

Globalisation From Below

Migration, sovereignty, communication

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It's the customary law of the sea: if a vessel is in distress, the nearest ship comes to the rescue. Such a pity it doesn't work that way on land. On 26 August 2001, the Norwegian container ship the *MV Tampa*, on its way from Perth to Singapore, answered the call of a sinking ship, and rescued 433 people. The nearest port was Merak, in Indonesia, but the people the *Tampa* saved from the water did not want to go there. They were mostly Afghan refugees. They wanted to go to Australia. The captain, Arne Rinnen, sized up his desperate guests and turned the boat around.

When the Australian government heard of this, the Prime Minister, John Howard, took a personal interest in the case, but not out of any great sense of compassion. He was determined not to let the *Tampa* into Australian waters. If he did, these asylum seekers would have rights. They could claim refugee status.

Howard was facing a difficult election. His conservative coalition was unpopular. Ordinary working people were feeling the pressure of his dry economic policies. But Howard saw his chance. Skilled juggler of political footballs that he is, he exploited it. He made the *Tampa* a front-page story by refusing to let the ship in. He cast himself as a friend of the 'battler', the mythical Australian everyman, resisting the swelling tide of 'refos' supposedly heading for Australian shores. And it worked. By refusing natural justice to 433 seasick and homeless people from the other side of the world, he scraped home in the 2001 Australian federal election.

The *Tampa* incident became a *cause célèbre* for Australia's public intellectuals, and many ordinary people of left or liberal persuasion, or of just a plain compassionate nature, expressed their outrage at Howard's antics. But while the feelings were genuine and the numerous actions, legal, political and symbolic taken on the asylum seekers' behalf sincere, there was not a lot of analysis of what the events might suggest. Many Australians pride themselves on their multiculturalism, and in the wake of the *Tampa* vigorously asserted and defended a vision of Australia as what its official policies still proclaim it to be: a multicultural state.

But defending a plural notion of Australia that its Prime Minister had abandoned, necessary as such a tactic may be, doesn't really think through the contradictions of such a position. The problem is not just that an 'opportunist' Prime Minister exploited insecurities in the Australian electorate, as Guy Rundle and others have argued. While Rundle is quite right to hold Australian Prime Minister John Howard's behaviour up to a critical light, there is a much

deeper problem, the problem that the boat person, the asylum seeker, the refugee, poses to the very concept of national sovereignty.

And not just Australian sovereignty, although the historical absurdity of this European state that sits at the bottom of the world may be the reason that this crisis is particularly acutely felt there. As Anthony Burke argues in his book *In Fear of Security*, the construction of Australian statehood and nationhood is inextricably linked to the way that what is outside its borders is conceived.

The construction of a national history is also the construction of a space of internal consistency, marked off from an outside. This outside then appears as that which threatens internal consistency. We become the opposite of what we oppose.

We have an excellent emblem of the workings of power within the state in Michel Foucault's *Panopticon*. But as Giorgio Agamben has recently pointed out, this internalised power of discipline now appears quite secondary to an externalising power of security. To which one can only add: perhaps it always was. One of Bentham's pamphlets was called *The Panopticon or New South Wales*. As every Australian knows, British power took the latter route – transportation – not the former, the Panopticon.

A much more profound understanding of the modern power of security, or what I would call vectoral power, may be found in Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific*, where Smith brilliantly exposes the way in which the British warship traversed and mapped the open space of the globe. Perhaps Australian anxiety about 'boat people' stems from the nagging memory of the fact that most of us are descendents of boat people. For most of us, our ancestors followed the vectoral line opened up by naval power.

It's a paradox of security that the mapping and navigating of the world not only secures an imperial state's place in it, but sets in motion flows of information, people, goods and weapons that create still new spaces, which in turn undermine security and require still more vectoral power. Thus, with the technologies of vectoral power, from the 18th century warship to the 21st century Raptor unmanned surveillance aircraft, experience accelerated development.

Sovereignty, or the autonomy of a centre of power, rests both on security, the externalising power, and discipline, the internalising power. But these are times in which disciplinary regimes are breaking down, not least because of the effectiveness of vectoral technologies in mapping routes of movement and opening up territories. The vectoral techniques that have their roots in the power of security are breaking away from the security function, and becoming an autonomous power. The same vectoral technologies that secure lines of movement for imperial powers also undermine the integrity of their relations of dominance in the world, setting loose unmanageable flows and demands for flows.

I know that the free flows often characterised as 'neo-liberalism' are a taboo subject: denounce it first, ask questions later. But I tell you, we haven't seen anything yet. The world will become much more vectoral if it is to become any more just. The boat people are the symptom of an aporia in left-liberal thinking on vectoral power.

Illegal migration is globalisation from below. If the 'overdeveloped' world refuses to trade with the underdeveloped world on fair terms, to forgive debt, to extend credit, to lift trade barriers against food and basic manufactured goods, then there can only be

an increase in the flow of people seeking to get inside the barriers the overdeveloped world erects to protect its interests. While sovereignty equals self-interest, there can be no security.

The 433 people rescued by the *Tampa*, their very presence in this stateless state, was testament to the absence of effective international justice. Trade between states, taking place as it is in the absence of justice, can only produce injustice, which in turn produces flows of people who come to exist outside the space of justice. The most telling human critique of globalisation is not the black-clad protesters in Seattle or Genoa, it is the still, silent bodies of the illegals, in ships, trucks or car boots, passing through the borders. The placeless proletariat. The involuntary border-hackers.

Those 433 people, which the media for the most part rendered nameless, are a critique of the limits of sovereignty. Asylum seekers are in the paradoxical position of being a standing critique of the failings of a regime of sovereignty, and at the same time totally dependent on finding a state that will accept their claims to refugee status.

Some asylum seekers demand access to CNN and the Internet. It is the vectorial flow of information around the world, along ever proliferating vectors, that creates the possibility of seeking this leave of absence from the space of the nation and the state. The overdeveloped world feels free to advertise its charms – and yet withholds access to the trade in the very goods it advertises through its domination of the trade in images.

The Australian state takes a hard line against asylum seekers so as not to encourage others to test their borders. But it is the rule of the border in general that the refugee challenges. Every state seeks to secure itself at the expense of other states. While the Australian government deserves special condemnation for its callous disregard for suffering, it is not the only state that stands accused by refugees of a foreclosure of justice. It is the justice of national sovereignty in the abstract that the body of the asylum seeker refutes in particular. The asylum seeker is a force in revolt against the privileges sovereignty grants us.

Many who put themselves in the way of globalisation – the so-called anti-globalisation movement – do so in the name of some local and particular demand. These demands are not always just. Why should French farmers have more rights to grow food for the French than Brazilian farmers? Why should American steel workers have more rights to make steel for Americans than Polish steel workers? But that is what the return to protectionism that many anti-globalisation protesters demand would amount to. A demand for more local and particular privileges.

The asylum seeker who is outside the state, rather than the local interest inside the state, is the body that calls upon the absence of a global justice, who calls for it. Those who seek refuge, who are rarely accorded a voice, are nevertheless the bodies that confront the injustice of the world with a total critique of it. They give up their particular claim to sovereignty and cast themselves on the waters. Only when the world is its own refuge will their limitless demand be met.

That may be a utopian demand, but the possibility of what Hardt and Negri call 'global constitutionalism' are now firmly on the horizon. It is evolving out of particular interests. Clearly, a global regime of trade is far more strongly developed than a global regime of jus-

tice. Global trade without global justice ends up being unfair trade, trade that tries to strengthen the sovereignty of interests within some states at the expense of others. Global justice without global trade merely secures the interests of the overdeveloped world against the interests of the rest. However, these limitations to global constitutionalism are precisely the reasons to push further, to demand a global justice adequate to the challenge posed to it by the figure of the asylum seeker.

In his famous work on postmodernism, Jameson calls it an “effacement of the frontier”. It was the frontier between high and low culture that he was referring to in that context. But as is clear from his writings, this is not the only frontier that disappears in the shift from a modern to a postmodern sensibility. The frontier between inside and outside, on which sovereignty is founded, is also the fault-line where it founders.

While theory works out the end game of modernist fables of inside and outside, the boundary has already imploded. It's simply not helpful to call it hybridity, when there's no way of assigning origins to any of the elements in cultural formations in the first place. We no longer have roots, we have aerials. It's not helpful to propose extension to the logic of the Panopticon, when it is not the disciplinary apparatus of internalising an external potential for observation that is the dominant form of power. We no longer have origins, we have terminals.

Vectoral power, which is forever exceeding the limits of the inside/outside boundary, has been the dominant form of sovereign power from Botany Bay to Afghanistan. What those in the old world think of as modern power, disciplinary power, was always a subsidiary institution built on the back of the expansive and expanding vectoral power, of which we in the antipodes are the direct product.

As September 11th makes chillingly clear, vectoral power has broken away from its origins in regimes of security. Even counter-powers to an emerging regime of global constitutionalism take a vectoral form. Even totalising negativity has become globalised. This is the great paradox of Osama Bin Laden – how much his anti-Western rhetoric appears to mimic very Western forms of anti-modern reaction, but couple it with vectoral technology.

So what is the progressive position in all this? These are times when two hypocritical positions face off against each other. The right wants to open the borders to flows of goods, but close them to flows of people; the left wants to open the borders to flows of people, but close them to flows of goods. Both positions rest on attempts to secure an inside against an outside, and both partake of curious new rhetorics to achieve it.

But at the end of the day, neither position is coherent or consistent. It makes no difference whether one discriminates against the passage of the body of another across one's borders, or the passage of the efforts of his or her labour. Both are discriminations, and both are, *prima facie*, unjust. Thus the argument between right and left in Australia, as elsewhere, comes down to an argument over the mode of discrimination that secures interiority and sovereignty. Neither is a progressive position. The debate is further muddled by the existence of a clearly more reactionary position, one that would secure the borders and assert a radically secured interiority against flows of both goods and bodies. By pointing to a more reactionary position, both the right and left obscure their compromises.

One can map these three positions as a diagram: two are progressive on one count,

and reactionary on the other; one is reactionary on both counts. But where is the position that would count as progressive on both counts? That is in favour of a just and open globalisation, of flows of people and flows of the products of their labour?

Slavoj Žižek has called for the building of “transnational political movements and institutions strong enough to constrain seriously the unlimited rule of capital and to render visible and politically relevant the fact that local fundamentalist resistances to the New World Order, from Milosevic to Le Pen and the extreme right in Europe, are part of it”. But this doesn’t go far enough in addressing the critique that the asylum seeker poses to national sovereignty – the total critique of a privileging of the insider over the outsider – a privileging of which the transnational anti-globalisation movement is not entirely innocent.

As Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze say: “perhaps the flows are not yet de-territorialised enough, not decoded enough”. Perhaps one needs “to go further”. Globalisation as it exists may offend the reactionary left as much as the reactionary right, but “the truth is that we haven’t seen anything yet”.

What if we have not thought far enough down the road to what Deleuze and Guattari call de-territorialisation? This is the call to which I would like to answer, and that I think the body of the asylum seeker calls us. Where can the asylum seeker actually find asylum? She or he cannot find it where they seek it. It is surely better to be admitted to the country than to languish in detention, but there is no guarantee of security even if one gets inside the border. In the US, Arabs, even Sikhs, have been assaulted, even killed, over the panicky need to police the interior of sovereignty.

It is right and necessary to draw attention to the racist dimension in these attacks. But race, as left-liberals understand it, is no longer an adequate category for understanding injustice, either within the space of sovereignty, or without. The deployment of race is changing. What the asylum seeker confronts everywhere is what Balibar calls “racism without race”. The global constitution as it stands recognises states as sovereign, but no longer associates the state with a nation as a one to one relationship.

One of the perverse developments in cultural practice around the world is the rarity with which racism is now explicitly argued in terms of race. Even racists have understood and adopted the social constructionist critique of the essentialism of race. Now almost everyone is agreed that differences are socially and culturally constructed – even racists. The difference now is between those who see differences as something that can coexist, and those who don’t. Race is not the problem; sovereignty is the problem. Sovereignty purged of its racist baggage, sovereignty with a culturalist, even multicultural rhetoric, is still an obstacle to justice.

As Michel Feher argues, a striking characteristic of the (non) responses to the Bosnian and Rwandan crises on the part of a would-be system of global justice is the extent to which policies of inaction were justified in culturalist terms.

Due to the supposedly intractable historical roots of cultural differences in the Balkans, there’s nothing one can do but sit on one’s hands. One simply takes at face value the claims and counter claims of competing cultural groups, one acts as a ‘peacekeeper’ for a non-existent peace, and by default lends support to the more aggressive party, by virtue of treating the parties as equal – but different.

The monstrous policies of NATO powers in the Balkans faced only a very incoherent and inconsistent critique from the left. On the one hand, when they failed to act, the Western powers would be accused of neglecting genocide. On the other hand, when they did act, they were accused of acting like imperialists. There were exceptions, but all too often, what one got was hardly a consistent critique of modern sovereignty.

The world won't wait for politics any more than it will wait for theory. Whether one backs intervention – let's say, in Afghanistan – or opposes it, either way, the "effacement of the frontier" proceeds apace. Either there are interventions in oppressive states, thus challenging their sovereignty; or there are flows of asylum seekers, thus challenging ours.

Either way, social forces are emerging that push against the limits of sovereignty. Two kinds of social forces are abstracting themselves from local and contingent ties, and may have an interest in a new global justice. One does not do so entirely by choice. The asylum seeker runs out of options, and while he or she chooses flight, it is hardly against the background of a wealth of choice. Nevertheless, the asylum seeker is a social force that challenges the form of the nation state. The asylum seeker is an objective challenge to sovereignty, a vectorial challenge. Nothing depends on the asylum seeker's identity, only on his or her disposition.

There is another social force that breaks out of the bounds of national sovereignty, but unlike Negri and Hardt I don't see it as a resurgent mobilisation of the labouring and multiple masses. Marxists always say that the concept of class will make a comeback – and for once I agree. But in much of the 'overdeveloped' world, the labour movement cut a deal with capital within a protected national market. While the envelope of the nation appeared relatively secure, people worried instead about the envelopes of communal or self-identity. The cultural politics of racism without race emerges out of the shelter of a historic compromise between labour and capital, which lasted from the '40s to the '70s.

With the class compromise secured, other differences became points of antagonism. But in the '80s and '90s, class is back on the agenda, partly because of the success capital has enjoyed in breaking out of its national compacts, and decamping to the newly industrialising world. But also in part because of new developments, as yet barely understood.

Deleuze and Guattari once argued that "it is capitalism that is at the end of history, it is capitalism that results from a long history of contingencies and accidents, and that brings on this end".

But there is a tension in their historical thinking between the notion of capital as the end of history, and the possibility of the world becoming still more abstract. I would argue that the abstraction of the world is a process without end, but one that has taken a significant leap beyond the abstraction of capital already. First land, then moveable property, then information has formed the basis of regimes of commodity production and accumulation. Let's not forget that in much of the underdeveloped world, accumulation based on land as property is still going on. Its conflict with the overdeveloped world accounts for two of the great global struggles of our time. Agricultural accumulation seeks to open the markets of the overdeveloped world, against the stubborn resistance of the state-protected farmers in Europe, America and Japan.

The other great movement for land based accumulation is resource based. Here the

overdeveloped world acts to secure its interests at the expense of the sovereignty of the underdeveloped world. One great exception is the OPEC cartel, which succeeded in securing a rent from a partial resource monopoly, but at the expense of the arrested development of the commodity economy of the oil-dependent states.

Accumulation based on capital as property is, curiously, migrating out of the overdeveloped world, into the newly developed world. If you buy a car or a computer, chances are a lot of it was made in Korea or Taiwan. If you buy sneakers or a sweater, chances are it was made in Indonesia or China. The brand name might say Honda or Nike or Sony or Apple, but increasingly the wealth of these corporations is invested in the intellectual property it commands – its trademarks, patents and copyrights – not in the making of things, which is of so little strategic importance to these companies that it can be contracted out elsewhere.

So what does the accumulation of wealth in the overdeveloped world increasingly rest on? Not land or capital as property, but information. And not just on intellectual property, but also on the capacity to realise its value, in other words on communication vectors, on a vectoral power breaking free from regimes of security. But media vectors have gone beyond troubling the boundaries of self and community, and now trouble national boundaries just as much. The proliferation of ever faster, cheaper, more flexible media vectors with a more and more global reach makes possible the colonisation of more extensive spaces by commodity relations. The national space, and the national compromise between labour and capital come undone. So too does the international space, as a space governed by rival national sovereignties.

This shifts the anxiety toward one of two options. Either towards a resurgent nationalism, or towards a resurgent class awareness. Either one fends off one's anxiety about the permeable borders of the nation, community, and self by hardening the national boundary against the other. Or one follows the vectoral line that traverses self, community and nation and discovers the class interest that potentially forms along it. One either demands more boundary, or one starts to question who owns and controls the vectors that both traverse and incite the boundary.

This is the problem that bedevils the 'anti-globalisation' movement which, even on the left, falls into anxiety about borders rather than seeking a New Deal for the vectoralisation of space, one that abandons the dialectic of inside and outside and takes up instead an embracing of the vector. An open world with plural forms of ownership, not just private ownership, in which justice and well-being has a place alongside profit and 'productivity'.

But we need a new concept of class to grasp vectoralisation. Marxists still think only of the force of production, steel and concrete, as being material. The forces of communication – media vectors – are also material. And like the forces of production, they and their products can be turned into property – intellectual property. If commodification starts with the enclosure of land, continues with the accumulation of capital goods as private property, its next phase grows out of intellectual property.

The commodification of information, which begins to accelerate with the invention of the telegraph, has two dimensions, a technical and a legal one, both form the basis of a new regime of accumulation, and, arguably, a new kind of ruling class. No longer a pas-

toralist ruling class, extracting rent from landed property, no longer a capitalist class, extracting profits from fungible things as property, but what I would call a vectoralist class, whose accumulation of wealth is based on ownership and control of information.

If the asylum seekers are globalisation from below, then the vectoral class is most definitely globalisation from above. With its rise to power within the ruling block, the ruling block as a whole frees itself in an unprecedented way from all local and contingent constraints. The vectoral ruling interest provides the means for other branches of the ruling class to extract themselves from national compacts with subordinate classes. It is not quite, as Ghassan Hage says, that capital becomes transcendental; rather it is that a vectoral class-power transcends the limits of capital, abstracting commodification still further.

Pop open the back of your television and you will find components from Ireland, Nigeria, Indonesia or Peru. Pop open a television of the same make made a year later, and the same components may be from Hungary and China. The sourcing of components may be based on nothing more than fluctuating exchange rates, or slight variations in the spot markets for capacitors. Either way, it's the technologies and services of the vectoral class that create the imaginary 'global' space within which these components are traded.

However, both primary and secondary producers in the peripheral world confront the overdeveloped world of Europe-USA-Japan which secure their internal class compromises at the expense of peripheral states. Peripheral states also confront a new global ruling class, which uses its monopoly over intellectual property as a form of imperial leverage. And the peripheral world also confronts what one might call the 'undevelopable' world – those states now left out of all pretence of incorporation in a vectoral space of trade and security.

Part of the challenge for the left-liberal position is to put the illegals in the context of these three linked developments, to prevent the collapse of the issues of globalisation into the demand for a new disciplinary response for the illegals, who are just an element of this larger pattern of development. Punishing the bodies who are globalisation from below does nothing to address the inequities posed by globalisation from above. But ultimately, the refuge seeker poses just as much of a challenge to left-liberal discourses that have not thought through their investments in sovereignty.

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