This paper challenges two popular notions that (1) globalization refers only to the economic unification of the globe integrating all the countries of the world under a single grid of market; and (2) globalization is a euphemism for “Westernization,” that is, the discourse of globalization is a Western hegemonic imposition on the rest of the world in the mode of “cultural imperialism.” Rather than viewing globalization as a narrow, economistic and exploitative process, the paper suggests that globalization is to be understood as a multi-dimensional process. As such, a more careful look at the various dimensions of globalization in all their complexities and contradictions is in order. The paper also argues against the popular myth that, as a mega-process affecting all aspects of our life, globalization unleashes destructive consequences by erasing differences, leading to a homogenized world. The paper takes issue with the popular criticism of globalization as “global pillage” and attempts to re-emphasize the notion of “global village.” Taking a dispassionate view of this process, this paper suggests that a return to the original usage is necessary, reiterating the heterogeneous and multi-cultural features of globalization processes that open possibilities for further theoretical and empirical explorations.

Two dates — 1494 and 1969 — stand out as important moments in history of the world as a global place..... Since the fifteenth century, people have slowly come to think of the world as a global place. This process was aided by the widespread use of maps and globes in schoolrooms. ... [in 1969] the astronaut’s photographs of the earth gave currency to the idea of the world as a global place


INTRODUCTION

As the opening quotation reveals, globalization as an historical process has been unfolding for centuries. The discussion of globalization as a concept, a sociological category, has a rather brief history. In recent years, the term “globalization” has become a buzzword. Business leaders, politicians, academics and the lay public have used it so frequently that it has lost its analytical rigor. There is more to it. In the politico-ideological discourse, it has become a highly controversial term, so much so that now one hears of “globophobics” as well as “globophiles.” The former group presents a doomsday scenario of the consequences of globalization; the latter group wel-
comes globalization with open arms (and markets!) and sees it as a cure-all, as a redemption.

By tracing the history of the concept of globalization, I argue that globalization does not refer simply to the creation of a world-embracing economic system signaling homogenization on a worldwide basis, nor is it just a new variant of so-called “cultural imperialism.” Globalization is neither a menace nor a panacea; it is a complex process of social, cultural, economic and political connectedness that must be approached at a high level of complexity and abstractness.

A caption in the International Herald Tribune summed up the popular understanding of globalization neatly. It said: “Bhutan Joins the Global Village” (20 May 1999). The newspaper covered the story of the legalization of television and internet in this mountainous and devoutly Buddhist Kingdom in South Asia. The coming of television in Bhutan plugged this hitherto aloof society into the global system. For years, Bhutan had resisted television while neighboring Bangladesh and India had allowed television since the early 1960s. Now this popular notion of globalization is not in itself inaccurate or misleading but it is surely incomplete. It raises a possibility for transformation that has both far-reaching and complex implications. The popular understanding, however, must be complemented by in-depth sociological investigation. For example, one could argue that, in neighboring India, television has been as much an instrument of preserving Indian tradition as it has been a harbinger of global modernity. Some writers tend to conceptualize globalization as worldwide modernization, often posing a threat to local cultures and traditions. Others see globalization as an historical outcome, made up of a variety of local traditions and locality as a site of a dynamic confluence of various cultures. It would be too early to assess the impact of these exposures on Bhutan.

It is important to conceptualize globalization in relation to such cognate concepts as modernization and westernization. Globalization is viewed by some as Westernization in general and Americanization in particular. Implicit in this image is an attempt to demonize globalization. In another view, globalization is equated with modernization. As a sociological concept, modernization has been much maligned. It has been attacked for its ahistoricity as well as its lack of empirical validity. A reformulated view of modernization takes into account that, historically, modernization does not mean removal of the deadweight of tradition. On the contrary, it sought to use or incorporate tradition in constituting itself. The historical possibilities of multiple trajectories of modernization convince us to look at globalization in a similarly multivalent manner. The main failure of the early genera-
tion of modernization writers was their inability to theorize the tradition that modernity would supposedly replace. Rather than being replaced, tradition remains alive, so much so that it sets the agenda for modernization. The notions of multiple modernities outlined by Goran Therborn (1995) make a seminal contribution in this regard. Some sociologists now argue that a second wave of modernity is marked by reflexivity (Therborn, 2000; Beck, 2000). In a similar vein, the process of globalization has been referred to as “reflexive cosmopolitization” (Beck, 2000).

The multidimensionality of this concept, and the heterogeneity of the phenomenon of globalization have led to a plurality of discourses on globalization (Robertson and Khondker, 1998). In addition to a number of disciplinary discourses of within the contemporary social sciences and cultural studies, discourse on globalization also occurs regionally, in such diverse areas as Asia, North America, Europe, Latin America, Middle East and Africa. More to the point, these discussions share no homogeneous and universal understanding of the meaning of globalization. Although, most writers tend to emphasize the economic interconnectedness of the world in their definitions of globalization, we will argue, that it is a much more comprehensive and holistic process. The three dimensions of globalization that must be considered are: Techno-Economic, Socio-Political, Cultural/civilizational.

A PROBLEM OF DEFINITION

Against the backdrop of an upbeat mood of the presumed victory of capitalism and liberalism following the end of the Cold War, the concept of “globalization” was developed to capture the changed social reality. A great many writers began to view globalization as a resurgence of capitalism where market, capital, technology, enterprise and technology would not know any national boundaries. Surely the economists, marketing and business strategists and the custodians of the international financial and development organizations applauded such a view. The response in many liberal and left quarters, however, was the exact opposite. They approached the situation with a sense of fright and apprehension. Concerns were (and continue to be) raised about the fate of the environment, local cultures, “differences,” etc. in the face of the march of globalization. Many recent critics, e.g. Mittelman (1994), Petras (1993) — and possibly, some supporters! — of globalization base their position on a simplistic and commonsensical understanding of the term globalization. The critics advance a reductionistic view of globalization, equating it with the irreversible march of capitalism. Smith
sees it as “a shift from the rubric of modernization toward the geographical
euphemism globalization” (Smith, 1997: 174). Smith later continues, “Global-
alization is as much a script for U.S. corporate boardrooms as a strategy for
national economies, simultaneously a diagnosis and prescription” (Smith,
1997: 175). For Kiely, “the globalization thesis contends that we live in a
world economy dominated by transnational corporations (TNCs), that
invest wherever they like in a footloose manner” (Kiely, 1998: 96).

Empirically speaking, however, there is no denying the fact that transna-
tional corporations have proliferated in the late 20th century, matching their
clust. According to a recent UN Report, there are now 60,000 TNCs which,
together with their half million affiliates, account for over 25 percent of the
global output and have combined sales of over US$11 trillion (The Straits
Times, 28 Sep. 1999, p.57). Others view globalization as a form of “cultural
imperialism” that accompanies the march of transnational capitalism.

Thus, globalization is often seen, as in Kenichi Ohmae’s comments above,
primarily in economic terms. The mobile forces of capital, labour, technol-
ogy, and information are presented as moving relentlessly to and fro across
political and cultural boundaries, threatening the integrity of the nation-
state and of national cultures as they go. Nations and cultures, so the story
goes, are faced with massive challenges to their very existence unless they
can find some effective form of national resistance” (Holton, 1998:108).

Some of these concerns, though legitimate, are based on a mistaken and
apocalyptic diagnosis of the situation. There are, at least, two major sources
of this miscognition (to borrow a term from Bourdieu). First, the impact of
economic penetration and integration was not analyzed closely enough to
examine the varied responses such impact evoked. The presupposition of
homogenization precluded the interactive relationship between the global
and the local. The second lacuna is a studied inattention that was accorded
the sociological writing that at once introduced and problematized the con-
cept of globalization.

As a concept, globalization made its appearance in sociological literature
towards the end of the 1980s (Waters, 1995). Although the genealogy of the
globalization perspective can be traced back to the earlier works of
McLuhan (1964), Moore (1966), and Nettl and Robertson (1968), serious the-
oretical discussion began in the mid-1980s, especially in the United States.
Sociologists who took the lead in this discussion were Roland Robertson
and his students (Robertson and Chirico, 1985; Robertson and Lechner,
1985) at the University of Pittsburgh, Albert Bergsen (1980) at University of
Arizona who was responding to the somewhat economically deterministic
view of Immanuel Wallerstein at that time and John Meyer (1980: 1992)
who, along with his students was dealing with globalization of state and education in the light of institutional isomorphism at Stanford. A common theme of these discussions was the abandonment of the simplistic convergence thesis. Robertson’s (1987) conceptualization of globalization insisted upon heterogeneity and variety in an increasingly globalized world.

The emergence of the discourse of globalization itself signaled an intensification of globalization as a social/economic/political/cultural process. Globalization refers to “both to the compression of the world and to the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole” (Robertson, 1992: 8). This definition takes into account both the empirical aspect i.e., compression of the entire world into a single, global system and conceptual ideas about the ways in which the world as a whole should be mapped in broadly sociological terms (Robertson, 1990, 1993). Harvey (1989) argues that the process of time-space compression is rooted in the flexibility of new forms of capitalism. Globalization, for Giddens, “is really about the transformation of space and time.” He defines it as “action at distance, and relate[s] its intensifying over recent years to the emergence of means of instantaneous global communication and mass transportation” (1994: 4). John Tomlinson defines globalization as “complex connectivity,” it “refers to the rapidly developing and ever — densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern social life” (Tomlinson, 1999: 2).

Globalization also means an increased awareness of the world. In the words of Malcolm Waters, (1995: 3) it is “[a] social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding”.

Evidence of the “detterritorialization” thesis can be found in the takeover of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990-91. One writer commented, “… The occupation and subsequent liberation of Kuwait has shown that in the age of globalization, physical space is not central to the state’s survival …. When the territory is occupied, the state can become diffused in the financescape and the mediascape or transformed into what might be called, following Baudrillard, a “hyperreal state,” “hyperreal Kuwait survived as a state in the global flow even when it was occupied physically” (Fandy, 1999: 125).

As with any social scientific concept, conceptual clarity benefits from the analytical separation of the concept of globalization from such cognate categories as internationalization, modernization, westernization, cultural diffusion, homogenization, and universalization. Although many of these concepts are overlap, it can be stated rather directly that globalization is not internationalization (although many tend to use these two terms interchangeably); it is not westernization in the sense that the world is becoming
homogenized to the extent that the non-Western world looks more like the
"West." Its relationship with cultural diffusion is somewhat problematic. If
one conceives of cultural diffusion as a process of mediation rather than as a
simple unidirectional overpowering of one culture, then it resembles the
general process of globalization. The relationship between globalization and
modernization and/or universalization is rather complex, a discussion to
which we will return shortly.

LOCATION AS A PROBLEMATIQUE?

Social scientific conceptual apparatuses or, more broadly, intellectual con-
structs that seek to capture social processes are often socially embedded.
The intellectual construct, now widely known as the globalization approach
or framework (or paradigm) is enjoined to the task of understanding
processes of globalization as they take place at various institutional and/or
cultural levels. There is no denying the fact that the origin of the theory but
not of the process — of globalization, a relatively recent entrant into the
pantheon of sociological theories, can be given a specific time and place.
That the place of origin (say, Pittsburgh) could be geographically located in
the West, does not make it a Western paradigm.

It is relevant here to note that ironically, mainstream American sociology
has thus far paid precious little attention to discussions of globalization.
Although it is likely that, as the non-American sociological world has given
pivotal importance to ideas of globalization, American sociology will soon
catch up with it. Sociologists are now beginning to emphasize the
internationalization of sociological curricula in the United States. Canadian
sociology has been interested in the issue of globalization but for the
“wrong” reasons. An issue of the Canadian Review of Sociology and
Anthropology (Aug, 1995) was devoted to the theme of globalization. Even in
the announcement and call for papers for this special issue, the question
was raised: “What ideological assumptions lie behind the various versions
of “globalization”?” (Society, 1994: 5). Not surprisingly, most of the essays in
the journal took a critical stance vis-a-vis the globalization process taking it
to be the irreversible march of capitalism.

During the heyday of Cold War, many critics of capitalism around the
world invoked both non-Western and Marxist intellectual positions at the
same time. The emergence of the Marxist discourse on Western soil does not
make it a “Western” theory, much less an apologia for the capitalist world-
system, by any means. The relative autonomy of these discourses should be
accepted and should supplement the view of embeddedness. For us, a con-
convenient epistemological starting point would be the middle ground between the “strong program” and the radical non-foundational position, a la Rorty. The post-modernist discourse (or anti-discourse), which has turned to Rorty’s anti-foundationalism for its own foundation, has made an important contribution in terms of shaking paradigm-centered orthodoxy and lending an open-ended quality to the discourses. The globalization approach, indeed, incorporates some of that open-endedness, especially the notion of non-linearity. The globalization approach has also moved away from the rigid progressivist views that continue to characterize many conventional social theories. Yet, it is important to recognize the necessity of a moral compass for measuring progress.

How discourses become fully autonomous from the social conditions that create them in the first place and how they may even recreate those social conditions are subjects that have commanded considerable attention in the discourse of social epistemology. How discourse assumes power in defining a field or subject, what is to be left out, who shall be heard, or silenced are Foucauldian concerns. Important as they are, we are not particularly concerned here with discourse in the sense Foucault uses the term. The strait-jacket quality of the Foucauldian understanding of discourse leaves little space for counter-discourses and alternate discourses of which — ironically — his contribution is an illustration. Additionally, over the years his contributions have created a new discourse that provides the bedrock for post-structuralists of various hues. The post discourse has become a new discourse.

The questions we raise and the issues we address lead us to the view of discourses that occupy a middle-ground between the restrictive Foucauldian and the broad dictionary meaning of the term. We see discourses as trends and patterns of thought with certain root metaphors, provisional conceptual boundaries and a discursiveness that (a) create a space in contested intellectual terrain and have a certain staying power, (b) cross-cut conventional disciplinary boundaries, often incorporating the ideas and opinions of the professionals, politicians, who may or may not be intellectuals, and even average people. For example, it can be said that there is now a post-modernist discourse among literary critics and others interested in cultural studies in Asia, Latin America as in North America and Europe. This example may imply that discourse only refers to the approaches of intellectuals within certain high-sounding intellectual fields.

Taking the broader meaning of the term discourse, we can say that in the post-cold war world there now exists a world-wide discourse on free-market economy. Though initiated by the economists of the Bretton Woods
Institutions (IMF, World Bank, etc.), this discourse is no longer confined to economists or to World Bank-friendly governments. Other social scientists, opposition politicians, Non-Governmental Organizations, journalists and average thinking public are all participants of this discourse. Those who oppose or who are less enamoured of free-market ideas may also criticize or express their reservations in response to this idea, and are thus implicated in the discourse. This point needs further elucidation. We assert that in order to participate in discourse, one need not be simply a follower of it. One can affirm discourse even by criticizing or rejecting it. In this sense, Wallerstein’s view of the contributions of the anti-systemic towards the sustenance of the system provides a close parallel. Commenting on the historical anti-Western tendencies among Russian intellectuals, one writer stated: “The more Russian thinkers distanced themselves from the West, the more they used it as a point of reference. While criticizing it, they observed it, if anything, even more closely than did the westernizers” (Laszlo, 1993: 103).

The discourse of globalization ought to be understood as the thematicization of the issue of globalization running the entire gamut of the intellectual and public scene. The globalization discourse incorporates those who affirm it, those who partially accept it, or even those who reject it. In the last sense, the whole movement towards indigenization — provided its point of reference is the global society — can be seen as the flip-side of globalization, thus becoming a part of the globalization discourse.

Goethe’s idea of a world literature provides another example of this process. As Bhabha points out, for Goethe, “the possibility of a world literature arises from the cultural confusion wrought by terrible wars and mutual conflicts” (Bhabha, 1994: 11). “Nations could not return to their settled and independent lives again without noticing that they had learned many foreign ideas and ways, which they had unconsciously adopted and came to feel here and there previously unrecognized spiritual and intellectual needs” (quoted in Bhabha, 1994: 11). In a similar vein it can be said that, in today’s world of so-called conflicting civilizational standards, multi-culturalism, and the overall sense of chaos and political disorder, a new awareness of the globe and of global culture are taking shape. Globalization is a shorthand name for these complex processes. The discourse of globalization is likewise an intellectual response to these processes.

THE PROBLEM OF HEGEMONY

Historically formed and culturally negotiated hierarchies are among the central features of the complexities of the modern world. The problem of
hegemony captures the variety of dominating, exploitative and repressive hierarchical relationships that characterize the world. We maintain that an important difference exists between hegemony at the politico-economic level and the hegemony at the cultural and intellectual levels. It is in the latter sense that Gramsci uses the word ‘hegemony.’ Second, there is an important difference between willful, voluntary acceptance of certain procedures often for pragmatic reasons and the involuntary subjugation.

At the military, political, and economic levels, it is not difficult to show the hegemony of the United States or NATO or G-7 countries, including Japan. This hegemony is often manifested in overt domination, very much in the vein of earlier imperialism. That does not mean, however, that the theoretical approaches and the intellectual currents produced in that milieu are mirror images, embodying the same hegemonic intent. Take, for example, the globalization of knowledge in medical science. In a world dominated by big and powerful multinational pharmaceutical companies, one can argue that, although there are odd examples of enforced implementation, much of the diffusion of medical knowledge now takes place in the context of voluntary acceptance. Without minimizing the importance of indigenous medicine and alternative healing techniques, one can argue that in the event of say, a massive flood in Bangladesh, which often brings in its wake such epidemics as cholera, that both officials and intellectuals will unconditionally accept vaccines from Germany or USA without debating the possible hegemonic quality of “western” medical science. A less dramatic example of the popularity of certain “indigenous” Chinese medicines (Tiger Balm, for example) in countries like India and Bangladesh provide further evidence of the same pragmatic actions. When it comes to intercultural borrowings and diffusion of knowledge, people often make choices based on pragmatic calculations and are not simply cowered into ideological submissiveness. An earlier example of borrowing “western” medical technology can be found in the case of Japan, a process that preceded both the Meiji Restoration and the onset of Commodore Perry in 1853. Japan began borrowing western (Dutch) knowledge of medical science (to combat the cholera) and military technology — mainly gunnery — as early as 1840s (Najita, 1993: 26).

The view that social theories are linear reflections of certain politico-economic designs is patently naive. Petras asserts: “One of the great deceptions of our times is the notion of ‘internationalization’ of ideas, markets and movements. It has become fashionable to evoke terms like ‘globalization’, or ‘internationalization’ to justify attacks on any or all forms of solidarity, community, and / or social values” (Petras, 1993: 145). Even overlooking the irony that Petras is for protection of “community” and “social values,” it is
clear that he takes a simplistic, unproblematic slogan of globalization to task. The imperial role of the United States, which has become more glaring in the post-cold war world has its apologists. We do not rule out official, “diplomatically correct” points of views, but they are points of views that often embellish quasi-official publications in the United States. They are surely not theoretical statements. The disjunction between geographical space and theoretical, or more generally, intellectual, tendencies is a feature of the process of globalization. For example, Noam Chomsky’s works (1994) abundantly document the imperialistic ventures of the United States government and business in the so-called “new world order.” It is at the same time worth stressing that the fact that such critical discourse is possible in the United States shows a certain autonomy of the intellectual culture. Edward Said has been a vocal critic of the imperialistic designs of the United States and has used his enormous intellectual force to expose the “orientalist discourse.” Now to hold Said’s location in the centre of world capitalism against him — as Ahmad (1992) does — would be to deny the possibility of a disjunction between geographical space and the intellectual universe. Homelessness and fluidity are the essences of contemporary — postcolonial — intellectual practices and praxes.

We do not assert, however, that the idea and possibility of intellectual hegemony does not exist. It does. Such ideas as “cultural imperialism,” “colonization of mind,” “enslaved imagination” must be treated with more care than it has thus far been the case. A number of writers tend to confuse the empirical and the analytical domains. To complicate the matter further, the simplistic analysis of the empirical domain finds its way into an equally unproblematised analytical domain. Abmad criticized Said (1992: 203-11) for privileging the category of “nation” over that of “class” and of making the distinction between colonial and post-colonial writers that neglect details of their writings and to limit the examples to certain numbers. For the first, one can simply invoke the issue of authorial preference of an analytical framework. If not, then is Ahmad’s unhappiness due to the fact that Said is not Marxist enough?

The second critique seems to confuse analytical with empirical domains. Binder (1988) makes a distinction between “good,” “bad,” and “pragmatic” orientalism in Said’s “oriental discourse.” Clifford Geertz’s study of Islam is an example of “good orientalism.” A wholesale attack of “orientalism” and an “orientalist discourse” has led to the development of a “reverse orientalist discourse,” which can sometimes manifest in, what Abaza and Stauth (1990) call, “going native.” Counter-discourse is often the mirror image of discourse. In attacking the moral high-handedness of the metropolis, it situ-
ates itself on a newer moral high ground. The very practical exemplars of these are the ideologies of Hindu fundamentalists in India or Muslim fundamentalists in Algeria.

Neither a metropolitan orientalist nor a peripheral nativist be simply located in a geographical grid anymore. A geography-centered approach is predicated upon the creation of a “good us” versus a “bad them,” ruling out the possibility of home-grown fascists and other such odious reactionary tendencies. The attendant problem of cultural relativism, such binary distinction leads to more pernicious political and eventually moral relativism. An escape from binary to a much more pluralistic understanding of the social, cultural milieu is necessary even for political/moral reason. Relativism bars us from criticizing one another thus foreclosing the possibility of learning from each other (Jarvie, 1983) though, it might allow one to repudiate the other as both the colonial and now the reverse colonial discourses indicate. In the binary world-view difference is the root metaphor which entails competing rationalities. As Mohanty argues, “But the issue of competing rationalities raises a nagging question: how do we negotiate between my history and yours? How would it be possible for us to recover our commonality, not the ambiguous imperial-humanist myth of our shared human attributes, which are supposed to distinguish us all from animals, but more significantly, the imbrication of our various pasts and presents, the eneluctable relationships of shared and contested meanings, values, material resources? It is necessary to assert our dense particularities, our lived and imagined differences; but could we afford to leave untheorized the question of how our differences are intertwined and, indeed, hierarchically organized? Could we, in other words, afford to have entirely different histories, to see ourselves as living — and having lived in entirely heterogeneous and discrete spaces (Mohanty, 1989: 13)?”

One of the weaknesses of the “orientalist discourse” has been its tendency towards conflation. Amartya Sen (1993) suggests that there are, at least, three modes of non-Indian discourses on India: the exoticist, the magisterial, and the investigative. It is important to stress the varieties and nuances of the so-called “Western” discourses on non-Western societies so that the perniciousness of condescension, insult, and misrepresentation can be separated from the more plausible representations.

The history of colonialism demonstrates a variety of examples of cultural subjugation and violence, yet the primary objection to the simplistic and unreflective acceptance of the “cultural imperialism” thesis is that it denies the role of agency. Moreover, notions of imperialism and domination entail intentionality. Globalization as a process is more unintentional and amor-
phous. In the words of Tomlinson: “Globalisation may be distinguished from imperialism in that it is far less coherent or culturally directed process. For all that it is ambiguous between economic and political senses, the idea of imperialism contains, at least, the notion of a purposeful project: the intended spread of a social system from one centre of power across the globe. The idea of ‘globalisation’ suggests interconnection and interdependency of all global areas, which happens in a far less purposeful way. It happens as the result of economic and cultural practices which do not, of themselves, aim at global integration, but which nonetheless produce it” (Tomlinson, 1991: 175). This is not to suggest, however, that the whole process is teleological — history unfolding itself towards a predetermined endpoint i.e., a globalized (and, even, a homogenized) world.

Spatial or geographically specific hegemony has arguably been supplanted by disciplinary hegemony. The hegemonic rise of the discipline of economics over other social sciences has taken place concurrently with the definition of the world in primarily economic terms (Markoff and Montecinos, 1993). The rise of economics as a discipline and economically-oriented theories in sociology illustrate the force of economic globalization. Rather than advancing a defense for the “Western” social sciences, we are simply trying to establish that the globalization approach is not a camouflaged attempt to establish the hegemony of Western social theory, culture or ideology. This can be done by turning to the so-called “non-Western” part of the world. The use of the quotation marks suggests that we are using these categories while at the same time underscoring their essentialist qualities. In the world today, we are all implicated by and in globalization.

THE PROBLEMATIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNIVERSALIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION

Can the expansion of the global field be equated with the march of universalization in the traditional sense? The idea of the march of universalization in both spatial and cultural terms was one of the clarion calls of modernization theories, which unfortunately turned out to be its theoretical Achilles heel. Many critics pointed out that what was billed as “universal” was the “particular” culture of the West. Universalization was, in that sense, the world-wide spread of Western particularistic culture. The idea of universalization was an accompaniment to the notion of progress nurtured by the idea of Enlightenment. A critical evaluation of the enlightenment project provided another opportunity to challenge universalistic ambitions. A simplistic yet popular view of globalization tends to conflate globalization and
homogenization. For example, one writer asserts it: “Cultural globalizing tendencies are most evident in the common core syllabuses that have spread across the globe. Schoolchildren, whether they be in Islamic Iran, Croatia, or the Basque Country, learn to master the same basic mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology. As an orientation to the world, this common global socialization provides strong constitutive elements for a core commonality” (Goonatilake, 1995: 228). This is a clear and empirically valid statement but then to conclude from this that “[t]hese ongoing processes of cultural globalization are tending to wipe out local cultural identities” (1995: 229) is little overdrawn.

Despite the undeniable fact that certain homogenizing tendencies are at work at the global level, it is not necessary to equate globalization theory with earlier homogenization theory: a theory that has Marxist as well as mainstream varieties. The duality and the conflictual relationship between locality and globality produced by a misreading of globalization theory has been largely redressed by the introduction of the concept of [glocalization] by Robertson (1995). To what extent globalization theory embodies a universalist position is an issue that cannot be discussed here in any great details. We share the minimalist theory of the universality of (moral) values — “truth” and “justice” — proposed by Walzer (1994) as a starting point. In a more philosophical bent, Walzer, while retaining the duality of “particular” vs. “universal,” seeks to transcend it by advancing both the notion of minimal morality and the politics of difference at the same time. Drawing upon the difference between society and humanity, Walzer writes:

“Societies are necessarily particular because they have members and memories, members with memories not only of their own but also of their common life. Humanity, by contrast, has members but no memory, and so it has no history and no culture, no customary practices, no familiar life-ways, no festivals, no shared understanding of social goods. It is human to have such things, but there is no singular human way of having them. At the same time, the members of all the different societies, because they are human, can acknowledge each other’s different ways, respond to each other’s cries for help, learn from each other, and march (sometimes) in each other’s parades” (Walzer, 1994: 8).

Here, obviously Walzer proposes a pluralistic world-view in consonance with the ideals of liberalism. Although we do not want to deviate too much from this pluralistic intent, we suggest a number of common concerns of humanity can now be shown to have “shared understanding” and even some common festivals. Issues, such as ecological degradation, epidemics such as AIDS, gender equality, cultural rights, etc. have clearly become com-
mon concerns of humanity. Earth Day and the United Nations Day are also celebrated worldwide. Global conferences on the environment (Rio Conference of 1992) or the Women’s Conference in Kenya (in 1985) or in Beijing (in 1995) illustrate this. The impact of globalization on local contexts cannot be seen simply as erasure of local traditions, nor can “local” be recreated as an imaginary land. Even those who are concerned over the adverse effects of globalization on the local level are quick to warn against the fabrication of the local, because that might resurrect and legitimize primitive oppression and exploitation. Local can be the site of resistance and liberation but also a predicament (Dirlik, 1997: 85). When the ideas of resistance are invoked, the need arises for a moral compass to separate a life worth living, and thus fighting for, from what is unacceptable and loathsome. The idea of measuring progress does not become obsolete.

One problem of earlier modernization theory was its inability to theorize progress and its uncritical acceptance of a unilinear view of progress. In the face of endless theoretical onslaughts against the idea of progress, salvaging it poses a challenging task. In our opinion, Therborn’s (1995) discussion of four routes towards modernization, i.e., the European, the New Worlds, self-imposed, and modernization by conquest is helpful in its emphasis on the plurality of the concept. On the issue of progress, Sztompka’s (1990) view of a progressive theory of progress based on the principles of self-evaluation and self-correction can be incorporated into the globalization approach. The problem of universal versus particular, and the rationality vs. relativism debate can also be negotiated by adhering to the minimalist position that Walzer recommends, by arguing for a position of weak or flexible absolutism, or by what I would call a reflexive universalism. Reflexive universalism must be based on adherence to a minimum set of common ground rules allowing for sensitivity to local traditions, norms and institutions. A reflexive universalist position allows for negotiation and rational discussion among competing claims to rationality. Such debate and discussion is pivotal to ensuring social justice on a global basis.

CONCLUSION

Plurality and reflexivity are not only attributes of the contemporary world that we inhabit, but they are also hallmarks of the concept of globalization that we employ to make sense of our existence. The availability of multiple discourses on globalization, controversies, new battle-grounds point to a complex and non-linear reality. Recognition of and respect for disparate discourses of globalization prove anything but its hegemonic intent.
Globalization does not mean the removal or erasure of local culture. The local culture under the conditions of globality has become as important as global culture itself. The local culture does not surrender itself to the forces from outside unproblematically, rather it absorbs as it valorizes its own distinctiveness. At the turn of the twenty-first century, what is local and what is global is becoming increasingly uncertain. The near-erasure of the distinction between the local and the global as spatial categories has given way to a disjuncture between conceptual and spatial polarities. How the process of globalization works out both institutionally and culturally depends to a large extent on the local condition. The reconstitution of the local takes place with the recognition that, as is any culture, local culture is not a timeless structure. It changes, and gathers strength by incorporating and indigenizing traditions from far and near in the truest spirit of cosmopolitanism.

To conceptualize globalization in a more meaningful and thus more useful way, we must transcend the binary mode of thinking. We must no longer consider either tradition or modern, but the fusion of tradition and modern. It is no longer either global or local, rather it is global and local simultaneously (“glocal” in Robertson’s phrase). Cosmopolitanism, “hybridity,” “pastiche,” “melange,” “multihistoricality” are terms that come to mind in describing this process. A national citizen, whether of Singapore or Korea, today has the potential to become a truly “cosmopolitan citizen,” to borrow a Kantian phrase. That possibility is the result of globalization. In his original formulation, Robertson (1987) conceptualizes global circumstance as the global-human condition (emphasis in the original) which includes individuals, societies, relations between societies and mankind (in the generic sense) as the major contemporary components or dimensions of that condition.

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