



Jakub Patočka

Globalisation is not like rain

Globalisation and antiglobalisation in cultural context

In this speech originally held at the Dreamlike Book Fair in Pula, Croatia in December 2002, Jakub Patočka dissects some of the prevailing views on globalisation and concludes that rather than being inevitable, globalisation is a manmade process upon which society needs to act.

Let me begin with a clear statement: I firmly believe that any culture deserving its name is standing on the side of antiglobalisation. I will try to give you a couple of reasons why I believe so.

First, what is globalisation? Where has the word come from, after all? Who else, if not the distinguished audience of a dreamlike book festival, should take the chance to think of the meaning of the words by tracking down their origins? The tracks are astonishingly short in this case, anyway. Does anyone remember the word globalisation being used in the 80s? Surely no, and this is not a special feature of the somewhat isolated world of Central and Eastern Europe. The word simply has not been out there. Take any sociological book published in the 70s or first half of the 80s and go through its index, you will never find this word, at least not in its current meaning. The Czech dictionary of foreign words, published in the early 90s suggests that globalisation is a special alternative method of education. The new Croatian dictionary suggests only as a third possible meaning: *Proces povezivanja financijskih i industrijskih aktivnosti na svjetskom trzistu*. I believe this is correct and the word is so new because the process has not required a special title until recently when it became the key principle of organizing of the world matters.

The advocates of globalisation like to say that to protest against it resembles protesting against something such as rain because both processes occur naturally. This statement, however charming it may sound, fails to match the reality. The people on the streets of Seattle, Quebec City, Prague, Genoa and dozens of capitals throughout the Third World have not been protesting against rain. They have been protesting a sophisticated and ever more complicated web (*proces povezivanja*) of multilateral trade agreements, transnational bureaucracies, misleading mainstream media imageries, and other technocratic authoritative structures, all of which fuel the engine of economic globalisation. The predominant characteristic of globalisation is that it expropriates the legitimate democratic decision-making structures from their power and delivers it to non-transparent, non-accountable and ever less manageable transnational corporations whose major and legally binding obligation is to make profits for its shareholders.

The key components of what we can call the "Corporate Globalisation Model" or neoliberalism include growth for growth that is fuelled by unrestricted exploitation of the environment and natural resources, cultural homogenization based on intense promotion of consumerism, economic monoculturalization including conversion of local, national and regional economies, some of those largely self-reliant, into the socially and environmentally harmful export-oriented production for the global trade, dismantling of public health, social and environmental programs as if all those were illegitimate constraints to the growth.

All of this is the globalisation and it is about as natural as an acid rain. Globalisation is a process that comes out as a result of both intentional and unintentional impacts of particular decisions made by particular people. If anything, globalisation — with its notion that through the global free trade the humankind will terminate all the problems once and for all — is the last great utopia, the last meganarrative. After all if you see the shiny happy faces of globalizers, don't they remind you of the faces of the self-confident young communists whose confidence came just from the same kind of para-religious believe that communism will prevail once and for all? They, too liked to talk about the end of history; for them communism was coming as well as a kind of a rain; a kind of a heavy acid rain one may like to note after the experience. It was brilliantly and prophetically noted by the Czech philosopher and the first President of Czechoslovakia Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk almost one hundred years ago, that the liberals obsessed with the economy who deny the moral foundations of society have been and are nothing but a kind of Marxists. Thus, it can be argued, the most solid basis for saying no to globalisation is the basis of democratic realism.

This allows me to come a bit further and break the confines of this debate I have accepted up until now. We have more choices than to preach globalisation or say we are "anti". We can say we have a better alternative. Just a month ago, there was a book entitled *Alternatives to Economic Globalisation* with the subtitle *A Better World Is Possible* published by the International Forum on Globalisation. This is a unique club of leading intellectuals from Europe, Northern America and the Third World who have worked on a profound critique of globalisation process and alternatives to it even before the first major protests in Seattle grabbed the attention of the world media.

The alternative model they propose and I largely subscribe to, is based on ten core principles:

1. New Democracy — not only the party politics structures, but civil society and its ever broadening scope of participation on decision making; in the Czech republic we would perhaps say it is a masarykian vision of democracy.
2. Subsidiarity — the decisions made should take place as close to the citizens influenced by them as possible.
3. Ecological Sustainability — the economy has to respect the natural constraints.
4. Common Heritage — that includes three different categories of resources; first: natural resources, water, air and that like; second: culture and knowledge; and third: modern common resources, like social security and public health care. None of those real foundations of any decent livelihood and civilization should be subject to the global trade as it is the case today.
5. Diversity — both cultural and economic diversity are key for the vitality of any society and civilization, and must be protected against the potentially harmful impacts of trade.
6. Human Rights — they do not include only civil and political rights but as

well cultural, economic and social rights. If human rights are in conflict with a subsidiary, i.e. a local ruler is waging terror on his fellow-citizens, the universal human rights should trump.

7. Jobs, livelihood, employment — not only the rights and needs of workers in the formal sector, but the livelihood needs of an increasing number of people in the informal sector and those who are underemployed must be addressed.

8. Food security and safety — new rules of trade must recognize that food production for the local communities must be in the top of the list of priorities for the agriculture.

9. Equity — a century ago a tough businessman named J.P. Morgan suggested the CEO should not make more than twenty times the income of the least paid worker. 50 years ago a leading Czech democrat and the best Czech journalist of the twentieth century Ferdinand Peroutka, that time in exile as the CEO of the Czech branch of Radio Free Europe, in his essay Democratic Manifesto presented the fact that the gap in incomes of the poor and of the rich was shrinking in the West, as if it was a feature of vital strength of the free democratic world. Today, in the US the average CEO makes 485 times the income of the average worker. This has to change, for social justice and equity — among nations, within nations, between ethnic groups, between classes, and between women and men — are cornerstones of sustainable society.

10. The precautionary principle — it is the opposite of the risk assessment procedures applied by the current world trade system. The precautionary principle lays the burden of proving harmlessness of any new devices on which the industry wants to make profits, on the industry itself. Today, the practice is contrary: the civil society has to prove the harmfulness of any new devices introduced. This usually takes time during which serious damages may occur.

Let me make here a short note on the technology passion, or technology tomfoolery would be perhaps more accurate way to call it. Some of the advocates of globalisation would like us to believe that it is all about the new amazing technology. We did not use the word internet in the 80s either, they would perhaps argue. The precautionary principle brings some democratic realism to the technology zealots as well: of course it is great to have the internet, otherwise I would not be able to send emails to my friends for free and in an instant. At the same time without global communication devices of this kind there would hardly be the global terrorism of current scope, nor would there be the global economic speculation that is in a matter of days able to devastate through virtual digit games the real national economies based on a lifelong work of hundreds of thousands of people. Even the technology, any kind of technology including internet or mobile phones, not talking about TV, has to be subordinated to the democratic scrutiny and regulation.

Now, last but not least, what should the role of cultural media in this debate be? I think as we are speaking of largely non-commercial media, the task is an essential one. The commercial media are corporations themselves and they would not cover many of the issues critical for the public to understand the real nature of globalisation. The fact that over 50.000 black voters were excluded from the voters lists in Florida before the last US presidential elections, the fact that the Green party candidate Ralph Nader had larger number of people coming to his rallies than both the major parties' candidates, the fact that in India dozens of farmers cheated by the biotech corporations like Monsanto committed suicide swallowing the herbicides that they bought from those corporations only to be driven by them to bankruptcy - any of those and plenty of more similar fact are not covered by vast majority of the mainstream media. It is symptomatic that one of the few exceptions, the British newspaper The Guardian is published not by a corporation but by a charity. My newspaper, Literární noviny had its golden era in my country in the late sixties when it was

an island of the free thinking on politics, society, civilization and culture in a land dominated by a political monopoly. I think the time is coming for cultural magazines to assume once again such a role and work systematically on the broadening of the space for non-commercial communication in a world dominated by corporate monopolies. The reason is at least twofold. Literature is under the strong pressure of consumerism so it is completely justified to fight back; and let us not forget that the social change usually comes with a strong involvement of the intellectual elite.

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