

# **'The Liberal Project': Globalization, Modernity and Identity**

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## **Abstract**

This article argues that globalization, or rather the globalization of modernity, can be conceived of as a 'liberal project.' At the heart of the 'liberal project' is the creation of a global civil society based upon universal values: human rights and the rule of law. However, a 'liberal' global civil society requires, as a precondition for its existence, the erasure of difference: the creation of 'unencumbered' individuals out of communal identities and the universalization of liberal democracy and capitalism. Historically, a product of the European Enlightenment, the 'liberal project' has taken the form of colonialism, imperialism and genocide in the non-European world, in the process compromising its central ideal of universal freedom. However, it will be argued that, in the light of the present ethno-religious revival, this 'liberal' project has failed. Three different but interrelated sets of explanations help account for its failure to transform the world in the image of the West: the incommensurability of cultural value systems, the dynamism of modernity and the distorting effects of pre-modern practices which make multiple non-western modernities possible.

## **Introduction**

This article will examine the impact of globalization upon collective identities. Globalization in a conventional sense refers to the globalization of liberal capitalist modernity. Following the collapse of Stalinism in the 1990s, it has been argued by neo-liberals that liberal capitalist modernity remains the only viable mode of economic, social and political organization. Furthermore, although most liberals acknowledge that a global political identity is at best embryonic, or

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presently limited to the developed North, they insist that globalization will inevitably lead to the dissemination of a global political cultural identity and the creation of a global civil society. This will be referred to as 'liberal' *global* civil society.

The liberal conception of a global civil society refers to a society where 'social life (the public sphere) is modelled on exchange and persons meet in order to arbitrate their pre-existing interests which have been "self-authored" (chosen in the private sphere)' (Hopgood 2000:1). David Jacobsen speaks for many when he writes that what 'we are witnessing is the development of a global (if still limited to the northern hemisphere) political culture based on human rights — which is demarcated (in principle) in non-territorial terms and, in its domain, is distinct from territorial states (the local political authorities)' (Jacobson 2001:177). Mary Kaldor is more emphatic in her assertion that horizontal transnational networks are replacing vertical territorial based forms of civil society on a global scale. For Kaldor:

(T)he coming together of humanitarian and human rights law, the establishment of an international criminal court, the expansion of international peace-keeping, betoken an emerging framework of global governance, what Immanuel Kant described as universal civil society, in the sense of a cosmopolitan rule of law, guaranteed by a combination of treaties and institutions. (Kaldor 2003:7)

Sceptics, on the other hand, are suspicious of claims that a global political culture based on human rights exists or is constitutive of a global civil society. Human rights are seen as the weapon of strong states, their abuses used to justify coercive intervention in weak states such as in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq and now Liberia. Whilst tribunals have been set up by the UN Security Council to deal with mass human rights violations in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia and Rwanda, powerful states, including the 'liberal' United States, have refused to ratify the Treaty of Rome that proposed the establishment of an International Criminal Court. The U.S. has suggested that there might be illegitimate political motivations in accusing U.S. citizens, notably U.S. military personnel, for alleged viola of 'universal' norms. However, it has derided the idea that there might be illegitimate political motivations in accusing citizens of Yugoslavia or Rwanda. One is, therefore, left with the impression that, a double standard exists at the heart of the global civil society: those from weak states such as Yugoslavia, Rwanda and, Iraq, may be prosecuted whilst those from strong states, defined in

realist terms as states possessing both a UN security council veto and, importantly, weapons of mass destruction, such as the PRC, Russia and the US, will not be prosecuted. However, the conventional sceptical critique begs the question of what is civil society and whether the globalization of civil society is indeed possible.

## **Global Civil Society**

The term 'civil' society emerged in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth century to denote a type of society distinct from the state of nature. For Thomas Hobbes, the state of nature was conceived of as a 'war, as if of every man, against every man' characterized by mutual fear, distrust and *anarchy* — a concept which as we shall see later was seized upon by international relations theorists to describe the contemporary international system of states. Civil society, in contrast, was characterized by the rule of law, based on certain fundamental rights enforced by a political authority also subject to the rule of law (Kaldor 2003:17). The origins of the term civil society lay in the *societas civilis* of classical antiquity. The term *societas civilis* was derived by pre-modern Europeans from Cicero's definition of the state (*civitas*) as a partnership in law (*societas*) and became a generic term for a secular legal and political order (Black 2001:33). The *societas civilis* was conceived of as a zone of 'civility,' entailing respect between members of a political community, based on security and trust. Civility was associated with the term 'civilization' which for Plato entailed bringing the private interests and passions of men under control. For Aristotle, *the societas civilis* was equated with the *polis*, a political community based upon public reason and public deliberation (Kaldor 2003:23).

Civil society receives its first systematic consideration in political thought in John Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government*. For Locke, the term 'civil society' refers to a society of free men, equal under the rule of law, bound together by no common purpose but sharing a respect for each other's rights (Gray 1986:12). These rights differ from the earlier pre-modern emphasis upon duties in that they are conferred exclusively upon individuals and are fundamental and inalienable, and remain embedded in a context of Christian theism. For John Dunn, Locke was a 'theocentric thinker for whom the truth of the Christian religion ... was an indispensable major premise of a scheme of practical reason within which most human beings had sufficient most human beings had sufficient motivational grounds for behaving as ... they ought' (Dunn 2001: 41). A civil

society was seen to have been constituted by a social contract whereby men exchanged their natural freedom in return for rights guaranteed by law. For Thomas Hobbes, the fundamental right had been a security which could only be provided by a *Leviathan* commanding absolute authority. For Locke, 'natural' rights included those of the preservation of life, liberty and property granted to individuals by *God*. Consequently, these rights may not be taken away or exchanged by men as they are *God's* property.

The link between civil society and a market economy was further developed by a group of Scottish thinkers in the late eighteenth century, particularly Adam Smith. In the *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Smith argued that the private self-interest of individuals guided by the 'invisible hand' of the market would lead to the greater prosperity of society as a whole. In order for the market mechanism to be allowed to operate, civil and political liberties needed to be guaranteed. Thus, the system of commercial liberty finds its natural counterpart in constitutional government (Gray 1986:25). Economic and political liberty were to be, from this point on, indivisible in the classical liberal tradition and form the theoretical foundations of contemporary neo-liberal globalization. Adam Ferguson had earlier attempted to historicize the concept of civil society in his *Essay on the History of Civil Society*. Civil society, for Ferguson, was a distinctly modern form of social and political organization which could be contrasted, not with a mythical state of nature based on mere 'conjecture', but with 'rude nations': the 'uncivilised world' which were in the process of being incorporated into European empires. Civil society for Ferguson was not necessarily superior to the societies of rude nations but was different, characterized by legality and individualism. Both Smith and Ferguson, in common with their contemporaries, attempted to ground their theories in a comprehensive account of human social development and a theory of social and economic structure whose terms had the status of general laws and not merely historical generalizations (Gray 1986:24). They, furthermore, introduced a stadial theory of history whereby society developed through different stages defined in terms of 'modes of subsistence', methods of producing basic human needs (Kaldor 2003:24). The Scottish thinkers, in other words, paved the way for the development of modern thought: the Enlightenment.

For Immanuel Kant, enlightenment referred to 'the freedom to make use of one's freedom in all matters' (Kant 1991:55). Through enlightenment, man emerged from 'self-incurred immaturity' to individual, moral autonomy. For Kant, morality could be derived from reason in a way that was independent of actual

experience. Human beings were enjoined by a categorical imperative to treat other individuals as 'ends' in themselves. It was this categorical imperative which provided the basis for the realization of a 'community of ends.' As Mary Kaldor points out, this was conceived of as a universal *civil* society, the *telos* of human development and was attained through conflict between man's 'asocial socialibility': man's ability to live in society as a social being and his tendency to think and act as an individual, 'to isolate himself, since he also encounters in himself the unsocial characteristic of wanting to direct everything in accordance with his own ideas' (Kaldor 2003:25-6).

Hegel, however, criticized Kant's notion that reason was independent of human experience; rather reason for Hegel was an historical product and could not exist beyond the constraints of time and space. For Hegel reason was embodied in language and culture. As the world was characterized by the existence of a multiplicity of different languages and cultures which differed across time and space, it followed that reason should be the highest expression of the *geist*, or spirit, of a particular linguistic or cultural group (Jones 2001:106). Thus reason was simultaneously universal *and* particular. The *geist* was a real, concrete, objective force that remains one, yet is particularized as *geists* of specific cultural groups and impersonated in particular individuals as the *Weltgeist* or world spirit. The *Weltgeist* progresses towards self-consciousness through history and is seen by Hegel as the gradual realization of freedom (Hegel 1991). As he states in his introduction to *The Philosophy of History*, the essence of Spirit is Freedom:

As the essence of Matter is Gravity, so, on the other hand, we may affirm that the substance, the essence of Spirit is Freedom. All will readily assent to the doctrine that Spirit, among other properties, is also endowed with Freedom; but philosophy teaches that all the qualities of Spirit exist only through freedom; that all are but means for attaining Freedom; that all seek and produce this and this alone. It is a result of speculative Philosophy that Freedom is the sole truth of Spirit. (Hegel 1991b:17-italics mine).

For Hegel, freedom does not merely consist of what Isaiah Berlin referred to as *negative* freedom (Berlin 1969), the freedom not to have one's 'natural' rights to life, liberty and property interfered with, but is 'none other than self-consciousness — consciousness of one's own being' (Hegel 1991b:17). History is none other than *progress* towards the consciousness of freedom (Hegel 1991b:18).

For Hegel, freedom was actualized in civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), the arena of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) in between state and family. In the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel subdivides the sphere of ethical life into family, civil society and state. They are the 'moments' of 'the ethical order' and 'are the ethical powers which regulate the life of individuals. The norms of the ethical order are actualized in different ways in the actions of and relations of individuals who belong to the three types of ethical order. In the family, ethical duties are determined by one's place in the family. In civil society, however, this type of ethical unity disintegrates:

in civil society, each individual is his own end, and all else means nothing to him. But he cannot accomplish the full extent of his end without reference to others; these others are therefore means to the end of the particular person.

But through its reference to others, the particular end takes on the form of universality, and gains satisfaction by simultaneously satisfying the welfare of others. (Hegel 1991a: 227-8)

Individuals, in civil society, are primarily concerned with the satisfaction of their private, selfish wants. This is done through working, producing and exchanging their product in the *market* which is regulated by a framework of rules, which define the rights of individuals, their person and property. The market, however, is constitutive of another kind of bond. Through the market men enter into social relations with one another and are socialized into playing socially useful roles for which they are rewarded not only financially but with *recognition*. Thus, civil society was not merely a system of needs but equally a sphere of recognition enabling the possibility of identifications and connections of mutuality between individuals and embodied rationally grounded norms that determined conduct (Khilnani 2001: 24). Civil society was, for Hegel, 'the achievement of the modern world' and thus the *telos* of history (Kaldor 2003:27).

*Global* civil society, in a liberal sense, refers to the 'space of uncoerced human association' (Walzer 1995:7), existing in opposition to the state and a states-system representing the interests of *particular* national communities. The liberal conception of global civil society assumes the existence of the 'unencumbered individual' that is, individuals unfettered by cultural or social norms and values (Hopgood 2000) This gives rise to a contradiction: On the one hand all human beings are *assumed* to be free, equal and bearers of inalienable rights to life, liberty and property, yet on the other hand, as Margaret Canovan has pointed

out, 'human beings as we encounter them are not free, not equal, not the bearers of inalienable rights'(Canovan 1990:5). Human beings are born and live within a particular political community, and are bound to their fellow citizens by special ties. These ties usually include a common interest in maintaining the stability and integrity of their community. Since human beings grow up within a particular community, they tend to feel a part of it and define their identity in terms of it. They, in the words of Bhikhu Parekh, 'see their community as theirs, feel a particular sense of responsibility for it, experience pride or shame when it does or does not live up to certain ideals, and take interest in its problems' (Parekh 2003:8).

These communities frequently have different social and cultural norms and values and relate to one another asymmetrically, according to local and global hierarchies of power and inequality. The special ties that bind members of these communities together may be national, ethnic, religious, regional, linguistic or even civilizational (Huntington 1993;1996) but can not be *global*. This is because, as Chris Brown points out, 'a global identity would have no borders, no frontiers, no sense of the Other' (Brown 2001:131). Brown follows Hegel in arguing that individuals become who they are through a process of *differentiation*. Identity is about difference: identity is not simply a matter of who you are, equally it is about who you are not (Brown 2001:129).

The creation of a 'liberal' global civil society, requires the erasure of difference, the creation of 'unencumbered' individuals out of communal identities. This may be seen as a distinctively modern project, embodying many of the ideals of the Enlightenment. Margaret Canovan, John Gray and Tom Young see the Enlightenment explicitly as a 'liberal project' (Canovan 1990; Gray 1995; Young 1995). In the words of John Gray, the liberal project is that 'of specifying *universal* limits to the authority of government, and, by implication, to the scope of political life'(Gray 1995:131- italics mine). Gray goes on to suggest that liberalism is the political theory of modernity, in that all other modern ideologies are parasitic upon it or share the same enlightenment ideals. Liberalism, or rather the classical liberal tradition, is, according to Gray, characterized by a definite conception of man and society which is individualist, egalitarian, meliorist and universalist. Liberalism is individualist in that it asserts the moral primacy of the individual against the claims of any social collectivity; egalitarian in that it confers on all men the same moral status; meliorist in its affirmation of the improbability of all political arrangements and social institutions; and universalist in its affirmation of the moral unity of the human 'race' (Gray 1986:

x). At the heart of the liberal project, and by extension, of modernity, lies a belief in the possibility of a universal standpoint, 'the view from nowhere' (Nagel 1986) which can be applied across time and space.

The view from nowhere, however, far from being frozen in time and space, developed in post-renaissance Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, in the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) and gradually was adopted as the worldview of an assertive, mainly Protestant *bourgeoisie*. One of the central elements of this 'view from nowhere' was the privileging of the individual as a *rational*, autonomous and self-determining being whose consideration outweighed that of the community into which he or she was born. Science, a form of knowledge that brought control and mastery over one's physical environment, was also seen as being able bring the emancipation of the individual from the ignorance and servitude of his or her *social milieu*. Thus, above all, the Enlightenment world-view was characterized by a commitment to *rationalism*: the belief in the power of reason to establish conclusive truths that lead to the *progressive* emancipation of the individual from the constraints imposed upon his or her liberty by the physical or social environment.

## **Modernity and Identity**

The idea of progress towards a universal human civilization characterized by individualism, rationality and secularism, although absent from some of the earliest thinkers associated with the Enlightenment such as Hobbes, was integral to the subsequent development of modern thought, most notably in the work of Kant, Hegel, Marx and Weber. Modernity was conceived of as a single, homogenous process that encompassed many distinct aspects and could be traced to a single causal principle: the rise of capitalist commodity production for Marx and of rationalization for Weber. Modernity was associated with the development of industrial capitalism and its distinct social forms, the most prominent of which was the nation-state. Industrial capitalism comprised of two dimensions: industrialism and capitalism. Industrialism refers to the social relations implied in the widespread use of material power and machinery in production processes, whilst capitalism refers to a system of commodity production involving the private ownership of the means of production and the commodification of labour (Giddens 1991:15). Industrial capitalism necessitated new forms of social and political control. Social control was provided by *organization* — the regularized control of social relations across indefinite time-space distances (Giddens



1991:16), whilst a specific type of organization, the state, was to maintain political control through its 'monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber 1991:78).

Although both Marx and Weber saw modernization as a universal process, their theories of modernity helped to qualify the universality of the Enlightenment project. Whilst Marx particularized liberal-capitalist modernity as the ideology of the bourgeoisie, Weber explored its cultural roots in Protestant asceticism. Following Marx and Weber, liberal-capitalist modernity may be seen as encompassing a specifically *bourgeois*, Protestant world-view. It refers to the institutions and modes of behaviour established first of all in post-feudal Europe, but which in the twentieth century became world-historical in their impact (Giddens 1991:15). Modernization, conceived of teleologically as progress towards a universal civilization implied not only the incorporation of the rest of the world into a single world market but also the progressive *Westernization* (or, more precisely, Protestantization) of indigenous cultures. For most of the post-enlightenment period, this took the form of colonialism and imperialism: varying degrees of European political and economic control over the rest of the world. This Imperial 'mission' in Asia, to use Karl Marx phrase, was simultaneously destructive and regenerating, entailing 'the annihilation of old Asiatic society and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia' (Marx 1977:332). Colonial practice, however, significantly diverged from this model.

Today, the custodians of the 'liberal project' are the United States and its North Atlantic allies in NATO and in the G7. The US is wedded to liberal universalism where it remains an 'ideology of undiminished strength' reflected not only in a legalist discourse of fundamental rights but also in public life and academic world where 'there is no tradition of thought or reflection that is not liberal' (Gray 1995:173). The US and its allies, despite differences over policy as recently manifested in the war against Iraq, are committed to the globalization of the 'liberal project' and use their leverage over indebted Southern societies through principal institutions of the international political economy, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and, to a lesser extent, the World Trade Organization (WTO), to achieve this goal. Their main instrument used for liberalizing the economies and societies of the South are structural adjustment policies (SAPs). SAPs refer to policies prescribed by the IMF/ World Bank nexus to heavily indebted societies which seek radical institutional reform along neo-liberal lines. Nominally they seek an efficient form of management by emphasizing market forces and the benefits of export-led growth, but, as Robert

Biel has argued, they also serve to make the internal economic and political structures of the South conform to the dictates of the international system of capital accumulation and thus may be seen as new instruments of imperial control (Biel 2001:231).

Globalization in a neo-liberal sense refers to the attempt to *universalize* liberal-capitalist modernity. It is manifested through political, economic and cultural homogenization on a global scale. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, liberal-democratic institutions have emerged in most states and even self-proclaimed 'socialist' states such as the PRC participate in a world economy organized on capitalist lines. Francis Fukuyama has famously seen in this the culmination of the Hegelian dialectic: the 'end of history'. For Fukuyama:

There is a fundamental process at work that dictates a common evolutionary pattern for all human societies ... something like a Universal History of mankind in the direction of liberal democracy. (Fukuyama 1992: 48).

The idea of a universal history of mankind was first suggested by Immanuel Kant in his *An Idea for a Universal History of Mankind*. Kant suggested that history would have an end point or a final purpose that was implied in man's current potentialities and which made the whole of history intelligible. For Kant, as for Hegel and Marx after him, this end point was the realization of human freedom, defined as the universalization of a just civic constitution. Only when all states accept such a constitution, adopting a republican form of government, and join a *Foedus Pacificum*, a pacific federation or union guaranteeing 'the Right of a foreigner not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else's territory,' would there be an end to conflict and, therefore, perpetual peace (Kant 1991). For Kant, belligerency was equated with the existence of tyranny — an assertion which has been resurrected in the post-Cold War period by international political theorists operating from the Liberal tradition. Kant argued in *Perpetual Peace* that if the decision to go to war was taken by the people rather than the sovereign, then the frequency of conflict would be drastically reduced. Recently, Michael Doyle has proposed a 'democratic peace thesis' which has assumed the status of an axiom of international relations (Doyle 1999). Doyle equates Kant's republic with contemporary liberal democracies and has persuasively (if incorrectly) argued that no two liberal democracies have gone to war with another.

Kant's project for a universal history of mankind was undertaken by Hegel in

the generation following his death. The task of such a universal history was to 'provide the exhibition of Spirit (*geist*) in the process of working out the knowledge of that which it is potentially' (Hegel 1991b:17-8). History proceeds through a continual process of conflict, wherein societies and systems of thought based upon different ideas clash and then fall apart due to their own internal contradictions. This dialectic took place between different societies as successive systems of thought are replaced by less contradictory ones. For Hegel, the 'history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom' (Hegel 1991b:19). The consciousness of freedom was absent amongst the 'Orientals' living under despotic rule and first emerged amongst the Greeks. However, they — and the Romans later — knew only that *some* were free — not man as such since they kept slaves and 'their whole lives and the maintenance of their splendid liberty, was implicated with the institution of slavery' (Hegel 1991b:18). The Roman Empire ultimately collapsed because it established the universal legal equality of men, without *recognizing* their rights and dignity. This recognition was to be found in the *ideology* of Christianity that established the universal equality of man on the basis of his moral freedoms. It was only under the influence of Christianity that the 'German nations' were able to attain the consciousness that man as man is free. Thus:

the Eastern nations knew only that *one* is free; the Greek and Roman world only that *some* are free, while *we* know that men absolutely (man as man) are free (Hegel 1991b:19)

Freedom finds its embodiment in the modern constitutional state, which Fukuyama equates with a specifically liberal-democratic one. It is only in the social and political institutions of the modern state, that man becomes conscious of his/her freedom. The realization of individual self-consciousness would, therefore, close the dialectic and bring 'history' — defined as the progress of man to consciousness of freedom — to an end. For Fukuyama, 'the monumental failure of Marxism as a basis for real-world societies' (Fukuyama 1992:65) invalidates Marx's critique of Hegel's philosophy of history. Marx had argued that the realisation of self-consciousness was dependent upon man first satisfying his material needs since 'the mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process' (Marx 1977:388). It followed that a sufficiently large surplus product must be available to release men from direct productive activity in order for them to realise their freedom. This was not

possible under capitalism as a fundamental contradiction remained between the interests of two classes: the bourgeoisie, the owners of the means of production, and the proletariat. The formal political equality and freedom of individuals are contradicted by the unequal nature of capitalist relations of production: the expropriation of the labourer's surplus value by the capitalist. Under capitalism, men become 'more and more enslaved under a power alien to them ... a power which has become more and more enormous and ... turns out to be the world market' (Marx and Engels 1965:48-9). Hegel's constitutional state was unable to resolve this contradiction since it was 'but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie' (Marx and Engels 1848). Only the socialization of the means of production and the establishment of a communist society by the proletariat, 'the universal class' would bring history to an end.

The establishment of 'communist' societies in the Socialist world, however, did not bring the anticipated 'withering away of the state' predicted by Marx and Engels but instead the establishment of proletarian dictatorships and 'state capitalism'. Under state capitalism, the state itself constituted a class of *apparatchiki* and took on the historic task of the bourgeoisie in expropriating the surplus value of the labourer and maintaining control over the principal institutions of civil society. The failure of state capitalism to match standards of living in the more developed West triggered a wave of democratic protests through the Soviet bloc in 1989 which led to its eventual demise. For Fukuyama, the 'triumph' of liberal-capitalism over both socialism in the last century constitutes 'the end point of mankind's ideological evolution' and the 'final form of human government.' Furthermore, Fukuyama argues that the universalization of liberal-democracy constitutes the end of history as it is 'free of fundamental internal contradictions' (Fukuyama 1992:xi). It follows, as Fukuyama's support for the recent Anglo-American wars against Afghanistan and Iraq suggests, that those societies without liberal-democratic institutions whose leaders prefer to remain insulated from the fluctuations of the world market, stand 'outside of history' waiting to be brought in, perhaps coercively, by those more 'advanced' states which best embody liberal ideals. This is the flip-side of the democratic peace thesis proposed by Doyle and influential in foreign policy circles in Washington and London. Doyle has argued that in order to preserve a liberal community of states, or, following Kant, the 'zone of peace', it is necessary to extend the liberal zone through inspiration (hoping peoples in non-democratic regimes will struggle for their liberty), instigation (economic restructuring) and, if all else fails as in Iraq, intervention (Doyle 1999: 41-6).

Furthermore, 'successful' or stable liberal democracies require a *participatory* or 'democratic' political culture: one in which rights-bearing individuals *reflexively* participate in politics. Thus the 'liberal project', as Tom Young has pointed out, requires a form of social engineering: the creation of a reflexive citizenry from communities with differing value-systems (Young 1995). Here a comparison of US policy towards post-war Japan during its occupation (1945-52) and contemporary post-Saddam Iraq (2003) is instructive. The occupation of Japan has been evoked frequently by contemporary American policy-makers in the light of the Iraq war. Following their overwhelming victory in the Pacific war (1941-5), the American authorities under the command of General Douglas MacArthur attempted to impose a 'democratic revolution from above.' In the words of John Dower, the Americans set out 'doing what no other occupation force had done before: remaking the political, social, cultural, and economic fabric of a defeated nation, and in the process changing the very way of thinking of the populace' (Dower 1999: 78). Its relative success, despite the considerable divergence from the western model, particularly in the sphere of economic policy, has encouraged the Bush administration to attempt, or at least pay lip service to, a similar transformation in Iraq. The 'liberal project' in its economic dimension also requires the creation of a world market of *consumers*. Culturally, the 'liberal project' will manifest itself in the emergence of what Benjamin Barber termed 'McWorld': a homogenous cultural space in which the forces of global consumerism reduce differences to trivialities (Barber 1992; 1995).

However, as the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 aptly demonstrate, *jihad* is as much part of our present era of globalization as is McWorld. *Jihad*, whose generic meaning in Arabic is 'struggle', is used by Barber to refer to 'a hundred narrowly conceived faiths against every kind of interdependence, every kind of artificial social cooperation and civic mutuality' which threaten a 'retribalization of large swaths of humankind by war and bloodshed: a threatened Lebanonization of national states in which culture is pitted against culture, people against people, tribe against tribe' (Barber 1992: 54). Contrary to the hopes espoused by the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment thinkers throughout the modern period, we find at its close, as John Gray points out, a 'renaissance of particularisms, ethnic and religious' (Gray 1995:145). A global ethno-religious revival has accompanied the collapse of Soviet variant of the modernist project. Nowhere is this more noticeable than in the birthplace of the Enlightenment: Europe itself. For a decade following the introduction of multi-party elections and a market economy in 1990, ethnic conflict simmered and then shattered the ethnic mosaic of

societies in the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY).

Why then has the 'liberal project' failed to remake the world in the image of the Western prototype and to have universalized Enlightenment ideals? We can isolate at least three different types of explanation for the contemporary failure of liberal-capitalist modernity to take root in the non-western world. The first type of explanation sees the 'liberal project' itself as deeply flawed from its very conception. For Alasdair MacIntyre, the 'liberal' project, like its Marxist-Leninist variant, was destined to fail. MacIntyre conceives of the Enlightenment as the project of an independent, rational justification of morality (MacIntyre 1981:51). A project which given the incommensurability of different cultural viewpoints or premises, is, according to MacIntyre, bound to end in failure since there remains 'no theoretically, neutral, pre-theoretical ground from which the adjudication of competing claims can proceed' (MacIntyre 1990:173). The globalization of the 'liberal' project has so far failed to 'empty' the self of inherited modes of thought and conduct. The reason why the 'western' self appears more modern than the non-western self lies in the continuity between western modern and pre-modern patterns of thought and practice. The modern western self, like the 'liberal project' itself, remains anchored in the social and cultural norms of Christianity.

The second type of explanation locates its failure, paradoxically, in the very dynamism of modernity. For Giddens, the very *dynamism* of modernity works against the replication of the 'liberal project' throughout the world. For Giddens, the modern world is a 'runaway' world marked by uncertainty, risk and doubt. Three elements, or sets of elements, help explain the dynamic character of modern life: the separation of time and space, disembedding mechanisms and institutional reflexivity. The separation of time and space involves an 'emptying' out of time and space through the widespread use of mechanical timing devices and zones. Disembedding mechanisms consist of symbolic tokens — interchangeable media of exchange which have standard value — and expert systems which bracket time and space through deploying modes of technical knowledge which have independent validity. The transformation of time and space, coupled with the disembedding mechanisms, propel social life away from the hold of inherited modes of practice encouraging a greater institutional *reflexivity*. Modernity's reflexivity refers to the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity and material relations with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge. It is the very reflexivity of modernity, however, that turns out to undermine the foundations of Enlightenment thought. For the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment, reason could overcome the dogmas of tradition

by offering certainty of knowledge in place of habit. However, the reflexivity of modernity erodes certitude by exposing widely established 'scientific' theories, including those of modernity, to the methodological principle of doubt (Giddens 1991:15-21). A common reaction to such dislocation is to seek reaffirmation of one's self-identity by drawing closer to any collective that is able to reduce uncertainty and anxiety. Religion and ethno-national identities and are viewed as particularly relevant organizing principles at a time when modern society is making increasing demands on individuals as religion — like nationalism — supplies *existential* answers to individuals' quest for security by providing order from the chaos and uncertainty in the world (Kinvall 2001: 89).

Finally, the third set of explanations, which are crucial to the development of the following argument in this chapter, focus on the ways in which liberal capitalist modernity *encounters* traditional, indigenous societies. For Sudipta Kaviraj, conventional theories of modernity are 'faulty' in three different respects. First, Kaviraj argues that, although the coming of modernity entails a massive alteration of social practices, not all modern practices are either historically unprecedented or accepted uncritically by the modernizing society. Background skills of earlier inherited practices work inside and through new ones 'to bend them into unfamiliar shapes' (Kaviraj 2000:139). Modernization in Islamic societies, for example, has not led to the creation of modern, secular liberal-democratic societies and has instead, as Gellner has argued, strengthened the position of the *ulemma*, urban, literate religious scholars who were in the vanguard of the Iranian revolution in 1978 (Gellner 1994). However, the 'failure' of secular, liberal democracies to emerge in Islamic societies<sup>1</sup> may be contrasted on the one hand with the appeal of an 'Islamic democracy' for the Shi'ite Muslims of Iran and Iraq and with the distinctiveness and longevity of Indian and Japanese democracies on the other. Although a modern democratic form of government was first introduced India and Japan by their respective conquerors, once institutionalized Indian and Japanese democracy took on a distinctive shape of its own, broadening and deepening its appeal by drawing upon indigenous practices and beliefs. A similar accommodation between modern and indigenous practices may well be needed for democracy to take root in Iraq after the collapse of the regime of Saddam Hussein despite the best intentions of her American conquerors. Iraq could do worse than emulate her southern neighbour where the

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1. Turkey, Malaysia, Pakistan under civilian rule and contemporary Indonesia provide exceptions to this rule.

establishment of an 'Islamic democracy' in the wake of the Islamic revolution have so far proved successful, despite an inhospitable regional environment.

Second, modernity is, contrary to the conventional theories of Marx and Weber, not a single, homogenous process that can be traced to a single causal principle but is, in fact, constituted by a plurality of historically distinct processes (Kaviraj 2000:139). Modernity is not a homogeneous process and in Asia, Africa or Latin America was not experienced in the same way as it was in the West. The centralized state, for example, was not a natural outgrowth from previous inherited forms of political and social organization but was imposed coercively by the colonial powers on indigenous societies. The colonial state, however, was neither hegemonic nor uniform; its patterns of control varied from genocide, as in the Belgian Congo, German South West Africa or British Australia<sup>2</sup>, to constitutional government, as in the latter years of the British *Raj*<sup>3</sup> or Japan<sup>4</sup> under the American occupation. Capitalism was also unevenly experienced by different societies in different historical epochs. Sub-saharan Africa and Latin America were incorporated into the modern world system of capitalism as producers of primary commodities, including labour, at a time when most of East Asia remained firmly outside, giving to theories of development and underdevelopment which have sought to explain the poverty of the former (Frank 1973, Rodney 1980) with reference to the operations of a global capitalist economy which has enriched the latter. The different paths to modernity, or rather, the different ways of experiencing the different aspects of modernity help explain the distinctive character of modern cultural identities.

Third, following Giddens, Kaviraj suggests that because of the existence of the principle of *reflexivity* at the heart of modernity, it is doubtful that all societies, once freed of colonial rule, would voluntarily choose to emulate the experience of Western modernity (Kaviraj 2000:141). The attractiveness of the Soviet variant of modernity until its collapse in the early 1990s was indicative of a deep hostility on the part of post-colonial elites towards the Western powers and suspicion of their goals and interests in promulgating market-oriented growth

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2. See Mann (2001) or a discussion of genocidal colonial policies in South West African and Australia.

3. It should be pointed out that the early years of British rule in India after the 1857 mutiny was characterized by a considerable degree of repression and that India was only able to experience a limited form democracy when the *Raj* was confronted by a powerful, mass-based nationalist movement.

4. See Dower (1999) for an analysis of the coercive imposition of a 'democratic revolution from above.'



strategies designed to benefit private capital, much of it in foreign hands. This hostility, born of experiences of colonialism, has not, however, resulted in a rejection of western modernity but a search for more effective solutions to indigenous problems — solutions which in East Asia has taken the form of a preference for more consensual and collective forms of decision-making, whilst in much of the Islamic world and South Asia, this reflexive rationality has led to an accommodation between politics and religion. Although conventional western models of modernity are flawed, they have not been rejected outright by the pre-modern cultures they encounter but have been adopted in different ways and have taken a distinctly *local* flavour. Thus, it is possible to speak, not of a grand narrative of modernity or of a single modern project, but of *multiple modernities* (Eisenstadt 2000). The modern project has not failed as much as been *transformed* by the various pre-modern practices it has sought to confine to the dustbin of history and, in so doing, has fractured along ethno-national or religious lines .

## Conclusion

A world culture which was simply a uniform culture would be no culture at all. We should have a humanity de-humanised. It would be a nightmare. But on the other hand, we cannot resign the idea of world-culture altogether. [...] We must aspire to a common world culture, which will yet not diminish the particularity of the constituent parts. (Eliot, 1948:62-63)

As the above quotation from Eliot suggests, a world, or global culture remains a dream worth pursuing. A global identity also remains a distant possibility as identities in general are 'never completed, never finished; ... they are always as subjectivity itself is, in process .... Identity is always in the process of formation' (Hall 1997: 47). This dream however could easily turn into a nightmare. If globalization is to produce a global culture which does *not* recognize difference, a homogenous McWorld, then indeed it would de-humanize humanity. What advocates of conventional theories of globalization understand by the global, is, as Stuart Hall has pointed out, 'the self-presentation of the dominant particular'. It is the way in which the dominant particular, in this case the West, 'localizes and naturalizes itself and associates with it a variety of other minorities' (Hall 1997: 67).

Conventional liberal theories of globalization may therefore be seen as both a statement of western ideals and the intellectual tools through which the West,

and the United States in particular, have attempted to rationalize and legitimize its political, economic and cultural hegemony since the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is not, however, to deny the *reality* of globalization, or rather the intensification of the globalizing processes, particularly in the economic sphere, but merely to question the 'Liberal Project's' claims to universality, to a 'view from nowhere' (Nagel 1986). We must, as Foucault insists, 'never forget that the Enlightenment is an event, or rather a set of events and complex historical processes that is located at a certain point in the development of European societies' (Foucault 1991:43).

A recognition of globalization as a distinctively *western* project, however, does not necessarily imply that alternative forms of modernity can not take root in non-western societies. India, Iran and Japan may all in their different ways be seen as modern societies, indeed a case could be made for regarding Japan as more *modern* than many if not all western societies, certainly if one were to employ strictly economic or institutional criteria. Similarly, politicized ethno-religious movements should not be seen as reactions to, but as products of globalization and modernity. Certainly, the recent technological revolution has facilitated, through the improvement of communications and information technology, the formation of *transnational* identities. It is now possible for members of the same ethnic, cultural, religious or political group to remain in contact across time and space. To take an extreme example, *al-Qaeda* despite its 'fundamentalist' ideology, is perhaps as modern, in terms of its technological sophistication and its ability to maintain links between members in different parts of the world, as the more conventional and labour intensive agencies and forces attempting to crush it. In this sense, even 'fundamentalist' groups which reject outright the central tenets of the Enlightenment, may be considered modern, even though they seek not to capture but to destroy state power. As Chris Brown puts it, 'Osama bin Laden is as modern a figure as Tony Blair, but represents a different *kind* of modernity' (Brown 2002:298). Modernity, shorn of its ideological Enlightenment baggage, thus becomes a purely descriptive term, used to describe the acquisition of a particular level of economic and/or technological competency.

However, the acquisition of a certain degree of 'scientific' competency presupposes a commitment to a rationality which can not be constrained by traditional forms of social or political authority. Modernity can, therefore, best be seen, following Foucault, as an *attitude*. By attitude, Foucault means a 'mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in

the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task' (Foucault 1991:39). However, a modern attitude is a particular kind of attitude. Foucault terms it a *limit-attitude*, one that consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits (Foucault 1991:45). In other words, modernity may be seen as comprising a critical or, to use Giddens's term, *reflexive* attitude towards the inherited boundaries of reality which consequently mark one's identity. All identities, therefore, which involve reflection and analysis may be termed modern identities. Modernity, therefore, does not, as the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment teleologically suggest, entail a single political project which will culminate in the establishment of a global (liberal) civil society, but multiple projects whose outcomes can neither be predicted nor controlled by existing state structures which are themselves products of an earlier stage of modernity.

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