

The Paradox of Globalization: Coming Together Yet Growing Apart

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The advent of globalization has brought about sweeping changes that have left indelible marks on societies. While newfound interconnectedness between cultures, information, and people creates an increasingly homogenized planet in some respects, such trends also have the effect of isolating certain non-members of the so-called "global community." This residual marginalization has typically affected those who obstinately cling to the past, and those who are simply dubious towards the current state of affairs. For these persons, methods of coping with this social and psychological schism run the gamut from complete denial and delusion, to important modulations of acceptance.

In the case of the main characters in Dave Eggers' *A Hologram for the King* (2012) and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011), detachment from society is the answer to globalization's questions. These novels demonstrate a paradoxical approach that argues that in order to truly understand something foreign, such as globalization, you must separate yourself from it and take an etic perspective on what is transpiring. In essence, the grand scope of globalization necessitates a much more intimate and elemental approach that takes into account the nuances and backgrounds of its subjects. For it is within these nuances that we realize that, although there exist certain truths about globalization, analysis of it can be muddled by subjectivity endemic to its constituents. This atomistic and paradoxical approach of detachment affords us the ability to draw more general and holistic conclusions about globalization's effects, which can, in turn, be used to ease the process of reintegration back into society. However, as depicted in these two contemporary novels, in order to understand something as large and influential as globalization, one must, first and foremost, learn about something that is ostensibly smaller, but of even greater magnitude: the self.

A Hologram for the King is essentially about an average, middle-aged, white, American called Alan Clay, who travels to Saudi Arabia in order to sell his team's hologram project to King Abdullah, himself. He is burdened by being more than a hundred thousand dollars in debt, and by his fractured family life. Along the way, he becomes further disillusioned with the contradictions endemic to the American worker while also, surprisingly, experiencing a metanoia of sorts that was brought upon by his newfound independence in Saudi Arabia (Eggers 2012). Julius, in *Open City*, is a Nigerian psychiatrist in New York who becomes just as dis-

enchanted with global and social forces as Alan, except Julius tries to reconcile this by wandering around the city, ostensibly hoping to learn more about others (Cole 2011). In the case of both characters, in their attempts to learn more about others, they end up learning more about themselves.

It is perfectly normal—if not human nature—to remain oblivious to the things transpiring around you and to be satisfied with being another cog in the global machine. The common person does not typically worry about globalization's effects on society, simply because they are concerned primarily with their immediate family and themselves. Inquisitorial behavior only arises from people whose disposition lends itself to such thoughts. Typically, people who are either pensive or indignant because of past and current experiences possess this disposition. The main characters in the aforementioned novels, Alan Clay and Julius, offer significant credence to this argument as they represent an entire spectrum of disillusionment. However, it becomes increasingly evident that their discontent does not arise arbitrarily, rather it is a by-product of failures in the system and in themselves. Together, Alan and Julius' experiences with globalization construct a cogent representation of how globalization's influence permeates all aspects of life and simultaneously violates the tenets of global ethics (as defined by Hans Kung). While Alan's frustrations stem from the economic side of globalization, Julius' qualms lie in the transformation of civil society.

Scholar, and notable anthropologist, Arjun Appadurai expands on how this dynamic manifests itself in "scapes" in "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." Appadurai notes how the irregularities of global cultural flows often form the basis of the "disjuncture" present in the global economy. In Alan and Julius' cases, the particular "scapes" of technoscapes and ethnoscapas are suitable theoretical lenses through which one can view their disconnect and disillusionment.

Appadurai defines technoscapes as "the global configuration...of technology and the fact that [it] now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries (Appadurai, 325). The defining characteristic of technoscapes is how, by disseminating technology in a seemingly random and arbitrary fashion, it leads to "increasingly complex relationships among money flows, political possibilities, and the availability of both un- and high-skilled labor." The outsourcing of Alan's job at the Schwinn bicycle

production plant represents a paradigm of the technology that is "deeply disjunctive and profoundly unpredictable" yet fundamentally is "subject to its own constraints and incentives" (Appadurai, 326). It would appear "unpredictable" for Schwinn to sacrifice its brand and image as "an American company" simply to decrease costs, but that is precisely what is happening as Schwinn is "subject to its own constraints and incentives" that prioritize minimizing costs over maintaining an image (Appadurai, 326). Ultimately, these "incentives" are manifested in the emerging markets brought about by globalization.

Due to their tangible nature, the effects of an increasingly global economy are intensified. The possibility of losing your means of living can cause palpable fear that paralyzes both the body and mind. Alan's musings following his discussion with the man on the plane sheds light on this, "Alan had spent a few decades with bikes...And yet year by year there was less work for a guy like him. People were done manufacturing on American soil. How could he or anyone argue for spending five to ten times what it cost in Asia?" (Eggers, 14). This hearkens back to Appadurai's discussion on technoscapes and the ensuing complex relationships among money flows and labor (Appadurai, 325). In the global economy, the focus on decreasing marginal costs has led to an increase in marginalized workers. Admittedly, an increase in technology is likely to lead to some workers' skills being rendered obsolete. However, in the case of Alan, his skills did not depreciate so much as the demand for his labor. The advent of globalization acted as an impetus that led to the emergence of entirely new economies in developing nations. This influx into the labor force allowed businesses to drive down costs, but at the expense of the domestic worker.

The portrayal of the new global economy as impersonal and exploitative makes Alan's perpetually jaded personality seem warranted and natural. In fact, this evolution from the past to the present could be construed as tantamount to the move from local to global. The fact that Alan's indignation is palpable and understandable prevents it from appearing as being predicated on mere romanticized nostalgia. Scholar Arif Dirlik discusses this in "The Global in the Local," "It is possible that the disillusionment with capitalism...has played a fundamental part in the resurgence of an antimodernism that has redirected the attention of radicals to local solutions to problems of development" (Dirlik, 26).

Essentially, Dirlik is arguing that dissatisfaction with the present (globalization/modernity) has brought about heightened desire to return to the past (localism). Dirlik attributes this dissatisfaction to a reversal of global roles: "Parts of the earlier Third World are today on the pathways of transnational capital...Likewise, parts of the First World marginalized in the new global economy are hardly distinguishable in way of life from what used to be viewed as the Third World" (Dirlik, 31). It becomes increasingly evident that these aforementioned "parts" are in reference to people like Alan. The plight of the marginalized American worker today does not stray far from the marginalized worker of the past.

Appadurai also draws attention to the transformation of civil society in his analysis of ethnoscapas: "landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live" (Appadurai, 325). In this regard, ethnoscapas are a viable backdrop by which to analyze the character of Julius as he is a Nigerian immigrant living in New York. However, Julius is not representative of ethnoscapas so much as the people around him, as he seeks stability while others live in a constant state of flux and movement. Appadurai comments on the now ephemeral nature of human interaction and the stability of communities, "The warp of these stabilities is everywhere shot through with the woof of human motion" (Appadurai, 325). Human transience and imagination have subverted most of the existing stability in communities, as people "deal with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move" (Appadurai, 325). Essentially, the dramatic and comprehensive changes that Julius undergoes of both culture and lifestyle (as a result of ethnoscapas and transience) is one that ultimately leaves him jaded yet pensive.

Julius' issues with globalization seem to stem from how it has changed the social dynamic of society. He believes that the increased homogenization of cultures and people has simultaneously siphoned any sense of individuality. Julius expands on this, "The sight of large masses of people hurrying down into underground chambers was perpetually strange to me, and I felt that all of the human race was rushing, pushed by a counterinstinctive death drive, into movable catacombs" (Cole, 7). Julius is describing subways here, but he also admits to the existence of solitude "above-ground," which portrays society as paradoxically growing apart despite its coming together.

In what appears to be a recurring theme, Julius finds solace in his version of the "local:" the elderly. Interestingly, Julius' interactions with people often come across as terse and ephemeral, save for the few interactions he has with older people. The scenes preceding and including his visit with Professor Saito support this theory. In order "To escape the din" of the plaza Julius took a diversion to a bookstore until he realized that "the entrance was full of the crowd overflow from the street." Julius then, "changed his mind, and decided to visit an old teacher" (Cole, 8-9). This scene succinctly depicts present-day society as enervating Julius to the point where he seeks refuge in the past, i.e. Saito. His noticeable agitation with society depicts him as an anachronistic being. This hearkens back to Dirlik's localism and how the past is often viewed favorably, and where the elderly act as a static medium of the past (Dirlik, 26). This idiosyncratic behavior is demonstrated further by both his study of the elderly and strokes, and his relationship with the older woman (Dr. Maillotte) on the plane.

It is now apparent that the arrival of globalization has negatively impacted the main characters in concrete and substantiated ways. It then becomes reasonable to extrapolate from this and assert that globalization is rife with negative externalities that harm people in many facets of life, whether it is economically, socially, or psychologically. In fact, it could be argued that the process/institution of globalization is inherently flawed in its structure and thus fails to satisfy scholar Hans Kung's definition and criteria of global ethics. Kung, in *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, gives a broad definition of a "global ethic" calling it a "basic consensus on binding values, irrevocable criteria and personal basic attitudes, without which any community is sooner or later threatened with anarchy or a new dictatorship" (Kung, 40). Alan and Julius, by deviating from an increasingly homogenizing world, represent a subversion of this ideal and thus threaten what globalization sets out to accomplish. Globalization fails to maintain this "global ethic" as it threatens the stability of society by marginalizing and subsequently angering people. A system that is not conducive to some of its subjects is one that, consequently, harms all of them.

Kung expands on his definition of a "global ethic" by arguing that it has two basic tenets: "1. Every human being must be treated humanely, and 2. What you wish done to yourself, do to others" (Kung, 4). Kung also acknowledges that humankind's insatiable drive for technical progress

could lead to a concurrent moral regression: "Humans must always be the subjects of rights, must be ends, never mere means, never objects of commercialization and industrialization in economics, politics, and media..." (Kung, 4). In this regard, it is evident that globalization has violated these sacrosanct rules. Economically, the focus has been not on maximizing total welfare, but rather on maximizing profits. As previously discussed, Alan's experiences represent a paradigm of how globalization affects the domestic worker in a global economy. This would be an evaluation that puts the rights of enterprise above the rights of human beings.

Kung's definition of "global ethic" could be viewed as being saccharine and too idealistic to bear any real significance today. After all, it is foolish to believe that there exists a global system where everyone is respected and no one is harmed. It is simply not feasible. As the global economy is predicated on capitalism, it would be erroneous to not expect inequity and eventual dissatisfaction. However, when the global system marginalizes people like Alan and Julius, who is to say that it does not adversely affect others like them? Ultimately, although Alan and Julius are atypical characters, their strengths and weaknesses are representative of the larger population. Like all of humankind, they both exhibit a desire to be desired in society. When a person loses their sense of self-worth, they lose their ability to be productive members of society. This is precisely why Hans Kung's humanistic emphasis on self-worth and collective success is extremely pertinent in this discussion.

A person's reaction to adversity is often more insightful and revealing than the adversity itself. In this regard, Alan and Julius take similar, albeit slightly different, paths. They both detach themselves from society through a multitude of outlets, but none greater than through the rather unassuming act of walking. The fascinating thing about this form of catharsis is how those affected by the advancement of technology and society find solace in one of the most elementary actions of humankind. This regression back to something familiar and comforting clearly depicts them as longing for the past, but not knowing how to get there. So they walk, not with a destination in mind, but rather, they wander to try and escape their economic and social fetters, and to demonstrate their autonomy and independence.

The importance of walking is made clear from the very beginning of *Open City*, as Teju Cole prefaces the novel with exposition on the subject. Julius describes this seemingly idiosyncratic ritual, "Walking through busy parts of town meant I laid eyes on more people...than I was accustomed to seeing in the course of a day, but the impress of these countless faces did nothing to assuage my feelings of isolation; if anything, it intensified them" (Cole, 6). Julius' description of walking could be construed as a metaphor for globalization. The increased homogenization of the world has led to a concurrent decrease in individuality. Even though the world is "coming together", it is primarily for economic reasons rather than social ones. As Dirlik mentioned, the expansion from local to global was economically driven (expansion of labor and global market) and this has rendered most people into characterless drones: mere cogs in the global machine (Dirlik, 31).

Julius reveals his cultural dissonance while talking about his late-night introspection, "I rehearsed in the dark the numerous incidents and sights I had encountered while roaming, sorting each encounter...My futile task of sorting went on until the forms began to morph into each other and assume abstract shapes unrelated to the real city..." (Cole, 7). It is evident that Julius is not apathetic towards his situation but actively tries to understand and contextualize what is happening around him. It is also equally apparent that he comes to no real conclusions and has to settle for abstractions.

Although Julius goes directly into society, his subconscious is elsewhere which makes the whole effort a little disingenuous. It seems as if Julius is almost enjoying being a contrarian and malcontent. For instance, while riding public transportation Julius notes the appearance and actions of everyone around him, and draws sweeping and cursory conclusions from this. He particularly notes the banality of people: "Everyone in the car seemed to be wearing black or dark gray...No one on the train spoke and no one, it seemed, knew anyone else" (Cole, 45). Julius does, however, contrast this with the next train car that was "brightly lit" and had "a few people in the train talk[ing] to each other" (Cole, 45). What is particularly revealing is when Julius suddenly leaves the train car when the Wall Street workers get on. The fact that Julius does not describe them individually, but rather as one mass, is indicative of how Julius values some types of people over others.

What Julius fails to do, is scrutinize himself as he does others. To an outsider, Julius would seem like a brooding man who does not stray far from normalcy. Julius' presumptuous behavior is ironic in a sense, as others may be viewing him in the same assuming light. It becomes clear, now, that Julius must first introspect and understand himself before understanding others (globalization). Detachment from society is ineffective if the person has no desire to reintegrate and if they actively seek to differentiate themselves from others. Otherwise, it is merely an exercise in futility or pretension. In fact, it is only towards the end of the novel that Julius truly learns that he, rather than globalization, is inadequate and that he is projecting his dissatisfaction with himself on the whole of society.

It even appears as if Julius, by reminiscing about the past, is seeking to find something that never truly existed. Julius is mixed (half Nigerian and German) which potentially represents a dichotomy between the past and the present. In fact, Julius often laments his lack of control over identity (the self) as people assume that he is solely black and ergo attempt to construct artificial familiarity and camaraderie out of this. Thus he takes solace in the modicum of control gifted to him by virtue of him living in both Nigeria in the past and New York in the present. The diametrically opposed locations allow Julius to associate and differentiate between the major phases in his life, and he ultimately chooses idealized nostalgia (Nigeria) over reality (New York).

Scholar Susan Stanford Friedman in "Migrations, Diasporas, and Borders" touches on this phenomenon: "Many migrants and diasporics associate home not with a particular geographic location but with an 'imaginary homeland', with the experience of being perpetually in between cultures..." (Friedman, 262). Julius is not smitten with the country itself, but rather the notion that Nigeria offered familiarity and simplicity that the bustling city of New York cannot provide. To Julius, New York is a cacophony of randomized movement whereas Nigeria represents a much tamer and deliberate way of life that affords him the time for introspection. However, although Julius' reflections are inundated with innocuous and ostensibly anecdotal stories of things like Coca Cola, he chooses (perhaps deliberately) to omit the event that most likely shaped both his feelings of inadequacy and disillusionment today: the rape of Moji.

This epiphany occurs when Moji confronts Julius about how

he forced himself on her when she was fifteen years old. Moji was a childhood friend who Julius later encounters in a party in New York. In what is, by far, the most poignant and resonating part of the novel, Julius comes to terms with who he really is: "Each person must, on some level, take himself as the calibration point for normalcy, must assume that the room of his own mind is not, cannot be, entirely opaque to him...And so, what does it mean when, in someone else's version, I am the villain?" (Cole, 243). In this passage, Julius admits to having a misguided view of himself that is founded on egoistic delusion. This delusion operated on the assumption that he was "normal" in a world full of deviants, and this ultimately masked his own imperfections. When directly confronted with this truth, Julius finally admits that he is not an omniscient being who can make sweeping assumptions about groups of people as he does in his psychiatry practice. He is as much a part of the same social fabric as everybody else. It is in this fabric that immense subjectivity lies due to the pretenses that people put up in order to keep social order and stability. Modi attests to this quite explicitly, "He (her current boyfriend) sees through you anyway, you, the psychiatrist, the know-it-all...he's a better man than you. He is wiser, he understands life better than you ever will" (Cole, 245). This focus on "understanding life" depicts Julius as someone who is more nascent and ignorant about life, than he would like to believe. This revelation forces Julius to change his "detachment" from society. Instead of detaching himself from society by his walking, Julius learns that he must detach from himself and his ego in order to learn more about himself and his repressed thoughts and actions (Cole, 244). Ultimately, Julius learns from his detachment that, although globalization may have harmed social relations, it was merely a scapegoat that masked his innermost demons and regrets.

Whereas Julius walks toward people, Alan chooses to isolate himself by walking away from them. In innumerable instances, Alan willingly separates himself from his coworkers and wanders to places like desolate buildings. Alan describes his coworkers as having "no interest in manufacturing or the type of person-to-person sales he'd spent his life perfecting (Eggers, 130). Alan is ruing how the current state of business operations is dominated by impersonal interactions. He then begins to attack their physical manifestations as he associates them with being willing pawns in a bastardized game: "Cayley and her upturned nose. Brad and his caveman brow..." (Eggers, 130).

Alan, unable to even be near them, leaves and wanders off to a seemingly abandoned building where he introspects by himself. It is in this isolation that Alan tries to make sense of what is happening and what has transpired, "He listened to his own breathing. He tried not to think of anything" (Eggers 2012, 132). Alan then ruminates about his former failings, whether it be emotionally or economically, until startled by a worker. It is here that Alan's disillusion with society and himself becomes apparent, "You are not supposed to be there, fifty feet under the earth, walking like that, pacing, angry, recounting unchangeable events from not just your own past but that of the country as a whole. But Alan knew this...He was well aware of everything he was not supposed to be doing" (Eggers, 137). Alan's distancing from society, by his own admission, is solely discretionary. He chooses to detach himself from the world because it is cathartic to him and allows him to contextualize his past.

When he is not wandering, he plays the part of a recluse in his apartment in a drunken stupor, preferring a delirious state to his reality. This is another form of detachment that allows Alan to be uninhibited without any conscious effort besides drinking. Alan explains, "There was something to this, to this drinking alone in one's room. Why hadn't he done this before? He could do all this and no one could say boo... The moonshine makes me an adventurer" (Eggers, 110). This passage reveals both Alan's discontent with society and himself as he laments his lack of control and his mundane existence. Alan possessed complete dominion over everything in the hotel room and this offered him something that he had not had since globalization's onset: control. In the past, Alan was subjected to the whims of his wife, distant economic entities, and even his coworkers. This newfound independence took Alan by complete surprise, and he, evidently, was not ready for it. His drunken escapades and experimentation on his body demonstrates just how marginalized and jaded he had become (Eggers, 115). It also depicts a person who has a tendency to put the onus of accountability on external sources, while simultaneously seeking easy, ephemeral solutions, rather than solutions that address the root of the problem.

Despite not receiving the contract from the King of Saudi Arabia (the reason Alan went there was to sell his team's hologram project), Alan remains strangely optimistic; which is indicative of a type of metanoia on his part. It appears as if the independence experienced by Alan in Saudi Ara-

bia—of all places—has made him into a more efficacious and resilient person. When discussing with al-Ahmad about the prospects of Alan staying in Saudi Arabia, al-Ahmad offers to help him out, "I certainly would like to help you. 'You would?' Sure, why wouldn't I? Alan could think of so many reasons. But he had to presume goodwill. He had to hope for amnesia" (Eggers, 331). Ostensibly, it appears as if Alan has become resigned to his fate. However, this is not to say he has grown so apathetic that he no longer cares. Contrarily, Alan stays because "he couldn't go home yet, not empty handed like this" (Eggers, 331). Here we see then, that he has not resigned to his fate so much as he has accepted it. Alan recognizes that globalization has damaged people like him, but—for the first time—now seems willing to confront it instead of fleeing from it.

Detachment from society is not tantamount to escapism, provided that the person involved makes a concerted effort to understand their situation. Passing this litmus test turned out to be a struggle for both Alan and Julius, as they often regressed to their coping mechanisms of alcoholism and egoism, respectively. Despite this, they were able to learn more about themselves, which, in turn, allowed them to learn more about others.

Globalization, as demonstrated in the two novels, played the role of a scape-goat that ultimately overshadowed more structural deficiencies— not within the global community— but within people themselves. This is not to argue that globalization was harmless, as it demonstrably caused substantiated harm to both Alan and Julius. It is more so to draw attention that this "conflict" between global forces and the self was not a zero-sum game where if one entity wins, the other loses by the same amount. Rather, globalization appeared to compound existing problems and deficiencies within the self.

For Julius, it was the lingering feelings of impotence that were brought upon by the repression of his rape of Moji. Globalization merely brought to light these feelings of just how powerless and alone he is in the world. Julius' rape of Moji and his increased interaction with people because of globalization may bring him "physically" closer to them, but in reality, he could not be further apart. Julius' story essentially was a microcosm of globalization's paradox about how people can socially and psychologically drift away despite being physically closer.

Similarly, Alan's feelings of inadequacy were transformed into concentrated, and arguably misplaced, disdain for globalization and the global economy. Alan took this project with the hopes that it would bring about a windfall of money that would enable him to both pay off debts and pay for his daughter's education. In a sense, this entire project and the prospect of riches would not be possible without globalization and the ensuing creation of the global economy. This lends credence towards the idea that the global economy is fair in that it is somewhat random in the benefits and costs it offers.

With this in mind, it is only natural that we turn the locus of control back onto the self and how people need to realize their own shortcomings before assessing the shortcomings of others. Throughout this examination, it becomes increasingly evident that globalization simply exacerbated existing problems rather than being the original source of them, and it is only when Alan and Julius realize this, that they are able to be accountable for their actions and situations. Ultimately, the realization of the self—that is brought upon by detachment— clears any preconceptions and biases that we may have, and this allows us to objectively evaluate something as ubiquitous yet personal as globalization is.

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