



ЯЗЫКОВЫЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ

LANGUAGE IN PROCESS

DOI: 10.22363/2618-897X-2026-23-1-20-29

EDN: GEAZOQ

Research article / Научная статья

**B. Barber's "Jihad vs. McWorld"
in Contemporary Transcultural Realities****Vladimir P. Sinyachkin¹, Anton A. Lavitski²**¹ RUDN University, Moscow, Russian Federation² Vitebsk Branch of the International University "MITSO," Vitebsk, Republic of Belarus anton_lavitski@mail.ru

Abstract. This study critically analyzes the ideas of American political scientist B. Barber, presented in his book "Jihad vs. McWorld." The scholar attempts to substantiate the concept of the struggle between two forces shaping the world order: *Jihad* and *McWorld*. The former is presented as a movement oriented toward the establishment of a society of radical national-cultural isolation — the demarcation of ethnonational living space from the influence of the outside world. The latter implements globalization approaches to create a unipolar world of unified and uniform cultures, which ultimately should lead to the formation of a common transnational personality. According to B. Barber's predictions, the radical confrontation between *Jihad* and *McWorld* should end with the victory of the latter, that is, the complete blurring of intercultural boundaries. The relevance of *McWorld's* "cultural pressure" in recent decades is confirmed by the vocabulary of modern language, where foreign borrowings, typically international in nature, are displacing lexemes representing an ethnocultural worldview. Examples of contemporary cultural realities objectify the emergence of a form of interethnic relations development different from that proposed by B. Barber — regionalization. Regionalization, when applied to a cultural context, represents a natural process of countering the tendency to erase cultural and ethnic boundaries. Thus, formally, it appears to be in opposition to globalization (*McWorld*) and the related ideas of *Jihad*. However, it is consistently demonstrated that the doctrine of regionalization has a symbiotic basis: despite its focus on preserving national-ethnic identity, it implements transcultural diffusion through the assimilation of borrowed cultural elements. Examples of "cultural assimilation" in the literary process, the film industry, science, and even the catering industry are cited as supporting examples. Regionalization is realized in its natural form as an individual's independent desire to escape cultural assimilation, and in extreme forms, as a shift toward cultural separatism. Artificial regionalization is viewed as a subject of national discourse and is found in ideologically oriented communication flows aimed at obtaining, maintaining, or developing statehood. A conclusion is drawn about the expanding manifestations of cultural regionalization based on the principles of ethno-genealogical connections, adjusted for the contemporary political map of the world.

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Key words: regionalization, globalization, “Jihad,” “McWorld,” culture, national-ethnic identification, transculture

Article history: received 01.11.2025; accepted 02.01.2026.

Authors’ contribution: *Sinyachkin V.P.* — research concept, literature review, compilation of the bibliographic list, translation into English; *Lavitsky A.A.* — literature analysis, processing of the material, writing of the text, conclusions. Both authors are familiar with the final version of the article and approved it.

Conflict of interests: the authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

For citation: Sinyachkin V.P., and A.A. Lavitski. 2026. “Barber’s ‘Jihad against McWorld’ in Contemporary Transcultural Realities.” *Polylinguality and Transcultural Practices*, 23 (1), 20–29. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2618-897X-2026-23-1-20-29> EDN: GEAZOQ

«Джихад против Макмира» Б. Барбера в современных транскультурных реалиях

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Аннотация. Критически проанализированы идеи американского политолога Б. Барбера, представленные в книге «Джихад против МакМира». Ученый предпринимает попытку обосновать концепцию борьбы двух сил формирования миропорядка: *Джихада* и *МакМира*. Первое представляется как движение, ориентированное на становление общества радикальных национально-культурных изоляций — демаркации этнонационального жизненного пространства от влияния внешнего мира. Второе движение реализует подходы глобализации для создания однополярного мира унифицированных и единообразных культур, что в конечном счете должно привести к формированию общего транснационального характера личности. В предсказаниях Б. Барбера радикальное противостояние *Джихада* и *МакМира* окончится победой последнего, то есть полным размытием межкультурных границ. Актуальность «культурного давления» *МакМира* последних десятилетий подтверждается словарным составом современного языка, где иноязычные заимствования, имеющие обычно интернациональный характер, вытесняют лексемы, репрезентующие этнокультурную картину мира. На примерах современных культурных реалий объективизируется становление иной от предложенных Б. Барбером формы развития межнациональных отношений — регионализации. Регионализация в преломлении к культурному контексту являет собой естественный процесс противостояния тенденциям стирания культурных национально-этнических границ, то есть по формальным признакам представляется оппозицией по отношению к глобализации (*МакМиру*) и родственной идеям *Джихада*. Однако последовательно доказывается, что доктрина регионализации имеет симбиотическую основу: несмотря на ориентацию на сохранение национально-этнической идентичности, она реализует транскультурную диффузию посредством ассимиляции заимствованных культурных элементов. В качестве подтверждающих примеров приводятся факты «культурной ассимиляции» в литературном процессе, киноиндустрии, науке и даже сфере общественного питания. Регионализация реализуется в естественной форме как самостоятельное желание личности уйти от культурной ассимиляции, а в крайних формах — перейти к культурному сепаратизму. Искусственная регионализация рассматривается как предмет национального дискурса и обнаруживается в коммуникативных потоках идеологической направленности, ориентированных на получение, сохранение или развитие государственности. Сделан вывод о расширении проявлений культурной регионализации по принципам этногенеалогических связей с поправкой на современную политическую карту мира.

Ключевые слова: регионализация, глобализация, «Джихад», «МакМир», культура, национально-этническая идентификация, транскультура

История статьи: поступила в редакцию 01.11.2025; принята к печати 02.01.2026.

Вклад авторов: *Синячкин В.П.* — концепция исследования, обзор литературы, составление библиографического списка, перевод на английский язык; *Лавицкий А.А.* — анализ литературы, обработка материала, написание текста, заключения. Оба автора ознакомлены с окончательной версией статьи и одобрили ее.

Конфликт интересов: авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Для цитирования: *Синячкин В.П., Лавицкий А.А.* «Джихад против Макмира» Б. Барбера в современных транскультурных реалиях // Полилингвильность и транскультурные практики. 2026. Т. 23. № 1. С. 20–29. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2618-897X-2026-23-1-20-29> EDN: GEAZOQ

Introduction

In 1995, American political scientist Benjamin Barber's book "Jihad vs. McWorld" was published. Barber began publishing excerpts from his work in 1992. Incidentally, it was that year that Francis Fukuyama, one of the most renowned philosophers and proponents of globalization, also published his book "The End of History and the Last Man" [1]. However unlike Fukuyama's work, few immediately paid attention to Barber's work, let alone its overall narrative, which ran counter to the concept of mass consciousness, which had entrenched the idea of "democratic world" as a concept of international security [2. P. 102] and the recognition of the greatness of victory over the resurgence of the imperial spirit which is Russian communism [3. P. 127].

Even in his very first article, B. Barber predicted nothing good for the future of the world. The discussion revolved around the imminent clash of two forces, which he referred to as *Jihad* and *McWorld*. These forces, according to B. Barber, have already begun to operate, and both are equally productive: the first "recreates ancient subnational and ethnic boundaries from within," while the other "erodes national boundaries from outside" [4]. In other words, Barber's *Jihad* is a policy of demarcating ethnonational living space from the influence of the outside world. *McWorld*, on the contrary, advocates the formation of a common transnational character through the unification of perceptions of the external world, adhering to uniform stereotypical situations of interpersonal and interethnic contacts.

Frankly speaking, it should be noted that in his programmatic article, B. Barber presents the concept of *Jihad* in an emphatically radical sense, which this word acquired in the mass consciousness of people familiar with the culture of Muslim East only through news narratives, statements by individual politicians, social media posts, and ordinary kitchen-table discussions. In the modern interpretation by the followers of B. Barber's ideas, *Jihad* is a manifestation of "identity politics and multiculturalism," which is reflected in the desire of society to freely express its diversity. In Arabic, *jihad* (الجهاد) means 'zeal', and in a religious context it is

understood as “striving on the path of Allah, the struggle for faith.”¹ Thus, according to B. Barber, *Jihad* movement is, first of all, a cultural phenomenon: “a return of huge human masses to the tribal communities” [4].

Speaking of *McWorld*, B. Barber writes: “We are being confronted by economic and ecological forces that demand integration and uniformity, captivating the world with fast music, fast computers, and the fast food of MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald’s, drawing countries into a single, commercially homogeneous global network: one *McWorld*, linked by technology, ecology, communications, and trade” [5. P. 37]. Strange as this may sound today, but *McWorld* functions according to the principles of imperialism found in Marxist and Leninist theory: the constant pursuit of resource, trade, financial, and production markets will inevitably “force nation-based capitalist countries to blur national boundaries in search of an international economic empire” [4].

Both *Jihad* and *McWorld*, for B. Barber, have their own set of virtues. The former is attractive by its national identity, community and unity, tribal solidarity. *McWorld* opposes any narrow-mindedness and isolation, fragmentation and confrontation in any form. But in his conclusions, B. Barber is categorical: “Jihad may be the last deep breath before McWorld’s eternal yawn” [4].

Discussion

In his radical descriptions of *Jihad* and *McWorld*, B. Barber reached an equally sweeping conclusion about imminent victory of the latter. However, he himself apparently later realized that predictions about the development of world order cannot be so categorical. Thus, already in 2003, in his other book, “Empire and Fear,” he no longer mentions McWorld’s eternal yawn, and, moreover, states that “No state ... can justify its policy with arguments that are unacceptable to others” [6. P. 101], that is, he points out the absence of even the prospect of forming a unified political and cultural center. One gets the impression that the scales of B. Barber’s preferences are already tilted in the opposite direction towards *Jihad*: “The most important value of democracy is actually tolerance” [6. P. 172]. And then we find an even deeper disappointment in the global world and the statement that nothing can be exported to a national culture, that is, brought in from outside, if it has not come to this on its own [6. P. 172]. This formulation also reveals a modification of B. Barber’s view on Jihad. This is no longer an attempt to “preserve” national-cultural communities within the system of their own customs and traditions, linguistic and spiritual contacts. Rather, it is about the possibility of adapting cultural realities brought in from outside, integrating them meaningfully.

¹ “Jihad”. In *Islam: An Atheist’s Dictionary*. 1988. A.V. Avksentyev, O.F. Akimushkin, G.B. Akiniyazov, et al.; edited. by M.B. Piotrovsky, S.M. Prozorov. Moscow: Politizdat Publ. P. 68.

A little over 30 years have passed since the publication of “Jihad vs. McWorld,” and 20 years since “Empire and Fear.” It isn’t a long time in historical perspective. “But, oddly enough, we can already see whether Barber’s predictions are coming true. And we believe the answer is clearly negative. Neither in his first attempts to scientifically predict human development, nor in his subsequent U-turn on this issue, did Barber even admit the idea that the confrontation between two radically opposed forces would give birth to a new concept of world order — regionalization, which embodies the ideas of national-cultural identification that would integrate elements of the globalized *McWorld*.”

The world has never been homogeneous, and transcultural processes have accompanied human civilization, apparently, from the very first steps of the development of interethnic contacts. Even in ancient times, a number of authors (Gnaeus Naevius, Titus Maccius Plautus, Quintus Ennius, Publius Terentius Afer, and others) adapted literary works by Greek authors for the Roman theater stage; the technique of contamination, that is, the combination of several plays, was widely used.² While the phenomenon of the “crossbreeding” of elements of Eastern and Greek culture went down history as the concept of Hellenism. But these and other historical ideas in the late 20th — early 21st centuries were interpreted quite differently — as humanity’s globalist aspirations for a unipolar world. Moreover, it was culture that was to become the first step in the centralization of society. This could be partially believed in, given the rapid manifestations of globalization in this direction. One need only to look through the dictionaries of national languages, which even today continue to be largely filled with echoes of Western culture (primarily English-language culture). For example, the Explanatory Dictionary of the State Language of the Russian Federation, included by the Russian government into the list of standard dictionaries, reference books, and grammars that define the norms of modern Russian literary language, is replete with such lexemes: from *avuary* and *bitcoin* to *hedging* and *emitent*. However, the dictionary does not include words such as “*boyar*,” “*kulebyaka*,” “*raspekot*” (to scold), “*repa*” (turnip), and so on.

In the rush of mass adoption of new cultural and regional realities, only a small number of experts paid attention to the fact that globalist tendencies entail global cultural shifts. For example, proponents of the concept of European integration actively promoted the idea of Spanish philosopher and sociologist José Ortega y Gasset about the nation state as the “worst of all dangers.” In his book, “The Revolt of the Masses,” he wrote: “When for the first time a European stumbles upon national borders, he senses how incommensurate his economic, political, and intellectual demands — that is, his life opportunities, his scope of life — are with the collective body in which they languish” [7. P. 146]. At the same time, globalists seemed to ignore, or simply ignored, Ortega y Gasset’s other conclusions. For example, that

² *Translation Theory: a Textbook*. 2025. U.M. Bakhtikireeva, A.A. Lavitski, T.N. Petrashka, G.T. Khukhuni. Minsk: RIVSH Publ., p. 49.

“it is not blood and language that create a national state — on the contrary, it is the state that equalizes the composition of red blood cells and the articulation of sounds [7. P. 146]. Without entering into lengthy discussions about the truth or falsity of such a statement, we suggest considering just one question: is Ortega y Gasset so wrong, if we recall that in the paragraph above we mentioned an explanatory dictionary, which has the *legal* status of a standard norm of the literary language?

More obvious is the scholar’s assertion that in the future, the average European will be “mentally healthier and stronger than their predecessors, but also spiritually poorer,” since “as they rapidly erupt to the surface of history, they will not have time to be imbued with traditional culture.” It was only more than half a century later that the first attempts to conceptually analyze and understand this very idea of Ortega y Gasset’s, as it relates to reality, appeared in scientific and popular discourse.

Critics of the era of globalization, predicting the inevitable collapse of the idea of a unified cultural code, remained on the fringes of public discourse for almost the entire 20th century. Yet history has seen failed attempts at “cultural grafting,” the intended result of which was to unite peoples under a single cultural umbrella. One can recall, for example, the Roman Empire, whose collapse led to the death of Latin, once the most widespread global language.

Unifying the worldview doesn’t necessarily mean creating a unified sense of the world. It is this formula that works with national-ethnic identity. The effectiveness of harmonizing social relations will always be inversely proportional to social and cultural contacts, which are based on the culture in which an individual was born and raised, as well as the ethnogenetic experience of many previous generations. Individuals turn to the voices of these generations whenever they feel that newly imposed rules and standards push them beyond their “cultural comfort zone.” The search begins for a new “religion of life,” one that preserves everything that a) is subjectively necessary to inherit from cultural ancestors and b) has already been integrated into the modern cultural environment and become “their own.” In today’s reality, such a philosophical approach corresponds to the ideas of regionalization.

Regionalization is a reaction to globalization (the transition period between them is most often called *glocalization*). Regionalization most obviously fits into our philosophical and anthropological reality, which, as it was perspicaciously noted by O.A. Valikova, U.M. Bakhtikireeva and V.P. Sinyachkin, consists of an attempt to rethink the classical philosophical imperative “Know thyself” [8. P. 254]. Regionalization is a desire to put the interests of an ethnocultural group or related ethnic groups above the symbols of internationalism and cultural integration. Regionalization is objectified by several factors. Firstly, as A.M. Buttaeva writes, a multicultural society is not harmonious by definition; it quickly becomes rigid and conflict-ridden if different cultural groups clash within its borders, their situation aggravated by social inequality [9. P. 85]. Secondly, faced with the abyss of the disappearance of one’s own ethnic group, people themselves come to the desire to

escape cultural assimilation, and in extreme forms, to move to cultural separatism. Thirdly, the gap between the cultural realities of the past and present is so great that it is incompatible within a single linguistic culture (it's difficult to imagine someone who would sincerely admire the works of Tchaikovsky, Chopin, Shostakovich, Schubert, and contemporary rap music).

Artificial regionalization can also be productive. It is realized as a subject of *national* discourse, meaning it is found primarily in ideologically oriented communication flows. The political and ideological platform of regionalization is one possible path to achieving, maintaining, or developing statehood.

In the late 20th century, Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev attempted to prove that the “national path” of development lies not in borrowing from foreign ethnic groups and imposing one's skills and ideas on neighbors, but in self-awareness. But human history shows that this is not entirely true. Clearly, the process of cultural regionalization can no longer proceed disregarding the results of globalization. Today, there are no “refined” (“pure”) cultures. We live in a transcultural space. New cultural realities (products of *McWorld*), absorbed by national self-awareness, are integrated into its deepest subsystems. But at the same time, the content changes. Thus, regionalization consistently strives to eliminate the prefix “trans” in the name of culture, but only formally. In fact, we live on a planet of transcultures. For example, the once-phenomenon of children's literature, Harry Potter, largely spawned a new series of adventure fantasy novels in various national languages: Oleg Roy's “Fantasy Patrol” and Natalia Shcherba's “Chasodei” in Russian, Katja Brandis's “Children of the Forest” and Martina Baumbach's “I'm Transforming” in German, and Elisenda Roca Palet's “The Adventures of a Little Sorceress” in Spanish. This constitutes national literature, and no one wants to call it transliterature. The sitcom, which originated in the Western world, has been “nationalized” in its plot and, therefore, is not alien to any culture developing its own cinema. Even fast food restaurants have acquired a national flavor in recent decades (the Russian “Teremok,” the Kazakh “Bauyrdaq Qazaq,” the Belarusian “Khutka-smachna,” and others). Thus, despite the diffusion of cultural phenomena, the cultures themselves are contrasted in the concept of regionalization.

The transition to a new era is a complex process of social transformation. Like any global change, regionalization entails many potential threats, caused by the still absent system of relationships between all its subjects. In the mid-1990s, Samuel Huntington wrote in his book *The Clash of Civilizations* that “... the most large-scale, important and dangerous conflicts will occur not between social classes, rich and poor, but between peoples of different cultural identifications. Within civilizations, there will be intertribal wars and ethnic conflicts” [10. P. 67]. The latter, in our view, is connected with the fact that “any culture and nation is to a large extent heterogeneous, consisting of many interweavings” [11. P. 289]. Today, these are definitely transcultures. It is difficult not to draw a parallel here with Barber's *Jihad*.

However, the first, also known as “tectonic,” “cultural rifts” will still occur (or are already occurring) along the West-East and South-North axes. These geographic coordinates, whether coincidental or not, represent formal hypercultural centers (the culture of the East, the culture of the West, etc.). Then, the globalist ties between Slavs and Germans, Turks and Mongols, Celts and Romans, etc., will weaken. Further, the movement of regionalization will most likely follow a genealogical path, adjusted for the political map of the world. Clifford Geertz, the founder of symbolic-interpretive anthropology, substantiates this, but only comes to his conclusion “from the opposite”: “... when you see such organizing concepts as “country,” “people,” “society,” and, of course, “state”; they all seem to be drowning in the concept of “nationalism,” as if it were some kind of strange magnet. The strength and significance of the former are lost or weakened as they become interchangeable with the latter and with each other...” [12. P. 4]. We believe that K. Geertz here means civic nationalism, not ethnic nationalism. Although A.M. Buttaeva points out that ignoring the ideas of civic nationalism inevitably leads to radical consequences: “Ethnic processes — a surge of national consciousness, a sharp transformation of people’s social and political activity into a nationalist form in the form of a spectrum of national-political movements, ethno-religious ideological currents and social and political organizations, etc. — have an objective internal logic of development, which, if ignored, leads to increased political extremism and political violence” [9. P. 89].

It should be immediately noted that the presented forecast is not a scenario for a global cultural apocalypse. Besides, it is not about national marginalization or, even worse, separatism or Nazism. Regionalization is, rather, a nation's immune response to attempts at viral cellular level restructuring. That is, it is a defense mechanism aimed at preserving one’s own identity, the cytoplasm of which, however, has already been rebuilt by globalism. This identity should be called national-cultural and detailed in ethno-historical, religious, linguistic, axiological, and other aspects. However, in fact, *national-cultural* here means *state-based*. Naturally, we do not equate these concepts. But the modern institution of statehood appears to be based on a national foundation. According to the philosopher and cultural historian V.M. Mezhev it is rather convincingly confirmed: “A nation, unlike an ethnic group, is ... something that is given to me not by the fact of my birth, but by my own efforts and personal choice. I do not choose an ethnic group, but I do choose a nation, I can choose it ... A nation is the state, social, and cultural affiliation of an individual, and not his anthropological and ethnic definition” [13. P. 12]. In this context we can refer to S. Huntington: “Without having determined their identity, people cannot use politics to pursue their own interests” [10. P. 16].

Consequently, cultivating ideas of national identity, self-sufficiency, and cultural richness is a key instrument for the political unification of a nation in the form of its own statehood. It is no coincidence that countries with strong intra-

national ethnic differences are more likely to suffer from political instability. Conversely, in states where the dominant position of the titular nation is obvious and unquestioned, the vertical power structure functions more smoothly.

Regionalization manifests itself in actions to protect national sovereignty and preserve identity. A start has already been made. This is exemplified by changes in the legal system, whereby the norms and principles of national legislation are recognized as superior even to ratified international legal acts. Some countries have enshrined this provision in their constitutions. Others apply it as the *status quo*. In Russia, the Young Guard's Speak Russian Project is actively developing; one of its goals is to use Russian words instead of borrowed foreign ones. Here, we will also omit linguistic discussions about the original Russian vocabulary, but instead focus on the idea itself — an effort to avoid the blurring of lexical boundaries and to affirm the idea of the self-sufficiency of the Russian language.

Let's look at a few more localized (= regionalized) examples. In 1992, a landmark year for our research, one might have assumed that a scholarly journal on Tuvan studies was only possible as a run-of-the-mill local publication, nothing more. But today, there are no global scientometric databases that don't index the journal "New Studies of Tuva." Looking at the archive of our beloved journal "Polylingualism and Transcultural Practices," we see that this year, two thematic issues have already been published, dedicated to Chuvash humanities and the language, culture, and traditions of the Mari. Before that, there were special issues on the languages and cultures of the peoples of the Volga Region, the Urals, and the North Caucasus. Isn't this regionalization in action?

Conclusion

Of course, one could argue that the arguments and examples presented so far are not entirely historically relevant, and that the conclusions are "adapted" to the actual state of affairs, which is determined not by obvious trends but by the situation. Indeed, we have already noted that, historically speaking, too little time has passed to draw completely objective conclusions. However, one cannot deny that regionalization is most likely what awaits us. Without regionalization, the future scenario of our lives appears more dramatic: ignoring the processes of making national identity relevant could develop into more radical movements of national-political, religious, and extremist character.

As we see, in its essential embodiment, modern regionalization is a natural process, which has so far been most clearly explicated from the national-cultural side. This is society's desire to remain within a system whose coordinates are determined by its internal interests and needs, identified as unique, while new cultural realities are verified for their conformity with these needs and interests and are substantively unique. Regionalization is not an evil that seeks to destroy a unified world. Firstly, because the world has never been uniform. Secondly,

because regionalization does not declare the superiority of one culture over another, does not elevate one ethnic group above another; it advocates for tolerant trans-culturalism. Thirdly, it can be assumed that regionalization marks the beginning of a change in the historic era. The Middle Ages lasted 1,000 years, the Modern Era lasted 500, and the Contemporary Era may need a little more than 100 years to transform into the Supermodern Era.

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