon terms flowing in. The task is not an easy one and a complex procedure is to be followed. The proposals have to be approved by the French Academy and other related Ministries before the new words can appear in the Journal Official. Then, they have to be taught to and adopted by the speakers.

To resist this Anglo-Saxon linguistic invasion, the commissioners are forming neologisms. They try to use words that are clearly ours. For example: data warehouse becomes *entrepot des donnees*, hacker: *fouineur*. But in the long run, it is usage that shall prevail.

French being a neo-Romanesque language, most of our basic words are derived from Greek and Latin roots. In this respect, ever since, we are in the process of borrowing and blending too, but not so much with the Anglo-Saxon languages, for they belong to another linguistic family.

But in the Philippines, with its more recent colonial impact and heritage, together with the very structure of Filipino and the 110 related languages present in the archipelago, this calls for different answers and solutions to the problem. Belonging to the western branch of the Austronesian Family, these languages master composition. They are agglutinative and have a high aptitude to integrate in their vocabularies new and alien words as a root without any alteration of the morpho-syntax.

Regarding the ways of life, system values, modes of governance and world-views, I observe in the Philippines a great variety of cultures, a mosaic with opposite

forces at work. Such a complex Heritage is at the same time an infinite cultural wealth and an obstacle to the implementation of a central government administration. I foresee two difficulties, namely:

- Particularism and irredentism may arise as a violent stand against homogenization.
- Simultaneously, another danger is arising: a total split, a total disjunction between the particular and the universal.

Globalization seems to be the new Universality. However, it is achieved through the lowest common denominator, namely homogenization and standardization.

As a result, we can foresee the danger of replacing a universal concern for the world by a multiculturalism or the tendency by each one of the groups to cultivate particular identities (the *kanya-kanya* system).

As a reaction to globalization, it is expected, and somehow legitimate as I have just shown, but at the same time I foresee a real threat of no transcending frontiers, values, and no more tolerance arising. This attitude threatens to forget the human values and rights as universal wisdom.

If we built barriers between each culture, rather than giving each culture the resources and the means to create, survive and irradiate in togetherness with each other, can we reasonably believe that cultural diversity will be better preserved?

In this “chaos-world” where we can no longer foresee or plan in advance, we might have to accept that our identity will keep on changing, even more profoundly, in contact with each other.

At this point, we are confronted by notions difficult to conceive of and even more difficult to implement and put into practice at the personal level.

As a linguist-anthropologist among ancient societies of archipelagoes in Southeast Asia for thirty years, I have dedicated my attention to the intricacy and perfection of local knowledge about Nature, Literatures of the voice and the various aesthetics, Mythologies and related Cosmogonies, ancient modes of production, Customary Law, Ethics and Ancestral Wisdom. I have been the witness and the analyst of the inexhaustible creativity and expressions in the various Arts and Crafts, all the wonders that made up a tangible and an intangible Heritage in this country and in the Nusantara area of civilization. I have tried to contribute, in a modest scale, to its safeguarding.

Knowledge is transmitted by showing and demonstrating, by doing together, by giving names and functions, by contrasting items like plants, by grouping them in sets and subsets, hence building taxonomies that are at the same time fully mastered and semiconsciously articulated into a logical system; silently making the various crafts like weaving; performing rituals exemplifying artistic expressions and instilling a sense of aesthetics and multiple emotions linked to the beauty of patterns and motives, of musical scales, rhythms and melodies, of voices and words making up eloquent and beautiful figures of speech.

This immersion in the natural and cultural world is done without the strict discipline of attending school, as in the ancient courts traditions of Asia and the Western world. It is, rather, aiming at learning to know a specific world, learning to do, learning to live in a given community and learning to be, according to the principles and values of a given society.

There is poetics in the relationship. There is an ethics of the relationship in learning and mastering the many ways to survive and to be an accomplished person in a peculiar world and society.

All these know-how are linked to a transcendental feeling and a sense of belonging, affirming and conveying a cultural identity.

However, as an anthropologist, it also appears to me that the world tends to be more and more “creolized” today. I mean to say that we can observe a fact: the fusion, the blending of cultures.

This is not so new either, but modalities, speeds and scales are new, aleatory, and unequal. In this world and on this planet Earth, we will have to find new ways to relate to Others, for our destinies are bonded from now on.

There is a necessary complex and subtle interplay between the Particular — the sense of a tribe, of a culture, of a nation—and the Universal—the many Human Rights, Education for all, Labor and Leisure for all, Health for all, Food for all, Respect for all the Living, Caring for the Earth, Respect for the Laws, Social justice and Equity between women and men, Harmony as the basic values for any government. We are suffering when these values are violated, as in the time of totalitarian rule or of uncontrolled violence.

It is a must to be able to perceive in our reactions and in our policies the errors and the illusions we are simultaneously forging, at an international level certainly, but also at a national level, in order not to build up more tensions inside each nation-state, leading to exclusion, ostracism, fanaticism, absolutism and war.

Humanistic Insight

At this point, I would like to stress that every human being is not a mere fact, he is also, and above all, a value. Humanism asserts the intrinsic value of man's life before death and the greatness of his potentialities: his faculties, his aspirations in life and his well-being in society.

However, the existence of Man, for a humanist, is and will remain, probably imperfect. It is "an imperfect garden" as Montaigne wrote and as this thought was recently developed by T. Todorov.

Humanists are not utopists. They are distant from revolutionary transformations and radical discourses. They do not conceive of the world as in a continuous progress regarding the moral values of individuals and the political virtues of societies.

A humanist puts his hope and confidence, as J.J. Rousseau did, in a certain "perfectibility" of Man and Society.

However, this "better" will never become a Good forever. It is not an irreversible better, but a fragile, unstable, fluctuant one. It is not certitude nor an acquisition but, rather, an aspiration, a guidance in life.

This is where Education in today's world plays such an important role. The future of Education has to be conceived according to values, knowledge and aesthetics, relevant to each country but also with a respect for universal values.

If there is already, for some countries, an overwhelming access to databases, computer simulations, multimedia and virtual reality as new teaching tools, others will appear, and not necessarily in the West. They will spring from Asia, where 60% of the world population will soon be.

For the young generations, the tools are very poor without guidance on the topics they have to learn, on the data they have to use and the related values they have to set into motion, that they have to refer to in their lives. The transcendental relationship between pupils and teachers, masters and disciples should be cultivated in today's world as a vital antidote to the devastating flow of information.

On the other hand, plurality of cultures is a wealth that should be listened to, enhanced and safeguarded not only for its past but also for its potential creativity in the present and future of a nation.

How is it to edify modern societies that are at the same time genuinely plural and would share a common sense of belonging in one national community?

How is it to teach the cultural communities and the national majority to live together?

How to integrate this diversity within one state is one of the major difficulties. But there are various models of the notion of state and new ones are to be conceived

of and created. The notion of a nation is defined as a community of citizens based on a system of values which each cultural community can identify itself with in a spirit guided by tolerance, mutual respect, reciprocal knowledge and parity.

The local is part of the national, not as a juxtaposition of cultures but as a blending of cultures. This is where intercultural values could be of help to fill in the gaps between communities that used to ignore each other. They could prevail in a world of contact and exchange with more flexible and dynamic identities.

It is the responsibility of each state to take the proper legal, administrative and financial policies to protect the past and encourage the present and the future of their own Heritage. It is most important to cultivate human creativity in the Sciences and Technology, the various Arts and Crafts and the Love of Wisdom.

Thanks to their sensitivity and vision, artists and thinkers can instill better qualities of life in the local communities, as they did in the past. More urgently in today's world, they contribute deeply to the development of their respective societies.

Ancestral Teachings, ancient Wisdoms of Asia and universal values of the Enlightenment in the West are to be cultivated, as we are confronted by uncertainties at the educational, social and political levels.

In the new era we are living, we have to learn **How to know, How to do, How to live together** and **How to be in this world**. These are the four "pillars" which are to underline a life-long Education, as the International Commission on Education for the 21st century recommends.

Our major concern should be **How to live together**, and I would suggest that we do it in the following ways:

- by developing the knowledge about, the respect for and the comprehension of the Other;
- by perceiving and emphasizing what brings the people together, what unites them;
- by taking into account the interlinkage of policies and plans for sustainable development in the interest of each community involved;
- by foreseeing what the whole can bring to a national development and to an international constructive cooperation;
- by recognizing the identity of the Earth itself and by controlling the destructive powers at the nuclear level, and at the level of the various activities of daily life;
- by edifying a more just, peaceful and tolerant world.

The year 2000 was committed by the General Assembly of the United Nations to celebrate Culture and Peace and a special attention was devoted to the Respect of Cultural Diversity.

Let us not make a fetich of technology.

Let us trust our respective creativity.

Notes

1. See Douglas Ruskoff, 1996, 1999.
2. April 27-May 31, 2000.

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