

# TO HAVE OR TO BE TRACING EUROPEAN HERITAGE – THE PERMEATION OF CULTURES

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## ***Abstract***

*On the verge of the third millennium, the all encompassing diversity and hyperconnectivity which unconditionally surpass standard forms and hierarchical structures are the main characteristics of a changing world. That which has been created through centuries is becoming the collective heritage of humankind thanks to the transference of inventions, ideas, information, products and technology from one civilization to another. The subsistence of humankind asks the question “to have or to be”, a note for everyone who searches for the truth and the meaning of existence in their individual choices or collective predication. That is in the essence of the creation and development of the European idea, its identity and continuity. The dominant values of the European culture have never been of sole significance. Instead, both those values and their counterparts are significant. The encounter, fruitful for diversification, antagonisms, competition and complements, is important for the creation and development of the European culture. Its essence is in dialogues and critical rationality contrary to taboos and imposed solutions. That’s not Eurocentrism, but the opulence of diversity which is in the essence of the individual’s spirit and fate. That is where the strength, sustainability and universality of the European idea lie.*

## ***Key word***

*Europe, culture, diversity, heritage, future.*

## Introduction

In the shadow of conflicts, conquests and the destruction of war, motivated by larceny and the desire for domination, which have marked the history of the mankind, cultures have permeated and built bridges across civilizations, therefore connecting them.

Far from the ecstasy of the conflicts of interest and civilizations, the history of the world has noted the tenuous webs of cultural heritage of different peoples: the expansion of Christianity through Europe during the time of the Roman empire, the introduction of scientific ideas during the Umayyad conquest of North Africa and Southern Europe (in particular, Spain) and the establishing of trade between Europe, Japan and China in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

With time, through building its integrity on the permeation of diverse cultures, Europe has become the synonym for societal pluralism, conflict and complexity. With all difficulty, Europe has proven that the diversity of race, ethnicity and individuals isn't an obstacle to freedom and progress.

The embodiment of Europe's magnificent historical experience, contained in its openness towards all civilizations, has become the synonym of and the key to planetary progress, as the assumption of the others' experience cannot only protect one's own, but also enrich it with one's own. Compared to the ancient worlds, the European world has stood out through its enhanced care for the advancement of humanity. Great European thinkers (Husserl, Valery, Musil, Heidegger, Huxley, Sartre, Levinos, etc.) provided the meaning to the European world which rose above particular, local values and perspectives, towards the establishment of an all-encompassing, collective human world. Their dream of the Europeanization of humanity is a magnificent vision of a New World. The strength of Europe's humane dedication and tolerance, which has come from its own destructive experience, reassures everyone in contact with others and others different from themselves – to have a look at the source of spiritual wealth for themselves, for others and for their unity. Once we exchange the divisions and conflicts, effects of cultural diversity of the past, with awareness of a collective fate, we can get to a future of solidarity and existential certainty through the relativization of conflict sources of the past. Through the current confrontation of past diversity and antagonisms they can seem creative compared to those who experienced them first hand and to whom they were irreconcilable and, therefore, destructive. The experience of the European unity after WW2, which not only gives faith to the essence of European identity, but sets an example to the world, goes to

that end. Hence, with the great fears of today's populists, the great European thinkers' dream of Europeanization is becoming a reality.

### **Tracing European heritage – The permeation of cultures**

1. Since the individual's departure from the cave the history of humankind has been marked by the transference of cultural advancement from one group to another – from one civilization to another. For instance, until recently paper and printing have been considered vital characteristics of Western civilization, even though they existed in China for centuries before being brought into Europe. The same goes for the magnetic compass, which enabled the development of grand inventions that brought the Western hemisphere into contact with the rest of the world. Mathematical concepts have made their way through the cultures. Trigonometry comes from Ancient Egypt and the numerical system used throughout today's world was created in India, although the Europeans call them Arabic numerals, as the Arabs were middlemen through whom the numerical system made its way into medieval Europe. Numerous works of classical Greek philosophy emerged in Arabic translations first, only to be translated into Latin or other spoken languages of Western Europe.

Many values associated with the cultural heritage of the Western civilization originated *outside of it*, often in the Middle East or in Asia. For instance, chess originated in India, gunpowder comes from China and various mathematical concepts – from the Muslim world. The Muslim conquest of Spain (the Umayyad conquest of Hispania) in the 8<sup>th</sup> century made Spain the center from which scientific knowledge of astronomy, medicine, optics and geometry was spread into the Western Europe, as it was more advanced in the Mediterranean countries and in the East. Western Europe later experienced growth and established predominance in the domain of science and technology, built from the scientific foundation. Western science and technology started to spread throughout the world, not only in the USA or Australia, but to non-European cultures, with Japan being the most noticeable example.

The history of the trade of cultural advancement and its evolution into the collective heritage of humankind stands for more than cultural diversity. It means that certain cultural goods are not only diverse, but their mass usage points to the fact that they are *better* or more suitable to the individual's needs at various levels of the civilizational development. The fact that people, whether they are European, African, Asian or any other, have been willing to

leave their own cultural goods behind in order to replace them with others, originating from other cultures, proves that the trade has been *more effective*. Arabic numerals are not only different, but better from Roman numerals.

Cultural goods do not exist simply as marks of cultural identity that we nurture affection towards. Conversely, they exist in order to meet the individual's needs and to further the individual's goals. When they get overcome by the goods of a different culture, they get dismissed or remain in existence as curiosities, as is the case with Roman numerals.

Ideas, information, products and technologies aren't the only things that get transferred from one culture to another. The same goes for natural resources. Malaysia leads the world in cultivation of rubber trees, even though the rubber tree originally comes from Brazil. Most of the rice being produced in Africa comes from Asia, whilst African tobacco comes from the Western hemisphere. One of the largest exporters of wheat, Argentina, once has had to import this grain, as wheat has never grown on its soil. Hence, the claim that cultural diversity, from an international historical perspective, isn't a static image of differences, but a dynamic image of competition, where that which is better serves the fulfillment of the individual's needs, whereas the other one vanishes.

Manuscripts have once been the technology used to store knowledge and information. However, once those cultures became aware of Chinese parchment and the printing of books, which were more efficient and of lesser cost, manuscripts were completely suppressed. Books were not only *different*, but *better* than manuscripts.

The previously used terminological and fundamental distinction of "diversity" and "efficiency" may cause the wrong approach of superiority and inferiority of certain cultures. It is apparent that certain products, skills, technologies, crops and intellectual concepts help to achieve certain developmental advancements more than others. Therefore, a culture as a whole needn't be compared to others in all aspects, nor should we claim that they remain in the same relations to each other throughout history. It is evident that cultural dominance has shifted over time. China has been far ahead of any European country in every domain for at least a thousand years and had the highest living standard in the world even at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and yet today it is a poor country with a vast potential for development. In truth, Europe has surpassed China in many domains over the last few centuries, but its potential for development will remain unfulfilled and unused without a path to the East. Similar rises and falls of nations and empires

were common in long periods of the history of the mankind (The Roman and Ottoman empires). However, although cultural leadership shifted, it was real during those periods and many of the things accomplished in the process contributed greatly to the possibilities of contemporary civilization. ***Competition in the field of culture isn't a fight to extinction, but the driving force of humanity and that which makes its survival certain.***

The history of the human society marks a series of examples which point to the fact that no isolated cultures thrived, whilst numerous cultures made historical progress after leaving isolation caused by outside influence. A classic example of this very situation is 19<sup>th</sup>-century Japan and a similar thing happened to 17<sup>th</sup>-century Scotland when this country provided the world with pioneers in numerous fields in a short historical period: David Hume in philosophy, Adam Smith in economy, Joseph Black in chemistry, Robert Adam in architecture, James Watt whose invention of the steam engine brought about a revolution in the transport industry. During this process, the Scots lost their language, but gained world domination in many fields which reflected on the quality of life of the population as a whole. Nevertheless, culture exists even in isolated societies which aren't surrounded by other cultures, but where the internal cohesion is strong (the Aborigines).

One thing is for sure: cultures exist in order to serve the individual's vital and true practical interests – to put the society in order so that the continuation of the species could be ensured, to transfer the experiences gained strenuously and so that the new generations would be spared the expensive and uncertain learning processes, without trial and error. Even more now, as the humanity's cultural heritage at the current level of development is in direct correlation to its existence. Today, on the verge of the third millennium, the humanity has never been closer to the Armageddon. A thorough re-examination of the phenomenon of the humanity's development inevitably brings the demise of its true essence. For centuries, the dominant understanding of the essence of the human society's progress has been embodied in the idea of material progress and growth conceptualized in the same way has brought the world to the edge of self-destruction. That is the final end to the illusion about the supremacy of matter over humanity's spiritual development, and the hope for the survival of mankind at the same time.

2. "The Great Promise of Unlimited Progress – the promise of domination of nature, of material abundance, of the greatest happiness for the greatest number, and of unimpeded personal freedom – has sustained the hopes and faith of the generations since the beginning of the industrial age. To be

sure, our civilization began when the human race started taking active control of nature; but that control remained limited until the advent of the industrial age. With industrial progress, from the substitution of mechanical and then nuclear energy for animal and human energy to the substitution of the computer for the human mind, we could feel that we were on our way to unlimited production and, hence, unlimited consumption; that technique made us omnipotent; that science made us omniscient. We were on our way to becoming gods, supreme beings who could create a second world, using the natural world only as building blocks for our new creation” (Fromm 1984).

At the end of the industrial era, the failure of “The Great Promise” is evident – mankind has never been closer to self-destruction:

- a) Unrestricted satisfaction of all desires is not conducive to well-being – prudence and spiritual development are the path to maximum pleasure;
- b) The omnipotence of personal choice loses meaning in bureaucratic order and cybernetic vision of humanity’s future;
- c) The economic gap between rich and poor nations is ever widening;
- d) The supremacy of technology over basic social responsibility developed ecological limitations which are a direct threat to the survival of nature and mankind.

“... Man has become a superman... But the superman with the superhuman power has not risen to the level of superhuman reason. To the degree to which his power grows he becomes more and more a poor man ... It must shake up our conscience that we become all the more inhuman the more we grow into supermen ...” (Fromm 1984).

Many great contemporary thinkers warn us in similar ways, yet are left without a thorough reaction from the public. It is as if the strongest of all instincts – the survival instinct – is out of reach of global social responsibility. Politics and business executives, where personal interest, larceny and greed overpower the survival interests of the community, do not allow much space or time for grand deliberation. Besides that, it seems that the inevitable shifts needed in order for the global community to survive require a drastic change and that people are less prepared to make sacrifices, even though the inertia of catastrophe grows ever greater. Historical warnings from the oldest “books of creation” of the importance of knowing the difference between having and being are in vain. The great teachers Buddha and Christ have put the alternative of these two ways of existence at the center of their teaching. Buddha teaches us not to lust over possessions if we want to achieve

the highest level of human development. Christ says: What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his soul? The substance of their messages is the same – profusion is as evil as poverty and the point of the survival of mankind is to be plenty, not to have plenty. This is a great subject which poses much deliberation which can be brought down to a reminder of the importance of culture and the suiting of cultural heritage which has saved mankind from the moment when its ambition carried by greed made an illusion of superhuman power inside of it.

History and current events are reminders of an unlimited egoism and the passion for possession leads to never-ending conflicts and international wars. ***PEACE AND GREED ARE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE*** (Grgurevic 2008).

### **Instead of conclusion**

1. The fall of the Berlin Wall and “a creative chaos” as the outcome in ex-communist countries and in the world as a whole generated numerous discussions in searching for an efficient and sustained development model. In the general whirl of historical conditions, economic values, paradigmatic visions, the opinion on the need for the development of people and not only economy for its own is matured. The Renaissance of religious values everywhere in the world leads more and more people to doubt the economy that treats the sources as the goals and material goods puts over people. Such understanding obliges for a different conception of the essence of the progress that cannot be measured anymore by the progress of technologies or material standard of living exclusively, because the society that is morally, culturally and politically humiliated – cannot be the progressive society. That is why the real question is: how to provide the quality of life and economic growth at the same time? This is at the same time a local, religious and global, well, a civilization issue, since it is equally relevant for Balkan, Rwanda, Bangladesh or North Korea, but also for the USA, Canada, Japan, Europe, Russia, India, etc.

The historical processes in the Western Balkans have unfolded slowly and out of reach of the contents and institutional forms of European heritage, which encumbers the confrontation with the basic assumptions of the New World in the making. The Copenhagen accession criteria prioritize the development of social processes as a whole and stress the role of the human rights and the coexistence of cultures. Imagination and creativity are not sustainable in authoritarian and autarchic environments. Thus, the acces-

sion of the countries of Western Balkans to the European Union implies the complete social rehabilitation of the Region, in accordance to the EU values, praxis and policy and the development of Euro-Atlantic integration (Grgurevic et al. 2018).

2. It is definite that the beginning of the third millennium offers the mankind both the chance and the anxiety. Such a world is far more opened and indefinite than the one whose historical essence is found in superiority of hierarchical structures, brutal power, incredible forms of collective self-destruction (Gulag, Hiroshima and Auschwitz) and planetary poverty. Such new world promises perhaps more – but it will be more unstable. Multi-polar worlds ask for delicate adaptation according to the maps of power that will fluctuate continuously. The objective essence of power is in elasticity, adaptability and competition that may, to a certain extent and only temporarily, neutralize uncertainty. Knowledge and education, ethical principles, social responsibility and humanity are the foundations on the basis of which one may search for models and institutions of long-term struggle with uncertainty the mankind is facing in third millennium. All the more so due to the fact that historical experience shows that material and spiritual development has followed opposite paths during the larger part of the history of mankind. These paths may again become closer when the mankind gives up from the desire *to rule* and when it begins to adapt not to the world we created, but to the world which we have been created for. In such a world, which is now only a vision of future, the power of an individual and of the institutions will rest in common spirit of developing course. That means adaptation of internal human nature rhythm with primordial principles that rule over the emerging process in the nature and around it. By feeling love for everything in life before and love to follow after – the individual will find out primordial welfare of cosmic Mind, which is the condition of his/her dedication to natural rhythmic course that bears in itself the whole physical reality.

If the choice of a new emerging world will be the path that measures success not only by the rate of growth of the consumption of goods and services, but also by the results with minimum consumption achieved in realizing internal satisfaction of people, joy and harmonious development of a personality, in that case the economic cooperation will have its purpose, and the mankind – a prosperous future. By neutralizing *Greed*, as a motive and source of power and consequence of the whole self-destruction over several millennia, *Love* will give the individual and the mankind the final and collective source of salvation (Grgurevic 2009).



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