UNIVERSALISM AND GLOBAL MEDIA WORLD

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Summary: This paper is dedicated to the relation between universalism as a philosophical point of view and global civilization of knowledge created by mass media. Author tries to convince us that both terms – universalism and globalism are not synonyms. Globalism based on world mass media has to win its own disadvantages to be real universalism.

Key words: universalism, globalism, mass media, global civilization

Introduction

Universalistic projects are not the ideology of our times. It was already in the Ancient world where we could encounter the universalist ideas which constituted the foundation of empires and religions – in our cultural circle *Pax Romana* and Christianity which brought universalist soteriological message with itself. However, neither Roman legions nor Christian missionaries preaching Gospel hundreds years after the collapse of the Empire managed to create a global civilization. The Romans entrenched themselves in their borders creating a great fortress in the basin of the Mediterranean Sea. Christianity crossed the borders but from the technical point of view it did not cope well with the evangelization on a global scale. This problem, however, did not concern only Rome or Christianity. Surely it can be said that every empire and religion, having universalist ambitions, encountered the barrier delimited by space [Piskozub 1995].

Overcoming space occurred gradually and we owe it to the development of communication technologies. At first they were connected with means of transport. However, in the period of industrialization also our physicality was overcome. By means of telegraph and radio people were able to send messages to other people without the physical contact. Even thinkers who were skeptical towards the universalist ideas noticed the foundations of universalist civilization in this technological revolution [Toynbee 1991].

Nevertheless, a real revolution occurred in the second half of the 20th century when TV, computers, mobile phones appeared and when a global network - Internet started to develop. The world, using the metaphor of Marshall McLuhan, became a global village in which a global tribe exists [2001: 179].

In this article I consider the relationship between the development of means of mass communication and universalism. A significant issue of semasiological nature: *is universalism a synonym to globalism?* In other words, *is global civilization ex definitione a universal civilization?* I will try to solve this problem in the paragraph below. The solution for this problem will allow us to answer the question

whether Mc Luhan's "global village" and "global tribe" resulting from global IT and communication network, have universalist traits.

Uniwersalism – what is it?

In the philosophy of history and the civilizational thought we deal with two opposing doctrines: universalism and pluralism [Krzysztofek 1991]. This dichotomous division does not indicate the variety of attitudes. Therefore, it seems necessary to complete it with some indirect attitudes [Modrzejewski 2009a]. And we can regard (1a) extreme pluralism, (1b) moderate pluralism, (2a) moderate universalism and (2b) extreme universalism as such attitudes.

Extreme pluralism accepts the existence of only so-called particular civilizations and also particular optics of philosophy of history and civilization. The idea of universalist civilization is perceived as an expression of Western expansionism or as post-modernistic delusion leading in fact to the uniformization of culture [e.g. Koneczny 1935; Huntington 1997; Kołakowski 1984; Tibi 1997]. Moderate pluralism assumes as actually existing particular civilizations as well as particular optics of philosophy of history but at the same time it allows for the possibility of the future creation of universal civilization which will be a form of globalised particular civilization. However, in general it usually concerns Western civilization [Toynbee 1991 and 2000; Znaniecki 1990; Maritain 1937; Piskozub 2003]. Other kind of moderate particularism treats the universal status of a given civilization e.g. Christian civilization, only in a symbolic meaning [e.g. Dawson 1958; Ratzinger 2005].

On the other hand, moderate universalism accepts pluralism of particular civilizations and cultures as well as historical, cultural and civilization universality [inter alia Coudenhove – Kalergi 1998; Novak 1993]. This attitude is also characteristic of Karol Wojtyła – John Paul II [Modrzejewski 2009b] and other Polish universalists, inter alia Józef Warszawski [Górski 2007: 89-96] and Jerzy Braun [Łętocha 2007: 83-84]. While extreme universalism, which affirms the existence of only one civilization, may take either the exclusivist form as a domain of one cultural circle, it usually concerns the Western world or Christianity, but also some non-Western societies claim the right to exclusiveness to the use of the category "civilised", or the syncretic form, when the local cultures "melt" in historical and civilization oneness (e.g. bahaism, the New Age movement). Syncretism has also its linguistic dimension. It leads to the search for an original language, some kind of pre-language, which would include all contemporarily existing and extinct languages [Eco 2002: 367].

Universalism may refer to current reality when it constitutes some kind of universalist interpretation of reality, or to the future when it is a project of organizing new civilizational order. Consequently, we have two approaches: realistic and ideological (idealistic). Realistic approach indicates so-called generalities, which are the elements constituting currently and really existing universal civilization. What may be understood by generalities is the form of human activity manifesting itself in many cultures (science, technology, art, sport) or values uniting the whole mankind (love, truth, human work, universal human rights, basic ethical rules). Realistic universalism may also have philosophical background indicating ontological messages, supporting the existence of universal human community, universal culture, history and civilization. Idealistic universalism is at most the desire or postulate of building common community connecting people from various cultural circles, nations and ethnic groups.

A leading Polish expert at universalism – Janusz Kuczyński – created a decalogue of "real universalism" [1986: 116-118]. Postulates of many universalist trends are synthesized in it. According to Janusz Kuczyński "real universalism" should (1) in ontological and epistemological respect express both diversified world

as well as powers integrating it; (2) on axiological level include variety of values regardless of time and place of their creation; (3) in historiosophic respect present the world in the process of its constant development; (4) not avoid assessment, but the assessment free from the attempts of domination or violence. The acknowledgment of the superiority of a given piece of work of a given culture with respect to analogical piece of work of other culture is giving justice to certain achievements. This attitude should not be connected with the attempt of subjecting certain cultures to other cultures; (5) transform mankind in the direction of awareness of human community, its full unity, in which antagonisms and contradictions will be transformed into a creative tension; (6) transform mankind in the direction of mutually enriching dialectics of individuality of individuals, groups, nations and comprehensive community; (7) go beyond differences and not oppose them, its aim shall be metaphilosophy which may in an intellectual way transcendent the signs and notions of fights, beyond the domination of one culture over the other and its theoretical justifications; (8) as a theoretical reflection search for its premises in generalities such as science, logics, technology, sport and also in human existence; (9) on the ethical and axiological grounds support international solidarity among all the people and nations having their roots in common lot and common opposition towards numerous global threats; (10) be both realistic and optimistic despite the awareness of the drama of the situation of inevitable replacement of exclusion of some values at expense of other.

Returning to the question asked above, we notice that not all forms of universalism are identical with globalism. Especially exclusivist universalism – already on the quantity level – does not have globalist signs. Universal civilization is at most potentially global. However, the difference of a philosophical nature is more important than quantitative proportions (geographical range). Globalism is associated with spontaneous phenomena. Although they are the result of human activity e.g. in the sphere of technology or interpersonal or intercultural communication, they are not included in a certain philosophical context which would either disclose universalist sources and human aims (realistic universalism) or would be understood as a scenario of activity including the vision of universal community supposed to concentrate the efforts of the architects of social order as well as common people (idealistic universalism.)

Globalism is deterministic in its nature. It is a consequence of economic globalization, technological revolution and the promotion of certain cultural patterns on a global scale – so-called Hollywood culture, which may lead to cultural uniformization and in turn to the disappearance of cultural differences and particular identities. Such a form of globalism sometimes clashes with universalist philosophy or at least with some of its forms – e.g. such as the opinions of Janusz Kuczyński quoted above.

Nevertheless, supporting globalization is not the same as supporting universalism. Universalism, regardless of its realistic or idealistic version, is a philosophical awareness – metaphilosphy, whereas globalism is only a range – to tell the truth a global range – of phenomena occurrence, political, economic or cultural impact and attitudes. Therefore, it is relatively easy to confuse globalization and its final result – global civilization with universalism and universal civilization. It concerns both critics and skeptics of the other (e.g. Toynbee, Barber, in a way Huntington), as well as its enthusiasts (e.g. Fukuyama) who interpret global phenomena as the elements of world universal civilization. Universalism and universal civilization are a certain intellectual construction even if they are based on realistic premises. Globalism and global civilization are a factual state, social, economic, cultural and political reality.

Mass media – universal or global?

The fact that at present mass media have a global character should not be questionable. Especially in the era of the Internet and social media and the commonness in the use of English, present communication and information network has a really global range. Another thing is the issue whether the opinion concerning the appearance of "global tribe" is justified. However, it is not the issue which I have defined for the purpose of this article. I am interested whether in the context of global media we can talk about universalism. And if so, what is the condition for the universality of media?

In my opinion by definition global media are not universalist, that is participating in the creation of universal civilization. However, a condition for a universal community, culture or civilization, especially in its personalistic understanding [Modrzejewski 2009b] is some kind of universal communicativeness allowing for a mutual understanding and activity. And this, if universalism has globalist ambitions, requires global channels of communication and information. Social media play such a role. It constitutes a tool of uniformization, building universal community or universal civilization. However, it does not forejudge its universalism – obviously universalism in philosophical sense. Its universalism depends on consciously, and not only accidentally and spontaneously defined mission and attitude towards universal values such as human rights, justice, solidarity and in particular, with regards to the functions which media has, truth.

Global media and global media culture may be even interpreted as a contradiction of real universalism. Uniformization which globalised mass media may lead to is in opposition to the universalist principles which I have presented above.

Despite the fact that uniformization takes a rather mild form, its consequences have a global range, which has not been achieved by other uniformization projects such as nation-state dismissing and eliminating local traditions, languages and identities. Obviously speaking about global uniformization behind which there is media, I mean unformizing power of Hollywood culture which is most often associated with cultural globalization. Here we encounter the signs of mild media colonization which carries with itself or promotes rather than imposes defined for American culture cultural patterns, needs, values, traditions and styles of life. Giving it in a light, funny form causes that they are very attractive [Pradová 2009: 188]. Popular culture which is created by American media concerns and various local mutation and cooperators reaches almost every corner of the world. It is easily acquired by the representatives of various cultures and civilizations due to the fact that it flatters the average taste of its recipients. It occurs with some harm towards the national cultures. In the conditions of global competition, its proponents cannot face oligopolies from the United States of America and therefore, so-called high culture becomes an elitist good and its present creators more and more often move towards pop culture creating pieces of art basically not different from the American prototypes. Benjamin Barber – an American sociologist, accurately notices that pseudo-universalist world order which is being formed by means of media appears to be nothing more but only a omnipresent American provincialism, dubbed into various languages and financed by multinational co-producers [Barber 1997: 115]. The expansion of American (pop) culture leads to the uniformization of needs, customs, principles, norms and social values as well as patterns of behaviour. Therefore, the remark of Ewa Polak - a political scientist – researching civilizational transformations seems to be apt: "American mass culture whose symbols are inter alia: Walt Disney movies, MTV, Madonna, fitness clubs, Michael Jackson, coca cola, multiplex cinemas, Adidas shoes, fast foods, (...) soap operas and sitcoms (most of the abovementioned names do not have their national equivalents) through its

simplicity, attractive form and market generality has carried out expansion in all the regions of the world. (...) American creations of mass cultures are an example to follow for other countries and they serve not only as entertainment but also instill new values and habits when the opportunity occurs. It is getting more and more difficult to distinguish between *one's own* and *foreign*. Almost all the world watches the same films, listens to the same music and reads the same gossip magazines and guidebooks indicating how to live, wear jeans and T-shirts, has the same film and sport idols, is subject to the influence of advertisements and tries to achieve the success in an American style" [Polak 2001: 23]. Obviously generality used by Ewa Polak in this fragment is not a sign of universalism. It is only a synonym of commonness. Cultural uniformization being realized by means of global media is only – using Platonic imagery – a shadow of real universalism, if not its negation – anti-universalism.

Global media does not provide us with ontological premises for the creation of universal community and civilization. Interpersonal contacts do not have the signs of permanency and depth which would be the foundation of universalism. Contacts in the era of global information are rather compulsive, superficial and limited to the exchange of short information. It may be symbolized by *text message (sms)*, which conveys information in a very concise manner. However, it does not constitute the basis for taking up a dialogue with another person, it does not uncover the psychical and emotional depth of other person. On its basis it will not be possible to build a permanent interpersonal relations, constituting a *sine qua non* condition for a successful implementation of universalist projects. Neither information sent by means of modern communication technologies nor media messages constitute the foundation for the reveling cognition of people, cultures and nations. In media messages there are enough mental shortcuts, distortions, stereotypes and prejudices. Text is often replaced by suggestive images which leave their stamp on human imagination and way of thinking. Nevertheless, they do not lead to the understanding of "otherness" but to the creation of superficial and sometimes even false knowledge about it. As Slavomír Gálik – a philosopher and ethicist – accurately notices, in the contemporary world, in which the Internet dominates as a basic source of information, thinking is often shortened, chaotic and without paying attention to information and logical argumentation [Gálik 2012: 254].

Permanent foundation for the universal ethics cannot be created on the basis provided by global mass media. Patterns created by celebrities of media and pop culture have the nature of quickly changing fashions, trends and fads. They are accompanied by atrophy of traditional values such as truth, loyalty, responsibility. Instead of axiology, there is consumption which reduces the subjectivity of people, limiting them to the role of consumers of images and texts [Gálik 2012: 256].

Nevertheless, as it was mentioned above, global mass media may become a tool for universalism: creating universal community of people, universal culture and civilization. However, the condition is to create a media culture favourable to universalism. This aim can be achieved by media upbringing. Its aim should be to gain media competences and skills, especially the acquisition of ability to think critically [Petranová 2011: 401]. Media upbringing can be referred to both recipients and senders of media announcements. Nowadays in the era of social media, this division loses its significance. We are, or to be precise, depending on the circumstances, we become either recipients or senders of media announcements. This state is defined as pro-sumption (being a producer and a consumer at the same time). Therefore, media upbringing should be treated complementarily. In the case which interests us it is the media upbringing for the benefit of universalist awareness, media upbringing should be enriched both by knowledge about intercultural communication and cultural differences. It seems advisable to create

the attitudes of openness and tolerance. The recipient should be sensitized towards the understating the sense of received announcements. He should be equipped with the ability to think critically which may protect him against accepting simplified images of reality.

The aim of media upbringing for universalism should be the creation of the attitude of readiness to meet and openness towards other people or other cultures. In the ultimate sense communication is a kind of meeting of a person with a person [Mikułowski Pomorski 2007: 28-29]. Present communication technologies enable us to go beyond the restrictions and limitation of our physicality. And as such they may become a tool for creating a universal community. However, much depends on how this tool will be used. And this is the core of the mission of media upbringing. At present global info-zone causes to create a global civilization. But, as I have already mentioned, globalism is not the same as universalism or at least it is not always relevant to treat both terms as synonyms. Modern communication technology does not determine universalist projects in the same degree as global civilization. For global civilization is an elementary condition while for universalist community is only a tool. The range of universalism and even the implementation of universalist ideas greatly depend on this tool. Nevertheless, it is not the carrier of information that is important but the content conveyed by its means, which may serve the creation of universal community, but it may also move us away from the realization of universalist ideas. Media will become universal when they realize universalist mission - unifying people in the name of common values. At the present stage of its development we can only speak about global media. Only when media is filled with content and people are prepared to understand this content, media may serve universalism.

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