Grappling with Global-Personal and Victim-Culprit Tensions
Reflections on Teaching Globalization Courses

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Abstract: My globalization courses are the place where I learn from the students. Each student examines her/his involvement in globalization as victim and culprit, and devises actions to counteract corporate domination and neoliberal globalization. From classroom discussion and reports, I am often surprised by the deep insights students develop about themselves and globalization. I have succeeded at least to turn the table around between the student and the instructor. Personal examination of individual involvement in globalization helps the student grasp the macro process of globalization as personally relevant historical and social process. They start seeing themselves relationally and being the connected parts of the macro structure. I hope that they take this world-systemic understanding of the whole and parts beyond my class, or continue to live through the global-personal tension. I am also impressed by the students' understanding of the complicated and often-contradictory nature of their involvement in globalization. The perspective of victim-culprit forces them to see their being not as singular unitary existence but as a collection of fragmented and contradictory 'selves.' I see myself as a contradictory being. My critical view on the corporation is accompanied by a middle class lifestyle that is quite dependent on goods and services supplied by the corporation. My pension fund is invested in military contractors and oil companies. I am struggling to come to terms with my own multiple and contradictory existence. I think that my pedagogical praxis is my way of pursuing utopystics (Wallerstein 1998; Tamdgidi 2007, forthcoming) by inviting students to form their communities so that they could overcome victim-culprit schizophrenia imposed on them by neoliberal globalization and the corporation.

INTRODUCTION

This essay is a reflection on my experience in teaching sociology courses on globalization.

I was hired by the Department of Sociology of the University of Alberta ten years ago to create globalization courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Trained in world-system studies at SUNY-

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Binghamton, I thought I could introduce to the students the useful tools to critically examine globalization. My pedagogical objective for the undergraduate courses, however, quickly turned to juxtaposing globalization against 'personal' for a couple of reasons.

First, I was frustrated with the division of roles in classroom between the instructor and the students as the provider and receiver of knowledge, respectively. This role assignment usually makes students passive participants in classroom while the instructor is expected to turn into an entertainer. I was not impressed with my ability to entertain, and I believed that the students could play the role of entertainer with their personal examination of their roles in globalization.

Secondly, I was frustrated with the complacency of the privileged middle class students from the Global North. Critical examination of globalization would involve questioning their lifestyles and privileges they take for granted. Also, they may be victim of globalization due to corporate infringements on environment, labor rights, and sovereignty particularly in the Global South,[1] even though the university students in Canada may be primarily the beneficiary of corporate activities. The best way to make them realize their involvement is to critically examine their personal involvement in globalization. These frustrations made me develop globalization courses that juxtapose a large-scale social process and students' personal involvement, and that examine contradictory and complicated ways we interact with global-

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[1] The term "Global South" is used here to indicate the countries and regions that are negatively affected by globalization. They are the so-called periphery in the world-system approach, together with the semiperipheral countries that experienced economic decline under globalization. The "Global North" designates the countries in the core zone, and they overlap with the OECD (Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development) countries.

ization both as victim and culprit. I am using the term 'global-personal tension' to describe the challenge of putting personal against global, and the term 'victim-culprit tension' to describe the exercise of examining our multiple and often contradictory involvements in globalization.

The lineage of my pedagogical concerns involving 'personal' in the world-system studies started with the exciting undergraduate courses my good friend Mohammad H. (Behrooz) Tamdgidi taught at SUNY-Binghamton and then at SUNY-Oneonta in the 1990s. He asked his students to apply the world-system approach to the understanding of their personal development, thus providing opportunity to critically reflect upon themselves and those who were influencing them at various life stages. At the end of the Spring 1997 semester at SUNY-Binghamton, he published a selection of his students' essays in a book titled "*I" in the World-System: Stories from an Odd Sociology Class.* The volume was a rare accomplishment in an undergraduate course since most of the term papers in university/college courses remain personal. Making student papers open to the public empowers the students (and instructor) since it provides a forum to continue engaging in learning/teaching experience. Even though the book initially met a challenge when the parents of a student contributor demanded the university to stop its publication because they were embarrassed by the critical assessment they received from their child, the university solidly stood on the side of the instructor and the student's freedom of expression and the book was published. While I do not have the capability to publish student essays, I learned from Tamdgidi's efforts the importance of putting the student at the center of learning experience.

Tamdgidi criticized the world-system studies for their Euro-centric, economic, and macro bias, and he suggested alternatives that build on his reinterpretation and

hybrid introduction of Marx, Gurdjieff, and Mannheim (Tamdgidi 2003). The two tensions I was grappling in my globalization courses were among the primary scholastic concerns he has been engaging in since his graduate student days. The global-personal tension resonates with his critique of world-system studies that place primacy on the 'macro' while ignoring the 'micro', or personal level, leading to a shortcoming in imagining emancipation from within (Tamdgidi 2004a; 2005; 2006b; 2007; 2008; forthcoming). The victim-culprit tension resonates with Gurdjieff's emphases on the paradigmatic significance of human inner division and multiple selfhood which Tamdgidi insists as the key when we imagine realistic historical alternatives to the existing world-system (Tamdgidi 2004b; 2006a; forthcoming).

Reading his work gave me a chance to reflect upon my experiences as an instructor of globalization courses, and that led me to this essay where I intend to introduce my approach to learning/teaching globalization by focusing on the global-personal and victim-culprit tensions. I hope that this essay could stimulate the imagination of the instructors and students toward fruitful and critical learning/teaching experience.

GLOBAL IS PERSONAL, AND PERSONAL IS GLOBAL

Globalization is a world historical process manifesting in the 1980s where the 'national' restriction on the cross-border flow of goods, services, money, and information was greatly removed. The neoliberal ideologues, those who believe in small government and limited public intervention in the market (or regulation over corporate activities), want us to believe that globalization was a natural phenomenon, or the only possible outcome of the failed Keynesian policy in the 1970s. From the political economy perspective, however, globalization

was an unexpected consequence of the failed economic policies based on utterly unrealistic economic model that were imposed by the US government, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In the process of globalization, the US regained dominant economic position using finance as the leverage while the major corporations became dominant economic players that were largely free from regulations on working condition, product safety, and ecological sustainability (Ikeda 2004, Ellwood 2001). As a result of unrestricted corporate activities, the working condition for the majority of workers both in factories and on farm deteriorated together with the declining wages. The earth's ecological system suffered from land, sea, and air pollution. Globalization, however, created opportunities for the privileged few, including the middle class students in Canada.

When I asked students "Do you think you will work for a foreign company or Canadian company operating abroad?" the answer was yes by a big margin (80%). Those who aspired to work for non-profit or non-government sectors had working abroad as part of their future plan. Permanently staying in Canada to earn a living was a future vision shared only by a few. When I asked them "How do you benefit from globalization?" students pointed out the varieties of consumer goods including food that are produced abroad. They enjoyed "ethnic food" available thanks to the spread of various diaspora communities and the increased communication with people all over the world using computers and telephones. Many students said they enjoyed music and movies made in various countries in the world that are now available through cyberspace. When I asked students "Are there any way you are victim of globalization?" those who were aware of global warming and the poor working condition in the factories in the Global South pointed out their indirect 'victimhood', but

the majority of the students did not see themselves as victims. I then turned their attention to their relationship with the corporation.[2] I asked them "Who tells you what brand name in cloths is cool? What is the brand of automobile do you want to have?" these questions invited students to cast doubt about their 'independence' in their consumer choice, leading them to the realization that they are dependent on the corporation for the choice they have over consumption items and the cultural meaning attached to them. The question could be escalated to: "Do you think you are a victim of corporate domination?"

Our lives in the age of globalization are dependent on the corporation, a legal entity that behaves rather pathologically (Bakan 2005). Unleashed from the various forms of regulation, profit-driven corporations create our wants and needs that are both essential and superfluous, even to the degree of determining the meaning of our lives. As I invite students to discuss various aspects of our engagement with the corporation, students start reflecting on their values and often-uncritical acceptance of the lifestyle prepared by the corporation. By buying into the corporate-promoted lifestyle, the consumers become part of the global structure of exploitation of the people and nature in the Global South.[3] Furthermore, the involvement of the residents of the Global North is much deeper and more complicated than their immediate involvement through consumption. The

young generation knows that the corporation provides high income earning opportunity. Because most students are not yet working as full-time workers, however, they are often unaware of the corporate control of their savings, investment, and post-retirement preparation. Once upon a time, children were the assets that provided livelihood to the elders. Today the middle class workers have to save money to prepare for retirement, and the principal investment venue is the corporate stocks. The future prospect of the workers is closely tied to the continued growth of the corporation. The lives of the middle class corporate employees are dependent on the corporation for income earning activities, consumption, and investment to the degree that they could not survive without the corporation.

When I ask the students "Do you know under what condition the products and food you purchase from the corporation are manufactured and prepared?" some students are aware of the sweatshop conditions in the Global South. News on the chemical contamination of pet and human food makes them aware of the potential safety problem of the foods we import. I introduce materials to inform students of corporate offense against workers and environment involving the production of their favorite consumption items. Then I ask "Are you culprits of corporate offense against the workers and environment in the Global South?" This gives an opportunity for students to reflect critically on the consequence of their consumption. By purchasing corporate-supplied goods and services, we are endorsing the policy of the US, World Bank, and the IMF and become the part of the problem of global inequality, worker exploitation, environmental degradation, and resource depletion.

Our personal lives are the source of global problem when we continue to dependent on the corporation. The fact that Canadians cannot vote in the U.S. presidential

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[2] "The corporation" designates the major corporations, or the corporate sector, that became the dominant economic actors under globalization. Joel Bakan (2005) has analyzed the corporation critically for their irresponsible nature under globalization pushed by neoliberal ideology.

[3] Corporate exploitation is not limited to the Global South. Even in the Global North, neoliberal globalization escalated ecological degradation and worker exploitation. Food security has been compromised as indicated by repeated e-coli contamination of meat and vegetable prepared by large-scale corporate operation.

election and that Canada's share in the World Bank and the IMF is not big enough to challenge US domination do not exonerate the Canadian citizens for the global problem caused by global corporate rule as long as the Canadians continue to support the corporation with their employment, consumption, and investment. I have been successful in sharing this realization that our personal lives are intricately connected to global processes that create inequality, poverty, and environmental degradation. Macro historical process (the global), therefore, is closely connected to micro level processes (the personal).

MULTIPLE AND CONTRADICTORY INVOLVEMENT IN GLOBALIZATION

When I first arrived at the University of Alberta, I was asked to teach an undergraduate course on inequality and social stratification. When I read the calendar description of the course, I was at loss. The course was a Canada content course when in fact I did not have any knowledge on Canadian history or society. I knew roughly the shape of the Canadian border with the U.S., but I had no idea about where and how Canada ends at its northern border. The undergraduate director at the department told me that I could change the content into globalization, and I tried to discuss global inequality and stratification based on nationality, ethnicity, language, etc.

The course turned out to be a boring one, particularly because the content was far away from students' interest and they often lacked basic knowledge to engage in discussion. I decided to stick to the calendar description, but decided to turn the table of teacher-student relationship around. Since the students are the resident/citizen of Canada who have longer experience of living in this country than their newly arrived foreign instructor, they could be the teacher. The discussion format based on

weekly reading assignment proved to be an effective tool to stimulate lively debate.

As I acquired knowledge on the history and society of Canada, I realized that most Canadian students hold a positive image that Canada is a country with gender equality and ethnic tolerance without extreme poverty. The literature, however, informed me otherwise. Then my objective in the course changed to challenging such naïve notions about Canada by introducing readings and videos that point out persisting gender bias, deep and historical legacy of discrimination against aboriginals and newcomers that still continue today, and persistent income class division overlapping with gender and ethnic inequality. The motto of my inequality and social stratification class became "make Canadian students feel uncomfortable for being Canadians." The similar motto applies to my globalization courses: "make Canadian students feel uncomfortable for being the victim and culprit of globalization."

In midterm and term reports, I ask students to perform critical examination of their involvement in globalization both as victim and culprit. As compared to the assignments in inequality and social stratification course where I ask students to examine their involvement in and contribution to discrimination based on gender, age, income class, ethnicity, language capability, etc., the assignments to examine their involvement in globalization may appear easy. But our participation in globalization via employment, consumption, and investment is often accepted uncritically while discrimination of any sorts are frowned upon or outright condemned these days. Therefore, examining our involvement in global inequality, environmental degradation, and resource depletion requires more careful and imaginative thinking.

Being Canadian for many students brings a sense of pride, and they usually express displeasure toward the U.S. policies in the world. It, therefore, is a challenge for

them to realize that they are, or will be, part of the privileged corporate employee/consumer/investor in the Global North and they are the culprits of global problems. I have not had a student who defended the corporation and globalization perhaps because my students are sociology majors and minors who share the consciousness concerning social problems and a keen sense of social justice. But because of their sensitivity toward social justice, it becomes difficult at times for them to face up to the reality of their offense against the workers and environment in the Global South. Many students realize that they are indeed the victims of corporate hegemony over material culture, lifestyle, and the values. I had many excellent papers that accomplished deep and critical reflection of their involvement both as culprit and victim of globalization. The success of the course, however, would be evaluated if the course empowered the students toward personal and social transformation for the better.

ACTION IS THE BEST TEACHER

Except for a few more mature students, most of my students are in their late teens and early twenties. They are the survivors of peer pressure to conform to the consumption norms set by the corporations. Class discussion on their personal brand addiction, for instance, becomes a lively exchange of what is cool and what is not. It is shocking for the students to learn about the sweatshops and unthinkably low wages paid to the young female workers in the Global South who manufacture the brand name shoes and cloths. The students face a dilemma between brand addiction and socially responsible behavior.

The key to overcome this dilemma is action/activism against global injustice. In the third year course on globalization, I introduced the action/activism component. The midterm project is a group project where students find and participate in anti-globalization and anti-corporate activist groups off-campus. The midterm report introduces the organization and its activities and assesses the effectiveness and impact of their action. For the term project, I ask students to devise their own anti-globalization action, implement it, and report the result. By activism, I mean 'work on others to change their behavior.' Simply changing the student's behavior, like eliminating brand name cloths from their closet, is not enough to be an acceptable term project. To my surprise, most students enjoy these assignments and come up with quite inventive activism.

One student, for instance, collected from numerous people pledges not to purchase from a global hamburger franchise for one year. After one year, he handed the certificate of the completion of their pledge to those who stood by the pledge. Another student attempted water tasting so as to inform people that brand name bottled water does not necessarily taste better than tap water. She had fun challenging people's brand-name addiction. Yet another student challenged his friends to give up their favorite brand name cloth. He brought expensive shirts and jerseys and tore them in front of his classmates as a symbol of the emancipation from corporate branding. Some classmate criticized him that the cloth could have served those in need. But I saluted him for his courage to talk to his close friends and to make them give up brand goods.

How is it possible to create alternatives to the existing world-system? From my research and instructional experience, I came to a conclusion at this point that the target of our individual activism is the corporation. How can we become free from corporate domination in our lives? I asked students "What are the things you do that do not involve goods and services supplied by the corporation?" "Is there anything you produce for your own consumption?" The

examples given were limited, such as growing herbs, buying food from local farmers, cooking own meals instead of eating out even though the materials may be purchased from supermarket. When I asked students "How can you reduce dependency on the corporation?" the immediate answers included efforts to reduce the amount of spending by switching from brand name to no-brand name and to brew their own 'fair trade' coffee at home instead of buying it from the global coffee franchise.

But the expected impact of these actions is small. I introduce the examples of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) where urban consumers pay in advance in spring to local organic farmers and receive weekly food box.[4] Other examples are the Local Exchange and Trading System (LETS) and Local Currency.[5] The LETS is a community-based network for exchanging goods and services and Local Currency is the currency accepted only in the community. These movements stimulate local economic activities outside the realm of corporate activities even though corporate supplied goods such as automobile may be necessary. Promoting local production for local consumption is a trend, and I hope that students could become involved more in these activities.

Realistically it is not possible for consumers of the Global North to achieve self- or community-sufficiency in their daily lives unless they are willing to live without advanced technology embodied in latest corporate products. There are so many black boxes around us which we have no expertise to produce or repair. Expanding alternative economies outside the corporate realm, however, will encourage the corporation to take social and environmental responsibility. There is no major corporation today that does not pay at least lip service to corporate social responsibility. This is a result of anti-corporate activism that targeted notable global corporations that used sweatshops and engaged in ecologically damaging practices. It is possible to pressure corporations with consumers' purchasing power, but it would be the existence of post-corporate alternatives that would truly motivate the corporation toward socially acceptable behavior.

Is it possible to challenge corporate domination in income earning activities? I asked students "Is it possible to find employment and or conduct income earning activities that do not depend on the corporation?" The alternatives students suggested included lawyers, medical professionals, teachers, and government employees. I suggested looking into the emerging post-corporate sector called social enterprise. A social enterprise is motivated to serve the society, in contrast to the corporation that is profit-driven, although it has to generate income to cover costs.[6] For the students, the non-profit and non-governmental sector also appeals as the meaningful place of work. One possible pitfall of this sector is that their operational fund often comes from the corporation or the government, and there is no guarantee that the fund will keep coming. Overall, students were excited to know that there are various employment opportunities outside the corporation. Income earning activities are essential, but we do not need to sell our soul to the corporation to do so. Earning income while engaging in activism is an ideal way to apply the theory and engage in praxis simultaneously.

Is it possible to challenge corporate

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[4] See http://www.localharvest.org/csa/ and http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml for US examples on CSA.

[5] For information on Local Currency, see http://www.ithacahours.org/ and http://www.communitycurrency.org/resources.html, and for the LETS, see http://www.gmlets.u-net.com/ and http://www.letslinkuk.org/.

[6] See http://www.hbs.edu/socialenterprise/ and http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/.

domination in post-retirement preparation? This is an area that is most challenging because of the lack of alternatives. Those who are concerned about unacceptable corporate behavior could invest in the Sustainable and Responsible Fund (SRF), Socially Responsible Investment (SRI), Eco Fund, etc. These funds enable the investor to take into account concerns over social, ecological, health, development, etc., in addition to the financial concerns. By selecting the stocks of the corporation that behave acceptably, these funds may be able to pressure corporations to conform to extra-financial social concerns.[7] Investment in these funds may sooth the consciousness of the middle class investors, but such investment supports the corporation and its drive for profit, which in turn will benefit the large-scale upper class investors. Truly alternative investment should serve the community and society, not the interest of corporate managers and the upper class.

Community investment was once performed by the credit union. Even though neoliberal globalization forced credit unions to conform to the global financial standard, they continue to service individuals and communities. It is possible to establish investment institutions that take into account the community needs and long-term sustainability in ecology, society, and economy. In Quebec, cooperative Desjardins provides an alternative to profit-motivated banks.[8] It is possible to nurture credit unions that serve the interest of the community so that even our investment becomes post-corporate activism. I have not yet challenged the students to device alternative investment networks, but it would be exciting to ask the youth to develop intergenerational investment mechanisms so that they could prepare for a sustainable future.

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[7] See http://www.socialinvest.org/ and http://www.socialinvestments.com/.
[8] See http://www.desjardins.com/fr/bienvenue.jsp.

CONCLUSION

My globalization courses are the place where I learn from the students. Each student examines her/his involvement in globalization as victim and culprit, and devises actions to counteract corporate domination and neoliberal globalization. From classroom discussion and reports, I am often surprised by the deep insights students develop about themselves and globalization. I have succeeded at least to turn the table around between the student and the instructor. Personal examination of individual involvement in globalization helps the student grasp the macro process of globalization as personally relevant historical and social process. They start seeing themselves relationally and being the connected parts of the macro structure. I hope that they take this world-systemic understanding of the whole and parts beyond my class, or continue to live through the global-personal tension.

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