Culture, Globalization and the Politics of Place: Introduction

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Among the various theoretical perspectives on processes of globalization, considerable attention has been paid to a "postmodern condition" which characterizes late-20th-century capitalism as newly fragmented and disorganized, exhibiting unprecedented instability and flux. Yet the work of anthropologists like Sidney Mintz (1986), June Nash (1994) and Eric Wolf (1981), and geographers like David Harvey (1989), Allan Pred and Michael Watts (1992), subverts claims that flows of capital, labour, technologies and ideas are new and characteristic of a postmodern era. These analysts show, in contrast, that such shifts are inherent to the logic of capitalism.

The consequences of globalization processes are profound, and it is hardly surprising that analysts are seeking new ways to understand and explain them. Some suggest that people's lifeworlds now expand beyond old borders, allowing them to break free of narrow localism, to aspire to acquire the trappings of capitalist success (and excess), and to choose, if they wish, to relocate themselves across borders, real or imagined. On the other hand, as processes affecting people's daily lives increasingly operate outside their local communities, and decisions taken far away leave them feeling powerless to make change locally, relationships to and within local communities are continually reconstituted and renegotiated.

As anthropologists struggle to find helpful ways to think about such processes, the very concept of "culture" itself is problematized and reconsidered. For example, in an attempt to find a theoretical way to reconcile "globalizing processes and distinctive forms of social life" (Featherstone, 1990: 2), some anthropologists have turned to an idea of global culture, a process of cultural production which transcends borders of all kinds, gathering up in its path migrants, refugees, entrepreneurs and tourists, as well as money, ideas and information (Appadurai, 1991; Hannerz, 1990). Yet while the idea of global culture speaks at some length to ethnic mobility

and the construction of transnational "third cultures," it lacks both gender and class analysis. Paradoxically these may be the very factors which are crucial to our understanding of the connectedness of global and local processes. Who moves and who stays? Why, and to what end? *Whose* global culture?

The global culture idea contrasts dramatically and deliberately with the concept of whole, territorialized cultures which has been dominant in anthropology historically, is increasingly untenable and was always problematic (see, for example, Wilmsen [1989] for a critique of the anthropological reification and circumscription of "the Bushmen"). This older conceptualization, conflating location, culture and identity, is demonstrated by the production of ethnographic maps (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 7) and the assumption of a "natural" rootedness of people to particular bounded places. This is not only a powerful idea in classical anthropology, but in social science more broadly, with its focus on territorially discrete nation states. Recent critiques question these ideas, showing among other things, the ways that anthropology itself has demanded a particular idea of place contiguous with culture to pursue its methodology (Olwig and Hastrup, 1997). Being "in the field" and then leaving it, implies travel for the anthropologist, but the subjects of study are expected to remain "in place." Gupta and Ferguson (1992: 14) contend that through this process anthropologists have been active agents in the production of otherness. This led to a situation where the discipline has been far more interested in those who "stay put," and has been relatively blind to those who move with the exception of some, such as nomadic peoples, whose movements are limited and predictable (Olwig and Hastrup, 1997: 4-5). It is only recently that attention has been paid to de Certeau's (1986) idea that practices blur the boundaries of place, through, for example, transnational processes and actions.

Starting from particular and grounded cases from France, Ecuador, Argentina, the Cayman Islands and the Philippines, the articles in this collection all insist upon an approach to place as socially constituted, and investigate the ways in which economic and political processes transform places. Addressing the emerging literature on space and place, the authors examine place and placelessness as sites of experience and locations where hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes are played out. Together the articles demonstrate the value of joining serious attention to particular histories with a global level of analysis, of bringing together the study of structure, cultural process and human agency (Basch et al., 1994: 11).

Lindsay Dubois' study concerns an urban neighbourhood in Buenos Aires where differences in the lived history of the place have disarticulated people from each other and from the apartment-block community in which they live. Dubois shows people trying to come to terms with how to live with their histories, and, by analyzing a community mural project, she shows how painting their histories helped people to bridge the past and the present, sometimes in unexpected ways.

Kim Clark argues that any sense that place is declining in importance is probably derived from attention to central rather than marginal places. Examining globalization from a marginal perspective, that of rural indigenous Ecuadoreans, she shows how Ecuador's participation in the world economy through the 1980s increasingly disadvantaged marginal peoples economically. On the other hand, she argues, it also opened up space for a revitalized indigenous political movement.

From a quite different marginal location, Charles Menzies examines how restructuring of the social and political landscape connects with local, historically constituted ethnic, gender and class practices to transform the lives of Breton fisherpeople. Again, the crisis has led to a cultural fluorescence and strengthening of Breton identity, yet Menzies argues that the material base of fishing communities is severely threatened and may not be able to sustain them.

Pauline Gardiner Barber critiques some recent theorizing in anthropology and cultural studies which focuses on the "in-between mode" of travelling culture, paying little attention to those whose mobility is not freely chosen and to the "historically specific modes of travelling and the social class dynamics which compel this." She argues that the practices of transnational Filipina, with multiple cultural, social-economic and political ties, call into question spatially simple ideas of home and nation.

Vered Amit-Talai examines national identity and historical consciousness in the Cayman Islands. In this example, transnationalism becomes an issue for local identity. While the Caymans are quite literally a bounded place, identity is confused by the transience of many residents, such as tourists and migrant workers, and by a system where citizenship is conferred by Britain, while legal residence status is determined locally. Amit-Talai shows how the cultural sector has responded to these "anxieties" by constructing history to ensure that access to rights and privileges is granted to a particular segment of the society, the "rightful inheritors of Cayman."

Some of the themes emerging from the articles here include the importance of looking at both staying put and moving, and the significance of considering both the

places where people are, as well as the more remote places where elements of their histories are made, in relation to large-scale economic and political transformations. The articles all indicate that, as Olwig and Hastrup (1997: 10) admonish us to recognize, local culture is never untouched by history, and is often not primarily defined by locals, nor constructed to serve local interests. As Gupta and Ferguson suggest, rather than taking cultural difference as an a priori condition, it is fruitful to take a position which sees it as "a product of a shared historical process that differentiates the world as it connects it" (1992: 16). The places where people live and work, including hegemonically constituted political spaces, continue to be vital locations from which to engage politically, mobilize social memory, construct identity and wage political battles.

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