

FORUM

Localizing the Global: A Framework for Discussing WAC's Problems and Promise

ALEJANDRO F. HABER

Universidad Nacional de Catamarca – Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas, Argentina

Whatever is said in general terms about 'cultural heritage', 'social justice' and 'ethics' is framed by the tension between *global* and *local* under the present phase of capitalism. Drawing from descriptions of this phase, given by different authors under the labels of post-fordism, post-coloniality, and empire, I discuss the present different roles of cultural heritage, social justice and global ethics. Finally, I will comment on the potential roles ('problem' and 'promise') for the World Archaeological Congress in the present historical context.

Introduction

If one wants to get an idea about the meaning of something related to globalization the internet seems a reasonable place to begin. In the case of the phrase 'ethical globalization', the first web page listed in Google is one named 'Realizing rights. The ethical globalization initiative'. Based in New York, the organization's page has a banner with the following illustrative sentence "A world connected by trade and technology must be bound by common values" (Realizing Rights 2007). This definition of ethical globalization is quite interesting, for it includes at least two operations: firstly the world is described (defined) as connected through economic relationships as they are understood and practiced in the expanded market economy, then that same kind of relation is applied equally to ethics. It suggests that ethical values are of the same order of things as goods and knowledge (the objects of trade and technology that are seen as connecting the world), and that the connectedness of trade and technology that features economic globalization, and that provides the relational template for ethics, is value free. The long history of colonialism shows several examples of this kind of universalistic declaration of principles, of commonality of values, implied in foreign interventionism, political and cultural repression, and endocolonial practices; one should be cautious facing this kind of statement of globalizing values. What is called 'the theory of globalization' has evolved to be commonsensical for Northern¹ countries middle classes, including intellectuals. Globalization and internationalism are the hegemonic ideologies of our times.

The last years have seen how even 'human rights internationalism' has been useful for renovating colonial projects. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have warned against the imperial consequences of international organizations. In their book *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000), these authors theorize an ongoing transition from a 'modern' phenomenon of imperialism, centered around individual nation-states, to an emergent postmodern construct cre-

ated amongst ruling powers which the authors call Empire, with different forms of warfare. 'Empire' today does not mean anything like what we have commonly understood by the word. It occupies no lands; it has no center (not even in Washington); it doesn't depend on tightly controlled satellite governments; it is a postmodern entity (Walzer 2003). The market operates to allow richer states to acquire and use the resources of poorer states - not independently of politics but without reliance on political domination. If it didn't do that, we would be much less critical of the market than we are (Walzer 2003).

The Empire is constituted by a monarchy (the United States and the G8, and international organizations such as NATO, the IMF or the WTO), an oligarchy (the multinational corporations and other nation-states) and a democracy (various NGOs and the United Nations). Nicolas Guilhot (2005) explores how the U.S. government, the World Bank, political scientists, NGOs, think tanks, and various international organizations have appropriated the movement for democracy and human rights to export neoliberal policies throughout the world. His work describes the various symbolic, ideological, and political meanings that have developed around human rights and democracy movements. Guilhot suggests that these shifting meanings reflect the transformation of a progressive, emancipatory movement into an industry, dominated by 'experts' hidden in positions of power.

As seen from these variously Marxist-oriented theories, there is nothing 'ethical' in globalization, but the 'ethical globalization' itself should be considered as symptomatic of the ongoing imperial expansion. Moreover, 'ethics' as phrased in an internationalist context calls for responsibility, that is, the burden of imperial power is to exercise itself on marginal or poor countries and/or groups. But Imperial power does not need to be enacted as political domination: claimed by the responsibility (democracy), the conditions set by the threat of power (monarchy), are related to the alienation of local resistances to global market economy, which the final goal of globalization (oligarchy). But even these theories fail to unmask the localized character of imperial power, which likes itself to be represented as global. Henry Kissinger was clear enough when he said, in a speech in 1999, that 'globalization' is another term for U.S. domination. It is in the context of 'globalization' as a representation of imperial power that the diverse versions of the *'mission civilizatrice'* have to be understood. Even the responsibility for social justice can be re-oriented in imperial terms.

The Empire is total, but economic inequality persists and grows, and as all identities are wiped out and replaced with a universal one, the identity of the poor persists. Our task should be in 'imagine[ing] resistance to the Empire', but the point of Empire is that it, too, is 'total' and that resistance to it can only take the form of negation - 'the will to be against'. Resistance to the Empire is to be co-opted by its power, so it should be constantly changing and moving.

Cultural heritage

Given this context for analysis, I would like to go into a framework for re-thinking 'cultural heritage' and, concomitantly, WAC positions. The first dimension to be explored is: how is cultural heritage to be understood from the Empire theory? The Post-Fordist (or late capitalist) world economy is not centered on the circulation of physical commodities any more. Information and knowledge trading is in the process of gaining more and more place in the market economy. Information, as coded in genetics, remote-sensing data for metallic ore concentrations at trace-scale, and traditional knowledge of plants, animals and technologies, is shaping present areas of risk capitalist investment and earning. These areas of the market

economy usually imply the localization in particular settings of the otherwise invisible powers of imperial forces. Bio-surveying, geological surveying and organic tissues collection are several of the ways in which imperial forces are manifested in local settings. Large-scale mining projects are equally territorialized, albeit much more visibly. The tourist industry is another main area of market expansion: always looking for recently discovered places with authentic cultures and original pasts. The commoditization of cultural heritage is not a straightforward process. Organic remains can be mined for genetic material, artistic motifs can be mined for iconographic large-scale reproduction, and archaeological knowledge can be mined for re-creation in the tourist industry. In this process, archaeology intervenes in the sense of *de-territorialization* of local resources (knowledge and memory, as codified in different media) into the global market. In a second stage, global forces are *re-territorialized* in particular localities, usually recapitulating colonial discourses and categories (as is usually the case with the discourse of foreign aid for development, capital investment, or foreign intervention for other equally unselfish endeavors). Archaeology sometimes participates directly in re-territorialization projects. For example, in impact assessments of large-scale investment projects, or heritage industry development, but it usually participates indirectly, through the previous de-territorialization process that promoted local resources as global commodities.

The relationship of globalization with cultural heritage usually means cultural heritage being introduced in the market economy (commoditization of knowledge, certification of authenticity for the commoditized past and otherness). Through that relationship, local history becomes de-territorialized; following this the global market becomes territorialized as part of a local development project, for instance, tourism. This two-way process, which has the appearance of a secular history of colonialism, implies the promotion of the local as global and its re-territorialization in localities. The relationship between local and global is at the center of the process, and also in the focus of resistance to imperial power.

But there is a previous relationship between local and global in cultural heritage, and therefore in archaeology; this former relationship is as old as early colonialism (fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) and, in fact, provides the broader framework for global projects. The idea of one version of history as universally valid implies its validation against local histories, the imposition of one way of understanding history, our relationship with the past, and 'humanity' as self-projected towards the future. This epistemic dimension of colonialism –what has been called 'coloniality'– is not simply derived from colonial experiences, but is constitutive of colonialism itself (Quijano 2000). This idea of epistemic coloniality as constitutive of colonialism provides a broader framework for analyzing commonsensical ideologies of history, including its assumed driving forces and future trends, as for instance in the narratives of globalization. Archaeology is not only involved in the substantiation of colonial epistemic violence, but it may be understood as emanating as part of the colonial arsenal itself. An understanding of both colonial roots *and* colonial actual involvement of archaeological discipline provides an adequate measure of the revolutionary dimension and consequences of 1986 World Archaeological Congress and the offspring organization.

While WAC has been directly involved in developing respect to diversity and empowering the 'rights to historical self-determination' of indigenous peoples (which can be understood as a powerful contribution to political self-determination), they are still a long-way from the needed disarticulation of the dominance of the Western colonial paradigm of a lineal history trending to a (desired) future. This has a central importance facing the renewal of colonial projects as charted by large-scale mining. Large-scale mining, consisting in the removal of

gigantic amounts of soil, its fine-grained grinding and the selection of trace-scale metals through the use of great quantities of water and toxic substances, is very demanding of territory, energy and water. In the last 15 years large-scale mining has turned to Latin America and Africa as the main areas of investment expansion (and environmental and social depletion). This expansion of colonial projects has provoked the emergence of local resistance movements almost everywhere, as often there were people inhabiting the localities where large-scale mining settled, and living from the resources used and usually polluted by mining projects.

WAC

Has the World Archaeological Congress, as an international movement for politically engaged knowledge of the human past and cultural heritage, involved as it is with the considerations of the social consequences of archaeology and the development of social justice, gone from being a weapon against power to being part of the arsenal of power itself? Following Guillot, one should say that if WAC simply appropriates the movement for democracy and human rights to export neoliberal policies throughout the world, it might reflect the transformation of a progressive, emancipatory movement, into an industry dominated by 'experts' hidden in positions of power.

WAC's problem is directly related to being progressively aligned as one more of the new and proliferating NGOs, nongovernmental organizations, which defend universal values or collective interests, and play a still-to-be-defined part in global politics. The oppositional potential of WAC would be reduced accordingly with its shift towards 'moral intervention', which would be nothing else but a frontline force of imperial intervention. But WAC as an international organization can (and does) intervene in a contrary motion, addressing rights and values regarding 'cultural heritage' not in the margins, but in the center of the Empire. Addressing social justice in its relationship to cultural heritage in Europe and the United States and associated nuclei has a counter imperial potential completely different than addressing the same issues in the margins. Social justice should always retain a local focus for it to be something other than a colonial project. Any universalistic representation of social justice and being prepared for intervention is a straightforward way of justifying imperial projects. Colonial and imperial projects are always triggered by 'moral necessities' (like the concept of 'an idea' in Joseph Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness').

But also the theories behind internationalist discourse have the consequence of ontologizing categories that should be critically scrutinized. Because the categories, even the categories of identity, are an active part of colonial projects, their processual status should be focalized as a way of countering the reification effect of colonial discourse. Categories such as 'indigenous', for example, are a product of particular colonial discourses, and the way in which they are assumed as counter-colonial political identities are always locally contextualized. Historical othernesses are those that have evolved in interlocution with national states; firstly colonial and secondly independent ones. 'Indigenous', 'black' and 'white' have particular meanings depending on the concrete configurations of diversity of each national state (Segato 2002). The worldwide application of those categories, being a requisite for those collectives to be able to apply for benefits and rights, is nothing but the exportation of local (usually US) configurations of diversity represented as global. Failing to consider the local understandings of such categories might imply the imposition of an alien understanding of the self, and the consequent recapitulation and re-enactment of colonial discourses.

A political reading of WAC in times of the Empire should include the consideration of the particular mechanics of Imperial power over local settings. That is, the Empire exerts its power in a direct way over particular local settings, leaving aside former intermediate powers, such as the national state for instance. That is the reason why the development of anti-Empire conflicts is equally verticalized: the forces of the Empire and the resistances against it are in a direct vertical relationship of one powerful to one powerless agent. The role of international organizations is usually to facilitate this kind of one-to-one vertical relationship ('trusted partnership' and 'brokerage', in the language of a major mining corporation), in which localities have little chance to exert successful resistance. Networking local resistances is, for that same reason, one of the most difficult but needed tasks at the present time. Again, WAC has a proven capacity for assuming such a networking task, as it has increasingly done in terms of regional and south-south networking. Horizontal networking at a local level can be a privileged focus for WAC involvement in large scale cultural heritage issues, avoiding it being co-opted by imperial powers as a feeder of the interventionist morality and global commoditizer of local heritages.

Also, the focus on the political rights of indigenous peoples concerning cultural heritage is of great potential in that sense; and it might be expanded to reinforce the local tethering of indigenous positions. But the application of the category of 'indigenous' is dependent on the specific history of production of otherness within particular self-understandings of each national society regarding its own colonial processes. Cultural and historical heritage is a privileged field of discourse for the affirmation and contestation of those processes of production of otherness, through which large scale colonial processes can either gain local grounding and reproduction or be resisted, redefined and contested by local communities. In that sense, the recognition of political rights to cultural heritage should be expanded to every descendant local community traditionally related to that cultural heritage, even if not recognized by the state as indigenous or if categorized within different frames of colonial production of otherness.

But because the global market is the primary ground of Imperial hegemony, we have to imagine a network that works through or against regulatory international agencies, such as UNESCO, and aim to constrain the power of capital while reinforcing the horizontal networking of local communities vertically affected by that power, in the way domestic social democracy did in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

To re-imagine WAC as a plural conversation of different localities is at the heart of the promise of WAC as a multi-sited place for encountering local subjectivities.

Acknowledgements

A previous version of this paper was read at the Cultural Heritage, Social Justice and Ethical Globalization Symposium, Adelaide, 28-29 September 2007, convened by Claire Smith at the University of Adelaide. The meeting, co-organized by Women For WIK, was in part a forum for drawing attention to the Australian Government's intervention in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territories, which involved both a moral 'justification' and mining interests. A couple of days after the conference, a group of WAC officers and myself met in a workshop with Rio Tinto people, following an invitation by the corporation to discuss their proposal of 'trusted partnership'. This paper was written as a way of making explicit my position regarding the partnership proposal, and in an effort to provide theoretical elements for a serious political discussion of it. The WAC Executive eventually

dismissed the discussion and my oppositional position was literally excluded from the conversation.

Though this paper failed to provide a wide framework for exploring WAC's relationships to mining corporations, social justice and local communities, I still think that such a framework is needed. The colonial paradox of highlighting the intervention of a government within its own territory yet at the same time remaining blind to the intervention of the (no-less-Imperial) corporations in other countries, still remains to be thoroughly discussed. I would like to thank Claire Smith for inviting me to the Adelaide Symposium, and Brian Hole, Horacio Machado and Nick Shepherd for reading previous versions of the paper.

Notes

¹ Meaning the geopolitical north.

References

- Guilhot, N** 2005 *The democracy makers: Human Rights and International Order*. Columbia University Press, New York.
- Hardt, M** and **A Negri** 2000 *Empire*. Harvard University Press, Harvard.
- Realizing Rights** 2007 Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative. <http://www.realizingrights.org>. Retrieved 2007-09-10.
- Quijano, A** 2000 Colonialidad del poder y clasificación social. *Journal of World Systems Research* 6:2.
- Segato, R L** 2002 Identidades políticas y alteridades históricas. *Revista Nueva Sociedad* 178: 104-125.
- Walzer, M** 2003 Is There an American Empire? <http://www.freeindiamedia.com>. Retrieved 2006-06-10.