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GLOBALIZATION AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF TRADITION: SOME LESSONS FROM "DEVELOPING" COUNTRIES*

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IKHTISAR

Globalisasi saat ini merupakan wacana populer terutama di kalangan pelaku ekonomi. Namun demikian, perkembangan teori tentang globalisasi masih berada pada tahap awal. Baik wacana populer maupun teoritis yang ada saat ini cenderung terfokus pada aspek ekonomis dan sosial globalisasi di tingkat lintas negara. Selama ini jarang yang melihat kaitan antara globalisasi dan proses politik kebudayaan di tingkat lokal. Tulisan ini mencoba menawarkan suatu pendekatan lain untuk menganalisis proses globalisasi dengan fokus pada konteks sosial dan kultural di negara berkembang. Dalam analisis semacam itu, kajian terhadap proses "pembumian" (vernacularization) bentuk-bentuk budaya global menjadi sama pentingnya dengan kajian proses pembentukan masyarakat global. Dalam kaitan ini, antropologi menawarkan kajian kritis untuk menelaah proses globalisasi yang terjadi dalam kehidupan keseharian (everyday life) di berbagai belahan dunia.

Perhaps "globalization" is the only word that has received so much attention during the past few years. This fancy word is used to refer to different things, from economic structures, ecological degradation, even to music performances. However diverse its application, it basically denotes a common concept of "one world, one

society". As Robertson (1992:8) writes that the central tenet of globalization concept refers to "...the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole." Marshall McLuhan (1960) was first to use the term "global village" when he referred to a shared simultaneity of experiences in a global community, made possible particularly through televisual media.

Since its first use the concept of globalization has undergone several proliferations and even criticisms. I will begin this short article by first identifying different approaches toward the construction of the "theory" on globalization. By doing so, I attempt to position the approaches in various theoretical frameworks although I realize that it is still an emerging field of study. At the end of this paper, I then move to its application in the context of "developing" countries in order to highlight some of its possibilities and problems.

Global Structure and Global Culture

As I said earlier, globalization accounts for a sociohistorical process when different societies from all over the world are connected each other to form a single community or what Hannerz (1996) calls a "global ecumene." This general picture consists of two critical aspects that have become the focus of debates in discussing globalization. Those are the notion of historical newness and social configuration of society.

As a characteristic of modern society which is linked to modernity, globalization exists as the result of the development in modern technologies of transportation and media. Even though archaeological and historical records indicate that people have travelled to different parts of the world since ancient time, the advancement of modern technologies has brought the pattern of social relations into a different configuration and with a different speed. Globalization lies at the peak of technological innovation in which technology has made possible the increasing movements of people and images throughout the world. This picture of global interconnectedness is indeed different from the previous historical period when movements of people were limited and constrained by ecological terrain and technological achievement. It is obvious that from this standpoint globalization is a characteristic of recent historical period.

Globalization produces a contrasting subject-object position in a global ecumene. First, it denotes the way of formulating a new consciousness on global collectivity (Robertson 1992). Through the medium of modern technology, there is a rapid circulation of idea that focuses on the emerging consiousness of being members of a new "global society." As a consequence, the boundaries of nation-state diminish and we are constructing a new social configuration that depends less on ethnic and national allegiances than on a common understanding of global social relationships. It calls for a reinterpretation of patterns of social relationship in which an individual is seen not as a member of ethnic group or nation but as a participant in a global social system (King 1997). Therefore, instead of privileging their ethnic, national, or racial interests, individuals are supposed to praise the universal language of "common rights and responsibility." What becomes significant is the way transnational movements of people and images produce a new spatial setting in which a new configuration of culture is staged. Second, globalization can be analyzed from the receptive side of the process. It is not the process of constructing a new configuration which becomes the center of attraction. Instead, it focuses on the forces which brings countries to be integrated into the global order. In this sense, countries, mostly non-western ones, are assumed to be non-creative agents which have no other choices than following the path toward integration to a global social, cultural, or economic configuration. The forces that drive the countries to be parts of global society are market and ideology, those which represent the characteristics of enlightenment rationality. In this context, global order is seen as an established setting, as a result of long history of capitalism, toward which every country should orientate its objective of development.

The two common pictures of globalization are actually two sides of a coin. It basically explains the new world order as a single system, and therefore it underlines the importance of world-system theory in elaborating the new world configuration (Wallerstein 1974). Both perspectives set-up a structured order to explain how capitalism or ideological values emanate from a center and spread to the rest of the

world. If the first picture focuses on the process of creating cultural, economic, or ideological world-system, the second attempts to look at how different countries respond and adapt themselves to the system. Despite the differentation in their objects of analysis, the pictures accept the same assumption that globalization refers to a situation in which various countries in the world create a single system of the world through the process of movements of people and images across boundaries. In this sense, country autonomy and specificity become less important since all are integrated into the same system despite their structural differences.

Although at first Wallerstein was less interested in "culture" and explained the structuration of the world based on economic dependency, he has deployed a "cultural" explanation to understand how the global system has served as a battleground for ideological struggles (Wallerstein 1990). In doing so, he conceives "culture" in a narrow sense, equating it with ideology such as racism, universalism, and capitalism. He argues that contemporary global system has made possible the spread of universal values such human rights, justice, or even work ethics across nations. But, he further argues, it is far from a peaceful process. The world-system always contain tensions between universalism and particularism as shown in ongoing struggles of nationalist movements in various third-world countries.

Popular concept on globalization obviously gives emphasis on the systemic one. The facts that nations' boundaries have become more permeable and that the inequal structure of the world exists are empirical ones. These create a picture of the world consisted of the centers from which people, image, and capital begin to disperse and the peripheries in which one can find the imported images and cosmopolitan people. However, it does not suggest that the centers should be the West and the peripheries should be the East as we can see the growing importance of Asian countries to gain their roles as the new centers of capitalism. The conceptualization of center-periphery in global relations does not also suggest that the former has a more privileged position than the later. What becomes significant in the concept is that although globalization seems to create a unified world, it is not a homogenous one. It reveals the complexity of cultural, political, and economic relationships between centers and peripheries.

Studies on center-periphery relations are usually focused upon two scenarios, that is, "cultural imperialism" and "peripheral corruption" scenarios (Hannerz 1997:108). The first one treats global culture as undergoing a homogenization due to the expansion of Western capitalism through high-tech media. This mastery of communication technology and organizational capabilities has led to entire absorption of non-western world into the western one. As the first scenario highlights cultural process at the center, i.e. Western countries, the second one gives more attention on the process at the peripheries. It also begins with focusing at concepts originating in the West and then looking at how they are adopted by the peripheries. The scenario is not ended at that point. It highlights how the peripheries eventually corrupt the Western cultural ideals.

The scenarios seek to conceptualize globalization as a homogenizing cultural process, located either at the center or the periphery. They attempt to explain how the movements of people and images led to the creation of global culture which shows, as a matter of fact, the dominance of western cultural images and values over the so-called non-western ones. Although the peripheral corruption scenario opens up the possibility of looking at local contexts of globalization processes, it still very much privileges western cultural ideals as the point of reference. Globalization is seen as the process by which western images and values influence and transform local "cultures" or "traditions" for the benefit of the alien, capitalist culture. However, the approach has failed to recognize the historicity and contextuality of the process, a perspective which gives more emphasis on the role of agents and cultural contexts in a certain historical point of transnational cultural flows. In other words, it calls for a focus on the significance of everyday realities in global processes.

Modernity and Tradition: The Cultural Politics of Globalization

As I said earlier, globalization is seen as a characteristic of modern era due to its dependence upon the advancement of communication technology that helps to shape the form of modernity by transferring images of modernization throughout the world. It means that globalization has been assumed as a process of spatial and temporal

transformations by which the image of modernity is carried along the process. Global space has become the site for reshaping the idea of modernity. On the other hand, modernity is a consequence of modernization process which places cultures on the different stages of progress toward a "civilized" society. Therefore, participating in a global culture is seen as a means of catching up with the progress, an idea that has been proliferating among the bureaucrats and middle-classes in developing countries.

It becomes a common discourse in the developing countries, emphasizing globalization as a necessitated step to achieve a higher stage of development. As the need of catching up with the western progress escalates, participating in a global society and culture has been the priority of development projects in Third World countries As a consequence, there are increasing attempts to identify a country's level of development with how well it has been able to "globalize", or to incorporates universal modern values to its development agenda. Within this framework, globalization corresponds to producing what Habermas (1987) calls the "public sphere of modernity".

Habermas' public sphere suggests a construction of a free space where agents can establish an equal dialogue among themselves, where communications between different actors exist without obstructions. This picture of rational society corresponds with the concept of global village as proposed by McLuhan, and therefore to the conceptualization of contemporary global society as I discussed above. It also opens up the possibility of modernizing process in which actors, in this case nations, have had an option to be engaged in a global collectivity in order to fullfil the demand of creating equal levels of modernization which shows a particular, and unfinished, characteristic of modernity. It is another interesting part to see whether globalizing process can end up with a "public sphere" where a free communicative action can exist among the nations. But for the moment, I will examine how globalization reveals both constrains and opportunities in dealing with modernity and tradition as these are the most important aspects of global influences in peripheral developing countries.

I have touched briefly on how globalization is tied up to the idea of modernity and process of modernization. However, heterogenous discourses of globalization as modernizing process have taken place within different social groups in peripheral countries. Those in favor of the idea that globalization serves to fulfill the project of modernity are those who have already occupied a center stage in the contexts of global or national social relationships. Their privileged position have enabled them to easily move from peripheries to the centers, leaving behind the cultural heritage of tradition which remains tied up to national borders. Their everyday contexts are switching rapidly between homes and metropolises. Such a spatial displacement creates cosmopolitans who appreciate the value of modernity as an idea of progress being staged in metropolitan "show-cases". On the contrary, those who have no supporting resources for moving from one center to another deploy a different understanding on the significance of global influences in their everyday contexts.

Cultural imperialism suggests that global influences impose their images directly upon the consumers in peripheral countries. Global images are therefore the active part whereas consumers are the passive ones. It treats peripheral communities as the guardian of tradition, a set of normative values which is being threathened by the destructive forces of global culture. This perspective tends to position consumer as the victim and at the same time the admirer of global cultural images. It also categorizes global culture as different to and against local tradition. In doing so, the perspective has overlooked the social and cultural contexts of consumer practices.

The proliferation of media such as television and newspapers in peripheral countries has made possible the transfers of global cultural images without involving direct social relations. The TV and printed media have brought global images of modernity directly into living rooms of developing countries houses. The media have enabled peripherial communities to access the images in their everyday lives. Having no adequate resources to travel outside their localities, they have also become consumers of global cultural flows even though with different magnitude and contexts of interpretation.

The movements of people from peripheries to the centers enable direct experiences with the place of origin of global images, also with actors involved in the cultural production of the images. On the other side, media has cut off the direct experiences of social relationships and spatial encounter. What people appropriate is only a simulacrum, an

image that is detached from the context of its production. Being a simulacrum, the image offers decontextualized cultural products that open up the space between process of production and the product. Transnational media provides resources for creating imagined world which transcends the certainties of national borders and social relations (Appadurai 1996).

The central tenet of cultural globalization lies not on the image but on the social configuration of meaning related to the global image. Transnational media acts only as a mediator of transnational cultural flows. Therefore, studies on globalization should go beyond looking at the image in its role to convey a certain construction of cultural values by elaborating the process of interpretation contextualized within historical and social contexts. If the transnational electronic media offers resources for creating a shared imagination, it is also important to see how the imagined world incites and is influenced by collective actions. In other words, it is necessary to see how "individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern" (Appadurai 1996:4). The perspective requires the understanding of globalization process as an everyday practices of popular culture. It suggests that globalization produces a contested space on the local level rather than a systemic image of global culture. In peripheral countries and among the less privileged social groups, transnational cultural flows invoke the significance of the cultural politics of tradition and modernity.

The image of global culture is a contested space. Different social groups in various cultural contexts deal with the global and at the same time with their traditional heritages. However, rather than seeing the global and the traditional as two contrasting categories, one is supposed to be able to see that they belong to the same field of cultural production. In the context of globalization, the process of consuming global images has shown how the image is being created and recreated in everyday discourses. It is our task to elaborate how the discourses on consumption has revealed local understanding on global processes and appropriation of global images. The focus of our study on globalization should move from cosmopolitan context to particular ethnic, national, or spatial confinements, looking at how those living in peripheral, or developing, countries situate their imagination of global cultural forms.

The Global in the Local: Some Lessons from Developing Countries

Anthropology has been continously arguing for the importance of looking at the local and everyday contexts. In its studies on cultural globalization, anthropology has illustrated how the global images of modernity have been undergone a process of translation, contestation, and even refusal in local contexts (e.g. Howes 1996). Those cases show that globalization is always a contextualized process, especially where social movements are limited and people depend entirely upon electronic media to "read" the images. Despite its colonialistic bias in categorizing stages of development, developing countries have been considered as places where local appropriation of global images has revealed the highest degree of "local creativities", the process that can be found in Indonesia as well.

Nowadays Indonesia has undergone a rapid cultural changes due to its strategic geographical setting and economic advancement. As a consequence of the rapid modernization, local elites have signaled the dangerous influence of modern cultural forms and life-styles upon traditional values. They have argued that global cultural flows have a destructive impact upon local culture. The elites' rhetorics of protecting traditions have therefore become part of the cultural politics of globalization on the national level. Despite the popularity of such rhetorics on the printed and electronic media, there is still limited attempt to look at how everyday discourses and social relationships, either in urban or rural settings, have manifested the complexities of translation and appropriation processes. In this brief paper, I will present some examples of the way the local interprets global images in order to argue that the generalized theory on globalization has failed to take local cultural politics into account.

The first example is concerning the notion of tradition. When national elites are speaking about the importance of maintaining tradition against the modernization process and western influences, other social groups have successfully appropriated transnational media and movements for the benefits of expressing cultural and ethnic identities. An obvious and proliferated example is found in tourism sector. Cultural tourism has been the space in which contestations over cultural production have been taken place. The construction of cultural

and ethnic identities reveals the process of negotiation among different actors; the process in which transnational movements of tourists have played an important role in conveying international demands on a certain cultural expression of the "Other" (e.g. Crain 1996). This illustration shows how the cultural politics of tradition has benefited from both romantic notion of cultural identity and global image on cultural purity that exists in the so-called not-so-developed countries.

The second example seeks to illustrate how global images of modernity are being translated in urban settings of Indonesian towns and cities. What happens in the urban contexts of developing countries reveal the process of vernacularization of the global, being staged in shopping malls, cafes, or other places which offer and sell the image of modernity. The flaneurs at the malls are not passive consumers. They are involved in constructing the image of consumer culture that expresses local characteristics. The most important aspect of consumer culture is not the image being displayed. Instead, it is the use of the image that should be the focus of attention in looking at the process of vernacularization of global cultural forms.

As Classen (1996) has illustrated in her study on Coca-Cola consumption in Argentine, people living in the northwest part of the country has thought that the soft drink is a local product. They point out the importance of similar taste of the drink with the traditional one. To them, it is less important to know that the soft drink is American originated than the fact that they consume "local" taste. Classen illustrates an example of how in the local context the image of global culture is less important than the way people interpret the significance of Coca-Cola in their everyday lives. It shows that in appropriating global cultural forms, people in peripheral countries have indigenized them in order to meet the reality of their social and cultural settings.

Concluding Remarks

This paper seeks to contribute to the discussions on globalization. Although the topic has received a lot of attention in everyday practices, it seems that the theoretical formulation remains to be developed. What we see now is the understanding that globalization points out to the process of establishing a new world order which lessen the role of nation-state and national boundaries. The emphasis on globalization as a world-system derives from a perspective which focuses on structural level than the notion of agency. The focus on structural processes is not surprising at all since the perspective helps to strengthen the dominance of western-oriented social theories over the non-western ones. As I have elaborated, it privileges the "centers" over the "peripheries" as the prime-mover of globalization processes and relegates the position of peripheral communities as the passive consumers of images of modernity.

Anthropology has been criticizing the theoretical tendency by suggesting a shift toward everyday practices. Not only the body of theoretical knowledge of bourgeois social sciences which should be reoriented, but also their role in shaping everyday discourses. In the case of globalization, one should be able to see that besides economic, social, and political processes on structural level, it happens on local contexts as well, the process which I call vernacularization of global culture. In this context, instead of creating a Habermasian public sphere, discourses on global process reveals the complexity of local cultural politics in appropriating global images.

In this paper I have briefly elaborated how people in developing countries are engaged in creative reinterpretations of global cultural flows. On the one hand, some who can travel extensively to the "center" have had direct experiences with social and cultural contexts of global images and created a cosmopolitan culture. On the other hand, those who get acquainted with the image through mediation of the media have been engaged in developing a creolized culture in peripheral countries (Hannerz 1996; Howes 1996). Anthropological studies on globalization in developing countries have given us lessons that we need to understand the process of transnational cultural flows contextualized in a certain social, cultural, and historical setting.

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