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R. RADHAKRISHNAN

Globalization, Desire, and the Politics of Representation

WHAT IS THE ATTRACTION of globality, and why is its rhetoric so seductively irresistible? What is the nature of its authority? Let me begin by suggesting that the triumphalism of globality has to do with the fact that it seems to emanate from reality itself even as it speaks persuasively for that reality. As a fait accompli, globality presents itself both as reality and as a representation of that reality, all within a unified temporality. It is as though the very essence of reality were global, and, therefore, any attempt at interrogating globality would be nothing short of discrediting reality itself. But how did reality get globalized so absolutely and normatively, and by what process did the space between reality and representation get closed up and claimed in the name of globality? Part of my purpose in this essay is to put some pressure, historical as well as theoretical, on the ideological structuration of globality, and to examine how such a profoundly uneven and relational category gets spoken for as though it were a thing, an essence, an incontrovertible property of reality itself. Consequently my focus in the following discussion will be on the tensions between globality as perspective and globality as content, globality as uni-polar and globality as multi-polar, and globality as process and globality as realized vision and product.

Fredric Jameson begins his essay “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue” with a schematic account of the phenomenon of globalization:

Four positions on our topic seem logically available. The first affirms the opinion that there is no such thing as globalization (there are still the nation-states and the national situations; nothing is new under the sun). The second also affirms that globalization is nothing new; there has always been globalization and it suffices to leaf through a book like Eric Wolf’s Europe and the People without History to see that as far back as the neolithic trade routes have been global in their scope, with Polynesian artifacts deposited in Africa and Asian potsherds as far afield as the New World.

Then I suppose one should add two more: one that affirms the relationship between globalization and that world market which is the ultimate horizon of capitalism, only to add that the current world networks are only different in degree and not in kind; while a fourth affirmation (which I have found more interesting than the other three) posits some new, or third, multinational stage of capitalism, of which globalization is an intrinsic feature and which we now largely tend, whether we like it or not, to associate with that thing called postmodernity. (54)

I do not intend to examine all four scenarios or offer an opinion on the classification itself. My focus will be on the “first position,” which, according to Jameson, asserts that as long as nations and nation-states continue to exist and exert hege-
monic influence on geopolitical circumstances, globalization are at best an ideological illusion. I would like to suggest on the contrary that there is indeed no contradiction between the logic of globalization and the self-interest of dominant nationalisms and nation-states. Just as notions of trans- and inter-nationalism are posited not on the basis of any critical negation of and/or divestment from the ideology of nationalism, but rather on the basis of a supranationalism that holds on to and consolidates the privileges and prerogatives of dominant nationalism, so, too, globalization extends the regime of uneven development between developed and developing nations (see Balibar and Wallerstein). Noam Chomsky drives this point home with great polemical verve:

Putting the details aside, it seems fairly clear that one reason for the sharp divide between today's first and third worlds is that much of the latter was subjected to "experiments" that rammed free market down their throats, whereas today's developed countries were able to resist such measures.

That brings us to another feature of modern history that is hard to miss, in this case at the ideological level. Free market doctrine comes in two varieties. The first is the official doctrine that is taught to and by the educated classes and imposed on the defenseless. The second is what we might call "really existing free market doctrine": For thee, but not for me, except for temporary advantage: I need the protection of the nanny state, but you must learn responsibility under the harsh regimen of "tough love." ("Free Trade and Free Market" 361)

Rather than posit globality and nationalism as adversarial projects, I maintain that globalization takes the form of the dismantling of subaltern nationalisms by developed nationalisms. Globality and globalization are the Darwinian manifesto of the survival of the fittest: the strong nations will survive "naturally," for it is in their destiny to survive as nameless and unmarked nations, whereas weak nations will inevitably be weeded out because of their unsatisfactory performance as nation-states. In other words, the strong nations will have earned the ethico-political authority to deconstruct the sovereignty of Third-World national rights precisely because these fully developed nations have succeeded in actualizing this form of sovereignty. The developing nations, on the other hand, will be blamed for their inability to secure this sovereignty on their own behalf, and, furthermore, they will be blamed and penalized if they raise the flag of subaltern national sovereignty in revolt against the standard of dominant national sovereignty. Globality is indeed the name of that ideological structuration that seeks once and for all to realize "the world as a worthy trophy to be held aloft by some nation-states on behalf of all.

If postmodern globality implies radical divestment from the politics of nationalism, such a divestment has different implications for Third-World nationalisms. When I use the term "postmodern" here, I refer to the "anti-representational" strand of thought within the vast and heterogeneous repertoire of postmodernism. Within the context of the developed world, the movement from modernity to postmodernity is macropolitically continuous and "conservative," whereas in the context of the underdeveloped world, whose very claim to citizenship in the modern world is the phenomenon of "underdevelopment" (see Gupta), the movement towards a postmodern economy of meaning is disruptive. In the case of the developed nations the capacity for going global enhances the capacity for self-representation as powerful nation-states, whereas in the case of the underdeveloped nations globalization attenuates and eviscerates national sovereignty. Within
the global postmodern space of advanced capitalism, what is problematized is not the representative and representational space of nationalism as such or the legitimacy of representation qua representation, but the ethico-political rights of postcolonial peoples to realize themselves as sovereign nation-states. Successful and dominant nationalisms are rewarded, while subaltern and emerging nationalisms are penalized for wanting the very things that dominant nationalisms have successfully monopolized merely by getting there first. Nowhere is this hideous double standard more visible than in the case of nuclear power, as developing countries with potential or demonstrated nuclear capacity are criminalized as “rogue states” without any recognition of the fact that this “roguery” was initiated in the first place by the superpowers (see Bidwai and Vinaik). It is as if a mighty criminal arrogated to him/herself the authority of the cop on the basis of her/his prior and therefore norm-setting entry into the realm of criminality and transgression. Nuclear capability and the CTBT (the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty) is not, however, my present concern. Rather, I am concerned with the status of representation as it inheres in the nation and the nation-state. As I have been maintaining all along, global capital as motored by postmodernist epistemology authorizes the belief that the flow of capital in and by itself identifies people’s interests the world over and speaks for them nonideologically. Such an assumption is as theoretically inept as it is counterfactual. Indeed, even under the premise of transnational and border-busting globality, protectionism and industrial and economic policy are well in place. But protectionism practiced by powerful nation-states is not named as such, whereas subaltern protectionism is immediately demonized as rabid nationalism. If the nation form is dismantled in the postcolonial context, who then will speak for the peoples of the Third World: Capital, NAFTA, WTO, or the president of the USA?

Let us take a quick look at the opposition to the WTO talks in Seattle and the IMF. As has been noted by many writers and analysts, this opposition has created many strange coalitions in the face of a common woe. To summarize these accounts somewhat schematically, there is the so-called ideological opposition between multinational and transnational corporations, on the one hand, and the sovereignty of nation-states, on the other. There is also the opposition between a border-busting capital and a nationally administered labor pool. Multinationals and transnationals, it is argued, undermine the sovereignty of nation-states because their only allegiance is to themselves, not to the ideological politics of nationalism. However, this argument—as lucid and persuasive as it may sound—fails to make the all-important distinction between actualized (and dominant) super-nationalisms and emergent nationalisms. Just as by its very definition nationalism empowers division and not relational or empathic solidarity, just as nationalism is posited on the fundamental assumption that there are good nationalisms (Us) and bad nationalisms (Them), so, too, these transnational configurations reassert the supra-national power of dominant nationalisms, thus making their nationalist ideologies transparent and invisible, and necessitate an ongoing inferiorization of emergent nationalisms. Take the simple instance of

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the loss of jobs, which are not categorized as “human” jobs but as American or Canadian or Mexican or Indian jobs. The leaders of the free world evince no embarrassment as they protect and represent their labor, their people power, their right to a fair share of global employment opportunities. It is inevitable that they do so, but they might as well do it with ideological candor, instead of parading their recidivism into mercantilism as a vigorous advocacy of free trade. It is obvious that First-World national governments become interventionist when the ideology of free trade suddenly turns inimical to their own economic interests. When was the last time that an American president showed concern or altered foreign trade policy in response to dire job losses in Mexico or in the Philippines? But, on the other hand, when the Mexican peso tumbles, American politicians are eager to help the Mexican economy so that America and American workers will not pay the price. In the unequal relationship between Mexico and the U.S., not only must Mexico deliver the impossible goal of living up to U.S. expectations, but it must also prepare itself to be demonized and castigated for ineptness should it fail. In a similar fashion, World Bank and IMF interventions in the economies of the Third World have been undertaken in the name of a world system that represents the interests of the dominant economies. The motivation here is neither benevolence nor altruism, but an egocentric concern that the weaker economies should be maintained in a state of systemic viability that is compatible with the growth patterns and objectives of the G7—even if such a form of viability endangers sustainable development within those poor and underdeveloped economies. And that is why most IMF and World Bank prescriptions for Third-World ills take the form of fundamental structural changes and redefinitions of priorities. The logic runs thus: be viable for us (the system) so that you can be viable for yourself. If there are genuine priority clashes, or if, for example, the local and national economic well-being of Indonesia requires strategic protection from rapacious foreign investment, these issues are quickly dismissed as incompatible with the avant-gardism of a developmental globality that unflinchingly invests in the underdeveloped world with the intention of maintaining it in eternal dependence and heteronomy. Within such a vision of dominant globality, the weaker economies are condemned to fantasies they can never actualize and to teleologies over which they have no direct agential control. Thus, the ideology of dominant globality plays out a duplicitous ideological game: on the one hand, it insists that the entire world should think uni-polar—that is, that the rest of the world should look like, resemble, emulate, and follow the Western lead; on the other, it requires that non-Western peoples remain forever the other. They cannot and should never be allowed to become us or like us, but they should bond with us like an indigent and hapless relative in need who pathetically solicits our help; in this way the chasm of an unbridgable and unactualizable desire remains always in place. When others behave like us, they become a threat, so they need to be contained within a sanctimonious rhetoric of pedagogy that ensures their perpetual discipleship or apprenticeship. We are virtuous and immaculate in what we do, but they are flawed and robberish in their repetition of our deeds. To sum up, globality shores up dominance and continues the anthropological fantasy of maintaining the other in intimate and yet exotic followership.
This in a nutshell is the lie of globalization: though the official blurbs maintain that the reality of globality transcends the sovereignty of nation-states, in fact and in effect the world invoked by globality remains structured according to a hierarchy in which subaltern nations are chronically engaged in the project of theatricalizing themselves as eternal laggards and "catcher uppers." The users of what Partha Chatterjee has called the "derivative discourse" are paralyzed as the objects of derivative discourse, and, as a result of this paralysis, the political agency of Third-World nations is effortlessly subsumed by the ideology of a post-representational globality. Globality, as it confronts the underdeveloped countries, marks the space of incommensurability where the inter- and the intra-national modes of organization and community historicize their mutual a-synchrony. Within the figularity of the postcolonial nation-state, for whom does the nation-state speak, and to whom is its rhetoric addressed? Does the addressee influence, perhaps even constitute, the legitimacy of the rhetoric, or is it the rhetoric ideologized without reference to an addressee? Moreover, how is the internal addressee different from the one without? How does the temporality of the nation-state form create insides and outsiders? When the head of a nation-state speaks and therefore the nation speaks too, is the nation addressing its own people, or is it addressing other sister and brother nations with whom it enjoys ideological and morphological contemporaneity? Within such a Janus-faced figularity, where is the point of balance—or homeostasis, if you will—between exteriority and interiority? When Jawaharlal Nehru made that memorable speech marking the birth of India as a nation, was he addressing the Indian people who henceforth would fill the interiority of India, or was he addressing the national peoples and national heads of states of the world, saying, "here we are in your ranks now: equal and contemporary." Within such an unavoidable double consciousness (I say unavoidable, since baptism by nationalism necessitates such an entry into the world of inter-nations), what are the safeguards against the sacrificing of "interiority" to the superior and prestigious demands of exteriority? Third-World nationalism, much more than Western nationalism, is in constant danger of capitulating its "being for itself" in deference to the demands of "being for the other"—here, the demands of a global internationalism. Therefore, unless nationalisms are destabilized the world over and a genuine alternative is found to replace the imagined community of nation-states, the Third World would do well to focus on issues of representation, rather than place implicit trust in the post-representational flows of globality.

If the discourse of representation operates on the principle that sovereignty needs to be produced on behalf of a people and their determinate and historically specific interests, the global network model assumes rather glibly that political issues of representation will be automatically taken care of in the name of capital and uncontrolled economic opportunism. Whereas the politics of representation does not attempt to exorcize the mediatory distance between the experiential and the political, the techno-global model attempts to "get real" by

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2 For a succinct and insightful diagnosis of the pitfalls of postcolonial historiography, see Chakrabarty.
3 For a postcolonial critique of postmodernity, see my essay, "Postmodernism and the Rest of the World," in Afzal-Khan and Seshadri-Crooks, 37-70.
presuming to take the place of the real in the name of its own seductive immanence. Whereas the model of representation insists that the "political" can only be produced through a process of ideological interpellation, the techno-global model sells itself as the home of the political imaginary, thus severing all connection with the alterity of the ideological call. The enticing aspect about technoglobality, particularly during these times of a general disillusionment with matters political and ideological, is that it promotes the belief that the political inheres in the model in a thoroughly transparent and trans-ideological manner. Reality matters, not the political; if anything, politics mars, disfigures and polemizes reality—that is the manifesto of techno-globality. This message sells since it makes the promise that the political does not have to be produced any more and that a certain way of "phenomenologizing" the real will indeed take the place of the real. The narcissistic imaginary of techno-globality, in not allowing the awkwardness of a jagged and contested "hors-texte," intends to celebrate its own immanent interiority as a form of experiential plenitude. In consonance with such a celebration of immanence, the techno-global model inculcates in its members a sense of inclusion that is in fact a facile substitute for the concept of agential citizenship. If inclusiveness has been the agonizing issue that all political movements and revolutions have faced, the techno-global revolution makes of inclusiveness a pseudo problem by suggesting that the network is indeed God's formal answer to the problem of "unconnectedness." Get on the network and ipso facto you are included, valorized, and politicized. The power and the persuasiveness of the network model is its ability to create space without ideological location or situatedness. In a sense, this could be termed the ultimate aestheticization of the political. No other phrase captures this tendency better than the phrase "global village"—a phrase that looks back to the history of the village only to dehistoricize it in the context of techno-globality.

In a recent interview in The Nation, Noam Chomsky responded to the question, "Can the master’s house be dismantled by the master’s tools?" by suggesting that chipping away at the system is a real and critical alternative to despair and apathy (28-30). Chomsky’s suggestion is not unlike Chatterjee’s notion of "the derivative discourse," or Ranajit Guha’s concept of "the small voice of history." Derivative discourses and the small voices of history are incapable of achieving systematicity on their own behalf. The best they can do is authorize their own sense of agency to chip away, to "signify" their intentions on a pre-existing and often alien text. These political actors are incapable of writing their own scripts; they can at best "turn the pages" of the dominant script in a certain way, as suggested by Derrida. Is this enough? Is anything else possible other than "a war of position" a la Gramsci? As we try to evaluate the possibilities of "signifying" and "chipping away," it would be worthwhile to consider critically the nature and the phenomenology of tools in general. What are tools, and what is the nature of their inherence in specific ideologies, isms, and worldviews? Are tools a kind of methodology definitively anchored in the theories and the epistemologies that

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4 Slavoj Žižek has been relentless on his insistence on the importance of the big O in the project of reconceptualizing universalism. See The Ticklish Subject and "Cyberspace."
gave rise to them, or are they detachable in a purely pragmatic and opportunistic interest? To what extent are tools faithful to their origins? Finally, does any body or group really “own” tools except in a purely functional and instrumental way? There are two related issues here: one is, to use Ralph Ellison’s suggestive phrasing from *Invisible Man*, the thinker-tinker relationship (7) or, in Marxist terminology, the theory-praxis relationship; the other is the issue of achievable agency.

In regard to the relationship between tools and those using them, the postcolonial situation presents itself as a complex and interesting instance. If both modernity and nationalism are historicized as a derivative discourse in the Third World, how can the derivative discourse be owned agentially (as against just being assimilated or instrumentalized) by the non-West? How bad and crippling a stigma is “derivativeness,” and is there any way of redemption over and beyond it? Can derivativeness be negated, or is there a way of working through and beyond derivativeness into a realm of originality and one’s own-ness? To avail of Partha Chatterjee’s compelling insight again, can anything be done at all at the level of the political that can erase the mark of epistemological derivativeness? Or to use Nestor Canclini’s terminology (see *Hybrid Cultures*), is it enough that non-Western cultures choose to enter and exit modernity in their own way and in accordance with their own needs and priorities? Why privilege epistemology to such an extent that it begins to underestimate the power of the political? Is it really necessary for the Third World to come up with its own organic and integral epistemology as a precondition for a successful resistance to Eurocentrism? Where and how should the Third World signify its valence both as “something in itself” and as a form of difference from the paradigm of Euro-American modernity? The postcolonial predicament can be summed up thus: how can political unification be achieved on the basis of double-consciousness?

If we look to Edward Said, two possibilities emerge: traveling theory and the possibilities of contrapuntal meaning. If the moment theory travels, its origins are immediately de-sacralized, relativized, and rendered contingent upon the realities and circumstances to which it moves. A theory “born” in the West can become a tool of resistance in the non-West. Hybridized, heterogenized, mimicked and shot through with difference, metropolitan theory is submitted to a process (to conflate Spivak with Said) of catachresis, as a result of which every metropolitan articulation is simultaneously realized as a postcolonial articulation. And yet, all of these strategies remain micropolitical and/or signifying practices, that is, strategies of ex-orbitation and supplementation incapable of formulating their own autonomous teleology. In their attempts to realize themselves as radical and interventionary perspectives these strategies are still caught up, in a reactive mode, with the canonicity of the given metropolitan text. Instead of signifying on an “alien” text, should they not be signifying on their own texts? But then, on the other hand, doesn’t the very nature of “signifying” turn inside out the proper differentiation between “one’s own” and “the other’s”?

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5 For the former, see “Traveling Theory,” in *The World, the Text, the Critic*; for an articulation of “contrapuntal” reading strategies, see *Culture and Imperialism*.

6 For a brilliant co-articulation of the metropolitan with the postcolonial, see Spivak’s “Reading *The Satanic Verses*,” in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 217-41.
In his moving essay “Towards a Third World Utopia,” Ashis Nandy makes a concerted effort at realizing the Third World both as perspective and as the possibility of a different vision and content. To quote Nandy: “Thus, no utopia can be without an implicit or explicit theory of suffering. This is especially so in the peripheries of the world, euphemistically called the third world” (21). Nandy goes on to say that “to have a meaningful life in the minds of men, such a utopia must start with the issue of man-made suffering, which has given the third world both its name and uniqueness” (Traditions 21). Nandy affirms that his essay is “guided by the belief that the only way the third world can transcend the sloganeering of its well-wishers is, first, by becoming a collective representation of the victims of man-made suffering everywhere in the world and in all past times; second, by internalizing or owning up to the outside forces of oppression and then coping with them as inner vectors; and third, by recognizing the oppressed or marginalized selves of the first and the second worlds as civilizational allies in the battle against institutionalized suffering” (21). Nandy’s essay dares to use the much-maligned term utopia with theoretical rigor and ethico-political conviction. It enacts a creative tension between the desired place-less-ness of utopia and the perspectival specificity of the location from which utopia is being visualized. A similar move is made by Amitav Ghosh in his novel The Shadow Lines, about which I will have more to say below. Another feature of Nandy’s contribution is that it boldly espouses “content” as the basis on which Third-World utopias may be differentiated from other utopias. However, the content term that Nandy chooses is not “development,” “progress,” “emancipation,” or “industrialization”; the key word for him is “suffering.” And with that word Nandy strikes unequivocally an ethical register (see also Sen). Rather than invoke the pathos inherent in suffering, Nandy seeks to ground suffering as a powerful intra-and inter-subjective and cognitive category. Unlike technological and developmental/positivist utopianism that seeks to negate suffering, consolidate gains already made on the basis of a zero-sum, winner-take-all model, and thereby perpetuate the terrain of imbalance and inequity (see Guinier), Nandy’s utopianism is directed at the human conscience in all its inter- and intra-civilizational complexity. In conceptualizing suffering as that perspectival category from which utopia is to be envisioned, Nandy opens up a vital relationship between self-centered imaginings and other-oriented commitments (cf. Madan). In endowing epistemology with an authority that is coeally but differentially ethical, Nandy in effect limits and renders the self-centered economy of the abidingly vulnerable to the ubiquitous demands of alterity. Two points need to be made to differentiate Nandy’s conceptualization of suffering from pathos-based and/or victim-centered articulations of suffering. First, in Nandy’s discourse, suffering is realized simultaneously as experiential and proactively agential; and out of suffering comes critical knowledge which in turn empowers the voice of suffering to make its own cognitive-epistemological intervention by envisioning its own utopia rather than accept an assigned position within amelioratory schemes proposed by the dominant discourse. Secondly, suffering, though exemplified in a certain way by the Third World, is a universal and omni-locational phenomenon that cuts across rigid and overdetermined self-other oppositions. No one or no one position has a monop-
oly on suffering, and, furthermore, no one should participate in what Angela Davis has memorably termed, “an olympics of suffering.” Suffering as such demands exotopic and translocal modes of understanding and diagnosis (see Bakhtin). Unlike the call of dominance that incites mindless emulation on the part of the slave to desire the place of the master (see Žižek and Butler), the empathy that suffering generates makes possible a decentered mode of cognition that is deconstructive of the politics of binarity, of normative insides and outsides.

It is only on the basis of such an epistemology of suffering that the Third-World perspective on utopia can be actualized as a perspective of persuasion. Not unlike the project of ethicizing subalternity that liberates “subaltern as perspective” from subaltern as merely teleological (see Das), Nandy’s rhetoric of advocacy seeks to realize the Third-World perspective as the ethics of the permanent revolution. Just as it is the objective of subalternity as perspective not to get rid of subalternity as ethico-political force and category, it is Nandy’s objective to keep alive “suffering” as a point of view even as he attempts to coordinate a global project to eradicate suffering in all its protean manifestations. It is in this spirit that Nandy’s rhetoric on behalf of the Third World—and, therefore, the entire world—seeks to “transcend the sloganeering of its well-wishers.” It is vital to notice that the crucial trope here is that of transcendence—a transcendence of the merely political and the opportunistic in the name of a multilateral, universal, ethical accountability. In an ironic way, Nandy questions the process of disingenuous politicization that reduces a thoughtful response to suffering into merely sloganeering and shibboleth-making. For not only is sloganeering superficial and un-self-reflexive, it is also sanctimoniously self-righteous. Nandy thus implicitly critiques both a vulgar and axiomatic insiderism that assumes that the Third World is recognizable through ideological posturings of defensive and paranoid rectitude, and a tendency to treat the Third World as a ghettoizable zone rather than as a universalizable perspective with the potential for a translocal jurisdiction through transformative powers of persuasion. Nandy’s discourse deconstructs the putative opposition between past and present, between the West and the Rest, in order to galvanize ethical accountability as a persuasive universal imperative. Just as Said would insist that ethico-political projects need to be imagined across and beyond existing asymmetries and that generalizations need to made audaciously precisely when they seem least probable, Nandy too enlists the First, what used to be the Second, and the Third World as civilizational allies in the fight against institutional suffering. For Nandy insides and outsides are never given as absolute a priori points of and for orientation, but are indeed constituted and produced as transactional functions of inter- and intra- historical and civilizational influence and dialogue. Just as he argued in The Intimate Enemy that colonialism inflicts deep wounds both on the colonizer and the colonized, here, too, Nandy tries to imagine therapeutic spaces of reciprocal rehabilitation. It is precisely by avowing the ubiquitous nature of oppression and suffering and by acknowledging ongoing collusions between so-called insides and outsides in the perpetuation of oppression and suffering that a utopian transcendence may be imagined in a multilateral mode.

Nandy offers us three assumptions on which his aspirations are based: 1) no
civilization has a monopoly over good or right ethics; 2) the purpose of any civilization is critically to alter its own self-awareness, and 3) any utopian imagination is unavoidably caught up in the contradictions and imperfections of its own particular historical situation. To put it in Nandy's words, "imperfect societies produce imperfect remedies of their imperfections" (22). And it is this last assumption that I wish to elaborate in the context of the current euphoric drive towards globalization. My point is that techno-capital driven blueprints for globalization are in fact tacit and ideologically disavowed utopian blueprints as well: globalization as a natural panacea for all human ills. As I have already stated at the very beginning of this essay, it is only by delinking the ethico-political and the ideological from the economic, and the theoretical-critical from the descriptive, and the politics of representation from simulacral phenomenology, that the rhetoric of globalization has been able to conceal the fact that globalization is intended as a utopian resolution of the problems of the world: a utopia sans politics, ethics, or ideological content. It has become possible, thanks to techno-capital, to embody utopia as a form of seductive immanence, of the here-and-now, and bracket away once and for all questions of representation and ideological perspectivism. In a post-communist, post-socialist world where "politics" and "ideology" are dirty words, techno-capital has become the undisputed motor of history and decides descriptively "what is to be done." The difference between an ethically inflected utopianism and the utopianism of techno-capital is that the latter, blessed with historical amnesia, can afford to be un-self-reflexive regarding its own practices and assumptions, as well as its rootedness in an imperfect world. In denying the necessary dialectical tension within the far from perfect perspective from which utopia is being imagined—that is, in being brashly positivist as against being deconstructive or hermeneutic—the dream of globalization ossifies or degenerates into the literalism of a fulfilled utopia. The point of view that authorizes the utopian vision is dramatically purged, to use Foucault’s language, of its own unreasonable history and genealogy. The ruse of techno-capital is that it creates an illusion that its perspective is already immaculately endowed with the semantic content of the utopia-to-be. Instead of utopia as multilaterally imagined and as an ongoing radical difference from itself, we now entertain utopia as the unipolar uniperspectival valorization of the temporality of “techno-capital.” If the creation of violent dystopias during times when marxism-communism degenerated into Stalinist statism had to do with the brutalization of the present in the name of the future and the violation of the ethics of the means in the name of the ends of politics, the current rhetoric of utopian globalization offers a somewhat different scenario. Having discovered that the means will always defer, complicate, and re-route the authority of the ends, the current globalist discourse, in all its spectacular implosive brilliance, creates the magical impression that the realm of the means has been exorcized altogether. The “means” are the magical body of the Real. The networks, the flows, the border busting, the trashing of national sovereignties are not means towards a specific end; they are instead

7 Theorists such as William Connolly and Giorgio Agamben, each in his own way, have been attempting in their work to articulate a transformative praxis between pure form and/or procedurality and the determinacy of specific ideological contents.
phenomena that are part of the Real, now mediatized and made available as pure and formal expressivity across the international division of labor.

What sense does the world make and from what point of view? How is it that point of view is both transcended and preserved as it were in its cognitive access to the alterity of the world as real? If all that we are talking about is point of view and its sublation through transcendence, how is one to distinguish and adjudicate among the legitimacies of different points of view? On what criteria is one point of view deemed invasive, colonizing of reality, and preemptive of other perspectives on the real, and another point of view recognized as generous and solicitous of reality on behalf of every perspectival desire and longing? Amitav Ghosh raises this question with memorable brilliance in *The Shadow Lines*: “One could never know anything except through desire, real desire, which was not the same thing as greed or lust: a pure, painful and primitive desire, a longing for everything that was not in oneself, a torment of the leash, that carried one beyond the limits of one’s mind to other times and other places, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one’s image in the mirror” (29). Before I undertake an analysis of this statement, it might be useful to add that this novel begins with the following definition of the value of human relationality and connectedness: “I could not bring myself to believe that their worth in my eyes could be reduced to something as arbitrary and unimportant as a blood relationship” (3). If going global means acknowledging a certain connectedness, what is the basis for such a connectedness? The narrator in the novel asserts unambiguously that the order of affiliation is of greater significance than the merely given but arbitrarily consecrated order of filiation. Filiation is arbitrary whereas affiliation is the result of agential choice and elaboration. Blood relationships tend to be tautologous, banal, repressive, and even racist through a militant exclusivity that gets naturalized in the name of nativism/nativism. Throughout the novel, Ghosh denaturalizes and makes ambiguous the ontological status of blood and its putative capacity to build and cement solidarities such as nationhood. Is blood, to echo Derrida’s famous reading of Levi Strauss, nature or culture? If blood is what unites all of humanity, then all human beings are one large oceanic and undifferentiated family. Blood is indisputably coextensive with all human life. But, on the other hand, blood does not get ideologized as national blood unless and until it is shed in a certain cause, within the structure of a certain antagonism: blood against blood in denominational fury—blood shed passionately for one group and in hatred of another, both bloods divided but semanticized as “official and national bloods” in the service of the cause that pits blood against blood, nation against nation. It is in the historical reality of being spilt that blood becomes meaningful as a filiative category and construct. When the English and the French are at war as nations, they demonstrate themselves as national-universals at the very moment when the national-ness of each repudiates the universal in the other. (It is of course undeniably true that the shedding of blood by colonized peoples in their struggle against colonialism is

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8 Rustom Bharucha’s *In the Name of the Secular: Contemporary Cultural Activism* takes up the concept of *sarva dharma sama bhava* and provides a useful analysis of the relationship of humanity to itself through denominational variants.
of a different ethico-political order than the blood shed between two “equal nations”; my point rather is that the necessary “shedding of blood” is ritualistically sacralized as the foundation of a collective and yet exclusionary identity.) It is this undecidability of blood as it straddles the filiative and the affiliative orders that has rendered all nationalisms a scandal. Within the aporetic figularity of nationalism affiliative bonds created in historical and secular struggle become valorized as a form of filiation and then naturalized. Such a naturalization militarizes borders and inaugurates a politics of immurement that guarantees that there will be perpetual outsiders. But what would it take to value affiliation radically so that solidarities and recognitions will always take place in an open space rather than within exclusionary regimes? The first passage I quoted from The Shadow Lines provides a possible answer.

What is “real desire” that is “painful and primitive” (a dangerous anthropological term being used positively by a Third-World writer and intellectual), and how is it to be known apart from lust and greed? What is the object of real desire and what is the object of lust? How is the alterity of the Real honored by real desire, but traduced by lust? “The longing for everything that is not in oneself”—isn’t that a kind of exoticism/orientalism that finds in the other, by way of a prescription for the incompleteness of the self, the mystique that will cure and complete the lack in one’s self? Didn’t colonialist desire dress up its determinate lack as universal and symbolic Lack and thereby justify its appetitive objectification of “the colony?” Didn’t colonialist desire find itself narcissistically in the very lack that was nothing but the object of the colonial gaze? In what way is the postcolonial, Third-World desire for loss of self anything other than a mimetic recuperation of the anthropological impulse? Within the dyadic structure of desire and lack, which term fixes the other so that the desire-lack game can be set in motion? Within this dyadic game, can the gaze be returned, its direction reversed, so that the roles become mutually reversible? If the desire of man fixes woman as “his” lack, and the desire of the West fixes the East as “its” lack, can woman and the East realize man and the West as their respective “lacks”? (see Yegenoglu). How can reciprocity of the gaze be achieved without the objective alterity of a third term? Transactions between self and other need to take place simultaneously on two registers: one, where the self is negotiating with the alterity of the world; and two, where different selves are negotiating with one another as one another’s self and other. Both registers are getting played out at the same time with implications for each other.

How is the alterity of the world as Real invoked differently by the subaltern gaze and the dominant gaze? I would like to suggest that the very alterity of the world-as-real is neither a given, nor is it single. It is only within the specificity of an epistemological model or gaze that the alterity of the Object is announced and recognized. And, since there are several perspectival gazes oriented to the Object, there are as many alterities as Object as there are gazes. It is in this sense that one asks: what is the subaltern world like compared to the dominant world, even though there is only one subtending reality that relates the subaltern to the dominant. The ability of each gaze or perspective to realize the alterity (the symbolic authority) of the Object is perennially interrupted by the perspectivism of
every other gaze, each engaged in realizing its own symbolic authority. The very alterity of the world-as-real is pluriform and contested, and the eventual “worlding” of the world depends on the extent to which the different gazes negotiate with each other on the basis of the strength of their symbolic currency. It is both a matter of contestation and persuasion. On the register of the political, the subaltern political imaginary has to produce its own symbolic authority in opposition to and with the intention of unseating the symbolic authority of the dominant discourse. On the ethical register of persuasion, however, the subaltern task is that of convincing the dominant discourse that in a world of shifting significations, it is wiser, truer, freer, and more just to relate to the world-as-real on the basis of the subaltern symbolic than on the basis of the dominant symbolic, that the subaltern representation of the Real is more valuable and worthwhile for all concerned than the dominant representation. The difference as well as the distance between “what the world looks like” and “what the world should look like,”—the difference between the actual and the ideal, the “is” and “the ought to be”—is best expressed as a function of ongoing multilateral transactions among perspectives committed to the task of reciprocal transcendence in the name of the One World in the making.

To put all this in the context of the politics of globalization, it matters from whose perspective the world is being realized as One. It also matters in what or whose currency the world is being “worlded” and within the symbolics of whose language the pros and cons of globalization are being discussed. As I have been trying to argue by way of Ghosh’s novel, there are good and bad instances of transcendence. “Eating the Other” (Hooks) is certainly not an example of ethical transcendence. A lusty or greedy transcendence would involve one point of view establishing a binding and normative relationship with the Real on behalf of all perspectives. It is a logic whereby I say that I don’t have the responsibility of proving the benevolence and the legitimacy of my god so long as I have the ability and the power to desecrate or destabilize the authority of your god. What makes my perspective axiomatic and universally binding is not the justice or the fairness of its vision but its power to destroy or depoliticize other perspectives.

The lust of the dominant desire is posited on the objectification of the other and the nihilation of the right to pleasure of the other. It is through this process of nihilation that the dominant participant names his/her desire as the Real of the encounter, and his/her lack as the semantic body of the Real. The Other in this experiential nexus ceases to have the right to name the experience and interpret it. The ultimate trope of such an encounter is of course rape, where the other is both implicated and silenced in the dominant self’s experience. But I still haven’t answered the key question: how is real desire different from lust? How does the economy of real transcendence create a balance between what is lost and what is gained, and who is gaining and who is losing? For starters, real desire is nonegocentric and derives from the notion of a radical “lack” that im-

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9 For a provocative reading of the relationship of the “agonistic” to the “antagonistic” in the context of modern day democracy, see Mouffe. See also, Butler, Laclau, and Zizek, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left.

10 For more on the nature of the ethical in the context of Lacan and Kant, see Zupancic and Critchley.
pervish every ego that would seek to sign for plenitude in its own name. Transcendence is intended as a qualitative movement that both acknowledges the specificity of the location that inaugurates the transcendence and marks that very location or state of being as one to be left behind. At the other end of the arc of transcendence is the other as activated and eroticized by the desire of the self. Is the other as self violated by the desire of the self undertaking transcendence? Why should the “other self” be available for transcendence at all unless the transcendence is mutually effected? I do not mind being the object or terminus of your transcendence so long as you consent to being the object and terminus of mine. It is only within such a context of reciprocal transcendence and the ethical obligation that it entails that the question of freedom can even begin to get posed contrapuntally against the reality of objectification. Are relationships unthinkable outside the law of mutual objectification? Is freedom conceivable as a proactive project undertaken in multiple solidarities rather than as a game of mutual negations and objectifications? In other words, can you and I ground our freedom in the universality of the One rather than make freedom the function of the formula “my freedom is in my right to objectify you and yours in your right to objectify me.” As I have been trying to argue, the issue of freedom as a transcendental function among and between perspectives can only be part of a more basic accountability to the alterity of the big O: the alterity of the One World as Real that is perennially both pre-given and available for realization by the heterogeneity of multiple perspectives.

To return then to the dynamics of transcendence as proposed by Amitav Ghosh: one of the chief preoccupations in that novel is how to realize a critical and mutually transformative relationship between “mirrors” and “windows.” Under what conditions do mirrors that reflect the self back to itself become windows that open out to the others outside, and when do windows that provide a vision “outside” for the self become surfaces of self-recognition? And indeed, if such a transformation is possible, what would be the nature of globality that would underlie such a possibility? If the world has indeed gone global, within such a cartography is it possible, say, for a village in India to look at itself in the mirror and as a result see the metropolitan reality of Paris. When London looks through the window at Lagos, as a result does it see a critical reflection of itself? The reasons for transcendence that Ghosh offers us are similar to Nandy’s reasons: because no one culture or civilization is complete in itself, the only way to deal with incompleteness is to radically “dialogize” possibilities of knowledge and cognition, that is, in-mix self-centered perceptions with other-oriented perceptions to actualize a different world, script a different historiography. Wonderful as all this sounds in a utopian vein, a cautionary note needs to be sounded. Who is seeking completion and who is undertaking the pilgrimage of losing self in the other? Even given the unavoidable incompleteness of any civilization, are some incomplete civilizations more dominant and deemed less incomplete than others? To put it more concretely, in a world structured hierarchically between East

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11 For more on the joys and perils of recognition, see “The Use and Abuse of Multiculturalism” in my forthcoming book, *Theory in an Uneven World*, where I discuss at great length the contributions of Charles Taylor and Nancy Fraser, among others, to the politics of multiculturalism.
and West, developing and developed nations, is the longing of the West for completion from the East somehow considered not as drastic as the longing of the East for completion by the West? Let us say, and here I am using fairly stereotypical characterizations just to make a point, the West is looking to the East for spiritual enhancement and enrichment and the East is looking to the West for technological advancement. Which of these two needs for completion would be considered more dire? In a world-historical situation where materialism and technology are valorized more than spirituality and matters "interior," it is inevitable that oriental dependency would position itself in a weaker position within the global structure.

There is a further problem with the ontology of the transcendence model, considered in a utopian framework. What is the nature of the tension between the egocentric "one" seeking transcendence and the pre-personal One without whom transcendence loses all meaning? Between the initial egocentric "one" that is the protagonist of transcendence (the Indian one, the American one, the Somalian one, the female one, the ethnic one, etc.) and the figurality of transcendence there lies a gap, and it is worthwhile to ensure that the project of transcendence does not become a mere act of surrender to a dominant discourse. This danger is particularly endemic in the context of postcolonial transcendence, as envisioned by Ghosh, since postcolonial realities can never be sure that they have succeeded in persuading the metropolis to play the same game that they are interested in playing. In other words, unless the ethical imperative honored by both parties is the same, there is every possibility that transcendence might have the effect of depolitizing postcolonial interest and agency. This dangerous possibility can easily be understood in the context of a game where one jumps and the other catches: what if the other, midway through the game, sensing superior control, intends differently and chooses not to catch? Within the symbolic alterity of the utopian horizon, there must be some way of making sure that no one participating political imaginary suddenly decides to own the horizon in its own name and thereby claim that its mirror be unilaterally legitimated as the window for all. The commitment to the utopian horizon has to find a way to keep the space of the Real open so that the globality of the world does not become just another name for Westernization or Americanization. The problem, both theoretical and methodological, with utopian spatiality is that of coordination and synchronization: how to deal simultaneously with the here and now and the long haul. How to think into reality the qualitative place-less-ness of utopia as a function and consequence of a critical thinking-through of the problems of the here and now? How to entertain passionately and postpone in rigorous critique the utopian horizon in the name of present history? In Ghosh's terms, how to go beyond "the shadow lines" of nationally demarcated identity regimes not by denying the historical reality of the shadow lines but rather by working deconstructively through the lines so that their authority may be rendered insubstantial, substance-less, and shadowy? If utopia is the imaginary multilateral answer to the problem of unequal perspectives and uneven temporalities, then such a resolution, to be legitimate, has to work its way through the agonistic field of perspectivism, redress wrongs and injustices en route, and not make a clean break from the politics of perspectives. Ghosh offers us the practice of what a character
in his novel calls, “imagining with precision.” Though all realities are imagined or invented and not natural, it is important that people invent their own realities rather than dwell passively and reactively in realities invented by others. The point here is that it is a good thing to be othered in general by the process of epistemology, but within such a general alienation, there is still a place for political agency. But the real and intricate challenge is how to imagine one’s reality not in egocentric isolation, but relationally with other imaginings. One of the cardinal points that Ghosh makes through his inventive and transgressive reading of cartography is that places in the world that are considered far and remote from one another are in fact closer to one another than places considered to be in close proximity. And often, a place in another nation is closer to one’s location than a fellow-location within one’s own country. It is in the context of a creative and diasporan rethinking of the politics of proximity and distance that Ghosh uses the phrase “imagine with precision.” The phrase dramatizes a valuable tension between the freedom to be different, heterogeneous, non-normative, and subjective, as realized in the word “imagine,” and the rigor invoked by the term “precision,” which denotes a certain representational fidelity as well as accountability. Here, by precision, Ghosh does not mean the facticity of empiricism, or the propositional rectitude of positivism, or the egocentric drive towards self-adequation; in Ghosh’s text, precision does not inhere in any one location. Precision is a thoroughly exo-topic and ek-static concept whereby the correctness of any one location can be determined only with reference to the precision with which it invokes its relationship to all other locations, and thereby the correctness of every other location. Precision operates as a form of global accountability as well as connectedness that functions as the ethical a priori that sanctions the attempt of every location to name and understand itself. Precision becomes the ethic as well as the narrative aesthetic whereby the story of every self is committed not to violate the story of the other. Precision is honored as that radical alterity without which the narrative of humanity degenerates into the history of warring nations, militarized boundaries, and homes that reek with hatred of the other. It may not be a bad idea to submit globality to such imaginative precision.

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12 "Poststructuralism and Subalternity: A Relationship," a chapter in my forthcoming Theory in an Uneven World, is an attempt to come to grips, in the context of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s discussion of subaltern alienation, with the phenomenon of alienation. See also Beverley.
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