THE GLOBALIZATION PHENOMENON IN HUXLEY'S NOVEL *BRAVE NEW WORLD*

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This paper analyses Aldous Huxley's novel Brave New World which depicts a future society so devoted to capitalist ideals that its cultural hero is Henry Ford. I want to emphasize the importance of the movement of people, goods, services and information by studying the way in which cultural identity is affected by globalization. Huxley's society is devoted to hedonistic pleasure (the ideology is very much opposed to that of conventional religion), but its official drive for universal happiness is just a subtle form of tyranny and subjugation. The purpose of this project is to observe the way in which globalization has an impact on changing selves and on the different ways in which it became possible to represent ourselves and the way in which Huxley approaches this issue. How do we represent ourselves and what is the role of representation in the formation and presentation of identity? Do we live in a society where materialism is all and the past is insubstantial and immaterial?

Keywords: cultural identity, globalization, dystopia, ideology, the role of technology

Aldous Huxley is a complex personality of the British literary world. He had a thorough cultural knowledge partly due to his family which exceeded in domains such as science, medicine, arts, and last but not least literature. His decision to combine science with literature seems a normal thing when his heritage is taken into account. Born in 1894 in Surrey, England, Huxley's father, Leonard Huxley, was editor of Cornhill magazine, a literary journal that published authors such as George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning. His mother, Julia Arnold, was the niece of the poet Matthew Arnold, and her sister, Mary Humphrey Ward, was a popular novelist in her own right. Huxley's grandfather was the famous biologist Thomas Henry Huxley, Charles Darwin's disciple and protégé. Huxley began writing professionally in 1920 for various magazines, and published his first novel, *Chrome Yellow*, in 1920 at the age of twenty-six. His satirical voice was well-received, and went on to publish several novels, producing *Point Counter Point* in 1928, establishing himself as a best-selling author. Although it has not been Huxley's most enduring novel, many critics believe *Point Counter Point* to be his most ambitious and successful work. It was on the heels of this success that Huxley produced *Brave New World*. His perception of the world as reflected in his novels was profoundly affected right from the beginning by the atmosphere of the age in which he lived, by his family heritage, and by his life experience. He was born toward the end of the Victorian age, a period when vast industrialization brought mass unemployment, economic crisis, but also technological progress and national self-confidence.

The conflict between the new sciences and religion continued, and traditional moral values were increasingly questioned. Huxley was to come to manhood during the catastrophic experience of World War I, and he was to write his first successful works during the turbulent postwar era of social unrest characterized as the Roaring Twenties. Young Huxley's association with his family's scientific and literary knowledge was to contribute to a fascination with modern progress but also a sober recognition of the demands for social reform. The models for the conflicting views that he came to question surrounded him from an early age. Queen Victoria's rule in England (1837-1901) had been characterized by a rapid

growth in industry, an enormous increase in the urban population, greater agricultural production, and improved medical techniques. Great Britain seemed destined to continue as the leading industrial nation of the world.

In 1930 Huxley bought a small house in Sanary, in southern France. It was here that he wrote one of his most celebrated novels, *Brave New World* published in 1932, an anti-utopia or dystopia that depicted an unpleasant vision of the future in which science and technology are used to suppress human freedom. In his novel Huxley bitterly attacks the technological innovations in the movies which enable the hypnotized observer to participate passively in the emotions being shown on the screen. In one of his essays *Modern Folk Poetry* he questions the effects of modern technologies:

> Can it be that the standard of intelligence is lower now than it was three hundred years ago? Have newspapers and cinemas and now the wireless telephone conspired to rob mankind of whatever sense of reality, whatever power of individual questioning and criticism he once possessed? I do not venture to answer. (Huxley "Essays New and Old" 94)

The criticism he has leveled against the movies he has also directed against newspapers. He finds them filled with violence, nonsensical information, gossip, and carnality. In addition, he accuses them of perhaps even a greater sin: their implant, by means of advertising, their readers' minds with the soul-decaying credo that only those entertainments are valuable which are mechanized, standardized, and paid for: "(…) newspapers are always suggesting that a good time can be enjoyed only by those who take what is offered them by entertainment manufacturers." (Huxley "The Olive Tree" 131). He finds that the "Dickensian Christmas at Home" has now been replaced by an economically motivated campaign to introduce people to find joy not in themselves but in mechanized entertainment. The result has been that people have lost their creativity and desire to search for more enduring values of life. They have become robots reacting mechanically to external stimuli. And yet despite people's feverish anxiety to have "a good time", Huxley concludes that they are still basically bored:

> The prevailing boredom – for oh, how desperately bored in spite of their grim determination to have a Good Time, the majority of pleasure-seekers really are! – the hopeless weariness, infect me. Among the lights, the alcohol, the hideous jazz noises, and the incessant movement I feel myself sinking into deeper despondency. By comparison with a night club, churches are positively gay. If ever I want to make marry in public, I go where marry-making is occasional and the merriment, therefore, of genuine quality; I go where feasts come rarely. (Huxley "Do What You Will" 204)

In addition to criticizing the popular arts such as the movies, radio, newspapers, he also reproaches the tendency of women to make themselves only physically beautiful. In his essay *The Beauty Industry*, found in the volume *Music at Night*, he reminds us that it is much more important to have a beautiful soul than a beautiful skin. In spite of the millions of dollars that women spend on cosmetics, lotions, and other products of the beauty industry, many of them, he observes, still look bored and insensitive.

Brave New World is an important text of the dystopian fiction which also shows the massive impact of the globalization process on the identities of humans. It portrays a hedonistic future society in which individuals spend most of their time searching for instant happiness through drugs, sex and mind-numbing multisensory entertainment like the popular "feelies" that are always broadcast so that the minds and senses of the citizens are always occupied. The emphasis on pleasure in Huxley's future society masks a great lack of individual liberty. Indeed, the drugs, sex, and popular culture are intended primarily to divert attention from social problems and to prevent individuals from developing any sort of strong feelings that might lead them to challenge official authority. Clearly, then, Huxley's dystopia works not the overt exercise of power that characterized the reigns of Hitler and Stalin (and the dystopias they inspired) but through the more subtle manipulations that inform modern burgeois society in the West. The central cultural hero of the society from *Brave New World* is Henry ford, who is seen almost like a god.

Meanwhile, the economic system presented in the novel is an exaggerated version of capitalism in which new products must constantly be developed and marketed to stimulate both production and consumption and thereby to keep the economy functioning. All aspects of life in this society are designed to increase consumption – even children are only allowed to play games that require complicated equipment. Materialistic self-indulgence in this hedonistic society is openly encouraged because those who are indulgent will consume more and thus keep the economy rolling. Not surprisingly, this consumerist attitude is conveyed largely through advertising-style slogans, among the most prominent of which are phrases like "The more stitches the less riches." and "Ending is better than mending." (Huxley *Brave New World* 34; 79); any items that need repair are routinely discarded so that they can be replaced by new ones. Mending old goods rather than buying new ones is considered highly antisocial. In our present society things are not that different and there is also a tendency towards a consumerist attitude which makes it very difficult for a person to have his or her own original identity.

In many ways the technology from the fictional society is highly advanced. Perhaps the most striking use of technology is the advanced techniques of genetic engineering, techniques that lead in this highly stratified and class-oriented society literally to the assembly line production of human infants, designed according to the strict specification of the class to which they belong. The "Alphas" - members of the highest class who will occupy positions that require advanced intelligence – are thus endowed with high IQs, while low-class citizens like "Deltas" or "Epsilons" are produced with low intelligence but high physical strength and endurance, so that they can perform routine and dull tasks. So the citizens of Huxley's bourgeois dystopia lack real individual identities, despite the myth of individualism that informs bourgeois society. Instead, they exist principally as specimens of their class.

Moreover, this custom design of citizens for social stability goes beyond their initial genetic makeup. Much of the society's technological capability is directed into a massive program of indoctrination designed to make them content with the roles that have been designated for them. Recalling, the crowning moment of Pavlov in Soviet Russia, the citizens of Huxley's dystopia are conditioned to react automatically without thought or feeling. Both thought and feeling are strongly discouraged in this society, and much of the technology of this dystopia goes into the development and production of goods designed to promote a

hedonistic pursuit of pleasure that will prevent the buildup of potentially subversive political energies. Advanced contraceptives are free to all so that the citizenry may engage in unrestraint sexual activity, sex being here a sort of opiate of the masses. And most of the citizens spend a great deal of time under the influence of more literal opiates, also produced and distributed by the government. In this dystopia the official drug of choice is "soma", which has "all the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of their defects" (Huxley *Brave New World* 42). The universally prescribed soma helps to keep the population in a happy stupor, incapable of mounting or even conceiving any assault on the status quo:

> The daily Soma ration was an insurance against personal maladjustment, social unrest and the spread of subversive ideas. Religion, Karl Marx declared, is the opium of the people. In the Brave New World this situation was reversed. Opium, or rather Soma, was the people's religion. Like religion, the drug had power to console and compensate, it called up visions of another, better world, it offered hope, strengthened faith and promoted charity. (Huxley *Brave New World Revisited* 156)

Maintaining the status quo is the central motivation of the World Controllers who rule this future society, despite the ostensible emphasis on change that fuels the consumerist economy. Part of the conditioning of the citizens of this society thus involves a deep-seated revulsion toward history and the historical process. Speaking to a group of schoolchildren, World Controller Mustapha Mond reminds them of "Our Ford's" declaration "History is bunk." (Huxley *Brave New World* 23). He then goes on to explain the official rejection of the past that constitutes such an important element of the official ideology of this Fordian society:

> He waved his hand; and it was as though, with an invisible feather whisk, he had brushed away a little dust, and the dust was Harappa, was Ur of the Chaldees; some spider-webs, and they were Thebes and Babylon and Cnossos and Mycenae. Whisk, whisk – and where was Odysseus, where was Job, where were Jupiter and Gotama and Jesus? Whisk – and those specks of antique dirt called Athens and Rome, Jerusalem and the Middle Kingdom – all were gone. (Huxley *Brave New World* 24)

The past is insubstantial and immaterial, and therefore irrelevant to this society in which materialism is all. In nowadays society globalization is frequently categorized by different dimensions, such as economic and political processes, social relations, the role of technologies or its environmental impact. Discussions of identity in relation to globalization has often focused on the demise of the importance of the nation state or of local cultures in shaping identities, and especially on the role of new technologies in opening up possibilities for the formation of identity. At the basis of this issue are questions about the extent to which it can be possible for people to rethink their identities and exercise any control over defining themselves, in the context of the all-encompassing forces of globalization. The scale and scope of the phenomena associated with globalization suggests that there are imbalances of power and that there might be a much stronger weighting in favor of the agency and control of some parts of the world and on the part of some protagonists. Some debates have focused on the imbalance between the local and the global and there are conceptualizations of the local global tension framed in the language of winners and losers. Huxley's dystopian world is clearly divided into the Savage Reservation and the World State.

David Held, the British political theorist, posits an alternative to the extremes of globalizers who see globalization as imposing enormous economic and political changes, and the opposing traditionalist view that argues that far from being a massive, new phenomenon, globalization has a long history and recent changes have not completely undermined state powers. His view supports the notion that:

> "Globalization is creating new economic, political and social circumstances which are serving to transform state powers and the context in which states operate…politics is no longer and can no longer be, simply based on nation-states." (Held 3).

These new circumstances, however, make people forget the past values. Huxley argues, through his character Mond, why old works like the plays of Shakespeare have been banned in the dystopian society. It is simply because they are old, and particularly because they are old and beautiful. "Beauty's attractive", Mond explains, "and we don't want people attracted by old things. We want them to like the new ones" (Huxley *Brave New World* 168). These new things, after all, are produced by the current system and therefore reflect the official ideology of that system. They are, as Mond goes on to say, "nice tame animals", as opposed to the potentially disruptive effects of Shakespeare or other old things produced outside the ideology of the current system.

As the book's title might suggest, Shakespeare is a central presence in *Brave New World,* which draws much of its energy from a confrontation between the values represented by this future dystopia and those represented by the traditional past, personified by Shakespeare. Like many dystopian fictions, *Brave New World* takes much of its plot from the conflict between the demands of a conformist society and the desire of a nonconformist individual. In this case the nonconformist is Bernard Marx, an alpha-plus intellectual whose individual quirts are attributed by most of his acquaintances to an error in his genetic makeup – perhaps due to an accidental in injection of alcohol into the test tube containing his amniotic fluid. Marx, however, is not politically sophisticated. He is not even a conscious rebel – he wants to fit in, but simply cannot, his difference being as ingrained as the sameness of his fellow citizens. In the end, he is exiled to prevent him from becoming a disruptive influence in the society.

The other major carrier of cultural difference in the book is "John the Savage", who is brought back by Marx from one of the "Savage Reservations" on which relatively "uncivilized" indigenous people live outside the structures of the World State that rules more advanced areas. John is the product of a natural birth – a horrific and obscene idea to citizens of the World State. Further, he has not undergone the high-tech conditioning to which all citizens of the World State are submitted. He might therefore seem to be a figure of natural humanity as opposed to the artificially conditioned humans of England and other "civilized" parts of the world. However, Huxley makes it clear that John has also been conditioned by the society in which he has lived, his values being no more natural (i.e., less socially determined) than those of Marx's fellow citizens of London.

One of the central sources of John's conditioning is an old copy of the complete works of Shakespeare that he has been reading since childhood. John's cultural heritage thus at first promises to offer a strong contrast to the insipid pop culture that informs the society of the

World State, where Shakespeare's banned texts are unknown except to a few higher-ups like Mond himself. As Mond explains to John, it has been necessary to ban Shakespeare because his works (especially the tragedies) evoke the kind of strong passions that the World Government, in the interest of "happiness", seeks to suppress. According to Mond:

> That's the price we have to pay for stability. You've got to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art. We've sacrificed the high art. We have the feelies and the scent organ instead. (Huxley *Brave New World* 169)

But Huxley's contrast between the "high art" of Shakespeare and the banality of popular culture products like these "feelies" is far from simplistic. Popular culture may encourage the conditioning of subjects into the positions demanded by official authority, but John the Savage has been just as thoroughly conditioned by the works of Shakespeare. John's expectations from and reactions to the experiences he encounters are almost entirely determined by his reading of literature. Huxley's world is a far different stage than Shakespeare's, though, and John's Shakespearean processing of the stimuli he receives is entirely inappropriate. Shakespeare's plays may be infinitely richer than the inspired feelies produced by the culture industry of the World Government, but John still lacks the powers of abstraction and analysis to be able properly to apply what he has learned from Shakespeare to conditions in the real world, or creatively to constitute his identity in terms of anything other than prefabricated stereotypes. The disjunction between John's Shakespearean expectations and the realities he encounters only increases his alienation in a society where he is already an outsider. He becomes a hermit, living alone in an isolated spot and attempting to "purify" himself through self-flagellation – which then becomes a media event, itself the subject of a popular feely. In the end he is driven – like his forerunner Emma Bovary – to suicide. literature for Huxley can be a powerful humanizing force, but it can be a negative one as well, especially if its readers lose the ability properly to distinguish between fiction and reality.

In many ways, the dystopian society depicted in *Brave New World* strikingly anticipates the "sex, drugs and rock and roll" counterculture of the 1960s, warning that this emphasis might lead not to liberation, but to enslavement. But, like most issues addressed in the book, Huxley's attitude here is a complex one.

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