ONE Introduction Global Savage

A suit-wearing European man sits in the dark talking with three tribal men around a campfire. The night sky behind them is deep purple, and into the colour of the sky is written the words, 'Talk anyone's language: Windows 2000'. Advertising images such as this provide windows onto contemporary worlds. They provide us with heavily researched and creatively engineered reflections of our times. They are reflections that perversely re-present the surface reality of contemporary social relations, and which nevertheless take us into the intensities of its promises, fears and dreams. Ironically, this advertising image reflects the tensions and contradictions that *Global Savage* is trying to understand. What is happening to the world under present conditions of intensifying contradiction, and how did we get here? What does it mean, for example, when a Vodafone advertisement depicts a satellite picture of the globe with clouds swirling over Africa, shrouding a Europe that is flattened by the parallax of perspective? The inscription on that advertisement reads, 'Vodafone spoken here'. Like the Microsoft advertisement, Vodafone projects the **globalism** as transcending difference. However, at the same time, its very accentuation of a 'possible world' of open communication makes us aware that place and identity still intensely matter. It gives the impression that **globalization** is wonderfully inclusive. However, at the same time, we are implicitly reminded that the present world can be characterized as 'global savage' in a second sense – that is, globalization as a savagely distancing and mediating; globalization that cares little for those who cannot keep up, and fears those who are its 'others'.

Microsoft's Noble Savages are postmodern motifs for everything primitive *and* modern: their spears speak of many remembered images. Like other postcolonial lads, as I grew up I watched the 1964 film *Zulu* and read Rider Haggard and Doris Lessing. Now, in the contemporary representations of popular culture it seems that 'the tribes' are coming again – and

either they are becoming us, or, alternatively, for example in the case of the ethnic nationalists of Eastern Europe, the supposedly more primordial of us have always been them. Look closer into the Microsoft advertisement and you can see that the warriors are wearing tartan, just like the clans in Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* (1995). It is ye olde clothe of the medieval 'Scot', William Wallace, as he patriotically ran into battle against Edward I of Hollywood's England. In shops in Scotland, years after *Braveheart* swept through the land, you can still find depictions of the American-born Australian-claimed actor, Mel Gibson, his nose and cheeks smeared blue with Celtic woad. The Scottish artists who lovingly paint Gibson's face did not care that the director of a film about this nation's 'birth' was an Australian-in-Hollywood rather than a son of the Highland soil. Nor did the stone mason who set out to capture the spirit of William Wallace through Mel Gibson's body. The statue is located at the entrance to the National Wallace Monument in Stirling, a spear's throw from Stirling Bridge where the 1297 battle against the 'English' took place. Gibson as an outsider, like the Irish actor Liam Neeson in *Rob Roy* (1994), is non-English enough to depict a Scot.

Elaborating upon this illustration of the connections between **tribalism**, neo-traditionalism, and globalism, Gibson's *Braveheart* provides significant inspiration for the League of the South, a group that began in 1994. On 4 March 2000 they signed their Declaration of Southern Independence. 'We, as citizens of the sovereign states of the South, proclaim before Almighty God and before all the nations of the earth, that we are a separate and distinct people, with an honourable heritage and culture worthy of protection and preservation.' Their Southland is the land of the losers in the American Civil War, currently part of the United States of America. At their annual honouring of Jefferson Davis, last president of the Confederate States of America, a kilted piper plays *Scotland the Brave*. The League has its own confederate tartan approved by the Scottish tartan authority, as incidentally do the expatriate Scots in Australia, with both tartans commercially available over the internet. The globalizing world is thus an amazing and contradictory place of local allusions and national recursions. It is not simply an open series of invented traditions, advertising slogans and postmodern film narratives, but nor is it a place of simple primordial depth or straightforward continuities from the past.

As I write the first draft of this chapter, sitting in an office built above the medieval city wall of old Edinburgh, the writing is both abstractly connected to everywhere *and* thoroughly bound in time and place. A 'moment' ago, I used Netscape, one of Microsoft's rivals, to find out the year when *Zulu* was made. I found myself in a place that I had never

been, reading a person I will probably never meet. On the University of Wales Swansea Student Union website, I was reading Louise Burridge's response to a posting that said '*Zulu* is quite possibly one of the best films of all time'. Two years after writing that last sentence – note how temporally confusing the abstraction of print can be – I find myself in Leeds (June 2002), reading a brochure for an exhibition called 'The Mighty Zulu Nation' at the Royal Armouries Museum. The vice-president of the Anglo-Historical Zulu Society, pictured on the African savannah in safari garb, is advertised as giving a lecture, accompanied by a screening of *Zulu* and by 'artefacts from his own collection for visitors to handle'. Six months later again, at a granite monument in Pretoria, two men put their lips to ram's horns to mark the most sacred moment of the year for the Afrikaners. At precisely noon, a ray of sun shines through a hole in the roof of an empty tomb symbolizing the death of the 470 pioneers who 164 years earlier, with guns and God on their side, defeated 10,000 Zulu warriors in the Battle of Blood River. Later still, on a plane returning from Chicago (September 2004), I read that airlines communicate globally in a single world-standard idiom called 'Zulu'.

Abstracted language-protocols? Artefacts to handle? An empty tomb symbolizing glorious embodied death in the name of the nation? The globalization of film culture? This world, like all the others before it, is a place of a myriad messy interconnections, immediate and abstracted, embodied and disembodied. *Global Savage* attempts to make some sense of these connections, all the while keeping in mind their messy unevenness and the way that they are caught up in vast permutations of power. It ranges from questions of apparently irrelevant detail such as 'Who is Gillian Stone, the narrator in the Nescafé advertisements?' and 'What is the relationship between things of stone, wood and flesh in Maubisse, East Timor?' to those of more obvious importance and generality. 'Is it actually resurgent tribalism that is the basis of accentuated global violence today?', 'What is the significance of the war on terror?' and 'How can we understand the formations of nationalism in an era of globalism?' The title of the book attempts to express the ambiguities of the present and its normative confusions. On the one hand, globalization has, with the Good War on Terror, become increasingly savage about how 'others' are treated. The world is seething in a modern abstract barbarianism that allows the four horsemen of the apocalypse to continue to ride this planet, this time in metal machines – sometimes under the banners of humanitarian intervention, military, economic and political. On the other hand, relations of tribalism and **traditionalism** that were once derided for their backward primordial 'savagery' have not disappeared as

proclaimed by the many soothsayers – from the Social Darwinists to the End-of-History ideologues. The title *Global Savage* is thus intended to be at once critical and ironical, discouraged and empathetic to the way that all social relations on this planet are increasingly forced to come to terms with globalization.

Rather than treating 'globalism', **'nationalism'** and 'tribalism' as discrete formations – with globalization replacing all that has gone before – the present study takes them as recurrent formations with rough-knotted intertwined histories. It helps to explain how they can be concurrent realities in the present. With the tropes of 'tribalism' now increasingly revisited by social theorists with gay abandon,[1] and globalism studies becoming all the rage, nationalism is the one formation of the three that is usually projected as having a dubious future. This is ironic given that for nearly a century the **nation-state** had been taken for granted as the dominant setting for the intersection of community (as nation) and polity (as state). A revolution in theories of the **nation** began in the 1980s as the processes of what might be called 'disembodied globalization' were taking substantial hold and the intersection of nation and **state** had begun to come apart. However, almost as soon as the theories gained a readership, the historical future of the nation-state was called into question. A series of debates began and still continues today. They continue to ask whether or not the nation-state is in crisis, and whether old-style community is still possible.

What tends to be missing from these debates is an appreciation of questions of comparative social form, the question at the heart of this study. In one way this is not surprising – investigating such questions tends to give way to an understandable emphasis upon immediate issues and social exigencies, the very issues brought to the fore by the galloping transformations in social form. In another way, however, it is alarming how the debates fail to take cognisance of the substantial and highly-relevant research that has been going on in a number of quite disparate disciplines. Social theorists are exploring the impact of different modes of communication or technology upon social relations.[2] Critical geographers are doing path-breaking work on the nature and forms of spatial extension lived by different types of communities.[3] Anthropologists are writing challenging works on the changing forms of identity in national and postnational settings.[4] This study is intended to draw synthetically upon these disciplines and others – particularly history and sociology, political theory, international relations and anthropology – to provide an alternative framework for understanding the current tensions between **polity** and **community**, nationalism and globalism. Underlying the entire

approach is the presumption that an adequate theory of tribalism, nation formation or globalization requires a generalizing theory of changing social formations. In other words, a phenomenon such as globalization or nationalism cannot be understood in terms of itself.

If the central focus is on changing forms of social relations, it is always with the view to relating the practices of the past to present trajectories. This is the sense in which the research can be described as a history of the present. It involves comparing tribal reciprocity, past and present – oral cultures involved in gift exchange and production by the hand – to the formations of empire, kingdom and sodality characterized by the development of script/print, paper money and new techniques of production. This is in turn related to the developments in communication, exchange and production that lie behind the emergence of the modern nation-state. It involves comparing face-to-face community with the structures and subjectivities of globalism. We trace the reconstitution of the nation-state as it has undergone unprecedented change – change based in part upon the development of mass communications, fiduciary exchange systems and computer-based production. Throughout, the aim is to draw conclusions about the contemporary underpinnings of polity and community in a globalized world.

The volume would at first glance appear to have the same massive historical scope as Ernest Gellner's *Plough, Sword and Book.*[5] However, except for its generalizing methodological pretensions, *Global Savage* is intended to be much more modest. Rather than sweeping across history, it uses anthropology, comparative historical sociology and political studies in order to understand the structures of the present. Gellner's book is a history of ideas, rarely talking about ploughs, swords and books. *Global Savage*, by contrast, is intended as a genealogy of the underpinning processes of *contemporary* tribal, national and global practices and institutions. The equivalent motifs to Gellner's 'plough, sword and book' are stone and wood, money and clock, book and computer. This is not to imply that we simply move historically from 'things of stone and wood',[6] to things of book and screen. In contemporary tribal life we find the assimilation of these themes into changing but continuous cosmologies. For example, Elizabeth Traube describes the integrative culture of the Mambai of East Timor as incorporating the layers of the invasion of that country – the Portuguese and the Catholic Church – into the passing on of authority structures. The stone and the book come together in their difference:

> Then Father Heaven, the great divider distributes a patrimony between his sons. To the eldest, Ki Sa, he gives the sacred rock and tree, tokens of the original ban and signs of original authority over a

silent cosmos. Upon the youngest, Loer Sa, he bestows the book and the pen, which the Mambai regard as emblems of European identity.[7]

As important as the continuities and assimilations within and across communities are, the differences between communities still have to be theorized. In addressing this issue, the discussion will move across different dominant *levels* of the analysis.[8] At one level – that is, at the level of analysing conjunctural relations – the focus will be on the following *modes of practice*: first, the changing forms of communication and information storage from print to electronic communication; second, the changing forms of exchange from gift exchange and barter to abstract money; third, the changing forms of production from manual production to robotics; fourth, the changing forms of enquiry, particularly the rise of techno-science; and fifth, the changing forms of organization, with the increasing predominance in the contemporary period of bureaucratic rationality. At a more abstract level of analysing categories of social **ontology** the focus will be on the changing way in which we live the categories of time, space, the body and ways of knowing.[9] Moving across these levels of analysis, the task will be to examine how the changing modes of practice – disembodied communication, abstracted exchange, post-industrial production, techno-science and technical rationality – bear upon the subjectivities and practices of political community in the age of disembodied globalism. The writing will explore the ways in which more abstract forms overlay (rather than replace) earlier modes of practice. In doing so, the book will attempt to draw political conclusions about alternative possibilities for polity and community as they play themselves out in the realms of tribe, nation and globe.

The present study thus enters into debates in social and political theory. One of the dominant avant-garde approaches in social theory continues to be post-structuralism, while the dominant mainstream emphasis in the academic disciplines is on empirically-grounded studies or rational-choice style approaches. Across these diverse, and I think unsatisfactory, ways of approaching social explanation, there is a common tendency to criticize the possibility of generalized analyses and to dismiss approaches which attempt to understand the 'social whole'. In some circles it is an anathema to talk of structures of social practice or to make broad characterizations about a social formation. There are good reasons for the post-structuralist critique of generalizing approaches, but the methodological problems they point to are not insurmountable. On the contrary, there is a pressing urgency to bring together and rethink the respective strengths of old and new ways of theorizing. Moreover, unless

we develop a more synthesizing overview of the trajectories of the present and its historical antecedents, we will be left with only vague renditions of contemporary life as a postmodern condition dissolving into difference, or as a fragmented world of self-interested rational choice. As a contribution to this political-methodological problem, the project is intended as an analytical interpretative history of some of the central institutions of the present, taking the intersection of polity and community as one of its key framing themes. It is an attempt to find a pathway between and beyond the modern confidence in grand theory and the postmodern rejection of other than piece-meal explanations for this and that discursive practice. It does so, not by setting up a grand theory, but by setting up a sensitizing and generalizing 'grand method' to explore the structures and subjectivities of social formations that traverse history as we know it.

Carrying through the concurrent themes of globalism, nationalism and tribalism, the book is divided into three parts. The first part is concerned with critically introducing existing theories of social formation, and setting up an alternative approach. Choosing which theorists to discuss was guided by three antithetical desires: the first was to keep the discussion as introductory as possible. The second desire was to give an adequate sense of both the complexity of individual theorists and the incredible range of theoretical traditions and approaches. The third was to choose generalist writers who would be most acutely useful for developing an alternative approach to understanding the abstractions and contradictions of social formation in the present. With these principles in mind, the following writers were selected: Ernest Gellner, Michael Mann, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Arjun Appadurai and Michel Foucault. Even as I am critical of their approaches, they provide us with a wealth of provocative writing. Chapter 3 elaborates their methods of analysis, and later chapters expand upon the details of their research and theoretical direction in the context of trying to develop an alternative position that can carry forward their strengths. These theorists, as if in a novel, thus become central characters, along with lots of other figures of occasional reference, throughout the rest of the book.

The second part, 'Rethinking Formations of Practice and Being', begins with the question of how customary or tribal community is constituted through relations of reciprocity, kinship and analogy as the dominant modes of exchange, organization and enquiry (Chapter 5). The chapter serves as a comparative base for later chapters on the changing dominant formations of traditional, modern and postmodern society. Chapter 6 continues the themes of communication and exchange, tracing the development

of writing and money as they fundamentally change from conditions of social reciprocity. It is an incomplete story. The study does not really cover the full diverse implications of the overall method. It concentrates on the modes of communication and exchange, but these are intended as indicative rather than *the* primary modes of practice. Similarly, when we come to Chapters 7 and 8 on the nature of time, space and bodies, the analysis is indicative rather than comprehensive. The basic argument through these chapters is that when dominant patterns of social change are drawn out from the incredible complexity of social life, we can trace an increasing abstraction of temporality, spatiality and embodiment across human history, layers of abstraction that overlie and reframe prior ways of being.

This analysis is intended to provide a schematic framework for understanding the changing forms of polity from traditional to nation-states, and the stretching forms of community from the local to the global. State as polity and nation as community are thus the focus of Chapters 9 and 10 respectively. These two chapters begin Part III of the book, 'Rewriting the History of the Present', with a third, Chapter 11, focussing upon questions of globalization. The book ends with Chapter 12 turning to what should be integral to any social theory – an account of its ethical assumptions and implications.

If the overall theoretical argument of the work is that the dominant constitutive level of contemporary society is becoming increasingly abstract,[10] the overall political-ethical argument is that we have to forge a counter-practice that revivifies the social importance of more embodied and continuing relations of mutuality and co-operation. We have to reflexively reconfigure social life in such a way as to qualify the runaway excesses of the abstract globalizing society, without treating the processes of social abstraction as bad in themselves. This position will be caricatured as anti-globalist and backward-looking by a dominant neo-liberal position. It is not. What it intends, first, is a counter-position to the dominant and utterly-blinkered faith in modern globalizing progress. This belief is characterized by displacement-projections about the putative sources of evil in the world today. In the words of one apparently-congenial and very powerful global administrator: 'Extreme nationalism, protectionism and tribalism are the curses of our species and inevitably lead to the restriction of liberties, blocking the advance of human rights and lifting of living standards and conditions.'[11] By contrast, I argue that nationalism and tribalism are ways of life – again, neither intrinsically good nor bad – but important to what it has meant to be historically human. What this book intends, moreover, is the development of a counter-position that allows us to make decisions

about political-ethical directions on the basis of an understanding about the complexities of different forms of community and polity, rather than on the basis of ideologically-driven prejudice about the essential virtues of savage globalization.

Notes

1 Albeit, loosely: they are never delineated in what I suggest needs to be distinguished as traditional, modern and postmodern forms. On what will later be defined as postmodern tribalism see, for example, Michel Maffesoli, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, London, Sage, 1996. For reasons that I cannot understand, he posits the unsustainable thesis that the new tribalism signals the end of individualism. See Michael Walzer ('The New Tribalism: Notes on a Difficult Problem', in Ronald Beiner (ed.), *Theorising Nationalism*, State University of New York Press, 1999) for an example of tribalism used as a loose rhetorical device. Ironically, this expanded currency of the term is occurring at the very time anthropologists are becoming increasingly wary of it as applied to traditional reciprocal communities.

2 Two prominent examples, both of which I think are provocative but methodologically flawed, are Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information*, Cambridge, Polity, 1990; and Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, Cambridge, Polity, 1992.

3 The literature here is burgeoning. Early seminal texts include the following: Derek Gregory and John Urry (eds), *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*, London, Macmillan, 1985; and Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991.

4 See, for example, Tone Bringa, *Being Muslim the Bosnian Way: Identity and Community in a Central Bosnian Village*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJZ, 1995, and Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere (eds), *Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1999.

5 Ernest Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book: The Structure of Human History*, London, Collins Harvill, 1988.

6 The name of an Australian rock-music band in the 1990s, part of the revival of interest in tribalism.

7 Elizabeth G. Traube, *Cosmology and Social Life: Ritual Exchange among the Mambai of East Timor*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986, p. 55.

8 See Chapter 4 for a full discussion of 'levels' of theoretical abstraction. For examples of other recent books which have been part of developing the same methodology and drawing upon the 'constitutive abstraction' or 'levels' method associated with *Arena Journal*, see Simon Cooper, *Technoculture and Critical Theory: In the Service of the Machine*, Routledge, London, 2002; and Christopher Ziguras, *Self-Care: Embodiment, Personal Autonomy and the Shaping of Health Consciousness*, Routledge, London, 2004.

9 Talking at this level of abstraction I should really say 'categories of temporality, spatiality, embodiment and epistemology', but the technical distinction is not important for the moment.

10 The lineages of this social abstraction involve variously a number of processes that have been much discussed in the literature on social change: (1) rationalization; (2) commodification; (3) codification; (4) mediation; (5) objectification; and (6) extension. For example, Marx takes commodification as the driving social force of modern capitalism, while Weber emphasizes the processes of rationalization including bureaucratization of management and the secularization of religious life. The argument that I draw upon comes from writers associated with the *Arena Journal* such as Geoff Sharp who conceives of abstraction as a socially-constitutive and material process.

11 Mike Moore, *A World Without Walls: Freedom, Development, Free Trade and Global Governance*, University of Cambridge Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 9. Mike Moore is Director General of the World Trade Organization.