

Asia and Globalization

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To those who in the last decade of the 20th century were celebrating (or mourning) the end of the nation, the first decade of the 21st century surely has brought considerable dismay, or relief, as the case may be. It seems presently that the euphoria over globalization of just a few years ago is bracketed between two invasions of Iraq, which not only dramatize the continued vitality of nationalism in its basest forms, but also expose slogans of globalization as little more than ideological cover for vulgar imperialism. Is there any justification other than nostalgia for a previous decade or ideological inertia for taking the concept seriously, or continuing to question the viability of the nation?

It depends on how we view globalization and the nation as historical concepts, is the evasive answer I would like to provide as a first step. The dramatic reversals of the past decade may offer two lessons. First is that a literal, positivist understanding of these concepts (as descriptions of a transparent reality) is the least useful, and the most ideological, way to comprehend and deploy them for analysis. I am not suggesting that they do not have reality, only that the reality is not transparent. Secondly, what makes for the opaqueness, in my view, are the contradictory sources of the concepts, and the contradictions they generate at the level both of concepts and historical reality, which call for a non-reductionist and historical (that is, non-teleological) comprehension and accounting of the concepts. I will point to some of these contradictions in this discussion. My discussion is guided, I should say, by a concern for the global surge in right-wing politics, and the urgency of the need to explore new modes of radical politics, by which I mean a politics devoted to the continued search for universal democracy and justice in all realms of life—from the economic to the cultural.

Globalization

I have long been troubled by the term "globalization" for the spatial and temporal teleology built into it, which also marks much of its use not just in everyday but also in scholarly and political literature. In this usage, certain fundamental practices, if not life itself, are in the process of being globalized in the sense of spreading over the globe, with homogenizing effects economically and culturally, which also represents the culmination of processes with a long history, if not constitutive of history, that began with bipeds straggling out of Africa to become masters of the globe, if not the universe. It is a kind of unrestrained diffusionism which may be "true," but is true in the most trivial ideological sense in that it allows no room for historicity, understood in a temporal as well as a spatial sense, or for power relations that may shape the content and direction of globalization. This is the version that has nourished the advocacy of some forms of world or global history since the 1980s.

A more restrained version is that which restricts globalization to the modern world, more or less identifying it with capitalism. Prominent examples are to be found in Giovanni Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century*, and, more recently, Global

Transformations, by David Held., et.al. This version may be traced in its origins to Karl Marx, as is dramatically illustrated by some of the statements about the (European)bourgeois unification of the world, and the creation not just of a world politics but a world culture. This version has the virtue of specifying globalization as a historical formation, and also offering an account, at least potentially, of the power relations that dynamize globalization. What it requires is further fine-tuning within the history of the formation dynamized by capitalism. I am referring here to the kind of reversal to which I have referred already that we have witnessed over the last decade. We could also take note of the argument, documented most extensively by Paul Hirst and Graeme Thomson in their *Globalization in Question*, that the late nineteenth century represented a greater state of globality than the late twentieth century. This kind of qualification brings forth a contingent, conjunctural, perspective on globalization that offers a much-needed corrective to evolutionary and diffusionist views. It also forces us to think of globalization as one process among others, and calls for a more intricate analysis of the forces at work and their dialectics. To be more concrete, why did globalization at the end of the nineteenth century correspond to the global spread of nationalism and colonialism, whereas globalization at the end of the twentieth century has nourished off postcolonialism, and the end of the nation-state (but not of the state as such)? If globalization then was not inconsistent with the nation-state, is it possible that the same may be the case now? And what of colonialism? Was it a phase within a long-term globalization, that could be recreated at a later phase? And what part did colonialism play in producing a global ruling class that may mark the contemporary phase of globalization? The questions go on and on.

I think it is important for us to distinguish globalization as a descriptive concept from globalization as a heuristic concept intended to grasp some, but not all, processes at work in the world. Roland Robertson's critique of sociology (shared by many others, most notably, world-system analysts) for being nation-based in its concepts and, therefore, unable to grasp processes that transcend the nation may be applied to all the disciplines we work in. My caution here is against a totalizing understanding of globalization that takes temporality and spatiality out of the processes (including capitalism) that the concept seeks to grasp. If I may simply state my own take on the question which I have discussed at length elsewhere, a non-reductionist non-ideological understanding of the concept would require an explicit recognition that: (a) globalization is one force among others in shaping the world, and its power is subject to its relationship with other forces, including localizing forces. While it is indeed most fruitfully understood in relationship to historical capitalism, capitalism, too, has a history, which endows globalization with a conjunctural temporality, (b) globalization does not refer spatially to the whole globe, so that it is necessary to be attentive of the world that globalization creates, which also leaves out or marginalizes significant parts of the globe. It may be the case also, as Manuel Castells has argued in *The Rise of the Network Society*, that globalization is grasped best in terms of networks rather than surfaces, which would also account for the apparent dissolution of the nation-state, (c) globalization does not just unify or homogenize, but also fragments and heterogenizes, creating new kinds of difference. Especially important in contemporary globalization is the struggle over the legacy of a Eurocentric modernization discourse and challenges to it in the resurgence of discourses and epistemological nativisms that had been marginalized earlier but discover newfound

power in the dynamics of a globalized capitalism, and, (d) while globalization is best for describing off-ground processes, two other terms, transnationalism and translocalism, may be better suited to the circumstances of a network society. These terms are open-ended in their spatial scope, and suggest, to this author at least, processes that are both cross-border and grounded.

Nationalism

Nationalism has its own teleologies, far more powerful, in its claims to a history that stretches from the beginnings of time to a future beyond imagination, to a national territory that supposedly has always been national, and a national culture that is almost biological in its claims on the citizens. Not least, the state in nationalism is the nation's, even as it claims the nation as its foundation. Ideologically (in contrast to legally), these claims define a sovereignty to live and die for. They also defy efforts to historicize the nation, no matter what the evidence.

This we all know, from personal experience as citizens of a variety of nation-states, as well as the immense scholarship on nationalism, even if we may all continue to express puzzlement at an idea that is so atavistic. But we also know that the ideology of the nation is subject to modification in the face of practical demands thrown up by changing historical circumstances. In the present context, what is at issue is the relationship of the nation to globalization.

First is the issue of sovereignty, established legally in the wake of the Westphalian system to be rendered subsequently into the "sacred" claim of the nation. It is the supposed erosion of national sovereignty (internal as well as external) due to intensified interdependence on the global scene that has led to the conclusion in some quarters that the end of the nation may be in sight; a conclusion that needs to be questioned both for its supposed novelty and its inferences from available evidence. Stephen Krassner argues in his *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, that sovereignty has never been absolute, as absolute sovereignty would imply autarky, which has been attempted on occasion but not realized. Sovereignty, moreover, has been subject all along to relationships of power. It is true that borders have acquired a new porosity due to new technologies that facilitate flows of commodities, finances, culture and knowledge. Transnational companies have become more cosmopolitan both in personnel and in their operations. Urban networks in some cases have created closer cross-border relations than relations to their national hinterlands. Motions of people seem to have achieved a multi-linearity that justifies speaking of "transnations" or diasporics rather than migrants.

It may be possible to find precedents for all this, especially if we extend our historical vision back to a period preceding the emergence of the nation-state. But it seems to me to be obscurantist to deny all novelty to a world that now witnesses new efforts at regional integration, is shaped by new transnational classes and organizations, and the proliferation of supranational organization and activity. On the other hand, it is another matter to view these developments as signalling the end of the nation, rather than adding new complexities to global political organization. Borders have not been disappearing but proliferating, as trans- and intra-national entities make demands for sovereignty. Some of these developments, moreover, have proven to be reversible, when threats to national sovereignty go beyond certain limits. No one has yet denied the

legitimacy of the nation, or the ability of the nation-state to exercise sovereignty(except in the case of states which the US, in its own self-interests, declares to be rogue-states).

Indeed, it is arguable that the relationship of globalization to the nation-state is mediated by class interests. Globalization is not merely an assault on the nation; what distinguishes it from an earlier imperialism is the participation in its processes of national elites from all societies, including the formerly colonized, who are willing to hitch their national (and class)interests to globalization. On the other hand, globalization appears as a foe of the nation(and class)to those who find themselves marginalized even within the national economy and culture as those are globalized.

For all the mythologizing after the fact, nation formation is itself a colonial process, where the nation in its formation suppresses those who do not fit in with its self-image and goals in order to create a homogeneous population as possible, at the very least culturally and politically but in many cases also ethnically. Globalization, ironically, has done much to expose this aspect of the nation, and provided a space of legitimation for those marginalized or suppressed under the regime of the nation-state. Not just ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples but marginalized local cultures have found a new voice in a globalized politics. Hence the oft noted coincidence of the local and the global, which is another of the contradictions born of the confrontation of the global and the national.

The Rise of the Right

There is good reason to celebrate the emergence from voicelessness and invisibility of those suppressed by national regimes, but indiscriminate celebration of the end of Eurocentrism, and of multiculturalism and diversity nationally and globally overlooks the simultaneous emergence of nativism and religious fundamentalism across the globe, which may be the ultimate irony of globalization. Globalization unifies, but it also fragments in new ways; as has been captured recently in the ironic title of a volume on "global cultural diversity," edited by Peter Berger and Samuel Huntington, *Many Globalizations*, where the contributors document the "globalization" of particular cultures-which makes the globe itself into the ultimate site for cultural contention and conflict, negating the very notion of globalization. Even capitalism, the ultimate dynamic force in globalization, finds itself claimed for competing cultural spheres. Culture has emerged also as a weapon in intra-elite struggles as well as in ethnic conflict which is another prominent marker of our times.

There have been a number of studies of the rise of right-wing politics over the last three decades, such as Lisa McGirr's recent *Suburban Warriors*, documenting the rise of the right in California from the 1960s, Robert Malley's *The Call from Algeria*, Peter van der Veer's study of religion in India, *Religious Nationalism*, and some of my own work on the re-emergence of Confucianism in Chinese societies of Asia, to cite some random examples. The question is one that demands closer attention. Managerial multiculturalism, which finds legitimation in the ideology of globalization, has little to say on this issue, as it contributes itself to the reification of cultural identity and particularism. Neither does postcolonialism, which has avoided the unanticipated consequences of its deflection of criticism from the social relations of capitalism to cultural issues of Eurocentrism, and has made identity politics into the ultimate goal of

critique. There may be little reason for surprise in either case, as both are themselves products of the globalizing dynamics of capital.

How the globalization of capital, and its spread beyond the spaces of an earlier modernity, including the spaces of latecomers to capitalism, has affected class relations is an urgent question. So are the cultural demands brought on the national and global scenes by those newly empowered by capital. We have had evidence of this kind of empowerment in the revival of native ideologies in East and South Asia. While globalization has become very fashionable in the study of local societies, what the globalization of local societies-their projection onto a global scene-implies for global cultural and political relations demands more detailed examination.

The question is not one, however, that may be explained through structural transformations, and requires attention to everyday political activity. A number of commentators have observed that the success of right-wing politics has been due to successful grassroots activity. While it is important to understand such activity, against a left preoccupation with transformation through state activity, it is also important to note that grassroots activity is not missing from left-wing politics, especially in Asia and the Third World, but even in the United States. The so-called failure of the 1960s overlooks that many radicals of the 1960s subsequently went "underground," engaging in different forms of place-based politics, that have shown their power in the Zapatista Uprising in Mexico, the antiAPEC and WTO protests in the US and elsewhere, and environmental organizing in India. Others, of a less radical orientation, have joined NGO's which occupy an ambiguous place in contemporary radical politics. All this, however, illustrates the need for acting locally while thinking globally, as well as acting globally while thinking locally!

Global Modernity

There is little reason to think presently that the world is headed for any kind of global unity, let alone a homogenized unity, as may be suggested by the temporal teleology of globalization. There is even less reason to think that the process is one that will encompass all the world's peoples or spaces, as is implicit in the very term globalization, which makes any such claim ideological. If anything, globalization makes the world's peoples-and their marginalization-more visible than ever.

I think, however, the rephrasing of modernization as globalization responds to a changing reality in the contemporality that may be described as co-presence or co-temporality. If the language of right and left has become meaningless, as some suggest, even more meaningless presently is the language of backward and advanced; not because the peoples of the world have reached a commonly shared level of development, quite the contrary. It is because it is no longer possible to deny the interrelatedness and structural nature of uneven development, or the modernity of even the seemingly most backward of ideologies, whether they emanate from somewhere in the Third World or the United States. This is a condition I have described elsewhere as "Global Modernity," which I take to indicate the universalization of the contradictions of capitalist modernity; contradictions that are in the process of creating Third World sweatshops within Los Angeles, as they create First World consumer facilities in Shanghai or Manila. The nation is still part of Global Modernity, as is globality. Other political, economic and cultural

configurations now complicate the situation, but there is no reasons why we should think of these configurations in zero-sum terms, rather than as add-ons that overdetermine the social and political contradictions of modernity.

As befits such a situation, we need also to view our own conceptualizations of the world in global perspectives. Much of the conversation on globalization or the nation still takes place on a First World intellectual and political terrain, with little regard for how these terms are read, interpreted, and deployed in other contexts. To clarify these meanings might be a point of departure for the construction of a more global social understanding that may also serve as the basis for a revitalized search for universal democracy and social justice that is urgently needed at a time of destructive political reaction.

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