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**GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURE.
STEREOTYPING AND GLOBALIZATION IN
CONTEMPORARY FILM**

Globalization is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, it allows even the smallest countries and nations to flourish economically and culturally because cultural goods, services and industrial products can travel or be disseminated with ease and promptness. On the other hand, globalization creates a phenomenon of consolidation of expectations, of demands and of the perceptions of other nations, race and sexual orientations. The globalizing machine is ruthless in imposing general standards and expectations while dismissing local beliefs, assumptions and entire cultures, at times. Globalization works on a hypothesis that the powerful partner in globalization exchange has the right to function based on their own system of values and imposes economic and ideological dictates in such a way that their own ideology and set of values are privileged. This particular conjecture later trickles down to cultural representations, one of which is film. Globalization is a phenomenon which took hold of the entire world. Although it is considered one of the most radical and awe-inspiring phenomena

both in economy and culture, it has also created negative phenomena, such as victimization of human subjects as unwitting targets of globalization.

In order for the cultural globalization to be successful, the producers of culture follow a set of assumptions about race, nation and gender thus producing films addressed to everybody, the films which do not portray cultural specificities or go into complexities of local politics. Such characterless cultural production leads to disastrous effects of the unfavorable or condescending portrayal of whole segments of population and disrespect for local matters. Consequently, the cultural product like film reveals deeply embedded ideological and economical inequalities. This kind of generalized presentation of other cultures is universally present in almost all blockbuster films produced by the Hollywood machine, the matter insightfully discussed by film theoreticians for almost four decades.

In my paper I will concentrate on these negative aspects of globalization and examine them in the films created in English-speaking countries, The United States of America and the United Kingdom.

In his book, *The Cinema of Globalization. A Guide to Films about the New Economic Order*, Tom Zaniello has defined globalization as “an economic and political phenomenon involving the transnational creation of goods and services by multinational

corporations at the lowest cost and for maximum profit”¹, which has led to mass migrations of people, lowering of labor costs, the elimination of many labor unions, changes in lifestyles and cultures, to the instrumental treatment of laborers and in general, to the one-size-fit-all policies in many aspects of life including entertainment and culture.

Globalization is usually described in a negative way as “one-size-fits-all-policy.” However, there are writers such as Noell Carroll who consider globalization a continuation of the trend of exchange between Europe and Asia in antiquity, between Rome and India, and of course, among the Hellenistic empires that arose in the aftermath of Alexander the Great². In one breath on the same page of his article, Carroll also mentions the trade along the Silk Route, the Mongol and Muslim conquests, Western colonialism, the introduction of new technologies of transportation, new technologies of communication, satellite delivery systems, and finally, the advent and dissemination of digital processing and the Internet³.

Also Arjun Appadurai in his famous book, *Modernity at Large*, treats globalization as one of the unavoidable aspects of modernity. As he describes diasporas, understood as people of one nation living all over the world and scattered over many continents,

¹ T. Zaniello, *The Cinema of Globalization. A Guide to Films about the New Economic Order*. Ithaca and London 2007, p.1.

² N. Carroll, *Art and Globalization: Then and Now*. The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism. 2007, vol:65, p. 131.

³ Noel Carroll, *Art and Globalization...*, op. cit. pg: 131–42

They (diasporas – J.F.) are part of the cultural dynamic of urban life in most countries and continents, in which migration and mass mediation constitute a new sense of the global as modern and the modern as global⁴.

Further he comments on the consequences of social globalization for the production of culture:

The megarhetoric of developmental modernization (economic growth, high technology, agribusiness, schooling, militarization) in many countries is still with us. But it is often punctuated, interrogated, and domesticated by all the micronarratives of film, television, music, and other expressive forms, which allow modernity to be rewritten more as vernacular globalization and less as a concession to large-scale national and international policies⁵.

However, as we gather from theoretical treatises about globalization and works concentrating on instances of adverse effects on the lives of ordinary people and of whole economies, globalization is perceived today as the source of all evil and a controversial phenomenon leading to negative outcomes of all kinds.

Globalization has already been portrayed or alluded to in many major American blockbuster films, small artistic films such as Gury Burns, *Waydowntown* (2000), TV series (*The Apprentice*, 2003–6, TV documentary series), traditional documentary films, agit-prop documentaries, films with social and political content

⁴ A.A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* Minneapolis, London 1996, p.10.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

(Alan Pakula, *Rollover* 1981) and many other films produced in North America. In all these films, the disastrous aspects of globalization for human rights, dignity and culture are obvious.

I would like to discuss several films which concentrate on the worst aspects of globalization, such as economic exploitation of the underprivileged, overuse of power of knowledge and politics, and corporate exploitation. *Life and Debt* reveals the economic exploitation of the underprivileged, while *Wall Street* made by Oliver Stone (1987) is considered one of the most honest films about capital globalization. *Wall Street* – one of the most politically involved American filmmakers, is perceived as the most important film made in the *Reagan Era*. It deals with the acute problem of Wall Street even today, the issue of insider trading made famous due to the Ivan Boesky insider trading scandal. Gordon Gekko (played by Michael Douglas) is an insider trader who ruthlessly destroys small and big companies in the name of greed. He holds on to any company he acquires just enough to loot its cash assets and sell off anything which is left, a process similar to the early privatization efforts of Polish government at the time of early privatization processes in Poland when many underperforming factories were destroyed by shady individuals like Gekko. The protagonist's actions which are not understood by common people have disastrous consequences for the owners and the workers of these small enterprises geographically situated all over the world. This particular film set the tone for many other films and cultural

productions like exhibitions and media productions critical of or suspicious about the effects of globalization.

In 2007, Tom Zaniello, Director of the Honors Program at Northern Kentucky University and adjunct professor at the National Labor College, George Meany Center for Labor Studies, has published a study, *The Cinema of Globalization. A Guide to Films about the New Economic Order*⁶ In the book he compiled a list of 500 most shocking short and feature films referring to globalization. He gathered these films under the following labels: What is globalization? The Indicators of globalization; Transnational organizations; Global labor; Global capital; Digitization; Changes in the workplace; Outsourcing and offshoring; Deregulation and privatization; Oil; Scarce resources; Intellectual Property rights; Containerized shipping; Export processing zones; Anti-globalization; and, What is the cinema of globalization?

The films discussed by Zaniello concentrate on the worst aspects of globalization, such as economic exploitation of the underprivileged, overuse of power of knowledge and politics, and corporate exploitation.

One of the films in this book is *Life and Debt* by Stephanie Black (2001), a shocking work about the economic exploitation of Jamaica. The film *Life and Debt* covers three big areas mentioned in the list of the above problems, that is, outsourcing, offshoring

⁶ T. Zaniello, *The Cinema of Globalization...*, op. cit.

and deregulation and privatization, the most acute areas of concern in the discussion of globalization.

Stephanie Black, a producer of this documentary film has revealed deeply ingrained racism in the decisions taken by World Bank and WTO (World Trade Organization) when the latter convinced the government of Jamaica to abandon local subsidies for the production of local food and instead allow huge American food producers entry into Jamaica, with disastrous consequences for the entire local economy. This documentary film focuses on the deeply troubled economy of Jamaica and on how that country's long-term indebtedness to international lending organizations has contributed to the erosion of local agriculture and industry. The dry economic realities are leavened by "the cool, ironic lyricism of a voice-over narration by Jamaica Kincaid, who adapted the text from her nonfiction book, «A Small Place»" (Stephen Holden NEW YORK TIMES). What this devastating film shows is the cycle of debt which Jamaica ran into. They were forced to accept short term loans from IMF which gave them OK to borrow from commercial banks. So on top of the destroyed local economy, they also ran the country into the ground because they were forced to repay all the debts and accept working conditions from huge conglomerates from the USA. So the film reveals inequalities in the distribution of power and the distribution of wealth. The whole matter of global powers helping underdeveloped nations really

amounts to putting these small countries under the foot of huge business who additionally believe that what they are doing works.

To be fair to the “devil”, Prime Minister Michael Manley who came to power on anti-IMF platform, could not resist the deal with IMF and WTO completely. He had a country that had been colonized for 400 years; all the raw resources were exported, what was consumed was imported. He needed to start building an infrastructure, roads, schools, etc. He also had to rebuild sugar factories, because when the British left, they just let them run down. He was in need of capital which could not be obtained from commercial banks unless he had the seal of approval of the IMF⁷. Manley also stated that he could not place the country on an austerity program, so he was forced to turn to IMF.

Unlike films such as *Gone with the Wind*, (Victor Fleming, 1939) where blacks are portrayed as infantile and amusing individuals, *Life and Debt* is a powerful depiction of black Jamaicans fully understanding the consequences of this economic change for their own economy. The stereotyping of “the other” is fully exposed and undermined in this film and clearly reveals colonialist practices in the globalized economy.

In their stereotypical perceptions, the advocates of globalization oversee the local facts and do not want to think not only about the effect globalization has on the economy of local

⁷ Interview with Stephanie Black by Giovanni Fazzo, named *Documentarian shots from the hip inside Jamaica's debtor's prison*, The Japan Times Wed 2005, July 13

countries as in the film I have discussed but also about the effects on local population.

Other films dealing with adverse aspects of global capital and globalization in general have been mainly created in late 1990s and 2000s. These are: *Bigger than Enron* by Marc Shaffer (2002), *Darwin's Nightmare* (Hubert Sauper: 2004), *The Future of Food* (Deborah Koons Garcia, 2005) – about Monsanto company and its patents on seed, *Is Wal-Mart Good for America?*, *Mardi Gras*, *Our Friends in the North*, *State of Play*, *The Tank Man*, *The Wire*, *Workingman's Death* and other films, expose colonialist practices and the power of capital in the treatment of people.

A crucial term for the analysis of globalization is the term *Stereotype* which often serves as an unintentional basis for making business decisions unfavorable to people being “globalized.” According to *Encyclopedia Britannica* stereotype means:

an often unfair and untrue belief that many people have about all people or things with a particular characteristic, something conforming to a fixed or general pattern; *especially* : a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment⁸.

If we take into consideration the basic meanings of stereotype included above, then in the analysis of the above mentioned films we could think about the owners of capital

⁸ www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stereotype [access: June 7th 2015]

applying biased and unduly empowered opinions to the people economically underprivileged. In the stereotypical opinions of those, the lack of money in the lives of those people creates a number of disadvantages which adversely impacts their access to education, travel and access to power structures. Consequently, these people will not object to or will not know or be aware of the complexities of the markets or of the deceptive accounting.

These ideas of stereotyping are especially pertinent in the case of films which deal with racial stereotyping. The color of skin, and especially black skin, adds to the stereotypical perception of the economically underprivileged in that it is reinforced by a powerful bias against the culture, the work ethics and the education level of black people in general.

Excellent examples of such a stereotypical presentation in the films about globalization is present in *Bigger than Enron* (Marc Shaffer, 2002), *Darwin's Nightmare* (Hubert Sauper: 2004) and *The Future of Food* (Deborah Koons Garcia, 2005), the films worthy of further scrutiny. In the films from the above group stereotyping is more sophisticated in the sense that it does not relate to gender issues, race matters or any other classical areas but rather to a presumption that people who do not belong to the high levels of power do not understand the intricacies of bogus financing and banking schemes. This particular element of stereotyping proved fatal to such companies as ENRON, in which a modest but especially honest and open minded accountant informed the world

about shoddy accounting in one of the biggest companies in the world at that time. What was particularly eye-opening was that elaborate linguistic gymnastics was applied by the financial officers of the company to fool the world at large about their power and prestige.

Another film dealing with these matters, especially relevant to understanding of the devastating effect of globalization is a well-known British film, *Dirty Pretty Things* (Stephan Frears, 2003) in which illegal immigrants in London, UK, sell their own kidneys in order to survive and support their families. The person who helps them and at times saves their lives is Okwe, (an illegal immigrant himself), a black doctor fully qualified to perform surgeries and treat people. Despite the fact that Okwe is derided by Londoners as one of the black illegals, he is able to survive and practice his profession, albeit illegally. The film deals with such effects of globalization as selling body parts for profit, illegal work and illegal stay.

However, sometimes in rare cases the effects of globalization especially where globalized labor is involved, are seen as quite positive. One positive effect is shown in the film *Diverted to Delhi* (2002) where unemployed college graduates take special courses in English in order to get employment at hundreds of call centers in India. The billion dollar industry in India is the direct result of outsourcing and off-shoring by almost half of the American Fortune 500 companies. Due to low wages and modest

working conditions, such deals are viewed with a lot of interest by big companies. For employees the results are mixed: they get employed on the one hand but on the other, they suffer from really miserable working conditions. One good aspect of this kind of globalizing effect is the professional courses these students get from call center companies for free which teach them how to “sound” English and how to behave with the public in a friendly way including exchanging gossip and jokes. Obviously, such films promoting the culture of the powerful and the rich are also seen in negative terms. Critics of these promotional films see them as a libidinal catering to colonialist practices in that the promotion of English as a universally spoken language in the world and the promotion of “British” and “American” values as the ones which are expected and valued in the workplace tastes like the old-fashioned colonialism practiced in India a long time ago.

In general, films related to globalization are aplenty. For the purpose of this paper, I have chosen those films which are mostly critical of globalization and which expose serious problems related to the exploitation of people, the eradication of local cultures and the destruction of land.

Filmography

TV series (The Apprentice, 2003–6, TV documentary series)

Bigger than Enron (Marc Shaffer, 2002)

Darwin's Nightmare (Hubert Sauper: 2004)

Dirty Pretty Things (Stephan Frears, 2003)
Diverted to Delhi (Greg Stitt and Others, 2002)
The Future of Food (Deborah Koons Garcia, 2005)
Life and Debt (Stephanie Black, 2001)
Wall Street (Oliver Stone, 1987)
Rollover (Alan Pakula, 1981)

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Streszczenie

W moim eseju koncentruje się na negatywnych aspektach globalizacji wyraźnie pokazanych w filmach pochodzących z krajów anglosaskich: Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki oraz Wielkiej Brytanii. W oparciu o analizę następujących filmów, (Gury Burns, *Waydowntown* 2000), TV series (*The Apprentice*, 2003–6), TV documentary series, *Wall Street* (Oliver Stone, 1987) *Bigger than Enron* (Marc Shaffer, 2002), *Darwin's Nightmare* (Hubert Sauper: 2004) and *The Future of Food* (Deborah Koons Garcia, 2005). Wyciągam wnioski, że globalizacja stworzyła negatywne zjawiska szczególnie w zakresie traktowania jednostek ludzkich. Mimo że globalizacja uważana jest za zjawisko pozytywne w ekonomii oraz w kulturze (szczególnie jeśli chodzi o rozpowszechnianie zjawisk kulturowych na całym globie ziemskim), traktuje ona jednostki ludzkie w sposób stereotypowy i bezduszny. Bohaterzy wyżej wymienionych filmów nie są pokazani jako indywidualne charaktery ale raczej jako przedstawiciele bezosobowej i stereotypowo traktowanej masy ludzkiej.

Słowa kluczowe: globalizacja, filmy, stereotypy, wiktimizacja

Summary

In my paper I have concentrated on the negative aspects of globalization and have examined them in the films created in English-speaking countries, The United States of America and the United Kingdom. Based on the analysis of the following films, (Gury Burns, *Waydowntown* 2000), TV series (The Apprentice, 2003–6, TV documentary series), *Wall Street* (Oliver Stone, 1987) *Bigger than Enron* (Marc Shaffer, 2002), *Darwin's Nightmare* (Hubert Sauper: 2004) and *The Future of Food* (Deborah Koons Garcia, 2005), I have concluded that although globalization is considered one of the most awe-inspiring phenomena both in economy and culture, it has also created negative indices, such as victimization of human subjects as unsuspecting targets of globalization.

Keywords: globalization, films, stereotyping, victimization