

INTRODUCTION

Global Dissonances: Bringing Class and Culture Back In

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Transcending States, Nations and Identities in an Age of “Transnationalism”

The essays presented here stem for the most part from the conference *New Cultural Formations in an Era of Transnational Globalization*, held on October 6-7, 2001 at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan.¹ Globalization is a phenomenon maybe as old as human history (especially if one reads Eric Wolf’s “History” religiously); if not, it is certainly synonymous with the rise of capitalism itself, exemplified by “the modern world system,” a term made famous by Immanuel Wallerstein.² Yet, judging from the recent flurry of social scientific writing and academic debate on the topic, it might appear that globalization is a new phenomenon, rather than in the literature,³ just a misunderstood one. Whether globalization has just accelerated in recent years, as though as the result of increased time-space compression in David Harvey’s terms, or has mutated into a new form is a worthy topic of debate that has generated heated discussion.⁴ But in this regard, I think that there is currency for viewing contemporary globalization more constructively as a process of transnationalism. Thus, one is without doubt dealing here with a new or different kind of phenomenon, regardless of whether one regards it literally as a transcendent phenomenon predicated on nation-stateism or as a function of underlying systemic processes that have prompted coalescence of nations toward increased global integration or transparent fluidity. Time-space compression may have blurred our ability to capture the rapid nature of changes that have

taken place globally, but this should not blind us from seeing that transnationalism is, in the first instance, less a continuation of an older globalization than a fundamental change in its systemic practices.

If Bruno Latour is right to declare that “we have never been modern,” then there may be, by the same token, some substance for believing that “we have never been global.” Hybridity, porous borders, multiple identities and global culture have been the most popular of many keywords evoking the advent of this ‘new’ global order. Unfortunately, too much attention has been given to dichotomizing the universalizing tendencies of global culture and the erasure of local diversities, as though they are conversely related.⁵ Indigenizing strategies of multinational corporations have effectively blurred what used to be hard and fast cultural categories and definitions, and the changing nature of global-local distinctions (thus giving rise to the ‘glocal’) has in effect made anachronistic core-periphery polarities constitutive of the ‘modern’ world system.⁶ In this respect, there appears to be much merit in Arjun Appadurai’s depiction of the new global cultural economy, constituted by “functional disjunctures” of “disorganized capitalism.”⁷ Seemingly devoid of strong state intervention, which led the vanguard of an earlier generation of trade imperialism, or an overt centralized control of capital that has been at the heart of maintaining economic dependency in an earlier era of core-periphery relationships, transnationalism must then be understood in terms that transcend the language of an older colonial capitalism. But at the same time, one should also in fact question to what extent this new ‘glocalization’ is *just* the product of functional disjunctures, and to what extent capitalism is *really* disorganized. This is the point of departure for our present focus.

Globalization, transnational or otherwise, definitely exists, but it is quite difficult to interrogate it directly by asking what or who is the global. It can perhaps be best described as the sum total of vested interests that actively contribute to its driving forces. Of the many speculations on the nature of the post- and trans-national, most have ruminated on superficial aspects of culture, identity, and boundary blurring, without attempting to locate where the active *sites* of globalization are within this geography of power. Trans- and post-nationalism operate in given nation-state frameworks, but global forces may act on sites that largely crosscut the nation-state. In this regard, it is probably more fruitful instead to see how globalization *forms* the site of engagement, appropriation and negotiation by states, *ethnies*, classes and people through the imaginative and strategic agency of markets, discourses, and ideologies. This process is the basis of both global fictions and frictions.

The functional disjunctures brought about by decentered flows of ideas, images, capital, people, and things, as well as glocalization brought about by the breakdown of boundaries and blurring of identities contrast, on the other hand with increasing resistance and collective protest against globalization, as though polarized by an overt dualization between the haves and the have-nots in this global hierarchy of power. How does one reconcile the obvious contradiction between these two faces of transnational globalization? It may be, as Jonathan Friedman once noted, that this inherent disorganization of the global order is more likely the consequence of decentralization of world accumulation, and an inevitable fragmentation of identities brought about by the dismantling of closed economies and reverse capitalization by *nouveau riche* economies back into the imperial core.⁸ One might add that the global ‘order’ seems inherently chaotic, *only* if seen from a once-hegemonic center.

Nonetheless, there is a sense in which this new phase of transnational globalization is still driven by the same kind of utilitarian market capitalism that drove an earlier world system, regardless of functional disjunctures and blurred identities experienced at the cultural level. Joseph Stiglitz, for example, has recently criticized the role of global agencies, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO) and World Bank, in policing the international economy primarily to serve the interests of what he calls the “Washington consensus” of economic development.⁹ In essence, the advancement of free-market capitalism as the ‘ideal type’ of this global economy is achieved at the expense of the developing economy, which leads in the long run to a widening gap between the rich and poor. Should one be surprised then by the nature and extent to which meetings of the WTO have incited violent mass demonstrations? Capitalism has never been more *real*.

I argue then that the facts and fictions of contemporary globalization are probably less interesting than the interactive relationships between the two, insofar as they invoke diverse perceptions of culture, the geography of power hierarchies, and strategic accommodations between local and global in light of all the above, that involve a multitude of agents, institutions and interests.

One obvious question to be asked is: how transnational or postnational are we? Clearly even in Stiglitz’s account, globalization is a misnomer in the sense that global capitalism seems to be the same old capitalism, writ large. The new international order of governing bodies is simply the projection of systemic values that drive the interests of the dominant core nations. What then is global in the transnational or postnational, and how does the local in any social context constitute these globalizing influences

and forces through the mediation of culture, ideology, economy, and politics? One should not be satisfied here with simple narratives of transnational hybridity or unilateral notions of economic determinism. In short, a more sophisticated framework of analysis is necessary to take into account a diverse interaction of factors.

Epifanio San Juan's essay, in this issue, appears to be on a well-worn topic, namely the violence of the nation-state, but its relevance is at a deeper level much more seminal to contemporary globalization than meets the eye. Resistance to globalization is not simply limited to WTO demonstrations, but also coincides with the general rise of first peoples' movements and similar fundamentalist struggle against the West. Global terror in the form of state-sanctioned international interventions, euphemistically called peacekeeping missions (such as those in the former Yugoslavia), has been more on the rise than on the wane. One may question whether globalization should be on trial.¹⁰ Like the fiction of transnational hybridity, the neo-imperialism that masquerades under the cover of global intervention is just old domination by state powers restyled at a new level of sublimation. Since we have never evolved beyond a contest of imperialist domination, the violence that San Juan attributes to the nation-state is relevant in an era of transnational globalization, not only because it is an extension of the same logic that gave rise to the paranoia of ethnic cleansing and other holocausts, but more importantly because, as he argues, this violence is really rooted in the class hegemony of its capitalist state machinery. In effect, class division within society is isomorphic with social stratification in the world system; its global reverberations are extensions of the inherent violence of these norms.

Cross-Narratives: The Differential Calculus of Markets, Classes and Ideologies

It may seem contradictory to claim that transnationalism must, on the one hand, be seen as a new phase in the history of globalization; then, on the other hand, make reservations about how or whether we are transnational, given the possible extension of ongoing hegemonic patterns that have driven the state based struggles of an earlier world system. To put it more clearly, there appear to be overlapping levels of interaction that crosscut as well as appropriate each other. The extent to which imperialist states are complicit in spawning or cultivating the mutating nature of transnational capitalism is a matter of debate, but there is a definite sense in which the

blurring of once well demarcated cultural boundaries and identities, deliberate or otherwise, has served to effectively sublimate the underlying nature of global violence. Increasing hybridity and unquestioned fluidity can be seen as resistances to monolithic identities, and the standardized conformity of a nationalistic past, but they can also serve in a transnational present as tools that unwittingly accommodate the vicissitudes of an ongoing imperial capitalist domination, the *disconcerting* or divisive consequences of which are only now being felt.

San Juan's attribution of state violence ultimately to the class hegemony of its capitalist state machinery parallels the writings of Jonathan Friedman, who has consistently viewed cosmopolitanizing and indigenizing tendencies within globalization, regionalization, and localization as a function of various processes of class stratification and social consolidation, which are vertically as well as horizontally constituted.¹¹ In other words, cultural hybridity and essentialism are less meaningful as culturalizing processes per se, than as inherently politicizing strategies that enable different kinds of actors within a geography of power to create culturally meaningful niches for themselves. Rather than pitting nationalism against transnationalism and global against local, Friedman argues that it is perhaps more useful to view hybridity and indigenization as two converse processes that link the strategic lifestyles of two different social constituencies, namely hybrid cosmopolitans and rooted ethnicities, to the same pole of societal stratification or global hierarchy. In this regard, ideology is complicit as well. Ironically, cosmopolitan discourses have not only hailed the advent of a premature celebratory globalization, but also contributed to the emergence of new, hegemonic 'dangerous classes.'

In essence, global reconfigurations, such as economic regional alliances, fundamentalist supranationalism, ethnic-national revivalisms, and nativistic separatisms can be seen as a function of diverse politicizing strategies that transcend their literal nature as territorial realignments, and have different ramifications for power negotiation and contestation within the global order. Instead of seeing spatial identities and their underlying structures of feeling as a product of postcoloniality and difference in a transnational context, as Gupta maintains for example, it is necessary to go beyond such spatial re-inscriptions to see how this new globalization represents recolonization or postcolonization (if not transgression) of ongoing sociopolitical processes.¹²

Terence Turner's essay in this issue, expands on this overall perspective by showing how class conflicts (or indigenous movements in particular) have emerged out of the inherent contradictions of this historically evol-

ing global ‘system.’ For him, the major antagonist of global disorder is the unregulated nature of global capital. The latter is not simply the result of an inherently disorganized global capitalism. Capitalism’s systematic transformation has always been a multifaceted process of class contestation over the extraction of surplus value, which, through policing by international financial bodies, in fact uses the free market to protect domination by global corporate interests:

Until and unless some transnational movement can succeed in forging viable global political framework capable of regulating transnational capital, the pivotal elements in this conflict of class perspectives and projects remain the same. Just as the state, acting in concert with other states, created the institutional basis of the global market and financial system, and remains the most practicable source of the powers of international regulatory agencies and crisis intervention by central banks to avert periodic threats of monetary and financial collapse, so concerted action by states remains the most likely basis for the imposition of a new global order capable of regulating financial and corporate capital for social and political ends. This would make a concerted political movement that could retake control of state policymaking from the current neo-liberal hegemony; this, in turn, would require a more coherent social and political vision than the current array of [New Social Movements] and fragmented oppositional movements (including working class organizations) have thus far been able to produce.

In the longer run, social movements thus constitute primal rumblings of a global struggle over production. Chuang Ya-chung and William Thornton pick up on the theme of social movements in different ways. Chuang points out that this new phase of globalization has clearly problematized an earlier generation of social movements theory, perhaps best exemplified in the work of Alain Touraine. By re-spatializing the development of capitalism within a global context, “the problem is no longer about a postindustrial society, but about a *postindustrial condition* in the changing global space,” as Chuang puts it. While Chuang sees a constructive role for identity politics of various kinds in galvanizing support for the emergence of transnational movements that can crosscut older forms of class and place-based consciousness, Thornton, on the other hand, advocates civil antiglobalism as a kind of Third Way between Western global hegemony and the reactionary fundamentalism of jihad-like struggles. For Thornton, anti-global nationalism and nativism need not be reactionary entities by definition. In its united front against neo-liberalism, antiglobalism can reconcile schisms between North/South and Left/Labor.

Mohammed Bamyeh’s essay in this issue looks at the dialectics of Islam and its relation to global modernity. Perhaps contrary to the way “the clash

of civilizations” seems to depict Islam’s fundamentalist reaction to the West as its own mirror image, Bamyeh argues that there is no single entity called the Islamic world, and that the relationship of various nations to their region and the wider world must be seen in light of the way they have construed or appropriated modernity in a local cultural context. In each case, the coercive lineage of globalization constitutes a common frame of reference for diverse experiences and interpretations. Islam has been able to remain viable and persist through constant change while spreading widely, “precisely because it has been able to accommodate a variety of interpretations and conflicts,” as Bamyeh phrases it. Dialectics thus engenders for Bamyeh, the same kind of functions as class dynamics for Jonathan Friedman. The modern Islamic experience has always been ‘hybrid’ by nature in ways that differ little from transnationalism in a Western context and highlight its strategizing process.

The Power Sublime: Empire, Nativism and Cultural Violence on a Global Scale

Bamyeh’s dialectics accents the importance of cultural interpretation in sociopolitical process. Transnational globalization can ‘mean’ many things in a local context too, as Allen Chun’s essay on Taiwan in this issue shows. His choice of “multiculturalism” as a site of contradiction in global and local frames of reference critically reflects on the assumption of multiple identities and cosmopolitan hybridity that has driven discussions of transnationalism in the theoretical literature. If anything, Taiwan’s emergence in the global economy is largely a phenomenon made possible by the rise of transnational capitalism, that began with its expulsion from the United Nations, prompting the dismantling of a protectionist economy and the opening up of free trade. The free flow of capital that spawned an export oriented economy, combined with the advent of hybrid multinational institutions and lifestyles, contrasts, on the other hand, with the stratified and tightly regulated flow of labor that continues to characterize the transnational economy. Thus, far from being the product of inherent “disorganization,” the different fate of different kinds of “flows” (in this case, capital vs. labor) highlights the focal role of the state in regulating specific commodities as well as the interpretive role of culture in influencing the process within which people and institutions appropriate external forces. Not unlike elsewhere in Asia, the advent of the nation-state in Taiwan has ironically exposed a contradiction between the secular face of an

economy essentially open to global multiculturalism, and the primordial nature of a communal polity largely resistant to it. Tensions between them exist, perhaps uneasily, but they highlight the overlapping planes of agency that characterize the complex interaction between different institutions and interests within any social context. There is no *a priori* reason to believe that the virtues of transnational globalism in one domain of life will necessarily dominate any or all other domains of societal life. This is largely a contest of cultural meanings and social values. Wang Horng-luen's essay in this issue takes an even stronger position on the impossibility of global or postnational society by arguing that institutional routinization of "the nationalist reality" (Michael Billig's "banal nationalism") has already become our global habitus.

To be sure, both nationalism and the state will carry on, but as noted at the outset, the sites of globalization crosscut the nation-state, and continue to form lines of interaction between various actors and institutions over the control of capital, social production, and the meaning of community. By far the most ambitious attempt to relate the transformation of sovereignty to the evolution of the system of biopolitical production through hybrid integration, and seamless networks of movement and communication that culminates in a new vision of imperial order, is *Empire* by Hardt and Negri. Empire is the ultimate global society of control according to Hardt and Negri, predicated on the realization of a world market operating on the immanence of capital, what they call "a smooth world."¹³ Building on Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, while rewriting the missing volumes of Marx's *Capital*, Hardt and Negri have admirably pulled together threads of what various authors here, from specific vantage points, view as complex layers of interaction that invoke a multiplicity of actors and interests, whose intentions and outcomes are mediated through contests of cultural meaning in local contexts of social practice and life struggle. Moreover, the analysis of transnational globalization cannot be separated from the politics of authorial engagement. Like the dangers of celebratory postcolonialism, this new crisis of contemporary globalization involves, in part, resisting embracing the façade of disorganized transnationalism based on celebrations of cultural hybridity and multiple identities. Resistance to globalization, in whatever façade is, at the same time, a political struggle over regaining control of social production or of the very subjectivity of labor. In the final analysis, Chu Yiu-wai, in this issue, rightly asks whether there is a role for a renewed sense of postcolonial criticism. Chu argues that "globalization from below" in Appadurai's terms¹⁴ must also be accompanied by a reworking of the role of academics in writing theory: "Postcolo-

nial and global/local discourses remind us that, besides the now common recognition that identities are in fact not being but becoming, knowledge is a similar process of becoming too." It is a weapon if held right.

NOTES

1. Paper givers at the original conference included Immanuel Wallerstein, Wang Horg-luen, Mohammed Bamyeh, Jonathan Friedman, Terence Turner, Bruce Robbins, Saskia Sassen and Allen Chun. Forum discussants included Chua Beng Huat, Meaghan Morris, Lin Kai-shyh, William Thornton, Chuang Ya-chung and David Barton. Papers in this issue represent the half that focused primarily on the divisive aspects of globalization, i.e., its discursive fictions, internal contradictions, political tensions, social frictions, and transnational ramifications.
2. See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, New York, 1973 and Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, Berkeley, 1982, for clarifications on globalization, which is distinct from trans-nationalism.
3. Roland Robertson's *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. London, 1992, and David Held et al. *Global Transformations*, Stanford, 1999, are useful.
4. The linear dimension of such time-space compression, which is an overt dimension of Paul Virilio's use of "speed," which has been used to reflect the relative ease and high mobility of contemporary transnational flows is perhaps a secondary factor in our present discussion.
5. Ulf Hannerz, in "The Withering Away of the Nation: An Afterword," *Ethnos* 58, no.3-4 (1993), for example, sees globalizing trends as contributing directly to the overall demise of the nation-state. Similarly, the kind of de-territorialization invoked by mass migrations and diasporic identifications that is the object of inquiry in Linda Basch et al. *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and De-territorialized Nation-States*, Amsterdam, 1994, has also been viewed by many as phenomena that inevitably contribute to the undoing of cultural homogeneity and boundedness of all sorts.
6. The classic example of this is Kenichi Ohmae's *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy*, New York, 1990. See also, Roland Robertson, "Glocalization," in *Global Modernities*, eds. Mike Featherstone et al. London, 1992.
7. Arjun Appadurai's "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Public Culture* 2, no.2 (1990), relies heavily in this regard on Scott Lash and John Urry's *The End of Organized Capitalism*, Madison, 1987.
8. See Jonathan Friedman, "Global System, Globalization and the Parameters of Modernity," in his *Cultural Identity and Global Process*, London, (1994): 210-11.
9. See Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents*. New York, 2002.
10. Paul James, "Relating Global Tensions: Modern Tribalism and Postmodern Nationalism," *Communal Plural: Journal of Transnational & Crosscultural Studies* 9, no.1 (2001): 11-32.
11. See Jonathan Friedman, "Class Formation, Hybridity and Ethnification in Declining Global Hegemonies," in *Globalisation and the Asia-Pacific: Contested Territories*, eds. Kris Olds et al. London, (1999): 230-55, as well as the essay in this issue.
12. See Akhil Gupta, "The Song of the Non-Aligned World: Transnational Identities and the Reinscription of Space in Late Capitalism," *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no.1 (1992): 63-79.

13. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, 2000.
14. Arjun Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination," *Public Culture* 12, no.1 (2000). 15-17. See also Slavoj Žižek, "Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism", *New Left Review* 225, (1997): 28-51, for a similar point of view.