

Dwelling in the Borders: Nations and Subaltern Cultures

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■ Is “Capitalist diversity” thinkable and desirable? Are there “subaltern capitalist economies?” Or shall we think in terms of “economic (instead of capitalist) diversity”, since capitalism is one way of economic organization but not the only way (although so it seems)? How does Central Asia fit in the global scene? How its economic and cultural diversity are entangled with global economy (natural resources); with international politics (in between China, Russia, the European Union and the U.S.)? And how its cultural configuration, with a significant population from Islamic enters in between Jihad and US war against terrorism? What follows are the personal meditations of a concerned scholar and intellectual rather than the opinion of an expert on these issues.

I – Nations, Subaltern Cultures and Globalization

The very idea of subalternity (the subalterns, subaltern cultures) is an invention of the national imaginary (Antonio Gramsci). Gramsci was himself a subject in the borders of the modern/colonial world. Gramsci was born in Ales, Italy,

on the island of Sardinia, a relatively remote region of Italy that was mostly ignored by the Italian government in favor of the industrialized North. In the modern/colonial world one side of the border is hegemonic and capitalist and the other is “subaltern” in various and different ways. That was later translated into the nation-colonial imaginary of post-partition India. Gramsci is better known as a communist and anti-fascist. Less attention he has received from dwelling on the borders of the nation and, as Sardinian, “feeling” the marginal and lesser conditions of certain people who were not only the proletarians. Thus, we can say that “subaltern cultures” are cultures at the margins or not quite integrated to the “nation,” that is, “the people.” You have noticed, for example, that Presidents and First Minister never refer to the nation as say the “American, Argentinean or French subaltern.” They always refer to the “American, Argentinean or French people.” But again, Gramsci described the modern-European subalterns as an extension of the class composed by proletarians, the working class engendered by the Industrial Revolution. “Subalterns” shall not be understood in ontological terms but rather in terms of power relations of the modern State. Subaltern cultures are defined in relation to the “hegemonic culture,” the culture of the homogeneous nation-state. When Ranajit Guha translated the concept to post-partition India, he (and his group) ended up identifying a different social sector: the colonial subalterns. That is, the subalterns that, on the one hand, were marginal to central power (British empire or independent Indian national state)

and, on the other, the subalterns that endured the colonial wound, that when through the history of the colonial difference; that is, of the racialization of human beings in the modern colonial world, from purity of blood in the sixteenth century to the color of your skin in the nineteenth; to the accent or your language and how far is from Greek and Latin and the nature of your religious belief in the twentieth century.

The very idea of subaltern cultures, either within a nation or at a global scale, had a better fortune in the ex-Third World than in Europe or the U.S. You may guess why. It became common, for example, to use the concept of “subaltern modernities” to describe peripheral countries and culture catching up with European modernity which of course was “hegemonic.” The very idea of subaltern modernities is either colonial or imperial following the lead of Euro-American modernity (today called also “globalization”). Subaltern modernities, therefore, are always already racialized in the hegemony of modern imperial (and Western) discourses. They have been racialized since the sixteenth century through the construction of the colonial difference. That is to say, Indians and Blacks were not just culturally different from Christian Spaniards. They were inferior. And this ranking was not invented by the Indians and the Blacks, but by Christian men of letters. You see how the colonial difference is constantly being hidden by the talk on cultural differences and cultural diversity? Subaltern modernities could be also conceived through the Imperial, and not just colonial, differences. Think of Russia and the Soviet

Empire, for example, or of Japan or of China today. Modernity is assumed to be, as British sociologist Anthony Giddens will have it (1991), an invention of Europe toward the end of the seventeenth century that, since then, spread and continue to spread (and 15 years after Giddens pronounced that dictum, we know how is spreading). Imperial nations like Russia/Soviet Union, China or Japan beyond the Atlantic empires of the past five centuries (again, Spain and Portugal; France, Holland and England; the U.S.) were cast as either yellow or Slavic Orthodox/Communist empires. That is, empires beyond the Western imperial frontiers which are assumed to be, again, Christian religion, white stock and capitalism in the economic sphere.

“Cultural diversity” at a global scale becomes entrenched with “economic uniformity” which it begins to be rearticulated as “economic diversity.” Cultural diversity is a mild form of maintaining racism under the carpet. And the illusion of economic uniformity made racism invisible in the sphere of international trade and international merging. Take for example the recent debates over the terminal ports in the US and whether it should be owned by a company based in Dubai, in United Arab Emirates. It was obvious, when President Bush announced the possible deal, that he was shooting his own foot. One was wondering whether he was totally unaware of all his previous actions and discourses; whether he did not care and thought that “the American people” will not care or pay attention to it; or whether his rootless determination toward the military and economic control of the world allows him to ignore every-

thing that matters but that it gets on its way. The Dubai deal acquired an enormous visibility because economic deals all of the sudden got entrenched with the “clash of civilization” that Samuel Huntington either forecasted or contributed to unfold at the cultural level, only. However, Dubai was not the only case in the recent past where cultural diversity gets in the way of economic uniformity. Last year CNOOC, a Chinese oil company, was stopped from its desire to acquiring U.S. based UNOCAL (a Chevron Company).¹ And there is also the story of an Indian metallurgic company attempting to buy a European based-one. Coming back to the deal with US terminal ports, the debate came to an end when it was announced that the deal will be transferred to the British owned Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation, generally known as P&O. It is useful to remember that P&O is a shipping and logistic company that dates back from the early nineteenth century, when the British Empire was at its very inception.

The *New York Times* (Sunday, March 12) published an article by Daniel Gross on the Dubai-P&O deal, and conceptualized it using a restaurant metaphor: “Globalization offered two ways: A la Carte and Prix Fixe.” The highlight sentence was the following: “The Dubai debate shows the new desire to pick and choose trading partners.” What is the logic of the pick and choose? My contention is that the underlying logic is the logic of coloniality, which is based on racial discrimination. Up to this point, that is, the past 10 years, racism was looked at within the nation (or nations) and casts as a problem of the civil and political society. That

is, something of which both the State and the Corporations were out of it. Although the articulation of economy and racism were brought together particularly by Marxists interpreters of society, such articulation was always pointed out in the sphere of civil and political society but never at the level of the cooperation and conflicts between the State and the Corporations. Now it became visible, in full bloom, a point of non-return.

“Cultural diversity in Central Asia” is indeed an intriguing proposition for some one, like me, existentially coming from the Western Hemisphere and whose professional training in the history of the modern/colonial world, and the emergence of the Atlantic economy, in the sixteenth century. Notice: not the European Renaissance, but the Atlantic economy and the imperial colonial/culture that emerged from it and flourished ever after—that is to say, the darker side of the Renaissance.

That displacement, from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, went hand in hand with the writing of history and above all the world. It was the moment in which Christian history of the world since its creation, which was one among many, started its route toward becoming the model of Universal History. World histories were subsumed under a hegemonic uni-versal model. The imprints of Christian narrative did not go away with the Enlightenment. They were only secularized and Hegel re-told uni-versal history not from Paradise but from some place in the East and its triumphal march toward the West. Today, that tradition (from Christianity to Hegel) was subsumed and incorporated into

a uni-versal history that changed its direction, from West the East. If for Christians the uni-versal narrative of the past justified the conversion to Christianity, of the entire world; and Hegel wrote at the time when the civilizing mission was the self-assigned responsibilities of Western European countries already under a well established capitalist economy. In the past half a century, history changed its direction and its mission: it was development of Southern and Western countries what animated its soul, the soul of History. More recently the mission has been redefined: the spread of democracy to the South (America and Africa) and to the East (Middle and Far) is what moves history now. Central Asia, which was marginal to the Western map tracing the march of history, came into focus after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Central Asia, South America and Sub-Saharan Africa are three regions in the global distribution of wealth whose destiny may be that of providing services for the concentration of global economy in South and East Asia, the Middle East, European Union and the U.S.

II – The Rise of Western Imperial Hegemony and Dominance: Central Asia in/and the Modern/Colonial World

I would like therefore to engage in a speculation that will bring cultural diversity, racism and capitalism together at a global, not just national level. Thus, we would have to consider, on the one hand, nations and subaltern cultures within the nation (as the title indicates) but, also, subaltern

nations in the concert of the global inter-state and inter-economic relations. I would ask, with the intention of engaging a conversation with colleagues from this part of the world, where is Central Asia in the global distribution of cultures and in the global distribution of wealth? So, let's take one thing at the time since there are many issues packed together here.

First let's spell out the rhetoric of cultural diversity hiding under it the latent racism entrenched in the logic of coloniality or the colonial matrix of power that govern the modern/colonial world. I have addressed related issues in previous conferences of the *Academy de la Latinité* (chiefly the meetings in Alexandria and Istanbul).

I am not sure when the concept of Central Asia originated, but I am sure that it was not before the 13th century. The only civilization of the globe, at that time, to conceive the world divided in Asia, Africa and Europe was Christianity. Chinese did not conceive themselves as Asian at that point. People living in the African portion of the world did not conceive themselves as Africans either. If then the division of the globe in Europe, Asia and Africa is a Christian creation, it carried also the seed of racism, at the global scale, in the configuration and foundation of the modern/colonial world. Why I am making this assumption? Because the Christian distribution of the known world, at the time, was based on the attribution of each part of the globe to Noah's son: Shem, Ham and Japheth. If then Asia could not have been conceived before the 312 century AD, when Constantine converted to Christianity and Christians be-

came entrenched with the Empire, then Central Asia is a division of a later vintage. It has to be part of the redistribution of the globe in the hand of Western empires and the building of international law, drawn by Spanish legal-theologian, Francisco de Vitoria, in the sixteenth century, and by Dutch jurist and humanist Hugo Grotius (1583-1645). Not before then for sure, but probably not before either 1848 when the British empire forced China deal with Western economy and military power and perhaps not before 1865 and the Meiji restoration in Japan. Thus, all the names that identify the region are part of the growing imperial dominance and influence of Western imperialism from (Spain, England, France, US).

Central Asia (Russian: Средняя Азия/“Srednyaya Azia” for “Middle Asia” or Центральная/“Tsentral’naya Azia” for “Central Asia”; in Persian یزکرم ایسآ; Standard Mandarin Chinese: 中亚/pinyin: “Zhōngyà”; Arabic یطسول ایسآ/“Asya al Wusta”) is a vast landlocked region of Asia. Though various definitions of its exact composition exist, no one definition is universally accepted. Despite this uncertainty in defining borders, it does have some important overall characteristics. For one, Central Asia has historically been closely tied to its nomadic peoples and the Silk Road. As a result, it has acted as a crossroads for the movement of people, goods, and ideas between Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia. It is also sometimes known as *Middle Asia* or *Inner Asia*, and is within the scope of the wider Eurasian continent. It is also sometimes known as Turkestan (*Wikipedia*).

But where is Asia coming from? It is assumed that in early Classical times, the term “Asia” referred only to the

small region known today as Anatolia (a part of Turkey). Eventually however, the name came to denote the much larger land area with which we associate it today.

The etymology of Asia can only be guessed at. The strongest possibility is that it derives from a borrowed Semitic root “Asu,” which means varyingly ‘rising’ or ‘light,’ of course a directional referring to the sunrise, Asia thus meaning ‘Eastern Land.’

And what about Africa?

The ancient Romans used the name *Africa terra*—“land of the Afri” (plural, or “Afer” singular)—for the northern part of the continent, corresponding to modern-day Tunisia. The origin of *Afer* may be the Phoenician *afar*, dust; the Afridi tribe, who dwelt in Northern Africa around the area of Carthage; Greek *aphrike*, without cold; or Latin *aprica*, sunny.

And what about Europe?

The name *Europe* derives from *Europe*, probably a compound meaning “broad-faced” (referring to the Earth), *eurus* (PIE **wer-*, “broad”) meaning “broad” and *ôps* (PIE **okw-*, “eye”) meaning “face.” A less likely possibility is that it derives from the ancient Sumerian and Semitic root “Ereb,” which carries the meaning of “darkness” or “descent,” a reference to the region’s western location in relation to Mesopotamia, the Levantine Coast, Anatolia, and the Bosphorus. Thus the term would have meant the ‘land of the setting of the Sun’ or, more generically, ‘Western land.’

In Greek mythology *Europa* was the beautiful daughter of a Phoenician king named Agenor, or Phoenix. As Zeus saw her, he transformed himself into a gentle white bull and approached her and her playing friends. She climbed onto the bull’s back and it began so swim off to Crete, where she fell in love with the then-changed-

back Zeus and had three sons with him (Minos, Rhadamanthus and Sarpedon, the first two of which constitute, together with Aeacus, the three judges of the underworld). (<http://www.answers.com/topic/placename-etymology>.)

If we look at the latest geo-historical locations in this definition (Europe, Middle East, South Asia and East Asia), we begin to understand the making of Central Asia. Alfred Thayer Mahan, the author of the *The Influence of Sea Power over History*, invented the *Middle East* in 1902. In 1902, Mahan published an influential article in *National Review*, an important British imperialist journal. There he came to an appreciation of the Middle East's strategic importance in the coming world conflict that would pit Britain (and, by implication, the United States) against the increasingly aggressive naval power of imperial Germany and the threat by land posed by imperial Russia. What is so astonishing is that someone so ignorant of what was happening in a geographical area to which he helped to give a name—the Middle East—could in his time so influence European and American understanding of that area. Mahan was among the few who understood the importance of the Middle East in a new global strategy, a strategy that would also include the U.S. with its newfound world role. The Persian Gulf—as it was known to Anglophiles—was the main area in a strategic line linking Europe with India—and this before the age of oil. Thus, if China and Japan were located in East Asia, and India in South Asia, Central Asia became configured as a region of Asia that was under the control of the Russian empire and of which Western capitalist empires were not

yet economically invested. The invention of the Middle East, because of its oil resources needed as the consequence of the Industrial Revolution, had priority in the global designs of a well-established British imperialism and French colonial dominions and an emerging U.S. empire (remember that Mahan wrote during the presidency of Theodor Roosevelt).

Why am I telling this story? For two reasons: the first is to underscore the fact that Central Asia, like South America, South Asia, Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia, etc. are not regions naturally emanating from nature, but all of them have been defined according to global designs of Western empires and by theological and egological epistemology. Let me put it another way: *cultural diversity*, in any region of the world and within one single nation, is subservient to *epistemological uniformity*; and epistemological uniformity is imperial, theological and ego-logical (e.g., the secular frame set up by René Descartes by putting thinking before existence and in that move des-embodiment and unplacing epistemology. One of the effects of the faith of an epistemology that is not located in any-body and in any-body's place is the assumptions that geo-historical regions, like Asia, South or Central and the Middle East, America or Europe are indeed natural configurations of the planet. And the second is that whatever histories and cultures unfolded in the region today called Central Asia before Central Asia became a region mapped by Western Empires in their constant distributions of land since the sixteenth century (see

Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 1952), those histories and cultures had to re-define and re-do themselves in relation to the insertion of Western categories of thoughts from religion to science, from political economy to political theory, from philosophy to aesthetics, from diversity of subject formation to the model of the modern subject (self-sufficient, competitive, defender of meritocracy, imperial). Dwelling in the borders became little by little around the world, since the sixteenth century, the historical conditions of non-Western people both in the history of geography and in the history of epistemology and the philosophy of belief (e.g. religion). But this I mean that non-Western subjects and subjectivities are all of those whom, whatever place of the planet they grew up and were educated (in Central Asia or Central Europe; in the Middle West or Western Europe), Greek and Latin (languages, histories and cultures) and the six imperial languages of the modern/colonial world (Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German and English) where not the house they inhabited in their, yours or our lives. Dwelling in the borders means to belong to a subaltern “culture”; that is, to a subaltern language and epistemology. I am using epistemology in the sense of principles and assumptions upon which knowledge and understanding is construed, either among Native Americans or Native Europeans and assuming, also, the power differential that placed Native Europeans in a privileged epistemic position. Epistemology was indeed and continues to be the empires companion. In the last analysis, the conflict between the U.S.

and Iran is above all a conflict for the control of knowledge which, at this point, is crucial to the continuing control of the economy and of authority (e.g., the State and the army) which means that nuclear knowledge in the hands and in the heads of Iranians, who speaks Farsi or Persian and are Muslims. Dwelling in the borders means exactly that: inhabiting a language and an epistemology that is not Greek-Latin based (even if in many cases is Greek-Arabic) and that did not unfold in the six imperial European languages of the modern/world.

If we take a glance at Azerbaijan, we see that its history shows the mark of substantial religious and cultural influence from Iran (Shiite Muslim) although linguistically and ethnically the country is predominantly Turkic. Furthermore, the republic was part of the Soviet Union for seventy years, but Russian culture had only incidental impact. In other words, Russian language and Orthodox Christianity were the imperial languages and religions that may have been in the head but not in the heart of Azerbaijanian. In the Americas we have similar phenomenon. Five hundred years of Christianity, Liberalism and Neo-Liberalism had as one of the consequences, the election of the first Indian President in Bolivia, and a government that is projecting the transformation of the State following the principles of Aymara and Quechua languages and epistemology. Of course, the history of the liberal state (imposed from outside with the consent of the “White” elite in connivances with European and/or US interests—similar to the case of Russia in Azerbaijan.

III – Dwelling in the Borders: Colonial Wounds and Subaltern Imperial Prides

The schematic road map I just traced is the blue print from where and in which the very idea of “cultural diversity” came into being at a world scale. Today, cultural diversity of a given region cannot be understood properly without reference to the larger picture in which regional/cultural diversity have been formed: that is, of the modern/colonial world. It can be objected that it is really an imperial interpretation to believe that cultural diversity in Central Asia and Azerbaijan. But I would argue that, first of all, the very concept of “Central Asia” is the invention of modern Westerns empires, taking for granted the Christian three partition of the world. From where Central Asia would come from if not from a cosmology that has conceived Asia as one of the three continental parts of the planet? Secondly, Central Asia whatever its previous local histories and “cultural diversity” had to be re-articulated once the local history of the Russian empire infringed upon them its global designs. And third, Central Asia cultural diversity had been again re-articulated with translation of the Russian Empire into the Soviet Union and, finally, with the end of the Soviet Union and the global dominance of Western (US yes, but Europe no) neo-liberal doctrines and designs. To simplify the story, let’s say that:

- Central Asia cultural diversity was articulated with the modern/colonial world when the Russian Empire—particularly after Peter and Catherine The Greats, controlled the colonies

economically and militarily and its imperial culture enters in conflict with regional ones. [*The Russian Empire and the World, 1700-1917: The Geopolitics of Expansion and Containment* by John P. Ledonne.]

- Central Asia cultural diversity when the modern/colonial world re-entered Russia through Marxism and from there forced a cultural re-articulation of Central Asian colonies. [*The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence* by Pauline Jones Luong (editor).]
- Central Asia after the fall of the Soviet Union, the growing incursion of US neo-liberal international and economic politics in the region disguised under the rhetoric of “democracy”. [“Central Eurasia In Global Politics: Conflict, Security, And Development,” *International Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology*, v. 92, by Mehdi Parvizi Aminch and Henk Houweling (editores).]

In these three coordinates, the imperial and colonial differences (Tlostanova 2003) are at stake. Cultural diversity today in Central Asia cannot be properly understood without taking into account imperial designs and colonial subjugation, which is “cultural” as well as economic and political. What is that story of the “imperial difference?” Let me make a long story short and linked with “nations and subaltern cultures” which is the topic I was suggested to address in this conference. In other words, “cultural diversity” means the *accumulation* of memories, of languages, of religious practices and beliefs in relation to land and, on the other, the *accommodation* of memories, languages and religious practices in relation to the land to imperial infiltration. Now, imperial infiltrations in Central Asia were of two kinds. First, through the Russian/Soviet Empires, which means, from the Russian incorporation of liberal political,

economic and cultural designs and through the incorporation of Marxist political, economic and cultural designs. However, it has been said several times in several forms, that the Russian Empire (as it emerged and unfolded since the sixteenth century) it was different from the Western ones that also emerged and unfolded in the same century). Interestingly enough, both Western empires (first under the lead of Spain and Portugal and after the eighteenth century of England and France) and the Russian had the Roman Empire as their ancestor. However, there are two stories of the fall of the Roman Empire. The fall of the Western Roman Empire (from where Western modern and capitalist empires emerged) is generally dated in 476 AD. However, the end of the Eastern Roman—that is the Byzantine Empire (from where Russia Empire emerged), is generally in 1461. The collapse of the Byzantine Empire opened the doors for the emergence of the Russian and Ottoman ones, as well as the fall of the Western Roman Empire paved the ways for Spain, England and France to take its destiny as their inheritors—and, of course, today to the US.

The point in remembering this story (often forgotten because by the fall of the Roman Empire is assumed to be its Western incarnation) is to also revisit a piece of history familiar to most: the Russian Empire was coetaneous to the formation of Western Empires, but was different. And one of the differences is that it expanded through land and not crossing and traversing the seas. More important than the facts, are the racialization that went on in the interpretation

of the facts. The Russian Empire (as well as the Ottoman) was not just perceived as different by Western Christians, but as in some way wrong headed and, in the model of the perfect human beings that Christians established for themselves, in some way also inferior. However, since neither Russian nor Turks were colonized by Western empires, at stake it was not the colonial but the imperial difference. It is in this sense that Madina Tlostanova described Russia/Soviet Union as a Janus-Faced empire (2004) and Taiwanese scholar, Leo Ching (2001), described Japan as a Yellow Empire with two eyes, one toward the colonies and the other toward the West. The point Janus-Faced empires are always aware of Western Empires, while the reverse is not true. Europe or the US never had problems with Easternization, but Chinese and Japanese had a history of pre-occupation with Westernization. This concern is not manifested at the level of the authority (State, military power) and economy (labor, land appropriation, financial circuits, trades and banking systems), but it acts in the formation of the subject and, of course, of knowledge. Subjectivity and identity become entrenched with epistemology. It was imperative for many Japan philosophers between the wars to study in Germany. There were not many Germans or Western Europeans who wished to “study in” Japan, although they were many Europeans and US scholars (from Orientalists to Area Study specialists) interested in “studying Japan.” This logic is indeed global. It is the logic of the colonality of knowledge and of

beings, the formation of subjects dwelling on the borders of the imperial and colonial differences.

This is the global logic in which I am looking at “cultural diversity of people and colonial subalterns” in Central Asia as well as Central Asia “natural diversity of resources” for the global economy. Both spheres, the cultural-political and the natural-economic, are related to the war on terror.² Central Asia has raised to visibility, in the West, due to the war on terror, the economic challenge of China and the US needs of its natural resources. Briefly, this means the US imperial need to control authority and economy under the rhetoric of national security and the war on terror. It also means control of the imperial differences with China and Russia. U.S. military bases have been established in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, causing both Russia and the People’s Republic of China to voice their concern over a permanent U.S. military presence in the region. It should be consider to what extent the Popular Republic of China and Russia, as well as several of the former SSRs, have taken advantage of the war on terror to increase oppression of separatist ethnic minorities. China has taken a harder line against the Uighur separatists of Xinjiang, while Russia has pursued the second war in Chechnya with greater intensity. Washington, which considers Russia and China as strategic partners in the War on Terror, has largely turned a blind eye to these actions. The ethnically diverse former SSRs, especially Uzbekistan have reclassified ethnic separatist attacks as terrorist attacks and pursued more oppressive policies.

In the sphere of economy, the most obvious countries conforming Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), offer a well of natural resources and a large Muslim population. That is, five countries positioned halfway between the Atlantic and the Pacific and bordering Russia, China, the Tien-Shan mountains and the Caspian Sea.

Far from bringing an “end of history,” the collapse of the Soviet Union has restored the Middle East to a condition that is much more historically normal than what prevailed for the better part of the past century and a half. History has come alive again. The whole northern third of the region—the Caucasus and Central Asia—which was locked in the Russian and Soviet Empires have again become part of a world that is primarily Islamic. But there is little evidence of a “clash of civilizations” within it. Christian Georgia already does most of its trade with Muslim Turkey and has a good relationship with Muslim Iran. Christian Armenia trades with Iran. Israel has constructive relations with all the new states of the Caucasus and Central Asia, both Christian and Muslim. They all look to the United States for support and leadership that will give them the strength to develop a normal relationship with their former colonial Russian masters.³

Thus, thousands of years in the history of these five countries were re-articulated when the Russian Empire colonized them and then colonial power was transferred to the Soviet Union. Today, “cultural diversity” enters the major global conflict of our time for the control of authority and economy (natural resources more than labor in the region). In the last analysis, Central Asia and the Caucasus, may

have an important role to play now that capitalism is being detached from its original *secular ideological beliefs* (liberalism) and attached to *sacred religious beliefs* alien to the formation of capitalism, both in its Catholic mercantile moment as well as in its Protestant Ethics moment. Once again, cultural diversity is confronted today with economic homogeneity. That is, as China and India are added to Japan economic power, and so Middle Eastern oil-based countries, would a global capitalism with a diversity of cultural faces will be better for the humanity at large than a capitalism with only one face? Could we imagine a politics of liberation based on economic wealth, as it may be the case of Hugo Chavez, in Venezuela, reach in oil and Evo Morales, in Bolivia, reach in natural gas and coca-leaves economy?

IV – The World Is not Just Flat; it Is also very Thick

I am not thinking of a Chinese or Singapore or East Asian capitalism. In 1994 *Foreign Affairs* published an interview with Lee Kuan Yew, Primer Minister of Singapore between 1959-1995 that became a signpost for debates on capitalism and Asian values. One of the many avenues that the concept of capitalism with Asian values opened up was to detach capitalism from liberalism and Christianity; that is, to detach capitalism from Western or Euro-American values. To link Christianity to capitalism may sound odd because Christian spiritual accents clashes with the material accent of capital-

ism. This is not the place to engage in such exploration; it should suffice to underline that capitalism and Asian values open up the naturalized and unquestioned relationships between capitalism and Euro-American values.

Detaching local values from global capitalism really opens up a can of worms; but it helps in understanding what the problem really is and what are really the issues in the US debate about whether or not to sell the terminal ports to a company based in the United Arab Emirates or a Chevron oil company to a Chinese one based in Hong Kong. We (and by that I mean all the 6 billions plus people living on planet earth) may be facing a future in which, part of it, will be the struggle of “capitalist diversity.” I would like to say “economic diversity” with the awareness that capitalist economy will be around still for a while yet, from US and the European Union to China; from India Brazil and Mexico; from Russia to the Middle East. The rest of the world will be reduced, really, to “cultural diversity” and “service countries.” That is the portion of the world that is flat, according to Thomas L. Friedman.⁴

The portion of the world regulated by capitalist corporations and supporting States it is just part of it. It is the most visible, *and flat*. But there several other short histories of the twenty first century. One of them, and relevant to our topic of “Cultural Diversity in Central Asia” has been the *re-articulation of the Jihad as a de-colonial project*.⁵ And I said Jihad and not Al-Qaeda, although Al-Qaeda has been the main force in the re-articulation of the Jihad *from the Cold*

War to the world between Imperial States and Colonial Political Societies. The role of Al-Qaeda, with different means of course, was equivalent to the role played by the Zapatistas uprising in 1994: the Zapatistas globalized Indigenous struggles and brought back to the present the five hundred years of the formation and global expansion of the colonial matrix of power. They used the internet, instead of other means provided by capitalist globalization that used by Al-Qaeda. After the Zapatistas, the Indigenous movement cannot longer be reduced to individual countries and to national struggles. It is at once continental (the Americas) and global in two complementary senses: the identification of aboriginal people in New Zealand and Australia but also of entire populations that recognized in the Zapatistas *their own colonial wound*. In this regard it is remarkable the reception that the Zapatistas discourse (not just the uprising, but the discourse; that is, knowledge and subjectivity) had among Kurds in the Middle East and Turkey—and of course among aboriginals in New Zealand and Australia.

Just in case you have been distracted or the phone rang when you were reading the last two paragraph, let me clarify that I am pairing (and not com-pairing) the Zapatistas and Al-Qaeda for three simple reasons.

- They are both responses to the end of the Cold War and to the “end of history” announced by neo-liberal triumphal rhetoric. The Zapatistas uprising, which was not spontaneous!, happened the very day in which the NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement)

went into effect. Al-Qaeda responded to a more tenuous menace that was announced in 1993 by Samuel Huntington “clash of civilization” and by Condoleeza Rice, in 2000, writing in *Foreign Affairs* that the end of the Cold War posed a problem for U.S. National Security: they did not have a clear enemy against whom to fight and justify the need for national security. You see, social security is not a natural need but an invented need.⁶

- Both, the Zapatistas and Al-Qaeda placed the struggle at another level, the global and trans-national, and moved it away from the fundamentalist ideals in Muslim and Indigenous thoughts, both among Indians and Muslims as well as about the common sense imaginary of the Western world (Europe and the US) *about* Indians and Muslims. And both the Zapatistas and Al-Qaeda articulated a powerful discourse that is no longer *anti-colonial* (or anti-Western) but *de-colonial*: that is, revealing that the rhetoric of modernity hid since the 1500 the logic of coloniality.⁷
- Muslim and Indigenous share one heterogenous historico-structural moment in World History: the same forces that ended Muslim domination in Europe, in the fifteenth century and since then the “victors” continue to humiliate them were the same forces that ended with the Inca and Aztec empires and, since the early sixteenth century, continues to humiliate them.

Al-Qaeda doesn't equal Jihad, but it contributed to detach the history of the Jihad from the institutional holy war and to place it at the level of the public sphere. It contributed also to detach the Jihad, by the same token, from Muslim Fundamentalism. Muslim Fundamentalism (like Hindu Fundamentalism), are not just religious but entangled with Hindu Nationalism and Arab nationalism, respectively. That is, it is the European and imperial concept of nationalism that forced the merging of religious belief with nationalist feelings. Now you see where I am heading to close this article: to the very question of "nation and subaltern cultures" and subaltern cultures at the global scale.

Let me risk a triple parallel:

- When Karl Marx disclosed the transformation of living labor into waged labor and, therefore, the exploitation of labor re-structured by the Industrial Revolution, he thought that he found a model for global history since the exploitation of labor provoked a conflict between the exploited sector of society (workers, proletarians, working class) and the exploiter sector (bourgeoisie, capitalists, owner of the means of production). As a European, he was able to perceive the logic of exploitation of labor and as a Jew (and since one of his first writings was on the Jewish question), he obviously felt the "internal colonial difference:" that is, that within Europe the Jews were inferior and suspect human beings. He was not expected to necessarily to "see" things from the perspective of a non-European person (whether

Chinese; a person in British India or in Hispanic America; Indonesia or in what will become after Marx death of the Middle East; or from the perspective of Black slaves on the Caribbean plantations); or from the perspective of a non-Jewish person (Muslim in Indonesia or the Middle East; Hindu in India; Indigenous people in Bolivia or Canada; Blacks in the Caribbean or in Sub-Saharan Africa) who were “feeling” the consequences of capitalism and racism. Thus, Marx was perceptive of the miserable conditions of *subaltern cultures within European Modernity* and capitalist European nations. He was not aware of *subaltern cultures* in both the colonized world and the world not colonized but degraded through the imperial difference. Arab nationalism, as Hindu nationalism, as other non-European nationalism, were responsive to the impositions of the model of the European Nation-State. And in the case of Arab and Hindu nationalism, things got entangled with religious practices and beliefs. Al-Qaeda, Jihads and the plurality of manifestations, organizations and movements known as “The Islamic Revival” since the 1970 testifies of a larger phenomenon: the thickness of the globe since the 1970s when, emerged simultaneously, the theory and practice of neo-liberalism (the end of the welfare State in the US and the collapse of “development projects for the Third World”) and the emergence, at the global scale, of de-colonial thinking and actions (e.g., Indigenous movements through the

Americas, Civil Right Movement, 1968 in Beijing, Paris, Checoslovaquia and Mexico).

- Al-Qaeda and the Zapatistas contributed to uncoupled struggles de-colonial struggles from the idea of the nation and of the nation-state (which was the limitations of political decolonization from 1947 to 1965 approximately). “Subaltern cultures” at the global scale (Indigenous and Muslims) overcome the limitations of Ecuadorian and South American Indians or Arabs, Tajiks or Indonesians Muslims. James Phillips wrote recently in *The Heritage Foundation (Heritage Lecture # 928)* the following:

Jemaah Islamiah, captured in Thailand; and Hamzah al-Rabbiyah al-Masri, a key operational leader killed in Pakistan. More than 4,000 suspected Al-Qaeda members have been arrested worldwide since September 11, 2001. Al-Qaeda cells have been uncovered, dismantled, and disrupted in Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. More than \$140 million of its assets have been blocked in over 1,400 bank accounts worldwide.

I am not interested in the figures, but on the places: you realize the scope of geo-political reach of Al-Qaeda and also of Jihad and of Islamic Revival at a global scale.

- “Cultural Diversity in Central Asia” shall be viewed and understood today, in the double and almost simultaneous scenarios of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the globalization of Islam. Both are tied up through US imperial designs: when the Soviet Union collapsed

a new justification for national security was needed, as Condoleezza Rice candidly stated. Curiously enough, Central Asia began to emerge in the global imaginary at that junction. Afghanistan brought together US support of the Taliban against the Soviets and the first target of a global war on Terrorism that replaced the war against Communism. But “Cultural Diversity in Central Asia” (and in Caucasus) began to be re-articulated (from outside and from inside; that is, from global designs of imperial *local* histories and *local* histories responding to global designs) also in relation to “economic diversity.” China knocking the doors of Central Asia eastern frontiers and Muslims everywhere became a serious concern of US imperial designs to control of the economy and of authority. And imperial control of authority (the State, like in Georgia; or the conflicts in ex-Soviet colonies, in Central Asia and Caucasus, in their looking toward Moscow or to Washington, through London or Berlin).

If you look at technological and industrial capitalization of China and India, as well as East and South Asia at large, the world may look flat. But if you look at the growing global articulation from global and colonial subaltern cultures, you realize that the “the culture of capitalism” is no longer the only game in town. And at this point it is necessary link, on the one hand, “cultural diversity” with “capitalist diversity” and on the other, to de-link “capitalist diversity” from “economic diversity.” That is, there are many ways of organizing

the economy beyond the capitalist model; and there are many examples already around the world, thinking and acting on non-capitalist economies. The bottom line is that “cultural diversity” within “epistemic and economic homogeneity” is just a prescribed game of imperial reason in its Euro-American foundation. The struggle of the twentieth first century will be that of “epistemic diversity” necessary for de-colonizing the state, the economy and all dimensions of subject formation (e.g., gender, sexuality, racism). In the de-colonial turn we are witnessing, the struggle will be between uni-versal and imperial knowledge (that is, disembodied and un-placed knowledge, that is, di-racialized knowledge sustaining “capitalist diversity” in US, India or China) and embodied and emplaced knowledges that rather than buying into the mythology of progress and development for the good of the people at large,⁸ they began to build alternatives to the imperial bubble and the sacred belief that the only way to go is to improve what you have.

Notes

1. CNOOC is a Hong Kong-incorporated public company that engages primarily in the exploration, development and production of crude oil and natural gas offshore China. We are the dominant producer of crude oil and natural gas. The Company is also one of the largest offshore producer of crude in Indonesia.
2. “Cultural Diversity” in Central Asia evolves around religion, politics and economics. “Islam is the religion most common in the former Soviet Central Asian Republics, Afghanistan, Xinjiang and the peripheral western regions. Most Central Asian Muslims are Sunni,

although Shia comprise the great majority in Azerbaijan, and in Afghanistan and Pakistan there are sizable Shia minorities. Tibetan Buddhism is most common in Tibet, Mongolia, and the southern Russian regions of Siberia, where Shamanism is also popular. Increasing Han Chinese migration westward since the establishment of the PRC has brought Confucianism and other beliefs into the region. Nestorianism was the form of Christianity most practiced in the region in previous centuries, but now the largest denomination is the Russian Orthodox Church, with many members in Kazakhstan. The Bukharan Jews were once a sizable community in Uzbekistan, but nearly all have emigrated in recent years.”

3. “American Middle East Policy. The Need for New Thinking,” Paul B. Henze and Enders Winbush, in *Central Asia* 2/8, 1997; <http://www.ca-c.org/dataeng/stã05ãhenze.shtml>.
4. *The World is Flat. A brief History of the Twenty First Century*, New York: Farrar and Strauss, 2005.
5. I owe the frame and history of this idea to Faisal Devji, *Landscape of the Jihad*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005.
6. “Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interests,” <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20000101faessay5/condoleezza-rice/campaign-2000-promoting-the-national-interest.html>).
7. Zapatistas discourses are well known and available, but see Walter Mignolo in a previous publication of the Academy de la Latinité. For Osama Bin Laden see the edition of his speeches in *Messages to the World. The Statements of Osama Bin Laden*, edited and introduced by Bruce Lawrence, London: Verso, 2005.
8. UNOLOCAL/Chevron motu in the web page is: “We improve people’s life, wherever we go.”

APPENDIX













