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Social countervailing powers against the globalization of economy and media culture

Abstract. Economic and media globalization is being developed by individuals, groups of people and institutions that accept the idea of particular freedom and stand in opposition to traditional cultural values as well as to the values and principles of democracy. The accomplishment of this idea leads to, G. Soros claims, “market fundamentalism” and “transactional society” where production-distribution-consumption of the goods and the values of media culture are most important – the purpose of human life. Social countervailing powers stand in opposition to this domination of global economic and media institutions and their values. In his article the author expands J.K. Galbraith’s theoretical concept of countervailing powers and within its framework he explains the origins and performance of some of anti-globalist movements in Poland and in Europe generally.

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1. Axiological base and features of globalization

The development of global economy and low media culture is grounded on two ideas which accept the individuals and groups of people creating worldwide phenomena and processes without a trace of criticism. The first one is the idea of freedom that dates back to the Enlightenment and gradually permeated the consciousness of people of “the Western civilization”, as Samuel P. Huntington labeled it. The heroes (founders) of globalization understand this idea of freedom in a common-sense way, missing any philosophical interpretation, as the freedom of free actions in the world using all existing technical and technological means in order to achieve their individual or collective goals if they are, for example, wealth or power over other people (both kinds of goals are jointly accepted).

The advocates of the common sense idea of freedom do not recognize any geo-

graphic or cultural boundaries to their actions. Moreover, they do not even take any ethical responsibility for the negative consequences of their actions. Such freedom may also be called a particular one which I interpret as the state of thinking and acting oriented toward achieving wealth and power by choosing and using suitable technical means as well as the values of low and high cultures. The particular freedom assumes the maximization of production, distribution and consumption of goods (globalization of economy) and its followers are in permanent pursuit of multiplying the values of low media culture and its worldwide influence (globalization of media culture). And even if they spread ideological slogans about free market, cultural pluralism etc., they always aim at expanding their power over others which means they act according to a set purpose to delimit these peoples' freedom of choice among these goods and values that they create and sell by themselves. A commercial is the means by which people are being forced to choose the consumption of certain goods and values. The same commercial, paradoxically, disguises the globalists' aspiration after taking control over others by a variety of means to delimit their freedom of choice. Furthermore, it creates low culture and imposes it on the majority of people to an incomprehensible extent and at the same time it trivializes high culture, people's ways of life, their ambitions and goals. Sooner or later, as K.-R. Popper insisted, there must be legal decisions introduced to facilitate delimitation of particular freedom in media culture. For without such decisions, all the appeals made by the elite of high culture related to at least partial elimination of low culture's influence and control over television programs will fail. In the meantime, however, i.e. before some legal, in my opinion necessary, regulations come into being, the fight against low media culture has been undertaken by social countervailing power that prevents people from falling into the state of media barbarity. I shall return to that point later on in my article.

The second idea holds that free market gives the opportunity to bring forth the particular freedom - this idea is accredited by the authors of global economy without the slightest hesitation. George Soros writes that "abstract empire - world capitalism" has control over people's consciousness since it engendered the ideology of free market, among other things, which the author calls "market fundamentalism" and its main norm points that everything is for sale - material goods and culture values including religious values and services. Soros holds that global capitalism creates the wealth for the privileged but it never guarantees any freedom, democracy, rules of law nor does it contribute to the development of cultural values. And that is why the values and democracy must be protected against free market by state policy that is to acknowledge "social values" as its principle and must aspire after common welfare. Those who accept fundamentalist ideology create "transactional society" instead of democracy (G. Soros, 1998). In such a society, we must add, all relations among people are estimated taxonomically as goods. To

put the things strongly, in the transactional society also politicians may be bought by selling democracy.

In relation to Soros' remarks on the particular freedom and his opinions about market fundamentalism we must say that this freedom may be fully embodied in material sense within the frameworks of global free market.

Let me illustrate the above-mentioned state of understanding and realization of the particular freedom by the co-authors of both global economy and media culture who *nota bene* ignore cultural values and accept no ethical responsibility for the consequences of their actions, quoting a perfect literary extract from Kapuściński's *Heban (The Shadow of the Sun)* devoted to African people and cultures (R. Kapuściński, 1998).

Thus in the course of the eighties Philips had produced its special series of battery-fed television sets a great number of which was sold throughout these regions of central Africa where people lacked electric power and had this great opportunity to watch the moving images of the so far unknown world for the first time in their lives. The author sadly describes how the down and out African people who conceived their way of life as a standard suddenly saw that remote, extremely rich and exotic life. Only then did they realize their material poverty, austerity of life in a village, ugliness of old people whom you do not have to respect any more and uselessness of a taboo that in the world of moving images does not exist at all. Therefore, by means of the banal television set and trivial images, the values of indigenous culture and centuries-old relations among people became unessential for them.

In the light of this particular event, the opinions of some thinkers - glossators of globalization processes - may be conceived as quite perfunctory. Anthony Giddens, for example, states that globalization enhances social relations in the world in general, which is expressed by the fact that some local events are shaped by decisions and actions of people being "thousands miles away"; even though they are local events they can exert a "reverse" influence (A. Giddens, 1990). I myself cannot imagine how the people's way of thinking and the relations among them changed by media culture and the moving images about white people's way of life can bring about any effect on social relations in the world.

In this and similar examples I do not observe any reversible influence of the local societies on decisions and especially on changes in relations within the society creating the phenomena and processes of economic globalization and media culture. I will repeat my question, how the relations (to date patriarchal or matriarchal - or recently being gradually modified into partner relations) between, for instance, children and their parents living in the African bush affected by the moving images may have their effect on social relations of the huge television environment. However, such a reverse influence of local events may occur but only in an individual case when the globalist (the manager of global economy or of media culture) meets "face to face" with either negative or positive consequences of economy

or culture being the results of a global organization's performance in which he is involved. Such a man needs to have the minimum of moral receptiveness. For if he is a morally neutral globalist working just to accomplish his corporation's material goals or, in other words, if he is "morally cold", then he will see the destructive consequences of his corporation's performance, be it in the African bush, in Poland or anywhere in the world, as the necessary side-effects of general globalization development.

Jürgen Habermas is absolutely right when he writes that "administrative and economic systems tend to cut themselves off from the social environment and obey only their own imperatives: money and power (...)" (J. Habermas, 1992). It is widely known that both material and media products of these systems influence the consciousness and behavior of the people living in local communities but their indigenous values and ways of life do not penetrate into the very systems.

The particular freedom and the ideology of market fundamentalism - in their relation to the accepted aims of action - require from globalists the formation of specific rationality useful for planning and realization of the accepted aims. We are able to distinguish the following two versions of rationality formed within the background of education and necessary for the authors and servants of globalization:

- 1) A short-term rationality required while carrying into effect the decisions of the global organizations' management bodies, it enables to select relevant means and methods of actions in particular sections of production and distribution of goods and values; this version of rationality is useful for the middle level managers.
- 2) A long-term rationality is formed by the managers of global organizations within economy and media who lay out the purposes and strategies of the whole organization's performance as well as its respective departments within the head office and foreign branches; all elements of the organization must be functional in their relation to the assumed purposes.

Both kinds of rationality stand for an indispensable tool serving global economy and media expansion. Thus, we may say that the particular freedom and the ideology of market fundamentalism create a functional rationality in both versions.

In reference to the above considerations I would like to remind the views of two thinkers who analyzed the modifications in the way of understanding and forming rationality in culture as well as its meaning in social progress. Max Weber proved that the institutionalization of human cognition originated in the Enlightenment. Science and education gradually merged with the social and economic organizations and from now on the purpose of science is to provide theories facilitating modifications of the fragments of social life, work and natural resources etc., instead of searching for truth. Thus, both the authors and holders of the theory accept "the functional rationality" that distances itself from ethical values (M. Weber, 1992). During the series of lectures at Columbia University in 1944 Max Horkheimer presented his criticism of "an instrumental reason" that captured the consciousness

of people in the course of the twentieth century. Such a reason, formed on the ground of exact sciences, accepts the pragmatic conviction that every cognition must be useful for people but withdraws the former research on traditional questions of the sense of life and truth. The instrumental reason projects the fragments of social life (in economy among other things) but it still remains neutral in its relation to the ethical goals of life. It can either serve evil or good (M. Horkheimer, 1967-68).

Leaving behind the differences in the views of these two philosophers and Horkheimer's extremely radical criticism of pragmatism, we must say that both the functional rationality in Weberian sense and the instrumental reason analyzed and criticized by Horkheimer rule the modern globalists' consciousness and determine their ideological points of view on the function of cognition in general as well as on the function of science in the wider understanding of culture.

I shall confine myself to one example which, as I reckon, unquestionably verifies my conviction that the authors of economic empirical sciences knowingly accept both the functional rationality and the instrumental reason when they treat people as objects being a material means to accomplish an economic effectiveness. Professor M. Armstrong titled his volume as *A Handbook of Human Resources Management* (Kogan Page 1977 - and seven further editions). Having read the book I must admit that its author's narrative skills and the precise construction of the theory of human resources management met with my approval. But I must also express my painful irony by stating that rational and instrumental use (!) of people in order to accomplish the assigned economic purpose was already practiced on a mass scale in the 20th century in both totalitarian systems: the Nazi German Reich and Soviet Russia, as well as in many other totalitarian states after World War II. There is no doubt, however, which I firmly stress, that the author radically criticizes totalitarian states and their ways of putting people to death by labor. My irony refers rather to the title of the book that in a remarkable way evokes, unfortunately, painful memories of history.

2. Social countervailing powers

In reference to the above-presented considerations we must ask two questions: are there any social powers that would revise the processes of globalization so they would not contribute to negative results on the one hand, and, are there any values and ideas which would defy the particular freedom on the other hand? Before I outline my proposition of answers, I shall state that it is impossible to stifle the globalization of economy unless there are specific circumstances, world war - for instance which destroys all centers forming the processes of globalization. Thus, there is only the revision of its processes at stake. In my opinion, the control over

economic and media globalization may take place - as it already does - by *social countervailing powers* and some democratic organizations acting throughout the world or the continents e.g. the European Union.

The answer to the second question is obvious. In opposition to the particular freedom and low media culture is a philosophical idea of positive freedom that lays the foundations of democracy and forms civil society as well as ethical values of the high culture and the value of responsibility, especially for negative consequences of actions. As regards the global economy I state here that only some specific circumstances may stifle the development of global media culture. Let it develop and spread the humanistic values of indigenous and high cultures of Europe, Asia, America and other parts of the world. In such a phase of progress there will emerge pluralistic high global media culture.

John Kenneth Galbraith had elaborated his theoretical concept of “countervailing power” in the course of the fifties by analyzing the progress of American capitalism from the late part of the 19th century until the fifties of the 20th century. His analyses were published as *American Capitalism. The Concept of Countervailing Power* (1952). The title says it is just a concept but in his work he often writes about the theory. However, it certainly is a theoretical concept instead of an explication of an empirical theory and its statements explain a group of economic, cultural and social phenomena. His theoretical assumptions - some partially presented and some to be reconstructed from his declarations by his reader - can be applied to explain certain social and economic phenomena that occur within globalization. We may then say that his concept still preserves its theoretical (explanatory) function.

Galbraith writes that on the free market there are dominating powers - monopolies that destroy the competitors within the weak economic entities where there is a strong dominance of manufacturers over consumers and the employers impose their own pay conditions. Since there is a need to support the material interests of the weaker entities (wholesalers, individual entrepreneurs) as well as employees and consumers there is also “a need”, writes Galbraith, “and a good opportunity that it will be profitable to create a countervailing power on its opposite side” (within the free market). This statement is thoroughly grounded on the silently accepted assumption that the worse economic position of people on the free market generates individual psychological attitude (formation of a need to enhance someone’s position) leading to an active resistance against the prevailing economic powers. The necessary condition of bringing such intention to balance the weaker and stronger powers into being is the minimum of favorable circumstances as well as organizational and rallying skills. The author again stresses the meaning of psychological dispositions (organizational skills) and political conditions. For when he writes about favorable circumstances he certainly means that only in a democratic state, where the positive and political freedoms exist, the organization of countervailing powers is possible. The author further writes that his statements

are formulated basing on the “the assumption” that the dominant economic power is held “in check” by the countervailing power of those who find themselves in its sweep (reach). The first power generates the second one (i.e. the dominant power generates its countervailing power).

In his work Galbraith describes the birth and performance of the countervailing powers in the USA. His research reveals that, which was not foreseen by the economists, the purchasers, i.e. wholesalers and consumers’ organizations who began to participate in formation of the product prices, further, workers’ trade unions that protested against their low wages, which resulted in the fact that the employers benefit more of the companies profits, all opposed against the domination of manufacture monopolies on the free market. The appearance of grocery shops chains and malls had begun to determine the production profile of the huge food industry. The author goes further and says that we can always expect “the countervailing powers to appear in order to control the economic force’s temper” and calls them “inborn powers” that emerge in order to demarcate the dominance of strong economic entities on the free market (J.K. Galbraith, 1986).

Galbraith’s theoretical concept exposes a certain regularity or the recurrent interdependence of phenomena and events occurring within the free market and social phenomena. Therefore, following the intentions of the thinker, I shall now introduce the notion of the countervailing social powers. The regularity explains the causes of events and the appearance of phenomena in a structural sense, namely that the countervailing powers participate in the formation of free market, in a broader sense - they create economic and social processes. Basing on the described assumptions and detailed statements of Galbraith we may define this regularity in the following way: *in the course of advanced progress of capitalism, when the free market is dominated by enlarged structural economic organizations there appear the countervailing powers, spontaneously and always as the dominant ones, which in an organized form oppose domination of the stronger powers and bring about the balance on the market.* Then the free market and general economic progress are subject to at least partial control of the organized structures of the countervailing powers.

Such a formulation of regularity may be, as I previously mentioned, related to the contemporary phase of globalization of economy and media. The spontaneous (in Galbraith’s terms) countervailing powers oppose the great (in terms of wealth) powers of the advanced organizational structure. The economically or ethically motivated individuals declare themselves against the dominant powers and shape their own psychological attitude to rally strong support to the opposition (this is an individual attitude). People use their abilities and organizational skills as well as both positive and civil freedoms provided by democracy and organize themselves to create the social countervailing power against economic and media globalization. The organized countervailing powers act against the particular fragments or

the elements of global free market and against certain corporations participating in the globalization of economy and media.

The phenomenon of contemporary countervailing powers requires separate considerations and sociological analyses. In my article I shall describe some of the examples of the countervailing powers performance. Thus in the course of the eighties in France and Italy there appeared first individual protests and later on an organized, social-economic countervailing movement against the so-called ‘macdonaldization’ of food. Many people across France and Italy, including restaurant owners, declared against the expansion of the Mac Donald’s chain and the widespread *fast food*, thus they spontaneously entered upon establishing a new habit of *slow food*, which meant the actual return to the regional tradition and local cuisine.

In 1986 in Italy, Pertini established an association of lovers of good food (M. Jędrzyk, 2001). His idea of returning to traditional cuisine and taste was a great success also in America. Nowadays the association (Slow Food Arcigola) gathers around 60 thousand of members, publishes its own magazine and gastronomic guides on tastes and peculiarities of national cuisine. It also holds its annual Taste Room in Turin. The opponents of ‘macdonaldization’, presently being an institution, are aware that their power withstood a fragment of globalization by restraining dominant huge corporations on the free market. In this case the countervailing power is a social and also an economic movement as it undertakes its own economic activities. The association annually awards its prizes for the economic initiatives the aim of which is to revive local craft traditions or regional ways of food production. In 2001 the prizes were awarded to a Moroccan collective farm manufacturing cooking and cosmetic oils, a Mexican farmer for making chocolate according to the Mayan recipe, a Portuguese biologist who established his own company producing salt of a specific taste in a traditional way (M. Jędrzyk, 2001). Furthermore, owing to this countervailing power many people found their jobs thus reducing the number of the unemployed.

The countervailing power is also formed by political parties of the so-called Greens. First there were individual and group protests, then we witnessed emergence of the organized political actions. The Greens representatives in politics rectify the economic processes in their countries, they also influence the processes of the global economy. This social and political movement has its undeniable merits as regards imposing restrictions on this type of production which destroys the natural habitat as well as the social environment of human beings.

Social countervailing powers in politics exist also permanently in unorganized forms. Tadeusz Buksiński writes about the increasing role of “sub-politics” - created by “a new political class”, i.e. authors and officials of globalization who, though having no formal rights, influence the decisions of political authorities. It is against this class that young people “practice anti-politics (...) politics from the ranks, competitive to the politics of huge concerns, monopolies and political parties.

Thus they create a new type of democracy. It is a spontaneous democracy without any regular program, an open one (...)" (T. Buksiński, 2001). In my opinion, anti-politics as the social movement of the youth - so far dispersed, without any form of regular association, manifesting itself by protests against globalization - is just the kind of an inborn countervailing power against economic and political globalization. This movement is slowly transforming into an organized countervailing power. An illustration to this is the meeting held last year in Porto Alegre by a variety of anti-globalist groups that entered into the next stage of their activity - an organized form based on a clearly formulated program.

Artists and youth circles create the so-called counterculture as an inborn countervailing power against the low culture of global media. Within the counterculture the old values are brought back to life, new values emerge, the associations act and new fellows groups are formed. Such actions contribute to the development of the high culture and the specific values of youth culture that, although difficult to be classified, are still overtly opposed to the trivialized values created by global media institutions.

3. Polish society versus globalization of economy and media culture

Marek. Ziółkowski, basing on his and his associates' sociological research on modifications of values in the Polish society in the course of the 1990s states that "the general orientation of the Polish society is directed (...) toward material interests and values. Social-cultural values as regulators of everyday behavior are given a distinctly minor meaning". The author writes that correspondingly we face a formation of a new attitude toward "postmodern postmaterialism and libertarianism" but only in "a few (though sometimes socially perceivable enough) circles, among the intellectuals, a variety of minority groups and other groups aspiring after realization of the so-called alternative values" (M. Ziółkowski, 2000).

We may venture an opinion that the social acquiescence to material values must have taken place in the situation of comparing the levels of affluence in Poland to the countries of the European Union (the relation of gross national income per head in Poland and the European Union countries was 1:5). The aspiration after material values is a primary motive of entrepreneurship in Poland. Thus the values play a positive role and point out the aims of individual and collective actions. It seems that, by way of digression, Polish people's declaration of being attracted to Americans (sociological research proves that around 60 percent of the Polish society show their positive attitude toward Americans) is motivated by their recognition of material achievements by the USA.

Half of the adults do accept the inflow and presence of foreign capital in Poland because of the general materialist orientation in life and only 20 percent hold that foreign capital and modern technology impend over the job market and contribute to the increase of unemployment. This opinion is mostly expressed by the people in their fifties with elementary or vocational education who virtually lost their jobs. But as much as 90 percent of young people (up to 25 years) with secondary or college-education as well as managers of state or private enterprises accept the foreign capital in Poland. As for the preferences in the nationality of the capital owners, around 45 percent of people indicated the investors from the USA (A. Szymaniak, 2000). We must assume that those accepting the global principle of economy - free flow of capital - because of their background and knowledge of the world economic mechanisms accept the progress of global economy for they understand it as plausible opportunity of gaining profits for themselves and for Poland.

Until now there has not appeared, with an exemption of farmers and conservative social groups, any Polish social countervailing power against globalization of economy. In the light of the sociological research referred to, we may formulate an opinion that at least half of the Polish society and nearly all young people with secondary and college-education together with almost all managers do accept the progress of economic globalization. But at the same time, as the sociological survey reveals, 80 percent of the population is for the control of foreign capital: Will the investments increase the size of unemployment? What amount of profit is to be exported from Poland? Is foreign investment a threat to Polish enterprises? They all want the capital and investments owners (the owners of wealth) to recognize the norm and the value of the ethical and social responsibility as the result of their actions. I think that the common demand for responsibility betokens not only the fear of material threat from the global economy but also the acceptance of a substantial level of ethical norm.

4. Countervailing powers against economic and media globalization in Poland

In my opinion, the social countervailing powers against economic globalization appear in today's Poland in their three forms:

1. Political form, firmly organized within two parties - *Samoobrona* (Self-Defense) the members of which are recruited from farmers and *Liga Polskich Rodzin* (Polish Families League), a conservative catholic party. The programs of both parties oppose free inflow of world economic organizations to Poland and opt only for the acceptance of a limited and strictly controlled (financial and technological) support of foreign entities.

2. The second form of countervailing power, also firmly organized, is trade unions, including “*Solidarność*”; to some degree it follows the tradition of historical “*Solidarność*” of the 1980s. Trade unions accept global economic progress under the condition that, firstly, the Polish economy takes part in it, or that the legal equality is maintained on the world market; secondly, half of the Polish shares are involved in establishing companies with foreign capital in Poland and, lastly, that permanent tax control is provided by our state over foreign capital.
3. The last, arbitrary and the most spontaneous one, is the short-time form - associations of people emerging mostly in small and middle-sized towns that oppose the existence of huge mercantilist branches as well as the construction of malls by the Polish owners. The associations are formed by the retailers and their members protect their own material interests. Sometimes they find support from those who do not accept foreign supermarkets expansion at all (though they buy the imported goods) and do not recognize the anonymous standardization of huge malls.

Hitherto, as previously stated, Poland has not had such a countervailing power as it has already been formed in France or in Italy which opposes domination of the global economic market in their own countries.

We need to state generally that the global media culture is recognized by the majority of Polish people and its values are shared among youth especially. A primitive commercial and its images being “Newspeak” shape a lower esthetic level of viewers and an instrumental, taxonomic language that cannot serve a dialogue on ethical values and even precludes criticism of the low culture. In social groups, especially among young people, amusement as the way of life is widely accepted. Neil Postman perfectly described it in his work (N. Postman, 1985). According to him, amusement hermetically veils all the problems of the world – whether it is war, peace or all important problems in the life of an individual and a group, pursuit of the sense of life or even approval of common welfare etc.

The countervailing powers against global media culture are not organized in a social sense. In Poland we may observe the actions of particular, individual powers who are individual human beings of the intellectuals and artists being identified, as Marek Ziolkowski put it, with the postmodern postmaterialism who accept the values of the high culture or create their own values blatantly opposed to the media culture.

I shall prove my conviction that an individual human being is a particular countervailing power against the global media culture by two examples from Poland. In recent years the outstanding film directors, Andrzej Wajda, Jerzy Hoffman and Jerzy Kawalerowicz, made four epic movies based on the works widely recognized by the Polish history of literature of the 19th century. Generally speaking, the films are about the significant meaning of religious, ethical and social values for people. The movies were watched in Poland and abroad including the USA by a

couple of millions of viewers. I shall refer to two movies by Andrzej Wajda: “Pan Tadeusz” (“Mister Thaddeus”) - an epic poem by Adam Mickiewicz and “Zemsta” (“Revenge”) - a comedy by Aleksander Fredro. I shall not go into a detailed analysis of axiological strata of both works, instead I confine myself to the statement that the Polish viewers, who read the poems at school, again asked themselves whether ethical and social values, both positive and negative ones, of the nineteenth-century nobleman’s culture are able to motivate modern behavior of people. Among the viewers there were many technocrats and the low culture participants who rarely consider the question of cultural values. Wajda, Hoffman and Kawalerowicz created a given axiological and social pattern and thus contributed to the birth of a large audience composed of individual beings who learnt about the ethical values of Polish nobleman’s culture. Since they learnt such values they learnt to think about values at the same time. In my opinion, they are to some degree ready to carry on the discourse on social values in general.

In the light of the presented example, and many similar ones, we must hold that each artist creating his works within the high culture that are addressed to people, especially to the participants of the low culture, by means of material technique plays the role of an individual countervailing power against the global media culture. Through his work, an artist provokes in an esthetic way and encourages his viewers/readers to question, criticize and sometimes even to reject the low media culture.

My second example, or rather examples, of creating certain social patterns appeared in Poland two or three years ago when the price of PC and Internet access decreased. In dozens or even several hundred of small towns and villages (the phenomenon is not officially reported) particular individuals, mainly young people, with writing skills and a journalist flair were very successful in establishing their local newspapers on the web. Apart from being journalists they also organize social actions in order to solve current problems important to the inhabitants of certain towns or villages. People trust them because they help them find jobs and write about the values of local or regional culture. This example confirms my view that the individual countervailing powers, acting within local communities, oppose globalization of the low culture media. These people are not professional creators (artists) but still they serve their role of social promoters of the revival and establishment of indigenous social relations based, as I have mentioned before, on ethical and local cultural values.

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