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Globalization in the Era of Sexualized Bodies

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This contribution develops a single point: the new forms of nationalism arising before, during, and after COVID-19 are not counter to globalization; instead, they are

different expressions of a globalized, politicized body. For centuries, the body has been the kernel of normalizing power, and its discursive determinants have embodied experiences and language around the world. Contrary to their claims, these various nationalisms are not opposed to globalization; they aspire to be globalized. They may reject a form of “universal democratization,” as Benedikter and Kofler suggest, yet they cultivate their own dream of globalization, one that reflects their historical and cultural particularities. Societies, as well as cultures, are not unified essences but multiform entities, constantly transforming through internal and external pressures. Thus, a form of globalized nationalism may coexist with a tentative movement toward universal democratization within the same society, reflecting the complex intersections between globalization and local identity politics.

Biopolitics and the Governance of Life

Michel Foucault calls this culture of politicizing the body biopolitics. Based on the multifaceted assemblages of power and knowledge, biopolitics can shift because its epistemic objects are multiple. Yet its conceptualization remains consistent: the body, at both individual and collective levels, becomes the central concern of politics, even though political rationalities and governmental technologies may change. At the heart of this creative culture lies the expression of a meticulously developed historical program whose “truth” revolves around the correct use of the body. This sensibility generated an enduring drive to speak about sex. Emerging in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Western societies, it persisted into the twentieth century and eventually spread worldwide, influencing moral education, medicine, literature, and state administration. It reconfigured the individual as both a moral and biological subject-someone who must know and confess their body to become a proper citizen of modernity. From the beginning of the twentieth century, we can observe how Muslim countries adopted and reinterpreted this way of life, integrating their religious and cultural particularities. Like the West, the language around sex became increasingly refined, and the desire to discuss confessions of the flesh intensified. The insinuations of the flesh no longer belonged to the realm of indifference; every judgment, wish, dream, and enjoyment of body and soul required us to find meaning. Imported Western knowledge encouraged a process of moral guidance and the search for meaning, when these were new to the region. The new European pastoral was not entirely foreign to the Middle East, where older religious traditions already contained similar notions.

Sexuality, Confession, and the Globalization of the Flesh

Furthermore, we have learned that this new system insisted that sexuality be examined down to its most subtle concerns. New trends of Islamism learned that even a shadow, fantasy, or image could be “problematic”; thus, “everything has to be told” (Foucault). This evolution also cultivated a tendency to mark the flesh as the origin of evil. In Muslim societies, as elsewhere, both secular and religious communities gradually learned that this torment of humanity had to be known in its most secret forms. Even extremist movements like ISIS spoke in a manner echoing earlier European biopolitical discourses. Biopolitics, in this sense, has become a shared global culture among extremists and seculars in the Middle East, Europe, and beyond. Sexuality today is problematized and medicalized everywhere; thinness has even become a form of religion, with dieting tied to moral notions of strength and weakness. This concern does not remain at the individual level. The obligation to express everything about one’s sexuality has become a public matter. Individuals must now speak of sex publicly. This culture, born in the West, has found expression elsewhere. As in Europe, doctors, school directors, and professors in the Middle East offered advice to families and proposed projects to authorities. Schoolmasters issued moral and medical recommendations for students, and married couples faced increasing surveillance and prescriptive literature. As in Western societies, these cultures became obsessed with acts deemed “against nature.” Populations learned to seek the “deep truth” of sex, believing it reveals our essential truth, while life itself became the object of calculation and management. The discourse on sexuality, therefore, became a way of disciplining the population - linking the health of the individual to the strength of the nation and the stability of the state.

State Power, Market Logics, and Neoliberal Biopolitics

States have played a considerable role in institutionalizing this culture. State power must be understood beyond the narrow notion of sovereignty based solely on a regime's military apparatus. In this conception, the state primarily functions to maintain order within a nation-state's territory (Giddens). Beyond guaranteeing order, states exercise control, surveillance, and regulation over individuals, markets, and populations. State discourses assume responsibility for managing the body as an object of social concern, using apparatuses such as social policy to yield specific kinds of populations. For example, health policies ensure that citizens remain physically fit to contribute to society, as people’s bodies are viewed as capital at the state’s disposal. This reflects the modern liberal state’s concern with promoting life, development, and population welfare, while also valuing populations by market

standards to remain competitive, and privileging one ethnicity over another, privileging the male over the female, and favoring the professional over the manual worker. These incitements have been replicated, albeit unevenly, in Middle Eastern and Asian countries that share the same global dream. There are dynamic relationships between global corporations and nonmarket entities on the one hand, and the actions of those states on the other. Governments have opened new economic opportunities and sociopolitical spaces in response to global market forces, experimenting with new forms of sovereignty and governance (Ong).

Within this culture, ideologies demand eugenic procedures to protect national purity, and blood becomes a practical “technology.” Eugenics positions blood as both the focal point and the foundation of the concept of human nature, nationhood, and progress. Eugenics functions as a disciplinary machine, using blood and descent to categorize personal essence, organize bodies, and optimize national health. Genomics, by contrast, serves as a regulatory apparatus identifying population differences to produce data, manage control, and impose order on life itself. The problem of genomic investigation is how to regulate and control entire populations. This is why eugenics and genomics must be defined as a “science of globalization” empowered by global neoliberal economies (Levina).

Biopolitics, Racism, and the Ethics of the Self

The racial hierarchies fostered by these frameworks have become central contradictions of political modernity. Biopolitics replaces traditional internal enemies with “biological” dangers-abnormality, degeneracy, racial inferiority, and criminality. Modern science often underpins such discourses, even in extremist rhetoric like that of ISIS, where biopolitical logic justifies violence. Wherever biopolitics operates, racism persists, transforming itself to fit the ideological needs of the age. If democracy faces a risk today, we must look to biopolitics as its primary threat. Contemporary nationalisms are global in form; they resemble one another precisely because they are biopolitical; biopolitics has become a universal rule. There are two reactions to this culture of the body: one assumes that saying “yes” to sex means saying “no” to power; the other assumes that saying “no” to sex rejects power. Both fall into the trap of biopolitics, leading to the same conclusion: there is no alternative. Indeed, the alternative will not be found in a utopia. If there is an alternative, it lies in new ways of relating to ourselves. Radical alternatives to capitalism-or to any form of political progress- are not to be found within political parties or unions. Instead, politics must become, above all, an individual and ethical concern. If everything is political, and the personal is political as well, then the self

becomes the frontline of contemporary politics. In this sense, re-globalization must also be understood through this lens, across all five R’s.

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