Eliot Scott
Professor Everett
Anthropology 511
Final Paper
2 December 2005

How Anthropology Can Study Globalization

Globalization has become an imperative concept in discussions of society, politics and culture. There is not a single country where globalization “isn't being intensively discussed. In France, the word is *mondialisation*. In Spain and Latin America, it is *globalizacion*. The Germans say *globalisierung…*yet as little as 10 years ago the term was hardly used, either in the academic literature or in everyday language. It has come from nowhere to be almost everywhere” (Giddens). Though it would appear as though globalization was a completely new phenomenon given its prominence in discussions of society over the last decade, globalization began far longer than ten years ago and is in fact a process that predates the advent of discipline of anthropology. It has been questioned whether or not anthropology, as a discipline that has traditionally studied small scale and isolated societies, should study a macro-phenomenon such as globalization. The question is not whether anthropology can or should study a macro-phenomenon such as globalization, but rather how a discipline whose stated goal is to study the totality of human culture and society, can ignore the processes of globalization. To fail to study globalization would be like neglecting the study kinship or the tributary mode of production.

The forces of globalization are tied to the economics of capitalism. Capitalism must always expand beyond its current boundaries to continue to create the profits that fuel capital investment in order to function. “In the course of capitalist production, capital

purchases two elements, means of production and labor power. With rising technological inputs, the proportion of capital invested in means of production would increase, while the proportion of capital invested in labor power would decrease" (Wolf 299). Increased spending on technology, or means of production, to compete with rivals necessitates a decrease in spending on labor. As profit is obtained from unpaid labor, not from technology that decreases in value over time, labor needs to become less expensive. Likewise, if too much has been produced and goods have no market, new markets need to be found. Thus capitalism must strive toward constant expansion in search of less expensive labor and new markets, and this characterizes the processes of globalization.

As globalization is inextricably tied to the expansion of the capitalist mode of production, it is easy to see how anthropology has failed until recently to study the phenomenon. Anthropology has historically been primarily concerned with studying remote societies that have been presumably untouched by capitalism and colonialism. This preoccupation with "primitives" and cultures that were "untouched" by Western modernity has blinded anthropology from studying cultures, societies and phenomena that were ripe for anthropological inquiry. Further, anthropology has seemingly ignored the fact that an "untouched" culture is unlikely to exist. All cultures exist in relation to other cultures. Sherry Ortner believes there is an "assumption that everything we study has been touched ('penetrated') by the capitalist world system" (387). Perhaps the assumption is incorrect, yet even when looking at seemingly isolated "untouched" societies such as the *Yanamamo* in the Amazon, we see that they have bananas which

are native to India. It would be a safe assumption that the crop arrived through the processes of trade, the expanding capitalist market and globalization.

Globalization and its associated phenomena must be explored from historical, economic, socio-political and cultural perspectives in order to understand the phenomena in its entirety. It is impossible to separate socio-cultural phenomena from their historical, economic and political dimensions. “Cultural worlds are embedded in larger, more impersonal systems” (Marcus 166). Ortner discusses the problems of previous anthropological approaches that established society as a reality *sui generis*, but failed to ask where it came from or how it might change (403). As David Scott states “an understanding of the non-Western world’s modernities ought to be informed by a more nuanced and discerning understanding of Europe’s pasts” (198). When anthropology has failed to look at social and cultural phenomena without acknowledging the historical and economic contexts and dimensions of the phenomena, it has failed to understand the entirety of the human experience. A number of anthropologists have responded to the challenge of studying globalization from a variety of perspectives and have begun the long process of integrating the historical, economic and socio-cultural facets of the macro-phenomena of globalization.

Eric Wolf in Europe and the People Without History attempted a comprehensive prehistory of Globalization. Wolf states “In 1968 I wrote that anthropology needed to discover history, a history that could account for the ways in which the social system of the modern world came into being and that would strive to make analytic sense of all societies…human populations construct their cultures in interaction with one another, and not in isolation. (ix). “The world of humankind constitutes a…totality of

interconnected processes…and this holds true not only of the present but also of the past" (3). Thus the societies studied by anthropology have been altered by European expansion and are not remnants of past evolutionary stages. Essentially, the anthropological notions of untouched cultures are false.

Wolf begins with an extensive depiction of the world in the 1400. The economic core was comprised of agricultural zones from Morocco to China linked by trade and formed into many states based on a tributary mode of production – peasants giving surpluses to ruling elites by coercion or force. Long distance trade was mainly in luxury goods for elites such as gold from Africa or silks from China. Most gold in Europe in the Middle Ages was from African mines arriving via trade routes through the Sahara. Patoralists in between the agricultural states raided caravans along the trade routes. Europe was on the economic periphery and was mostly rural with subsistence agriculture and local exchange. Europe's exchange goods in the global trade were mainly slaves and timber, which flowed back to the economic core. Europe's dense forests were gradually cleared for agricultural production. The surpluses of agricultural production gradually contributed to state formation from fiefdom/chiefdoms.

The states of Europe eventually become politically consolidated. "External warfare, trade and internal consolidation created new states in Europe and reversed the relationship between dominant east and impoverished west that had characterized earlier days. Around 1300, the pace of European growth slackened again" (Wolf 108-9). This was due to a decline in agricultural production as climate worsened and perhaps the technology had reached its limit. To pay for war and expansion elites extracted more tribute from peasants and this led to periodic rebellion in what was referred to as the

crisis of feudalism (Wolf 108-9). Solving the crisis required “locating, seizing and distributing resources available beyond the European frontiers” (Wolf 109). This led to European conquest of the New World and Africa in search of the resources.

Profound social and cultural changes occur throughout the colonized world. Dependencies were created in the newly conquered territories. The fur trade with natives in North America and the slave trade in West Africa created dependencies of the local populations on trade goods brought by Europeans. In Africa, metal, firearms, rum and tobacco were introduced into preexisting trade networks. Crops from other areas were also introduced. Instead of practicing traditional means of subsistence, people in these areas became increasingly engaged in the Euro-dominated trade. In North America, obtaining and trading furs by individuals instead of hunting in large groups led to social upheavals. Chiefdoms became increasingly common, developing from areas traditionally ordered by councils, where “big men” took control of the trade between the European merchants. Councils became increasingly irrelevant as chiefs established control. These societies were forever altered by European expansion.

James Clifford gives a thorough and detailed history of Fort Ross in California and its place in the larger history of the colonization of the American Pacific Coast. The meditation discusses history of the Russian, Spanish, Mexican and American rush to colonize this area caused native societies to be uprooted or exterminated. Native Californians were often rounded up at gunpoint to join work parties when labor was scarce. Many fled their native homes and relocated to other areas. The near extinction of the sea otter occurred in the area to make hats and coats for Russians and other Europeans. Native Alaskans were used to hunt the animal, changing their traditional

subsistence patterns, and both the Native Alaskans and Californians were encouraged to convert to Russian Orthodoxy.

The cultures of the colonizers were altered as well. Ann Stoler states “the regulation of sexual relations was central to the development of particular kinds of colonial settlements and to the allocation of economic activity within them” (636). Men working in the colonies were initially encouraged to be unmarried and to take native concubines, however as the men became increasingly indigenized, the “supremacy of *Homo Europaeus*” needed to be made clear (639). Concubinage was gradually phased out and European women were encouraged to move to the colonies to preserve the Europeans status as superior to the native.

David Harvey explores the compression of time and space since the European Age of Discovery. As Europeans began to explore and navigate to other regions, the notions of time and space became accelerated and compressed respectively. This had consequences on the psyche of European cultures. Maps became objectively mathematical representations of space whereas in the Middle Ages they had been more subjective representations based on experience of the place. Art also shifted toward representing space in perspective. Objective maps facilitated the capitalist trend of privatization of land, thus further pushing economic life away from traditional forms of barter toward an economy based on money and events in one area could affect another far away via economic interdependence. All cultures became enmeshed in this economic interdependence and it affected each in profound ways.

At the turn of the 20th Century in the US, Henry Ford introduced assembly line mass production. He needed workers to be able to afford the mass produced products,

as there are only so many elites to purchase the products. By having a $5 eight-hour day he created a worker who would have enough income and leisure time to consume mass-produced products like cars. He searched for a particular kind of worker to create a new society built by the application of corporate power. He used social workers to interview people to ensure that they were the 'right' kind of people – with proper morals and families so that rational consumption would live up to corporate needs and expectations (Harvey 126).

What Harvey calls Fordism comes to fruition after World War II as advanced capitalist countries achieved stable rates of economic growth, crises were contained and a worldwide expansion brought in newly de-colonized countries into the capitalist system. Technologies had matured during the war and state sponsored economic reconstruction took place in war torn countries under the Bretton-Woods agreement (Harvey 129-32). "Postwar Fordism [was] less a mere system of mass production and more a total way of life. Mass production meant standardization of product as well as mass consumption; and this meant a whole new aesthetic and a commodification of culture" (Harvey 135). The effects of mass production and mass consumption on the cultures of industrialized nations were profound. Everyone needed a mass produced automobile to traverse the society. Mass consumption of media via radio and later television created whole new markets for the advertising of more products and more consumption. A culture of consumerism emerged from the engine of mass production.

By the 1960's war recoveries were complete and the internal markets of the Western countries were saturated. The demand for new products was low as everyone who could afford them already had one. By 1973 the recession created by this crisis of

capitalism enhanced by the oil embargo ushered in an era Harvey terms flexible accumulation as response to the crisis. Union power declined dramatically, and part-time, self-employed and contracted workers become the corporate norms. Offshore production facilities become increasingly common due to weak labor markets where profit can be enhanced by lower wages. “The devaluation of labor power has always been the instinctive response of capitalists to falling profits” (Harvey 192). The threat of simply moving production elsewhere keeps laborers docile and limits organizational ability. Likewise, industrialization of the countries in the economic periphery opened new markets for mass produced products. “To many living outside Europe and North America, it looks uncomfortably like Westernisation - or, perhaps, Americanisation, since the US is now the sole superpower, with a dominant economic, cultural and military position in the global order. Many of the most visible cultural expressions of globalisation are American - Coca-Cola, McDonald's” (Giddens).

Arjun Appadurai argues that the global economy and culture in late capitalism is in disjuncture. He believes that cultures indigenize Americanization (or other dominant corporate cultural exports) in one-way or another, such as “Filipino virtuosos of American popular music” (31). His framework for exploring these disjunctures consists of dividing global cultural flows into five dimensions: ethnoscapes (transient people), mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes (political imagery). In all these –scapes, movement occurs with increasing rapidity furthering disjuncture and thus difference, but also deterritorialization in the traditional sense of national, state and political boundaries. Further, deterritorialization creates new markets for more import and export of commodities (human, technology, money, media, etc.) through the various

–scapes. These -scapes can be used by the powerful to increase their power and by the disenfranchised to further their cause. All things become commodifiable and people's sense of tradition, place and community becomes deterritorialized.

Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson discuss this deterritorialization of culture. They note that anthropology has traditionally gone to Thailand to study Thai culture, India to study Indian culture and so on. The process of mapping culture onto territory is no longer relevant or necessary, as culture has transcended territory. Michael Kearney documents a newly deterritorialized culture, Mexicans from Oaxaca who are migrating to California in the US for agricultural work. They are one of the new global transnational communities that are no longer defined by the nation state or by territory. They defy the power of the nation state and its ability to regulate their movement. Their culture is no longer localized or territorialized. They are an example of a community moving into a post national state. The reasons behind their migration generally point toward economics. "The current transnational age is characterized by a gross incapacity of peripheral economies to absorb the labor that is created in the periphery, with the result that it inexorably flows to the cores of the global capitalist economy. " (23-24) This can be seen when Chinese refugees come in ship containers to the West coast, when people from Eastern Europe and the Middle East migrate to Western Europe or when West and North Africans migrate to Spain and Italy thus creating these new transnational communities. This is what Kearney refers to as peripheralization of the core.

These deterritorialized cultures are not an entirely new phenomenon. James Clifford discusses cultures in diaspora, or cultures that are displaced from a homeland,

which may be real or imagined. These cultures are more than mere immigrants as they do have a desire for return to their homeland. One diasporic community that has succeeded in creating a territorialized state is the Zionists in Israel. Prior to the creation of the Israeli state, the Jewish people had been migrating around the Mediterranean and elsewhere for centuries. The assertion that deterritorialized cultures are not tied to the nation-state or nationalistic is disputed by John Agnew stating, “migration has often underwritten nationalism rather than written its epitaph” (226). He points to the Jewish diaspora that consolidated into the territory of Israel as well as the radical nationalism of Irish Americans. Although cultures may seem deterritorialized, the cultural conception of territory is still very much embedded in the human psyche.

Nancy Foner discusses immigrants to New York City both now and at the turn of the 20th Century. These immigrants both past and present maintain “familial, economic, political and cultural ties across international borders, in effect making the home and host society a single area of social action” (341-342). Many migrated for economic reasons and put away money to return home and buy property, and this is true both in the present and during previous migrations. What make the current transnational communities new are the technological innovations that allow closer contact between home and host society. This includes telephone, email, transportation as well as financial transactions. With electronic money people “can transfer vast amounts of capital from one side of the world to another at the click of a mouse” (Giddens). This allows immigrants to send money home instantaneously but can also devastate entire economies if enough capital is involved. The effects of such transactions on the way in which modern life is experienced are profound.

The processes of globalization are nothing new. But, “the level of world trade today is much higher than it ever was before, and involves a much wider range of goods and services.” (Giddens). Although empires have often sought to conquer the world since at least the time of Alexander, it was not inherently necessary for them to do so. With increasing technology in the name of competition and the necessity of growth for profit in capitalism, the forces of globalization have become increasingly intensified throughout and beyond the history of European expansion. The ways in which anthropology can study these processes are numerous. “For better or worse, we are being propelled into a global order that no one fully understands, but which is making its effects felt upon all of us” (Giddens). Anthropology must grapple with the macro-phenomenon of globalization. Studies should continue from historical, economic and cultural perspectives and all should incorporate the dimensions of each. If anthropology is to be a relevant social science, it must continue to do more research in the processes of modernity and globalization and acknowledge that finding a pristine “primitive” culture may not even be possible in historical or archaeological research. In an increasingly globalized and technified world, finding such cultures is unlikely. Anthony Giddens speaks of a friend who was studying in a remote village in central Africa. “She was invited to a local home for an evening's entertainment. She expected to find out about the traditional pastimes of this isolated community. Instead, the evening turned out to be a viewing of Basic Instinct on video.” All cultures have been touched by one another in this interconnected world. Anthropology must acknowledge and study these interconnections – the cultural, economic and historical interconnections, rather than attempting to study a culture in an isolation that is non-existent.

Reference Page

Agnew, John
Nationalism

Appadurai, Arjun.
1996 Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Brennan, Denise
Globalization, Women's Labor, and Men's Pleasure: Sex Tourism in Sosúa, the Dominican Republic. Urban Life.

Clifford, James.
1997 Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Edelman, Marc and Angelique Haugerud
Development

Foner, Nancy
Transnationalism, Old and New: New York Immigrants. Urban Life

Giddens, Anthony
1999 Reith Lectures: Lecture 1 - Globalisation
http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/events/reith_99/week1/week1.htm

Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson.
1992 Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference. Cultural Anthropology, Vol. 7 No. 1: 6-23.

Harvey, David.
1990 The Condition of Postmodernity. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Ho, Karen
2005 Situating Global Capitalisms: A View from Wall Street Investment Banks. Cultural Anthropology, Vol. 20 No. 1: 68-96.

Kearney, Michael
Transnationalism in California and Mexico at the end of empire

Marcus, George E.
1986 Contemporary Problems of Ethnography in the Modern World System *In* Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds. Pp. 165-193. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ortner, Sherry B.
1994 Theory In Anthropology since the Sixties *In* Culture/Power/History. Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley and Sherry B. Ortner, eds. Pp. 372-411. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Scott, David.
1995 Colonial Governmentality. Social Text 43:191-220.

Stoler, Ann.
1989 Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th Century Colonical Cultures. American Ethnologist, Vol. 16 No. 4: 634-660.

Tsing, Anna
2000 The Global Situation. Cultural Anthropology, 15(3): 327-360.

Wolf, Eric R.
1982 Europe and the People Without History. Berkeley: University of California Press.