Globalism, Culture, and the Nation-State

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COMMENTARY

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This paper explores culture in a globalized world. Hitherto understood primarily as a system of values, practices, and perspectives characterizing a specific group in a given locality or territory, culture has become more like a free-floating signifier. In a world increasingly without boundaries, culture links diverse groups and collectivities through a complex network of structures, often beyond the nation-state. If culture is linked to meanings, the contemporary condition can be characterized as having an excess of meaning but a shortage of sense. Culture adds as much to our disorientation as to our location in the world. Since it is an important component of a national consciousness, nation-states have to redefine culture to better suit their present dysfunctions.

KEYWORDS: culture, globalization, nation-state, diaspora, virtuality

The role of culture in the contemporary global condition is problematic. While culture has always been an essential component of all societies, the present conjuncture links culture to the global condition in a way that requires rethinking the role and function of the nation-state and other institutions assuming a spatially bounded notion of culture. Hitherto, the nation-state has been based on a notion of culture that is territorial, homogeneous, and exclusive.

Each nation-state possesses a specific national culture that distinguishes it from others. One of its major responsibilities is to preserve and defend its national culture. Cultural borders are established and fiercely defended. Foreign cultural elements are domesticated and indigenized. What happens then to the nation-state when this view of a territorialized culture is no longer tenable? What may be expected when cultural borders are routinely breached and culture fragments into innumerable elements? At the very least, the nation-state must reinvent itself to adapt to new conditions.

The terms "culture" and "globalization" are so commonly used now that their meanings have become banal. But contemporary culture is unmanageable and is no longer the basis for stable social formations. How did this come about and what is its consequence for the nation-state? The global condition overwhelms any territorially based culture. Locality is no longer a viable site for culture even though this locality is constituted by the nation-state.

The Aporia of Culture

Culture is one of the major aporias of our times. It expresses fundamental contradictions in our contemporary society. There is a surplus of meaning but a lack of sense (Markus 1997). It disorients as often as it locates its subjects. A global interconnectedness transcending national, linguistic, religious and cultural boundaries has brought this about. This condition penetrates our traditions and locality, overwhelming these with new signs and meanings that have been generated elsewhere.

Culture used to be the specialty of the anthropologist interested in the exotic. Anthropologists use culture to describe the way of life of a particular people. This description includes practices, ideas, beliefs, and material objects that distinguish a people from their neighbors. In this sense, culture is as much a practical orientation to life as it is an awareness of identity. The Kalinga distinguish themselves from the Kankanai as much by their practices as their beliefs. Moreover, while anthropologists recognize that even the smallest community contains difference, culture is seen as a consensual whole subscribed by all its members, generally because culture arises from shared material conditions and

ways of life. A rich Kankanai is beholden to the same cultural norms as his poor neighbor. In this understanding, culture is what people living together share with one another. Sharing a life-world constitutes the basis of this common culture.

Globalism has severed the spatial relationship between a life-world and its corresponding culture. Culture is now more often used to refer to images, representations, and objects circulating freely across national boundaries. While culture was earlier associated with closely bound groups, it now more commonly refers to networks spanning spatially dispersed members. Hence, one refers to gay culture, popular culture, or even cyberculture, which are examples of deterritorialized cultures. The first two refer to widely dispersed networks sharing, at most, a body of images and representations loosely linked to people's actual behavior. Gay Filipinos are different from gay Australians, even if they have similar sexual orientations. While Filipinos can perform the songs of Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers competently, they do so with a local flavor and without the nostalgia associated with its performance in America. Cyberculture is not even spatially located but nevertheless links a network of real and virtual interlocutors. Virtual culture creates virtual societies and organizations all over the world. Many young Filipinos belong to cyberfraternities and cybergangs. Nokia is now a virtual or imaginary organization.

Nonspatial Culture

The examples I have described point to sets of representations, images, practices, and objects shared by widely dispersed members. These sets importantly constitute the life-world of members across territorial boundaries. Globalism combines both spatial and nonspatial elements in constituting peoples' life-worlds. While former cultures also combined spatial and nonspatial elements, the electronic communications revolution and rapid transportation have given nonspatial elements a salience and immediacy hitherto lacking. Not only do we follow world events as easily as local events but also their impact on our everyday life is also readily apparent. The events of 11 September 2001 made this relevance dramatically visible; but more banal factors such as overseas

work, the cellphone revolution, global commodities, and tourism rein-
force the same sense of connectedness of our private life-worlds with
their global counterparts. It is this sense of nonspatial connectedness
that gives culture its virtual orientation.

Virtual States

The nation-state was the first virtual society based on an imagined ter-
ritorial culture. Earlier territorial cultures based on a notion of a
homeland were also imagined but they rarely possessed the resources to
implement this imagination. Jews are an example of a culture strongly
based on a conception of an original homeland. They nourished this
conception but were unable to operationalize it until modern historical
conditions led to the creation of the state of Israel. Since then, other
cultures, such as Palestine, Kurdistan, and Armenia, have tried to emu-
late Israel but so far they have met with less success.

Virtual Fragmentation

The operational basis for this imagined national territory is now frag-
menting. Unless the nation-state can reinvent itself, its continued
existence would be limited. European states have realized this; they have
now realigned themselves on a regional rather than a national basis.
Imputed national qualities such as French charm, German punctuality,
or Italian zest will have to be recreated within the European Union
(E.U.). After decades of rebellion, Ache, in northern Sumatra, may be
given autonomy within the Republic of Indonesia. Thus, Indonesia may
have to reinvent itself to include culturally and, to some extent, politi-
cally autonomous regions coexisting within a greater unity. This example
indicates how national cultures, hitherto seen as the main basis of the
nation-state, no longer operate unproblematically. National cultures have
to recognize other bases of cultural allegiance and adjust themselves to
its implications. This lesson may be useful in solving the problem of
Moro autonomy. We can no longer expect all Filipinos to subscribe to
one version of a territorial culture.

Because globalization challenges the cultural basis of nation-states, it also, paradoxically, provides for the expression of other cultural formations referred to as ethno-nationalism. As the nation-state's cultural homogeneity fragments, some of them coalesce into new cultural units seeking the protection of national sovereignty. Appadurai (1997) has argued that, in opposing the nation-state, these new cultural formations insist on reproducing themselves through similar means. It appears that territoriality is often the ultimate goal of certain cultural formations.

The Filipino diaspora is another example of this new character of culture. While deterritorialized, culture is still the cement linking Filipinos living and working abroad. Since the nation-state cannot provide suitable economic opportunities for Filipinos, it has expanded the notion of political franchise to include people working overseas. Another recognition of this diasporal culture is the move to grant Filipinos dual citizenship, a right enjoyed by citizens in many other nation-states. Nation-states can no longer insist on the exclusive allegiance to their respective national cultures. The rights of citizenship and political membership reflect an increasingly nonterritorial and diasporal culture. The Philippine nation-state is responding to the global condition, which generates nonterritorial cultures whose membership is shared across networks spanning many nation-states. An American-born friend describes herself as a Filipino from California.

I am not claiming that Filipinos no longer subscribe to a national culture however this is defined. I am claiming that this cultural subscription is enriched and challenged by other cultural allegiances. Filipinos now inhabit a culturally complex and heterogeneous world. The contemporary Filipino is a product of this complex cultural orientation. To illustrate this point, a friend assures me that he feels gay as much as he does Filipino. In fact, his being gay obliges him to reject aspects of Filipino culture such as the portrayal of a *bakla* or *binabae* persona. In this case, his identity is as much the product of a gay global culture as it is of a national culture. Moreover, from the perspective of this global culture, he criticizes aspects of Filipino culture that marginalizes and ostracizes him, and refuses to grant him full rights of citizenship such as marriage and parenthood. In other words, the notion of a consensual and homogeneous Filipino national culture is no longer tenable.

Images and representations are no longer directly connected to their structures in everyday life. Instead, they are imposed on everyday life by global structures far removed from local experience.

Globalization or Internationalization?

"Globalization" is used by economists to refer to transnational markets. It differs from "internationalization," a term used by political scientists, which is meant to indicate closer ties between otherwise independent nation-states (Tomlinson 1999). Both globalization and internationalization are features of our time but the former has more significant consequences since it challenges the rationale of the nation-state.

Economists generally do not have much use for culture, mistaking it for commodities, which to some extent contemporary culture has become. While political scientists take culture more seriously than economists, they tend to reduce culture to forms of hegemonic domination. For them, culture becomes a way of organizing power and domination. Culture is indeed an expression of power but it cannot be reduced to it. How are we to link culture and globalism without reducing culture to commodities and globalism or strategic interests to unfettered power?

Globalization also refers to the political reordering of the world, where nation-states no longer play decisive roles. Instead, regional alliances and expanded markets oblige nation-states to adjust their policies to attract capital. The global condition now determines the viability of earlier political constellations such as the nation-state. Under these new conditions, nationalist narratives have to be recast. The old nationalism, based on the promise of political liberation and economic development, is no longer convincing in an age of globalism. Who would blame Zamboangueños for welcoming U.S. soldiers if they bring business and the prospects of peace?

Culture of Virtuality

If culture is seen as the circulation of images and ideas, then like capital it becomes porous to national boundaries and risks disrupting local

sovereignty (Jameson and Miyoshi 1998). Globalism often overwhelms local culture, replacing it with a culture of virtuality (Holmes 2002). This culture of virtuality consists of simulacra, pretending to satisfy needs that it has itself created. Hence, Filipinos who desire to experience a New York winter but cannot afford to travel can experience it at SM Megamall. Eastwood City in Libis, Quezon City is the latest virtual community. People crowd its chic restaurants, pretending communality even before the existence of a community. It is also appropriately an international call center whose imagined geography links Atlanta, New York, and Manila. The only exception to its global virtuality is the hard reality of local wages.

Another example of simulacra increasingly penetrating everyday life is the advertising used by housing companies. A housing estate advertises the quality of its houses as "making you feel that you are living abroad." Security gates and structures, such as entertainment facilities, schools, and hospitals that allow one to dispense with locality, reinforce this simulacrum of foreign life. Hence, the common use of exotic and foreign names such as Corinthian Estates or Buckingham Gardens. These examples indicate that everyday life is now primarily imagined through global images and representations.

Real Culture

How has culture become detached from other aspects of ordinary experience? Culture refers to values and lived routines as much as it does to fictions, fantasies, and desires. Their combination constitutes culture as its members experience it. As this combination becomes more complex and less integrated in the practical routines of daily life, culture becomes unmanageable. Globalization increases its unmanageability by introducing virtual elements into it. Not only do we experience a New York winter at SM Megamall but we also have relationships in cyberspace. Alongside traditional values and practical routines, global culture consists of virtual realities over which we have little control and even less understanding. Their combination results in an unmanageable culture.

Increasingly, all of culture must come under a critical perspective. But in doing so, we lose our earlier footings in an unexamined but lived culture. The previous security offered by notions such as family, national loyalty, sexual identity, and even religion come under critical scrutiny. Globalization increases these doubts because we become aware of other possibilities or compelled to accept cultural alternatives. We begin to doubt our cultural bearings and, in response, some of us adapt fundamentalist attitudes in the hope of recovering an earlier cultural security. This only compounds our problems because the world that had guaranteed that previous security no longer exists. We can no longer simply divide the world into good or bad guys, democrats or terrorists. These totalizing categories have now been exposed as relative, partial perspectives, or as dangerous simplifications. They no longer reflect the complexity and diversity of our times.

Virtual Culture

Culture is separating itself from its earlier association with a particular life-mode. It is becoming detached from other aspects of experienced life. In a recent study of young Filipinos using mobile phones, we found out that they use this technology like young people in Norway and Finland do (Pertierra et al. 2002). They use it to explore new relationships and radical identities. These identities often reflect global structures and their corresponding virtual realities rather than local orientations and constraints. Interactive communication technologies enable their users to access aspects of their own subjectivity hitherto inaccessible. Young men and women admit they are able to send text messages, like "I love you Mom (or Dad)," which sound corny and which they would not usually say to their parents. Others share text messages on sex with their parents, hitherto unimaginable. These examples show how the new technology facilitates an awareness of one's own subjectivity and intersubjectivities.

One informant had explored and developed his gay identity through texting. He exchanged messages with other gay contributors to a television channel. These exchanges resulted in a virtual community, some of whose members later met and established gay relationships. A mother

had a text-affair while caring for her child. A young woman entered into a virtual friendship with a man in Pakistan who volunteered to pay for her phone cards. She declined fearing that he may have been connected to Osama Bin Laden. These examples indicate how this technology enables subjects to explore identities far removed from their daily lives. New communities of intimacy involving strangers are easily generated, often resulting in the creation of a sexualized subject.

We are all bombarded by advertised images and commodities that elicit desires and generate needs. These desires and needs are shaped by external and often contradicting forces. How are we to make sense of these global structures that increasingly also become our own? As a wit puts it, never before have so many people have so many things that they cannot understand (Iyer 2000). In fact, the information revolution ensures that increasingly more things that we do not understand will face us. How do we respond to a world that is becoming less comprehensible?

The Cultural Crisis of Modernity

Sociologists refer to these problems as the crisis of modernity: culture is its most acute expression. This crisis began in the nineteenth century and resulted in the separation of areas of life into the private and public spheres, each sphere governed by its own set of norms. In *the work of culture* (2002), I tackled some of these questions and explored the distinct ways culture manifests itself in the contemporary world. While it seems to be everywhere, it no longer locates its subjects anywhere. Airports, travel, and tourists encapsulate this nonlocating culture. Iyer (2000, 59) refers to forms of global neurasthenia when he describes Los Angeles Airport:

> And so, half-inadvertently, not knowing whether I was facing East or West, not knowing whether it was night or day, I slipped into that peculiar state of mind—or no mind—that belongs to the no-time zone, no place of the airport, that out-of-body state in which one's not quite there, but certainly not elsewhere. . . . I had entered the state of jet lag.

In a world increasingly becoming globalized, the role of culture has become problematic. From expressing collective orientations and values, culture is presently seen as primarily marking difference. In a world characterized by a surplus of meaning and a lack of sense, its capacity to provide a shared lens or framework for society is being challenged seriously. As the world becomes progressively interconnected, a common basis for understanding it disappears. Only local and contingent perspectives are viable and even these are often globally constituted. No wonder modernity is ontologically insecure, constantly in search of enemies threatening its existence or of simple solutions for its problems.

Conclusion

The global condition has made culture a major problem of our age. It is no longer the principal basis for a nation-state. Culture crosses national boundaries and links members in diasporal or virtual communities. This is why nation-states presently seek larger entities, such as the E.U., within which to constitute themselves. While the E.U. is not (yet) a cultural identity, its political and economic resources allow it to better provide for the expectations of its citizens. The E.U. has transformed itself into a super-state but, in the process, it has absorbed its previous national consciousnesses. A cultural exclusivity is no longer the basis for the E.U. in the way it was for many of its member nation-states. Perhaps this indicates that, however important (territorial) culture may be for the formation of collectivities, other bases for their existence are equally possible.

Culture presents a world that is not quite as it seems. The world of culture is always counterfactual. It consists as much of unfulfilled aspirations as it does real achievements. While local culture is closely related to experiences and routines of everyday life, it also includes prereflective bases for inequalities involving gender, age, class, and ethnicity. National culture is less directly connected to everyday experience and consists predominantly of normative and exemplary rules imposed on everyday life through appropriate institutions such as schools and government bureaucracies. Global culture rarely arises out

of direct experience but acts as a powerful stimulus and incentive for new values, norms, and orientations.

All these uses of culture generate their own aporias. Local culture is unaware of its prereflective assumptions and is thus unable to question basic inequalities. National culture imposes its values on resisting minorities and insists on homogenizing cultural difference for its own ideological purity. Global culture promises a world of new pleasures and commodities located in a space-time unconnected to other aspects of everyday life. Global culture creates its own virtual world with an excess of meaning and a lack of sense.

We are caught simultaneously in these three dimensions of culture and each poses its own problematic. In every case, culture provides the framework for making sense of our place in the world. The problem is that our place in the world is not always directly related to our experience of or our response to it. While local culture is closely related both to our experience and response to our world, it brackets out questions about how such a world is constituted. Local culture presents an image of a singular world. It has no place for the stranger and little understanding of difference.

A national culture is less related to direct experience and instead relies on an exemplary view of cultural achievement. It stresses the accomplishments of national heroes, artists, and famous people (e.g., Rizal, N. V. M. Gonzalez, Joseph Estrada) to serve as inspirations for its citizenry. The nation is portrayed as a horizontal and caring brotherhood. It is capable of eliciting an extreme altruism and self-sacrifice from its members. Moreover, the nation sees itself as free, sovereign, and the architect of its own future. However, this image of the nation seldom conforms to direct experience; instead, it reveals itself as primarily ideological. It is a creation of vision and imagination. The nation is the first conscious expression of a virtual community. Rizal's novels were the first narratives that allowed their readers to imagine the nation. That kind of imagining takes place less and less today; very few Filipinos depend on these novels' powers to provoke their imagination.

In its place, Filipinos increasingly crave for commodities and lifestyles only accessible through overseas work. But once overseas, their Filipino

identity persists, shifting its basis from spatial contiguity to personal identity and memory. The global condition mimics a national imagination when it portrays the world as a unified and integrated community. But its fictions are no more effective than the old nationalism in its attempts to persuade. We still have to see what social and cultural futures await us.

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