

# 1

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## Introduction

This book is about the contest between two intellectual currents attempting to define a global identity, one sometimes referred to as cultural universalism and the other cultural particularism; but unlike most accounts of stark dualisms, it is also about the paradoxes that lead each to occasionally overlap or draw inspiration from the other. One is mainly an outgrowth of the rationalist Enlightenment, approaching the challenges of world integration with the tools of science, commerce, and bureaucracy. On the surface, it is pedestrian and instrumental, but at a deeper level tends to be inspired by an ideal of universal peace, democracy, and prosperity. The other current looks to an absence of frontiers as a possibility for unrestricted cultural freedom and creativity. It begins with a relativist negation of social progress and the search for knowledge, proceeds to a valuation of indefinite, changing, unknowable identities, and arrives, sometimes without intending to, at an ideal, borderless world of tolerance, cultural playfulness, and a form of absolutism that paradoxically reposes on a rejection of all absolutes.

The burgeoning literature on globalization now represents a conceptual microcosm in which this major intellectual struggle – one that for the past several decades has divided numerous academic disciplines – has been refined to its essence. Seneca tells us (in so many words) in the epigraph of this book, that the utopian imagination tends to move in opposite directions, toward either a universal commonwealth or to restored, autonomous communities; but the story that he does

## 2 Introduction

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not, and in his time could not, tell is that each ideal tends to feed off its contrary, and that efforts to combine or accommodate them then tend to fall into irresolvable dilemmas. One of the consequences of globalization that has not been adequately discussed is the paradoxical stimulus of social convergence on the rearticulation of distinct cultures. The act of rallying against the almost identical cultural pressures occurring in many parts of the world, using supranational legal mechanisms and lobbying strategies, has produced global or quasi-global political entities – such as “indigenous peoples,” “ethnic minorities,” “Subalterns” and the anti-imperialist nations of the “South” – all directed toward cultural survival.

This would seem to provide a stimulus to the relativist ideas of the cultural contingency of truth and moral standards and the importance of protecting discrete societies as the best source of nurture, growth, and guidance for individuals. But the most recent trend in cultural studies is to take this one step further, to go beyond all boundaries, to emphasize cultural movement, migration, diaspora, and dissolution; and above all to negate the value of research-driven description. This makes it possible to arrive at dreams of perfect cosmopolitanism from the direction of cultural irrationalism. A world lacking all secure boundaries and sources of identity becomes, almost by definition, free of nationalist closure and ethnic rivalry, a haven of perfect peace and freedom.

More than ever before, the opposition between universalism and particularism reaches those societies that are on the margins of nation-states, societies that are attempting to preserve their cultural distinctiveness, either as minority participants in national and international political culture or through efforts to become, to the maximum extent possible, self-determining isolationists. Complete insulation from competing civilizations, ideas, and political currents, however, has become a near impossibility. The mere effort to impose and protect total community autonomy takes on some of the qualities of sectarian fanaticism. The real choice for those being forced into uncomfortable proximity with the forces of globalizing modernity is not a stark one between exercising autonomy or falling into assimilation. The self-determination of distinct peoples largely depends on the ideas and institutions of outside “others.” It is often applied by choosing among various ideas, institutional models, and strategies, originating from dominant societies and global institutions, which hold out the possi-

bility of protecting a distinct community's ability to make such choices in the future. Universal ideas of liberation are growing in importance and are introducing a central paradox to the universalist/contextualist divide: it has become universally necessary to draw upon universal ideas for the protection of social distinctiveness. The very process of trying to hold social integration at bay is a force of social integration.

This refusal of the major trends to stay within a tidy dualism makes the task of piecing together the intellectual puzzle of global convergence that much more difficult. I have therefore decided to begin (in chapter two) with an introductory outline of the utopian antecedents of the globalization concept; then, (in chapter three) I discuss the most familiar, widely identified global processes: cultural globalization and the corner-piece of the puzzle, free-trade globalization. The latter is a version of the idea that every nation and people in the world can be competitively enhanced with a good, solid dose of systematic technical know-how. Societies that make creative use of science and technology have shown themselves to be capable of accomplishing ever-greater feats of engineering, environmental control, and social harmony, all of which are fueled by the engines of world capitalism. Advocates of free trade argue that commerce mediates the expansion of technological resources now at the disposal of local groups and interests and that if only this process were allowed to proceed globally without interference from international institutions, nation-states, and nongovernmental organizations, it would result in a new era of prosperous world integration.

Globalization cannot be adequately understood without considering efforts being made by defenders of communities to resist or control it, especially if one wishes to argue (as I do) that such efforts often lead paradoxically to more complete community integration with transnational forces. Thus, another way to try to create a world in which human differences are inconsequential is through the assertions of communities, local cultures, or micro-nations, through the creation of microcosms shored up against the intrusions of global integration. This strategy tries to resolve the uncomfortable inconsistencies of modernity by excluding the influences of other (especially dominant, "civilizational") ways of life. It relies on a moral filter to exclude those technologies and social arrangements that are seen as dangerous innovations, while only admitting the useful and wholesome. A new source

#### 4 *Introduction*

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of local power and authority can be found in the role of gatekeeper, the intermediary between chaos and certainty. Under the sway of such moral truth-defenders, the world beyond difference becomes a microcosm of reinvented tradition and/or world-rejecting faith, a community of the elect that acts to nullify the influences and consequences of cultural intrusions and Diasporas. It builds an adamant barrier of faith, birth, or culture around "Us" and "Them," around those who belong and those who cannot.

I illustrate this in chapter 4 by temporarily setting to one side my central concern with social theory and its utopian imaginings of a global community and turning instead to ethnographic examples of community reassertion that I encountered in several separate research projects, one provided by the activities and ambitions of a Muslim reform movement in West Africa and another by the more global process of indigenous identity-formation, particularly the identity inscribed in sophisticated information and communication technology, as adopted by the Crees of northern Canada and the Samis of northern Europe. Although reformist Islam might appear to be turning toward a universalist faith as an answer to the onslaughts of modernity, it does so in a way that rejects not only the inroads of the West but also the tolerance observed by the vast majority of Muslims. By contrast, those who participate in the international movement of indigenous peoples sit more firmly astride the organizations and technologies commonly associated with western liberalism and globalization in order to redefine and reassert community values and integrity.

The influence of such bounded communities is reflected in intellectual expressions of utopian longing. In particular, the idealization of communities that resist global forces has become an active ingredient of the sociological imagination, based primarily on an idea that tries to shrink cosmopolitan prophecy down to manageable size. It finds inspiration in the conception of a closed, culturally self-defining community – or in a world populated by them, a "heterotopia."<sup>1</sup> But this ideal cannot be maintained for long under the influence of direct, careful, thoughtful examination. Actual experiments in closed identities, no matter how picturesquely rebellious and critically inspiring, often rely on despotic forms of power and grossly repressive techniques for maintaining them. The utopian sociological imagination therefore blurs the image of closed, self-defining communities to the point at which such blemishes are no longer visible. This permissive

cosmopolitanism revels in hopeful abstractions and retreats into vague “descriptions” of counter-modernity in which the “tribes” or “local cultures” naturally offset the alienation of a globalizing world, or it combines an argument for the virtues of the oppressed with the assertion that looking too closely into actual conditions of peoples’ misery and marginalization is itself an act of oppression.

Community-affirming cosmopolitan idealism takes a variety of forms. The human rights movement (the topic of chapter five) is a source of rationalist world identity, which constitutes a system of universal morality that has become the world’s most popularly accepted system of law. At one level, it derives its appeal from its opposition to the worst state-sponsored practices of tyranny, torture, and genocide. At the same time, however, it approaches the overwhelming problems within its purview with the assumption that law changes social orders progressively through its inherent superiority over the inflexibility and irrationalism of tradition. In a way, this rights-oriented perception of necessary change in community-based identity is just an extension of the expected emergence of a unified global community. But there is also a strong collective-rights orientation in the human rights movement, and with it an infusion of relativist pluralism that runs counter to the individualist orientation of human rights, and more widely the statist orientation of the United Nations. In the aftermath of World War II, and even more after the political decolonization struggles of the 1960s, a concern in the human rights movement with the liberation and self-determination of distinct peoples took shape. This was an entirely non-universalist stimulus to social reform. So the human rights movement is now divided between the desire to preserve distinct societies through collective rights and the need to change them through individual rights and the leveling mechanisms of law and bureaucracy. Human rights therefore have the potential to be both socially liberating and a powerful force of cultural homogenization and global integration.

The relativist elevation of cultural self-definition is another pathway to permissive cosmopolitanism, through “grassroots globalization” or “globalization from below.” I deal with this phenomenon in three closely connected chapters (six, seven, and eight), covering postmodernism, neo-Marxism, and postcolonialism. We should use the labels that apply to these sociological/philosophical systems with caution, in part because they are (to some degree purposively) difficult to define,

## 6 Introduction

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defying strict categorization by avoiding the unambiguous use of categories, and in part because they merge into one another. Without recognizing the interconnectedness of these approaches to social critique and sublimated radical hope, the cultural contests of globalization cannot be adequately understood.

The postmodern movement (introduced in chapter six), ironically did everything it could to excoriate all varieties of universalism from intellectual life – starting, naturally enough, with almost the entire gamut of political and intellectual “isms” (Marxism, communism, liberalism, pragmatism, etc., but, unaccountably, stopping short of postmodernism itself), then moving on to disengagement from the public sphere and rejection of all forms of instrumental reason. Yet its very sweeping condemnation of these things itself took on the quality of a universal; and, what is more, some wayward postmodern souls were unable to cope with the movement’s nihilistic implications and began looking for a way to express their bent toward sociological optimism, toward the possibilities inherent in postmodern society – a utopian mass society that rejects universals. The dualism between universalism and particularism is not as stark as it might at first seem. Reality-bending radical hope in one form or another proved to be inescapable.

Some postmodernists (as I illustrate in chapter seven) are shifting away from the nihilistic implications of their early ideas, responding to their diminishing popularity by finding inspiration in the intellectual rehabilitation of neo-Marxism, occasionally expressed quietly as a “certain spirit of Marx” or a Marx-inspired rejection of a wide range of social injustices and inequalities. Freed by postmodernist methodological looseness, Marx is now being used to advance the idea of a global post-revolutionary society of infinite and indefinite cultural possibilities. Until quite recently it was generally supposed that the legitimacy of Marxism and the revolutionary ideals that stem from it took a last step into oblivion with the “fall of the wall” and the subsequent breakup of the Soviet empire. “The end of history,” approach to the global supremacy of American values, while provoking much interesting controversy, nevertheless reflected and popularized the erroneous view that the legitimacy of Marxism lay almost entirely in the fortunes of Soviet expansionism, that the post-1989 fragmentation definitively vindicated American-led capitalism as the sole remaining ideological and economic force of the new world order.<sup>2</sup> But the com-

bined influences of world events and intellectual fashion have produced two alternative forms of Marxism. One, inspired largely by postmodernism, takes the shape of a Marx-inspired celebration of alternatives in which Marx's abiding concern with world history has been largely replaced with speculation about the contours of post-revolutionary society, a society that Marx never really bothered himself about, at least not far beyond a concern with how it was to emerge from world capitalism. Another approach to neo-Marxism sheds almost all speculation about revolutionary transition and draws instead from the ideas of human rights and the Enlightenment tradition of reason-based social reform as guiding principles of radical politics.

The rejection of universalism, while retaining a core of postmodernism's critique of instrumental thought and institution building as well as Marxism's egalitarian values, is expressed more overtly by those who, in practical ways, want to reverse globalizing trends by protecting or returning to community-based existence. Such political aspirations have received support and affirmation from the intellectual movement known as postcolonialism (discussed in chapter eight), one of the recent avatars of relativism. Postcolonialism approaches the most overt actions and symbols of colonial domination as metaphors for more subtle and insidious forms of domination. Subjection of the Other can begin with intellectual constructions, or even with the refusal to acknowledge the impenetrability of identities and belief systems. Cultures are, at a fundamental level, incommensurable. Such postcolonial concepts as cultural diaspora and hybridity are in this sense an extremely appealing alternative to the once-prevalent colonial-era practice of forced assimilation. Now no one need be subjected to the traumas of a policy-driven cultural erasure and indoctrination, once thought necessary to bring about the breakdown of local cultural barriers. The inexorable forces of modernity and technology are doing this on their own. Out of this new condition of cultural detachment and uncertainty there must be, according to one trend in postcolonialism, a greater possibility for – or even imminent certainty of – the emergence of a truly shared humanity.

If we usually fail to recognize the intellectual antecedents of the current perceptions of cultural globalization, it is mainly because earlier theorists of social integration, many inspired directly or indi-

## 8 Introduction

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rectly by the universal ambitions of the French Revolution and the unprecedented powers of industrialization, used an entirely different terminology. They were centrally concerned with the growth of the state, the expansion of empires, the progress of civilization or some particular extension of civilization manifested in such things as family patterns or law. These were phenomena that entailed profoundly important processes of power accumulation and social uniformity, sometimes with a view to a terminus of history, the centralization of governments, and an end to all significant human differences; but because the term globalization is missing from their exertions, our attention tends to be drawn elsewhere, closer to the present.

Another reason for our lack of recognition is that until recently it was unfashionable to express hopes of universal human liberation, still less to construct designs for it. Even the world religions, especially Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, seem to have solidified the commitments of their believers by upping the tempo of intolerance, as evident in the protracted hatreds of the Middle East, Northern Ireland, and (notwithstanding recent glimmerings of peace) Kashmir, rather than dedicating themselves fully to the universal harvest of souls. The optimistic campaigns of proselytization that marked the expansionist centuries of Christianity and Islam and the Christian conquest of newly-encountered people during the Age of Discovery – people seen as ignorant, benighted, and ripe for conversion – seem, since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the East and the rise of secularism in the West, to have settled into relatively fixed boundaries between believer and infidel and a renunciation of the idea of an earthly paradise to be formed by uniting an entire humanity of co-religionists. The human obstacles to fulfilling the dream of a pure faith for all of humanity have become insurmountable, aside, of course, from the idea, beloved of fanatics, of apocalyptic judgment.

Christian ecumenicalism, oriented toward a sort of compromising spiritual unity, was central to the development of world-utopian aspirations, perceived by many as a way of transcending the intractable hatreds and clear moral bankruptcy of the crusader mentality. According to the most extreme form of ecumenicalism, God does not favor those who harbor their spirit in a particular race, homeland, or nationality; and divine grace can even fall upon those of other faiths, or of no faith at all. Human souls can only be judged according to each person's willingness to dim or fan into flames the same inner spark

that is given to all. And if all individuals are the same in this most basic sense, then the most spiritually meaningful community can and should be a heavenly city on earth, built on the bedrock of a common humanity. Christian ecumenicalism, from the early Enlightenment onwards, was usually less theologically grounded and more often a supplement to scientifically-based conceptions of the way the world should be, providing an element of spiritual prophecy, varying greatly in their inventiveness or orthodoxy, to the otherwise diverse imaginings of such visionaries as Francis Bacon, Henri Comte de Saint-Simon, and Herbert Spencer.

After World War II, however, things appear to have taken a different turn. Several of the most astute analysts of late modernity have noted that even as technological achievements and supranational politics contributed to and reflected the accelerated pace of "global shrinking," the popularity of overtly utopian ideas has gone into decline.<sup>3</sup> Habermas contends that the projects of social democracy and the welfare state removed much of the vitality of the utopian imagination, not so much by supplanting utopian ideals with unambiguous conditions of prosperity and security as by creating an ambiguous politico-economic order that forbids any recognizable alternative, or at least inhibits radical designs for a better future.<sup>4</sup> The renunciation of overt social idealism is unquestionably also related to the spectacular failure in the twentieth century of all forms of overt political imperialism: the defeat of fascism, the arrangements of independent statehood for the overseas colonies of Western European powers, and the relatively peaceful dismantling of the Soviet empire. There is intensifying debate over whether or not the United States constitutes an empire and, if so, in what way it does; but the idea of a chosen people, of conquest motivated by faith in the superiority of civilization, or what Nazi ethnologists called "high-cultural existence" (*hochvolklichen Dasein*), was, for a while at least, thoroughly discredited.<sup>5</sup>

I do not want to argue, however, that world-historical idealism has come to an end, but rather that utopian or radically liberative imaginings are being expressed differently. The decline of overt utopianism has been a recent and, as I will show in this book, a temporary phenomenon. The roots of universal hope run deep. It can even be, as in postmodernism, hidden by outward rejection of universals. The human propensity for radical hope seems inexhaustible. For the most fervent of freedom-seekers, nationalist aspirations are often not

## 10 Introduction

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enough; the ultimate goal must be something higher: a network-based identity, a global community of the liberated, a “New International,” some conception of a universal *we* without an adversarial *they*. Under accelerating conditions of human integration, universal paradigms of liberation have become increasingly “good to think” and capable of being acted on. Almost everywhere, the accepted limits of political constraint are being lowered, the expectations of freedom raised, and the extent of the hoped for community-of-the-liberated expanded.

So what was, until recently, a near-universal consensus on the supreme importance of avoiding a political empire of the kind imagined at various points in the western utopian tradition, is now breaking apart. Even postcolonialism and postmodernism, the theoretical paradigms that reject such concepts as “mankind,” “civilization,” “progress,” and any notion of the inherent superiority of western philosophy and literature in favor (when they do express positive conviction) of giving voice to colonial subjects and “subalterns” or privileging the anti-imperialism of boundaryless, hybrid, mobile social formations, have failed to move from theoretical critique to social reform, and occasionally themselves lapse into musings about a new, emergent humanity. The sublimation of hopes for world liberation is attenuating. These hopes seem to be, sometimes in a confused, chaotic, and oblique way, coming closer to the surface. Dreams of a global empire, or a world state, or a perfect global community of free-floating individuals have once again emerged as stimuli to political action. In the western imagination, these dreams are recurrent. A tradition of aspirations toward earthly perfection informs our thinking in ways that seem hardly to be noticed in our efforts to understand the forces of global transformation.