

Introductory Notes: Dialogues on Globalization and Indigenous Cultures

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Globalization both as a concept and as an empirical process has caused seemingly endless debate. What is globalization? When did it begin? What is the impact of globalization on local economic, societal, and cultural structures and identities? None of these questions have or will have definite answers. There are four divergent views of globalization. With some critics globalization is a myth, an ideology, for nation-states and different nation-state situations still constitute the universal reality of the world. Some critics argue that globalization is nothing new, for as Rick Wolf contends in *Europe and the People without History*, the process of globalization began with the beginning of the world. According to Wolf, the Neolithic Age already had global trade routes: Polynesian products traveled to Africa and Asian pottery pieces were scattered all over the world. Some scholars argue that globalization began with the emergence of colonial capitalism—or in the year of 1492. Still others take globalization as a fairly new historical phenomenon, whose inauguration is marked by the end of Cold War. The proponents of globalization celebrate it as an invigorating form of modernity that leads to universal prosperity, progress, and democracy as well as to new structures of feeling, imagination, and subjectivity. The opponents of globalization believe that globalization, originated in and perpetuated by the centers of capitalist power, emerges as a rerun of Western imperialism via TNCS, IMF, Hollywood films, computer technology, American values and lifestyles, all of which work together to resubjugate the previous third and second worlds to the first world's domination. Those who embrace a Hegelian dialectical view of globalization processes speak of them as historically inevitable while at the same time launching rigorous critiques of their negative effects on social life.

Of all the debates on globalization, the most engaging and productive that is of interest to everyone inside or outside academia and with or without expert knowledge about economics, politics, and culture seems to concern the consequences of interaction between the local and the global, that is, the transformation of local or indigenous cultures under the impact of the global flows of capital, information, ideology, values, and technology. For culture, as Raymond Williams has taught us, is a whole way of life, and everyone adopts a certain way of life or wants to have a changed way of life. A general anxiety permeates these discussions: the fear that the ongoing processes of globalization are threatening to level or erase various historically formed local cultures. In this particular debate, each side seems to be resistant or opposed to the perceived prospects of disappearing indigenous or local cultures. Some critics maintain that globalization essentially means the unification or Americanization of the world culture; some insist that that globalization is not necessarily the story of cultural homogenization or Americanization; instead it encourages and creates cultural diversity and protean difference. These two positions are met with a third position that attempts to reconcile the global and the local—it argues that globalization is a two-fold process which brings the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism at the same time.

Since the 1950s, with the advent of informational revolution, the Western capitalist countries have undergone radical socio-economic transformation characterized by the global division of labor, the rapid development of a global credit economy, the transnational corporations' control of capital, an increasingly flexible manufacture system and labor process, post-Fordist or Toyotist informatized production, and standardized market and consumption. Meanwhile manufacture centers have moved from the advanced post-industrial countries to peripheral or semi-peripheral countries and areas. In the capitalist centers such as USA, there has occurred a completely different mode of production, which is more of a production of production, a higher level of production, or what some Americans call meta-production. The market of such production no longer prioritizes concrete commodities, but specific arrangements or configurations of images, spectacles, and services. A new

signifying system of value has superseded the old one, and capital is reforming special spaces of accumulation. As culture is the social space for organizing capital and disseminating the desire of production, capital necessarily penetrates and saturates the social space of cultural production. That is to say, with the growth of transnational corporations, culture itself becomes trans-nationalized as well, hence a global culture. Transnational corporations bring different societies and cultures closer, catalyzing cultural interpenetration, interaction, and transformation through new telecommunication media. The agency of transnational corporations colludes with one another, forming a transnational capitalist class, who do not identify with any particular country, nor even with the first or Western world. They identify with the global capitalist system. Through penetration of capital into the remotest areas, transnational capitalists spread a consumer ideology that interpellates and affects the constitution of individual subjectivity, transforming individuals into consumerist subjects all over the world. As consumerist subjects, individuals are willingly incorporated into transnational capitalist culture-ideology, to borrow a phrase from Leslie Sklair, subjected to the ideas and values of the global capitalist system and losing or abandoning their previous cultural identities.

It is in view of this perceived global situation that critics like Fredric Jameson, Masao Miyoshi, and Samir Amin argue that US-centered global capitalism is colonizing both the unconscious and the previous third world, recreating the world after its own image, converting lands into territories of the global Empire, people into its appendages, and things into commodities. In the moment of global capitalism, Jameson argues, the distinction between economics and culture has disappeared, for “commodification today is also an aestheticization” and, together with weapons and food, “the entertainment business itself [is] one of the greatest and most profitable exports of the United States” (Jameson 53). As Jameson comments, “The standardization of world culture, with local popular or traditional forms driven out or dumped down to make way for American television, American music, food, clothes and films, has been seen by many as the very heart of globalization” (Jameson 51). In his view, American postmodern culture, due to the constant expan-

sion of American military and economic forces, is aggressively penetrating into every corner of the world. It is in this sense that Marxist critics see capitalist globalization as threatening to lead to cultural homogenization—world cultures homogenized or unified by the logic of commodity and reification. It needs to be pointed out that these critics' views of globalization as Americanization are radically different from Francis Fukuyama's Americanist globalism, which is advocated and celebrated in his *The End of History and the Last Man*. Fukuyama maintains that history has run its full course of evolution in the day of global capitalism because the American model of democracy is now being embraced as the norm of socio-political life throughout the world. The universal triumph of democracy leads to the universal institution of democratic societies characterized by the satisfaction of individuals' desires for recognition as equal. As an apologist of capitalist democracy and an advocate of Americanism, Fukuyama's ultimate purpose in declaring capitalist globalization as the end of history is to subsume all different nations and societies into one singular orbit of development. His globalism not only celebrates Americanism, but also presupposes a unified world culture and a unified collective subjectivity at what he calls the end of history. In critiquing global capitalism, Marxist critics like Amin, Jameson, and Miyoshi also take globalization for Americanization; however, they see it as vicious, bloody American expansionism. In describing globalization as standardization or Americanization in manufacture, market, and consumption, they, unlike Fukuyama, do not celebrate or propagate the idea of Americanization. Rather, what they do is to map out an objectively happening reality, and their ultimate purpose is to expose the vices of global capitalism, calling upon the violently and unequally globalized to imagine utopian alternatives to the existing social order defined by social disintegration, atomization, and commodification.

The view of global capitalism as leading to capitalist globality is counterpointed by critics like Samuel Huntington, Arjun Appadurai, and John Gray, in whose estimate, what reigns in the world is still irresolvable or irreconcilable difference. In his *The Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington argues that the most significant conflicts among nation-states are cultural or civilizational instead of ideological, political, or

economic. “In the post-Cold War world,” he contends, “states increasingly define their interests in civilizational terms” (34) and “local politics is the politics of ethnicity; global politics is the politics of civilization” (28). Modernization is different from Westernization, for it has created neither any significant universal civilization nor the Westernization of non-Western societies. Civilizational confrontation is on the rise and the influence of the West is on the decline. While non-Western civilizations are redefining and reaffirming their own cultural values, Western societies’ universalism only manages to return the world to civilizational confrontation. In *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai argues that electronic media and migration have caused an epochal rupture between the modern and the postmodern. Electronic media and migration have brought about transnational and translocal solidarities of taste, opinion, and pleasure, radically undermining nation-states’ control over individuals and communities within and without geopolitical borders. Globalization is in no way a story of homogenization; modernity at large is modernity decentered, differentiated, and resistant to definitive boundaries. Part of the implications of Appadurai’s notion of modernity at large seems to be that postmodern global flows of biopower, information, finance, technology, values, and narratives have triggered a stampede of uncontrollable micro- and macro-modernities. Huntington’s and Appadurai’s notions of modernity seem to echo, in their respective ways, Gray’s view of global capitalism, which, he maintains, does not inaugurate a universal civilization; instead, it allows indigenous forms of capitalism to emerge and develop, “diverging from the ideal free market and from each other. It creates regimes that achieve modernity by renewing their own cultural traditions, not by imitating Western countries. There are many modernities and as many ways of failing to be modern” (Gray 195).

Challenging the above views is Roland Robertson’s position on globalization which he characterizes as the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism. This two-fold process happens simultaneously throughout the history of international or global contact. His classic example is Japan, on which such turn-of-the-century Western sociologists as Durkheim, Spencer, and Max Weber had great impact. It was under Spencer’s explicit advice that “the Meiji political

elite established a firm tradition-based Japanese identity” (Robertson 109). Japan is the exemplary non-Western country that electively incorporates and syncretizes ideas “from other cultures in such a way as to particularize the universal” and “return[s] the product of that process to the world as a uniquely Japanese contribution to the universal” (102). Robertson argues that Western sociology and classical sociologists since Durkheim and Weber have regrettably ignored two things: the world is as interpenetrated and interconnected and nationally constituted societies as inherently heterogeneous. While they were busy discussing contrasts between Western countries and non-Western countries, they were not aware of non-Western countries being “busy sifting and implementing packages of Western ideas for very concrete political, economic and cultural reasons” (110). Robertson challenges sociology’s dominant tendency to conceive or regard nationally constituted societies as homogeneous or unitary entities. The implications of Robertson’s argument are not only that nationally constituted societies are always spaces of co-existence of different ethnic communities, but also that there is always foreignness or otherness in self-identity (echoing Julia Kristeva’s notion of “the foreigner in the self”). This latter implication supports his notion of particular in universal and universal in particular or the universalization of the particular and the particularization of the universalism. For “the cultures of particular societies are, to different degrees, the result of their interactions with other societies in the global system. In other words, national-societal cultures have been differentially formed in interpenetration with significant others” (113). The two arguments (on heterogeneous national-societal cultures and on interpenetration between countries) support and reinforce each other—they are actually two moments or sides of one argument—one leading to the other.

It is in the context of this general debate on globalization and culture that we proposed this special issue on “Globalization and Indigenous Cultures.” Aware that the issues debated have engaged world-wide scholarly attention for the past two decades and will remain long open to further dialogue in the future, we intend to provide space for discussion among a group of scholars on the relationship of economic and technological globalization and cultural-ideological transformations across the

world, or, put somewhat differently, on the interaction between West-centered global flows of capital, biopower, technology, values, lifestyles, and local or indigenous cultural habits and conventions in peripheral or semi-peripheral countries or areas. As vocabulary is a major part of the common ground for any discourse, it is necessary to clarify the ambiguity of “indigenous,” as well as the relationship among the following cognate words themselves: “indigenous,” “indigenes,” “indigenization,” and “indigenism.” By “indigenous,” we mean “native” or “having originated in and being produced, growing, living, or occurring naturally in a particular region or environment” (*Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* 592). Actually it could be taken as equivalent to what is designated by the Chinese word “*bentu*.” When we say “indigenous cultures,” we mean *bentu wenhua* of historically colonized or semi-colonized countries or of erstwhile “third world” countries as distinguished from postmodern Western cultures. More specifically, the term both refers to cultural values, productions, traditions, and heritages in those countries which stand distinct from postmodern Western cultures and refers to cultural traditions and heritages of those countries which have more or less remained little affected by Western cultures.

The tension among “indigenous,” “indigenes,” “indigenization,” and “indigenism” reminds us of the relationship between “culture” and “cultural” as has been discussed respectively by Raymond Williams and Arjun Appadurai. While the adjective “indigenous,” for example, can apply to different situations unproblematically, it does not seem to sound right to use the noun “indigenes” for the Chinese in China (Hans and even ethnic populations such as Miaos, Yaos, Bais or Uigur people in China) or for Indians in India though it is perfect when used to name First Nations peoples in Canada, Maoris in New Zealand, and Gaoshan people in Taiwan. Similarly, “indigenization” can apply to previously colonized and semi-colonized populations but not to aboriginal populations in North America and Taiwan. Because to indigenize is to make a native version of something coming from abroad, and that always involves, as history testifies, a voluntary or imposed systematic project of modernity or modernization with the colonized (India and China for example) after colonial encounter. The end result is a kind of

hybridization in which neither the Western nor the indigenous remain unchanged. However, with the aboriginal peoples across the world, the kind of indigenization described above as an act or an event did not really happen, for what they met was threat or reality of extinction; they became either borderless or confined to specific spaces of reservation. Today, the 300,000 indigenes (For this figure see Arif Dirlik's article included in this issue) around the world are much less in a position to indigenize, not because they do not want to, but because they do not have an undeprived or undestroyed culture that can generate as much enabling space for negotiation, translation, appropriation, and resistance required by indigenization as do colonized nations with borders. More importantly, to indigenize, as previously noted, always involves a notion of modernity. The argument can be extended to the case of diasporic Chinese populations indigenized in lands they migrated to. If "indigenization" in China and India means making a Chinese or Indian version of Western thoughts and institutions, modernity (not necessarily Western type of modernity though) seems to be the point of departure and destination. The indigenization of diasporic Chinese or Indian populations overseas, such as in the Caribbean, Africa, or other parts of Asia, however, is an entirely different story: There is more assimilation and much less negotiation in their indigenization and, therefore, it is not informed or enabled by a notion of or a desire for modernity. Moreover, the difference between "local" and "indigenous" and between "to localize" and "to indigenize" also calls for discrimination. We can say local traditions or industries in provinces or areas in China but not indigenous; there is no problem involved if we say localized mandarin or Peking opera in Hunan or Hubei. However, in a global setting, indigenization and localization as well as indigenous and local seem almost entirely interchangeable: the indigenization or localization of global forces or Western "democracy" in any third world country may mean the same thing, though the former seems to have a stronger sense of *bentuhua* (indigenization) which implies appropriation and resistance going hand in hand, hence more politico-culturally consequent.

Given the inclusive definition of the term "indigenous," it is arguable that there are different kinds of indigeneity and indigenous poli-

tics, whose politico-ideological resonance deserves dialectical analysis. In his article "Globalization, Indigenism, and the Politics of Place," Arif Dirlik examines two indigenous situations, one of which refers to third world countries resisting globalization from the West, upholding their own cultural, ethical, and political institutions and traditions; the other refers to aboriginal peoples struggling to preserve their indigenous cultures, traditions, and social institutions in the first, second, and third worlds. While acknowledging the validity of the term "indigenous" and the epistemological and political significance of indigenous discourse in each situation, Dirlik at the same time argues that indigeneity in the age of globalization or after global colonial or neocolonial conquest is more of an imagined reality, a desire, a politically consequent projected goal for identity politics, than a really existing cultural, social, and economic mode of production. The indigenization of modernity in the nation challenges the paradigmatic claims of the Western version of modernity, providing "alternatives to parochial Euro/American traditions," for these traditions "masquerade as exclusive forces of universal truth." But the national project is itself a colonial or colonizing force. Indigenous projects must be critical of both global colonialism from without and national colonialism from within the nation-state. Indigenism is a much needed utopia, but it could also serve as a source of conservatism rather than a radical challenge to the status quo. J. Hillis Miller's article entitled "The Indigene and the Cybersurfer" stages two arguments. One argument questions the binary opposition between the indigene and the cybersurfer, another name for the cosmopolitan; the other rehearses and recontextualizes Jean-Luc Nancy's argument that every community, past and present, is composed of dissimilar individuals whose absolute singularity is uncomprehendable and untouchable. Following Wallace Stevens's idea of the indigenous, Miller evokes the indigenes as living perfectly at one with their environments and with other indigenes, understanding one another perfectly well due to the transparency of their shared language before he proceeds to deconstruct the indigenes thus conceived as mythical realities. In redeploying Nancy's notion of community in the context of discussions about global/local interaction, Miller contends that the singularity of neither indigene nor cybersurfer

is touched by indigenous culture or by the leveling American popular culture. “Beneath the superficial cultural garments [of globalization,]” he contends, “both indigene and cybersurfer remain singular, wholly other to one another.” Both arguments, though apparently contradicting each other, seem to argue that there is no real danger of global Western capitalist culture erasing cultural and ethnic differences across the world, because the world is already Westernized and because individuals and communities are essentially impenetrable and uncolonizable.

Rob Wilson investigates global semiotic displacement, the Disneyfication of indigenous cultures, and the transnational migration of images, ideas, and narratives from one geopolitical space to another. Global reproductions of indigenous cultures, music, and landscape, Wilson argues, increasingly send the local culture offshore and worldwide, “resolving the tensions of imperial history and global imbalance into mongrel fantasy, soft spectacle, and present-serving myth.” In calling upon transnational cultural studies to contest its field imaginary, he recommends two analytical frameworks of displacement respectively offered by Yunte Huang and Houston Wood. Huang’s framework addresses the transpacific displacement in the domain of cultural images and meanings, calling for a revised conception of American literature. Wood’s new perspective of American Pacific studies focuses on the rhetorical displacement of native Hawaiians in dominant U.S. While agreeing with Huang that the U.S./Pacific Asia relationship should be seen as a two-way traffic instead of a one-way route of Americanization, Wilson regards Wood’s model of U.S./Pacific studies as a necessary complement to Huang’s, for Wood’s model examines the U.S. relationship with its interior Pacific as one of domination and colonization cum Disneyfication via “rhetoric of demonization.” On the one hand, Wilson maintains that the semiotic displacement, the displacement in the domain of cultural images and meanings, has to be conceived of as a two-way traffic, that is, it refers to the transpacific migration of texts, images, ideas, and cultural meanings and values from both sides of the Pacific. On the other, through his discussion of the US postmodernist colonization of its interior Pacific, he alerts his readers to the fact that the transpacific or global flows of ideas, images, and values are happening in an asymmetrical fash-

ion. As a half-way fellow traveller with Wilson, Bruce Robbins presents his perspective on globalization and the relationship between the global and the local through a close reading of passages from Richard Power's 1998 novel *Gain* and through a discussion of Walt Whitman's cosmopolitanism. After critically analyzing Whitman's cosmopolitanism with its democratic inclusiveness as reminiscent of George Bush's imperialist rhetoric heard worldwide in the 2003 American Invasion of Iraq, Robbins proceeds to argue that, despite its dangerous impulse, Whitman's poetics of cosmopolitanism is a very important line of defense against the unilateralism of the American government. In Robbins's view, the world today is interdependent, for different countries, areas, and peoples are visible and invisible components of "a great global dance." It is impossible to draw a clear line of demarcation between home and cosmos, the global and the local, and the West and the indigenous. He concludes by calling upon us to challenge our received conception of us and the world, stretching ourselves to "become conscious of our interdependence with the rest of the world," to adapt to the ways in which we are already "connected to the rest of the world," and to see the world in our homes, and "our homes . . . in the world." Robbins's intervention on the globalization debate seems to give credit to each of the three previously discussed positions—globalization as Americanization, globalization as endless differentiation, and globalization as an integration of universalism and particularism. For one of the key themes of Power's novel *Gain* is that today it takes a fully interconnected world to manufacture any single product and that global capitalism has eaten into everyone's body and daily routine life. If the world is already economically and culturally globalized as Robbins argues, then the contemporary world undeniably imploded with irreconcilable ethnic, civilizational, and politico-religious differences and conflicts seems to point to the simultaneity of globalization and differentiation.

Third-world situations of globalization and third world reactions to globalization are always at the core of a debate about globalization. The two Chinese scholars, in their respective contributions, present a third-world case of globalization and a third-world response to global capitalism. Due to burgeoning capitalism and the influx of transnational

capital into China over the past two decades, Wang Liya argues, China is undergoing vast changes economically, technologically, culturally, and ideologically. The Chinese are beginning to buy into consumerism with a vengeance. The power of capital transforms everything it touches into a commodity. Education, media, art, and everyday life, all these are becoming increasingly commercialized while the disciplinary studies in the Humanities are being reduced to marginal status. Education in China has become a profit-oriented industry in itself. In Wang's view, economic transformation triggers or happens at the same time with cultural transformation. She argues that there is no distinct division between the two. Any dogmatic adherence to a rigid separation of the economic and the cultural will only impede an enlightened project of emancipation. The implications of her assertions are that economic globalization will necessarily result in cultural-ideological globalization, a position championed by critics like Fredric Jameson and John Sklair. Chen Yongguo offers a double critique—the Chinese New Left critics' critique of globalization and his own critique of their critique. The Chinese New Left's resistance to globalization is premised on its argument that the processes of global capitalism totally destroy indigenous industries, leaving them disordered and unreconstructed, further marginalizing the undeveloped or underdeveloped countries and undermining severely the sovereignty of the nation-state. According to the Chinese New Left, economic globalization is a process of subjugating different regions, societies, and individuals to a hierarchical and unequal structure of global monopolization. The alternative is nationalism. Chen argues that, in drawing their intellectual inspiration from the Western Left intellectuals, the Chinese New Left seems to have ignored the post-war historical context in which the Frankfurt School mounted attacks on capitalist modernity and enlightenment. China needs to merge into the new world system, he insists, for globalization enables China to acquire needed technological means and economic power to eventually counterbalance the hegemonic system of global capitalism. Chen speaks positively of the changes that have happened in China over the past two decades, which are paving the way for a successful transition from a developing country to a developed one. What the readers hear or overhear between the lines is "What's

Wrong with globalization?” These two articles can be taken as dialogue between indigenous globalization scholars and their Western colleagues as well as between Chinese globalization scholars themselves. We offer these articles, not as definitive statements, but rather as interventions—across continents and oceans—that will hopefully facilitate and develop discussions on this urgent topic.

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