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**GLOBALISATION AND POSTMODERNISM****Mihai Androne, Assoc. Prof., PhD, "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galați**

*Abstract: Globalisation is a contested and highly controversial concept. Just like the concept of postmodernism, in fact. Both concepts refer to the physiognomy of contemporary man marked by the desire to step out of isolation and become perfectly integrated into a dynamic, global, open, prosperous, complex, and free society, by means of science and technique, by means of a new malleable and permissive life philosophy which is pragmatic and individualistic, having abandoned absolute moral standards and the old metaphysical values of the past, and promoting in exchange the new ideals of plurality and diversity. Globalisation and postmodernism constitute a legitimate terminological pair, as there is more and more debate lately on the existence of postmodern globalism or a globalised postmodernity. Although we are living in the globalisation age, there are nevertheless voices contesting the existence of a real connection between globalisation and progress.*

**Keywords: globalisation, postmodernism, pluralism, secularisation, relativism**

The European integration of the Eastern-European countries is a process which takes place within the larger framework of globalisation, during the postmodern era. A citizen of an Eastern-European country who lived in communism and who is now part of the free world has, in other words, more reasons to approach such a topic, relating to globalisation and, implicitly, postmodernism. However, at the same time, the century we live in is upsetting and controversial: upsetting, considering the serious political and military events that take place in this part of the world, and controversial because globalisation and postmodernism are two words related to a few others belonging to the same cultural family: relativism, secularisation, atheism, subjectivism and individualism.

The term itself seems to have appeared for the first time in American English more than half a century ago, although the idea of globalisation is much older<sup>1</sup>. At present, globalisation is perceived as an economic and irreversible phenomenon which we cannot escape. Today, market economy has spread all over the world and under its auspices there is a deeper and deeper integration of the national economies that are in competition, but also in search of progress and prosperity: these last two values are perceived as more important than the preservation of national sovereignty and cultural identity. In the age of globalisation, the borders are less and less relevant: the sought for globality is definitely postmodern.

Although globalisation is, primarily, an economic and financial phenomenon, it also represents a complex reality, with many controversial aspects. Not only is globalisation economic, but also cultural, political, communicational, technological and ecological. It develops in a world dominated by liberalism, democracy, freedom, hedonism, eclecticism<sup>2</sup> and consumerism.

And although globalisation *has a meaning*, it is still "a contested concept that refers to sometimes contradictory social processes", as there are still voices "who denounce modernity

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Aart Scholte, "Globalization", in Barry Jones 2001:613.

<sup>2</sup> Featherstone 1995:76.

and secularism”<sup>3</sup>. And not without reason. In what the economic aspect is concerned, although national economies tighten their connexions more and more, the economic gaps are not in the least eliminated.

It is even more sensitive when it comes to the spiritual and cultural aspects, as *integration* is utterly opposite of terms such as *uniqueness* and *distinctiveness*. Can we live comfortably in a global culture? This is a legitimate question, as, in order to behave similarly and live together in a single globalised village, people from different parts of the world, with specific traditions, should adopt, after all, a shared set of values, principles and standards, i.e., the Western ones, to become, at least to a certain extent, cosmopolitan, and critics of their own theological and philosophical traditions.

Can we legitimately aspire towards a universal ethics, one to disregard the religious factor and to be, at the same time, able to make anyone happy? These pages can only propose some hallmarks, and not to exhaust the topic in order to give a final verdict.

Can we, humans, be happy without identifying, through philosophy and theology, the meaning of our own lives<sup>4</sup> and without having “an intrinsic nature”<sup>5</sup>? Or, rather, do we have every reason to be desperate under these circumstances? French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre admitted that, without God, our existence can no longer be explained – it is contingent, absurd, and meaningless<sup>6</sup>. “If God does not exist, everything is permissible”<sup>7</sup>. Although we live on different continents, we, humans, live in the proximity of the others thanks to the modern means of communication and to the unprecedented development of science and technology. Although we neighbour physically, we are more and more spiritually estranged when we unyieldingly pursue only our personal interests.

The freedom of the Western world is not at all times positive and without disagreeable traits. Thus, the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama made the following remarks in one of his well-known books, proving that the excessive accentuation of freedom to the detriment of authority is bound to seriously affect the existence of social cohesion: “In societies where individuals enjoy more freedom of choice than at any other time in history, people resent all the more the few remaining ligatures that bind them. The danger for such societies is that people suddenly find themselves socially isolated, free to associate with everyone but unable to make the moral commitments that will connect them to other people

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<sup>3</sup> Steger 2003:1. The globalisation-postmodernism pair is legitimate for the good reason that both terms are equally contested “postmodernism is fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political” (Hutcheon 1988:4).

<sup>4</sup> “Science, on the other hand, cannot understand why it itself exists. It does not reveal the meaning of life, provides no guidance.” (Jaspers 1957:38) To put it otherwise, science does not possess, as philosophy and theology, an ethical dimension (Michelman 2008:261).

<sup>5</sup> Rorty 1989:8. In this circumstance, one should not be surprised that man of today no longer knows who he really is. (Heidegger 1991:209, Niebuhr 1941:4).

<sup>6</sup> Sartre 1938:187. “With the supernatural removed from the world-view of modernity, all meaning has been ripped out of the universe and life is left without purpose.” (Baggini 2005:10). See also Camus 1957:183 and Sleasman 2011:3. On the contrary, if our life is “meaningful”, then it is also “worth living”. It is indeed doubtful whether the “meaning of my life” can be “my fundamental project” (Young 2005:5) as long as in the atheistic views, death is a (total and definitive) annihilation of existence.

<sup>7</sup> Sartre 2007:28-29.

in true communities.”<sup>8</sup> If community life is in decline, then we *all* risk of becoming egocentric people, devoid of any higher aspiration, looking only for comfort<sup>9</sup>.

We live in a historical period dominated by functionalism, operationalism, technologism, and they all depersonalise and dehumanise: man lives in a state of alienation, in insecurity and disorientation<sup>10</sup>. Postmodern man is no longer searching for wisdom, but for science. He tends to completely give up *metaphysics* for *physics*. Although science and technology have reached unprecedented heights in our times, the progress has never been accompanied by spiritual evolution.

We live in postmodernism, i.e., in an age dominated by relativism, a problem of interest for philosophers, sociologists and theologians. Relativism equates disorder; it presupposes a radical conceptual upheaval<sup>11</sup> of our ideas of science, rationality and man. If there is no authentic and constant human nature along the centuries, then, there is no ethical universality or an ethical truth either. In other words, Kant’s question, *What should I do?*, can have more possible answers, depending on the historical and socio-cultural context in which is placed the one who answers to it<sup>12</sup>, and also depending on his/ her personal preference.

Everything depends on a certain perspective, everything is reduced to a simple opinion, everything represents a mere point of view and the result of an emotional preference – these are the statements to which our cultural relativism may be reduced<sup>13</sup>. Relativist postmodernism arbitrarily separates facts from their signification: the ideas “there are no facts, only interpretations”<sup>14</sup> may become extremely dangerous when applied in the field of ethics, i.e., in the area of interpersonal relationships.

Raymond Boudon maintains that relativism is, primarily, an effect of the egalitarianism promoted by the democratic political regime. If all the individuals who share different values are considered equal, then equality is the only incontestable truth, and any other truth vanishes<sup>15</sup>, together with the notion of objectivity: if all men are equal, then their statements are also equal, though they may be in complete opposition.

“Modern man, instead of attempting to raise himself to truth, seeks to drag truth down to his own level”<sup>16</sup>. This explains why subjectivism perfectly matches pluralism and the more and more prevailing sense of insecurity felt in contemporary society. In postmodernism, there are no longer strict, predetermined, inflexible moral principles dictated by the State or the Church, whilst reality is complicated: it generates ambivalent moral choices. Postmodern

<sup>8</sup> Fukuyama 1999:48. “And the culture of intensive individualism, which in the marketplace and laboratory leads to innovation and growth, spilled over into realm of social norms, where it corroded virtually all forms of authority and weakened the bonds holding families, neighborhoods, and nations together.” (Fukuyama 1999:5-6).

<sup>9</sup> Fukuyama 1992:328.

<sup>10</sup> Rauche 1974:vii.

<sup>11</sup> Rios 2006:120.

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer C. Manion, « Moral Philosophy », in Taylor and Winquist 2001:253.

<sup>13</sup> Boudon 1996:170.

<sup>14</sup> KSA 12:315. Boudon 1996:179.

<sup>15</sup> René Guénon maintains that equality is a lay dogma of the present-day Western world (Guénon 2001:71). Gilles Lipovetsky notes that the modern age has morally equated the believer and the unbeliever (Lipovetsky 1992:39-40). In other words, the century of secularisation and egalitarianism annulled the hierarchical difference (Lipovetsky 1992: 40) between Christians and atheists (and, inherently, between their ideas). However, as René Guénon argues, negating the differences between men can only bring chaos to society (Guénon 2001:70).

<sup>16</sup> Guénon 2001:66.

society has given infallibility a mortal blow. Zygmunt Bauman suggestively describes the complicated situation of man nowadays, determined by his lack of moral certainties: “With the *pluralism* of rules (and our times are the times of pluralism) the moral choices (and the moral conscience left in their wake) appear to us intrinsically and irreparably *ambivalent*. Ours are the times of *strongly felt moral ambiguity*. These times offer us freedom of choice never before enjoyed, but also cast us into a state of uncertainty never before so agonizing. We yearn for guidance we can trust and rely upon, so that some of the haunting responsibility for our choices could be lifted from our shoulders. But the authorities we may trust are all contested, and none seems to be powerful enough to give us the degree of reassurance we seek. In the end, we trust no authority, at least, we trust none fully, and none for long: we cannot help being suspicious about any claim to infallibility. This is the most acute and prominent practical aspect of what is justly described as the ‘postmodern moral crisis’.”<sup>17</sup>

Postmodernism is characterised by great, tolerant, ethical flexibility, turning *right* and *wrong* in *functional values* of limited viability, historically perishable<sup>18</sup>. Postmodernism contests the legitimacy and scientific value of the traditional Western explanatory systems, as well as their ability to establish moral, social and political practices. “Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives.”<sup>19</sup> Postmodern science and knowledge no longer means consensus, but a quest for instability<sup>20</sup>. Postmodernism resorts, to a great extent, to aphorisms and metaphors<sup>21</sup>, it brings forth a multiplicity of meanings (marked by ambiguity and hazard)<sup>22</sup>, and interpretations; disorder becomes its constant: it is no longer an exception in postmodernism<sup>23</sup>. Postmodernism aspires to be a battle for emancipation from any tyranny<sup>24</sup> (be it conceptual, epistemological, moral or of any other nature).

Nevertheless, postmodernism weakens its own position with such a stand. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that some authors doubt the existence of a *postmodernity*, whereas other intellectuals prefer to speak of *postmodernities*<sup>25</sup>, in the plural. A possible explanation for this predicament is that the postmodern discourse is under the sign of difference, heterogeneity, multiplicity of the cultural contexts, and, implicitly, of the

<sup>17</sup> Bauman 1993:20-21. Harvey 1990:10-11.

<sup>18</sup> Zygmunt Bauman (Bauman 1993:37) resorts to a text by Robert Musil, which we shall quote in French: “Qui peut encore se passionner pour de millénaires bavardages sur le bien et le mal, quand on a établi que ce ne sont pas des ‘constantes’, mais des ‘valeurs fonctionnelles’, de sorte que la bonté des œuvres dépend des circonstances historiques, et la bonté des hommes de l’habileté psychotechnique avec laquelle on exploite leurs qualités!” (Musil 1995:46).

<sup>19</sup> Lyotard 1984:xxiv. Evaldas Nekrasas, “Positivism, Post-positivism and Postmodernism”, in Baranova 2005:152 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Fredric Jameson, “Foreword”, in Lyotard 1984: xix.

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche answers as follows to the question “What is truth?”: “A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations”; the truths, adds Nietzsche, are just “illusions” (Friedrich Nietzsche, “Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne”, in KSA 1:880-881). In this case, the proposition that truth is an illusion becomes the new truth of postmodernism, which we should not doubt! See also Hart 2003:7.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida 1972:81, 109.

<sup>23</sup> Lefebvre and Letiche 1999:12.

<sup>24</sup> Baghramian 2004: 81.

<sup>25</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Theology and the condition of postmodernity: a report on knowledge”, in Vanhoozer 2003:3.

meanings, of the paradox, duality and duplicity<sup>26</sup>, of overcoming the limits and excesses<sup>27</sup>: for Jacques Derrida, “il n’y a pas de hors-texte.”<sup>28</sup>

There is no unity of views on postmodernism: it has multiple meanings. The supporters of this intellectual movement contest the possibility of the objective knowledge of reality, the existence of truth and the unity of the human ego. Postmodernism is, par excellence, unconventional, contesting, critical – it attacks the intellectual basis of Western civilisation<sup>29</sup>.

If the Western intellectual tradition is a road, then the postmodern scholars drive on its wrong side. They prefer indeterminacy to determinism, diversity to unity, difference to synthesis, complexity to simplification, the unique to the general, relativism to objectivity, and fragmentation to totalisation<sup>30</sup>.

Philosophically and ethically speaking, the world we live in is in quandary; present-day man aims to reconcile unconciliating facts, which contradict and exclude each other. He wishes to be the sovereign creator of his own moral and, at the same time, to feel secure and permanently protected by it<sup>31</sup>. In this context, the critical departure from postmodern philosophy may seem to many a salvaging solution.

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<sup>26</sup> Hutcheon 2002:1.

<sup>27</sup> Habermas, 1985:279.

<sup>28</sup> Derrida 1997:158. This proposition can be also understood in the sense that there is no truth outside the text: in other words, truth is an effect of the discourse and of its governing rules (Phillips 2007: 24).

<sup>29</sup> Cahoone 1996:1-2.

<sup>30</sup> Rosenau 1992:8.

<sup>31</sup> “I want to believe - and so do you - in a complete, transcendent, and immanent set of propositions about right and wrong, *findable* rules that authoritatively and unambiguously direct us how to live righteously. I also want to believe - and so do you - in no such thing, but rather that we are wholly free, not only to choose for ourselves what we ought to do, but to decide for ourselves, individually and as a species, what we ought to be. What we want, Heaven help us, is simultaneously to be perfectly ruled and perfectly free, that is, at the same time to discover the right and the good and to create it.” (Leff 1979:1229).

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