Volume 19 Issue 58
Originally issued as H9



Global Journal of human-social science: H
Interdisciplinary
Volume 19 Issue 9 Version 1.0 Year 2019
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460x & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Global Identity

By Xiaodi Zhou

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GJHSS-H Classification: *FOR Code: 160303*



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Global Identity

Xiaodi Zhou

I. Introduction

I turned my head left, then swung right, only to be caught up in the whirlwind of neon lights that swirled the hazy night sky in Bangkok. As a high schooler, I had come here with my classmates from the US, two of whom were born in Thailand. I remember how everyone there greeted each other with a bow of the head behind clasped hands, saying sawadee krab (or ka depending on the gender of the speaker). During that month, we went to the pristine beach, to fantastic shows, to caverns of delicious food stalls inundated with the aromatic scent of Thai curry and lemongrass. We drove through oily green fields intersected with gullies and clandestine villages under sun-pierced canopies of palm leaves.

I saw the extravagant ancient stone palace of Wat Phra Kaew, affluent modern abodes of concrete tenements in condominium-laced neighborhoods overgrown with banyan trees, but also the one-room make-shift shanties – wooden slabs with rusted tin roofs – on the river's edge where people squatted to wash laundry and fetch water. I rode elephants and went banana boating in Pattaya. I remember I leapt into the waters of the lucid blue ocean, where sea lice promptly ravaged my body; so when I fled the tepid waves, I had tiny red marks strewn across my entire body that itched for days.

As a naturalized US citizen from China, I have had the privilege to travel abroad with relative ease. I have been to many parts of Europe, South Africa, Mexico, Canada, China, Mongolia and other Asian nations, as well as all throughout the US. In each of these different locales, my cultural positioning shifted, even if subtly. My Western frames of reference which developed from years of living on the East Coast of the US, nowfar more palpable than my heritage Chinese self, encountered each of these new cultural and linguistic contexts. From living in north Florida and Georgia during my high school and adult years, I had learned to partially assume a Southern US perspective (e.g., my love of sweet tea and college football). In every one of these intersections of identities (Crenshaw, 1989; Hermans & Hermans - Konopka, 2010), my perspective and general attitudes towards the world also changed.

Global Context

Today, I often hear we are living in a globalized world, one connected evermore so with the ease of travel and advancements in communication technology. There is the clichéd expression that the world is getting smaller, but it is also getting more complex, its tiny idiosyncrasies magnified and our static stereotypical categorizations troubled. We are privy to and can empathize with the experiences of so many diverse people and cultures, of so many different eras past, and can more readily conjure an even more complex interconnected future synthesized from the foundations of today. We bring to these imaginations the backgrounds of our own specific cultures, which color our visions into a recognizable hue. In fact, every culture we come into contact with or study, or even conceive of, is done so through the lens of our own.

But, our own cultures are often hidden to us, made invisible by their omnipresence, by their subtle but pervasive infiltration of our subconscious. I say cultures because each of us are different intersections of cultural identities (Crenshaw, 1989; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), each one of our thoughts the birthed result of so many other entangled ones wrought by a maelstrom of dialogic simultaneity (Bakht in, 1986). So, even with the globalized reach of our world, each one of us is unique given the distinct hybridity of cultures that results from this countless algorithm of developmental, gendered, linguistic, racial, and cultural intersections (Nuñéz, 2014).

Decades ago, I was born and discovered the world in China, and learned to express myself as a young boy in Mandarin with the rural Nanjing (六合) accent of my nanny. It was a time immersed in family and the sonorous echoes of childhood – the clanging bells of the ice cream lady, the loud rhyming chants of the popped rice vendor pushing his portable oven, the addictive night-time fables of my father and the lapping laughter of time spent with friends in the neighborhood. I would run around the dizzying concrete corridors of my grey apartment complex tucked in the maple-lined former Nationalist government sector (now the Jiangsu provincial administration district), scraping my knee, getting into trouble.

But, ever since the age of seven, I have been living in the United States, arriving aboard a huge 747 journeying interminably for an entire day to the other side of the globe. When I finally arrived after vomiting the entire ride, I was met by an over-joyous mother and a greasy box of chow mien from Chinatown, still the best meal I have ever eaten my entire life. New York City at night was a dizzying conflagration of lights. My dreams and reality bled into each other in my jet-lagged daze. Throughout my time here in this country, I have often

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referenced my former culture, and indeed, my former self, as I negotiated US life. I had felt shame at one point in my origins, trying to flee impossibly from my heritage self, but have since learned to embrace both of my cultures. I am a living hybrid, an organic dialogue of two complex and global cultures.

As I straddle these two cultures, two languages, two histories and world views, as well as regional variations of each, both in the US and in China, I have learned to empathize with the perspectives of every locale. I can assume divergent national/regional positional ties, or "alterities" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.31), in the different arenas in my life. For example, I can feel more Chinese when I am with my Chinese family and friends, either in the US or in China. At other times, I feel more American with my US friends and family when I am either in China or the US.Conversely, my Chinese self may be more obvious with my non-Chinese friends, and my US self more apparent with my non-American friends, made more salient by the contrast with those I am around. In other words, the geographical space does not dictate my cultural positioning; rather, it is the context, whether it be the people I am with or my specific location (e.g., Starbucks in China), that defines my positionality as more Chinese or American. in this sense, the culture within a culture is often a hybrid of both (Bhabha, 1994), as we translanguage and transculturate in our interactions (Arroyo, 2016; Fu, Hadjioannou, & Zhou, 2019), indicative of the intersectionality and mutually affective nature of cultural dialogue.

II. Fragmentation of Selves

Indeed, the two broad cultures which I have been juggling since my arrival in the States are not monolithic: the US and the Chinese. Within these identities are a plethora of other stratifications that dialogue with each other, perhaps incurring a different dynamic at their intersections (Areheart, 2006). Intersectionality is a type of dialogue where different veins of identity negotiate with others within an individual, producing complex and compounded *I*-positions. In reality, contrary to simple fusion or blending, my Chinese American identity has been one of "alternating" allegiances (Huynh, Nguyen, & Benet-Martínez, 2011, p.829), as I wade back and forth between my Chinese and US selves, identities that negotiate with the other veins of myself, as well as with the other ethnic cultures I encounter. I also alternate between feeling more blended and assimilated within my US cultural context, and feeling more disparate. Thus, I also have varying degrees of cultural memberships and identifications, made more complex due to the intersections with my other identities (e.g., ideological, social, digital, and professional).

At work, we may engage with others in particular ways, think of the world in certain ways in line with the culture of the workplace, and conceive of ourselves in such a way that best conforms to the workplace's definitions of the optimal employee. At home, we may be a parent, a spouse, a sibling, a child, or a friend. With each of these identities, a distinct frame may exist. In some arenas, several can coexist simultaneously. Say for example, you work with your sibling and/or spouse, or you engage with colleagues socially; there may be intersections between and across different dimensions of self. With the digital age, these *I*-positions expound exponentially with the pluralization of online and digital identities. Yet a oneness still remains.

In our consciousness, with the multitude of voices of our digital interconnected world, a reaction occurs at their intersections. Where singularity meets multitude, a transaction and refraction of identity is possible. When we rest at night, when our heads hit the pillow and our minds drifts back across the day, we internalize and make sense of the day' smultiple events via a single consciousness, an awareness, or self-awareness, that we have continuously been constructing and pruning our entire lives. Sometimes, our beliefs may shift and newfound self-perception breathes into our minds. In our world today, individuals are apt to seamlessly drift back and forth between our multiple identities, constructing our worlds and our senses of self from the fragmented dimensions of our existence.

For example, my wife recently returned to work as a second grade teacher. For the past two years and three months, she has been a great mother to our beautiful toddler daughter. As new parents, it has been a learning process for all of us ever since her first evening when my daughter's cries reverberated the entire night, not knowing what sort of reality into which she had just unwittingly entered. But, whenever she cried, my wife would get out of bed, and walk over to her crib. I would go some times, but my wife did the majority of the caring. For the last two plus years, she has been a fantastic mother: caring, devoted, strategic (bringing diapers and snacks wherever we go, making sure there are bassinettes in motel rooms, etc.). Even though there are times when I can tell she is overextended from caring for our daughter, she has embraced full-heartedly her role as a mother. Her subjectivity, frame of reference, her *I*-position, was mainly that of a mother. Sure, she was also a wife, a daughter, and a friend, but she admitted to me that her motherhood mostly defined her sense of self during this time.

Last year, she returned to her previous *I*-position of an elementary school teacher. Although there are overlaps between these two roles, especially when one teaches young children, being a parent and being a teacher are different. For one, one does not get paid to be a parent, at least not in the traditional sense. You

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also can not get fired for doing a lousy job, though child protective services may intervene in the most extreme cases. Being a parent is also a role that morphs with each passing developmental stage of the child, whereas teachers often teach the same grade each year. Although instruction does come with being a parent, the focus is not on teaching material or formal assessment of learning. In any case, her identity, or intersection of identities (Crenshaw, 1989), has been dynamic, with new ones added and old ones discarded in the various contexts of her life, though they never fully leave, such as when my wife at times speaks to our daughter in her teacher voice. So, she still retains her teacher role and *I*-position, even as she has added her mother one, with each influencing the other.

In fact, Jung (2014) has voiced these different identities as archetypal manifestations within a dynamic Self. It is in this fluid mixture of voices composing one's sense of self that we find our identity. Uniformly categorizing people as sinners or saints misses out on the other times or situations when individuals assume other roles, other positions. Complexities exist in the multitudinous spaces of interpersonal interactions, which argue against the categorical branding or labeling of any one person. Globalization and the fluidity of personal identities in the present digital era have made one's sense of self in flux and less tethered to strict labels.

III. Literature Review

Individuals in today's world, particularly those who have multiple linguistic and cultural orientations, tend to have distinct frames of references, or what scholars would refer to as *I*-positions (Hermans, 2001). These are certain perspectives one may hold in different arenas in their lives. For bicultural people such as myself, we tend to feel "a 'dualistic' form of awareness where the *I* is strongly detached from specific positions" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.10). We are apt to assume different identities in the different social circumstances in which we are engaged. This line of thinking suggests that "globalization locates individuals and groups in fields of tensions between different cultural positions. Each of these positions represents a different or even conflicting cultural voice that requires multi-voiced emotion work, with one voice speaking in ways that are different from and even opposed to how the other voice speaks" (p.59).

In fact, global *I*-positioning relates to the constant tension between local and global forces, within and between our world and personal consciousness (Blommaert, 2010; Brandt & Clinton, 2002). That consciousness, that sense of who we are at any one time, is fluid and shifts with our dynamic world. That sense is also affected by the languages we utilize, the words we use to describe our experiences. Thus, our *I*-positions, especially global ones, are also influenced by the languages with which we negotiate a shifting present context. The subjective self is forever in dialogue with our context, engaged in a tussle with an "objective" world made up of different subjective realities with which we are not fully aware.

This friction can occur interpersonally as well. In our seemingly more contentious and divisive world, members of an ulterior group can be considered "foreigners within" (Ong, 1999, p.180) or worse yet, "enemy outsiders" (Abu El Haj, 2009, p.275). When the other*I*-position is vilified and cast as the villain, the complex nature of humanity, of the historical process of becoming, and the number of intersecting factors that make up this present moment is distilled to a singular emotion: hate. Our own perspective becomes antagonist to the unsanctioned other in our midst, and we seek to rid our world of the blemish. I believe the solution to this mistrust and misunderstanding is empathy and systemic thinking. Instead of partitioning awareness to our personal psyches, we need to consider problems from ulterior points of view. To accomplish this, we need to expand and aggrandize our *I*-positions to encompass those of others as well, especially those very distinct from us.

Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) have posited that processes" such as immigration, international exchanges, tourism, traveling, media-communication, border-crossings, and diaspora increase not only the number but also the difference and heterogeneity of positions in the self" (p.136).In fact, numerous scholars have produced works regarding the globalization of society (e.g., Blommaert, 2010, Abu El-Haj, 2009), including the sprawling of immigrant identities across the globe as a result (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 2000). Yet how long do migrants need to live somewhere to be considered a native? Is there even a native identity anymore, given the hybridity of cultures that exist in our world these days (Bhabha, 1994)?

Furthermore, a global psyche, where individuals identify with global perspectives is fast becoming the norm (Arnett, 2002). There are four main identities that may result from such mixing of cultures. The first of these is the most dialogic, the most equally distributed global identity, termed the *bicultural identity*, characterized by a part of their identity rooted in the local culture, whereas another equal part is aware of the global. The second identity is one of *identity confusion*, prevalent amongst youths today, wherein their local contexts are changing due to globalization, and they find themselves lost between cultures and worlds. There is the perpetual tension of global and local forces (Brandt & Clinton, 2002).

The third type of cultural identity is the identity of *emerging adulthood*, where individuals are lost in explorations of love and work, and are engaged in a

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prolonged search for identity (Arnett, 2002). This extension of adolescence may be a particular reality for some people in today's more complex world. Last is one of *self-selected cultures*, where individuals form in-groups with other similar cultured individuals. They may form niches within a majority culture, or may be part of the majority culture itself.

These identities are not set in stone, but are fluid, and may shift with the context of individuals' experiences. In fact, the terms globalization and localization are not mutually exclusive either, as evidenced by the notion of *glocalization* (Robertson, 1995), where the boundaries between the local and global are being blurred. Global products have local manifestations, instances affected by the local culture and context, to create a hybridized version. In this paradigm, many manifestations of humanity and culture is changed, even language, so that "the sociolinguistic world needs to be seen in terms of relatively autonomous complexes, obviously influenced by global factors but still firmly local" (Blommaert, 2010, p.180). The tension and dialogue between these two selves, the local *I*-position and a more global *I*-position, may cloud allegiances, or make them hybridized or alternating.

In essence, there is an abundance of "decentralizing movements that lead to an increasing multiplicity of the self but also of centralizing movements that permit an integration of the different parts of the self" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.5). This relates to Bakhtin's (1981) notion of centrifugal and centripetal flows in the development of language, wherein the former signifies the expansion outwards to diverse meanings, and the latter denotes a coming inwards to some standardized definition. It is this idea of the expansion of our more global persons and the simultaneous condensation into one that characterizes how many of us live in the world today. Bound by so many different inclinations, our regional consciousness mingles with the international, perhaps via the Internet, and the local and global either clash or synthesize and integrate.

Huynh, Nguyen, and Benet-Martínez (2011) researched this complexity of cultural identification using the Bicultural Identity Integration to conceptualize the cultural positionality of bicultural individuals. They identified four levels of integration: *integration* or memberships in both cultures, *assimilation*, which is membership in the host culture alone, *separation* or identification with the heritage culture only, and finally, *marginalization*, or the estrangement from both cultures. With these four classifications, we see varying degrees of cultural dialogue. In some of these levels, the majority culture is stronger, and in others the heritage culture dominates; in still others, neither is overly salient, or they can both manifest strongly.

In fact, Ong (2010) has troubled the notion of a singular citizenship in our globalized world today, suggesting the concept is flexible and that there is now a subaltern identity in many immigrant communities. When immigration has shifted the global cultural landscape, when pockets of "foreigners" exist in almost every cultural niche, a singular static "national identity" is called into question. For those immigrants trying to adapt and possibly acculturate into the mainstream culture, this dynamic can be an active resistance to a dominant hegemonic force. The identities of cultural minorities thus may be oppositional to the mainstream sanctioned culture and language.

Identity in the global age is difficult to classify categorically, as we are all a mix of varying degrees of cultural *I*-positions. And as a result of this fluidity of cultural space and increased "border-crossing[s], two positions ('I as proud' and 'I as ashamed') became prominent that were earlier in the background and did not play, in referring to her nationality, any significant role as long as she was in her home country" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.136). We may not be as rooted to our places of birth, but rather to the locale where we currently live or have dwelt the longest, or where we have the most visceral memories. Space and time can be traversed as the simultaneity of our past selves and alternate culture selves breeds a complex notion of being, where cultural hybridity ignites a dialogical conflagration of impulses as we intermittently empathize with one, and then with another.

IV. Theoretical Perspective

Hubert Hermans is a Dutch psychologist influenced by the works of Mikhail Bakhtin. Expanding on Bakhtin's (1981) notion of heteroglossia and multiple subject positions, and the dialogic nature of their dynamics, Hermans coined the notion of *I*-positions to describe the different positional ties people assume in different situations. He describes the interactions between these distinct identities within a person as a dialogue. Dialogue in this sense is most closely related to Bakhtin's understanding, in which an entity encounters another, an alterity, and from that encounter, both are changed whereby they become hybridized with the other. Bakhtin (1981) describes dialogue as "this give-and-take" (p.314), this "mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance" (p.358). With each syllable we utter, a unique dynamic concoction of our hybrid experiences are birthed and rebirthed, each affecting the next utterance.

In today's evermore global community, people's subjectivities and senses of self are becoming more complex, as on "the level of the self, this interconnection is expressed as a movement between positioning (as participant in a global discourse) and counter-positioning (as representative of a local community)"

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(Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.23, parenthetical in original). In other words, there is a tug and pull between the local context of our more immediate space and the disembodied, hypothetical global space we anticipate (Brandt & Clinton, 2001).

As global citizens, we engage in alterities, whichas" a central feature of well-developed dialogue, is a necessity in a world in which individuals and cultures are confronted with differences that they may not understand initially but that may become comprehensible and meaningful as the result of a dialogical process" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.31). In this case, cultures outside and within an individual are apt "to engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures" (Bakhtin, 1986, p.7).

As cultural insiders of some cultures, while being outsiders of others, or perhaps even as external insiders (people born in one culture but matured or live in another), we are a confluence of culture memberships (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). In current times, it is the" recognition of otherness in the self [that] is one of the aspects of the post-modern self that is of central importance to the dialogical self….As involved in dialogical relationships with the actual other and the other-in-the-self, the alterity of the other is acknowledged when she is seen, approached, and appreciated from her own point of view, history, and particularity of experience" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.108, parenthetical added).

This "tug and pull" occurs at all dimensions of our being, from our daily trips to the local grocery to buy strawberries to the online news article about the plight of migrant workers laboring inhumane hours to pick those same strawberries which we just purchased. We realize that these delicious red berries symbolize some global injustice rife within an oppressive geopolitical context. This tugging and pulling also illustrates the dialogic dynamic, where there is tension and discord that presages some inchoate understanding. When we eat our sweet and savory strawberry, we also feel the sweat-laden fields of its origins as we flow back and forth in our cultural identifications.

We can at once be the consumer enjoying a ripe strawberry in our air-conditioned living rooms and that undocumented migrant farm worker picking the strawberry in a vast field in southern California, anxious about political realities and the conditions of their families back in Latin America. Hermans (2001) believes in "a discontinuity of the self" (p.246), where the dialogical self is conceived of as "a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous *I*-positions" (248). These selves engage with one another, as well as the outside world, the outer and inner cultures that surround it, being changed by, while also changing others. It is in this discontinuity, this fragmentation of the self, that the modern world has helped manifest more readily. In this context, we may assume what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as a dialogic "double-voicedness" (p. 185), or simultaneously or alternatively heralding two distinct points of view. Perspectives in a simultaneously increasingly interconnected and increasingly dissimilar world illustrate the phenomenon of feeling at the same time a part of a community and estranged from it.

Individuals in today's complex world are apt to "develop a bicultural identity: part of their identity is rooted in their local culture, and another part is attuned to the global situation. Or they may develop a hybrid identity" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.27). Double-voicedness and hybridity via dialogue between parties results from an encounter of distinct *I*-positions, or the "unmasking of another's speech [resulting in] a typical double-accented, double-styled *hybrid construction*" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.304, parenthetical added, emphasis in original). The hybridization of perspectives drives the development of new *I*-positions, and humanity's collective cognitive advancement. Similar to genetics in biology, the cross pollination of perspectives yields hybridization in the next generation of thought, similar to, yet distinct from, its parents. Also, the more diverse the preponderance, the greater the chances that one of those ideas may be useful, just like the more diverse the genes, the greater the chances for survival because the chances for adaptation to diverse contexts increases.

This is what we need in our world today, greater diversity in thinking and voices, or what Bakhtin would call heteroglossia (1981) or polyphony (1984). I hear more and more politicians and television personalities denounce those who do not concur with them, but I feel it is through that friction of perspectives, that coming together of diverse points of views that meaning and understanding develops. What those iconoclasts desire is monoglossia, a unitary perspective that aligns with their own beliefs, which in actuality may be unknowingly hybridized themselves. Genuine dialogue and the resultant heteroglossia from a centrifugal flow of ideas is necessary to protect against dangerous one-sided views of reality, where only one *I*-position is deemed "right" or "worthy."

Being double-voiced does not solely mean being bilingual, or even bicultural. Double-voicedness carries with it multiple, dueling or parallel perspectives regarding the world which may correspond to their split orientation to certain strata or partitions of society. Indeed, "double-voicedness in prose is prefigured in language itself (in authentic metaphors, as well as in myth), in language as a social phenomenon that is becoming in history, socially stratified and weathered in this process of becoming" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.326, parenthetical in original). Language, in a sense, can be

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thought of more than solely a means to communicate, but a social entity that is dynamic and complex, simultaneously affecting, and morphing with, both its source and its context (Blommaert, 2010). In this sense, being double-voiced carries with it social weight in our world. Hybridity has long been the norm, even as some struggle to whittle our diversity to some perceived homogeneity.

Methods

For this paper, I conducted a literature review of some seminal work on the areas of globalization and identity, and reflected on these texts within the vein of dialogic theories. I also accessed my own personal experiences with globalization, whether travel to different places or my own sense of cultural identity as a Chinese American in such a culturally plural setting as the US, thereby providing an auto ethnographic highlight or context for my contentions (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). In this sense, I intersected prior research, notable theoretical postulations, and my own personal experiences to author new insights or perspectives on identity in the global era.

I read books and journal articles to conjure my own ideas about globalization. I used both my personal experiences and my knowledge of global history and politics to transact and make sense of those studies and theories. In effect, this article is a product of self-reflection and an attempt to overview others' ideas regarding our interconnected world today. My own cultural experiences in the US, China, and around the world, contextualize, highlight and personalize these ruminations.

Thus, I utilized an inductive approach to knowledge, as I used specific cases and examples to postulate larger theoretical implications (Saunders, Lewis, & Thorn hill, 2012). I identified patterns and consistencies between the literature, my background knowledge regarding this issue, as well as my personal experiences as a transnational and culturally hybrid person to synthesize an understanding of global identity in the current era. The case for the fluidity of cultural identification is not new, yet the synthesis of dialogic theory, global history, and personal anecdotes presages a new focused first-personlook at identity in the current interconnected era.

V. Results

When Europeans termed the Americas "the New World," it was only new from the perspective of those Europeans. From their collective *I*-position, the newly discovered continent upset their understanding of the world, and overstepped its prior boundaries. Suddenly, many of those who were there already were often deemed "savages," uncivilized barbarians who did not deserve to exist in that space. Those who were once insiders of a land were suddenly cast as enemy outsiders. This ownership of space gives territories powers beyond the dust which vails these lands (Soja, 1989). In essence, space is given immense power, as lines in the sand demarcate different lived realities. This was literally the case with Native American reservations, where the habitable space of an entire group of people was cordoned off, excluded from full-membership in the "new" nation.

Political realities in our world currently reveal hidden schemas of reality deemed to be the "Truth" by some people: men need to be in charge, Christianity is the only righteous religion, Whites need to stop the minoritization of the US (one way is to stop "illegal" immigration from non-White states), etc. These contentions constitute a way for some in our society to stand up for themselves as others gain rights for *themselves*. In today's new reality, many different new and hybridized *I*-positions result. Currently, Americans not only consist of different races and cultural backgrounds, but within those subgroups, new hybridization cause those traditional cultural orientations to be troubled (eg., Fong & Chuang, 2004, Irizarry, 2007, Mirzoeff, 2014). Not only are we more aware of the other, at times, we are even embodying their frames of reference. This may even go beyond compassion or even empathy, to an actual assumption or adoption of the other's subjective, cultural *I*-position. The white president of NAACP who claimed and assumed a Black identity is a recent example of this cross-ethnic cultural identity borrowing (Blow, 2015).

In a globalized world community, a place without boundaries that partition our national or racial identities, our senses of self become dynamic and morphing, our national and regional identities hybridized with a slew of others. But, national identities have always been fluid anyhow, and some of us who identify with certain nations are often not as seen as fully representative of that nation. Particularly in a diverse nation as the US, identities are often hybridized, as in Arab-American, Asian-American, and Hispanic-American. For example, I can remember an African American boy living within a community of undocumented Hispanic American immigrants who learned to speak a little Spanish, but spent most of his free time reading Manga comic strips. His world consisted of different languages and perspectives (African American, Latin American, Spanish, Japanese, etc.). In different contexts, he simultaneously, or alternatively, assumed all these cultural identities, these "alterities" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p.31), which are hybridized with his own familial, heritage African American culture and the dominant Southern White American larger context of his life. His sense of regional/national and cultural identity is thus apt to be plural and heterogeneous.

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But, these hybridized subcultures often lead such individuals to adopt a subaltern identity (Kaltmeier & Thies, 2011; Ong, 2010), an unsanctioned undercurrent of society that is largely invisible or inconsequential to the rest of society. These individuals often lack sufficient voice to author their validity as Americans; yet, perhaps they can, instead of changing themselves to be more American, change the notion of Americanism to encompass their own identities. Why is it that those first "Americans" of European origin never had to worry about acculturation, but rather appropriation, yet successive generations had to assimilate? There needs to be an attempt to accommodate the diverse *I*-positions inherent in society.

It is truly remarkable the different cultural *I*-positions individuals are able to assume in today's world. But, what does this portend for their futures in our world, or the future of society? I contend that each of us have always been hybridized, that from the days of the first "American" settlers in North America who brought with them those British, French, Dutch, and Spanish cultural, spiritual, political values and languages encountering diverse Native American languages, cultures and customs. The United States has long been an eclectic and living hybrid. The different positional ties that have since landed on our shores and been brewed in our society have even more diversified this locale and given breath to new ways of perceiving and naming the world.

VI. New Selves

I remember in middle school, I went to South Africa with my momone winter break. The country had just ended apartheid, and although there was no longer a formal partition of the races, there was still de facto segregation between the Whites, the Blacks, and the Coloreds (mixed race of Blacks and Whites), as well as other minority ethnicities (East Asians, South Asians, etc.). We stayed with a family who identified as Colored, and we danced, ate, and laughed together for the entire month, speaking English, Afrikaans, and Xhosa. The trip was impactful because it taught me that families were all alike no matter the race, nationality, or language. They laughed together during meals and scolded naughty children the same way. I especially remember dancing with the family, and trying to show off my dance skills, but being thoroughly humiliated by a five year old boy doing a flawless Michael Jackson impression. During that trip, there were various intersections of so many different cultural nuances.

So, what does this plural, heterogeneous blend of identities or perspectives mean for the world today? Can we no longer label ourselves and those around us into neat racial, cultural, national, ethnic, geographical, spiritual, and ideological categories? When those categories that have for millennia defined us, or rather confined us, into neat dimensions of acceptable behavior, I believe those labels do a disservice to the individual, and to those around him or her. When we no longer allow national or ethnic stereotypes to define an individual, when we see people and our students as potential instead of liability, when we learn others' languages, and not just expect others to learn ours, then we will have gained a level of cultural empathy and acceptance required for the twenty-first century global world (Zhu, 2011).

Cultural empathy means more than liking another culture's food or people, but an appreciation for how they see and name their world. The term means keeping names (for places, specific foods, select people, etc.) in their original vernacular instead of translating it into a recognizable, familiar ring. When we do the latter, we anoint what we think about another's reality *the* reality for everyone. For example, when I brought my US friends to China, they were actually surprised at the absence of fortune cookies after our meals. In reality, fortune cookies are an American invention and not a part of the dining experience in China (Lobel, 2017). We need to remember that when we practice cultural appropriation without sufficiently understanding that other culture, we may misrepresent or alter perceptions of that culture.

When we rename something from another culture, we are also changing the name, so it is influenced by and becomes hybridized with the local culture. I remember once in China I was looking for Walmart, which I knew was nearby. I asked a policewoman where one was, and she was confused. She was befuddled as to what place I was referring to. When finally she understood, she corrected my American pronunciation into one composed by similar phonemes corresponding to certain Chinese characters. Not only was the name Sinicized, what the store sold was also different varieties of what was sold in Walmart in the US. For example, their food section was a lot more developed, with a slew of half-cooked products that were much spicier than their counterparts in the US.

Not only was my notion of the US different in China, perhaps as a reaction to Chinese perceptions of the country, but my own national/cultural identity was also troubled. Even as I felt as I represented the US culture, most Chinese people did not see me that way. To them, I was just another Chinese person, and so my lack of etiquette or cultural awareness and my Chinese illiteracy was due to personal flaws. Even though I felt American in many respects, I realized I needed to act more Chinese because no one would see me as a foreigner, and thus not excuse my cultural impasse.

Part of my identity is constructed for me by the world and the other part is what I give to it by my assumption. Just as meaning via reading is an interaction and justification between the author and the

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reader (Rosenblatt, 1994), so too is identity in this globalized world a dialectical product between the producer and the receiver. In the global era, identities are no longer contained by set categories, but individuals may harbor infinite positions on the spectrum of cultural identification with a limitless algorithm of degrees of identification with particular majority cultures and their local ones. Identities in our global world have become fluid and transient, even as many continue to see the world in inertial terms of set nationalities, races, genders, and classes.

Even if we have never left the country, we are still apt to assume other national identities and *I*-positions. For example, there are many people in the US of all different races who love the Rastafarian identity of Jamaican origin. They may listen to Reggae music, wear dreadlocks, don a tricolor woven hat, and smoke cannabis. What they experience is a transnational hybrid identity (Vertovec, 2001), as these individuals assume another culture's customs and traditions, perhaps adapted to their personal preferences, even as they simultaneously participate in their own heritage.

VII. Discussion

Given the globalization of cultural preferences, the idea of cultural authenticity and fidelity becomes an issue (Warikoo, 2011). When particular cultures, or subsets of cultures, adapt to different settings, when they become hybridized by local distinctions, they are changed from their origins. Racial, cultural, and linguistic identities can be borrowed by outsiders of those identities, and the enactment of such conventions becomes tainted by idiosyncratic tendencies. So, as the global world remixes the different dimensions of itself, like its foods, its music, its art, its customs, and its languages, a hybridity of time and space, a confluence of cultures will result. But, the other side of this dialogue, the pulling in, or centripetal forces of tribalism and localism will no doubt grow equally strongly. This force may be a natural inward looking, centripetal reaction to the centrifugal forces expanding our understanding and empathy. The world is an ever-emerging picture, constantly filled with static, every blurry moment only seemingly clear in hindsight. Every phenomenon, every political perspective, is hybridized between some universal notion and the particular localities of its existence. It is only when we realize the blurred dialogic nature of our languages, thoughts and identities that we stop vilifying others, that we see each other as interrelated, interconnected pieces of humanity.

For example, I can remember on a study abroad trip to the Netherlands in college, when I met a Dutch girl named Joke (pronounced Yo-ka) whose favorite novel was also *The Catcher in the Rye* and favorite musical artist was also Tupac. That synergy of literary and musical preferences connected us, though first languages, heritage cultures, geographical space, gender, and race separated us. I felt an immediate connection with her, how art can transcend so many differences to conjure a common humanity. Our distinct positionalities, the multifarious interlocking perspectives and idiosyncratic experiences unique to every individual, offer an almost infinite variation of glances. Our shared preferences somehow intersected our distinctions to a commonality. A confluence of perspectives engenders something deeper, perhaps a more profound realization about the world, such as my one in the Netherlands.

More than simple transnational or hybrid identities, individuals in the modern age are liable to experience varying degrees of cultural memberships that shifts in the various contexts of their lives. I want to question the idea of set national and cultural identities, and instead posit a new consciousness where there are just degrees of being. Any person in this global era is able to assume any others' cultural propensities. Such empathy can be approximated via reading a book, watching a movie or podcast, or listening to a song; but, the most veracious introduction is visiting that culture and spending an extended amount of time there with its people, getting to know all the nuances of a place, which is happening more and more with the ease of international travel.

Just as we know more about each other, we can also choose which of others' positions to extol and which to detract from, which to encompass their being and which to dismiss as trivial. If one spends enough time somewhere other than their country of origin, she or he may be able to deconstruct their prior prejudices and what is conveyed via the media, and tease out the nuances. For example, because I learned about the Second World War, I was hesitant about the German people, assuming their core was racist and callous. But, when I went there, I found most Germans to be full of smiles and kindness. Once on the Euro-Rail in Germany, I was desperately in need of using the lavatory for which there was a long line, but was hesitant to ask due to my presumption of the nature of the German people. Yet, the German lady in front of me in line, noticing the grimace on my face, smiled, and asked, "Emergency?"I emphatically nodded, and she promptly yielded her place in line for me.

That one act of kindness upset my prior biases against all German people, and showed me that there were compassionate and kind people everywhere. I always remind myself of that encounter when I find myself prone to stereotypically branding any group of people due to preconceptions or isolated experiences. I believe that as people of a global world, we need to remind ourselves of the diversity and vibrant distinctions that make up this land, but also of the common core of humanity that tethers all of us. We can all appreciate certain literature and art because they address some

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universality of the human experience; yet, at the same time, we each personalize that experience with the tangents of our specific individual and cultural/linguistic understandings, so our notions of that artifact is a hybridized product of our local experience of some finite global reality.

Even as we nurture our global selves, we react with a centripetal local pull because we need to see ourselves in this vast landscape, to put our personal stamp on this world. This is the essence of dialogue and the resultant hybridity, because when we see ourselves in the other and the other in ourselves, we are engaged in a tussle of perspectives. Empathy and true compassion can result because we can assume the viewpoint of another. We no longer see the world in terms of "us versus them," but one facet of ourselves versus another facet. We no longer grieve over sending aid to others in faraway lands because we see ourselves in others.

VIII. Globalized Selves

In this global era, we can no longer be tied to one language, to one cultural perspective, to one "truth." We need to recognize we are living hybrid products of multitudinous "foreign" influences. Geopolitical conflicts and military "defense" need to be reframed into a process of truly understanding the other's perspective and rationale for their stance, rather than impulsively reacting with armed force. All the wars of the past have been the result of the refusal of one group's collective *I*-position to empathize with the *I*-position of another.

Platforms such as the United Nations were created with the express purpose of encountering local or national *I*-positions on the global stage. However current political realities have caused select national leaders to flout those international initiatives by pandering solely to their base who care only about their personal local interests. In the name of nationalism, patriotism, and self-interest, they have partitioned *I*-positions so not only does the local have nothing to do with the global, but the two are in direct opposition to each other. Sending aid to other nations will bankrupt our own. Caring about others' realities clouds concern for our own.

This type of thinking is monoglossic and one dimensional (Bakhtin, 1981), because in this simple paradigm from a single perspective, there is one winner and there is one loser. But, reality is rarely so simple. In global conflicts, whether militaristic, economic, or cultural/political, it is becoming increasingly harder to tease out a true winner and a true loser exactly because we are becoming more globally connected. For example, in a trade dispute, we can raise tariffs on imports of foreign merchandise to aid domestic industries, but at the same time, prices increase at home due to the loss of the cheaper products built from those foreign parts, mediating those profits. As another example, stemming "illegal" immigration may sound great for an economy where these individuals "steal" US jobs, but again, prices of produce increase because we lose the cheap labor required to harvest those crops, offsetting the economic gains.

A global network of nations, interconnected by economics, languages, and cultures makes traditional views of international affairs obsolete. Instead, we need to transcend tribalism and one-sided insular thinking to consider how we can benefit the entire network, and not just help only ourselves. Assisting others does not mean hurting ourselves when we can conjoin disparate *I*-position into an amalgamated *We*-position that encompasses others' inclinations as well. Indeed, *We*-positions cultivate empathy, such as the plight of the Mexican migrant on her or his journey into the US, the sacrifices he or she makes every day. When we learn others' language, we learn how certain words in that vernacular, like *frontera* which means *the border* but also has the added definition of *the frontier*, can change and challenge our perspective of a global issue.

In essence, *We*-positions take into account other people's points of view, and encounter those perspectives with our own to make a hybridized product that is double voiced and heteroglossic. This can best be exemplified by a classroom where students are apt to bring diverse ideas and compose distinct papers. A dialogic teacher in this context can validate each student's point of view while also conjuring a class direction for the discourse, engaged in a simultaneous pushing out and pulling in of voices to assist in learning. The collective voice of the students becomes a *We*-position for the class. What we need as a world is an embodiment of this tension, this multifarious way of thinking where perspectives pluralize and synthesize hybridity and multivoicedness. No longer are notions and ideals tied to one particular group of people with their own specific cultural past, but we share a human experience that transcends specific heritage realities to one composed of our commonality as human beings.

This does not mean relinquishing all local heritages and traditions, because then the heteroglossia incited by globalism would be amiss. This does mean being open to others' languages and truths even as we take pride and partake in our own. In the global world, when our ways of categorizing this reality have become so pluralized, we need to understand that helping others is helping ourselves in the long run in the larger picture. We need to escape short-sighted thinking that limits our senses of selves to just our own corporeal existence or those of our immediate surroundings. An us-versus-them mentality will only partition consciousness and realities, attempting in futility to cordon off intercultural identifications and dam the steady stream of cultural flow.

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Instead we need to validate the rich tapestry created by the multicolored, multivoiced society induced by globalization and connectivity. We need to tease out the appetitive or valuable aspects of any given culture, and mesh it with our idiosyncratic selves, bringing to it our own tint, our own signatures. In this culturally plural landscape, there are multitudinous ways of knowing and naming things, where designated labels that used to contain and restrict become fluid and adaptive to the idiosyncrasies of the new world.

IX. Balance of the Local

However, I do not want to portray the sense that the world is now totally globally conscious, and that antagonism has ceased to occur to various cultural minorities. Scholars have noted the aversion some feel towards the minoritization of certain locales (e.g.,Davis, Goidel, Lipsmeyer, Whitten, & Young, 2019). The host culture may be less welcoming to the diversification in certain cases. For example Warikoo (2011) points out that there are two main types of racial discrimination towards outsiders today: large-scale societal from adults and within schools from peers. She posits that for Afro-Caribbeans, there is larger systemic racism based on historical and macrolevel forces that paint them as deleterious in society. Conversely, she also notes that for Asians, in particular Indians both in the UK and in the US, there is a negative portrayal at schools as lacking style or toughness. As a consequence, while many Asians reject and flee their ethnic label, Afro-Caribbeans in turn react with a strengthening of their ethnic and racial identities.

So, as a counterbalance to the diversification of ethnic and racial identities and culture, there are two main responses. One is to distance oneself from that minority identity, gravitating to an ulterior more sanctioned, yet borrowed one. The other is to turn inwards, to embrace that identity in spite of the external pressures against it. Both reactions are not dialogic, for they either turn outwards or turn inwards, and not do both simultaneously. For example, I can remember trying to escape my Chinese self in high school, refusing to speak Chinese or learn about the culture, and never letting my friends in on that side of me. I cordoned off that part of myself in fear of shame.

But, if I had the strength and confidence at the time, I could have held a more dialogic relationship between my two cultural identities. I could have seen the strength in both and not looked down on one as inferior. The local realities of the world may offset some of the global forces that seek to expand and aggrandize our sense of self and awareness of others. Without the simultaneous pushing out and pulling in of myself, that constant tension, I would not have developed the met aperspective to accept and embrace my own culturally plural self.

X. Conclusion

In specific cultural contexts, thus, ethnic and cultural plurality, and the stereotypes that they conjure, results in different levels of identification/assumption with the various cultural identities. When cultural identities have limitless formulae for their mixing, while the degree of identification to a particular identity by the individual is likewise infinite, a person's cultural identity becomes less a set label than a node on a two dimensional continuum. We are all an idiosyncratic blend of different allegiances, privy to countless stories and truths.

In spite of globalization and plurality, it is important not forget our personal selves, to not relinquish our individualism in the face of the tsunami of a global tide. Yet, I do not believe the two tendencies are mutually exclusive, but rather I conceive of globalism as a conglomeration of local tendencies that is swayed by and adapted to each individual locale. As evidenced by the effect of differentiated local tastes of a global product, whenever a global product encounters a local context, that product is changed.

Just as my experience of Thailand was a certain way in which I remembered certain places, people, and experiences pertinent to my own identity, the experience of a global artifact locally personalizes that product so it conjures personal meaning. What is important is the recognition that all our experiences of the world are unique, and our notions of this complex world need to be plural to capture the experiential realities of a heteroglossic world. When we hear and see multiplicities, we can think beyond the monoglossic self-confirming biases of our own cultures to a more veracious reality. We learn to truly be a part of this world.

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