From Anthropophagy to Glocalization

A Hundred Years of Postcolonial Responses to Globalization

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While post colonialism is generally associated to the post-World War II global movement toward independence in former colonies, the intellectual move toward cultural independence goes back much further than the last sixty years. Paraphrasing the well-known title of a classic study on post-colonial literature, the Empire has been writing back for a long while.¹ Of course politically post-colonialism started at the end of the eighteenth century with the independence of the United States, closely followed by that of Haiti, and then of the Hispanic republics in Latin America. Therefore it would seem legitimate to start a reflection on the post-colonial cultural situation with the early Americans' claim for cultural independence, when the former British citizens of the thirteen North-American colonies had to forge their cultural identity with the English language that they shared with the former colonizing nation.

Reinforcing difference by turning to the local features was natural, all the more so as ever since 1492 a process of reverse influence from the New World on the Old World had been taking place: not only had the Native Americans helped the founding fathers discover and manage the natural resources of the new continent, but a counter-conquest of the Old World had been taking place through the digestive tubes of the invading nations. The Europeans were soon hungry for tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, chocolate, Indian corn and...turkeys (although their American origin was not so hidden in French, *dinde* referring more clearly to their West Indian origin).

Considering intercultural relations from the point of view of food is not as trivial as it may seem. Even today, it is everybody's experience that while people cling strongly to their family-inherited eating habits, they are generally ready to adopt many exotic foods more easily than other foreign cultural practices. Admittedly, it was not so with the early *conquistadores* who were shocked by some of the eating practises of the Native Americans they first encountered, that they soon came to refer to as *cannibals*.

Almost a century ago, the Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade remembered these first encounters when in May 1928 he launched his *Manifesto Antropófago*

1 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989).

in the first issue of the São Paulo-based *Revista de Antropofagia*.² This short text, whose modernist and even surrealist form is reminiscent of the long poems of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, was crammed with provocative references to the anthropophagic practices of the Amazonian Indians but also with classic literary references such as Montaigne's essay on the Cannibals.³ The Brazilian writer insisted on the wisdom and astuteness of the minoritized⁴ people from whose point of view he was addressing the Europeans, dating his text in reference to a distinctly American chronology, "Year 374 of the Eating of Bishop Sardinha." The cannibals were wise enough to select the best morsels from the intrusive culture to derive from them strength and energy that could increase the impact of their cultural creativity:

Cannibalism. Absorption of the sacred enemy. To transform him into a totem. The human adventure. Earthly finality. However, only the pure elite manage to realize carnal cannibalism within, some sense of life, avoiding all the evils Freud identified, those religious evils. What yields nothing is a sublimation of the sexual instinct. It is a thermometric scale of cannibalist instinct. Once carnal, it turns elective and creates friendship. Affectivity, or love. Speculative, science. It deviates and transfers. We arrive at utter vilification. In base cannibalism, our baptized sins agglomerate - envy, usury, calumny, or murder. A plague from the so-called cultured and Christianized, it's what we are acting against. Cannibals.⁵

The "cannibal" response suggests an original combination of the double legacy of colonization, from the culture of the native people and from their colonist, in which the post-colonial culture emerges richer because it can sift through these legacies. This frame of mind can be compared to the double consciousness Ralph Ellison has shown that African Americans had a chance to develop, since as oppressed minority it was essential for their survival to understand the

2 The original text of Oswald De Andrade's *Manifesto Antropófago* and a French translation is available at <http://www.revue-silene.com/images/30/extrait_143.pdf>. An English translation of the "Cannibal Manifesto" is available at <http://events.ccc.de/congress/2009/Fahrplan/attachments/1386_cannibalmanifesto1928.pdf>, both visited on 9 August 2013.

3 M. de Montaigne "Des Cannibales," ("Of Cannibals") in *Essais*, 30. Many translations are available on the internet, for instance by Charles Cotton through the Project Gutenberg: <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3600/3600-h/3600-h.htm>>, visited on 17 April 2012.

4 "Minoritized" is a recent coinage that applies to cultural groups that are treated as minorities, regardless of their actual demographic status.

5 De Andrade, *Manifesto*.

frame of mind of the whites while the dominant majority did not need to do so.⁶ Ellison draws the parallel between the “Indians” the protagonists in the Boston Tea Party pretended to be and the mask the black man still has to put on in a segregated society, that links him to a protest position that the majority community no longer has to assume—by having to act dumb to deflect attention from themselves, he argues that African Americans embody the core of the American identity as “masking jokers” and benefit from a double consciousness. The minority discourse’s strategic advantage is that it has to know that there are several perspectives.

At this point it may be a good time to ponder on the words we use to refer to the agents of the postcolonial response. First, there is the spatial metaphor, dear to V.S. Naipaul among others, of the “centre” and the “periphery.” Certainly there are peripheral cultures (or peoples?), but interestingly “central cultures” sounds awkward, and that is because discourses originate from the centre—the discourse of scholars and scientists no less than that of political power. It is where the grammatical subject of discourse is situated, and the peripheral cultures are the predicate. The central discourse defines national identity (especially in the nineteenth century when the development of nation states is also the development of national identities), but the identity of the other (minority) group also originates in the centre: it is a product of the colonizing process.⁷ Second, an ambiguously quantitative or qualitative metaphor: majority culture vs. minority culture. Actually the quantitative approach is misleading: the “minority” culture may well be that of the demographically more numerous portion of the population. This apparently neutral term may well thus cover a quality assessment: the “minor” culture is minor in that it is younger, less advanced and/or of an inferior quality—adopting the term “minoritized” will therefore be more appropriate, insisting as it does on a status forced upon such communities.

In the heyday of the French colonial expansion, at the time of the Second Empire and the Third Republic, the dominant discourse was that Algerians and other lesser ethnic communities should be treated as the Gauls had been treated by the Roman Empire: they were mostly brutes that the glory of the colonizer was to acculturate for their own good, to detach them from their idiosyncratic and superstitious practices that could not be considered as

6 Ralph Ellison, “Change the Joke and Skip the Yoke,” in *Partisan Review*, Spring 1958. Rptd. in *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), 100–112.

7 Anne-Marie Thiesse shows how national identities are built in Europe in the Romantic period on a mostly Scottish template that spreads to the Eastern periphery of the continent, *La création des identités nationales: Europe XVIIIe–XXe siècle* (Paris, Seuil, 1999).

culture. The white man's burden was to convert them to the enlightenment of modern civilization, a discourse that is not totally extinct. However, in his *Epistles*, the Roman poet Horace had famously warned that transcultural influence sometimes worked the other way round: '*Græcia capta ferum victorem cepit, et artes intulit agresti Latio*'.⁸

This brings us to the type of culture that is expected of "minoritized" peoples. The case of the new French museum in Paris that replaced the politically charged *Musée des Colonies* is interesting. The original project changed names quite often in the span of its comparatively short history, witnessing to the embarrassment of the intellectual and political spheres. The museum originated in the Paris international exhibition of 1931, whose theme was the colonies. From 1931 to 1935 it was the *Musée des colonies*, then *Musée de la France d'Outre-mer* (Museum of Overseas France) until the end of the 1950s, eventually *Musée des Arts africains et océaniens* in 1961 and *Musée national des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie* in 1990.⁹ The shift in names reflects a shifting emphasis from the civilizing influence of France in the world to a showcasing of the arts from other continents. The latest evolution of museography leads to the *Musée du Quai Branly*, whose name is just its location, avoiding the controversial name that President Chirac had thought of, *Musée des Arts Premiers*.¹⁰ 'First arts' sounds arguably more positive than "primitive arts." While the arts of first nations are acknowledged as fully dignified, their cultures' achievements are still only aesthetic, downplaying the world-view, spirituality or ethics in their cultural context, insulating them from the implicit (second?) arts that would come next.

Meanwhile, in the Gaulish collections of the archeological museum of St Germain-en-Laye, the emphasis shifted, emphasizing that the artefacts long collected, once tokens of primitive art, reflect a complex and sophisticated civilization. As the present curator Laurent Olivier put it in an interview for Arte television, "We benefitted from the perspective of the anthropologists on primitive art, which shows that there are different visions of reality that are expressed by motives that to us are merely geometrical, and that are actually concepts, symbols. We don't know how to consider Gaulish art from the inside. There is a

8 "Greece once conquered in turn conquered its uncivilized conqueror, and brought the arts to rustic Latium."

9 <<http://www.palais-portedoree.fr/fr/decouvrir-le-palais/lhistoire-du-palais-de-la-porte-doree>>, visited on 9 August 2013.

10 The uncertain scientific positioning of this museum is the object of Sally Price's corrosive book-length study, *Paris Primitive—Jacques Chirac's Museum on the Quai Branly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

mythology, a history behind it! It is thanks to the surrealists that our gaze at primitive art, also Gaulish art, has changed.”¹¹ Olivier explained that André Breton spent time in the US during World War II and became interested in Navajo puppets, which changed the French perspective on their own Gaulish legacy.

A more comprehensive appreciation of minoritized cultural groups needs to take into account the ethic and cognitive dimension of their thought—which is not like making up the myth of minoritized cultural groups as holding the key to the future against a capitalist, globalizing and therefore limited western thought. Rather, some form of syncretism should be allowed to play as it always has: after all the Gaulish and Roman cultures did merge and enrich each other.

How then to value the input of minoritized groups without falling into the trap of more generalization, more essentialism—new forms of cultural colonialism? The term “Alter-globalization” posits such groups or communities as ‘other’ in reference to the subject of enunciation, thus keeping them marginal in the act of discourse. This “other” globalization tends to value a rootedness in the concrete realities of local territory, on communal values. Is there a new romanticism there? Such other modes of apprehension could be stigmatized as clinging to imaginary values, while the mainstream civilization masters the symbolic, and that most abstract form of symbolism that is not just cash, but virtual cash.

Or is not the struggle over? There would be nothing else to do but assess the mechanics of interaction between cultural groups as they become intensified by the new media of communication, so that it becomes possible for cultural groups to dispense from local territory and their members to build a strong and valuable sense of diasporic identity. This is the world of transnational collective identities that Arjun Appadurai foresaw.¹² The deterritorialization of culture would be encouraged by the need for diasporas to link to the culture of their native country through international cultural productions. Such an optimistic vision of globalization sees the advent of a positive hybridity (called creolization in some contexts). Even the dissemination of mainstream western productions is not necessarily seen as a threat because this cultural imperialism can creatively be distorted and lends itself to creative and humorous reappropriations.

In *Cosmopolitanism* (2006), Kwame Anthony Appiah insists on a transnational identity that tends toward homogenization; he points out that syncretism

¹¹ “Les Gaulois au-delà du mythe,” *Arte*, broadcast on 9 June 2013.

¹² Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Much of the ensuing discussion was stimulated by the perspectives in Paul Jay, *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

is not a new thing, as cultural identity, local though it may be, has always resulted from contaminations.¹³ Even ancient Egypt was not as insular as to exclude foreign influence. If cosmopolitanism results in moral universalism, the temptations of colonialism might return—willing the peoples' bliss against their needs. It is necessary to make sure that marginalized, stifled voices from the margins, from beyond the borders could be heard. Deterritorialization can also be, after Deleuze and Guattari, a usage of the other in reference to the subject that is the only thing that matters, an oblique approach that is not necessarily wrong, if one considers that Alexis de Tocqueville's study on *Democracy in America* (1831) stemmed from an inquiry into the prison system in the United States with the purpose of improving it in France, and went beyond this scope because its author had another agenda—to liberate France from its old regime limitations.

At this point a distinction should be made, clearly put to light by the revolutions in the Middle East over the last few decades, or even going back to the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Cosmopolitanism in all its forms is more easily accessible to the ruling elites of developing countries than to the working classes. Cosmopolitanism and the cultural hybridity of world culture have little to offer to the inferior classes, even in their diasporas in the more developed countries. As is more and more universally admitted, intercultural exchanges are essential to any active cultural community. Cultural transfers, *métissage*, hybridity, creolization are loosely referred to, somewhat subjectively, even affectively. But the essentialist prejudice on the inner consistency of cultures lives on. How to gauge the structuring value of cultural transfers? How can they converge? To what extent does culture play a role in power games, or is this link cultural?

The post-colonial, post-national world of globalization suggests a more general question: is it possible to contemplate post-cultural identities? The excitement of communicating with the global village contradicts an urge to acknowledge oneself as distinct from the others, to be localized. Should this lead to a gendered approach of globalisation vs. localisation? A bundle of stereotypical associations tumbles open: if there is resistance, then there is oppression and its victims—should the victims be protected, or provided sanctuary? A benevolent sense of superiority lurks, with simplified oppositions, as Louise Yelin¹⁴ and Carla Freeman¹⁵ have exposed it: the dichotomy

13 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006).

14 Louise Yelin, "Globalizing Subjects," in *Sign: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29.4 (2004), 439–464.

15 Carla Freeman, "Is Local: Global as Feminine: Masculine? Rethinking the Gender of Globalization," in *Signs* 26.4 (Summer 2001), 1007–1037.

male/power/globalisation/western homogenisation vs. female/local/resistance/unadulterated culture results in a reduction of the local to negativity in reference to a standard process. It may also lead to ignorance of the play of interactions that have always kept cultural communities alive.

What then is the dimension, the perimeter of re-localisation? We are witnessing this debate in crisis-ridden Europe, in emerging nations as they are caught in various integration strategies, religious wars, conflicts over natural resources that question national boundaries. There may be territories—in the Americanist milieu one could use the term *frontier* as it is proposed by Gloria Anzaldúa, while remaining cautious about the traps of metaphors—where the localization of minoritized cultures, crisscrossed with dialogical cultural inputs, can produce temporarily identifiable discourses.¹⁶ They are Mary Louise Pratt's 'contact zones' or Edouard Glissant's "cultural zones" that serve as crucibles for the contemporary dialogical American novel.¹⁷ In these privileged frontiers one can contemplate that a culture is a crucible of information, experiences, economic exchanges, and more importantly sort out the voice of agents that are not the second or third person of the colonial discourse.

To conclude—more than ever, the status of peripheral cultural groups and the individuals who identify with them cannot be considered from the point of view of unbalanced power struggles between major actors and minor subjects; in a global world intercultural relations operate at several levels, and members of minoritized groups can to some (more or less large) extent choose their levels of involvement in various cultural communities. New terms of discussion emerge, new discourses allow new types of interactions, while this flexibility is also offset by threats of an unprecedented scale, like the destructive power of weapons of mass destruction, the extensive capabilities for private spying and above all the threats on the natural environment of the planet. Strangely, those threats can be causing more insularity as mortal humans face possible global changes their race has been responsible for that are far beyond their capacity to comprehend them in a life time.

16 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestizo*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

17 Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992); Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, ed. and trans. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989).

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