GLOBALIZATION OF CULTURE AND VALUES: MYTH OR REALITY?

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R ESUMO

No discurso da globalização, deve-se ter o cuidado de não simplificar a complexidade nem fazer uso de termos totalizadores, essencialistas e absolutizantes. Os valores culturais tornam-se uma arma aterrori-zante se sua ambigüidade é ignorada, se a cultura se torna culturalismo sem considerar que os valores sempre foram, em qualquer momento da história, construções da cultura e portanto, sujeitos a recons-truções: um processo que testemunhamos agora sob o impacto de uma globalização economicamente dominada.

P ALAVRAS-CHAVE

culturalismo, estudos culturais, globalização.

1. Globalization. When we speak of globalization we have in mind first and foremost *economic* globalization: the multinational stage of capitalism, financial transfers and investments all over the world, the rapid assimilation of hitherto nationally regulated markets, a new legal regime of governing cross-border economic transactions. But globalization also includes both *political* aspects such as the eclipse of national sovereignty, a new geography of power across the borders of nation states as well as *technological* ones such as a hitherto unknown expansion of information technologies (think of the virtualization of economic activity on the stock market). In general, all of these aspects entail the mobilization of commodities and people, consumerism and mass migration.

2. Culture. Globalization can also be spoken about in terms of *communication*, of deregulation when it affects *group identities, labor flows, forms of mentality, manners and behavior* (the Bali villagers drinking Coca Cola and smoking Camel cigarettes while attending the cremation ceremony; or, more

provoking in the eyes of the Westerner, the young Hindu men in western India, clad in American T-shirts, attacking Muslims with the ancient sword, as it recently happened in the carnage at Gujarat). We can speak too of globalization in terms of *identity and difference*, of being centered or marginalized, of *multi-ethnic alliances*, of a world where nobody in principle is 'outside', but everybody could, in principle, be on the move, displaced (the prominent postmodern figure of the nomad). Or we can realize the local presence of far away events on the television screen (the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in Manhattan as experienced in Bangkok or Berlin). So when discussing all these matters of globalization we are already referring to matters of *culture*, even though on a scale of vague and uncertain expressions. There is, for example, *multiculturalism* (not only in Los Angeles and the suburban neighborhoods of London, but also in the business centers of Toronto or Singapore); there is also the idea of the *hybridity* and *liminality* of cultures and the idea of new formations of life and work in the space "between and betwixt," as Homi Bhabha put it in his most influential book *The Location of Culture*[1]; or we can also, to set up the agenda more dramatically, be intrigued by Samuel Huntington's frightening idea of a "Clash of Civilizations"[2], confronting the West with the newly emerging powers in the rest of the world, profane and sacred. After September 11th, the American writer Susan Sontag spoke of the "fear market," where our sorrows and anxieties materialize.

3. <u>Values</u>. The discussion about values cannot be separated, as the phenomena mentioned indicate, from a cultural understanding of the process of globalization; and globalization as cross-border economic transaction will depend, whether consented or resisted, on issues of culture (identity, mentality, language, race, gender etc.). These issues are highly problematic in themselves because in the age of globalization the absence of *normative cultural standards* and the presence of diversity at large is evident (unless you take Americanization and consumer capitalism as the one and only cultural device, as Richard Rorty, the American philosopher of pragmatism, did recently, suggesting – tongue in cheek – that Macdonaldization will greatly help to pacify the young population in Arab countries). In his book, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Arjun Appadurai conceived his well known "scapes" to classify and differentiate the worldwide process of modernization: *ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes* and *ideoscapes*. Most importantly, as Appadurai makes clear, these "scapes" occur simultaneously, and gain reality

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[1] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994).
[2] Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996).

only because they are compatible. Consequently he theorizes globalization as the *fragmentation* of the one and only path of modernity, stressing the rupture with the Anglo European concept of civilization. We have *multiple modernities* and *local cultures*, and we experience *culturalism* as an intentional, sometimes violent mobilization of difference.

How can we define culture? One can still make use, I find, of the definition of culture that the British historian Raymond Williams gave in 1960: culture not to be understood in the old European elite way (works of art which represent cultural values in themselves) but instead *culture* on a descriptive level, as "a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual"; and as an analytical category reflecting and giving evidence of the social changes of the historical period.[3] The material *and* the spiritual. The latter is a social fact as well, particularly when you think of *the imaginations and illusions which relate to people's practical life*. Anthropologists refer to "imagined communities"[4] or "narrated nations"[5]. The imagination has broken out of the particularly expressive space of art, myth, and ritual and has become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people in different societies. "It has entered the logic of ordinary life from which it had largely been successfully sequestered."[6]

As far as the *cultural dimensions* of globalization are concerned one can at first glance draw a friendly and idyllic picture comprised, for example, of a pattern of intercultural relations consisting of dialogue, tolerance and consent. But as soon as you get down to the facts and details of cultural *differences*, one becomes aware that culture is never something given or attributed normatively. Instead you will realize that culture, profiled in intercultural relations, is something claimed or challenged. In other words, in every case and event issues of *values* will be involved. Values are at stake when questions are asked about recognition, resistance, or origin (roots), about authenticity, borders or transgressions of borders. And, quite naturally, values determine such emotions as fear, care, shame, guilt and hope. Considering that all these matters are different in different cultures you might get an idea of what a Department of International Relations has to do (or should do) when global cooperation is to be successfully handled. Unfortunately the discussion must begin with insufficiencies and with globalization's discontents.

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[3] Raymond Williams, *Culture* (1981).

[4] Benedict Anderson, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes its Objects* (1983).

[5] Johannes Fabian, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

[6] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), p. 5.

In order to produce more reality than myth, the discontents and problems of cultural globalization will have to be thematized in this essay more than the wishful thinking of the consensus allows. We all can easily follow the vision of a shared history in which global interdependence would create a new culture of globalization. We then celebrate difference and differentiation as such. Of course, all of us intellectually welcome *cultural pluralism* as a concept to end all forms of *ethnic insiderism*. To be sure, we would all welcome back those minority groups, races, and ethnicities excluded from welfare – we would, that is to say, at least welcome them back into the rhetoric of our public speech. We would hale the falling away of those structures of power that, economically and politically, condemn them to silence and subalternity.

I hope to conclude this paper with prospects – not prophecies – from the view point of cultural studies. Not as an economist nor as a politician, but as a cultural historian I will follow the path of criticism and self-reflection in accordance with the European cultural tradition of skepticism and negation. Particularly in Germany this culture of negation set new standards beginning with the philosophies of Kant and Hegel and again by the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory after the Holocaust and the fall of the Third Reich. In trying to understand globalization and in search of a new value system as a result of modernization, I will first follow the concept of "post-traditional societies," a term prominent in European social sciences. I will then bring up the *human rights* agenda, developed in the tradition of European cultures, claiming worldwide influence and acceptance. At this point I will also make some remarks on the values of human rights and *immigration policies*. I will also comment shortly on another discussion of values in the framework of globalization: genetic engineering in relation to globalization, the so-called *biotechnological revolution* promising us health, dignity, and the relief of suffering for all people.

In traditional mainly western societies *values* like freedom and responsibility, equality and solidarity, as well as progress and emancipation, were constitutional facts. Life could be thought of as embedded in ethical and legal principles; repetition, cohesiveness, and collective memory gave orientation to these cultures. In the German cultural history of the 19th and 20th century , e.g. in Oswald Spenglers *The Decline of the West,* industrial modernization was reflected as a grand narrative of a loss of those values: a loss of community spirit, religious confidence, personal characteristics. The "whole" of society gave way to the particular, the genius of universality surrendered to expert rationalities. When in our days sociologists like Ulrich Beck in Germany und Anthony Giddens in Britain (one of Tony Blair's advisers) refer to "post-traditional societies" they offer a kind of constructive

criticism and self-criticism, speaking of alienation (atomization, loneliness, isolation) not only negatively in terms of cultural pessimism but also positively in looking towards a new way of living and acting. Beck speaks of the modern Western society as a "risk society" and defines *individualization* as a chance and condemnation at the same time: creating do-it-yourself-biographies of the "self," self-responsibility, self-obligation, etc. The old myth of Sisyphus is revived: the man who feels happy rolling the stone up the mountain again and again. No longer embedded in the welfare state, this high-modern or late-modern individual re-constructs himself or herself in multiple engagements. *Values* therefore become signifiers in a kind of *aesthetic* laboratory: truth can be combined with beauty, technological skill with art, creativity with business control. In this kind of living, *ambivalence* is permanently re-produced and supplemented. The problem is, however, that this new *culture of individualization,* as it is called, wholly depends on its own encouragement. In the long-run, this individual cannot rely, on an institutional framework (state, church, community) and therefore – being permanently engaged in building up his or her self-reflexivity – self-confidence is the most important resource. The trouble with this construction, however real it might be, is the need arising from the flipside of the so-called "risk society" for the return of the "old" virtues: the sense of belonging, the simple life, sometimes in the form of a new rigidity, asking for clear cut solutions of complex cultural and political problems.

The problem with this construction of a lifestyle, associated with a "post-traditional society," increases when it is taken as a model of cultural globalization, as Anthony Giddens, the British social scientist, seems to suggest. Giddens stresses the accelerating connectedness between everyday decisions and global outcomes. "On a global level, therefore, modernity has become experimental."[7] Giddens uses the term "experimental" because, to an imponderable degree, the outcome is beyond our control. Thus for "humanity" as such, the source of the whole value system of the occident is at risk; "humanity" becomes possibly reduced to certain *effects* of the human existence, uncertain human agencies. This is what Richard Sennett, in his book on work in the new capitalism, has called *"the corrosion of character,"* referring to the United States.[8] Giddens' argument, however, is that there is no way back to any cultural essentialism as a rescue from the "experiment" of modernism which by now has spread out around the globe. As a matter of fact,

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[7] Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, Scott Lash, eds., *Reflexive Modernization* (1994), p. 59.

[8] Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character* (1998).

there never was and never will be a society without functionalism. Even in the !Kung society of the Kalahari desert, the simplistic ritual which produced the values of cohesion and solidarity originated functionally.[9] With regard to so-called value systems the question arises whether values produced by long-term traditional societies relying on ritual and repetition can be substituted in short time lifestyles, let us say zapping and short cutting (to use popular practices and metaphors). Whereas tradition controls space through its control of time, with globalization, obviously, it is the other way around: time controls space. Globalization is essentially action at distance. Global absence predominates over local presence.

If we took this for granted we would refer to something like feeling or intimacy as an effect of globalization, insofar as it is produced by the information and television technologies. But here again *cultural relativism* is an argument, as it is as well in Giddens' framework of a global society. Post-traditional personal relations cannot survive as "pure," artificially constructed relationships. *Local cultures,* with their social and religious "essentials," still provide the discursive space in which new forms of "experimental" life and work are acted out. Maybe we have to imagine "identity" on an experimental stage, where the old play has been newly dramatized, because choices and decisions of the characters in private life as well as in business affairs are always at risk according to multiple engagements – as a combination of built-up knowledge, collective memory, some sort of daily necessity, and a daydream imagination of the future.

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In a world of shifting cultural activities and changing social relations the question of *values* cannot simply be transferred back to norms and standards, Western or Eastern. In globalization, traditional cultures are permanently reconstituted, re-inscribed into forms of acting and reacting as Vasavi, a scholar from Bangalore, South India, has observed. Militant Hinduism has been kindled by globalization.[10] Existing cultural priorities (and not the imported occidental value system of individual rights and democracy) have been combined with the new impulses of free market privileges, so that the techno-managerial class has strengthened the Hindutva agenda, situating religious and personal identities and the symbols of Hinduism within the new consumer culture of India, the mass media, and the "Bollywood" film industry of Mumbai. The clash of cultures occurs *within* this newly formed Hindu

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[9] Ibid., p. 61.
[10] Agrarian Distress in Bidar. NIAS Report (1999).

culture of India. It also explains, Vasavi argues, the outbreaks of violence against Muslims, addressed in the West as "fundamentalism," allegedly the sheer opposite to the culture of individualization and differentiation. The same is true, of course, for the construction of an Islamic fundamentalism that foregrounds politics across the Atlantic after September 11th. *Values,* we have to remind ourselves in any case, are *cultural constructions,* dangerous materials when they are being used to characterize something like the pure "other," the fundamental opposite of one's own culture.

How do we arrive at *human rights* from human nature? For my second point, concerning the interrelations of globalization, culture and values, I come back again to the European tradition, and a value system which is still alive and obviously indispensable in designing the utopia of a world society. Human rights, it seems, is a unifying principle on the world stage (the UN Charta) even though our era of globalization has witnessed more violations of humanitarian principles than any previous. In the era of Enlightenment, where human rights were grounded, classical natural law and early modern definitions of rights drew their normative force, as the London law professor Costas Douzinas states in his provocative book, *The End of Human Rights*[11] from a conception of *humanitas* that excluded the "non-enlightened" as barbarians, as others, who did not and could not become *citizens.* The great 18th century declarations of human rights, the French and the American constitution, pronounced natural rights to be independent of governments, expressing in legal form the eternal and universal rights of man. But here already we are faced with a paradox: the act creating human rights politically, was, of course, based on the authority of the nation and the state. Citizenship introduced a new kind of privilege which was protective for some by excluding others. Legal philosophy formulated the ideal by drawing a sharp line between moral issues (human rights) and power (sovereignty) to protect values like freedom, equality, and dignity from the state (as Thomas Hobbes mentions in his *Leviathan*). Human possibilities had to be safeguarded against any dogmatic exclusions by governments and institutions and, of course, against any other violent actions that disregarded "the human." It is in protecting against such abuses of power that human rights issues are being mobilized in our present era of globalization. But in a world of cultural differentiation and increasing social inequality and unjustified subordination, the paradox is even more palpable as it was the Enlightenment. Values associated with human rights reveal themselves in the gap between, on the one hand, the

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[11] Costas Douzinas, *The End of Human Rights* (2000).

abstract man of the Declarations (in our days empirically represented by an all-too-human white, propertied, urban male), and, on the other hand, the "others" subjected to their various insufficient surroundings of local cultures and political conditions. In terms of recent cultural studies one could speak of the "homelessness" of a postmodern humanity no longer identified with a universal essence of man.

More than ever before, it seems, a shelter is needed for this humanity. Can it be provided by human rights activities promoting better living conditions for the underprivileged and subordinate people in most countries of this world? The problem is, as Douzinas argues, that any individual desire or group-interest, when turned into an ultimate principle, looses its protective value, is somewhat devaluated. The logic of human rights cannot adapt to cultural differences, specific identities. Rights always agitate for more rights, for more *constructions* of human rights, in order to meet new demands and needs. Again, we have to conclude that human rights, as human values in general, are not given, they do not "exist" as such. They are constructed and function as a more or less abstract – you could also say metaphysical – principle in various situations and conflicts. Conceptualizations of human nature as "humanity" are all too transient and dependent on the cultural context and historical change. This does not mean, however, that values represented in affirmative action to protect minorities, or legal actions of a court of international justice are useless or without meaning. The opposite is true. One should resist all attempts to foreclose on the law in the name of haughty principles, thus neglecting the moral and political issues.

This is becoming evident these days in European countries, in Denmark particularly but also in Germany, where the conservative opposition supports a new immigrant law following the principle of "Leitkultur": all immigrants should adapt German culture, language and values if they apply for permanent residency. Here again we can see the old unholy alliance of culture and nation, which in the German past was part of the extermination of other "non-Germanic" ethnic groups, races and people (Gypsies, homosexuals, Jews). "There is a growing consensus in the community of states," Saskia Sassen writes, "to lift border controls for the flow of capital, information, and services and, more broadly, to further globalization. But when it comes to immigrants and refugees whether in North America, Western Europe, or Japan, the national state claims all its old splendor in asserting its sovereign right to control its borders."[12] Could another international agreement of human rights bring the solution to immigration problems? I would disagree with Sassen for two reasons.

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[12] Saskia Sassen, *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization* (1996), p. 59.

Beyond globalization rhetoric, the transnational agreement, if achieved, could again be essentialized, politically and economically, in its universal claim by the most powerful among the nation states. Furthermore, new immigration laws to do more justice have to be negotiated politically according to the *possibilities* of human rights in *the real surroundings and conditions of a cultural situation*. The ethical obligation shared by the international community would be to support and enforce these *possibilities* within the political and cultural framework of the *real* to keep alive the utopian heart of human rights.

The human rights discourse clearly shows that globalization is limited by the legislature of nation states. The proposition of values is uneven and contested, something which becomes most evident in clash situations as those in India mentioned above. Nonetheless, the culture-value-discourse, often neglected by economists, is of great importance because we know that economic and political decision-making is to a certain degree guided by habits and beliefs, which in turn are deeply rooted in cultural tradition. These are facts that have often been observed, for instance, in Japanese management with the concept of corporate identity in big firms.

In the age of globalization we are clearly entering an era of challenges to the cultural construction of the human. My last point is therefore a very basic one. If we take the value issue even more "fundamentally," from human rights to "the human" as such – that is to say, to our biological existence – we cannot escape globalization. Over the course of the past two decades, billions of dollars have been invested in what Margaret Lock calls "The Holy Grail of Biology"–the mapping of the human genome, promising a new utopia of health.[13] The capital investment in biotechnologies in the US and in other European and Asian countries is accompanied by a worldwide ethical debate. What does it mean to be a human being once germ line engineering determines the flow of generations and eventually re-shapes what we used to call an individual, a community, a life-style? What then is "normal"? Who sets the ideal of biological perfection? What is a "valuable life," and what will happen when some people are increasingly seen as "damaged goods," lower-class people, maybe whole populations of so-called underdeveloped or mis-developed countries? I cannot answer any of these questions, of course, and I do not intend to take part in drawing horror scenarios. But with regard to our topic of myth or reality of values in the globalization debate I am interested in the question of what is "naturally" and what is "culturally" produced. Where is the borderline? And is there something like a software of humanness (mind, soul, spirituality) to be set against the physical hardware of biological

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[13] Margaret Lock, eds., *Living and Working with New Biomedical Technologies* (2000).

facts of the body? At the very least one can say that in different cultures the acceptance of or resistance to biotechnological innovation will be different. And even in one and the same cultural frame like that of North America a new war on cultural values is being fought out, as Vincent Crapanzano has shown, for example, between the religious right with its literalism to read the very nature of the human in the sacred text of the Bible or the American Constitution, and the new scientific philosophy which advocates genetic testing and screening to improve health.[14] In this process of selection, the cultural conditions and social consequences are often ignored, as is the fate of disadvantaged people by school boards or employers. The mere possibility of disposing "bad genes" is tempting, of course, to all kinds of fundamentalist believers. Hopefully, depending on the importance of cultural values in the decision – making process, germ line engineering will not override individual choice. But who will judge whether the interests of society should dominate individual choice in the name of some new common wealth? And who will intervene when economic interests set the standard, when profit is being made out of the anonymous biomass or profit can be made by donors of body parts, managed by firms which operate on a global scale?

Although maybe the result of intellectual *angst*, it is not hard to imagine that "exotic bodies" are conceptualized as a special resource, joining the never-ending circulation of commodities integral to globalization. Political activists in Africa and the South Pacific like Aroha Mead, Deputy Convenor of the Maori Congress, have claimed that human genes are being treated by science in the same way that indigenous "artifacts" were gathered by museums; collected, stored, immortalized, reproduced, engineered – all for the sake of humanity, education, and health.[15] Yet a more optimistic outlook could figure out a growing consciousness of the cultural and symbolic worth of the body and body parts. Will a gene or a combination of genes be eventually conceptualized as part of the heritage of communities, clans, tribes, and entire indigenous nations? Values have to be redefined if the human identity is questioned, not only *culturally* but *naturally* as it is in biological engineering.

The economic endeavor, grounded in venture capital, has its very special fantasies of globalization. *Cultural values* can be understood as *symbolic capital*: an economic factor nonetheless, but unreliable, supporting or resisting the economic enterprise. In The Clash of Civilizations Samuel Huntington declares: "In an era in which peoples everywhere define themselves in cultural terms, what place is there for a society without a cultural core and defined only by a

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[14] Vincent Crapanzano, *Serving the Word. Literalism from the Pulpit to the Bench* (2000).

[15] Margaret Lock, *Living and Working*, p. 23.

political (and one should add: an economical) creed?"[16] Huntington dismisses the unilateral and universal concept of western modernization. But at the same time he feels distressed at the multicultural schizophrenia infecting the United States. Non-Western societies are encouraged to do it their own way, and not to slavishly follow the Western way of modernization. Japan builds upon and employs its own traditions, institutions and values. For many social scientists, like Huntington, the Japanese path to modernity revealed in paradigmatic fashion the interplay of an effective take up of Western models combined with the creative capacity to adapt them to a national cultural context. Thus Huntington would be willing to discuss new concepts of so-called "multiple modernities." But Huntington, I suspect, underestimates the *ambiguities* of the new formations of non-Western civilizations when he overemphasizes the influence of religious beliefs and cultural tradition, ending up with the clash of either totalizing or pluralistic visions. His simplistic notion of a battle of cultures has been revived, of course, to explain the terror attacks of September 11th and consequently has served to motivate a world wide war against Islamic fundamentalism.

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In times of crisis, politics tends to reduce complexity. This turns out to be fatal when *cultural values* of the other *as such* are declared to be the enemy, ignoring the manifold build-up and context of communities, societies, civilizations, however "different" they may be. Most societies are ambivalent in reconstructing their collective identities in reference to globalization and are ambiguous in their attitudes towards modernity in general and the West in particular – a fact which can be seen these days, for example, in the conflicts within the Moslem society of Pakistan. The clash is *within* civilizations not only *between* them, a fact also to be observed in the United States in the dispute between pluralistic and monolithic concepts of culture. In the discourse of globalization one should take great care not to simplify complexity, not to make use of totalistic, essentialistic, and absolutizing terms. ("The axis of evil" being only the most recent and egregious). Cultural values become a terrifying weapon if their *ambiguity* is ignored, if culture becomes *culturalism* without considering that values have always been, at any point in history, *constructions* of culture and therefore prone to re-constructions: a process we presently are witness to under the impact of economically dominated globalization.*

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[16] Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, p. 366.
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ABSTRACT

In the discourse of globalization one should take great care not to simplify complexity, not to make use of totalistic, essentialistic, and absolutizing terms. Cultural values become a terrifying weapon if their ambiguity is ignored, if culture becomes culturalism without considering that values have always been, at any point in history, constructions of culture and therefore prone to re-constructions: a process we presently are witness to under the impact of economically dominated globalization.

KEY-WORDS

culturalism, Cultural Studies, globalization.

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