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## “America Again?” Locating “Global Culture”

“In the beginning, all the World was *America*”, wrote John Locke in 1698 in what is one of the foundational documents of the liberal democratic tradition, the second of the *Two Treatises on Government* (Locke, 1988: 301). Locke’s statement invokes three beginnings. First, it proposes a theoretical beginning, a “state of nature” out of which civil society will emerge through the creation and defense of private property. At the same time, though, it also calls up the “discovery” of America in the late fifteenth century, the moment when America was a “new world” – an event taken by many theorists of globalization as the beginning of modernity and of the capitalist world system (see, for example, Wallerstein). The “beginning” of America in this sense, then, puts colonization (and Eurocentrism) at the heart of Modernity (see Dussel, 1999).

But the quotation also draws attention to the moment of its own enunciation as another “beginning” in the project of Modernity. As I have indicated, Locke is invoking America here in the course of justifying the acquisition of private property out of an earth given to mankind in common; he thereby establishes the defense of such property, starting with one’s property in oneself as a sovereign subject, as the foundation of civil government. Such notions of liberty and property run through the modern constitutional regime initiated by the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 and similarly informed another American “beginning”, its Revolution of 1776.

At the same time, though, by invoking America at the end of the seventeenth century – a century of settlement in the Americas by the British – Locke was also making the continent stand as the instantiation of the legal doctrine of “terra nullius”. The New World was an exemplary case of the “empty land”, land owned by no one and hence available for appropriation and transformation into private property. The “terra nullius” was a blank space, ready for inscription by Western values, not unlike the “tabula rasa” of the subject’s mind in Locke’s epistemology. On the other hand, in order for America to fulfill this juridical function, Locke had of course to write out of the continent its indigenous populations. In this context, the overturning of the Lockean doctrine and the reinstatement of some ownership rights to native populations in Australia and Canada in the 1990s might suggest that, in this chapter at least, we are at the beginning

of the end of the moment announced by Locke (alternatively, the limited degree of success in this matter may indicate precisely the opposite).

The latter point gives a hint towards one of the reasons why I begin an essay on globalization with a return to Locke and the end of the seventeenth century. There are in fact four reasons.

First, as a caution, if only to myself, to resist the temptation that a topic like “globalization” inevitably holds out: to generate “global”, totalizing theories of the phenomena under discussion, to present, in a brief article, a comprehensive account of “The World And How It Got To Be That Way”. One would not wish to imitate Locke and write out of one’s discourse on globalization any populations whose presence on the globe disturbs the globality of one’s theorizing. But this immediately suggests a problem: globalization, almost by definition, has to do with identity, with being able to say something about the world as “one place;” yet, in talking of the threat of cultural homogenization, we have had good warning in history (not only from Locke’s example) as to the lethal perils of homogenizing generalizations about culture.

On the other hand, Locke’s treatment of the new world as a *terra nullius/ tabula rasa*, has the virtue of drawing our attention to the fact that worlds, be they “new” or “global”, are written, inscribed, called into being by theories. This is especially the case with the discourse of “globalization” itself: a recent and problematic discourse, seeking to theorize what is presented explicitly as being under construction. To proffer an account of “globalization” (for example, as a process of progressive worldwide modernization) is thus necessarily to make an intervention, to fill the space the word conjures. Whereas Locke saw this process of inscription as taking place on a blank page, an empty space, we find ourselves engaged in writing a palimpsestic text, inscribing our theory of the world over a history of writings of the world picture.

This brings me to the third reason for beginning with Locke – one I have already hinted at. While not wishing myself to instate a “beginning” to “all the world”, I certainly do want to draw a connection between that moment at the turn of the eighteenth century when Locke stakes out some of the major political, legal and epistemological grounds of Modernity, and the moment at the turn of the twenty-first century where “globalization” as such first emerges into discourse.

What, then, is the relation between these two moments? Put another way, to what extent is globalization best understood, as Anthony Giddens presents it in the title of his book *The Consequences of Modernity*, as a cumulative stage in the development of the modern world system? Or to what extent does it represent a significant difference from the project of Modernity, as David Harvey’s title, *The Condition of Post modernity*, would suggest? Is globalization something qualitatively new, or merely an intensification of earlier tendencies?

What is at stake in this question are the instruments we use to theorize globalization, the intellectual and political contexts in which we inscribe it, the texts we write with or over. I have here already written over Locke’s text in order to identify what I see as some of the main features of Modernity. To extrapolate, these would include the ideology of the liberal property-owning democracy, based on the sovereignty that the modern subject concedes to the state for the defense of his [*sic*] liberty and property, its extension through colonization, and the epistemology of empiricism. Is globalization

the consequence, or triumph even, of this culture, or does it in fact mark its transformation into something else?

The question is, in a way, encapsulated in the fourth reason for starting with Locke's "beginning". I picked this particular text to open with in order to both connect and contrast the two moments: the New World/ America as empty signifier, a space awaiting inscription, and the notion that "America" is what we find inscribed all over the "New World Order" of globalization. In the beginning, and in the end, will all the world turn out to be "America" – with all the implications of homogenization that this carries? Does the difference between the two iterations of "America" correspond merely to the distance from America as figure of the world's emptiness to that of the figure of its plentitude, America as the source of "global culture", the voice of the "international community" and of "universal justice"? Is globalization, then, effectively a euphemism for Americanization and cultural homogenization?

No doubt it can often feel that way. But, without for a moment underestimating the power concentrated in, or emanating from, the USA, there are a number of reasons why it seems to me no longer adequate to identify globalization with what we have traditionally called American "cultural imperialism".

In the first place, the model of "cultural imperialism" implies a metropolis and colonized territories, the modern system of a national state and the extension of its sovereignty through colonial settlement. However, a consistent theoretical postulate of "globalization" is precisely that this geography of located, enclosed and extended sovereignty is being replaced by a radically more diffuse distribution of power. For Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, what is at issue here is a new form of sovereignty, based on what they call "an expansive power in networks" (Hart/ Negri, 2000: 166).

The framework of "American cultural imperialism" would thus give us a misleading geopolitical metaphor which fails to do justice to this diffusion of political, economic and ideological control. It would be ridiculous to deny that the place of the USA in any model of globalization remains crucial, but it is far from exhaustive. If it is not simply a blind for a concealed imperialism which in fact hardly needs to hide nowadays, "globalization" only figures to the extent that it signifies a qualitative shift in our conception of space that makes the geography of national imperialism redundant. "Globalization" is called into being as a response to the sense that frontiers and boundaries are being dissolved and transcended, be it in finance, trade, management, production, marketing, surveillance, policing, military activity, law, ideology, personal or social mobility, or broadcasting and communications systems (see Appadurai, 1990).

The role played by new information and communication systems in enabling the intensification of the "time-space compression" theorized by Harvey suggests the internet itself as a theoretical image for the globalization it serves, as in Manuel Castells' theory of "the Network Society". Under this intense compression, the increased mobility of images, symbols, expertise, ideologies, commodities, and people produce what Giddens calls "disembedding" (Giddens, 1990: 29) and John Tomlinson defines as the "deterritorialization" of signs, commodities, experiences and knowledges (Tomlinson, 1999: 2). As we lose our sense of the locality of experience, what transforms this, eventually postmodern, disorienting process of dislocation into "globalization", a sense of the world as one place, is, in Tomlinson's words, the principle of "complex connecti-

city". In sum, while the relation between culture and place is loosened through "deteritorialization", experiences are reassembled into a consciousness of their "global" interconnection.

This breakdown of barriers and recontextualization of experiences within a network in which any one moment or instance exists in relation to a manifold and complex tissues of other instances means that in the face of globalization, to quote Roland Robertson, "social theory in the broadest sense ... should be refocused and expanded so as to make concern with "the world" a central hermeneutic..." (Robertson, 1992: 52).

This is all well and good. The problem however is that thinking globalization – that is to say, thinking "the world" as the central hermeneutic – poses serious problems to the disciplines that might think it.

The sort of properties that I have suggested characterize globalization – deterritorialization and connectivity – already demand a difficult "complex connectivity" between fields of disciplinary thought. From what disciplinary standpoint, what theoretical ground, can one grasp the interactions between, for example, the levels of commerce, corporate structure, production technology and the marketing strategy, media systems and merchandising, race, gender and class identity, sexuality, aesthetics, and the semiotics of clothes – to name but a few – in analyzing the globality of "fashion" that connects the wealthy in the major cities, the middle classes in suburban discount malls or on holiday, and the sweatshop workers in Romania, Northern Portugal and South-East Asia, and which make one's choice of clothing impact on both the way of life of those localities and on the environment as a whole? This would be a crass point – the need to take the entire state of the universe into account in the explanation of anything – where it not for the fact that, inasmuch as we are viewing this phenomenon in terms of "globalization", it is precisely the interpenetration of levels that is at issue.

The most popular way in which the need to articulate different instances or levels has been resolved is by putting something called "culture" in the middle as the mediating term. In this sense, the need for interdisciplinarity has promoted the study of culture to an apparently more attractive position than that which Sociology, Politics and Economics have traditionally allowed it. This is not necessarily bad news for the cultural critic.

However, before one rejoices, there is a further problem beyond the by-now traditional call for interdisciplinarity and the usual resultant celebration of Cultural Studies as the site of postmodernity's *Novum Organum* (Bacon, 1620). What the attempt of disciplines like Sociology, Politics and Economics to think globalization has revealed is the extent to which these disciplines are themselves designed on the model of the nation-state. As Peter Taylor has argued: "In terms of the ontology upon which social science has been built, the key spatiality has been the sovereign territories that collectively define the mosaic that is the world political map" (Taylor, 1996: 1919). In other words, the horizon of sociology – "society", social system, or social formation – coincides with or is framed within the nation-state. The same is true of Politics and Economics, which have likewise traditionally been concerned with the theory of state governance and the functioning of economic factors within the nation – as witness the existence of "International Relations" and "International Economics" as sub-specialities. "In this sense", concludes Taylor, "social science is very much a creature, if not a creation, of the state".

The mapping of the framework of knowledge onto the nation-state is in large part a result of the development of these disciplines as, like the nation-state itself, centrally constitutive of Modernity. To the extent that this spatiality has been "taken for granted" by social scientists – in Taylor's words, "lost in their ontological assumptions" – it is at the heart of modern scientific culture. As Taylor points out, the very attempt to explain what is by definition a "nonnational" world with the concept of "Americanization" bears witness to how culturally embedded this framework is (*idem*, 1920). By the same token, both the "United Nations" and the more recent subject "the international community" both embodied the problem of constructing the global other than through the national.

It is this "embedded statism", as Taylor calls it, that is revealed and undermined by attempts to describe and theorize globalization. As the "core social sciences" try to think what Robertson calls the "concrete structuration of the world as a whole", they are constantly being brought up against their own structuration around the nation-state (Robertson, 1992: 53). As I have already suggested, the very concept of "international" betrays the fact: international regimes basically extrapolate contractual relations from within the nation and apply them to relations between nations.

Taylor, a geographer, distinguishes between the dominant disciplines of Social Science – Sociology, Economics and Politics – and their poor relations, as it were: History, Geography, and Anthropology. Geography's principal alternative to the national paradigm, which of course it does use extensively, is the ecological, the physical organization of world space and flows. But, for obvious reasons, the "natural" cannot be the basis for the cultural critic to organize the spatial field. On the other hand besides the ways in which History and Geography also work within the national paradigm, the discourses of these "lesser" disciplines have developed between two poles which represent different spatialities. On the one hand, they have operated within the extra-national category of the civilizational and the founding Anthropological category of the "human", while, elsewhere, they employ various categories of the local – tribes, villages, regions, ethnicities, families, communities. Can either of these poles help?

At the extra-national level, Samuel Huntington's theory of globalization as a "clash of civilizations", first ventilated in the American journal, *Foreign Affairs* in 1993, has enjoyed some political popularity since 11 September, but largely as an occasion for denying its relevance as an explanatory device. On the other hand, attempts to justify disregarding the traditional barriers of national sovereignty in military interventions on behalf of the "New World Order" or "the international community" has given new currency to the category of "Humanity", particularly through the reinscription of a language of globalized "human rights". Both "Civilization" and "Humanity", however, are concepts redolent of the Enlightenment; they raise awkward questions of the "barbarian" and the "sub-human", not to mention the "human rights" of those suspected of conspiring to deny others their "human rights".

Perhaps precisely because of the element of "compression" in global experience, concepts from the sub-national level have proven popular – at least since Marshall McLuhan stated in the early 1960s that "The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village" (McLuhan, 1962: 31). As the statist organization *par excellence* struggling with globality, the United Nations has also experimented with the language of locality, as in the report of the Commission on Global

Government published in the mid-1990s to mark the UN's fiftieth anniversary and entitled *Our Global Neighbourhood* (Commission on Global Government). Predictably, perhaps, Tony Blair promotes a vague, idealist (if not mystical) image of the world as a "community", a "coming together" of nations and of self-interest and collective interest in a new global harmony. But rather than a world community or unified civilization, what has been constructed in the wake of 11 September is precisely a "coalition" whose very fragility, particularly its juridical fragility, enacts the difficulty in founding global frameworks. The fact that this difficulty is concentrated in large part on the relation between the USA and the other "allies" in the "coalition" might be seen as staging the drama between "Americanization" and "globalization".<sup>1</sup>

It will not have escaped the reader's attention that I have kept carefully to the Social Sciences and have hitherto left out Literature, Language, and Culture. That is mainly because readers of this volume hardly need reminding how these institutions and the discourses which study them, perhaps more even than the Social Sciences, have been structured by "embedded statism", imperialism and "coloniality" (cf. Mignolo, 2000). When "Literature" was constructed as an institution during the eighteenth century it was precisely as a national literature – in the case of Britain, centered around Shakespeare as "national poet" – and it has so developed ever since (see the entry for 'Literature' in Williams, 1983; see also Dobson, 1992). The notion that a literature embodies the culture of a given national community has persisted as a rationale in a variety of different circumstance: not only for its study in many departments of Philology, or as a justification for a National Curriculum in England and Wales designed to promote a "common culture", but also as a valuable component of liberation struggles. Similarly, the defense of the national language and national cultural products continues to be the main focus for resistance to American cultural imperialism in Europe. And yet, over the last generation, the borders of Literature – both generic and national – have been severely compromised by a variety of critiques, to the point where the *History of English Literature* published in 2000 by Michael Alexander seems deeply perverse in its insistence on restricting itself to "the literature of the English" (Alexander, 2000; see also Theo D'haen's reply, 2001).

Much the same would apply in the case of Languages, especially inasmuch as Philology was originally constructed by situating literary works as the written repositories of a language which itself embodied a specific culture or cultural history. The civilizational and racial frameworks of nineteenth-century Philology served as backgrounds to a mapping of modern languages onto specific nation-states, so that we still distinguish, for example, between "British English", "American English", and "New Englishes" which are themselves attributed to the respective national population – as in the first chapter of John Platt *et al.*'s *The New Englishes* (1984), which is symptomatically entitled: "New Englishes and New Nations". Although Linguistics does privilege dialects and creoles, these still do not break with national languages as horizons or frames of reference and

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<sup>1</sup> I write these lines in mid-February 2003, aware of the extent to which they are hostages to fortune. In the struggle between the USA and Britain and the "old Europe", as Donald Rumsfeld characterized France and Germany, or rather the United Nations as an autonomous body, over policy towards Iraq, one sees the relation between "Americanization" and "globalization" being played out on the field of violence where the "world" is, indeed, forged.

there is still a sense in which these are only fully "enfranchised" as "languages" when identified with nation-states or their sub-units, like regions.

Notwithstanding the burden of the national paradigm, it is nonetheless true that, as already suggested, it is in the territory of Literature, Language and Culture that frontiers have been most productively fractured over the last decade or two. Hence arguments against globalization as homogenization and Americanization draw on models of hybridity and creolization reclaimed from biology by literary and linguistic theory and cast up as theories of culture (see, for example, Pieterse, 2000; Hannerz, 1996; Mignolo, 2000). These models are clearly attractive in allowing us to view globalization as not a single thing (which would be to homogenize globalization itself), nor as just a one-way movement (cf. Appadurai, 1990). Globalization, in this sense, can be seen as an opening up of a plurality of cultural contexts of different scales which subjects and communities constantly negotiate. But, powerful and positive as they are, theories of hybridity, "m $\acute{e}$ ti-sage", creolization and so on are not necessarily for that reason unproblematic.

The discourse of hybridity, as others have acknowledged, runs the risk of calling up the "purity" of the breeding stocks from which the hybrid then derives. Similarly, theories adapted from creolization might suggest a contrast between the original imperial language as "standard" and the "new" language "variety" which results from creolization. As Salikoko Mufwene has warned, creolization can be seen as implying an originatory language which was *not* a creole, and this cannot help but generate a hierarchy of pedigree (Mufwene, 2000: 9).

The alternative to this reduction amounts to an infinite regress, in which every cultural identity is *always already* impure, hybrid, diverse, liminal, in-between, because always mobile, always in process. Calling on the title of Homi Bhabha's influential volume on liminality, *The Location of Culture*, can this notion help us "locate "global culture"?"

Certainly not, I would argue, as a simple alternative to Americanization/ homogenization. For, if all culture is hybrid or creolized, then presumably global culture – which, after all, is a culture based on deterritorialization and interconnectedness – could not help but be heterogeneous, and we would simply have nothing to worry about. Furthermore, if in fact there are no "pure" linguistic, literary or cultural forms or identities, this theory must apply to any historical moment: there was no time when culture was not hybrid. Rather than a "terra nullius" or "tabula rasa", culture was always a palimpsest, rewritings resulting from negotiations between subjects and various networks of meanings. Liminality and plurality would not then be characteristics of global culture, but of culture as such. Finally, while the theory derives from a subaltern perspective as a decolonization of culture, it can, when appropriated as a global theory of culture/ theory of global culture, too easily forget that it describes interbreeding which results not from a love story, but from stories of power and oppression.

And this might appear to be one of the things "globalization" threatens to do: it flattens out the landscape on which these interactions have historically occurred. To avoid such a *tabula rasa*, an erasure of history and power, we need to remain specific about how the global and the local interact. For example, as Ulf Hannerz points out, seduction by the homogenizing values conveyed by globalized images and merchandise beamed into the periphery is most likely to occur among the middle classes, educated, as

he says, to “interpret and enjoy imported meanings and symbolic forms”, and have the money to do so (Hannerz, 1996: 74). On the other hand, “instances of cultural innovation through creolization”, mixing influences from outside with traditional cultural forms, are more likely to arise among poorer, less formally educated classes. However, one should note, inasmuch as globalization is a two-way process, it is usually these already creolized forms (whether advertised as “authentic” or not) that are imported back into the centre to become the next fashion in food, fashion, or music, and, no doubt, re-exported into the global markets (*idem*, 78).

This is not just a matter of remembering who is who in the interconnections of globalization. It is also the need to distinguish between “creolization” or “hybridization” as *local activities* of negotiating meaning conducted by a specific social group in relation to a specific source at a particular historical conjuncture, and the “creolized” or the “hybrid” as “*global commodities*” reappropriated by the centre and then circulated elsewhere.

In the past, processes of creolization and commodification went on as part of the imperialist project and were marked as such; and it is in the difference here, then, that we can begin to place “global culture” as the locale where the cultural negotiations signified by terms like “hybridization” or “creolization” are commodified and their historical asymmetries erased.

What I am suggesting, then, is that “global culture” is, in effect, part of a “branding” process. I want to try to support this suggestion, very summarily, through the example of the English language. After all, globalization would have a hard job being globalization were it not for *English as a Global Language*, to cite the title of David Crystal’s popular text of 1997.

The destiny of “English” as “a language of the world” was predicted in the early days of Philology by no less an authority than Jacob Grimm. Grimm made his much-quoted prophecy on the basis of English’s hybrid properties as a language, its cultural value (the genius of its national poet), and the growing power of the British Empire (Grimm, 1851). But, as we also know, for English to make its way from a language of empire to an international and subsequently “global” language, it had to be released from its associations with British imperialism, cultural and otherwise. It had to be rebranded.

A key aspect of this process has been the very Lockean issue of “ownership” (as addressed by Henry Widdowson in an influential talk to the 1994 TESOL conference called precisely “The Ownership of English”). In becoming “global”, rather than residually “imperialist”, “English” has supposedly been removed from “ownership” by the Anglophone community, from the cultural contexts of its dominant historical situations of use (Widdowson, 1994: 379). “As soon as you accept that English serves the communicative and communal needs of different communities”, as Widdowson said, “it follows logically that it must be diverse. An international language has to be an independent language” (*idem*, 385). But, crucially, as Widdowson goes on to argue, it cannot be so diverse as to become mutually unintelligible. In other words, it doesn’t devolve into a Babel of local creoles, but, precisely because it is a “global” language, it is reassembled as a means of communication, available to all.

To this end a whole scientific and commercial industry is springing up in attempts to describe this “global language”. Widdowson’s scholarly position is, for example, echoed by the owner of Bloomsbury, publishers of the *Encarta World English Dictio-*



nary (and J. K. Rowling, I hasten to add), who wrote in the foreword to the paper edition in 1999: "The argument for a new English dictionary, using the world as its cultural perspective, is inescapable, as English can no longer be said to be the British language originally defined by James Murray in the first *Oxford English Dictionary* or the language of America that Noah Webster set out to define. Today English is the language of the world" (Newton, 1999: n. p.).

This is not to tarnish Widdowson with Nigel Newton's commercial brush: the point is that the discourse is *everywhere* (as globalizing discourses should be, of course!). English becomes "the language of the world", in contrast with other languages (including its earlier incarnations, when it was "the British language" or "the language of America"), precisely because, unlike those languages, it has been deterritorialized, disembedded from the primary cultural contexts of its use, and (I am suggesting) "franchised" as "global". In other words, where the language used to be conceived as a vehicle for "British (or American, or whatever) culture", the "culture" of "global English" has become its potential for "global communication" – *i.e.* communication released from cultural embeddedness.

As distinct from the way it is actually negotiated in a myriad of contexts, as a "global language", "English" becomes another sort of language, not thick and various in accordance with its historical contexts, its "worldliness", but neutral, available to all as an instrument of communication. "Global English" is presented not a national or local language, but, precisely, a *lingua franca* (for accounts of the most important ELF project of the moment, the Vienna corpus, and for some of the issues ELF raises, see Seidlhofer, 2001; Knapp/ Meierkord, 2002). And what is a "lingua franca" – a language ostensibly "owned" by no one so as to be open to appropriation by all – if not a linguistic "terra nullius"? But is a language – particularly "English" – ever as available for appropriation, as empty of inhabitants and inscriptions, as that mythical concept sought to suggest "in the beginning"?

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