

TOWARDS A NEW CULTURAL DEMOCRACY: ARTISTIC EXPRESSION, CULTURE, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE NEW GLOBAL ERA

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(Reflections on the meeting of artists and cultural workers in Santorini, Greece, September 2000)

Glo-ba-li-za-tion is the new multi-syllabic refrain facilely invoked by all too many people to succinctly explain the good and bad of the human condition at the dawning of a new Century. Where do the arts and culture figure in the discourse? More important, where do artists and cultural workers fit?

The assertive sound and confident tone of non-questioning advocates of globalization conjures the image of a self-activating, self-perpetuating, awe-inspiring phenomenon, the implied spiritual virtues and boldly stated material advantages of which citizens of the world should quietly surrender with no fear.

The concept of a global community constructed on the foundations of free markets, less state regulations of internal economic affairs, and more privatization of social spheres, smoothly rolls off tongues of corporate and industry spokes people, banking and lending executives, advertisers, lobbyists, and the highest ranking national political representatives.

Arts and culture are increasingly considered by many global free trade proponents as the next spheres of human activity to be indiscriminately and totally absorbed into economic globalization. Lest the readers think this assertion outlandish, consider the glib exhortation Just reach out and globalize someone delivered in formal remarks by a U.S. State Department representative a few years ago to an international meeting of Ministers of Culture, who applauded politely, but many I suspect, with a degree of silent anxiety. Rather than being reassured, many people around the world say globalization with a fatalistic aura of doom, as though they are fabricated characters in an unfolding plot.

Touted by some corporate, political, and cultural elites as the magic elixir for economic growth, political democracy, and social development, globalization is viewed drastically different by millions of middle-class and poor people around the world who are experiencing this high tech, information driven social arrangement (that exports finance capital and consumer products to almost every inch of global-humanity) as a crude private-profit scheme that produces widespread economic misery and cultural deterioration. Some in arts and cultural fields embrace globalization without qualification, while many writers, plastic artists, and traditional artisans dread the notion.

However, the fibers of truth in both perspectives do not comprise a whole cloth. The complexities, virtues, and problems of globalization are not so easily discerned as proponents and critics assert. Is globalization fundamentally a malevolent spirit to be

forced back into the proverbial bottle, or a social creation, the potential of which must be made accountable to citizens and redirected toward construction of just societies and international relations that respect creative and cultural diversity?

Artists, cultural institutions and organizations, and activists, and intellectuals -- concerned citizens-- from around the world, met in Santorini, Greece in late September to discuss and debate the meaning and consequences of globalization, especially as it relates to artistic and cultural production and the cultural integrity of nations. At the conclusion of three days of serious, sometimes intensely passionate deliberations, participants voted unanimously to establish the International Network of Cultural Diversity (INCD) to focus attention on growing tensions among nations over global trade regulations related to arts and culture and to inform development of arts and cultural policies that will foster and protect cultural diversity. The parallel meeting of citizens and Ministers of Culture ---Third Annual Meeting of the International Network on Cultural Policy-** is evidence of growing universal acknowledgment of the inviolability of human and spiritual values inherent in cultural creativity and artistic production: An acknowledgment that should foreground Cultural Democracy as a fundamental topic, within and among nations, in the intense discourse about globalization.

Trepidations about erosive effects of unchecked privatization in all aspects of human activity on the integrity of local and national cultures on one hand, and growing awareness of the potential life-sustaining and liberating qualities to be achieved from mastery of the scientific and technological global architecture, on the other hand, have combined to spark a worldwide awakening that leads, at times, to fretful alliances and not so clearly articulated alternate projects and goals among citizens from all walks of life. Environmentalists, labor unions, women's groups, human rights organizations, indigenous, racial and cultural communities, policymakers in developing and developed countries, and now artists and cultural workers are organizing across national boundaries of space, language, aesthetics, religions, and political ideologies to confront global commercial regimes which are progressively undermining and displacing the nation-State as the fundamental democratic governance apparatus for free expression, protection and advancement of citizens' rights.

With the establishment of the INCD artists and cultural workers assumed a formal leadership role in defining the values and social and economic goals of the new global reality. They also took on the responsibility to ensure that they and fellow citizens live as culturally diverse peoples and nations. The parallel meeting with the International Network on Cultural Policy (INCP), organized by Cultural Ministers from various countries, is another important indicator of a growing and politically active citizenry across the world which is troubled by, and in some instances directly opposed to, the philosophy, rules, and governance structures of the reigning neo-liberal profit driven world-trade policy and regime. It is a movement of citizens who objectively oppose the fundamental erosion of the philosophy and practice of participatory democracy for, by, and of the people being carried out increasingly by unfettered corporate control of state governments. Through the coordinated forum in Santorini, the two groups came together as national and global citizens and policymakers to ensure that national government policies and transnational governance and commercial accords respect, reflect, and nurture the rich and varied

cultural, artistic, and spiritual ways of knowing and doing that are central to our common humanity.

Through deliberations and actions taken in Santorini, artist and cultural workers joined the ranks of civil society groups from all walks of life around the globe who are raising questions, and critiques and developing proposals to reform and/or dismantle global financial, commercial, economic, and political and social policies and institutions that in effect politically disenfranchise citizens and threaten and undermine local and national cultures and cultural industries. Broad public recognition and advocacy for cultural diversity as an indispensable policy element of sustainable development within or among nations was placed on the global agenda earlier this summer when more than 1500 representatives of non-governmental organizations met in New York City at the Millennium Forum under the auspices of the United Nations to address issues of global concern inadequately handled and/or abandoned to corporate interests by the governance structures of individual nation-states of which they are citizens.

Participants at the Millennium Forum prepared a final conference document which emphasized that the 21st century "will have the task of, placing ethical and cultural values as defining social objectives, subordinating the economy to these objectives, and employing technology as an instrument of a more human and just project." Brazilian Sociologist, Carlos Alberto Rabaca, commenting on the United Nations NGO Millennium Forum noted that in this new Millennium humanity will have to confront questions left over from the 20th Century such as "...how to safeguard sovereignty and culture without fear of the advantages of international integration; how to globalize without exclusion; how to carry forth the advance of technology without killing humanism; how to avoid citizenship becoming subordinate to dictates of the market; how to impede the monotheism of the market from transforming itself into an instrument of social control."

Prominent artists and cultural workers are providing broad, illuminating analyses of globalization, particularly in relation to the philosophies, goals, and programs of nation-states, heretofore ostensibly designed to foster and to protect the creation of a nation's citizen-artists, public service cultural workers, indigenous and traditional cultural communities and artisans, and cultural industries (publishing, film, music, and the like). Portuguese writer and Nobel Laureate, Jose Saramago, notes how the concept and practice of the modern nation-state are being reformulated to respond to the self-serving values and dictates of corporate and business interests, therein undermining democracy and citizenship. He instructs us "that behind the abstract Nation-State are women and men, citizens who are asked to accept less citizenship and to acquiesce to an expanding role of the state as an instrument of large concentrations of economic power."

Addressing the annual assembly of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, (In Prague in the midst of between five and eight thousand protestors from around the world, at the very moment of the Santorini meetings) poet-politician and President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel "made an emphatic call in favor of a rise in spirituality to counteract an 'essentially atheistic civilization' and for construction of a better world." Speaking at a more general philosophical, humanistic

level, with less specificity about the egregious characteristics of globalization, but implicating its basic problems, he criticized "a civilization that offers 'fabulous possibilities' but abounds with 'pressures of uniformity' which 'provokes the necessity to underline our differences'..." Havel's comments about the disturbing decline in social values and morality to leaders of global finance and national political representatives who serve as liaisons and facilitators for the implementation of transnational policies hint at Jose Saramago's feeling of "incompatibility with a concept and practice of globalization preoccupied with nothing more than purchase and sale of goods and services, for which all other considerations do not merit respect."

Like fellow citizens concerned with human rights, the environment, personal and social liberties, artists and cultural workers and institutions increasingly feel compelled to organize and to act against transgressions of transnational commercial regimes that are eroding the creative, artistic, humanistic, and scientific traditions that have sustained diverse societies and informed ongoing debates, struggles, and compromises intended to expand democratic values and practices in national institutions and governments. They are enabled to act, however, by the diversity of rich creative and humanistic traditions that have given fundamental meaning and purpose to human life, which is the bases for national identities and for affirmation of their global connectedness as diverse cultural beings.

Recent demonstrations against the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization in Seattle, Washington and Washington, D.C., and in Prague reveal widespread public discontent and quarrelsome relations among nations about the undemocratic decision-making procedures exercised by a few countries with respect to trade policies that affect all aspects of life on the planet. Although public opposition to unregulated corporate and commercial driven ends and decision-making mechanisms is the common factor uniting a wide array of special-interests groups in defense of the principles of national sovereignty and self-determination, at this juncture agreement on remedies and shared tactics still separate many.

As organized citizens, or civil society, critically reflect and attempt to redirect the human creativity that has produced the marvels of technology, the mastery of manufacturing products, and the efficiency of distribution, they must also face the challenge of rethinking dominant concepts of national cultural identity, sustainable development, and statecraft. The essence of the challenge is to avoid simplistic reassertion of cultural values, definitions and practices heretofore associated with nation-building and official national identity(ies). Artists, intellectuals, and cultural workers must consider their plight in the broader context of life-defining global issues that concern other fellow citizens. Jose Saramago notes, for example, that the author's right {intellectual property, etc.} "...is no more than a detail in the extensive general framework of human rights"; he poses a critical question to authors and by implication to artists and intellectuals: "Will we succeed, will we be successful in assuring that the rights of the author remain as an island paradise in the shipwreck of human rights?"

How arts and cultural sectors answer Saramago's question and how they organize to achieve their specific goals will significantly impact the effectiveness of groups like the International Network for Cultural Diversity. It appears that aggregate power of non-governmental groups derived through growing vertical organization of their respective special interests is proving to be more effective on general directions and programs of the World Bank, the International monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization, albeit slight at this juncture of engagement, than single-issue organized approaches.

Corporate affronts to the spiritual (artistic and cultural) dimensions of life should not be separated from attacks on the material conditions of life. Therefore, Sustainable development must be understood to include arts and culture as vital expressions of human existence as well as the purview of arts and culture professionals. The idea and practice of sustainable development must include diverse cosmologies and socio-cultural values and artistic practices and aesthetic traditions. Sustainable development and statecraft designed to secure the common good must not be pigeonholed into economic and statistical measurements. Nor should the concept of development favor commercial arts and culture over other expressions.

How, for example, can nations act to institutionalize internal and global relations which equitably include in the concept of the general welfare traditional and grassroots artisans, communal and group-specific ownership, and indigenous decision-making and conflict mediation models? How might, or can, normative social perspectives and regulatory measures that privilege the worlds of individual fine artists, commercial cultural arts and media, and individual-based copyright law be made compatible with the aforementioned cultural questions?

How can countries integrate indigenous knowledge systems and technologies as integral elements of national and global political, economic, social and cultural life and also reap the benefits for all from contemporary advances in science and technology? How might they respond to concomitant dislocations in the meaning and practice of received traditions of social ethics and morality?

Does the call for protection of Greek, English, Spanish, and French cultural heritage include the new vibrant traditions of 20th Century immigrant citizens and their cultural institutions? Will, for example, legitimate efforts to protect African cultural patrimonies from western hegemony confront the backwardness of some gender relations steeped in age-old cultural traditions, or fully incorporate African citizens of Asian and European heritages?

These questions are posed out of recognition that a simple assertion of official historical notions of national culture and identity, the status-quo, foreign and local culture, and sustainable development is not a sufficient or acceptable democratic response to guide citizens and nations in the struggle with commercial trade regulations and institutions that undermine national sovereignty and self-determination in the cultural arena. An orientation to democracy is required that addresses cultural rights and, in some cases, integrally related religious, political, social, and economic aspirations and rights --human rights*--of the many culture-specific communities, groups and individuals in all of our respective countries who are marginalized, frequently attacked, exploited, and excluded from official renderings of national cultural identities and policies. For many around the globe, arts and culture are more than performance, aesthetic tradition, artistic and media

representation and scholarly offerings for public consumption. Free access to nature -- wildlife, forests, seed plants, the mountains and plains -- and communal and group-specific practices also constitute the varied realms of the artistic and the cultural for millions of urban, rural and indigenous people.

Undemocratic cultural conditions too often plague both multi-cultural developed and developing countries. Thus, the restricted meaning, narrow goals, unfair organization, and unjust results of the reigning global paradigm challenges citizens to be more expansive in thinking, in setting goals and policies.

Citizens need to take hold of the creativity and wealth of the new global era to construct truly encompassing, respectful global cultural democracy founded on active and full participation by all those heretofore excluded from, or not fully incorporated into, official national cultural identity. Citizens and government leaders must honestly confront the all-too-prevalent fact that ethnic, racial and national minorities, women, indigenous cultures, traditional artisans, and Gay and Lesbian people are misrepresented or not represented in official cultural policies and profiles of the very nation-states now concerned about the threats posed by economic globalization to their local and national cultural identities and enterprises.

The United States plays an unquestionable pivotal role in world affairs, and should by all means be held accountable to fair and just practices. However, legitimate concerns expressed by other citizens and governments about the persistence of U.S. trade representatives who seek to eliminate cultural exemptions and understandable worry about the pervasive impact of Hollywood and other U.S. media throughout the world's nations should not distract or delay all citizens and their leaders from addressing cultural democracy on the "home front."

While seeking to balance democracy among nations, artists and cultural workers must also work earnestly and diligently to overcome the absence of full cultural diversity in arts and cultural institutions and industries and media in each nation. In particular, growing opposition in and outside of the U.S. about the alluring and expansive reach of unwholesome aspects of U.S. culture (labeled "toxic entertainment" by Democratic and Republican Party U.S. Presidential candidates), should not be allowed by the world's citizens and the community of nations to avoid addressing the lack of cultural democracy within their respective nations. In point of fact, the contours of Cultural Wars inside the United States suggest that citizens across national boundaries have common interests, and possibly can unite around global solutions.

Full recognition of and respect for cultural diversity must begin within and among nations with active, respectful participation in decision-making, and above all in administration, financial allocation, and representations of cultural institutions and industries by artists and cultural practitioners from diverse backgrounds and traditions. Recognition that arts and culture should be integral elements of any national or global construct about sustainable development is now squarely on the global agenda. A new global citizen-based cultural democracy movement can make it so.