

**The Cultures of Globalization, Frederic Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, editors, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998, xvii, 393 pp.**

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The title of this collection of essays, which were originally presented at the "Culture and Globalization" conference held at Duke University, will mislead and thus disappoint readers expecting an extension of the kind of analysis provided by such authors as Vandana Shiva, Gustavo Esteva, and the late Eduardo Grillo Fernandez. Unlike most of the contributors to *The Cultures of Globalization*, these writers approach the destructive impact of globalization as activists deeply rooted in local cultures of resistance which are also cultures of self-affirmation and renewal.

The contributors to the present volume of 18 essays, with only a couple of exceptions, are academics who are at home in the high-status tradition (within elite Western universities) of theoretically based criticism of the alienating effects of capitalism. The contrast for readers not accustomed to thinking in the conceptual categories that frame the analysis in most of the essays will be quite clear especially when they encounter the metaphors that serve as the main currency of intellectual exchange. Words such as "modern," "postmodern," "Identity," "Difference," and "hybridization" are constantly used as a form of conceptual shorthand for establishing the legitimacy of conceptual and moral categories.

The history of analysis encoded and implicitly carried forward by these metaphors may have been partially understood by the participants in the Duke University conference, but most readers unfamiliar with their complex genealogy will find them to be conceptual black holes. The following statement by Frederic Jameson is typical of how metaphors can protect the boundaries of an inner circle of emancipated theorists from intrusion by outsiders grounded in different metanarratives. In his essay, "Globalization as Philosophic Issue," Jameson observes that "India is a vast and multiple place indeed, and one finds both modernisms and postmodernisms in full development there." A few sentences later, he asks "Who could be against Difference on the social or even political level?" (pp. 73-74). Given the range of linguistic and religious traditions, as well as all the other complexities found in this country of nearly a billion people, the use of "modern," "postmodern," "Difference," and other metaphors used in cultural studies circles seems totally inadequate - and is symptomatic of one of the primary limitations of this collection of essays.

The dense style of writing that characterizes a number of the essays represents another serious weakness. Witness the following statement by Geeta Kapur:

This is a floating intelligentsia; the discourse of postmodernity puts to rout the notion of the 'organic intellectual.' Once again continents and nations recede into native habitations, and we have interpreters and translators decoding cultures across the globe. Paradoxically, if hybridity is the survivor's credo in the age of globalization, global culture, under the chasing speed of radical representation, emits a great buzz on identity (p. 199).

For the members of aboriginal cultures spread across North America who are attempting to re-establish their rights in the face of the cognitive authority of the West, the farmers of India who are being threatened by Monsanto's efforts to further industrialize the production of food, and the indigenous peoples of the Andes who are regenerating their ancient traditions of agriculture, Kapur's statement about globalization can only appear as yet another manifestation of elitism and misguided missionary zeal.

A number of essays in this volume address how writers and artists in different countries are responding to the cultural domination that accompanies the spread of Western media,

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technologies, and relentless consumerism. But they are all written from the same ideological and thus moral perspective. It is this interpretive framework that is the real source of concern about whether the essays are a manifestation of core problems associated with globalization or are make a positive contribution. As I argue in *The Culture of Denial* (Bowers 1997), academics are largely responsible for the distinction between high and low status forms of knowledge. The distinction is institutionalized in the forms of knowledge included the curriculum, and by what is excluded as unworthy of study. What is included, while it has many dimensions, privileges theoretically-based knowledge over context-specific knowledge that has been tested over generations of experience. Print-based encoding of knowledge is privileged over face-to-face communication, as is the view that intelligence is an individual attribute rather than the individualized expression of a distinct cultural way of knowing. Emphasis is placed on the discovery of new knowledge that will lead to technological innovation and an expansion of the commodification process into more areas of individual and community life and now, evolutionary biology is being transformed into a metanarrative that explains the genetic basis of autopoietic processes and why some social organizational forms (including cultures) are better adapted than others.

The ideological framework that informs this volume's essays does not reinforce this latter characteristic of high-status knowledge promoted by academics, nor does it necessarily subscribe to the increasing emphasis on discovering new technologies that contribute to transforming local knowledge, skills, and relationships into commodities. However, it shares many of the other characteristics of high-status knowledge - and thus the bias against the low-status forms of knowledge that happen to represent alternatives to the spread of commodified culture. All the essays are deeply theoretical in ways that marginalize local knowledge. They are also products of a print-based form of consciousness that assumes a form of individualism that can exercise culturally autonomous critical judgment, and further assumes that critical theory leads to emancipation rather than further embeddedness in the webs of moral reciprocity that characterize many cultural groups.

Lastly, the ideological framework that ties these essays together is deeply anthropocentric, even as it leads to criticisms of the Western tradition of reducing nature to the status of an economic resource. Several contributors share my concern about whether a cultural studies approach to addressing the crisis of globalization is part of the problem or the solution. Walter D. Mignolo, for example, observes that the ideology of progress and emancipation promoted by Western universities led non-Western peoples to "doubt their own wisdom, when that wisdom was not articulated in Western educational institutions and languages" (p. 46). Alberto Moreiras notes that "by virtue of its institutional mission in the reproduction of the global system, the Western university is an overwhelming machine for the colonizing and dismantling of singular practices" (p. 81). The question raised by Sherif Hetata reflects a similar uncertainty about whether the emancipatory agenda of cultural studies masks the same form of cultural domination that accompanied earlier stages in globalizing the Western model of industrialization - which were also legitimated on the grounds that it emancipated people from the limitations of their local traditions. Hetata writes that "perhaps cultural, multicultural, and intercultural studies need to identify themselves more clearly." He goes on to ask "What is the path or the paths that could make cultural studies prove a greater concern with and solidarity for peoples and their cultures in the South? How can we transfer knowledge and technology to those working in the area of culture in the South without appropriating them to the power system and power culture in the North?" (p. 285).

But perhaps the most important observation on the role of cultural studies was indirectly made by Leslie Sklair's suggestion that the most effective resistance to the spread of the culture of global capitalism can be found at the local level (p. 291). The different forms of resistance based on local traditions of self-sufficiency, as the reader will quickly discover, stand in stark contrast with the book's emphasis on treating globalization as a set of theoretical issues. Unfortunately, these brief expressions of uncertainty are never explored in any depth.

The book contains several essays that provide an insightful analysis of the difficulties faced

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by intellectuals in non-Western countries who are attempting to articulate alternative pathways to development that balance aspects of Western technologies and ideas with traditional elements of culture. Liu Kang's essay, "Is there an Alternative to (Capitalist) Globalization? The Debate About Modernity in China," examines the debates among leading intellectuals, policy shifts of the party, and the ideological tensions where both the Mao and Confucian legacies are being reassessed in the context of a resurgent nationalism. David Harvey's contribution, "What's Green and Makes the Environment Go Round?" combines an insightful critique of the double binds in a Marxist proposal for addressing the ecological crisis, and a good summary of the principles that should guide environmental justice policies.

Of the 18 essays, only two address the environmental crisis, and they appear as the last chapters in the book. This marginalization of environmental issues in a book that purports to address the destructive implications of globalization is especially surprising.

There are two other fundamental conceptual limitations that further undermine the book's contribution to the current discourse on local alternatives to globalization. Except for a brief reference to computers in Frederic Jameson's essay, all of the contributors ignore the role of computers in accelerating the process of globalization. The continuities between the earliest phase of the Industrial Revolution and its current digital phase of development in the form of individualism required by process of mass production and consumption, context-free patterns of thinking, subjective-centered sense of temporality, instrumental morality, and so forth should have been more central to any current discussion of the culturally-transforming nature of globalization. That the papers presented at the conference were probably written between 1995 and 1996, which was before the explosive growth of the Internet, is no excuse for ignoring the cultural mediating characteristics of computers. At that time there was already a significant body of literature that explained how the development and spread of computer technology needed to be understood as the next stage in the development of human evolution. The effort to situate computers in the process of natural selection, which would make Nature rather than the political process the determining factor, can be seen in books like Hans Moravec's *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (1988); Gregory Stock's *Metaman: The Merging of Humans and Machines into a Global Superorganism* (1993); Kevin Kelly's *Out of Control: The Rise of Neo-Biological Civilization* (1994); and Nicholas Negroponte's *Being Digital* (1995). Furthermore, well before the participants at the conference on "Globalization and Culture" sat down to write their papers, the role of computers in extending the global reach of giant corporations had been widely recognized, and even celebrated in the media as the latest technological achievement.

The other major conceptual limitation that sets this volume off from such other collection of essays on globalization as Wolfgang Sachs' *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (1992), and Frederique Apffel-Marglin's *The Spirit of Regeneration, Andean Culture Confronting Western Notions of Development* (1998) is the way it perpetuates the academic bias against local, intergenerational, face-to-face, and non-theoretically based forms of knowledge. The volumes edited by Sachs and by Apffel-Marglin are part of a growing body of literature that combines a critique of globalization with accounts of the local practices of different cultural groups that represent alternatives to the spread of commodified relationships. Unlike the contributors to *The Cultures of Globalization*, these other collections focus on the patterns of moral reciprocity and the ability to utilize intergenerational knowledge as the basis of self-sufficiency (which the current phase of the Industrial Revolution needs to undermine in order to expand its reach), and provide the reader with actual models of resistance - rather than the continual search for new forms of theoretically based understanding that sustains the cottage industry most academics rely upon.

The double binds inherent in the ideological framework that dictates what constitutes the center, margins, and silences in *The Cultures of Globalization* will severely limit the audience for this book. Unfortunately, the audience most likely to find it on the required reading list (graduate students in cultural studies) are not likely to be aware of these double binds, which will continue

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to exert their influence even as cultural studies is marginalized by an even more progressive form of critical theory.

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C. A. Bowers, has written widely on the cultural transforming characteristics of computers, and on the cultural roots of the ecological crisis. His most recent books are *Educating for an Ecologically Sustainable Culture: Re-Thinking Moral Education, Creativity, Intelligence, and Other Modern Orthodoxies* (SUNY Press, 1995) and *The Culture of Denial: Why the Environmental Movement Needs A Strategy for Reforming Universities and Public Schools* (SUNY Press, 1997). Bowers' most recent book, now in press, is *Globalizing Computers: Cultural, Ecological and Educational Consequences.*