



An Essay Concerning Abulad, Globalization, and the Postmodern *Ethos*

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Abstract

This essay gathers its impetus from a recent pondering on how violence unfolds both in the national and international stages. It is the persuasion of this piece that the now porous “global village” has fallen prey to the expanding nexus of organized chaos related to both economic and identity struggles. Interestingly, however, barely remain those barriers which prohibit us from seeing such horrible events. Both the social media and mainstream media provide direct glances even at domestic affairs whose significance may be held negligible. Recent scholarships, however, associate violence with ethical crises, especially in terms of identity struggles. For a while now, the so-called politics of identity has made its presence felt on the global stage ever dynamically. But to be fair, a handful of good things also can be gleaned over the news. Space exploration has made several breakthroughs; nanotechnologies happily pair with healthcare services; in terms of agriculture, artificial intelligence has also made relevant contributions. And the list goes on. But the point is that the world is within reach. And all this is made possible by globalization. This paper, hence, explores globalization and its relationship with “postmodernism”, which in the work of the celebrated Filipino philosopher, Romualdo Abulad, could be credited for the implosion of ethical pluralism. To do this, first, I explore the theme on globalization as accounted for by Peter Singer, Thomas Friedman, and Thomas Banchoff; second, I discuss Abulad’s seminal essays on postmodernism; and lastly, I provide prospects for their social-political implications.

Keywords: Abulad, Singer, Friedman, Banchoff, globalization, postmodernism

Introduction

This essay explores the theme of “globalization” and connects it with the shaping of ethical consciousness *via* Romualdo Abulad’s reflections on postmodern *ethos*. To approach globalization, I propose a reading of Peter Singer (2002), Thomas Friedman (2000) and Thomas Banchoff (2008) who note of the economic nature of this phenomenon – an offshoot to modernity. While it may be true that globalization can be taken positively in terms of its impact on commerce and trade, in the sciences, it is also important to note the horrors it brings in terms of technocratic domination. While it is no brainer that technological evolution makes better the human condition in many respects than at the beginning of the industrial revolution, the encroachment of technocracy which is susceptible to corporate manipulation poses some significant dangers. For one, this encroachment bridges nations and may be considered to have successfully caused the dissolution of boundaries. For Singer and Friedman, what came along was the erosion of the national boundaries, especially in terms of the cultural dimension. And as these boundaries thin out, the world “shrinks”.

According to Thomas Banchoff (2008), the dissolution of national boundaries poses immense challenges on the preservation of religious-ethical identities. These pertain to the self-understanding of human actors and institutions who seek to promote their distinct “conception of good life” and who stand by their respective ideals of “social justice”. The influx of transnational information does not only provide exchanges made possible by the technological advancements but also carries the tendency to erode a handful of cultural entities that might disrupt the complacency of extant socio-political spaces. With this, Banchoff speaks about “global violence” as antithesis, if not the necessary consequence to the promise of progress and globalization. Banchoff traces the prominent locus of violence at the global scale in religion, as generally construed.

Religion is fertile space for political contestations as in most cases the profession of “the articles of faiths” reverberates in the crafting of legislation and policy designs of a nation state. This is evident in both liberal and illiberal states. A case in point is Christian fundamentalism in the USA and a growing

number of antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe. LGBT+ communities in many parts of the world still can feel discrimination both in the contexts of work and culture. All this and many others point in a rather harsh truth that the implementation of legal norms is receptive to the ideals of the good life as structured by faith communities even if in liberal states the separation between the church and state had long been constitutionalized. A dramatic example of this occurred in October 2023 in the Philippines with the case of Pura Luka Vega, a drag personality who was sent behind bars for offending Catholic religious sensitivity (CNN, 2023). Banchoff highlights the significance of “religious pluralism” as key to curtail discriminatory practices and to eschew the persecution of faith communities or those who don’t share the same. In effect, liberal states may now be compelled to protect the rights to religious freedom to protect faith communities from violent persecutions and the community of individuals who don’t share theistic assumption.

At this point, the relevance of Abulad’s musings on the wake of Enlightenment imposes its presence. The wake of modernity ushers in the celebratory entrance of “postmodernism” about which Abulad highlighted some caveats. Although postmodernism and globalization don’t necessarily acquire identical essence, they are a happy pair. For Abulad, globalization bridges postmodern ideas across the globe. In turn, postmodernism makes possible the porous structure of the highly globalized world.

Thomas Friedman and Peter Singer on Globalization and its Ethical Implications

According to Singer, globalization is “internationalization” (Singer 2002, p.8); it is a “web” (Friedman 2002). It is not difficult to follow this initial characterization since by “internalization”, Singer means that globalization connotes the growing ties between nations or states. These ties pull nations together, causing them to shrink in terms especially of their geographic accessibility. In the globalized age, national artefacts like economic designs, culture, and political ideologies can be accessed easily through advanced transportation and communication channels. These artefacts intersect in so many

ways. A common example of these intersections would be architectural designs. One personal observation points to a trendy return to organic designs. Today, more than ever, the glorification of anything organic influences even national aesthetics standards.

What I mean is that developed societies who realize the detriments of air and water pollution, for instance, on the human population in general tend to promote a return to the organic ways of organizing communities. And this psychological makeup which may have started in the West is easily accessed in the East through the (soc)media and even in university curricular designs. The intersection cannot be undermined because it enables a direct look at the essential component of “identity” of a single nation by another (Singer 2002, p.76). That is why, in the global village, according to Friedman, nations are “interwoven”; here, we walk on the fragile thread of a global “web” (Friedman 2000). At our preliminary investigation, we find both Singer and Friedman agree that what comes along with this planetary pull is the convergence among scientific innovations, ethnic differences, political ideologies, and worldviews. It is for this reason that globalization relies on technology so much (Singer 2002, pp.9-10).

In *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Friedman characterized globalization as “the international system that replaces the Cold War system” (Friedman, *ibid*). “Globalization is what is new” (*ibid*.). According to Friedman, if one were to understand such phenomenon, she only needs to take a close look at its **two essential components**, namely, “culture” and “the economy”. What is striking in his characterization is the dynamics between **economy** and **culture** in the global age. For Friedman, the global age is where the overlapping between culture and economy manifests most. For keen readers, it comes as no surprise that the title of his book itself will give us a hint about what the author really wanted to convey.

“Lexus” is an allusion to “the economy”; while “the olive tree”, to culture or identity (ch.3). He owes the analogy of the olive tree in his assignment in Beirut, and Lexus, to his tour to Lexus company in China. These components may be universal references to both economy and culture. However, these are

not mutually exclusive categories because - as what Friedman observes in his travels – economy and culture do converge, especially in the global age. On one hand, he writes,

Olive trees are important. They represent everything that roots us, anchors us, identifies us and locates us in this world - whether it be belonging to a family, a community, a tribe, a nation, a religion or, most of all, a place called home. Olive trees are what give us the warmth of family, the joy of individuality, the intimacy of personal rituals, the depth of private relationships, as well as the confidence and security to reach out and encounter others (p.31).

The “Lexus”, on the other hand,

represents an equally fundamental, age-old human drive--the drive for sustenance, improvement, prosperity, and modernization-as it is played out in today's globalization system. The Lexus represents all the burgeoning global markets, financial institutions, and computer technologies with which we pursue higher living standards today (p.32).

Friedman’s characterization of the essential components of globalization is potent theoretical tool for elaborating further why globalization is a disturbing cosmic event and why it demands a close analysis. The bottom line here is that in the global age both will lose their strong independence. The boundaries between the “olive tree” and “Lexus” will eventually be challenged, if not dissolved. This doesn’t mean though that each intrinsic worth in the life of human individual who is caught up in this tacit divide disintegrates, too. The point is rather simple: the analogy of the Lexus and the olive tree stands as a constant reminder on how the two seemingly distinct categories get practically bridged by the phenomenon called “globalization”. In Friedman’s account, the chasm between culture and economy is demystified. Economy encroaches on culture, vice-versa.

Let me cite a few cases where in the globalized era, according to Friedman, Lexus and the olive tree are caught up in dynamism. First is Lexus versus the olive tree; second, Lexus and olive tree are wrestling with each other; third, Lexus and the olive tree are in a healthy balance; fourth, Lexus is struggling with the olive tree; fifth, Lexus is being exploited by the olive tree; last, is where the olive tree is exploiting Lexus.

On these selections, the basic thing to do is to start with two separate pictures of economy and culture. Then, try to pair with or pit them against each other. We can start with a formal comparison depending on which conceptual pictures come to our mind first while doing this thought experiment. After all, culture and economy are comprehensive categories whose extensions are hard to contain. So, now, as regards the **first** dynamism, there is a clear confrontation between economy and culture. Here, Lexus stands in an antagonism against the olive tree. Time and again, Lexus may represent the “drive for progress” or “modernization”. And the olive tree may allude to a “communal belonging”. This direct confrontation tells us that they are mutually exclusive aspects of human lives. But it is also safe to not set priorities with these categories because maybe at this juncture they are of equal importance. Here, we do not find ourselves in a moral dilemma. Friedman’s example of this is the story of Cain and Abel. Both are the first descendants of Adam and Eve. According to Friedman, Cain personifies Lexus and Abel, the olive tree. The former dedicated all his efforts to pursue economic stability or affluence while the latter was busy nurturing the spiritual side. To cut it short, in the end, the spiritual gets butchered by the material. To put it loosely, economic concerns overcame spiritual growth.

The formal categorial tensions Friedman provided are easy to follow. However, there is one confrontational stance that I wish to highlight to magnify the ethical implications of Friedman’s Lexus-olive tree dualism. What if one’s olive tree is being challenged by another olive tree? Thomas Friedman missed this question. Yet it is important to ask this question. If “the olive tree” represents culture where one draws her ethical conviction, then what would she do if she finds out that her cultural conviction is being challenged by another? If the olive tree is culture in general and ethical worldviews are its fruits, then which olive fruits must one pick and spare?

Peter Singer aptly calls this “the ethical challenge” (Singer 2002, p.185-190). The idea is supposed that there are two baskets of “olive fruits” before you. And only one basket is yours. Suppose further that a fire broke into your house forcing you to pick only one basket to save. Which basket will you save? For sure, it wouldn’t be difficult to choose between these two baskets, although you would really feel the weight of your property falling down on you as you see them burn. But then, at least you can save one of these baskets of olive fruits. In this situation, you will save your basket without a second thought. But you would regret not being able to save them both. The case is different, however, if both baskets are yours and if both basket containers have sentimental worth to you.

Let’s just say that we are going to choose between two baskets of our own possession after a fire broke out into the house. It will be difficult, yes. Further, each of these baskets contains our ethical conviction. The fire will consume them, and we cannot save both. Which basket will we spare? For sure, choice making here is painstaking unless you know which basket contains olive fruits of best qualities. But suppose further that you already had prior knowledge about their qualities, and you are certain that both are exquisite picks, which will you spare? In this situation, the decision will likely flow lightly. The wise decision may be to pick the heavier basket! Why? Obviously because it contains more, although you really must hurdle yourself out of the burning furnace.

Now, Peter Singer, a staunch proponent of utilitarianism himself, dragged this moral calculation to the discourse of globalization. He maintains that in the global era where both cultural and economic values are being weighed against each other, ethical decisions – that is, our olive fruits – must bow down to the supremacy of calculation. In the global age where everything shrinks and is bridged, our ethical commitments too must also be reconsidered. Upon weighing between two baskets full of “olive fruits”, otherwise referred to our moral collections, Singer would want us to consider asking,

What policy will produce the best consequences? If it is true that advocating a highly demanding morality will lead to

worse consequences than advocating a less demanding morality, then indeed we ought to advocate a less demanding morality. We could do this, while still knowing that, at the level of critical thinking, impartialism is sound (ibid., p.192).

In this situation, globalization and ethical calculation are perfect categories. But calculation does not time and again mean abandonment of ethical virtues. Nor must it step upon human rights in a situation where human rights and moral calculation are at a standoff. Let me clarify why, for Singer, moral qualities such as human rights always supersede calculation.

According to Singer, moral calculation only occurs when there is a need to calculate. Of course, the basis for the justification of actions is its impact on the vast majority. So, an action is right when it produces more benefits than harm. It is all the righter if the benefit goes to the bigger population. The underlying presumption is that, first, the unfavorable decision may not directly affect human population or that if it does, this population is not deprived of their rights to be heard of. In other words, decisions favoring the majority, if proper method is carried through, may not necessarily violate the rights of minority even if the latter are found to be deprived of certain things, or rights for that matter. Second, even in situations where certain decisions step on other persons' rights, moral calculation supervenes if it serves for the betterment of the majority life in the end.

What Peter Singer teaches us in his discourse on globalization is one thing: a strong ethical outlook is predominant in globalization. It is modified because it does not only focus on the capacity for sheer calculation but incorporates the idea of "human rights" in the scale. After all, for Singer, the purpose of morality is to further human lives and lift them up from unnecessary predicaments. This should be the ethics of political states too, especially in the case of representative politics.

Globalization is visible both to the academic and vulgar eyes. For Singer, even more that it must be obvious to those who dwell in the bureaucratic space. The implementation of laws in the political communities must not shy

away from considering the ethical core of globalization whose sway affects not only the economic but also and most manifestly, the material condition of human lives.

From here, another question comes to sight: suppose that different moral considerations weigh the same, which to uphold and which to discard? This points to another aspect, that is, the fact of ethical pluralism.

On the Religious Dimension of Ethical Pluralism

Ethical pluralism refers to the diversity of the conceptions of a good life. At some point, it may be related to conventional ethical relativism, which says that the justification of an act from the acceptance of a specific society itself. Ethical pluralism and conventional ethical relativism converge in the acceptance that there is more than one source of ethical legitimation. In the world that is full of cultural differences, various ethical outlooks overlap.

According to Banchoff (2008), however, the fact of ethical pluralism stems from the variety of religions that exist in the world. This is so because for him it is religion, broadly construed, that served as the first legitimating source of normative expectations on the social plane. From ancient civilizations until the present, religion plays a significant role in forming moral-ethical and even political consciousness and sentiments. The role that religion plays in ethics is immense, so much so that even in advanced societies religion cannot be taken for granted. In fact, there are no advanced societies where primary institutions are not influenced by religious sentiments (ibid, p.29). America for instance is one of the leading societies whose constitutional convictions are not free of religious sentiments (ibid, p.35).

No doubt, globalization helps spread religious pluralism, which “refers to the peaceful interaction among diverse religious actors – individuals and groups – who identify with and act out of particular religious traditions” (ibid., 7). This brings us to the idea that religions too may be viewed as key

sociological artefacts. As such, religion does not differ from other sociological data, such as health institutions, political organizations, etc, in terms of its goal to better human life. For instance, Christianity has been an important factor in the public arena for centuries passed. Its ethical precept of forgiveness and love are defining components in the promulgation of humane and just society. Perhaps, we might say that love and forgiveness as the Christian's ethical core are the most formal categories, which can accommodate the sense of justice. They are the commonly heard-of virtues that are truly difficult to practice (Butler 2010).

Further, Banchoff adds that ethical relativism resembles the different faith systems and sub-systems of world religion. But world religions need real sociological host for the former to thrive. In the 21st century, religion has been co-existing with the state. The former functions as auxiliaries of the state, even if constitutional states themselves, admittedly, are inherently sustained by religious ideals. The state and religion co-exist. The state is with religion although I am not saying that all states have official religions, while religion exists within a particular state. What is fascinating to note here is that while the state limits its concern to the secular world of the political, religion goes as far as encroaching into and influencing the political realm. It ascribes a divine character to the profanity of politics. And the state must tolerate this encroachment, as the former needs to be neutral. But religion is not neutral; it is not even democratic since its systems are close to negotiations. In religion, doctrines are reflected upon by a few experts, not negotiated. The state in turn can only let these doctrines pass. The state cannot sanction a religion. However, the former check the performances of the latter's actors. Unless no state policies are being violated, religion thrives.

This is precisely where ethical pluralism originates from the diversity of religious organizations. Each religion, to be sure, makes up the formation of a moral universe, where sub-systems resemble moral constellations. Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, etc – they all live on what Singer calls “one world” (Singer 2002). And these religions, each possessing sound theologies and doctrines, go global. And as they do, time and again, they influence both the culture and politics of their hosts. Whether religion is persecuted or propagated,

it holds the power to influence and direct human communities. “Religious beliefs,” Banchoff writes, “and practices embodying certain understanding of right human conduct, inevitably intersects with the questions about how power should organize and be exercised justly” (Banchoff 2008, 9).

As religion accumulates its power, it solidifies the core of its ethical commitment – until such commitment reserves a certain form of objective, if not universal accommodation. This is what Banchoff means by “the growing salience of religion in international affairs” (*ibid.*, p.10). We can only imagine how along historical shifts and struggles, religion survives, maintains, and solidifies its foothold in both the private recesses and social aspects of human lives. The moral core of religion, despite diversity and geographic distance, remains potent. In fact, according to Jurgen Habermas, religion is a scandal to modernity (Habermas 2010). It is fascinating to observe how religion survives the onslaught of the Enlightenment, where man with all his powers tried to ground the reality in the vicissitudes of epistemic certainty. For Habermas, religion’s survival from the modern encroachment is a telling lesson that maybe, just maybe, beneath the thick abstraction of the good, lies a certain reality, the ultimate reality, who is God.

The awareness of religious-ethical pluralism leads us to the question of “identity”. Every religion, Banchoff holds, re(creates) a sense of identity (Banchoff 2008, p.20). In other words, religions do not only vary in terms of their ethical components, but they also create a variety of self-understanding on the part of the believer, that is, the religious group or actor. Identity is formed out of the strict compliance to the norms of religious belonging. Curiously, this idea holds water. Norms do not only constrain our action; they also create in reverse a self-image. What this means is when a person acts morally, that is, an act which is reflected and checked against the backdrop of norms, she does not only execute this act for the sake of mere execution. The fact that she checks her acts against a certain normative standard – in this case, a certain religious normative standard – tells us that such religious actors would like to be associated with those people who would do the same. This association is identity formation. She identifies herself with those who do the same thing and worship the same God.

Such is the power of religion in the formation of collective ethical consciousness among human actors. Even without introducing yet the idea of eternal punishment and reward, we already have the insight about how the variety of religions and their sub-systems make up a complicated picture, if not messy, of a moral universe.

As globalization propels the spread of ethical pluralism, the former does so in extending and speeding up – through the aid of technology – of the transnational reach of religious organizations to the farthest corners of the world. No matter how varied and sometimes inherently self-contradictory, religious precepts create moral universes beneath which both personal and social identities are nurtured. I think the task is not about identifying which religion holds the epistemic truth or superior moral commitment. After all, this is the point of understanding pluralism. Rather, what I think really is the task continually reflecting upon the extent to which these religious-ethical pluralistic ideals can further better human lives.

The Filipino on the Crossroad: Reflecting on Abulad's Pessimistic Ethos of Postmodern-Globalization

With the fact of ethical pluralism or the multiple and competing moral standards, how ought we to live our lives? And in what manner ought we to respond to the events of everyday living? These questions is classic because up until now they have remained inadequately answered. The religious man may hold on to faith articles for guidance while political ideologues do another. To extend the issue, the implication is much more social than personal. Or should it be rather said that in most cases personal decision affects those who are in the peripheries, like a ripple – goodly or badly. Some would say that human actions can be evaluated and guided had there been **universal norms**, i.e., norms that are always acceptable and valid to all people, to conform with than when individuals are left alone to their discretion. But it is also claimed that moral autonomy can already suffice for mature discernment.

In the articles written about a decade ago, “Postmodern Critique and the Ethics of Postmodernism” (2004a) and “The Future of Ethics: A Postmodern View” (2004b), Romualdo Abulad reflected on the status of the ethical-moral principles, or “self-sufficing table of laws”, which landed on the “shaky” reception of the contemporary period which he emphatically called “the postmodern time!” He argued that norms are necessary as they help establish societal peace and order, but postmodernity holds them contemptible as they superimpose constraint over those they govern.

Here, I explore Abulad’s understanding of the status of ethical/moral norms in postmodernity. His thesis is sharp as he argues that the postmodernism distaste toward normativity owes its headway to the “epistemic crisis” manifest in the modern time and dealt most thoroughly by Immanuel Kant. (2004a, p. 84) I then reconstruct the tacit moral viewpoint undergirding the entire stretch of Abulad’s articles. He apparently suggests that what comes with the postmodern “negativism” (“*via negativa*”) is a reconstruction (“*via positiva*”) of a new form of “ethos”, that is, *a way of life*, built upon “respect” for pluralistic worldviews. Respect, then, is a category that provides a room for epistemic, moral and value pluralism without offending the individuals involved.

Between Postmodernity and Kantian Respect

Postmodernity - this is the key concept that preoccupied most of Abulad’s report, if not survey, about the prevailing postmodern theories. Throughout the essays, one may observe that Abulad maintained a joyful cadence on and had been very optimistic about the “the historical Passover,” or the transition from the modern to the postmodern time (2004b, p. 116). For him, postmodernity posted a variety of challenges to the modern era. And these challenges are a product of willful deliberation on some arbitrary themes of modernity - those that can be traced as far back as the ancient and medieval times are concerned.

So, what is postmodernity? To answer this, Abulad did not advance with a direct definition of the term. What he gave rather were descriptions or semblances of *it* and proceeded to characterize it. However, prior to his enumeration of these descriptions is the recognition that “ours is not anymore the modern time, but the postmodern one” (2004b, p.115). That modernity has passed over and “postmodernity has set in” is the major issue (ibid, p. 116). The implication of this recognition eventually undergirded the entire stretch of Abulad’s essays.

“Paradoxically though this may sound, postmodernism is not an ism,” Abulad argues (2004a, p. 79). He means that postmodernism must not be construed as a school of thought nor a new system in philosophical disciplines. His apologetic stance is understandable. Because by denying that postmodernism is “*not an ism*,” our philosopher is able carefully to dissociate it from systems of thought, which surprisingly have become porous enough to allow ideological strain to permeate through. Abulad speaks of a few common terms that are, for him, best examples of *isms*, namely, “Platonism and Aristotelianism,” “Hegelianism and Marxism,” and “Communism and Capitalism”, among others (2004a, 79ff.).

But if postmodernism is not *ism*, then what to make of it? Evading any definition, Abulad describes postmodernism saying, “Postmodernism is, to put it rather loosely, a way of thinking, an attitude, a consciousness, a *Weltanschauung* that belongs not to an individual or an association of individuals, not even to a country, a region or a continent, but to an era – our era, the present era” (ibid.). Accordingly, there are two important streams of consciousness, inherent in postmodernity, the “*conditio sine qua non* of postmodernism” (ibid.). First is the *via negativa* of postmodernism. For Abulad, “postmodernism is essentially negative” (Ibid.). The second is called *via positiva* of postmodernism (2004b, p. 123). This is the way of life that doesn’t succumb to the destructive approach of the former. *Via positiva* seeks to make the best out of the remnants of modernity’s project. According to Abulad, the former is pessimistic and destructive, while the latter, optimistic and reconstructive.

Among those who took the road of “negativism” are the following philosophers: Jiddu Krishnamurti (p. 81), Friedrich Nietzsche (p. 87), Martin Heidegger (p.80), and Jacques Derrida (p.81). For Abulad, each of these important figures contributes to “the devaluation of the truth-table” and refines the conceptual tool in “exploding” the gravitating “substance” of the previous epochs (ibid., p. 116). As to the object of negativism, Abulad leaves it open. Apparently, he seems to avoid pinning the object exclusively in either epistemology or morality. Interestingly, this leads to his position that postmodernism begins with Immanuel Kant. For Abulad, only after having considered Kant’s “merciless” *Critique of Pure Reason* can one understand that the moral dilemma that the postmodern man encounters hinges on an epistemic crisis (2004a, p. 83). To him, when Kant saw “the nature of all knowledge as subjective in its objectivity,” he mapped up the extent to which the claims of human reason can only be valid (ibid.). The thesis is that knowledge is not possible beyond experience.

The consequence is immense, especially to the conservatism of the Aristotelico-Thomistic philosophical tradition. More specifically, Kant’s *Critique* does not only challenge the condition of human knowing as determined by St. Thomas Aquinas’ theory of truth as “conformity”; Kant goes as far as “dislocating God and reduces it to a mere idea,” thereby destroying the foundation of traditional moral principles in the “natural law tradition” (ibid., p. 84). Abulad argues that “Kant’s conclusive statement regarding the limits of reason” cleared the path for postmodernity. Thus, “Kant: The Father of Postmodernism” (ibid., p. 82).

Redirecting the Discussion: Social-Political Implications

Abulad maintains that postmodernity “alters the ethical assumptions we have grown used to” (Ibid., p.78). So, if postmodernism signals the demise of traditional ethical standards, then it must be taken to mean that the postmodern is now emancipated from the narrowly repressive confines of traditionalism. For Abulad, this end to subjugation, for sure, calls for a “celebration” (2004b,

p.116). However, this tacit cheerful rhythm that echoes throughout his essays underlines the worry that “the groundlessness” of postmodernism may bring more harm than good in the bigger stage of the social and the political.

While Abulad argues that postmodernism is neither “ism” nor “ideological”, (2004a, 79), he refrains from criticizing its weakness - that postmodernism, that is, the contemporary consciousness, has itself become a constellation, a gratuitous host for various ideologies and a stable ground for schools of thought that today contribute to the proliferation of organized crimes and political violence in a way or another. This can be felt not only in the real world but in the digital one, as well. The ridding away of norms puts at risk every established relationship: corporate and national, intimate and communitarian. It also eliminates the assurance for the acquisition of sound spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental health.

So, how can the postmodern *ethos*, the way of life or state of consciousness, secure human communities which it tried to emancipate from the narrow confines of tradition? What can it offer to attain, if not maintain, a “network of attitude” that can sustain human life and secure personal integrity? Should moral categories, however diverse or competing and the need for normativity, be totally eradicated in favor of the *via negative* of postmodernism? Or in Abulad’s words, “Is anything left to render the assurance of what is good?” (2004b, p.123)

This to me is the most interesting region of Abulad’s two essays. Of course, it is one-sided if I present only one of the two components of postmodernism as understood by our philosopher. Toward the end of “The Future of Ethics,” Abulad ventures a decisive move in commending some moral platforms in Friedrich Nietzsche’s peerless “courage” and “will to life” (p. 120), in Immanuel Kant’s unprecedented “philosophical honesty and humility” (p. 125), in the Buddha’s “ethics of compassion” (p.124), in Joseph Fletcher “ethics of love” (p. 126), and in the exemplary life of Jesus Christ.

This commendation suggests at least to me at least two things. First, there is no inherent contradiction between the existence of postmodernity and

the constellation of ethical theories. If Abulad's position is right, i.e., if postmodernism is not ism, then postmodern practitioners may still dwell under a normative horizon or two. The freedom to choose which moral maxims to follow does not in any way negate the *ens* of those maxims, even if choosing one over another remains only preferential. Nietzsche only transvalued the table for morality; he did not negate those categories. Nor did he burn the table. Whether he successfully dug deep into the roots of our moral consciousness is another story. The semantics of each category sometimes gives it all up for the priority of ends. If a conservative moral standard works for some individuals, then they are entitled to its benefits. Although such entitlements do not excuse them for responsibility over the consequences. Second, and here I would like to bring back globalization. Postmodernity owes pretty much of its prominence to the expansion of the market economy. The rapid spread of postmodern ideas does not only occur in the academic space but also in architecture, engineering, healthcare, identity struggles, among others. It is a wonder how a stream of consciousness takes on the form of an article of commerce. If matter is to form, then market is to consciousness.

Abulad's report on the status of morality in the postmodern time suggests that the absence of a one valid criterion to justify human actions paves the way for epistemic pluralism and a multiplicity of value convictions that stand on equal footing. If postmodernism offers no single ground that can hold the variety of aspirations, then Abulad is right when he implies, following Kant, that "respect", as a moral principle, should be upheld in the postmodern world.

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