

**Minoritization as A Global Measure in
the Age of Global Postcoloniality:
An Interview with Homi K. Bhabha**
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One of the most important voices in postcolonial studies, Homi K. Bhabha is the author of the widely influential books, *The Location of Culture* and *Nation and Narration*. He is also editor of *Edward Said: Continuing the Conversation*, and co-editor with Carol A. Breckenridge and Sheldon Pollack of *Cosmopolitanism*. He has also written about contemporary artists Mary Kelly and Anish Kapoor. His writings are characterized by a close attention to the details of discourses and by an equal attentiveness to socio-cultural histories and conceptual theories. This interview took place in Beijing when Bhabha was an invited keynote speaker at a postcolonial forum and a visiting lecturer at Tsinghua University in China. The first question I asked was about significant influences on his writings.

In your work you refer a lot to Frantz Fanon, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Fredric Jameson, Sigmund Freud, Edward Said and, among the novelists, you seem to be extremely interested in Toni Morrison, V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie and a few other authors. So by whom are you most importantly influenced? Why and how?

I think you have given a list of the many influences on my work, but it will be very difficult for me to address each of these influences, because an influence is not necessarily to be seen as a body of work that impresses itself upon you as an uninterrupted ideal narrative. Very often you turn to the work of somebody when you have a problem in your own thinking, so an influence is less like a stream of thought and more like a problem solving exercise, or more like an intervention in your own thought or the thoughts of others. So influences are more like

networks than total traditions of thinking. But let me attempt to address some of the figures you mentioned.

You started with Frantz Fanon—my interest in Fanon emerged because of his attention to the whole question of the psyche and to psychic fantasy and psychoanalysis in understanding any form of political or social agency. Fanon was one of the very early thinkers in the field of colonization to make a direct reference to Lacan, in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Lacan, as you know, is a notoriously complex thinker. This reference to Lacan by a writer who was as much a political activist as he was a psychoanalytic therapist really intrigued me. My interest in Fanon began with his insistence that desire, the unconscious, dreams and psychopathology must be accounted for when you attempt to address the questions of anti-colonialism, nationalism, independence, or indeed any such political act.

The work of Lacan was important to me because Lacan questioned both the totality of subjectivity and the sovereignty of subjectivity. In Lacan's work, the subject is only ever a subject if it emerges into a dependent relationship, a relationship of secundarization through alterity, through what he calls "the other." The subject for Lacan is always constituted through an enigmatic and illusive instance, which he calls the *objet petit a*. The subject is constituted not as a total person, not as a totality, not as an individual, but as a series or a set of metonymic relationships. The subject in Lacan is a network. One of the interesting things in the literature of colonization was this idea that colonial subjects were always dependant subjects, that they feel secondary to the hegemonies of western or Eurocentric thinking, that they were secondary to Eurocentrism. Dependence or secundarization in psychoanalysis and in Lacan are not the same as, and should never be seen as analogical with, the notion of a dependant colonial subject who is dependant for cultural value and also for political positioning, who is dependant on the West or the colonizing society. Secundarization or dependence in Lacan and dependence in the political sense of colonization should not be seen as analogical.

However, what did intrigue me was the way in which colonized people had been colonized, creating both a sense of dependence on the colonial power and on colonial culture, and how through the experi-

ence of colonization, colonized people began to deconstruct the ideas of Eurocentrism. They began to deconstruct them because colonized people realized how problematic and shallow Western claims to freedom, sovereignty and liberalism were. They realized that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Europe had seen itself as embodying the ideals of liberty, creativity and freedom, that same Europe was producing a history of colonization. Some people in the West had their modernity, but others in the colonies were losing their freedom. While people in the West were becoming citizens, those in the colonies were becoming abject subjects. It is interesting to see how from the position of psychological over-dependence in relation to power, the most insightful colonized people used their own experience to understand the limitations, shortcomings, and narcissism of Eurocentric Enlightenment ideals.

The work of Jacques Derrida interested me particularly because he gave the whole act of writing itself, what he called *écriture*, a sense of agency. Writing was not secondary reportage. Writing was that which constituted a sense of the subject, a sense of the text, a sense of the social. He was able to take the issue of writing to the heart of the construction of our ideals, our life world, or the social text. But again, what was interesting to me in particular about Derrida's work was his understanding that there is no transparency, no necessary synchronicity in the representation of meaning in the social world, so that it is through mediation, through what he calls *différance*, through time lag, through displacement, that meaning comes to be constituted. These ideas, of course, have a very peculiar resonance for a colonial culture because in a colonial culture, there is a sense that your own historical position is always being displaced in relation to the empowering hegemonic colonizing culture that dominates you—there was a way of thinking about *différance* and deferral in the colonial text which I found very interesting.

Foucault was important because, for Foucault, to put it very briefly, all discourse is about authorization. There is no discourse that is not implicated in a power struggle; therefore any position, including one of powerlessness, is inherently and potentially invested with the possibility of resistance. This way of seeing power and resistance, or sovereignty and

subalternity, as being in an ambivalent and agonistic relationship—as a struggle around authority and authorship—made Foucault’s work very compelling to me. I cannot, obviously, go through each of the thinkers you mentioned, although many of the others are also important to me. I have tried to explain the influence of these thinkers in a narrative that shows how they intersect with one another, and also the ways in which they intersect with my explanations of the colonial text and the colonial condition.

I would need more than one interview to do justice to the various writers you mentioned in whom I have been interested: Toni Morrison, V. S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Nadine Gordimer, Adrienne Rich. But I think what I can say in a very general way about all of them is that they are interested in exploring the question of minoritization, the question of difference, the question of the failures of the democratic promises of nations. They are interested in the experience of those who were excluded, either on the basis of their sexuality or their race, and what is even more important, these writers are interested in trying to find narrative structures that reflect these problems. They use narrative to do the work of historical representation in a way that does not simply produce or give the reader a sense of social realism. They move away from the more transparent and stable generic traditions of realism to use complex narrative structures that actually make the reader participate in a performative way with the complex moral issues they live with. I will just give you one example in Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved*.

The act of infanticide, in which a slave woman kills her child, is known to have been historically an act of desperation at that time, as the rules of the slavery were such that mothers were often not given time to feed their children milk while they were working in the fields. The rate of infant mortality was very high. I discovered this by doing some research on infant mortality in the slave system. Mothers did not actively kill their children but very often allowed them to die early, rather than see those children grow into infants and die from hunger and neglect because the mothers were not allowed to nurture them by the slave owners. Toni Morrison could easily have written a narrative that made Sethe, the slave mother, a heroine who liberated her child through

death from a living death in the plantation. But Morrison provocatively and brilliantly refuses to do that. She produces, she reintroduces, the child as a ghost, who returns to the life of the mother, to blame the mother for killing her. She says: "You killed me. I was your child. How could I trust you?" What Morrison does there is to show that under conditions of slavery, even if a mother kills her child to relieve it, to save it from a sure death, which will come in a miserable way, the child still cannot understand how the mother could kill her. Morrison does not allow history to simplify the various complex ideas, emotions and ethical choices that present themselves while history is actually happening. Toni Morrison, in doing this, also suggests that even the victims of slavery, like Sethe, have to question their own acts and reflect on their own choices, whatever the historical conditions in which such choices were made and in which the acts were performed. She represents a very difficult freedom—the easy thing, as I said, would be to present Sethe as an abused slave who actually delivered her child from the pain of slavery and from certain death in slavery by killing her child. But what Morrison does instead is to suggest that it is only when the victims begin to question their own acts, even if those acts were performed in and provoked by an unfair system like slavery, that they can find their agency and indeed their freedom. Freedom cannot be given to the victims by somebody else. Freedom is an internal process of reflecting and finding resources of agency from within.

Marxism also has strong views against colonization, and there are different accounts of your attitude towards Marxism. What do you think about the relationship between Marxist theory and your work in critical theory?

Clearly, you cannot be a critical thinker in the twentieth century or the twenty-first century without being influenced by Marx. I think one of the most important reasons is that we take Marxism to be a theory that explains the mediation of material conditions at the level of ideological consciousness. You may agree or disagree with the Marxist notion of consciousness and it is interesting that Freud is in a way a near contemporary of Marx—someone much later, but who can be seen as one of the other master thinkers of the period—and that Freud complicates

the notion of the unconscious in a way that introduces the principles of difference, of fantasy, of displacement at the level of consciousness, which Marx does not do. One is indebted to Marx for the “theory of mediation,” which, to some extent, Marx also gets from Hegel and other writers, and for general thinking about dialectical methods, so these are very important contributions. However, Marxism, more generally, centres itself on the question of class difference, and my interests in colonization and minoritization raise questions involving a whole set of other forms of social differentiation and social discrimination—race, gender, generational, geopolitical movements, migration—a whole set of issues, which I now call more collectively a process of social minoritization, which, according to Marxists, always takes a subsidiary role to class. I have tried to democratize, if you like, the class experience, and suggest that class is one of the elements of social differentiation that has to be read in and through a kind of relationship of articulation with these various other elements. Therefore, I am very attracted to the ethical and political ideas of Gramsci, because I think through Gramsci there is an opportunity to place class in a relationship with other forms of social difference and to rearticulate the question of political agency.

The other issue that I want to emphasize is the question of contingency in historical and social events. Marxism tends to be a discourse that is more concerned with deterministic causalities. And I am actually much more interested in the play of the contingent in constructing historical conjunctures and constellations of meaning. I am also concerned with the whole place of the unconscious in the construction of political and social rationality. I am equally concerned with the status of representation, the question of the semiosis of social meaning, as an important participant in the creation of any historical movement or event. Marx’s emphasis was largely on the objective conditions of production. I am also very interested in relating that to questions of cultural reproduction and social reproduction and subjectification.

In this age of globalization, local confinement has given way to openness to the outside world, as was the case with China following the reforms that began in the 1980s. And this phenomenon has caused intellectuals in many

countries to stand up to stress traditional culture and nationalism. What do you think of this new current of nationalism? Is it healthy or sometimes dangerous? Or, do we need to look at this issue in context? I mean, in some previously colonized countries, people have a need to strengthen injured or broken national esteem to recover from imperial colonization and invasion, and to build the people's confidence in improving their countries. What do you think of the relationship between literature and nationalism?

The relationship between literature and nationalism is a topic that has been addressed by many people and I do not think that I necessarily have anything very new to say. I would just like to say three things. First, in the struggle for national liberation—whether it is in India, Angola or other parts of Africa or the Caribbean—in the struggle for independence—even going back to Fichte's discourses to the German peoples—literature has played a very major part because it has a way of gathering people as a national group by addressing them through the national language. This, of course, was one of Fichte's pioneering ideas. If national language is one of the major issues, one of the major constituent conditions of nationalism, then literary people, poets, and writers, and indeed even those who make up songs and national anthems, embody the national language in a way that arouses the passions, the nationalist passions of a group that is fighting for its independence or for its nation—that is one way of thinking about literature and nationalism.

Another way of thinking about literature and nationalism is less aspirational—that is the use of literature to constitute a national canon, which then excludes other minority voices.

A third way of thinking about literature and nationalism is not so much about nationalism, although it may be that too, but about the place of the nation in literature in universities or academies. Universities are important because they are the laboratories in which young people are imbued with ideas that they carry into the world, and in that context we know that literature is often taught in departments as defined by national origins, so nationalism is often constitutive of literature departments and of the academy as a whole. In comparative literature departments, the situation is traditionally not all that different because they tend to simply construct a larger regional map in which the nation state

plays the same determining influence. Comparative literature is often about one national literature in relation to another national literature. These are some of the ways in which we can think about literature and nationalism.

Your second question is about the resurgence in the post-Cold War world—for instance, the resurgence after the liberalization of markets in many countries of a sense of xenophobia and nationalism. Again, I think many people have spoken about the way in which, once the bipolar securities of a world divided between two superpowers collapsed, many nations in the second world began to have serious identity problems. For so long their own national consciousness had been suppressed into a more general Cold War mentality, that when this whole containing or framing structure broke down, there were a number of countries that started to lose their sense of orientation. When they lost sense of their own orientation, they attempted to recognize themselves through what I call “impossible nationalisms,” nationalism which is no longer part of the progressive, historically organic sense of the construction of the nation, such as that in the nineteenth century. These are often nationalisms that can only express themselves through ethnic cleansing and violence. They can only express their territorial instincts in ways that allow them to affirm their identities by destroying others, so that you begin to have this very fierce, exclusionary, reactionary and violent kind of nationalism. I am talking more about political conditions, but I would like to add that economic and cultural conditions can also create an exaggerated and often dangerous sense of nationalism.

But is it a coincidence that the liberalization of the Indian markets should have coincided with the resurgence of Hindu nationalism? My sense is that this argument could be made, although I am not a specialist in this area. When the market was liberalized, when the free market became much more institutionalized in India, there was a sense that the benefits of this free market situation should actually accrue to Hindus. I am suggesting that it could also be a sense of redefining the nation and the benefits of the free market in terms of Hindus. Of course, this is because, prior to the liberalization of the Indian markets, there was always a kind of secularism and socialism, which attempted to de-

emphasize communal differences between Hindus and Muslims and to forge a greater kind of liberal national identity. Many things contributed to the breakdown of these movements. The whole federal structure in India is very fragile. There are always tensions between the Sikhs at one end and the southern Indians at the other. There are all these internal fragilities. I am not suggesting that liberalization of the markets was the only cause of the breakdown, but I am saying that perhaps the market situation, which seems to emphasize a notion of the free market and of the individual as a player and an agent in the market, may not be the whole story. Maybe the free market in a situation that had a prior history of socialism and economic planning is what activated ethno-centric and xenophobic Hindu nationalism. Perhaps there is a link between the desire to constitute the dominant culture and the dominant religion in a majoritarian nationalism and the moment in which the markets themselves are being liberalized, whereby the population that sees itself as defining the national population seeks to control the market.

According to Jean-François Lyotard, the postmodern is “a part of the modern”: both actually appeared at the same time, contrary to many people thinking that the postmodern must come after the modern. My question is this: can we similarly put it that postcolonialism emerged at the time when colonization started? For, as we know, many people, especially colonized people, saw the need to combat the harm done by colonization at its very beginning, rather than after its end.

During the early period of colonization, there were colonizers at the same time as there were anticolonizers; very often in colonial societies there were people who were critical of colonization. Right from the late eighteenth-, early nineteenth- or mid twentieth- centuries there were people in the West itself who criticized colonization. Some people thought it was economically unadvisable. Some people thought it was religiously wrong to go to somebody else's country and exploit them. There were people who were against slavery right at the beginning of colonization. In a way, you could say that when colonization started, there were people who actually made a critique of it, in which sense that might be called 'postcolonial.' But the usual way of thinking about the

problem is that there were pro- and anti-colonization thinkers. Then there were the anticolonialists—people who fought for the freedom of their own country. After freedom, people say: “Now we do not have a free world, we have a neocolonial world.” Although formal colonization has ended, it is still a world that is dominated by the rich and powerful countries, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, whose attitude to the developing world, to put it crudely, is: “You have to follow our priorities. If you want to receive loans from the rich part of the world, from the developed world, then you should develop like us.” That was the period of neocolonialism.

I think ‘postcolonialism’ is frankly one of those titles and names that does not mean very much, but since you ask me the question, I am answering. Postcolonialism emphasizes the fact that the countries that were once colonized, in spite of neocolonialism, have developed lives, worlds and values of their own. They have gone down their own pathways. Yes, they are exploited by wealthy countries or they are exploited by international agencies, but their exploitation is not simply caused by those from outside who come to exploit them. There are also internal elites who collaborate in the exploitation of their own countries. So I think postcolonialism is first of all a way of seeing—a much more complicated way of seeing—how the regions that once were colonized have themselves developed, on account of both internal and external dynamism. Second, I think postcolonialism as an area of academic study has emphasized the question of culture, whereas the paradigm of neocolonialism emphasizes economics, politics and history. Postcolonialism, as it is developed through literature departments and through the Humanities, has actually raised the question of colonization and its aftermath to the level of a paradigm within the Humanities.

I have noticed that you have recently shown greater interest in the problem of globalism. Could you please tell us more about your new turn in this direction?

I do not think it is a new turn. Yes, it is true that I have begun to address the discourses of globalization. I have been elaborating on various kinds of conceptual, historical and social measures for thinking

about globalization, but I think my interest in globalization, current globalization, really emerges from my awareness of the global systems of colonization, slavery and indenture. Today, we are so enchanted by new technologies, such as the Internet, that we have a sense of almost instantaneous speed and acceleration in our relationship to the rest of the world. We are fascinated, as cultural critics, by the circulation of commodities. We are made aware of the incipient de-nationalization of national economies. We are continuously striving towards new forms of cosmopolitanism. But it also strikes me that at the moment of colonization, the development of steamship navigation, the development of the telegraph, the telephone, all the new technologies of that time were every bit as pioneering as the advances we have with new technologies today. I do not want to stress the old against the new, but in my interest in globalization, I want to relate the two. I want to be more aware of a kind of historical memory of contemporary globalization.

I am also interested in the question of citizenship, in contemporary issues to do with citizenship. These are issues that are related to minorities, refugees, diasporic peoples, immigrants, marginalized and underclass people, but these issues of citizenship also relate in other ways to those who might see themselves as majorities. The set of questions citizenship poses globalization are really quite profound, because we like to think about globalization as having opened up a much more transnational mode of life. We like to think of globalization as having made possible a whole set of exchanges, whether they are financial, intellectual, and so on. But at the same time, we are aware of the profound inequalities that exist in society, both in terms of resources and of access to resources. My interest in globalization really lies in the unresolved questions, the ways in which globalization emphasizes the disjunctures of the modern world, and citizenship is a very good example of how you belong or do not belong, or what the emotions and affects of home are in a world where people move around much more. I think this is to me a very important issue, because citizenship for me is the possibility of public action. Citizenship is a form of agency that allows us to coexist with each other in different forms of community, and at any given point to take meaningful action in the public sphere. When I answer the ques-

tion and emphasize the public realm, there is a whole other text about citizenship, which is the whole question of belonging: how you belong, the whole question of how you relate to tradition. Again, citizenship for me really emphasizes and encapsulates the strains within contemporary globalization. If we start thinking about globalization simply as in itself a huge and immeasurable numinous reality, we tend to spend our time describing and re-describing this thing called globalization. But if we take citizenship or minoritization as one of the ways, one of the measures of globalization, we are immediately faced with all the complexities and discontinuities of the current claims to global living, or to global life.

Although you have visited China and have lectured at Tsinghua University, as far as I know, only three of your essays have been translated into Chinese so far: "The Commitment to Theory," "Race', Time and the Revision of Modernity," and "Remembering Fanon," the preface to Black Skin, White Masks. The fact that more of your work has not been translated into Chinese may have something to do with the difficulty of your language. Has your work been translated into other languages and how is it received or criticized?

You know, the language I use, first of all, also has a history. If you read Hannah Arendt, if you read psychoanalysis, if you read Heidegger, the concept of "in-between" is in Heidegger and in Hannah Arendt. If you read the existential philosophers, you know there is a whole range of philosophical issues within which the language that I use is not that strange. But there are concepts I have developed myself, and a translator who is committed to the work has to try to find the equivalent word. My work may be very difficult, but the influence the work has had internationally is that however difficult the writing is, there are actually people who want to read it and will find it very helpful. Maybe more than other critics, I try to give a conceptual framework to ambiguous ideas and contradictory ideas. I make it my commitment to deal with difficult material, but it is contradictory and ambiguous material that a lot of people also experience as ambiguous and contradictory, but which they themselves either neglected or failed to deal with because it is difficult. I like to take that difficulty and I like to give that difficulty a

presence and a form in my work. I think it is because I can confront difficult problems, even problems that are not easily articulated. People are interested in my work because it confronts difficulty that engages them, not because I evade difficulty and find an elegant formulation to bypass what is difficult. This is the primary reason my work has either been translated, or is in the process of being translated into Italian, German, Portuguese, Japanese, and various other languages. If they can be translated into these languages, I do not see why they cannot be translated into Chinese. There is also talk about a Swedish edition of my work. The publication will come out soon.

Do you know of any misreadings of your theory? Some people tend to take only part of it to defend some kind of nationalism.

To defend nationalism? I think that is a real problem because whether it is in my work or whether it is in Edward Said's work, we are both very clear on that issue, and I think Said is even clearer than I am. He represents the exile's point of view. He says that there is a very positive value in the exiled intellectual. He cites Adorno in his own defense and I think he believes that nationalism is only a kind of transitional phase towards internationalism or cosmopolitanism. I believe also that it is not as if nationalism is good or bad: nationalism is a particular kind of ideology, a particular kind of platform for struggle at a particular time. After that time, it can become either progressive or regressive—history makes these decisions. We do not individually make these decisions, but I have argued for cultural translation as a way of understanding the world, not to reduce it to one language, but to understand the world by understanding translation, giving any particular cultural tradition or cultural text its own space. But we also see within that work there is a yearning to address a wider world: to fulfill that yearning, to make it address a wider world, is the purpose of the postcolonial critic. Because—and this is a very important point—colonization often turned in on itself during the process of colonization, the colonizers became bigoted, their view of the world became narrow because they had to defend their colonial rule, which is in some absolute moral sense indefensible. But the colonized, although they were the victims of colonization, had no option but to extend their

vision. They were forced to address people from other cultures and other traditions, so the colonized had a broadened vision. The colonized paradoxically and ironically became vernacular cosmopolitans.

In his book, In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures, Aijaz Ahmad critiques your writings. What do you think of his criticisms of you, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak?

I know that he is very opposed to me and certainly to Said. I do not know about Spivak. In fact, in the book he hardly mentions Spivak, but certainly he is very opposed to Said and me, and he has subsequently also written some stuff very critical of me. Actually, I have not even read much of it, but I have been told that it is very critical, and I did read a short article. You know, when you write, first of all you have to realize that you do not need to be loved by everybody. I consider myself grateful and fortunate that my work has been read and taken up by a number of people in various parts of the world, and I feel enormously humbled and grateful for that. You feel very modest when you realize that, but you also have to realize that not everybody can agree with you, not everybody should agree with you, not everybody should like you. All you can demand of your critics is that they read you in a fair way and that they do not misrepresent you. Often misrepresentation happens, sometimes because it is part of the old business of interpretation that we misinterpret. Sometimes misinterpretations are, as Harold Bloom puts it, quite good; and sometimes misinterpretations are simply mean. That is when they are used simply to pull somebody down because you think he or she is in a position of prominence. For example, in an intellectual debate yesterday one of my colleagues challenged me on my use of the term 'juxtaposition' and I had to explain that I was using the term in an alternative sense to that used by Hegel. He accepted my explanation—this question is important to me and my responses are important to him. That's productive. But sometimes you feel that criticisms are really not that productive. They are not made out of a spirit of intellectual engagement. You can certainly disagree with somebody's work, but you have to accept the status. You have to accept the integrity of that work. People do not do work because they want to destroy other people, but

because that is the work they can do. In my life, I try never to respond to critiques that are made more in relation to my status or who I am. I just do not do that because it can distract you from your own work. Why should I spend two hours or two days or two weeks writing a piece responding to somebody who does not really have an interest in my work, just so that a number of people can get some thrill to think two people are having a fight? I don't want it. I've never done it. I never respond to those critiques. I just go on and learn what I have to learn and write my next work. You know, I once had someone come to me and say: "Professor Bhabha, I wrote a very critical article about you." "Well, thank you very much for spending some time reading my work." "Aren't you going to respond to me?" I said: "Why should I respond to you? You have chosen to write an article that is critical of me. Good! Please do it and let the readers decide. But this doesn't mean that now I have to spend time writing about you—why should I do that?!"

I have noticed that in your recent works and speeches, you often mention the word minoritization as opposed to globalization. Is minoritization another version of globalization or one of the forces that resists globalization? Do you think minoritization will also give full play to the so-called Subaltern Discourse?

My view about this problem would not be part of the vocabularies of globalization, partly because I dated it much earlier: I located it in the 1920s, the interwar period, before anybody was describing the world as global. To me, the issue of minoritization is what emerges in and through a certain kind of putting the nation under erasure; because the minority inhabits the interstices, a minority is never a full citizen and only has a partial identification with the nation. But what happens to the other bit of the minority that is not accommodated in the nation? What happens to that? Now I think this is a problem that has persisted for a long time. One could even say from the 1930s and the 1920s that the whole problematic of minoritization was read in those terms. For me, minoritization is not merely something to be juxtaposed with globalization, but rather a way of trying to think of different—not necessarily transcendent—but different interventionist measures.

It seems to me that the more I read about globalization, the more critical I become of the idea. There is something going on that is acknowledged by the financial world, acknowledged by the economic world, by the political world, by industry and technology called globalization. And, it seems to me that the critical approach of scholars has in different fields been to try to cope with this immensity or this immeasurability—to use the Hardt and Negri term—and to produce a kind of critique that can somehow describe its structures, procedures and content. My view has been: if there is something big in the world, do I have to have something bigger with which to measure it? Do I need to measure it in its own terms necessarily? For me to talk about minoritization is in some ways to measure the global in terms of, say, rethinking something like citizenship. One of the major issues that comes out of globalization and all the kind of movements that Hardt and Negri describe is that the only hero left in empire is the postcolonial hero, as they put it. Unlike Hardt and Negri, I do not believe that everything is on the move, that all people are on the move. I believe something else. I believe that because some people are moving, the people who are staying put even in their local village, who have never moved at all, have also moved in some ways. It might just be another way of thinking about the same problem. But for me, minoritization is a way of taking another measure of the global, a measure of the global that does not deal with largely spatial movements. It deals with questions of temporality. It deals with the questions about which we have been talking, about rethinking or replaying the mediatory nature of the democratic process in a way that does not simply link it to its own history of individualism, tolerance, etc., but treats it as a mediatory process because, after all, the global has an aleatory element. It is to some extent a question of chance and contingency. I mean any discourse that I have read. If you look at the literature on citizenship, you will find that there is no definition of global citizenship out there. There is a whole set of procedures, a whole set of issues, that may or may not constitute such a concept. If you look at global justice, you have the same problem. If you read financial theories on globalization, you have the same problem. In 1978, Foucault asked, “Is there an economic globali-

zation? Maybe. Is there a political globalization? Perhaps. Is there a globalization of consciousness? No way!" Now, maybe, from 1978 to now, something has changed, but I still think those questions are provocative. I would say it is not something that both an intervention into and an attempt to produce another kind of temporary mapping of what the global looks like that I propose to present. I think this is related to the question of subalternity. Subalternity has been very interestingly developed over the last twenty years by our friends, the Subaltern studies scholars [Ranjit Guha, Gyan Prakash, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee and others], in relation to the whole struggle of nationalism, its problems, big history, small history and the colonial movement. I now think that there is another kind of notion of subalternity to be elaborated through the ethical political writings of Gramsci, which I have found productive in trying to elaborate this notion of minoritization, not given minorities, not pre-constituted minorities.

You came from India and studied in Great Britain. Have you ever had any problem with your identification when you go to the USA and how do you deal with the identity problem?

Well, identification is a very international issue. It is about the different kinds of institutions, different kinds of everyday practices that create the network of your life. I deal with it partly because I identify with some particular professional and intellectual projects that I find are best served for me in the United States generally. Many of the issues that interest me are very significant issues in the intellectual, cultural and scholarly world of the United States, so I feel quite comfortable in these respects. However, for much of my life I lived in India and Europe, so I identify less immediately with the American political world. I understand it, and I know that it is important to understand it, I understand the structure of it, but I do not identify with it. I am more excited about intellection in India or Britain than I am in the United States. I see many bad things in the United States, and so my relationship with the United States is at once productive and affirmative and conflictual, but that is actually true of my identification with most things, including my family. You know there are things within my family that I feel very

close to and there are things that make me feel very angry. Sometimes I scream at my children! That is exactly what I ought to do to the United States or indeed to Great Britain.

You said we should respect the “right to narrate.” My question is: how can developing countries ensure their right to narrate? In general, the transnational corporations in the cultural markets make excessive amounts of CDs, VCDs or DVDs, films, TV programs, and can sell cultural products in every corner of the world. Under this immense pressure, how can poor countries protect their right to speak?

That is an excellent question. I can answer this question in two ways. One, I think developing countries—at least the ones I know about and many I do not—first need to commit themselves to the right to narrate by making a greater commitment to public education. Developing countries—at least my own country, India—spend a lot of money developing nuclear bombs. I would suggest that we start by thinking less militaristically and less in terms of power supremacy and more in terms of social welfare and education. It is very easy to always blame the market and transnational corporations. But I see what you are saying. I’ll come to that in a minute, but I think a commitment to wider education, to greater education, is a very important thing. Certainly in some of the developing countries that I know, that commitment is not there. The right to narrate, the right to represent, the right to demand to be heard, these democratic rights do not entirely depend on literacy and education, but they do substantially depend on it. The reason I say they do not entirely depend on them is because I do not believe that literacy is a necessary condition or indeed a sufficient condition for democratic action. I know that for instance in India, even though the literacy levels are very low, when an authoritarian government such as Mrs. Gandhi’s emerges, even the uneducated villagers knew exactly what to do to vote her out. I would not say that unless you have literacy you cannot have democracy, but I do think that the whole set of rights, the rights of citizenship, depend on education and literacy. And in my view, not enough is done internationally, nor is enough done nationally for that matter. I think it is a substantial issue.

My second suggestion is that it is very difficult. My second suggestion is actually a historical illustration. As you know, there is in developing countries now—there has been for the last twenty or thirty years—a whole set of institutions concerned with representing the news from the perspective of developing countries. I think that happens. Of course you are right. It is very difficult to resist the power of somebody like Rupert Murdoch, who rules half of the world's press. But there are ways in which resistance to that kind of media can be formed and very often that is when the elites within the developing society decide not to align with these groups, not to side with them. It's very, very difficult. You know, Rupert Murdoch comes into town with three hundred million dollars in his pocket and wants to buy all the radio stations in Bombay. You have to be a very virtuous person to say, "Thank you very much, but I am still going to struggle." So I am not saying that these are very easy struggles. I am showing you how these media paramounts, these huge institutions, how they also find their ways into the hierarchies of developing societies, how the collaborations get set up. I think it is easy just to say that it all comes from there, you know, they come in and destroy where we are. But having said that, the most important thing is to think about literacy. That is the single most important issue and when you talk about literacy and social welfare in terms of literacy and education, the interesting thing is that there are many other elements that cannot be ignored. For instance, health is as important as literacy and education and anything else. I am saying education, just because it draws on a number of other social welfare mechanisms. Many third world countries will do best to focus on some of these issues. You know people always say where you cannot get food how can you talk about education? Yes, that is true. But quite often the choice is not simply between food and education.

What can a Chinese scholar do in the Chinese context, which was once called a "semi-colonial country" by such a revolutionist as Mao Zedong?

I have only been to Mainland China once, how can I answer the question? I think I cannot answer the question with any seriousness. Any answer I give will be very superficial and I have to apologize to you

and to the Chinese readers, but I think at a very general level, what the young Chinese and Chinese scholars and intellectuals can do for the world is to try and communicate to us the lessons of their history that they have lived through, the ways in which they have tried continuously to draw on the Confucian tradition and to draw on the Maoist tradition and to draw on the Marxist tradition, to create a way of living in the world, which is both very uniquely Chinese but also engages the wider humanitarian ideals that the whole world shares. I think that one of the things that happens in China is a powerful shift in regimes and ways of life and political ideas, which tries to hold together the old and the new. The rest of the world could learn from these Chinese experiences.

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