NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

CORRESPONDENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS ON CULTURAL LIFE

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Abstract: Globalization is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon involving the increasing interconnectedness and interdependence of countries and cultures around the globe. It encompasses a wide range of economic, social, political and cultural processes. This study addresses the negative implications of globalization on correspondence, identifying the circumstances and ways in which globalization has affected society, and a comparison between electronic and traditional correspondence. Also, we discussed some benefits of globalization, because globalization is a symbol of contemporaneity, having an uninterrupted evolution in all fields.

Keywords: correspondence, letters, globalization, folklore, culture.

Introduction

With its profound cultural significance, correspondence sparked interest among readers for the vivid and authentic portrayal it offers of the lives of literary figures and cultural personalities whose seminal works have profoundly influenced their respective fields. In all their complexity, letters have come to serve as exceptional and reliable sources, acquiring documentary value within the scope of Romanian cultural research.

In the context of an increasingly declining cultural landscape, one of the essential responsibilities of contemporary society should be the preservation of folklore, which remains one of the few authentic cultural expressions still largely untouched by the homogenizing effects of globalization. Acknowledging the importance of this objective, the present paper seeks to explore the dynamics of globalization and assess the extent to which its consequences affect folklore and related cultural domains. Through such initiatives, we aim to promote the safeguarding and appreciation of cultural documents – such as personal correspondence – as valuable instruments of cultural memory and identity.

Globalization

As an extremely broad and multifaceted process, globalization has not yet been assigned a universally accepted definition by scientists. In the academic

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literature, the concept is approached from multiple perspectives, often carrying contested and nuanced meanings. In what follows, we aim to offer a general theoretical framework for understanding the term.

Globalization can be seen as the natural direction toward which the world is evolving – an irreversible and complex phenomenon marked by openness, mobility, and innovation, and one that has undergone unprecedented development in recent decades. While it brings undeniable benefits, it also presents significant challenges across domains, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, or geographical location. People from diverse corners of the world now have access to a greater variety of ideas, traditions, and artistic expressions, facilitated by international trade, migration, and global mass media. The expansion of what is often referred to as the "democratization of technology"[1] has undoubtedly contributed to bridging distances, enabling people to be better informed and more interconnected than ever before.

A particularly relevant and accessible definition of globalization – highlighting its far-reaching consequences – is offered by Thomas L. Friedman, who emphasizes the transformative role of technology in shaping cultural transmission and adaptation. He writes: "The democratization of technology is what enables more and more people, equipped with ever more computers, modems, cell phones, cable systems, and Internet connections, to reach farther and farther, into more and more countries, faster, deeper, and cheaper than ever before in history... Thanks to the democratization of technology, today we can each have in our own home a bank, an office, a newspaper, a bookstore, a brokerage firm, a factory, an investment company, a school..."[2].

The effects of globalization are felt indiscriminately across all sectors of society – economic, political, and cultural alike. In the cultural domain in particular, globalization has deep and far-reaching implications, often leading to unfavorable outcomes such as the widespread adoption of imported cultural models, the erosion of diversity, the weakening of national traditions, and the dismantling of classical systems of value hierarchies.

In today's rapidly changing world, folklore is steadily losing ground in the face of globalization. This raises pressing questions about the extent to which folklore still holds relevance for contemporary audiences and for future generations. Driven by the market and fueled by television, sports, and the internet – through the rapid assimilation of new technologies–the globalized world is increasingly experiencing a crisis of meaning. This trend risks leading to a cultural and educational collapse on a global scale, with profound consequences for the society of tomorrow.

We live in a society shaped by specific traditions, customs, and rituals, marked by a unique culture, a distinct way of life, and a particular code of conduct. Unfortunately, many of the values and traditions unique to each nation are either

[1] Thomas L. Friedman, *Lexus și măslinul*, Bucharest, Fundația Pro Publishing House, 2001, p. 68.
[2] *Ibidem*, pp. 68-69.

fading away or losing their meaning – a phenomenon that also reflects individual responsibility, as we are all directly influenced by these global processes.

Another significant consequence of globalization is the erosion of cultural identity. Societal foundations can be severely shaken by change, especially when a society lacks internal stability. The excessive promotion of dominant values and practices often leads to the suppression of local traditions and customs, contributing to the disappearance of minority languages, traditional practices, and artisanal crafts.

The unchecked rise of technology has further accelerated the adoption of foreign influences in everyday language, the assimilation of customs from other cultures, and the celebration of holidays that are often at odds with the Romanian ethos. With the free flow of information, it has become increasingly difficult to control these influences.

Globalization tends to exert its strongest effects on more vulnerable, adaptable cultures, which, when confronted with a global "super-culture," begin to dissolve and gradually lose the valuable elements of their own history and heritage – effects that will no doubt continue into the future.

At the same time, however, the impact of globalization can be seen as ambivalent, as it also creates opportunities for revitalization and adaptation. Paradoxically, globalization can lead to a heightened awareness of the need to protect and preserve cultural heritage. International organizations and global initiatives can play a key role in supporting the preservation of vulnerable cultures and traditions.

As highlighted in the study *Romanian Intangible Heritage (Traditions, Folklore) in the Context of Globalization*, Tamara Paica emphasizes the idea that "globalization is neither a panacea that will cure humanity of all its problems and conflicts, nor an apocalyptic calamity that will destroy surrounding cultures"[3].

Summarizing the available information, we may conclude that globalization can, in fact, support the creation of a framework for cultural rapprochement. The same author argues that "it will never be possible to erase a nation's culture, literature, art, religion, folkloric and musical traditions, or its history"[4].

Correspondence

Beginning with the second half of the 20th century, the changes brought about by widespread globalization have also manifested in the realm of writing. Consequently, the cultural prestige once held by personal correspondence has diminished significantly, now occupying a marginal position.

In light of current trends in communication, discussing correspondence may seem anachronistic, as the art of epistolary composition has been reduced to a minor literary genre, ultimately becoming a mere convention. As a result, the letter has

[3] Tamara Paica, *Patrimoniul intangibil românesc (tradiţii, folclor) în contextul globalizării (aspecte legislative)*, Bucharest, Muzeul Naţional al Literaturii Române Publishing House, 2013, p. 28.

[4] *Ibidem*, p. 12.

come to be associated with artificiality and superficiality, losing its former luster under the influence of those who no longer value genuine cultural expressions.

As traditions evolve or adapt, the information collected over time may no longer fully reflect the original forms. For a long time, correspondence served as an efficient medium for communication between nations, opening up new opportunities for connection and collaboration. However, in the age of globalization, it has become largely obsolete. If we think of the world as an interconnected environment – structured like a hierarchical pyramid – then we can say that, for many years, the exchange of letters authentically connected individuals across distances. Today, however, global and systemic changes in social interaction have rendered this practice largely optional.

In the contemporary world, the focus is on digitalization and the implementation of new technologies, which, although valuable, must be used wisely. This shift is gradually leading to the disappearance of the epistolary phenomenon, with correspondence increasingly becoming a habit reserved mainly for individuals in cultural or intellectual circles.

The Transylvanian Hungarian ethnographer Balázs Lajos anticipates, in his study *Folklore: General Notions of Folklore and Popular Poetics*, a series of predictions regarding the effects of globalization. He states solemnly, yet with optimism, that: "The cultural and civilizational differences between the village and the city will diminish considerably, and consequently, so will the differences between rural and urban folklore. However, folklore – as a distinct way of reflecting life, expressing inner emotional and spiritual states, and shaping behavior within society through a vision and an aesthetic that is non-academic and non-canonical from the outside – will not disappear"[5].

In this new era of cultural consumption, Adrian Dinu Rachieru discusses several important transformations related to cultural homogenization: "Communication has become a phenomenon of total civilization. Mass communication now enjoys a broad, heterogeneous, dispersed, and anonymous audience. Moreover, the flow of information is rapid, leading to the simplification and homogenization of content"[6], thus leading, as M. Coman also pointed out, to the autonomization of the word. This process energizes communication and enhances the adaptability of language; however, it can also lead to ambiguity and confusion if the new meanings of words are not well understood or if the use of terms is inconsistent.

The internet, mobile communications, social networks, and digital platforms have made it easier for people to connect and have facilitated the exchange of ideas, values, and cultural practices, leading to greater awareness and cultural diversity. On the other hand, they have also intensified cultural homogenization.

[5] Baálzs Lajos, *Folclor. Noțiuni generale de folclor și poetică populară*, Cluj-Napoca, Scientia Publishing House, 2003, p. 10.

[6] Adrian Dinu Rachieru, *Globalizare și cultură media*, Iași, 2003, Institutul European Publishing House, p. 14.

While globalization has the potential to erode cultural diversity, it also presents opportunities for cultural exchange and the emergence of new cultural identities.

Critics argue that globalization can undermine cultural diversity by promoting dominant cultural values and perspectives while neglecting or marginalizing local cultures, which gradually leads to the dominance of Western culture.

Overall, globalization is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. It is important to highlight that we can identify both positive and negative effects it has on correspondence. These effects vary depending on region and sector, and managing its challenges while maximizing its benefits remains a key objective of global policy in the century we are currently navigating.

Thus, following the thread of these ongoing concerns, it becomes evident that a new approach is needed to bring folklore closer once again – by revitalizing its artistic forms of expression, such as letters. In this context, the current study of folklore must be kept alive, regardless of existing circumstances, through various interpretations and updates presented in a modern form.

The archival importance

The correspondence between folklorists forms a rich tapestry of communication. Often published in collections or anthologies and sometimes accompanied by commentary and explanatory notes, these letters share insights, discoveries, and debates within the field of folklore studies, as well as in related areas such as ethnology and anthropology. Maintaining correspondence and managing information, both in personal and professional contexts, remains a practice that can ensure the preservation of documents reflecting Romanian traditions and customs.

Many of the letters exchanged between folklorists are now archived in libraries, museums, and other academic institutions – such as the Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy in Cluj-Napoca, established in 1930[7], which houses historical documents. These archives provide valuable perspectives on the history and development of folklore studies, as well as on the personal and professional lives of individual researchers.

From a historical standpoint, the correspondence between folklorists has been essential to the development of folklore as an academic discipline. Through letters, researchers shared fieldwork experiences, discussed theoretical frameworks, and debated interpretations of folk traditions. These exchanges fostered collaboration and contributed to the advancement of folkloristic research by establishing professional networks. By sharing resources, expertise, and research methods, scholars were able to address complex research questions and broaden the scope of their investigations.

Correspondence between folklorists sometimes involves debates and disputes concerning interpretations, methodologies, and ethical considerations. Nevertheless,

[7] Virgiliu Florea, *Din trecutul folcloristicii românești*, Cluj-Napoca, Napoca Star Publishing House, 2001, p. 124.

the process remains fundamentally practical in nature, as it contributes to critical reflection and the refinement of both folklore theory and practice, with the ultimate goal of improving the scholarly system as a whole.

The expansion of scholarly focus through the implementation of international exchange has enabled a transition toward modernization and represents a strategic imperative. Folklore research often involves intercultural exchange, and correspondence plays a crucial role in facilitating communication between researchers from different countries and cultural backgrounds. This international dialogue enriches the field by bringing diverse perspectives to the study of Romanian folk traditions.

Therefore, it is essential to educate all members of society on the practical protection of intangible heritage – through its preservation, documentation, and transmission. Audiovisual digital technology must become our tool for storing and passing on cultural identity and richness to future generations. Insofar as globalization facilitates unlimited access to technology, we are presented with numerous opportunities to promote and expand the production and reception of cultural texts.

Overall, correspondence among folklorists serves as a vital means of communication, collaboration, and debate within folklore studies, thus contributing to its ongoing development and evolution.

Electronic correspondence *vs.* Traditional correspondence

Comparing electronic correspondence with traditional correspondence reveals significant differences in terms of speed, cost, environmental impact, security, and accessibility.

Alongside technological advancements, electronic correspondence–through emails, instant messages, faxes, and even text messages–has become increasingly widespread, enabling rapid communication. Although traditional letters once held a prominent place, they are now considered outdated, given their long delivery times, which hinder efficient communication. As a result, this practice appears to be fading, misaligned with the pace of modern societal development.

Unlike electronic correspondence, which requires internet access and electronic devices – susceptible to network interruptions or technical issues – traditional correspondence does not depend on technology and can still be used in areas without internet access.

Here, we can also highlight the ecological impact of both forms of correspondence. Electronic correspondence contributes to the conservation of natural resources by reducing the need for paper and physical transportation. However, this advantage is offset by the environmental impact associated with the production, use, and recycling of electronic devices, which generate digital waste and require high energy consumption. Traditional correspondence may use recyclable paper and biodegradable materials, but depending on the number of letters sent, it can involve

significant use of paper, ink, and fuel for transport, often resulting in a larger ecological footprint compared to electronic communication.

While the initial costs of traditional correspondence – paper, envelopes, stamps – may seem minimal, they can increase significantly based on the weight and destination of the packages, as well as the frequency of sending. In contrast, electronic correspondence involves initial expenses for purchasing and maintaining electronic devices and internet connections, but most email and messaging platforms are free or very low-cost.

In terms of security and privacy measures, electronic correspondence can be encrypted to ensure confidentiality, and access to electronic messages can be protected by passwords and other security protocols. While letters can be sealed to prevent unauthorized access, they may be lost, stolen, or damaged in transit and do not offer the same level of confidentiality as digital encryption.

Traditional letters allow for a high degree of creativity and personalization, as they can be decorated with drawings, wax seals, collages, and other artistic elements. They can also include small physical objects such as photographs, notes, or pressed flowers, adding a unique dimension to the message.

Both electronic and traditional correspondence have specific advantages and disadvantages. Electronic communication is fast, efficient, and cost-effective, but it may be vulnerable to cyber threats and depends on access to technology. On the other hand, traditional correspondence offers a more tangible and often more personal alternative but is slower and may have a greater environmental impact. The choice between the two often depends on specific contexts, user needs, and preferences.

Despite technological advancements and the popularity of electronic correspondence, traditional letters retain certain unique features and benefits that make them valuable, offering a tangible and personal experience. In recent times, more and more efforts have been made to preserve traditional correspondence, recognizing it as part of personal or family history – efforts that have contributed to a shift in mentality regarding the protection of cultural identity.

Preserving correspondence archives offers valuable insights into the history and development of folklore studies, serving as a reference and documentation tool – a record of communication across different contexts and settings that has maintained connections over the years, as well as offering insight into the personal and professional lives of the researchers involved.

Although epistolary literature allows readers to engage with great figures of the past, this practice has significantly diminished under the mark of postmodernity, giving way to the rapid spread of globalization and the homogenization of communication.

Conclusions

Generally speaking, globalization can, *stricto sensu*, be seen as an essential process for our evolution – a result of the firm desire and consciously assumed

decision of certain countries to connect to this system in order to gain benefits from it. It touches various sectors of society and has repercussions on all aspects of life.

At the same time, correspondence conceals within it essential data about a given society, space, and historical moment, which can be reconstructed today, hidden within the details of everyday life it captures. In Romanian culture, the publication of letters has remained a necessary endeavor. In recent years, there has been increased attention given to the study of correspondences, through the shared and ongoing effort of both letter writers and literary critics and historians. It represents an essential component in reconfiguring the lives and personalities of folklorists. It is up to us to explore and make use of their content once identified.

Although letters may somewhat blur existence by presenting a factual reality shaped over time by censorship constraints, they have remained, to this day, a promising source for research through the retrospective documentation of circumstances and events of documentary interest.

Globalization expanded rapidly in the second half of the 20th century, facilitating cultural and economic exchange on a global scale. This led to a diversification of cultural influences, but also to tensions surrounding cultural identity and authenticity. That century was marked by rapid and diverse cultural changes, influenced by global conflicts, technological and social advancements, and a constant dynamic between tradition and innovation. The culture of the 20th century reflects the complexity and diversity of human experience during an era of profound transformation.

Historical and global processes are dynamic forces that continually shape cultural practices and identities. These processes can lead to the preservation, transformation, or even loss of certain cultural aspects, profoundly influencing how individuals and communities define and live their cultural identity.

Today, globalization stands as a symbol of contemporaneity, as it simply exists, and we are somehow predestined to live under its sign, within its sphere, and to face all the forces it entails. Nothing that happens today in our society remains untouched by the scourge of globalization.

The use of technologies facilitates communication and improves quality of life, as we asserted at the beginning of this presentation. However, this rapid and tumultuous evolution disrupts the fragile balance between change and stability.

The act of letter writing by folklorists is a meticulous and valuable process that significantly contributes to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. Through their efforts, folklorists help keep alive the traditions and customs that define the cultural identity of communities.

In conclusion, our research did not aim to provide an exhaustive exposition of the entire process of globalization, but rather, we considered it useful to offer a few interpretive frameworks to illustrate some of its consequences on correspondence.

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