

# VOICES AT WAR. CAN CULTURAL DIPLOMACY BRIDGE BACK COMMUNICATION?

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*Summary:* Culture has always played a key role in politics, at the forefront of diplomacy. It has shaped nations, helping them define themselves, representing them on the international arena and was a core element in the formation of the nation-state. What has been, however, the role that culture played in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, between different political systems and what happens to it as states begin to talk different languages in terms of their approach towards their foreign policy and state interests? Can culture alleviate basic differences and help build a communication bridge or does it separate and divide?

*Keywords:* propaganda, ideology, cultural diplomacy, identity, mediation.

## **Context: A theoretical 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Foreign policy has long been dominated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by realism, moving from normative traditionalism to descriptive and explanatory positivism, and then by neorealism. Between the anarchic structure of the international system and institutions, learning and other means leading to cooperation, the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw neorealism and neoliberalism competing for the center theoretical stage. Critical theorists explicitly bring into the forefront the question of identities shaped by historical processes (the same that also create interests). Countries interacted with each other based on the “hard” tools of treaties, laws, political negotiations, internationally recognized organizations, military capability.

At the end of the century, critical theory, postmodernism and feminism all challenged the notion of state sovereignty and argued for new political communities more inclusive with the marginal and disenfranchised groups. Outsiders are of equal importance with a country’s citizens, challenging the nation-state. The massive migration flows of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have largely changed this concept. Postmodernism supports cultural diversity and stresses the importance of minorities, whereas feminism argues against the realist theory’s masculine bias, and for the inclusion of woman and alternative values into public life. The post-positivists have thus made their entrance into the game, changing and challenging the realist status quo. Channeling the classical view of the human being as an individual that is basically social and rational, capable of cooperating and learning from past experiences, the non-positivists theorists of the English school emphasize that states, like individuals, have legitimate interests that others can recognize and respect, and that they can recognize the general advantages of observing a principle of reciprocity in their mutual relations<sup>1</sup>. Shared values, shared interests and a dynamic international system are core values of the liberal theory, advocating international cooperation and change resulting from interdependence. This has eventually led to globalization and to the globalist system.

New trends in the 21st century have seen a revival of classical realism, especially of Morgenthau’s work. Scholars (Hartmut Behr, Muriel Cozette, Amelia Heath, Sean Molloy) have reinterpreted his works, pointing to the flexibility of his classical realism and revealing his normative assumptions based on the promotion of universal moral values. For Morgenthau, states are power-oriented actors, and this is a critical stance in security studies. At the same time, he acknowledges that international politics would be more pernicious than

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson, Robert and Georg Sørensen. *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 167.

it actually is were it not for moral restraints and the work of international law<sup>2</sup>. “The protection of human life and freedom are given central importance by Morgenthau, and constitute a ‘transcendent standard of ethics’ which should always animate scientific enquiries.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, recent years, with the constant, growing aggressions of Russia against Ukraine, first in the invasion and annexing of the Crimean Peninsula, leading to full-on warmed war of aggression against Ukraine that began on 24 February 2022, are also marked, up to a certain point, by conflicting theoretical views: Russia’s realist take on international relations, its emphasis on power, state security, self-interest vs a large (if not the larger) part of the neoliberal, post-positivist Western world, constantly advocating for progressivism, moralism, legalism, and which had lost touch with the reality of self-interest and power, as the global order was stable and aggression-free. The overoptimistic liberal belief was further challenged during the Covid-19 pandemic, which acutely showed what unbalanced (mainly economic, but not only) dependence can do to state security. Armed conflicts (more frequent in the Middle East, in Africa) had become less frequent or, at least, more geographically isolated. In the case of Europe, the following need to be mentioned: the break-up of Yugoslavia (leading to the Yugoslav Wars, spread over almost 10 years), Georgia (with a Russo-Ossettian alliance emerging as Russian explicit expanding presence), Abkhazia, Kosovo (leading to the North Kosovo crisis), Ukraine (with the Pro-Russian unrest, the annexation of Crimea, the Russo-Ukrainian War and the Russian invasion of Ukraine).

### **Realism. Neorealism. The Cold War**

Culture plays a double role in the context of international relations: it creates or expresses identity, and it then promotes it in the international arena (see, for the latter, the similar if not synonym concepts of cultural relations, cultural exchange, cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy is thus part of public diplomacy and closely related to the concept of soft power.

Realism saw the rise and development of cultural diplomacy in its institutional form: Alliance Française first opened in France in 1883, with its first foreign branch or comite local, opened a year later in Barcelona, Spain. At the time, the Alliance was an NGO and not a diplomatic body of the state (though it received funds and was often coordinated by the French Foreign Ministry<sup>4</sup>. It was France again that created the function of cultural attachés, sent in diplomatic missions during the First World War. Cultural diplomacy was further bureaucratized by having a dedicated department within the French Foreign Ministry, the Directorate General for Cultural Affairs. E. Pajtinka then details further examples, having a more specialized and concrete goal: the British Council, founded in UK in 1934, was meant to counteract German propaganda, particularly in the states of Latin America and the Middle East, whereas the Division of Cultural Relations, within the U.S. Department of State, was to fulfil a similar mission: foster cultural relations with Latin American countries to fight back the growing influence of fascist ideology in South America. It was created in 1938. In 1940, the Office of Inter-American Affairs, led by N. Rockefeller, was created in order to promote American culture in Latin America.

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<sup>2</sup> Behr, Hartmut and Amelia Heath. “Misreading in IR Theory and Ideology Critique: Morgenthau, Waltz, and Neo-Realism,” *Review of International Studies*, 35(2):2009, pp. 327–349.

<sup>3</sup> Cozette, Muriel, “Reclaiming the Critical Dimension of Realism: Hans J. Morgenthau and the Ethics of Scholarship,” *Review of International Studies*, 34(1): 2008, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief history of public diplomacy, see also Pajtinka, E. 2014. “Cultural Diplomacy in the Theory and Practice of Contemporary International Relations”. In *Politické vedy/ Political Sciences*. Roč. 17, č. 4, 2014. ISSN 1335 – 2741, s. 95-108, [http://www.politickevedy.fpvmv.umb.sk/userfiles/file/4\\_2014/PAJTINKA2.pdf](http://www.politickevedy.fpvmv.umb.sk/userfiles/file/4_2014/PAJTINKA2.pdf), accessed 28.04.2023, 08:00 a.m.

The Cold War brought a new dimension to cultural diplomacy, as it was an active tool, with, again, very concrete missions, in the tensed ideological struggle between the U.S. and the USSR. For the U.S., the take was the promotion of the values of democracy and freedom, as elements of American cultural identity. In the 50s, the United States Information Agency (USIA) coordinated activities related to cultural diplomacy. Created in 1953, the USIA later joined forces with government-supported groups such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) and private organizations such as the Ford Foundation; other elite cultural institutions, museums, universities, and foundations joined in, heavily sponsored by the private sector, a business world that not only understood to support the art world for itself, for economic gain, but also for political purposes. This kaleidoscope, then, shifted in the 1960s due to larger changes in American politics, culture, economics, and demographics.

The revisionist thesis—developed by Max Kozloff<sup>5</sup>, Eva Cockroft<sup>6</sup>, and David and Cecile Shapiro<sup>7</sup>, made famous by Serge Guilbaut<sup>8</sup>, and further elaborated by Frances Stonor Saunders<sup>9</sup>—then makes an argument for a more direct instrumental role that abstract expressionism played in the cultural Cold War: presumably apolitical and internationally prestigious, abstract expressionism would be a weapon of the Cold War for the United States.

On their turn, the USSR saw arts as playing a crucial role both within the Soviet Union and in foreign policy: through repeated exposure to the ideologically correct message it carried (deeply political, and less so aesthetic), art could help shape the new Soviet man, a selfless person, totally dedicated to the cause, a spark in the Communist Revolution, and a brick in the new Communist society. The Communist Revolution could be ignited through arts, so cultural diplomacy and cultural exchanges played a crucial part in Soviet foreign policy. Art could educate and be the correct representation of the only ideological correct world, the Communist one.

Stalin's death marked the beginning of what has been called the thaw, an era of lessened restrictions, and, in terms of foreign policy doctrine, of peaceful coexistence. Paradoxically, the famous thawing seems to have found its spring in the writings of the father of the October Revolution, Lenin. Since the revolution was to ignite the capitalist world, the Bolsheviks understood peaceful coexistence as a transitory state. Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg first used the term thaw as the title of his novella published in May 1954, which dealt with previously unmentionable topics, such as mass arrests, and questioned whether individuals could achieve real happiness through devoting themselves to building socialism.<sup>10</sup> As Stephen Bittner explains, Ehrenburg did not want his readers to equate the idea of a thaw with spring because "slight frosts" would still occur. Instead, the idea of a thaw is best understood as a lengthy process with periods of reoccurring frosts, which would evoke a feeling of uncertainty.<sup>11</sup>

Geoffrey Roberts explains, as successive Soviet leaders focused on developing Communism within the Soviet Union and the worldwide Communist Revolution did not

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<sup>5</sup> Max Kozloff, "American Painting During the Cold War," *Artforum*, May 1973: 44

<sup>6</sup> Eva Cockroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum*, June 1974: 39

<sup>7</sup> David Shapiro and Cecile Shapiro, "Abstract Expressionism: The Politics of Apolitical Painting," *Prospects* 3 (1977): 210.

<sup>8</sup> Serge Guilbaut. 1983. *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 2, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders, "Modern Art Was CIA 'Weapon,'" *Independent*, October 22, 1995, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/modern-art-was-cia-weapon-1578808.html>. Saunders develops this argument fully in *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2000)

<sup>10</sup> Stephen V. Bittner. *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2008, pp. 2–3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 2–3.

occur, peaceful coexistence became a constant notion.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, Soviet officials understood peaceful coexistence as permitting non-violent competition between the Communist and capitalist states, which offered the Soviets an opportunity to showcase the superiority of their system and emerge victorious. Robert C. Grogin argues, in, *Natural Enemies: The United States and the Soviet Union in the Cold War, 1917–1991*, that all three leaders, Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev, strove to spread Communism, using different means. Lenin sought a quick worldwide revolution; Stalin supported a more gradual Communist victory via military conquest; and Khrushchev desired to encompass the West by supporting national liberation movements within the developing world. Clearly, writes Grogin<sup>13</sup>, all three leaders remained dedicated to defeating the West and spreading Communism.

Soviet cultural diplomacy and then Soviet-American cultural relations entered a new era starting with 1957, when Khrushchev rose to undisputed power in the Soviet Union. As Cadra<sup>14</sup> writes, just as Americans planned to capitalize on these changes within the Soviet Union, Khrushchev actively sought a cultural exchange program designed to erode anti-Communist sentiment. The Soviet leader understood the vast potential of nonmilitary weapons. Even before he defeated his political opponents, Khrushchev had promoted American-Soviet cultural exchange. On June 2, 1957, during an interview with the American network CBS, Khrushchev argued that increased cultural relations would improve relations between the United States and Soviet Union and admonished U.S. leaders to stop halting cultural exchange efforts. Four days later, Soviet officials set forth a large proposal for exchanges in the scientific, industrial, technical, and artistic spheres<sup>15</sup> As with the previous attempts to persuade the United States to sign a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, Khrushchev's CBS interview aimed to cast the United States as a hostile and uncompromising foe. Though Ideological Goodwill outwardly seeking better relations, Khrushchev sought to compete with the West, and his belief in the doctrine of peaceful coexistence provided the philosophical basis for cultural exchange. However, as Cadra summarizes, "scholars either argue that Khrushchev truly desired improved relations with the United States, or contend that the Soviet leader harboured animosity toward the United States, or maintain that Khrushchev's policies vacillated between a hard line Communist stance and more moderate Communist policies"<sup>16</sup>.

Another characteristic in the Soviets' approach towards culture, and one immediately after the success of the October Revolution, was their acceptance of past. Indeed, it would be the carefully selected past, but, as Sheila Fitzpatrick<sup>17</sup> shows, in the 1920s there were bourgeois artists invited by the state to continue their work. More complicated was the case of the Imperial theatres, the Bolshoi in Moscow, the Marynisky in Petrograd (which later became Leningrad), which, all throughout the decade, fought for survival. Ballet, a form of art for the previous nobility, managed to stay alive, accepting innovative techniques (some

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12 Geoffrey Roberts. *The Soviet Union in World Politics: Coexistence, Revolution, and Cold War, 1945–1991. The Making of the Contemporary World*, eds. Eric Evans and Ruth Henig, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Robert C. Grogin. *Natural Enemies: The United States and the Soviet Union in the Cold War, 1917–1991*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Cadra McDaniel., *American-Soviet Cultural Diplomacy: The Bolshoi Ballet's American Premiere*, Lexington Books, London, 2014, p. 16

<sup>15</sup> Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali. *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2007, pp. 147–148

<sup>16</sup> Cadra McDaniel., *American-Soviet Cultural Diplomacy: The Bolshoi Ballet's American Premiere*, Lexington Books, London, 2014, p. 28

<sup>17</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick. *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992, pp. 91–92.

aesthetically valid, some other just experiments) which ensured its survival. “The ballet’s modernization symbolized the new society’s reconstruction of Russian culture, including the most sacred traditions of the prerevolutionary era. Soviet cultural identity consisted of prerevolutionary formats and techniques overlaid with revolutionary themes”, as Cadra McDaniel Peterson<sup>18</sup> wrote. It then became one of the most praised cultural weapons in the Cold War, with the Bolshoi ballet formally touring the US<sup>19</sup>.

“‘cultural Cold War’, the struggle for cultural prestige and influence between the Communist Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc satellites on one side and the United States and the nations of western Europe on the other. The battles of the cultural Cold War ranged from heated exchanges at international conferences to duelling theatrical productions to competing literary and cultural journals.”<sup>20</sup>

In the end, the bilateral exchanges led the way to Gorbachev's glasnost, perestroika, and the end of the Cold War. Yale Richmond<sup>21</sup> gives a compelling account of this cultural journey in his book *Cultural Exchange and The Cold war: Raising the Iron Curtain*.

### **The end of the Cold War. Neoliberalism. Globalization. Multiculturalism**

Since the end of the Cold War, culture and identity rather than ideology have been increasingly recognized as key forces shaping global order<sup>22</sup>. The rise of identity politics and religious revivalism have been feeding debates on the “clash of civilizations” and Islam’s challenges to the West, as the Western and the Arab worlds were brought closer together by globalization, open markets, migration.

The current intellectual and cultural commerce between the United States and other nations has produced radical changes in international relations. Movies, the mass media of communication, tourism, publicity, and advertising have altered the character of national cultures and of international discourse. The activities of universities, foundations, religious groups, fraternal orders, professional societies, and labour unions have contributed to the same end.<sup>23</sup>

In parallel, debates have been focusing on globalization, broadly defined as an “empirical process of increasing worldwide economic, political, technological, and cultural interconnectedness. Globalization’s impact on culture has been viewed as both a blessing and a curse: on the one hand offering unprecedented opportunities for interactive and enriching cultural exchanges and therefore increasing cultural diversity, and on the other leading to uniformity or tensions between cultures.”<sup>24</sup> In many parts of the world, globalization is

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<sup>18</sup> Cadra McDaniel. *American-Soviet Cultural Diplomacy: The Bolshoi Ballet’s American Premiere*, Lexington Books, 2014p. 36, Natea Mihaela Daciana, „Do we like the bad guy? Branding trough negative image”, în *Elite politice și securitatea națională a României*, Natea Mihaela Daciana, et all (coord.) Ed ProUniversitaria, 2018, pp. 112-117

<sup>19</sup> See, for this, compelling accounts given by Prevots, Naima, *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War Studies in Dance History*, Wesleyan University Press, 1998, and Cadra Peterson, 2014, *American-Soviet Cultural Diplomacy: The Bolshoi Ballet’s American Premiere*, Lexington Books,

<sup>20</sup> Greg C. Barnhisel. *Cold War Modernists. Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy*, Columbia University Press, 2015, p. 20

<sup>21</sup> Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and The Cold war: Raising the Iron Curtain*, Penn State University Press, University Park, 2003

<sup>22</sup> Irena Kozymka, *The Diplomacy of Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p.9

<sup>23</sup> González Chiaramonte Claudio, “The Evolution of U. S. Cultural Diplomacy in the Cold War. México y la Cuenca del Pacífico” [en línea]. 2007, 10(28), 19-42[read on 29 de Abril de 2023]. ISSN: 1665-0174. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=433747604003>

<sup>24</sup> Irena Kozymka, *The Diplomacy of Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p.9

perceived as a threat to national cultures and traditional forms of identity.<sup>25</sup> As a result and contrary to earlier predictions of “the end of history,” the forces of globalization appear to be more nurturing than destructive of the reaffirmation of sovereignties and, in reaction, in Irena Kozymka’s words, of the demands for recognition of regional and local differences.

Neo-liberalism, constructivism, postmodernism thus see culture as not an external tool in their public diplomacy, as outside representation, but as an intrinsic part, creating, shaping an evolving identity. Cultural diversity has become a hot topic, centred on multiculturalism – the cultural diversity within countries, on the issue of cultural globalization (seen as a peril in terms of cultural heritage and marketisation, driven by the capitalist drive for profit continuously opening and exploring new territories, i.e. markets). Multiculturalism thus stands against formal liberal universalism: there is no universal human nature, but countless cultural differences.

Regarding the complex relation between the multicultural and the global, “the first referring to the past and tradition, the second wholly centred on the present; the first consisting of differences, the second tending towards homogeneity,”<sup>26</sup> the two phenomena nevertheless refer back to and support each other. “The current globalization is a “new” historical fact owing to its eminently technical origin (information technology, military technology, economic and financial market, etc.), with a practical and operational basis which in itself does not lead to an effective universal culture. Hence it cannot rise up to the role of cultural universality or constitute a principle for the unification of a whole life form. Indeed, a totally technological culture is only possible as a technocratic ideology, that is, as the universalization (unfounded and therefore violent) of technological power<sup>27</sup>. Botturi continues by warning that “The modern paradigm of the human and political relationship as a conflict, in line with the *homo oeconomicus* model of mercantile competition and with the model of the centralizing state clashes with the new world configuration of globalization in which technological power and the universal interrelation make conflict an increasingly catastrophic reality.”<sup>28</sup> In this context the digital component must be considered in all form and shapes as it has a deeply transforming nature in matters of cultural dialog and diplomacy<sup>29</sup>.

Conflicts have not been far from the EU, but the annexation of Crimea and then the invasion of Ukraine have come to prove that while there many states were concerned with the global/multicultural paradigm, others, like Russia, never lost contact with Realism, continuing to act according to their reality of self-interest and power.

The political voices on the international relations scene are all loud, seeking to be heard, understood, respected, even obeyed. The pandemic, with its health (natural, universal) crisis, its (global) economic crisis, its social (culturally different) crisis, and now the war in Ukraine have shown, ever more acutely, the lack of a common communication language, i.e. a shared recognitional relationship.

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew Heywood, *Global Politics*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 136–156.

<sup>26</sup> Elena Pariotti, “Multiculturalismo, globalizzazione e universalità dei diritti umani,” *Ragion pratica*, no. 16 (2001), p. 63, accessed April 29, 2023.

<sup>27</sup> Francesco Botturi, “The Conditions for Multicultural Cohabitation”, Oasis [online], published on 27th March 2019, URL: <https://www.oasiscenter.eu/en/conditions-for-multicultural-cohabitation>, accessed April 29, 2023.

<sup>28</sup> Francesco Botturi, “The Conditions for Multicultural Cohabitation”, Oasis [online], published on 27th March 2019, URL : <https://www.oasiscenter.eu/en/conditions-for-multicultural-cohabitation>, accessed April 29, 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Natea Mihaela Daciana, *Communication through Digital Diplomacy and the Impact over National Security*, Luminița Chirean, Cristian Lako, Cristina Nicolae (coord.), Humanities in the Spotlight, Lambert Publishing, ISBN: 978-620-0-48128-3, pp. 188-194, Natea Mihaela Daciana, „Politica de diplomație publică între comunicare și manipulare”, în *Elite politice și securitatea națională a României*, Natea Mihaela Daciana, Lucian Săcălean, Roxana Mihaly (coord.) Ed ProUniversitaria, 2018

## Conclusions

After the annexation of Crimea, it has become evident that Russia and the Western states speak two different languages: Russia has never steered too far away from its Realist state interests, and has used the argument of a shared culture (the Russian minorities in Crimea and regions of Ukraine) to bring them back behind its borders. The Western states, adhering more, rather than less to the Westphalian principles, are also battling the challenges brought by globalization, with the changes in the global market and a steady rise of nationalist movements. At EU level “every crisis generated pressure on the EU. Every crisis generated the need for a common political action and solidarity. Finally, every crisis generated some degree of political division within the EU. The political division social manifestation and discontent which were in some cases by the information which reached the population”<sup>30</sup>. Although Lucian Sacalean was referring to EU cultural minorities, his warning regarding “the guaranteeing of a set of rights that encompass education, mother tongue usage, political representation both local and national, and actual cultural preservation is not only welcome but urgent and necessary to apply”<sup>31</sup> remains valid today. We believe that culture can bridge back communication between these such different political views, and that the role of cultural diplomacy needs to be strengthened if states are to speak the negotiation and even peace language again.

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<sup>30</sup> Mihaela Daciana Natea, “Is the EU Strategic Communication Good Enough? Why Does the War in Ukraine Prove the Need for a More Complex Approach Towards Disinformation?” in Mihaela Daciana Natea (ed.), *Disinformation Crossing Borders. The Multilayered Disinformation Concerning the War in Ukraine*, L’Harmattan, Paris, 2022, p. 13

<sup>31</sup> Lucian Sacalean, “Minorities vs. Majorities – An Evolutive Debate Towards An European Legislation?”, in Mihaela Daciana Natea et Lucian Sacalean, *Security and Reconstruction in Europe*, L’Harmattan, Paris, 2020, p. 192

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