GLOBALIZATION:
A WORLD WITHOUT ALTERNATIVES?

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A decade of an institution is but a moment in the time of history, no matter how accelerated historical time itself may appear in these halcyon days of "post-marxisms" and "post-modernisms." And yet a decade of existence of ICES represents a measure of extraordinary endeavour at developing understanding of crises of ethnicity as well as of nation-states. Tiruchelvam Associates, in a larger sense, and the ICES have also sought, successfully, to form and share languages of rights and responsibility of states and peoples in the domain of ethnic studies.

I am aware that the honour of invitation for me to be with you on this joyous occasion is not any acknowledgement of my complicity with this adventure. Rather, the invitation constitutes a reprimand for my inadvertent distanciation and a summons to redress my cumulative default by a more active future association with ICES in a regional effort to construct our common future. This decade for me has been marked by struggles against the creation of new minorities: whether they be women victims of custodial violence in a post-Mathura era of Indian state
and law or an MIC constituted community of suffering named as "Bhopal Victims."

The honour to be amidst you today signals to me the critical need to join hands in combatting that particular formation of order of power, both national and international, which co-produces authentic normative regimes of minority rights while simultaneously accomplishing future history of new minorities.

The ICES endeavours will be recognised, in this conjuncture, by its stress on nascent solidarity in suffering in the South, and by its distinctive endeavour at enriching cognitive and other related resources on ethnic entitlements. A most, though by no means the only, significant example of the latter is the recent monograph of Nirgunan Tiruchelvam on "MINORITIES IN THE CSCE PROCESS" which urges that the "notion of mononational state .... should .... give way to a political entity founded on tolerance and pluralism" and all states "should admit that, in their diversity, all cultures form the plural character of the society." (1992:5)

What is poignant in Nirgunan's sage observation is not the political truth of his statement but its enunciation in the newly arisen formative context of unipolarism, with its more mystified worse half known as "globalisation". Globalisation promises or threatens the provenance of a cluster of suprastatal agencies which will recast and reconfigure the already existing "mononational states" in its own image and assimilate the bulk of cultural diversity to the lowest common denominator of a global market.

Note that Nirgunan Tiruchelvam writes his truths about the same time as Jacques Ateilli writes Millennium: Winners and Losers in the Coming World Order (1991) which proclaims Africa to be a "lost continent", Latin America as a case of "terminal poverty" and societies of South condemned, all over again, to reenact their destiny as "millennial losers". This new vision of "globalization" is Social Darwinism updated for the next century; and it marks, amidst the eminently worthwhile struggle for ethnic and minority rights, the construction of a large mass of humanity itself as a perishable minority of the future.

Perhaps, it is this formative context of globalization, of a unipolar variety or genre, which makes the struggle for minority rights the cornerstone of the whole edifice of human rights movement today. It is in this context that I wish to acknowledge and salute the ICES for its pioneering endeavour.

II

We live in times marked by a profound disorientation, and a perplexed reorientation towards the world and its, our future. Many a fighting faith of yesteryear seems to us deeply incoherent or problematic. Many a leading thinker renegotiates her cognitive counters: whether they be the
end of ideology, the end of history, the end of politics. The more valiant amongst us have moved suddenly and swiftly from a worship of plural, heterogeneous world to an obscene sycophancy of a unipolar world and encouraging the process whereby the dreams of a solitary superpower threaten to become the nightmare for the world of nations, especially the South. How else do we understand the possibility of near-universalization of MacCarthyism even in the land of Lenin? How is it that our languages, and with these those, our visions of the world, seem to have been so irrecoverably transformed?

III

Perhaps, this change in all of it, may be located in the notion of "globalization" comprising all those processes "by which the people of the world are incorporated in a single world community." (Albrow & King, 1990:8). In this sense, the processes of globalization are not new. But one may distinguish at least three historic processes or stages of globalization. The first long phase of "globalisation" accomplished colonial imperialism, over long stretches of time and space throughout the world. The contemporary second phase of "globalisation" is marked by international efflorescence of concern for human rights and standards of international justice which will chaste the arrogance of sovereign power everywhere. The third phase of "globalisation", running concurrent with the second, has been marked by a steady rise of forces of late capitalism, so actively foreseen by Karl Marx in Grundrisse, manifesting multinational hegemony and the dominance of international financial institutions both emerging as suprastatal centres of authority.

The second phase of "globalisation" was indeed dramatically different from the colonial/imperial phase. In the heady days of decolonisation and self-determination of most peoples of the Third World and the emergence of the United Nations system as a prime weapon of the weak, "globalisation" signifies a new vision of the human future. This vision was concretised steadily in the sixties and seventies by epochal enunciations of human rights. Thus, "globalisation" in the second phase signified the articulation of a new culture and ethics of power, both nationally and internationally. May I name this second phase as 'globalism'?

Since the inaugural Universal Declaration of Human Rights, developments in recognition of individual human beings against and over state power are, indeed, remarkable. Not merely do they protect and promote basic human rights, categorised as civic, political, economic and cultural rights of individual human beings but we see a steady expansion of conferment of basic human rights so specific human collectivities or groups such as women, indigenous peoples, racially discriminated, physically disabled, mentally ill and dispossessed peoples, migrants and most recently, children. Equally remarkable are articulations of rights to
self-determination, economic and cultural rights of individual human beings, right against apartheid, right to environment, immunity from genocide, right to peace and the most recent declaration of the right to development of people and states. These enunciations truly mark the advent of a new culture of collective democratic rights of people.

The new culture of globalism also saw that human rights were not directed only against state power; increasingly, they were addressed to formations in civil society, wielding power over people. The little known UN Declaration of 1975 concerning Scientific and Technological Progress in the Interest of Peace and for the Benefit of Mankind urges states to so deploy science and technology or to avoid "flagrant violations of the Charter of the United Nations" and eliminate "inadmissible distortion of the purposes that should guide technological developments for the benefit of mankind." Similar in spirit are the Tokyo Declaration of 1971 addressed to the medical profession in dealing with situations of torture, cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment, and the 1982 General Assembly Proclamation of the Code of Medical Ethics, the UN Committee on Crime Prevention, Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, Lawyers and Judges, the 1986 Ottawa Declaration on Health for All, and the movement for a new international information order. All these measures address and involve autonomous professional groups as bearers of basic duties to the peoples of each nation and of the world.

As if this was not enough, the culture of globalism addressed itself to the task of enunciating visions of social progress, imbued with standards of international justice in relations and among states. For example, the 1969 UN Declaration on Social Progress and Development in addition to enshrining and enriching the principles of Panchshilla (termed in international law literature as the Nehru Doctrine) proclaimed the duty for developed countries to provide for "greater assistance on better terms", requiring specific dedication of one per cent of the GNP as minimal "aid volume target" as well as "the general easing of terms of lending to the developing countries through low-interest on loans and long grace periods for the repayment of loans" and the assurance that the allocation of such loans will be based on "strictly socio-economic criteria, free of any political considerations."

IV

We understood, till recently, by globalisation a realisation of the culture of "globalism". In the spirit of globalism in the mid-eighties globalisation appeared as a description of those values which take the real world of five billion people as an object of concern, the whole earth as the physical environment, everyone living as the world citizens, consumers and producers, and with a common interest in collective action to solve global problems (Albrow & King, 1990:8)
"Globalism" seems to be thus a very concrete universalism, moved by the actual sight of starving children in Ethiopia or by the data on malnutrition in Bangladesh. (Ibid)

But "globalism" in this sense has received a massive setback ever since the incoherence of American economy, with billions of dollars deficit, has come to full view. The humane languages of globalism stand eroded by languages of Super-301, structural adjustment programmes (cruelly emerging in an acronym as SAP), trade retaliation, debt problem; gone are the languages of the New International Economic Order, Sustainable Development, Right to Development so prominent in collective United Nations enunciations.

The passage from "globalism" to "globalisation" is marked by discursive practices where collective interdependence becomes collective dependence of South on North; where consumption needs of industrialised societies begin to enjoy ontological priority over the minimum basic needs of the wretched of the earth in the Third World; where resilient-market friendly liberal ideologies provide the dominant visions of human futures on the eve of the twentifirst century.

If practices of power account for this shift from 'globalism' to 'globalisation', practices of knowledge too have been complicitous. The variety of shifts in discursive formations or traditions of thought have also, I believe, created the ground for the shift. Even at the risk of a reductive narrative, it is important to highlight how the power of modern thought has profoundly transformed the very thought of power. And all this has also transformed the thought of resistance to power.

Thus, at the very time of efflorescence of standards of international justice, promulgated by the United Nations system, philosophical critique of rights and justice has reached its highest potential. Rights can no longer be conceded the status of self-evident, inalienable truths, and the labour of justifying rights only yields to staid semi-utilitarian rationales, which forbid any level of cogency higher than that of narrative pragmatism. Rights remain a moral good among many other moral goods, defying the logic of hierarchic prioratization. The explosion of rights enunciation in the last half of twentieth century is paradoxically accompanied by a philosophic universalization of Young Marx's Critique of the Gotha Programme, at a time curiously when the very idea of 'revolution' has lost its historic title to legitimacy. The down of an Age of Rights is also marked by the twilight of philosophic thought which made it possible in the first place. Among the more eminent moral
philosophers today exists a rights-weariness.

This word-weariness with rights discourse would not have been practically problematic had not the varieties of post-modernisms/post-structuralisms tried to shake the very foundations by interrogating the notion of being "human". Any discourse on 'human rights' must, ineluctably, adhere to a foundationist notion of 'human' beings who are entitled to rights. But if that very notion is periclitised by philosophic contingencies, the notion of 'right', too, becomes anachronically problematic. In the earlier philosophic lineage what was at stake was: who will count as a human being or the criteria of individuation as regards sensilebearers of rights however problematic, and actually horrid (witness the exclusion from the realm of rights of slaves, aliens, women, "barbarians", "heathens", women, colonized peoples), the moral baseline privileged whoever was to count as 'human' as a bearer of certain rights and freedoms. The subsequent rights revolution was made possible by a rich expansion of criteria of individuation (B.Parekh, 1990)

And this expansion thus made possible by adherence to the idea of being and remaining human.

But this very idea now trembles before philosophical critiques deprivileging the nation of being human. M.Foucault's The Death of Man sounded the deathknell in the sixties and the lamenting voices in the dirge include as diverse a range from Louis Althusser to Derek Parfitt. The problematization of 'subject' and 'agency' survived even the valiant polemics of E.P.Thompson and may outlive the monumental labours of subaltern historians. It would be impertinent for me before such a distinguished audience to trace the genealogy of the death of subject.

'Globalism', in all its languages, was tinged by the notion of an ethicial state: politics was... constructed as an instrumentality of pursuit of a good society. The state was presupposed, a la Hegel to be an ethical entity or a la Gramsci as a custodian of values, a moral pedagogue despite the acknowledged contingencies of the Nietzschean will to power. The empirical diversity of versions and visions of good society apart, the new orthodoxy, in a variety of ways, interrogates profoundly the ethically of the state. Much of the contemporary western theory is marked by the return of the repressed; the Nietzschean turn in political theory, more clearly perhaps than Marxism, addresses the problem of nihilistic practices of power, informed only by transvaluation of values in the march of will to power. Much like Methew Arnold's Empedocles on Etna the world of power represents on arena "where ignorant armies clash by night." In sucha vision of power, rights became contingencies of power, and not a discourse on its ethic. And state power, measured by the yardstick of human rights, begins to appear as an institutionalized order of insurgency.

It is in this milieu that Micheal Foucault speaks towards the end of his bewildering corpus, of the very end of politics. If politics in the Other of Revolution,a and if condition of possibility of revolution have ended,
politics too must meet its end. All, legitimation of power, from now on, as Jean Francis Lyotard reminds us, should be performative, knowing no push and prod from the realm of supposed values as Max Weber mistakenly believed. And the logic of performativity ordains the end of what he calls metanarratives. He counsels to us all: "Destroy narrative monopolies"; "Take away the privileges the narrator has granted himself." Globalism's metanarrative of rights - its endless chain novel about human rights - trying to "face the truth and save the world" must be replaced by little stories of rights and violations and resistance. Decontextualizing Lyotard thus, his counsel would be justice lies in an act of will to destroy metanarratives of power, rights and resistance. All that remains as our estate from now on is what he calls "justice of multiplicities". The hermeneutics of human rights will thus be antifoundational. As Stanley Fish is apt to remind us, antifoundationalism does not signifies absence of any foundations. All it slynies is that the foundations have to be rhetorically negotiated. Theories about rights are negotiable genre of discursive totalities of power. How they are negotiated does not depend on 'theory' which has, in a real sense, no consequences. This is how pluralism and diversity avenge themselves.

VI

This synoptic detour to the heart of post-modernist darkness, despite its rich reductivity, was not designed to proclaim the end of rights thesis! Nor was it an exercise in the discourse of sociology of knowledge, which calls for a rigorous analysis. My effort was undoubtedly, to suggest the arena of cohabitation of knowledge with power and the somewhat uncanny ability of power to conscript unselfconscious epistemic recruits. The hardest task today is how to stop the state thinking through us in the direction of globalization, away from globalism. The rehabilitation of the culture of globalism, the reclamation of the lost languages of social justice, and dependent upon it the construction of practices of solidarity - as a fellowship of suffering - is the very agenda of human rights today. In this direction, our prime task would to recover from the debris of enlightenment thought-elements in post-modernisms which energize, rather than enervate, vision of human emancipation.

It is this vision which globalisation threatens. The space for plurality shrinks a point where the whole world becomes an endless chain of shopping arcades or chains department stores, where all of us become potential Gremlins, lustfully mutated micro-organisms, 'in pursuit of instant, technologically mediated pleasures, stranger to the very idea of joy. The vision of globalisation threatens to take away local spaces. "Think globally, act locally" is a maxim confiscated of its meaning in an era when the "local" becomes the ghetto of the 'global.' A new world
imperialism is in the making of globalisation. If we are to combat it, the historically available reportoire of strategies is furnished by globalism, which repudiates the maxim: "The North Knows the Best".

It is this task to which the International Centre for Ethnic Studies stands historically summoned in its next decade. And I have every confidence that its praxis will rearticulate the spirit of globalism.

*Thank you, friends, for your patient indulgence.*