Globalization and the Discontents of Postcolonial Hybridity

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Globalization is a process of social transition that is under way. Though for some social scientists globalization is not new, it has gained momentum since the 1980s in academia. Robertson defines globalization as follows: "Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole…both concrete global interdependence and consciousness of the global whole" (1992: 8).

Though Robertson admits that the process of "compression" began in the Sixteenth century, he emphasizes that its intensification is a recent phenomenon. Nowadays global interdependency is clearly intense in terms of trade, military cooperation and cultural imperialism. Two years before Robertson gave his definition of globalization, Anthony Giddens had his:

Globalization can … be defined as the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. This is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanciated relations that shape them. Local transformation is as much a part of globalization as the lateral extension of social connections across time and space. (Giddens 64).

Unlike Robertson's definition, Giddens's emphasizes that globalization is not centered on metropolitan industrial cities, but it mainly focuses on the transformation of distant localities; hence, the global-local dichotomy. If we can conceive of an end to the globalizing process, then our globalized world will become a homogenous one world with one culture: a "small village" as some would like to call it. Others believe that this global world will not be harmoniously

organized for there will be no unilateral organizing center, but many centers. The nation-state will definitely be eroded since the transnational companies and the World Bank will be the ones that decide the future of the world; borders between countries will virtually disappear.

In the light of these social, political, and cultural global changes, Waters defines globalization as: "A social process in which the constraints of geography on economic, political, social and cultural arrangements recede, in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding and in which people act accordingly" (Waters 5).

Ideologically speaking, however, the kind of globalization that is being marketed now is quintessentially Western. Indeed, it was Western capitalism and colonialism that began this globalizing process. Deterritorialization, as a consequence of globalization, is implemented in Europe where borders are evaded. The viability of such deterritorializing condition, especially in the face of the unprecedented waves of immigration and terrorism, is for the future to tell.

There are some significant changes that contributed to the acceleration of globalization. The collapse of Communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 is one such important event. This collapse is in fact a consequence of globalization. In the face of global economic integration and the development of global information technology and media, communist economies formerly controlled by a centralized government and cultural hegemony imposed by the state-controlled body politic could not survive any longer. The European Union, also, represents a pioneering example of transnational governorship, where different nation-states join together. The Union issues regulations and legal rules that can help individual states, though they decline some of their national sovereignty, economic gain, political autonomy, and social benefits.

The unprecedented flow of information enables individuals to transcend their nation-states in their concerns. Individuals nowadays are more capable of sympathizing with other people all over the world if threatened by natural disasters, wars, or acts of terrorism. Individual responsibility has crossed the nation-state borders to embrace the world. This global outlook has decisively influenced the formation of individual identities. Individual identities are exposed to influences that go beyond the borders of their respective nation-states. Thus, the

nation-state role in forming its citizens' identities has receded and has been supplanted by much broader political and cultural sources of influence.

The most important factor in accelerating globalization is the economic role played by transnational companies. These have rendered the whole globe into a transaction site for the production and consumption of goods and services. Transnational companies like Coca-Cola, General Motors, Kodak, Mitsubishi, and many others control two-thirds of the international trade and possess budgets that are larger than the budgets of most countries. Thus, economic power results in the formation of the European Common Market, the Osaka declaration of open free trade by 2010 in Asia and the pacific, and NAFTA agreement in North America (See Held et al., 1999, 282).

This economic, political, and cultural globalization has caused many hot debates that left parties divided. According to Giddens, the "skeptics", for instance, believe that globalization is not totally new; the only difference is that modern globalization, in contrast with its precursors, has shown more intense interaction and proximity among nation-states. However, they do not believe that existing international economy has merged enough to form a real global economy. The economic interaction takes place among three regional groups: Europe, Asia, and North America (Hirst, 1997). Others believe that this economic regionalism is growing and is rendering global economy less integrated, (Boyer and Drache, 1996, Hirst and Thomson, 1999). They also believe that the role of the nation-state has not eroded. The nation-state is still the main agent in organizing and coordinating economic activities well as in signing trade agreements and deciding free trade policies.

The advocates of globalization, on the other hand, believe, contrary to the skeptics, that it is a process that does not give heed to geographical borders. The Japanese writer Kinichi Ohmae believes that globalization will result in a borderless world whose market powers will exceed those of nation-states (Ohmae, 1990, 1995). They believe that nation-states alone are no longer able to control their economies or have a say in issues that arise beyond their borders. The European Union, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization, for instance, take crucial economic and political decisions that single nation-states cannot face (Albrow, 1996).

The third group according to Giddens includes those who believe in the transformation power of globalization; they admit that the World Order is indeed going through dramatic transformations not only in the economic field, but in the political and cultural fields, as well. For them, globalization is an open-ended dynamic process that makes changes and is itself undergoing change, sometimes in contradictory ways. Still, nation- states have not lost their sovereignty, but tried to adapt by restructuring themselves in new economic and social forms. They have become more open in terms of governance under a complex global condition (Rosenau, 1997). It seems that the members of this third group are more realistic than the two others in their approach to globalization; they do not undermine the complex effects of the phenomenon, nor do they embrace it whole-heartedly, because they are aware of its dangers.

Among those dangers are the pressing ones on the eco-system. Scientists, for instance, are increasingly worried about global warming and its effects on the ozone layer of the earth. They expect that the constant melting of polar ice will cause the sea level to rise and communities of the lower countries will face destructive floods. In addition, the high ratio of pollution has extremely harmful effects on birds; yet there are no effective plans or measures to protect the earth and deal with these impending dangers (Beck, 1995).

There are, also, medical dangers related to health. The erosion of the ozone layer has rendered ultra-violet rays dangerous; people are advised not to expose their bodies to the sun's harmful rays. Also, the use of chemicals and pesticides has greatly influenced agriculture and foods. Animals injected with hormones, and genetically modified foods have influenced people's health negatively and led to the spread of certain diseases and epidemics. German sociologists call this the 'global danger society'. There are other social and economic dangers which include a decline in job security, a disappearance of traditional effects on individual identity and individuals' decisions because of instability. Deciding to get married, for instance, has become relatively more risky than it was in the past. These kinds of danger, in addition to many others, spread throughout the globe, transcending national boundaries. Eco and health dangers affect so many people regardless of class, gender, age, and race; the best example, here, is the Chernobyl

incident in the Ukraine in 1986. Radiation effects spread far away from Chernobyl itself to reach Europe.

One of the most dangerous challenges facing the world in the twenty-first century is that of inequality and the widening gap between the North (rich countries) and the South (poor ones). Industrial countries possess the biggest part of the world's wealth, since they are the ones that own the biggest transnational companies; while, on the other hand, less developed countries suffer from poverty, increase in population, foreign debt, and poor levels in education and health care. The United Nations has uncovered that one fifth of the population of wealthy nations has an average per capita income that is 74 times higher than the income of one fifth of the population of poorer countries (See Giddens 140).

In the late 1990s 20% of the World's population consumed 86% of the total world's consumption, had 82% of exporting markets, and used 74% of telephone lines in the world (Giddens: 144). Only twenty-three developing countries out of ninety-three have been able to achieve economic integration. It is obvious that many developing countries that need economic growth will suffer more loss, in this globalizing process (World Bank, 200).

In the light of this, there is considerable disagreement amongst experts that free trade will solve problems of poverty and inequality in the world. Harsh criticism has been directed against the World Trade Forum; only rich countries are benefiting of free trade. Third World critics believe that this organization is not democratic for it is dominated by rich countries, especially the United States. Critics rightly believe that the United States controls the World Trade Forum, the World Bank, and the World Fund. What is needed is that free trade must respect human rights, laborers' rights, environmental conditions, and national economies instead of accumulating profit for big companies. If man does not control this accelerating change in our world and solve emerging problems for the sake and benefit of all, then global economic inequality will continue.

The concept of hybridity is not a new one. Hybridity started in biology to refer to hybrid species, but soon moved to linguistics through the work of Bakhtine. His concept *heteroglossia*, which means the existence of two or more voices within a text, illustrates this linguistic hybridity. Many creative writers whether in the colonies or some metropolitan cities advocated the concept and

celebrated it as a solution to essentialism. Among these writers, to mention just some, are Derek Walcott, Salman Rushdie, Assia Djebar, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Edouard Glissant, and postcolonial scholars such as Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, and Françoise Lionnet. (Acheraiou, 89). In his *Imaginary Homelands* Rushdie writes that *The Satanic Verses:*

> Celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes out of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the pure. Melange, hotch-potch, a bit of this and that, is how newness enters the world. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change by co-joining. It is a love song to our mongrel selves (1991, 394).

In other disciplines of the humanities, however, and especially the social sciences, the term gained momentum. Kraidy approaches the concept of hybridity from a historical perspective. He connects it to its precursor concepts such as syncretism, mestizaje, and creolization. He says: "Standing on the shoulders of the disciplines that debated syncretism, mestizaje, and creolization, postcolonial theory re-popularized the term 'hybridity' to explicate cultural fusion." (Kraidy 57).

This cultural fusion informs Paul Gilroy's book *The Black Atlantic* (1993). He explains how waves of immigration, dislocation, and relocation of people mainly from Africa, Asia, and the West Indies have effected a fusion of cultural identities in the new world. He argues against essentialisms and nationalisms that try to mutate identities in binary opposition terms such as black and white. Instead, waves of migrations, as represented by ships carrying slaves or immigrants, represent a hallmark of our hybridized world. Rejecting the notion of cultural purity, Gilroy embraces the concept of international contact and mixture.

The second postcolonial theorist who dealt with the concept of hybridity was Edward Said. As early as the late 1970s, Said addressed in his seminal book *Orientalism* (1978) the cultural, economic, political, and military relationship between the West and the Rest, with a particular focus on the Middle East. His *Orientalism* argues that in addition to economic and military prowess, the West used legions of imperial discourses in order to effect the subjugation, domination,

and control of the Orient. Though Said set out to deconstruct the dichotomy of West / Orient, he unfortunately ended up rendering a supernatural monolithic West that cannot be resisted. However, this unwarranted essentialism of the West in *Orientalism* underwent a dramatic transformation in Said's other book *Culture and Imperialism* (1991). Drawing on so many narrative examples that include Dickens, Kipling, Austen, and Forster, Said argues that cultures can never be pure due to the colonial experience. He says that "all cultures are involved in one another, none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and monolithic" (1994, P. xxv). He continues few pages later:

We have never before been as aware as we now are, of how oddly historical and cultural experiences are, of how they partake of many often contradictory experiences and domains, cross national boundaries, defy the police action of simple dogma and loud patriotism. Far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more foreign elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude (p. 15).

This optimistic view of hybridity and mutual reliance amongst cultures does not blind Said in his later work to issues of power, domination, and resistance, no matter how much he commits himself to universal humanistic views.

Homi Bhabha, the third postcolonial theorist, expands arguments of hybridity and problematizes the concept further. Unlike Said who views hybridity as a taken-for-granted fact of modern societies, Bhabha spots ambivalence in the concept.

In his essay "Signs Taken for Wonders": Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817". Bhabha presents the anecdote of a group of Indians dressed in white and reading a book, the Bible, given to them by the white man. The anecdote demonstrates how the Indians accept the Bible differently. The sacred book, the symbol of empire, is estranged from its original place, though in translation, but still referred to as "English". The Indians have their own uses of the book. They sell, barter, or use it as waste or wrapping paper. The irony is that in England the public are told of the big number of copies distributed and they expect an equivalent number of conversions. This example illustrates how an encounter between two cultures creates an in-between space, a third space in Bhabha's terms where newness is borne.

The hybrid outcome is less than one and double. In India the Bible is Less than one Bible, but it is a double of two different ones. This state of the Bible according to Bhabha shows how the colonizer's authority is split and fractured by a culture that will accept it differently. Colonial authority depends on an essence that seems natural, whole, pure, and cannot be "distracted". This is the reason why hybridity breaks or pollutes, as it were, this purity and breaks binaries, such as white/black, self/other, and inside/outside. The Bible's authority, as it exists in English, is challenged by the Indians in the translated copies. The Indians cannot understand how the word of God can come out of the "flesh-eating mouths of the English." How could the Bible be an English book when they believe that it is God's gift to them? It is obvious that the Bible has been hybridized because it is a text whose authority is fractured. Thus, there is no fixed essence, no static identity of the Bible, since it has been shown by the Indians to be hybrid.

In his essay "The commitment to Theory", Bhabha quotes reverend A. Duff in his book *India and India Mission* (1839). The reverend explains how painful it was to explain to the Brahmans the Christian concept of the "second birth". The Brahmans will receive this and say that it is not new for, in their religion, they are born again and again. Before they attain full Brahmanhood, the Brahmans have to go through a long process of purification rites that will eventually lead to their second birth.

The previous example shows, again, how everything the colonizer says or produces, gets translated into local cultural terms. Every act of domination by the colonizer must be immediately translated, interpreted, and renewed in the cultural terms of the colonized, which undermines the master's authority and power. As Peter Childs and Patrick Williams say:

> Hybridity shifts power, questions discursive authority, and suggests contrary to Said's concept of Orientalism, that colonial discourse is never wholly in the control of the colonizer. Its authority is always reinfected, split, syncretized, and to an extent menaced, by its confrontation with its object, (Peter Childs and R.J. Patrick Williams, 136).

Though Bhabha's importance is undeniable, he remains a controversial figure in the critical and cultural scene. Much adverse criticism has been leveled against him. One of his earliest critics was Robert J.C. Young who, in his book *Colonial*

Desire (1995), points out that the colonial archives themselves are full of evidence "of an obsession with categories of hybridity and syncretism" (Huddart, 150). The book warns against celebrating hybridity uncritically, and compliments Bhabha as one of the 'Holy Trinity' of post-colonial theory along with Said and Spivak.

Another severe critic of Bhabha's discourse is Benita Parry who takes issue with Bhabha's exclusive focus on colonial discourse and his indifference to non-discursive practices. She criticizes his excessive focus on difference (Hybridity) because it might blur attention to the specific qualities of the struggle of colonized against colonizer in desperate times and places (154). Contrary to Bhabha's celebration of Fanon's divided and hybrid native, Parry believes that this division was not desirable, for Fanon was interested in a native who was politically conscious of the absolute enmity between him and his colonizer; hence the need for a unified strong self to conduct armed struggle.

Parry objects to the placing of agency in psychological ambivalence since this shift of agency from the insurgent subject to textuality will eventually "diffuse resistance as practices directed at undermining and defeating an oppressive opponent" (quoted by Huddart, 158). Parry's Marxist critique of Bhabha rejects his indifference towards armed struggle against the colonized and his exclusive focus on textual resistance as represented by hybridity that appears as a threat to colonial discourse since it splits it and shows its ambivalence.

Rasheed Araeen criticized Bhabha's hybridity theory for creating a division between whites and non-whites; he complains that although white artists can continue to do their work without carrying with them any sign of their cultural identity, non-white artists must always present their identity cards (Araeen, 16). He goes on to accuse Bhabha of being a native informant or a mimic man, though not by name.

> Native collaborators have always played an important role in perpetuating colonial power and domination, and it is no different today. They have always occupied the in-between space, to create a buffer between the ruler and the ruled. The recent globalization of the capitalist economy, still dominated and controlled by the West, has attained a new power and confidence which is now being translated through the globalization of world

> cultures. This has created a new space and job opportunities for the neocolonial collaborators. (Quoted by Huddart, 161-62)

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri criticize post-colonial and postmodernist discourses from the perspective of globalization. They deal with Bhabha as a representative of post-colonial discourse, and point out that post-colonial theorists are important because they represent the immense shift, or passage to globalization. Hardt and Negri believe that, though important, post-colonial criticism that focuses on binaries is not sufficient for "theorizing contemporary global power." (2000: 146) In their Marxist view, post-colonial theory is the philosophy of an elite class (cf. Neil Lazarus, Benita Parry, and Aijaz Ahmad hold a similar view). Hardt and Negri are interested in the practical aspect of post-colonial theory. They believe that Imperial Globalization has rendered post-colonial theory ineffective for it is incapable of generating liberation.

> Difference, hybridity, and mobility are not liberatory in themselves, but neither are truth, purity, and stasis. The real revolutionary practice refers to the level of *production*. Truth will not make us free, but taking control of the production of truth will (Hardt and Negri 156).

However, taking control of the production of truth requires involvement with real conditions of life. Some critics (cf. Acheraiou, Kraidy, Krishnaswamy and Hawley) have pointed out the reluctance of postcolonial theorists to get engaged in real life conditions. To do so means to get engaged with globalization because:"To globalize or not – that is no longer the question. What kind of globalization – that is the question both postcolonial and globalization studies must grapple with" (Quoted by Acheraiou: 173). Indeed, if postcolonial theorists continue their abstention from addressing pressing issues, such as the one of power relations that the concept of hybridity brings forth in relation to work migrants and refugees for instance, then their whole theoretical apparatus will be surpassed by the forces of globalization. Hence, it is a pressing need for academic as well as intellectual integrity and survival that requires postcolonial theorists to act soon.

Backed by capitalist imperialism, globalization has dramatically influenced world economics, politics, and cultures. The forces of globalization have indeed transformed identities of both cultures and individuals. It is true that nowadays, cultures are more aware of each other because of the revolution in mass

communication media. However, due to shocking economic inequalities between North and South, East and West, and because of the political hegemony of globalizing forces, "murderous identities", to use Amin Malouf's term, are being manufactured worldwide. Terrorism has become a scary phenomenon that needs urgently to be dealt with by dealing with its causes not only its consequences. If colonialism, a globalizing force itself, has produced hybrid identities through mimicry as a natural consequence of resistance to its hegemony, globalization is nurturing and producing dangerous essentialist identities despite the argument that the whole world has become like a small village. The inhabitants of this *small village*, though, must learn how to live together in peace with all the forms of heterogeneity that they may have. Identities may by hybrid, multiple, pure, imagined, fabricated, and so on; in the end, what is needed is mutual understanding and appreciation.

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