

CHAPTER ONE

THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE WORLD

Globalization Then and Now

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“Globalization” is a fuzzy word. What hidden histories are silenced by this fuzziness? What would the many phenomena heavily packaged and heavily publicized under the word “globalization” look like from a world perspective? In particular, what would a world perspective tell us about cultural flows and processes?

INTRODUCTION: COFFEE . . . CON LECHE?

Whereas the word “globalization” has been defined at least by some economists (see Trouillot 2001), its increasing use by students of culture and society has generated little attention to—and even less agreement on—what it actually means. The further we move away from economics, the more anecdotal and impressionistic our vision of globalization seems to be. Thus anthropology and literary and cultural studies in particular have yet to spell out what, if anything, globalization means to culture. Indeed, throughout the human disciplines, the relation between culture and globalization is as evanescent as it is pervasive (but see Ohnuki-Tierney 2001; Tsing 2000; Appadurai 1996).

It is not easy to fight a spook. Yet cultural globalization is a spook insofar as it is impossible to locate *in thesis* in academic discourse and almost as difficult to find in the world outside of academia. There are reasons for this, which suggest why cultural globalization is a dream for advertisers (“United Colors of Benetton”?), and I will allude to some of them. But first I will give flesh to the thesis. The enterprise is opinioned but intellectually honest. In making explicit a number of tacit but pervasive propositions about cultural globalization, I hope to render a dominant narrative more real and more conscious of its premises but, indeed, more vulnerable.

In synthetic form, the cultural globalization thesis goes as follows: economic and technological transformations since the 1970s have led to an unprecedented flow of capital, goods, ideas, and people across state and continental borders. These flows, in turn, have contributed to the demise of institutions of power, notably the state. Our times are thus marked by the incapacity of state-built or state-sponsored boundaries (borders, citizenship, ethnicity) to regiment populations and affect cultural practices and identities. In short, the world is fast turning into a single cultural unit.

At this point, the cultural globalization thesis splits into two parts, best captured in two subliminal images. The first image is that of a blending, a coffee increasingly *con leche*, at the end of which awaits cultural homogeneity across states and continents. The second is that of a shopping mall of cultures within which individuals and groups will be able to pick their preferred components and return home, as it were, to self-construct the culture (s) of their choice—with, indeed, the capacity to return the next day if the shoe does not fit.

There is a tension between these two images, but it is exactly because the images are subliminal that this tension rarely surfaces explicitly, even in scholarly studies of globalization, let alone in the public arena. When it does, notably in the hands of advertisers, spin doctors, or media handlers, it is hyped and projected in such terms that its harmonious resolution denies the very contradictions that produced the tension in the first place. Thus golf prodigy Tiger Woods, the blend of blends, the mixture of mixtures, can successfully shop for the cultural attributes of his choice—notably the American Dream—and sell some of his wares back to us in the form of shoes that fit all. The tension between story one (the unending blending) and story two (I am what I decide to be) is happily resolved because of the boldness of the move. That is, both images revel in the alleged newness of the phe-

nomenon, and that mutual newness is exactly what makes one support the other. Thus we buy the image—and the shoes. Again, Benetton comes to mind as a precursor, daring to juxtapose the obviously incompatible and claiming to resolve the incompatibility in a future marked by congenital innocence.

Yet claims of innocence are suspicious when it comes to globalization. Indeed, a narrative of political and economic change is fundamental to these images. These images work in part because we are convinced that the world is changing—fast, too fast—and that the motor of change is the inexorable hand of technology and trade (Gibson-Graham 1996). A critical reading of cultural globalization should therefore never lose sight of the political economy against which the narrative is deployed.

IS GLOBALIZATION UNPRECEDENTED?

Back to economics, therefore, to check on that feeling of newness. Is globalization unprecedented? We may approach the answer with this quote:

International finance has become so interdependent and so interwoven with trade and industry . . . that political and military power can in reality do nothing. . . . These little recognized facts, mainly the outcome of purely modern conditions (rapidity of communication creating a greater complexity and delicacy of the credit system) have rendered the problems of modern international politics profoundly and essentially different from the ancient. (Angell 1910)

The elements of a thesis are there: new technology—especially the speed of communication—creates an interdependence which in turn leads to a fundamentally different world. Does this suggest a radical break? Yes, except that the quote is from Norman Angell's *The Great Illusion*, published in 1910. Thus in the first decade of this century, some knowledgeable observers had already proposed that the main features we associate today with globalization fully obtained in the world of finance and politics. Were they wrong?

The figures that best measure economic globalization reveal that, in relative terms, the flow of goods and capital across state boundaries was at least as high during the period immediately preceding World War I as it is today. Ratios of export trade to GDP may have been higher in 1913 than in 1973. In the period 1913–1914, Foreign Direct Investment

(FDI) was around 11 percent, about the same level as in 1994. Capital flows relative to output were higher during the Gold Standard period than in the 1980s. To sum up a number of authors and arguments:

1. There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that the economic facts we most often associate with globalization are unprecedented;
2. There is evidence to indicate that the changes of the last twenty years are not as massive as we think they are;
3. There also is evidence that they are much more limited in geographical scope than the ideology of today suggests (Banuri and Schorr 1992; Trouillot 2001; Weiss 1997).

We should not draw from the figures highlighting the period preceding World War I that globalization first happened then—if only because two world wars should help temper such presumption. Rather, the most important lesson of the comparison between the first and last decades of this century is about the sense of newness that the awareness of global flows provoked then and now. Angell's pompousness is indeed refreshing when we know the date of his statement. Yet we need also to remember that at about the same date, Rosa Luxemburg (1968, 1972) was insisting that capitalism had always been a global process, needing from its inception new spaces to devour. Read as a process, economic globalization is inherent in capitalism and therefore as old as that system (Harvey 1995; Luxemburg 1972).

The lesson is thus one of humility, a mere suggestion that we may need eyeglasses to see things that are too near. If the economic flows we now associate with globalization are not as different or as massive as we may believe, should we not question the apparent newness of the cultural, social, and demographic flows that supposedly derive from this globalized economy?

In economics as in politics, in cultural as in social studies, the main narrative of globalization hides the very facts of power that make it both desirable and possible. All narratives impose silences (Trouillot 1995). The particularity of the narrative of globalization when it touches culture-history is a massive silencing of the past on a world scale, the systematic erasure of continuous and deeply felt encounters that have marked the last 500 years of human history. For sushi in Chicago to amaze us, we need to silence that the Franciscans were in Japan as early as the fifteenth century. For Muslim veils in France to seem out of place, we need to forget that Charles Martel stopped 'Abd-al-Raman only 300 miles south of Paris, two

reigns before Charlemagne. To talk of a global culture *today*, we need to forget that Chinese chili paste comes from Mexico, French fries from Peru, and Jamaican Mountain Blue from Yemen.

TIME, SPACE, AND HISTORY

Studies of globalization have been eminently parochial in their premises, eminently limited in their handling of either time or space, and of the time-space conflation itself. It is thus both ironic and necessary to insist that studies of globalization need to develop a global perspective. How do we do it? To start with, we need a better handle on two sets of issues that I will call, for short, temporality and historicity.

Narratives of globalization say something about the history of the world, but they often assume naively as their premises the state of affairs of the *Wall Street Journal*. If globalization is about world history, scholars of globalization need to ask: which world? whose history? We cannot answer the first question, “which world,” without a firm handle on temporality and the time-space relation.

You may have noticed that my title alludes to Fernand Braudel’s *The Perspective of the World* (1992 [1979]). Yet Braudel was less interested in the perspective *of* the world than in a perspective *on* the world. The original French title of the third volume of *Civilisation matérielle . . . is Le Temps du monde*, “World-time” or, more accurately, “the pace of the world.” Mistranslation aside, Braudel focused on that duration whose tempo was set by the global development of capitalism.

Still, Braudel’s perspective on the world is a crucial step in a search for a perspective of the world. For can we talk about globalization without taking seriously the various paces and temporalities involved? Braudel himself was careful to insist that there were temporalities other than the tempo of world capitalist development. World time does not affect the entire world in the same way. World time is not universal time. The pace of the world is uneven on the ground. Indeed, Braudel insisted, following Marx-Luxemburg and anticipating Harvey, that world-time itself necessarily created spatial hierarchies.

There are lessons here for those of us interested in the movement of global flows. Which temporalities do we privilege? Which spaces do we ignore? How do we set the criteria behind these choices? A world perspective on globalization requires attention to differential temporalities and the uneven spaces that they create.¹

Having distinguished, as we should, the temporalities involved, we need to return to the ground where those temporalities overlap. We need to observe how these temporalities coalesce, mix, disjoint, and contradict themselves among historically situated populations. Just as world space is not everyone's space, the history of the world is not everyone's history. We need to ask whose history is being told by the most fashionable narratives of globalization, and whose history is being silenced?

If temporalities overlap in inherently uneven spaces, this overlap enables and limits sensibilities and subject positions that can arise from within these spaces. In other words, we need to move from temporality to historicity, that two-pronged field in which human beings become both actors and narrators of their own story.

The rules of the game being what they are, it is no accident that the temporalities most successfully isolated by economic history are most successfully mixed in literature. I will not dare discuss Third World literature, whatever that may be, but I will dare suggest that Caribbean literature in all languages, of which I know something, is a world where time collapses into historicity.

Five hundred years that je cooperate, je pacify, je collaborate, that je dream American, socialize old-Europe style, that euros penetrate my ass with dollars a la leche. Here I am, plexiglass prostitute from Curacao to Amsterdam, soccer player on the French team, sweeper of all sixtine chapels in the chassé-croisé of exotic transfers. Ah, if for once I was the world, how they would laugh in Nigger's Corner!
(Trouillot 1997, 31)

THE FIRST MOMENT OF GLOBALITY

The world became global five centuries ago. The rise of the West, the conquest of the Americas, New World slavery, and the Industrial Revolution can be summarized as "a first moment of globality," an *Atlantic moment*, culminating in U.S. hegemony after World War II. Europe became Europe in part through severing itself from what lay south of the Mediterranean, but also in part through a westward move that made the Atlantic the center of the first truly global empires.

I cannot deal here with the empirical details of that moment, which encompass five centuries of world history and the shrinking of huge continental masses, including Asia. Indeed, my Atlantic moment is not restricted geographically to societies bordering the Atlantic Ocean. The designation

does not refer to a static space but to the locus of a momentum. Spain's conquest of the Philippines, the British conquest of India, and the United States' control of Korea all fall within that moment. I will insist, however, that it is no accident that such non-Atlantic ventures often took place when the respective power claimed partial or total control of the Atlantic Ocean.

This Atlantic moment of globality entailed at the onset massive flows of money, capital, goods, ideas, motifs, and people not only across states but across continents.

Global flows of population include, of course, the Castilian invasion of the Americas, the nearly 12 million enslaved Africans taken to the New World, and the hundreds of thousands of Asians brought to succeed the slaves on Caribbean plantations. As the North Atlantic states forcibly moved populations all over the world, their own citizens also moved from one continent to another, most often from temperate to temperate climate. Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Southern Africa, and the United States bear the marks of these demographic flows.

As peoples moved, so did goods. Massive flows of gold and silver, crops and spices, and plants and diseases, from tobacco to coconuts, from syphilis to smallpox, and from the mines of Peru to the Kews sprinkled over the British Empire and enmeshed world populations into encounters and confrontations unrestricted by physical distance. Economically these flows of goods and money sustained the life of the North Atlantic both before and after its Industrial Revolution. By the late eighteenth century, almost two-thirds of France's external trade rested on the shoulders of the Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue-Haiti and the slaves who died there. Similarly, in the nineteenth century, the opium trade proved vital to the British economy. Crops such as sugar, coffee, tea, or cocoa concretely tied together populations separated by oceans (Trouillot 1980; Mintz 1985; Brockway 1977).

This first moment of globality also produced its self-proclaimed hybrids, from the many *convertos* who joined the Castilian venture, to the early Americans who discovered they had become Indians, to the mulattos of Cuba, Brazil, or Saint-Domingue. *Cafe con leche* is not new, certainly not in Latin America. Already in 1815 Simon Bolivar had officialized a narrative of hybridity: "We are . . . neither Indian nor European, but a species midway between the legitimate proprietors of this country and the Spanish usurpers." Assessing the cultural evolution of the Caribbean, Edouard Glissant insists that creolization requires the consciousness of mixed origins, but he also contends that the notion of hybridity is too narrow to capture the richness of the situation.

THE HUMAN DISCIPLINES AND THE
LEGACIES OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC

The initial reaction of the men of robes and letters of the North Atlantic to this first moment of globality was one of intellectual curiosity. The new geography of imagination that arose during the Renaissance (and made possible the conversion of Latin Christendom into Europe) implied a global projection of power. That projection, which still serves as the foundation of what we call “the West,” inherently divides and segregates populations, cultures, areas, religions, and races. Yet it would be a mistake to think that it did so then the way it does now. From the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century, a number of writers expressed wonder at the globality just discovered but took it seriously enough to explore its social, moral, and cultural implications across a wide spectrum of philosophical and political positions.

From Amerigo Vespucci’s letters and the debates between Las Casas and Sepulveda through the sixteenth-century proponents of a total history, the reflections of Montaigne and Montesquieu, down to Diderot-Raynald or even Adam Smith on colonization, there is indeed an “us” and a “them.” But the “us” keeps changing, and the “them” is open-ended, for there is also a sense that what we say about “them” says something about “us.” To that extent, the Atlantic moment of globality was handled, at least by some of the most prominent European thinkers, as a truly global—that is, open if not open-ended—phenomenon.²

A precision is necessary. I am not arguing that Renaissance and Early Modern European thinkers were *not* ethnocentric. On the contrary, I have suggested elsewhere that the roots of scientific racism, as it first appears in the early 1700s before gaining full speed during the nineteenth century, go back to the ontology and geographical imagination of the Renaissance (Trouillot 1995, 74–78). This does not contravene the proposition that in the scholarly world, the impact of that geography was not homogenous. It implied closure and segregation, but it also implied degrees and forms of openness. Las Casas’ position at Valladolid was intellectually and *politically* defensible. It would look insane today.

When did this break occur?

In the nineteenth century, right at a moment when the North Atlantic nurtured jointly and with equal ardor nationalist rhetorics and myths of “scientific” racial supremacy, the scholarly world took what increasingly appears in retrospect as a “wrong turn” in the institutionalization of the human disciplines.

In a context marked by the increasing evocation and deployment of state power outside of academia and the reorganization of power within institutions of knowledge, the nineteenth century saw a qualitative break in both the notion and practice of “social science” as objective knowledge of the human world. Three fundamental changes sealed that break: the search for objectivity itself; the use of that “objective” knowledge as a guide for the management of social change, now perceived as inevitable; and the sense that such change would occur in a context where (political) sovereignty resided in the people (Wallerstein 1991). Objectivity and the manageability of data *and* populations fed on each other, separating the task into “disciplines,” increasingly removed from the humanities and from each other (Wallerstein et al. 1996).

So stated, the project created major zones of exclusion inherent in its aims and claims. To start with, in practice and for purposes of management, the bulk of the data to be analyzed came from the five countries where that institutionalization took place: Britain, France, the Germans, the Italies, and the United States. More important, the project left out *by definition* the populations thought to be impervious to change by nature or by practice, including most of the non-West, which became the purview of a particular discipline, anthropology (Trouillot 1991). It left out, by definition also, populations—often the same—that were not thought to be worthy of self-sovereignty. Indeed, sovereignty and the capacity for progress went hand in hand in North Atlantic social thought, if not from the days of Las Casas, certainly at least from the days of Condorcet. The project also left out the populations—again, often the same—that were thought to be (or, later on, chose to be) outside of the capitalist order as defined from the North Atlantic.

Tailing along, fighting for their own institutional space and microsites of power, the humanities tended to mimic the parcellation of the social sciences. The result is still horrific. The human disciplines rewrote their past and polished their theoretical apparatus, drawing primarily from the North Atlantic experience, as though what we now call the West encapsulated the entire richness of humankind. They did not simply neglect the experience of the non-West—and, some would add, that of quite a few fellow Westerners. Rather, they actively silenced that experience within their self-designed domains. They made it inconsequential to theory.

Within the self-designed domains, theoretical segregation paralleled the closure of human populations within the political boundaries designed by the North Atlantic or—in the lack of such—within the boundaries that

most resembled home in the minds of North Atlantic observers. Tribes, nations, regions, and ethnicities became not only natural units of analysis, which is bad enough, but they became the real thing. Not only was what was here to be studied, but it was what was “out there,” entities imbued with an internal life and enclosed in fixed boundaries. Anthropologist Eric R. Wolf evaluates the intellectual disaster thus:

The habit of treating named entities such as Iroquois, Greece, Persia, or the United States as fixed entities opposed to one another by stable internal architecture and external boundaries interferes with our ability to understand their mutual encounter and confrontation. . . . We seem to have taken a wrong turn in understanding at some critical point in the past, a false choice that bedevils our thinking in the present.

That critical turning point is identifiable. It occurred in the middle of the past century, when inquiry into the nature and varieties of humankind split into separate (and unequal) specialties and disciplines. This split was fateful. (Wolf 1982, 7)

CULTURE IN A BOTTLE

One consequence of that discursive narrowness is an essentialist approach to cultures, the borders of which supposedly overlap the imagined community of the nation-state or similar political boundaries within it. Anthropology, notably American cultural anthropology, played its part in this theoretical segregation, making culture not only both an object and a unit of analysis—an enterprise intellectually doubtful at best—but something “out there” that people obviously similar shared somewhat in their head when not through their practice.

To be sure, in the mind of many Boasians, the enterprise was partially intended to sever race from culture. Yet a century later it is not at all certain that cultural determinism’s possible victory over biology has done much to destroy racism. At any rate, willingly or not, anthropology, and American cultural anthropology in particular, sold the general public an ahistorical, classless, essentialist notion of culture that breeds determinism. Culture became something evanescent and yet palpable, shared by a community whose borders just happened to replicate political boundaries. One nation, one state, one culture. One subnation, one subculture. Where racial boundaries were also fundamental political boundaries, as in the United States, culture and race became conflated.

If a number of North Americans now think that there is more cultural affinity between a black boy from inner-city Detroit and a Kalahari bushman than between that boy and his white Bostonian counterpart, American anthropologists have to take part of the blame.

The notion of single, isolated, and identifiable cultures thus channeled the geographical imaginary of the Renaissance through some of the worst intellectual catheters designed by the nineteenth century. Never mind that this notion of an isolated culture was never adequate to describe any population in or out of the North Atlantic. It fit nationalist ideologies of what the world should look like.

But suddenly, alas, the world does not look as it should. The problem is not that cultures are suddenly changing: they have always been changing. Nor is it new that cultures are porous. Human groups have always been open, in various degrees, to new experiences, outside influences, borrowings, and impositions. The difference now is that the fiction of isolated cultures built by the nineteenth century on the assumptions of the Renaissance no longer fits the lived experiences of the populations of the North Atlantic. I now turn to this second moment of globality.

THE SECOND MOMENT OF GLOBALITY: MASS AND VELOCITY

Since the end of World War II, a number of changes have deeply affected the globalization process. The first major change is not in the nature of global flows. As I suggested earlier, capital, goods, populations, ideas, motifs, and sensibilities have traveled across state and continental borders for a long time. They continue to do so. But they now do it at speeds and in quantities unthinkable just fifty years ago. It is not the relative importance of global flows that is unique to our times. Rather, it is the sheer volume of these flows and the speed at which these masses move. Mass and velocity are unique to our times. Unique also is the widespread awareness of global flows. That awareness grows everywhere, largely because of the increase in both size and velocity.

We can now start reading the unspoken tensions that characterize a number of cultural icons of our times, from Tiger Woods to postcolonial theorists. Capital, populations, and information move in much greater mass and at increasing speed, producing a centripetal effect of perception: we are the world; we are at its center, since everything around us moves. But that imaginary center is also the eye of a hurricane, for not only does everything move around us, but everything moves too fast and too soon.

To phrase the proposition in slightly different terms, while global flows increase in speed and velocity, most human beings continue to think and act locally. There is thus a disjuncture between the awareness of globalization and the capacity to come to terms with its consequences. While the first moment of globality produced tremendous cultural upheavals felt deeply in the colonies, in the second moment of globality globalization hits consciousness as a never-ending shock, the echoes of which seem to circle around the world.

Two contradictory reactions thus dominate the popular responses to global flows: wonderment and fragmentation.

WONDERS AND FRAGMENTATION

The most visible products of the two moments of globality do not fit the essentialist categories we inherited from the nineteenth century. They disturb the sense we had of what the world was or should have been. Thus wonder emerges as one of the reactions among the public.

We knew—we thought we knew—that a Chinese looks Chinese, speaks Chinese, and acts Chinese—until we walk into a Cuban restaurant, say, on New York's Upper West Side or in Miami's Little Havana—and discover a Chinese face with Latin flavors and Spanish accent. We think: the world has changed. But the world has not changed. We have simply moved closer to it. Chinese laborers stood next to African slaves on Cuban sugarcane plantations without much surprise on their or their masters' parts.

The example brings home a difference of our times set in three propositions: (1) wonder is premised in the incompatibility between essentialist categories and the products of global processes; (2) the nineteenth century has left us with the habit of conceptualizing humankind fundamentally in essential terms; (3) the speed of the late twentieth century makes it impossible for us not to notice the nonessentialist products of global flows. Wonder and puzzlement increase accordingly.

Academics reproduce this wonder in part by providing new labels that attempt to reconcile the world we face and the one we think we left behind. Used uncritically, these labels couch the treatment of globalization—or some of its avatars: hybrids, transnationals (corporations or peoples), diasporas—in an essentialist mode that tries to recover the assurance of nineteenth-century pronouncements. Their fluidity once stated, we treat our new hybrids as entities—as givens rather than as moments to be unpacked.

The political danger is obvious. One of the least banal effects of the Tiger Woods, Hybrid qua Star phenomenon is a thicker mask on the formation of racial identity and the workings of racism in the United States. There is a mess out there, and the temptation to order the mess by inventing new labels, by naming the results rather than deciphering the process, is great. From nominalization to essentialism, the bridge is rather short.

Wonder does not exhaust our dominant responses to the second moment of globality. A second reaction is a feeling of fragmentation.

Since the end of World War II, a number of political and intellectual leaders have promised us, intermittently and with varying degrees of certitude, an end to racial and ethnic conflicts, both within and across political borders. Yet during that same period, such conflicts have erupted repeatedly in various parts of the globe, pushing millions of individuals to unexpected levels of verbal and physical violence. That violence does not exempt Western democracies such as the United States, Germany, or France. Further, even when mass violence is absent, race and ethnicity creep into personal relations, often with surprising twists of perversity. From the vote of the United Nations Charter in 1945 to today's headlines from Bosnia or Los Angeles, these last fifty years can be read as an ongoing tension between the promise of a future where religion, language, and phenotype would become increasingly immaterial and the reality of a present where differences, presumed irrelevant, would become suddenly pristine. The twenty-first century is likely to be marked by the speed and brutality of similar conflicts.³

Academics also have reproduced this tension both within and across disciplinary lines. Whereas some disciplines can be said to have emphasized the processes of integration rather than the facts of fragmentation, all have had to take both into account, albeit to different degrees. Overlapping the disciplines are, again, the labels that tie this new world together: globalization, global culture, and diasporas.

One danger in these labels is the extent to which they replace the old universalisms of nineteenth-century thought—or of development studies—with a new universalism that is equally blind to its parochial roots. The experience of globality is always that of historically situated individuals with specific resources and limits.

I am not convinced that we gain more understanding of globalization by suggesting that the world is now moving to a “global culture,” or that cultures are now engaged in flows of exchange that propel them

as equal partners in a global market of patterns and ideas. McDonald's in Beijing is not the same as sushi in Evanston. Or at least we should not assume so until we do the research that would confirm this assumption. The challenge is to face the reality that cultural landscapes are open, that their openness has always been an occasion for exchanges and flows, and that these exchanges have always been modulated by power. In better words, how do we study the cultural practices of human populations and take power into account?

THE HISTORICIZATION OF THE WEST

We cannot start with a clean deck. The history of the last 500 years has marked us all in ways that we cannot deny. Indeed, if there is proof of what I call the Atlantic moment of globality, the proof is that few of us can think about the last 500 years as though they were not inevitable, as if North Atlantic hegemony was not in the very premises of human activity. Thus the first task is to ask how and why that hegemony became not only so pervasive but also so convincing, and the ideal tool for that task is the parochialization of the North Atlantic. The historicization of the West—its practices, concepts, assumptions, claims, and genealogies—is a central theoretical challenge of our times.

That has been said by many, including notable subaltern and post-colonial theorists. My own insistence is that this historicization, properly conceived, requires a global perspective. It cannot be reduced to an empirical focus on the successive geographical areas or populations (Greece, Rome, Latin Christendom, or the North Atlantic) that the West now claims in its genealogies. To limit the investigation to the physical West would be to accept naively the West's own genealogies and forget that the current challenge comes to the human sciences, in part, from changes in the globalization process.

Theoretical ethnocentrism is not intellectually equipped to face that situation, nor are the marginal responses, such as Afrocentrism, that this ethnocentrism provokes. Nor can ethnic studies, legitimate in their own terms, fill that void, unless we are willing to argue that North American minorities can serve as historical proxies for the vast chunks of humankind abandoned by the Latin and Teutonic canons. Chicano studies, as legitimate as they are, cannot replace Latin American studies. Black studies, as legitimate as they are, cannot replace African or Caribbean studies. In short, we need to cross political and linguistic

boundaries to place whichever population we study, and the very places we come from, in a global perspective.

The difficulty in achieving such a global perspective may be the Achilles heel of postcoloniality, the main reason it has not delivered on the promises of a new theory and politics. To put it differently, postcolonial theory has broken a silence less than it has generated a new position within an ongoing conversation. The postcolonial intellectual *herself* entered the conversation only inasmuch as her positioning vis-à-vis that center demanded a generous attention that denies the facts of power that made this positioning necessary in the first place. As such, she may have changed the themes but not the terms of a conversation that preceded her entry and will likely continue after her departure.

The capacity to read one's own position and generate from that reading multiple, shifting, and questioning new locations seems to me the singular lesson from the most progressive academic trends of the last few years. The deployment of that capacity—in what I insist should be a global perspective—may be the key difference in evaluating the effectiveness of recent strategies of discourse and practice in and out of academia. If so, the difficulties that self-described postcolonials have in developing a critical reading of their own conditions of possibility may be a testimony to the limits of the enterprise.⁴ As others have suggested (Ahmad 1992, 1995; Harvey 1989, 350–52), the need remains for a more critical reading of the context of intellectual production in and around academia.

CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Within academia itself we need to cross disciplinary boundaries much more often than we do now. Today, no single discipline has the capacity to conceptualize the experience of the people dismissed by the nineteenth century. Anthropologist Eric R. Wolf (1982) again says it best: “It is only when we integrate our different kinds of knowledge that the people without history emerge as actors in their own right. When we parcel them out among several disciplines, we render them invisible.”

While parochialism, including that of the disciplines, leads to obvious dead ends and centrisms of all kinds—including the renewed search for universalist paradigms, such as rational choice theory—these now convince mostly the believers. The human sciences are going through what historian Jacques Revel (1995) calls a time of “epistemological

anarchy,” in part because of the greater empirical base available for theory. Yet if we make use of that empirical base, this very anarchy is an opportunity for new conversations that take into account the entire historical experience of the world, with the various sensibilities and viewpoints that this experience implies.

ENDNOTES

This chapter was written in 1998, when versions of it were presented at Stanford University, the University of Chicago, the University of Virginia at Morgantown, Duke University, and at the workshop on Theory and Politics after Postcoloniality (Institute for Global Studies, Johns Hopkins University). Since then I have substantially refined my thoughts on these issues in later articles noted in the bibliography below. I have also added later references to the text for the benefit of the reader. My thanks to Michael Dorsey, Jeffrey Mantz, Nabiha Megateli, and Clare Sammells, whose research tips inform this text, and to Vivek Dhareshwar, for the ongoing conversation that provoked some of these lines.

1. Yet when we turn to most of the literature on globalization from the *Wall Street Journal* to the liberal-minded literature of anthropology, and literary and cultural studies, we discover a peculiar handling of the space-time relation: a silencing of the past, an obsession with what Annales historians called derisively “la conjoncture,” a patchwork of current headlines projected as the duration of the future over a world unfettered by mountains and other sinuosities. The world started this morning when sushi first reached Peoria, and guess what—it is a flat world.

2. Trails of this wonderment can still be found in studies of the Americas, notably creolization studies focusing on Brazil or the Caribbean (Trouillot m.s.).

3. In February 1998, Zapatista Indians seized control of the Web page of Mexico’s Ministry of Finance. What could be more global than a Web page? Yet what is more grounded in locality and historicity than the claim of the Zapatistas?

4. Yet some of these are rather obvious: England’s difficulties in sustaining the Commonwealth as an economic and intellectual umbrella; the uncontested dominance of English as the Latin of the late twentieth century; the ideological and personnel relay points between the United Kingdom and the United States—from Thatcher–Reagan to Clinton–Blair—however weak the structural parallels; and the conditions of academic production in the United States, including the politics of racism, all seem parts of a landscape begging for critical description.

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