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GLOBALIZATION AND POLITICAL STRATEGY

A TTEMPTS TO DEFINE GLOBALIZATION often seem little better than so many ideological appropriations—discussions not of the process itself, but of its effects, good or bad: judgments, in other words, totalizing in nature; while functional descriptions tend to isolate particular elements without relating them to each other.¹ It may be more productive, then, to combine all the descriptions and to take an inventory of their ambiguities—something that means talking as much about fantasies and anxieties as about the thing itself. In what follows we will explore these five distinct levels of globalization, with a view to demonstrating their ultimate cohesion and to articulating a politics of resistance: the technological, the political, the cultural, the economic, the social, very much in that order.

I

One can talk about globalization, for instance, in purely technological terms: the new communications technology and the information revolution—innovations which, of course, do not simply remain at the level of communication in the narrow sense, but also have their impact on industrial production and organization, and on the marketing of goods. Most commentators seem to feel that this dimension of globalization, at least, is irreversible: a Luddite politics does not seem to be an option here. But the theme reminds us of an urgent consideration in any discussion of globalization: is it really inevitable?² Can its processes be stopped, diverted or reversed? Might regions, even whole continents, exclude the

forces of globalization, secede, or 'delink' from it?² Our answers to these questions will have an important bearing on our strategic conclusions.

II

In discussions of globalization at the political level, one question has predominated: that of the nation-state. Is it over and done with, or does it still have a vital role to play? If reports of its demise are naïve, what then to make of globalization itself? Should it, perhaps, be understood as merely one pressure among many on national governments—and so on. But lurking behind these debates, I believe, is a deeper fear, a more fundamental narrative thought or fantasy. For when we talk about the spreading power and influence of globalization, aren't we really referring to the spreading economic and military might of the US? And in speaking of the weakening of the nation-state, are we not actually describing the subordination of the other nation-states to American power, either through consent and collaboration, or by the use of brute force and economic threat? Looming behind the anxieties expressed here is a new version of what used to be called imperialism, which we can now trace through a whole dynasty of forms. An earlier version was that of the pre-First World War colonialist order, practised by a number of European countries, the US and Japan; this was replaced after the Second World War and the subsequent wave of decolonization by a Cold War form, less obvious but no less insidious in its use of economic pressure and blackmail ('advisers'; covert putsches such as those in Guatemala and Iran), now led predominantly by the US but still involving a few Western European powers.

Now perhaps we have a third stage, in which the United States pursues what Samuel Huntington has defined as a three-pronged strategy: nuclear weapons for the US alone; human rights and American-style electoral democracy; and (less obviously) limits to immigration and the free flow of labour.³ One might add a fourth crucial policy here: the

¹ See, for a sampling of views, Masao Myoshi and Fredric Jameson, eds, *The Cultures of Globalization*, Durham 1998.

² The allusion is to Samir Amin's useful term, *la déconnexion*; see *Delinking*, London 1985.

³ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, New York 1998.

propagation of the free market across the globe. This latest form of imperialism will involve only the US (and such utterly subordinated satellites as the UK), who will adopt the role of the world's policemen, and enforce their rule through selected interventions (mostly bombings, from a great height) in various alleged danger zones.

What kind of national autonomy do the other nations lose under this new world order? Is this really the same kind of domination as colonization, or forcible enlistment in the Cold War? There are some powerful answers to this question, which mostly seem to fall under our next two headings, the cultural and the economic. Yet the most frequent themes of collective dignity and self-respect lead in fact less often to social than to political considerations. So it is that, after the nation-state and imperialism, we arrive at a third ticklish subject—nationalism.

But is not nationalism rather a cultural question? Imperialism has certainly been discussed in such terms. And nationalism, as a whole internal political programme, usually appeals not to financial self-interest, or the lust for power, or even scientific pride—although these may be side-benefits—but rather to something which is not technological, nor really political or economic; and which we therefore, for want of a better word, tend to call 'cultural'. So is it always nationalist to resist US globalization? The US thinks it is, and wants you to agree; and, moreover, to consider US interests as being universal ones. Or is this simply a struggle between various nationalisms, with US global interests merely representing the American kind? We'll come back to this in more detail later on.

III

The standardization of world culture, with local popular or traditional forms driven out or dumbed down to make way for American television, American music, food, clothes and films, has been seen by many as the very heart of globalization. And this fear that US models are replacing everything else now spills over from the sphere of culture into our two remaining categories: for this process is clearly, at one level, the result of economic domination—of local cultural industries closed down by American rivals. At a deeper level, the anxiety becomes a social one, of which the cultural is merely a symptom: the fear, in other words, that specifically ethno-national ways of life will themselves be destroyed.

But before moving on to these economic and social considerations we should look a little more closely at some responses to those cultural fears. Often, these downplay the power of cultural imperialism—in that sense, playing the game of US interests—by reassuring us that the global success of American mass culture is not as bad as all that. Against it, they would assert, for example, an Indian (or a Hindu?) identity, which will stubbornly resist the power of an Anglo-Saxon imported culture, whose effects remain merely superficial. There may even be an intrinsic European culture, which can never really be Americanized; and so forth. What is never clear is whether this as it were ‘natural’ defence against cultural imperialism requires overt acts of resistance, a cultural-political programme.

Is it the case that in casting doubt upon the defensive strength of these various, non-American cultures, one is offending or insulting them? That one is implying that Indian culture, for instance, is too feeble to resist the forces of the West? Would it not then be more appropriate to downplay the power of imperialism on the grounds that to overemphasize it is to demean those whom it menaces? This particular reflex of political correctness raises an interesting representational issue, about which the following remark may briefly be made.

All cultural politics necessarily confronts this rhetorical alternation between an overweening pride in the affirmation of the cultural group’s strength, and a strategic demeaning of it: and this for political reasons. For such a politics can foreground the heroic, and embody forth stirring images of the heroism of the subaltern—strong women, black heroes, Fanonian resistance of the colonized—in order to encourage the public in question; or it can insist on that group’s miseries, the oppression of women, or of black people, or the colonized. These portrayals of suffering may be necessary—to arouse indignation, to make the situation of the oppressed more widely known, even to convert sections of the ruling class to their cause. But the risk is that the more you insist on this misery and powerlessness, the more its subjects come to seem like weak and passive victims, easily dominated, in what can then be taken as offensive images that can even be said to disempower those they concern. Both these strategies of representation are necessary in political art, and they are not reconcilable. Perhaps they correspond to different historical moments in the struggle, and evolving local opportunities and representational needs. But it is impossible to resolve this particular

antinomy of political correctness unless one thinks about them in that political and strategic way.

IV

I have argued that these cultural issues tend to spill over into economic and social ones. Let's look first at the economic dimension of globalization, which, in fact, constantly seems to be dissolving into all the rest: controlling the new technologies, reinforcing geopolitical interests and, with postmodernity, finally collapsing the cultural into the economic—and the economic into the cultural. Commodity production is now a cultural phenomenon, in which you buy the product fully as much for its image as for its immediate use. An entire industry has come into being to design commodities' images and to strategize their sale: advertising has become a fundamental mediation between culture and economics, and it is surely to be numbered among the myriad forms of aesthetic production (however much its existence may problematize our idea of this). Erotization is a significant part of the process: the advertising strategists are true Freudo-Marxists who understand the necessity of libidinal investment to enhance their wares. Seriality also plays a role: other people's images of the car or the lawnmower will inform my own decision to get one (allowing us to glimpse the cultural and the economic folding back into the social itself). Economics has in this sense become a cultural matter; and perhaps we may speculate that in the great financial markets, too, a cultural image accompanies the firm whose stocks we dump or buy. Guy Debord long ago described ours as a society of images, consumed aesthetically. He thereby designated this seam that separates culture from economics and, at the same time, connects the two. We talk a good deal—loosely—about the commodification of politics, or ideas, or even emotions and private life; what we must now add is that that commodification today is also an aestheticization—that the commodity, too, is now 'aesthetically' consumed.

Such is the movement from economics to culture; but there is also a no less significant movement from culture to economics. This is the entertainment business itself, one of the greatest and most profitable exports of the United States (along with weapons and food). We have already looked at the problems of opposing cultural imperialism solely in terms of local tastes and identities—of the 'natural' resistance of an Indian

or an Arab public, for example, to certain kinds of Hollywood fare. In fact, it is all too easy to acquaint a non-American public with a taste for Hollywood styles of violence and bodily immediacy, its prestige only enhanced by some image of US modernity and even postmodernity.⁴ Is this, then, an argument for the universality of the West—or, at least, of the United States—and its ‘civilization’? It is a position which is surely widely, if unconsciously, held, and deserves to be confronted seriously and philosophically, even if it seems preposterous.

The United States has made a massive effort since the end of the Second World War to secure the dominance of its films in foreign markets—an achievement generally pushed home politically, by writing clauses into various treaties and aid packages. In most of the European countries—France stands out in its resistance to this particular form of American cultural imperialism—the national film industries were forced onto the defensive after the war by such binding agreements. This systematic US attempt to batter down ‘cultural protectionist’ policies is only part of a more general and increasingly global corporate strategy, now enshrined in the WTO and its efforts—such as the abortive MAI project—to supercede local laws with international statutes that favour American corporations, whether in intellectual property copyrights, patents (of, for example, rainforest materials or local inventions), or in the deliberate undermining of national self-sufficiency in food.

Here, culture has become decidedly economic, and this particular economics clearly sets a political agenda, dictating policy. Struggles for raw materials and other resources—oil and diamonds, say—are, of course, still waged in the world: dare one call these ‘modernist’ forms of imperialism, along with the even older, more purely political, diplomatic or military efforts to substitute friendly (that is, subservient) governments for resistant ones? But it would seem that today the more distinctively postmodern form of imperialism—even of cultural imperialism—is the one I have been describing, working through the projects of NAFTA, GATT, MAI and the WTO; not least because these forms offer a textbook example (from a new textbook!) of that dedifferentiation, that confluence

⁴ I have made an approach to such an analysis in *The Cultural Turn*, London 1999; and see also chapter 8 of *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London 1991.

between the various and distinct levels of the economic, the cultural and the political, that characterizes postmodernity and lends a fundamental structure to globalization.

There are several other aspects of globalization's economic dimension which we should briefly review. Transnational corporations—simply 'multinationals' in the 1970s—were the first sign and symptom of the new capitalist development, raising political fears about the possibility of a new kind of dual power, of the preponderance of these supranational giants over national governments. The paranoid side of such fears and fantasies may be allayed by the complicity of the states themselves with these business operations, given the revolving door between the two sectors—especially in terms of US government personnel. (Ironically, free market rhetoricians have always denounced the Japanese model of government intervention in national industry.) The more worrying feature of the new global corporate structures is their capacity to devastate national labour markets by transferring their operations to cheaper locations overseas. There has as yet been no comparable globalization of the labour movement to respond to this; the movement of *Gastarbeiter* representing a social and cultural mobility, perhaps, but not yet a political one.

The huge expansion of finance capital markets has been a spectacular feature of the new economic landscape—once again, its very possibility linked to the simultaneities opened up by the new technologies. Here we no longer have to do with movements of labour or industrial capacity but rather with that of capital itself. The destructive speculation on foreign currencies seen over recent years signals a graver development, namely the absolute dependency of nation-states outside the First World core on foreign capital, in the form of loans, supports and investments. (Even First World countries are vulnerable: witness the pounding received by France for its more leftist policies during the initial years of Mitterand's regime.) And whereas the processes that have eroded many countries' self-sufficiency in agriculture, leading to import-dependency on US food-stuffs, might, conceivably, be described as a new worldwide division of labour, constituting, as in Adam Smith, an enhancement of productivity, the same cannot be said of dependency on the new global finance markets. The spate of financial crises over the last five years, and the public statements by political leaders such as Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia, and economic figures such as George Soros, have given stark visibility to this destructive side of the new world economic

order, in which instant transfers of capital can threaten to impoverish whole regions, draining overnight the accumulated value of years of national labour.

The United States has resisted the strategy of introducing controls on the international transfers of capital—one method by which some of this financial and speculative damage might presumably be contained; and it has, of course, played a leading role within the IMF itself, long perceived to be the driving force of neo-liberal attempts to impose free-market conditions on other countries by threatening to withdraw investment funds. In recent years, however, it has no longer been so clear that the interests of the financial markets and those of the United States are absolutely identical: the anxiety exists that these new global financial markets may yet—like the sentient machinery of recent science fiction—mutate into autonomous mechanisms which produce disasters no one wants, and spin beyond the control of even the most powerful government.

Irreversibility has been a feature of the story all along. First mooted at the technological level (no return to the simpler life, or to pre-micro chip production), we also encountered it, in terms of imperialist domination, in the political sphere—although here the vicissitudes of world history should suggest that no empire lasts forever. At the cultural level, globalization threatens the final extinction of local cultures, resuscitatable only in Disneyfied form, through the construction of artificial simulacra and the mere images of fantasized traditions and beliefs. But in the financial realm, the aura of doom that seems to hang over globalization's putative irreversibility confronts us with our own inability to imagine any alternative, or to conceive how 'delinking' from the world economy could possibly be a feasible political and economic project in the first place—and this despite the fact that quite seriously 'delinked' forms of national existence flourished only a few decades ago, most notably in the form of the Socialist bloc.⁵

⁵ I have taken the unpopular position that the 'collapse' of the Soviet Union was due, not to the failure of socialism, but to the abandonment of delinking by the Socialist bloc. See 'Actually Existing Marxism' in C. Casarino, Rebecca Karl, Xudong Zhang, and S. Makdisi, eds, *Marxism Beyond Marxism?*, *Polygraph* 6/7 1993. This intuition is authoritatively confirmed by Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, London 1994.

V

One further dimension of economic globalization, that of the so-called ‘culture of consumption’—developed initially in the US and other First World countries but now systematically purveyed all round the world—brings us, finally, to the social sphere. This term has been used by the Scottish sociologist Leslie Sklair to describe a specific mode of life, generated by late-capitalist commodity production, that threatens to consume alternative forms of everyday behaviour in other cultures—and which may, in turn, be targeted for specific kinds of resistance.⁶ It seems to me more useful, however, to examine this phenomenon not in cultural terms as such but rather at the point at which the economic passes over into the social, since, as part of daily life, the ‘culture of consumption’ is in fact a part and parcel of the social fabric and can scarcely be separated from it.

But perhaps the question is not so much whether the ‘culture of consumption’ is *part* of the social as whether it signals the end of all that we have hitherto understood the social to be. Here the argument connects to older denunciations of individualism and the atomization of society, corroding traditional social groups. *Gesellschaft* versus *Gemeinschaft*: impersonal modern society undermining older families and clans, villages, ‘organic’ forms. The argument, then, might be that consumption itself individualizes and atomizes, that its logic tears through what is so often metaphorized as the fabric of daily life. (And indeed daily life, the everyday or the quotidian, does not begin to be theoretically and philosophically, sociologically, conceptualized until the very moment when it begins to be destroyed in this fashion.) The critique of commodity consumption here parallels the traditional critique of money itself—where gold is identified as the supremely corrosive element, gnawing at social bonds.

VI

In his book on globalization, *False Dawn*, John Gray traces the effects of this process from Russia to Southeast Asia, Japan to Europe, China

⁶ See Leslie Sklair, *Sociology of the Global System*, Baltimore 1991.

to the US.⁷ Gray follows Karl Polyani (*The Great Transformation*) in his estimation of the devastating consequences of any free-market system, when fully implemented. He improves on his guide in identifying the essential contradiction of free-market thinking: namely, that the creation of any genuinely government-free market involves enormous government intervention and, de facto, an increase in centralized government power. The free market does not grow naturally; it must be brought about by decisive legislative and other interventionist means. This was the case for Polyani's period, the early nineteenth century; and, with particular reference to the Thatcherite experiment in Britain, Gray shows it to be very precisely the case for our own.

He adds another ironic dialectical twist: the socially destructive force of Thatcher's free-market experiment not only produced a backlash among those whom it impoverished; it also succeeded in atomizing the 'popular front' of Conservative groups who had supported her programme and been her electoral base. Gray draws two conclusions from this reversal: the first is that true cultural conservatism (to wit, his own) is incompatible with the interventionism of free-market policies; the second, that democracy is itself incompatible with this last, since the great majority of people must necessarily resist its impoverishing and destructive consequences—always provided that they can recognize them, and have the electoral means to do so.

An excellent antidote, then, to much of the celebratory rhetoric about globalization and the free market in the US. It is precisely this rhetoric—in other words, neo-liberal theory—that is Gray's fundamental ideological target in this book, for he considers it to be a genuine agent, an active shaping influence, of disastrous changes around the world today. But this keen sense of the power of ideology is best seen, I think, not as some idealist affirmation of the primacy of ideas, but rather as a lesson in the

⁷ John Gray, *False Dawn*, New York 1998. It should be noted that his official target is not globalization as such, which he regards as technological and inevitable, but rather what he calls the 'Utopia of the global free market'. Gray is an admittedly anti-Enlightenment thinker for whom all utopias (communism as well as neo-liberalism) are evil and destructive; what some 'good' globalization would look like, however, he does not say.

dynamics of discursive struggle (or, in another jargon, of the materialism of the signifier).⁸

We should stress here that the neo-liberal ideology which Gray sees as powering free-market globalization is a specifically American phenomenon. (Thatcher may have put it into practice but, as we have seen, she destroyed herself and, perhaps, British free-market neo-liberalism in the process.) Gray's point is that the US doctrine—reinforced by American 'universalism', under the rubric of 'Western civilization'—is not shared anywhere else in the world. At a time when the reproach of 'Eurocentrism' is still popular, he reminds us that the traditions of continental Europe have not always been hospitable to such absolute free-market values but have rather tended towards what he calls the 'social market'—in other words, the Welfare State and social democracy. Neither are the cultures of Japan and China, Southeast Asia and Russia, innately hospitable to the neo-liberal agenda, although it may succeed in ravaging them as well.

At this point, Gray falls back on two standard and in my opinion highly questionable social-science axioms: that of cultural tradition, and that—not mentioned yet—of modernity itself. And here a parenthetical excursus on another influential work on the global situation today may be useful. In *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington, too, emerges—if perhaps for all the wrong reasons—as a fervent opponent of US claims to universalism and, in particular, of America's current policy (or habit?) of police-style military interventions across the globe. In part, this is because he is a new kind of isolationist; in part, it is because he believes that what we may think of as universal Western values, applicable everywhere—electoral democracy, the rule of law, human rights—are not in fact rooted in some eternal human nature, but are, rather, culturally specific, the expression of one particular constellation of values—American ones—among many others.

Huntington's rather Toynbee-like vision posits eight currently existing world cultures: the West's, of course; the culture of Russian Orthodox Christianity; those of Islam, of Hinduism, of Japan—limited to those

⁸ See, on this and the general lessons of the Thatcherite strategy, Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, London 1988.

islands, but very distinctive; and the Chinese or Confucian tradition; finally, with some conceptual embarrassment, throwing in a putative African culture, together with some characteristic synthesis or other that we may expect to see emerging as a Latin American one. Huntington's method here is reminiscent of the earliest days of anthropological theory: social phenomena—structures, behaviour and the like—are characterized as 'cultural traditions', which are in turn 'explained' by their origin in a specific religion—this latter, as prime mover, needing no further historical or sociological explanation. One might think that the conceptual embarrassment posed by secular societies would give Huntington pause. Not at all: for something called 'values' apparently survives the secularization process, and explains why Russians are still different from Chinese, and both of these from present-day North Americans or Europeans. (The latter are lumped together here under 'Western civilization', whose 'values', of course, are called Christian—in the sense of some putative, Western Christianity, sharply distinguished from Orthodox Christianity, but also potentially distinguishable from the residual Mediterranean Catholicism expected to materialize in Huntington's 'Latin-American' brand.)

Huntington does remark in passing that Max Weber's thesis of the Protestant work ethic would seem to identify capitalism with a specific religious-cultural tradition; apart from this, however, the word 'capitalism' scarcely appears. Indeed, one of the most astonishing features of this apparently antagonistic world survey of the globalization process is the utter absence of any serious economics. This is truly political science of the most arid and specialized type, all diplomatic and military clashes, without a hint of the unique dynamics of the economic that makes for the originality of historiography since Marx. In Gray's work, after all, the insistence on a variety of cultural traditions was noteworthy for the delineation of the various kinds of capitalism they could produce or accommodate; here the plurality of cultures simply stands for the decentralized, diplomatic and military jungle with which 'Western' or 'Christian' culture will have to deal. Yet ultimately, any discussion of globalization surely has to come to terms, one way or another, with the reality of capitalism itself.

Closing our parenthesis on Huntington and his religious wars, let us return to Gray, who also talks about cultures and cultural traditions, but

here rather in terms of their capacities to furnish forth different forms of modernity. 'The growth of the world economy,' writes Gray,

does not inaugurate a universal civilization, as both Smith and Marx thought it must. Instead it allows the growth of indigenous kinds of capitalism, diverging from the ideal free market and from each other. It creates regimes that achieve modernity by renewing their own cultural traditions, not by imitating western countries. There are many modernities, and as many ways of failing to be modern.

Significantly, all of these so-called 'modernities'—the kinship capitalism that Gray traces within the Chinese diaspora, the samurai capitalism in Japan, chaebol in Korea, the 'social market' in Europe and even Russia's current mafia-style anarcho-capitalism—all presuppose specific, and pre-existing, forms of social organization, based on the order of the family—whether as clan, extended network, or in the more conventional sense. In this respect, Gray's account of the resistance to the global free market is finally not cultural, despite his repeated use of the word, but ultimately social in nature: the various 'cultures' are crucially characterized as able to draw upon distinct kinds of social resources—collectives, communities, familial relationships—over and against what the free market brings.

In Gray, the grimmest dystopia lies in the United States itself: drastic social polarization and immiseration, the destruction of the middle classes, large-scale structural unemployment without any welfare safety net, one of the highest incarceration rates in the world, devastated cities, disintegrating families—such are the prospects of any society lured towards an absolute free market. Unlike Huntington, Gray is not obliged to look for some distinct cultural tradition under which to classify American social realities: they spring rather from the atomization and destruction of the social, leaving United States a terrible object lesson for the rest of the world.

'There are many modernities': Gray, as we have seen, celebrates 'regimes that achieve modernity by renewing their own cultural traditions'. How is one to understand this word, modernity, exactly? And what accounts for its prodigious fortunes today, in the midst, after all, of what many call 'postmodernity', and after the end of the Cold War, and the discrediting of both Western and Communist versions of 'modernization'—that is to say, of the local development and export of heavy industry?

There has certainly been a recrudescence of the vocabulary of modernity—or, perhaps better, of modernization—all over the world. Does it mean modern technology? In that case, nearly every country in the world has surely long since been modernized, and has cars, telephones, aeroplanes, factories, even computers and local stock markets. Does being insufficiently modern—here generally implying backward, rather than properly pre-modern—simply mean not having enough of these? Or failing to run them efficiently? Or does being modern mean having a constitution and laws, or living the way people in Hollywood movies do?

Without stopping too long here, I would hazard the notion that ‘modernity’ is something of a suspect word in this context, being used precisely to cover up the absence of any great collective social hope, or telos, after the discrediting of socialism. For capitalism itself has no social goals. To brandish the word ‘modernity’ in place of ‘capitalism’ allows politicians, governments and political scientists to pretend that it does, and so to paper over that terrifying absence. It betokens a fundamental limitation in Gray’s thought that he is forced to use the word at so many strategic moments.

Gray’s own programme for the future emphatically disdains any return to the collective projects of old: globalization in the current sense is irreversible, he repeats over and over again. Communism was evil (just like its mirror image, the utopia of the free market). Social democracy is pronounced unviable today: the social democratic regime ‘presupposed a closed economy . . . Many of [its] core policies cannot be sustained in open economies’ where ‘they will be rendered unworkable by the freedom of capital to migrate’. Instead, countries will have to try to alleviate the rigours of the free market by fidelity to their own ‘cultural traditions’: and global schemes of regulation must somehow be devised. The whole approach is very much dependent on discursive struggle—that is to say, on breaking the hegemonic power of neo-liberal ideology. Gray has remarkable things to say about the sway of false consciousness in the US, which apparently only a great economic crisis can shatter (he is convinced that one will come). Markets cannot be self-regulating, whether global or not; yet ‘without a fundamental shift in the policies of the United States all proposals for reform of global markets will be stillborn’. It is a bleak yet realistic picture.

As for the causes: Gray attributes both the preconditions of the global free market and its irreversibility not to ideology, as such, but to technology; and with this, we arrive back at our starting point. In his view, 'The decisive advantage that a multinational company achieves over its rivals comes finally from its capacity to generate new technologies and to deploy them effectively and profitably'. Meanwhile, 'the root cause of falling wages and rising unemployment is the worldwide spread of new technology'. Technology determines social and economic policy—'New technologies make full employment politics of the traditional sort unworkable'. And finally: 'A truly global economy is being created by the worldwide spread of new technologies, not by the spread of free markets'; 'the main motor of this process [of globalization] is the rapid diffusion of new, distance-abolishing information technologies'. Gray's technological determinism, palliated by his hopes for multiple 'cultural traditions' and politicized by his opposition to American neo-liberalism, finally turns out to offer a theory fully as ambiguous as that of so many other globalization theorists, doling out hope and anxiety in equal measure, while adopting a 'realist' stance.

VII

Now I want to see whether the system of analysis we have just worked out—disentangling the distinct levels of the technological, the political, the cultural, the economic and the social (very much in that order); and revealing in the process the interconnexions between them—may not also be helpful in determining the shape of a politics capable of offering some resistance to globalization, as we have articulated it. For it may be that to approach political strategies in this same way might tell us which aspects of globalization they isolate and target, and which they neglect.

The technological level could evoke, as we have seen, a Luddite politics—the breaking of the new machines, the attempt to arrest, perhaps even reverse the onset of a new technological age. Luddism has been notoriously caricatured historically, and was by no means as thoughtless and 'spontaneous' a programme as it has been made out to be.⁹ The real merit of evoking such a strategy, however, is the scepticism it

⁹ See Kirkpatrick Sale, *Rebels against the Future*, Reading, MA 1995.

causes—awakening all our deepest held convictions about technological irreversibility or, to put it another way, projecting for us the purely systemic logic of its proliferation, perpetually escaping from national controls (as witness the failure of the many government attempts to protect and hoard technological innovation). The ecological critique might also find its place here (although it has been suggested that the will to control industrial abuse might offer a stimulus to technological innovation); as might various proposals such as the Tobin plan to control capital flight and investment across national borders.

But it seems clear that it is our deep-seated belief (true or false) that technological innovation can only be irreversible that is itself the greatest barrier to any politics of technological control. This might stand, then, as a kind of allegory for ‘delinking’ on a political level: for to try to envisage a community without computers—or cars, or planes—is to try to imagine the viability of a secession from the global.¹⁰

Here we are already slipping over into the political, with this conception of seceding from a pre-existing global system. This is the point at which a nationalist politics might rear its head.¹¹ I take Partha Chatterjee’s argument on the subject to be established and persuasive—or, in other words, to demand refutation, if an unmodified nationalist politics is to be endorsed.¹² Chatterjee shows that the nationalist project is inseparable from a politics of modernization, and inherently involves all the pro-

¹⁰ It is no accident that when one tries to imagine delinking in this way it is always the technology of the media that is at stake, reinforcing the very old view that the word ‘media’ designates not only communication but transportation as well.

¹¹ The words ‘nationalism’ and ‘nationalist’ have always been ambiguous, misleading, perhaps even dangerous. The positive or ‘good’ nationalism I have in mind involves what Henri Lefebvre liked to call ‘the great collective project’, and takes the form of the attempt to construct a nation. Nationalisms that have come to power have therefore mainly been the ‘bad’ ones. Perhaps Samir Amin’s distinction between the state and the nation, between the seizure of state power and the construction of the nation, is the relevant one here (*Delinking*, p. 10). State power is thus the ‘bad’ aim of ‘national bourgeois hegemony’, while the construction of the nation must finally mobilize the people in just such a ‘great collective project’. Meanwhile, I believe it is misleading to confound nationalism with phenomena like communalism, which strikes me rather as a kind of (for example) Hindu identity politics, albeit on a vast and, indeed, ‘national’ scale.

¹² Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, London 1986.

grammatical incoherencies of the latter. A nationalist impulse, he argues, must always be part of a larger politics that transcends nationalism; otherwise the achievement of its formal goal, national independence, leaves it without content. (Which is not necessarily to say that any larger politics can do *without* some nationalist impulse.)¹³ It does indeed seem clear that the very goal of national liberation has demonstrated its own failure in its realization: any number of countries have become independent of their former colonial masters, only to fall at once into the force-field of capitalist globalization, subject to the dominion of the money markets and overseas investment. Two countries that might currently seem to be outside that orbit, Yugoslavia and Iraq, do not inspire much confidence in the viability of some purely nationalist path: each in its very different way seeming to confirm Chatterjee's diagnosis. If Milošević's resistance is in any way linked to the defense of socialism, we have not been able to hear about it; while Saddam's last minute evocation of Islam can scarcely have been convincing to anyone.

It becomes crucially necessary here to distinguish between nationalism as such and that anti-US imperialism—Gaullism, perhaps¹⁴—which must today be a part of any self-respecting nationalism, if it is not to degenerate into this or that 'ethnic conflict'. The latter are border wars; resistance to US imperialism alone constitutes opposition to the system, or to globalization itself. However, the areas best equipped in socio-economic terms to sustain that kind of global resistance—Japan, or the European Union—are themselves deeply implicated in the US project of the global free market and have the usual 'mixed feelings', defending their interests largely through disputes over tariffs, protection, patents and other kinds of trade issues.

Finally, one has to add that the nation-state today remains the only concrete terrain and framework for political struggle. The recent anti-World Bank and anti-WTO demonstrations do seem to mark a promising new departure for a politics of resistance to globalization within the US. Yet it is hard to see how such struggles in other countries can be developed in

¹³ Cuba and China might be the richest counter-examples of the way in which a concrete nationalism could be completed by a socialist project.

¹⁴ This is not exactly his take on it, but see anyway Régis Debray's wonderfully provocative and sympathetic *A Demain de Gaulle*, Paris 1990.

any other fashion than the 'nationalist'—that is to say, Gaullist—spirit I have evoked above: for example, in fighting for labour protection laws against the global free-market push; in the resistance of national cultural 'protectionist' policies, or the defence of patent law, against an American 'universalism' that would sweep away local culture and pharmaceutical industries, along with whatever welfare safety-net and socialized medical systems might still be in place. Here, the defense of the national suddenly becomes the defense of the welfare state itself.

Meanwhile, this important terrain of struggle faces a clever political countermove, as the US coopts the language of national self-protection, using it to mean the defense of American laws on child labour and the environment against 'international' interference. This turns a national resistance to neo-liberalism into a defence of America's 'human rights' universalism, and thus empties this particular struggle of its anti-imperialist content. In another twist, these struggles for sovereignty can be conflated with Iraqi-style resistance—ie, interpreted as the struggle for the right to produce atomic weapons (which another strand of US 'universalism' now restricts to the 'great powers'). In all these situations, we see the discursive struggle between the claims of the particular and those of the universal—confirming Chatterjee's identification of the fundamental contradiction of the nationalist position: the attempt to universalize a particularity. It should be understood that this critique does not entail an endorsement of universalism, for in the latter we have seen the United States in fact defending its own specific national interest. The opposition between universal and particular is rather embedded as a contradiction within the existing historical situation of nation-states inside a global system. And this is, perhaps, the deeper, philosophical reason why the struggle against globalization, though it may partially be fought on national terrain, cannot be successfully prosecuted to a conclusion in completely national or nationalist terms—even though nationalist passion, in my Gaullist sense, may be an indispensable driving force.

What, then, of political resistance at the cultural level, which includes in one way or another a defence of 'our way of life'? This can be a powerful negative programme: it ensures the articulation and foregrounding of all the visible and invisible forms of cultural imperialism; it allows an enemy to be identified, destructive forces to be seen. In the displacement of national literature by international or American bestsellers, in the collapse of a national film industry under the weight of Hollywood,

of national television flooded by US imports, in the closing down of local cafés and restaurants as the fast-food giants move in, the deeper and more intangible effects of globalization on daily life can first and most dramatically be seen.

But the problem is that the thus threatened 'daily life' itself is far more difficult to represent: so that while its disaggregation can be made visible and tangible, the positive substance of what is being defended tends to reduce itself to anthropological tics and oddities, many of which can be reduced to this or that religious tradition (and it is the very notion of 'tradition' that I wish to call into question here). This returns us to something like a Huntingtonian world politics; with the proviso that the only 'religion' or 'religious tradition' which does seem to show the energy of a resistance to globalization and Westernization ('Westoxification', the Iranians call it) is—predictably enough—Islam. After the disappearance of the international Communist movement it would seem that, on the world stage, only certain currents within Islam—generally characterized as 'fundamentalist'—really position themselves in programmatic opposition to Western culture, or certainly to Western 'cultural imperialism'.

It is equally obvious, however, that these forces can no longer constitute, as Islam may have done in its earliest days, a genuinely universalistic opposition; a weakness that becomes even clearer if we pass from the domain of culture to that of economics itself. If it is, in reality, capitalism that is the motor force behind the destructive forms of globalization, then it must be in their capacity to neutralize or transform this particular mode of exploitation that one can best test these various forms of resistance to the West. The critique of usury will clearly not be of much help unless it is extrapolated, in Ali Shariati's fashion, into a thoroughgoing repudiation of finance capitalism as such; while the traditional Islamic denunciations of the exploitation of local mineral wealth and of local labour by multinational corporations still position us within the limits of an older, anti-imperialist nationalism, ill-equipped to match the tremendous invasive force of the new, globalized capital, transformed beyond all recognition from what it was forty years ago.

The concrete power of any religious form of political resistance derives, however, not from its belief system as such, but from its grounding in an actually existing community. This is why, finally, any purely economic proposals for resistance must be accompanied by a shift of

attention (which preserves within it all the preceding levels) from the economic to the social. Pre-existing forms of social cohesion, though not enough in themselves, are necessarily the indispensable precondition for any effective and long-lasting political struggle, for any great collective endeavour.¹⁵ At the same time these forms of cohesion are themselves the content of the struggle, the stakes in any political movement, the programme as it were of their own project. But it is not necessary to think of this programme—the preservation of the collective over and against the atomized and individualistic—as a backward-looking or (literally) conservative type.¹⁶ Such collective cohesion can itself be forged in struggle, as in Iran and Cuba (although, perhaps, generational developments there may now threaten it).

Combination, the old word for labour organization, offers an excellent symbolic designation for what is at issue on this ultimate, social level; and the history of the labour movement everywhere gives innumerable examples of the forging of new forms of solidarity in active political work. Nor are such collectivities always at the mercy of new technologies: on the contrary, the electronic exchange of information seems to have been central where ever new forms of political resistance to globalization (the demonstrations against the WTO, for example) have begun to appear. For the moment, we can use the word ‘utopian’ to designate whatever programmes and representations express, in however distorted or unconscious a fashion, the demands of a collective life to come, and identify social collectivity as the crucial centre of any truly progressive and innovative political response to globalization.

¹⁵ Eric Wolf's classic *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century*, London 1971, is still instructive in this regard.

¹⁶ Anyone who evokes the ultimate value of the community or the collectivity from a left perspective must face three problems: 1) how to distinguish this position radically from communitarianism; 2) how to differentiate the collective project from fascism or nazism; 3) how to relate the social and the economic level—that is, how to use the Marxist analysis of capitalism to demonstrate the unviability of social solutions within that system. As for collective identities, in a historical moment in which individual personal identity has been unmasked as a decentered locus of multiple subject positions, surely it is not too much to ask that something analogous be conceptualized on the collective level.