

# articles

## **NATION, GLOBE, HEGEMONY**

Post-Fordist Preconditions of the Transnational Turn in American Studies

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**Fordism**

**post-Fordism**

**post-Americanism**

**global Imaginary**

**futurity**

**global hegemony**

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*This article critiques the post-national analytic frame now on the rise in American studies by considering the post-Fordist conditions of its very possibility. Given capitalism's evident shift away from a national regime of accumulation and toward a transnational one, transnational American studies should not presume itself to be automatically performing progressive ideological work. In the context of the postwar university's mediating role between knowledge and politics, the post-national frame in today's American studies appears to be positioned quite similarly to the national frame of the Cold War era that it displaces. Both frames delineate the imaginary field within which the ideological struggles of their respective historical moments occur. To become more politically effective, post-national American studies should aim its critiques less at the past-tense national narrative than at globalization's future-tense narrative of inevitability.*

### **The transnational turn in American studies**

Close to a decade ago, Carolyn Porter published a review essay in the journal *American Literary History* meant to endorse an emerging convergence

1 Especially influential here would be the work collected by Homi Bhabha in *Nation and Narration*. Pheng Cheah critiques Bhabha's post-nationalism for dubiously valorizing an emergent cultural cosmopolitanism that (as Cheah notes) economic globalization has bestowed on postcolonial elites. This cosmopolitanism, Cheah suggests, requires Bhabha to disavow the example of the vast majority of non-elite postcolonials, whose conditions is better characterized by immobility and parochialism. While Cheah is right to unpack the class specificity of such blanket celebrations of transculturation, I would disagree that the primary alternative to elitist cosmopolitanism is a return to postcolonial nationalism, for this fails to acknowledge that the transnational nature of post-Fordist production processes deprives postcolonial nationalism of much of the political traction it in fact possessed in the era of Fordism (more on this in the next few pages). In some important sense, this essay aims to raise

between postcolonial and American studies. In 'What We Know That We Don't Know', Porter (1994) contrasted nation-bound scholarship still aiming to critique the ideological work of the American imaginary with an entirely new kind of project, one adopting a postcolonial emphasis on diasporic and transnational culture. For Porter, the critical border crossings transacted in Jose Saldivar's 'Our America' (1997) and Hortense Spiller's 'Comparative Americas' offered blueprints for an excitingly new American studies, one that, in lieu of the hegemonizing conflation of 'America' with the United States, labored instead to locate the United States in a wider hemispheric arrangement of cultural and popular transaction that would generate counterintuitive and potentially transgressive transnational knowledge about American culture. Porter's essay has proved prescient, as American studies scholarship of the last ten years has rapidly moved to adopt transnational frameworks, as evidenced in the recent scholarship of Donald Pease (1994) and Amy Kaplan (1993), Coco Fusco (1995), John Rowe (2000), Lisa Lowe (1996), and in continued work by Jose Saldivar (1991, 1997).

In this article, I want to speculate on the ideological implications of this shift since the 1990s in the object of knowledge for American studies. For me, the most concise expression of this transformation remains that of Don Pease. While a 1991 anthology by Pease had expressed its more modestly revisionist literary intentions in the title 'New Americanist Revisions of the Canon', by 1994 a second anthology, also edited by Pease, would proclaim the arrival of an entirely new interdisciplinary project captured under the rubric 'Post-Americanist Narratives'. This shift, Pease cautioned (1994: 4), should not be understood as an effect of the discipline's internal dynamics, but rather as an external imperative pushed by a generation of scholars affiliated not only with American studies, but also with identitarian social movements. Especially important here would be the influence of Latino and Asian American studies, both of which increasingly study a minority American identity in terms of larger transnational histories that are belied by a conventional paradigm of assimilative immigration. Identity politics, however, embraced 'post-Americanist' narration only after a crucial moment of engagement with the insights of postcolonial studies. If postcolonial critics had demonstrated to politically engaged American studies scholars the inescapably fictive narrativity of the nation, they had thereby also pointed the way to a new politics bent on disruptions rather than expansions of the national narrative.<sup>1</sup> It seems significant that, between publishing these two anthologies, Pease co-edited with Amy Kaplan an influential American studies collection entitled *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (1993) that, drawing explicitly on postcolonial analysis, offered a wide-ranging critique of American nationalism as a screen for empire-building. In his subsequent anthology, Pease suggested that race, gender and sexuality too have become post-national forces that no longer simply demand a more inclusionary

the question of how radical scholars in American studies can make a thoughtful contribution to a post-national cosmopolitical challenge to the hegemonic form of globalization.

2 For the detailed analyses I cannot enter into here, see Robert Boyer, *The Regulation School*, Alain Lipietz, *Mirages and Miracles*, and Martyn Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn*. My forthcoming book, which argues that the cold war precipitated the invention of identity as a political category, works closely with the cultural parameters of Fordism in the U.S.

3 I am thinking here of the way in which American studies was launched as a project to delineate the “American character,” including historical works like David Potter’s *People of Plenty* and literary studies such as R.W.B. Lewis’s *The American Adam* or even Perry Miller’s *Errand into the Wilderness*. It is these relatively congratulatory national narratives that prompted such counter-narratives as Sacvan Bercovitch’s *American Jeremiad* or even Edmund

American subject. Instead, they have come to challenge the very foundations of an oppressive national meta-narrative about a coherently imagined America, and have begun pressing the field toward an array of post-national projects (Pease 1994: 4–5).

While there is no doubt that the post-Americanist narratives in American studies are performing imaginative work for social movements, I want to explore in this article what happens if we choose to emphasize a more troubling externality to the discipline. What if we read the re-narratization of American studies in relation not only to progressive movement projects, but also to the arrival of post-Fordist knowledge imperatives in the American university? In American studies, the terms ‘Fordist’ and ‘post-Fordist’ are often invoked fleetingly, and without any overt connection to the institutional development of academic knowledge. It is therefore worth stressing that the emergence and development of American studies was closely tied to a set of Fordist economic and cultural arrangements that were inseparable from the political regime of the Cold War state. Fordism, to be highly schematic, names a historically specific form of capitalism in which a Taylorized mode of industrial mass production was articulated to a system of mass consumption, one that took a particular suburban form in the United States. In part, this articulation was accomplished by a Keynesian state that stabilized a liberal political hegemony while also regulating a national marketplace on behalf of capital.<sup>2</sup>

Given the centrality of the nation-state coupling to Fordist capitalism, and given the conflation of Fordist capitalism with American identity itself throughout the Cold War, it is not surprising that the new academic ‘discipline’ of American studies emerged in the 1950s alongside the retooling of the American university as an ideological state apparatus. As the university became the Cold War research institution *par excellence*, providing everything from Sovietologists to hard science for the space race, American studies developed as a knowledge project bent on specifying the national character of Americanness and as a pedagogical program aimed at the interpellation of American citizen-subjects.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the ideological substance of these national interpellations were hotly contested, as activist scholars mobilized a variety of progressive Americanist counter-narratives posing political demands on the state as the legitimated medium of political representation. Struggles within American studies over the plotting of the national meta-narrative, including who should be included or excluded in its principal cast of characters, may thus be usefully understood as institutionally privileged ideological struggles over the substance of Fordist/Cold War political subjectivity. One implication of this analysis is that the very notion of an ISA (ideological state apparatus), as classically formulated by Althusser (1979), should itself be historicized as a central feature of the Fordist era, given the immense regulatory responsibilities that

Morgan's *American Slavery/American Freedom*, texts arguing that American nationalism is built upon foundational discourses of normalization and/or ideologically sanctioned social injustices.

4 The term "third world" has fallen into some disfavor since the 1980s, at times derided as little more than, in Aijaz Ahmad's words, a "polemical" term with "no theoretical status whatsoever" (5) given how it falsely collapses the vastly different conditions and histories of nations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In this essay, I use the term in a more genealogical sense, as the name of a political project rather than a fixed place. In the sense I give it here, the 'third world' functioned as the radical political imaginary of peripheral Fordist decolonization. For an invaluable history of the term's invention, and its imbrication in the world made by the cold war, see Carl Pletcher's essay "The Three Worlds."

5 See Alain Lipietz's chapter on "The Old Division of Labour" in *Mirages and Miracles* (47–68).

Fordist capitalism invested in the nation-state and thus the commensurate ideological burden of the nation as principal legitimator of state power.

It is worth noting that the postwar development of American studies also coincided with the early years of decolonization in the Third World, and that Third World nationalism was itself caught up in the Fordist model of capitalist accumulation. In part, this reflects the United States' ability to impose its regime of accumulation on many emergent nations, thereby consolidating its sphere of informal imperial influence and corporate access to world markets. Whether beholden to the United States or not, Third World nationalism as a politic was often premised on the Fordist vision of coterminously political and economic territoriality.<sup>4</sup> The postwar slogan of 'development' encouraged strategies such as import-substitution as a means of building an auto-regulating industrial economy for the Third World nation, what Alain Lipietz (1987) has astutely termed 'peripheral Fordism'.<sup>5,6</sup> The Fordist hegemony of the Cold War years thus bred highly politicized nationalist projects both at the center of the world economy (the United States) and in the Third World periphery.<sup>7</sup> Among the so-called 'NICs' (newly industrializing countries), peripheral Fordism achieved partial success. By and large, however, the Fordist model of development failed for the vast majority of Third World nations, leading by the late 1970s and 1980s to a turn away from the nationalist model of postcolonial development.

In contrast to the Fordist scenario, the post-Fordist condition is most obviously marked by the transnationalization of production, the growing importance of finance capital and the state's declining ability to directly regulate political economy within its own territory.<sup>8</sup> For the United States, these changes follow from a far deeper integration of former Third World (and also former Second World) populations into the production processes and market strategies of its corporations. The territoriality of the American economy, one might say, has become openly and unapologetically international in its reach. For the former Third World, post-Fordism has fostered an expanded solicitation of direct First World capital investment as the reigning substitute for national development planning. Indeed, the very political project of a Third World, understood as the aspiration to economic and political independence from a First (and Second World) has suffered an unmistakable decline.

Amid these basic changes in post-Cold War geopolitical categories, concomitant changes would also be expected in the aims and objectives of many geographically defined forms of disciplinary knowledge, and here I am thinking specifically of the rapid rise of both a post-Third Worldist postcolonial studies and of a post-national American studies. The link that Pease and others have noted between postcolonialist and post-Americanist critiques of national meta-narrative, in other words, represents not merely a

6 This is precisely the historical juncture that Partha Chatterjee confronted in his powerful critique of postcolonial uses of nationalist politics, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial*

political-intellectual affinity, but a geopolitically determined convergence in post-Fordist thought. It is important, however, to recognize the university here as the institution that mediates between these new knowledge projects and post-Fordist social relations at large. Nation-centered American studies bore a relationship to Fordism that was not merely generic or reflective, but materially situated: it served as a pivotal knowledge project of the (Cold-Warring) Fordist university. So too post-national American studies must be historicized alongside the post-Fordist turn in American higher education.

### Globalization: The post-national ideology of post-Fordism

*World*. See also the critiques of postcolonial nationalism in Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* and in Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd's introduction to their collection *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*.

Nowhere has the post-Fordist reorganization of the American university been more thoughtfully critiqued than in the late Bill Readings's *The University in Ruins*. In his study, Readings contended that, as the nation-state ceases to be the site at which capital reproduces itself (i.e., as Fordism dissipates), the university is transformed from an legitimating 'ideological apparatus of the nation-state' into a 'relatively independent bureaucratic system' (Readings 1996: 14). By and large, Readings conceives this bureaucratized university as akin to the corporation itself. The term for its new mission, 'excellence', no longer names an ideology at all, but serves instead as a euphemism for capital accumulation: the amassing of either intellectual property (through research) or human capital (through profitable, pre-professional training). As capital becomes less reliant upon national ideology, culture loses its force as the site from which political struggles may be effectively waged. Only the more naked forms of market value, profitability, provide a rationale for the workings of the institution. The ISA becomes transformed into another site of accumulation.

7 Elsewhere, I explore this Fordist double mirroring or mutual mimicry of the United States and the emergent third world nation. During those years, the United States repeatedly worked to represent itself as a postcolonial nation, an elder sibling to the new nation-states of the third world (Medovoi, "Cold War..."). This self-representation both served as a screen for American imperial ventures abroad, while paradoxically also animating important progressive forces in

Readings's analysis suggests a different diagnosis of the shift from American meta-narratives to their post-Americanist alternatives. On the one hand, 'post-Americanism' becomes a symptom of the declining importance of national legitimation for the state. To the extent that post-Americanist scholarship is understood as aiming to dissolve an already weakened discourse of nation, an analysis like Readings might criticize post-Americanist projects for unwisely attacking 'the cultural hegemony of the nation-state' at the very moment when 'global capital engages in the same attack' (Readings 1996: 102).

The Bush administration's fierce return to Cold-War style American nationalism and exercise of state power might seem to contradict such an argument. Certainly we must no longer fall prey to the grandiose claim (popular in the 1990s among those who studied globalization) that the nation-state's power has declined *tout court*. The rise of post-national narratives in American studies does strike me as an imaginative response of

the domestic political culture of the U.S. Unlike the colonial model, one might say that postcolonial mimicry was bi-directional, though certainly asymmetric in its political effects.

8 See Ash Amin's anthology *The Post-Fordism: A Reader*, Martyn Lee's *Consumer Culture Reborn*, and David Harvey's classic *The Condition of Postmodernity* for a more detailed analysis of post-Fordism than I can offer here. My own forthcoming book, *Rebels*, examines the cultural politics of identity in the U.S. as a phenomenon of Fordism and the Cold War, with some discussion of the transition into post-Fordism. The most compelling analysis of the crisis transition into a globalist post-Fordism, though using somewhat different terminology, is arguably Susan Strange's classic study *Casino Capitalism*.

9 Although there are numerous accounts of the Regulation School positions, the most relevant one for this essay is once again Lipietz's *Mirages and Miracles*, specifically his chapter on

sorts to the corporatized internationalism of the post-Fordist university. However, if these post-Americanist narratives are to become politically effective critiques of their own post-Fordist conditions of possibility, then we will need to revise Readings' analysis in one crucial way. For him (writing as he did in the pre-Bush moment), the locus of modern power has in fact shifted from the nation-state to the transnational corporation (or TNC) itself, so that the discourse of excellence that it promotes is neither coherent nor linked to identity-forms, nakedly concerned as it is with the money-form. In an important sense, Readings thereby mistakes the end of the university of 'national culture' for the end of ideology itself.

The theoretical background of the terms 'Fordism' and 'post-Fordism' offer an important intervention here because the body of scholarship with which they are associated – the French Regulation School – insists that capitalism as an economic system can only be reproduced by way of what they call a 'mode of regulation'. Regulation school theorists, like Robert Boyer (1990) or Alain Lipietz (1987), argue that capital accumulation depends upon the stability of compatible financial, juridical and cultural norms, which must themselves be institutionally produced.<sup>9</sup> These norms are not epiphenomenal, as in the classical base-superstructure account, but social relations in and of themselves that may or may not complement particular accumulation strategies. Therefore, the history of capitalism is the history of successive articulations between a particular mode of production (the 'regime of accumulation') and a complex network of institutions and arrangements (the 'mode of regulation') that secure the preconditions of the regime's reproduction and expansion.

From this Regulation School perspective, the TNC cannot ever replace the nation-state, for that event would describe a mythically self-regulating capitalism that no longer finds political, cultural or ideological determinations in its social environment. We would, in other words, be taking global capital's rhetoric of deregulation at its word. To the extent that Readings believes capital can dispense with ideology, he writes as though the global market no longer needs the state (juridical institutions) or culture (ideological institutions). Let us consider each of these in turn. First, while the nation-state is certainly losing its plausibility as a self-regulating, sovereign system, this by no means implies the decline of the state *per se*. Post-Fordist capital's need for a mode of regulation means that the transnational corporation cannot go it alone. At a minimum, TNCs require laws and governance that protect property, as well as currencies that are backed up by the economy as a whole. Increasingly, the state is sharing these regulatory tasks with other institutions whose territorial scope is global rather than national. If post-Fordism is to survive economic crises like the 'Asian Flu' of the late 1990s or the current global downturn, supra-national institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank will need

“Questions of Method” (9–28). See also Robert Boyer’s *The Regulation School*.

to play expanding roles as framing institutions and lenders of last resort for transnational markets. Moreover, as Saskia Sassen (1996: 12–16) notes, new non-governmental organizations such as credit-rating agencies and private arbiters for inter-corporate disputes are also adopting many of the state’s traditional roles in economic regulation.

Though states are therefore no longer sufficient agents of regulation, they nonetheless remain necessary actors in the scene of economic globalization. First, it is they who negotiate and thereby produce the legal status of inter-state agreements such as North Atlantic Free Trade Alliance (NAFTA) and the European Union, as well as world environmental and human rights accords. Second, they are still called upon to supplement the financial resources of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which cannot as yet stabilize the worst cases of economic volatility. Finally, states retain a monopoly on authorized violence. More than anything, the American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrates that states, as repressive apparatuses, still have no transnational analog and are therefore indispensable to TNCs as the enforcers of market imperatives. It is a mistake, therefore, to view global capital as ‘attacking the state’, though it does aim in certain respects to disarticulate the ‘state’ from its ‘nation’. We can presume that, alongside the increasingly important world financial institutions, the states of the Fordist era will remain important institutions for the regulation of post-Fordist capital. This would be true both of the United States, where the Bush administration openly aims to enforce the ‘Pax Americana’ promoted in their notorious document *National Security Strategy of the United States* (White House 2002), but also of various ‘Third World’ states, who must negotiate the terms of their standing in that larger geopolitical order under the threat of ‘regime change’.

If post-Fordism relies upon the retooled state and upon the new world organizations for many of the same regulatory functions that the Keynesian state once provided to Fordism, then does post-Fordism also rely on any unique ideological formations comparable to the national narrative that enabled Fordism? What might be serving as the ‘common sense’ of the post-Fordist era, the set of unconscious assumptions that frame our very ability to pose questions and to stage contemporary dramas? To avoid the erroneous presumption that post-Fordism is a post-ideological form of capital (the mistake of Readings and others in the 1990s), but also the opposite error that nothing really has changed since the Fordist era (presuming, e.g., that Bush has simply restored the world to a Cold War environment), I suggest that we have to start thinking of globalization itself as a meta-narrative, one that aims to convert the ‘national narrative’ of the Fordist era into its own supplement. Both are narratives that employ the territorial consolidation of a totality, the nation and the globe, respectively. Both narratives are also linear, for while globalization moves us inexorably from a fragmented planet



toward the phantasm of ‘one world’, the nation moves mythically from its cultural origins along a path of ‘development’ or ‘modernization’. Finally, the ideological force of both narratives can be understood through their exclusionary power. Just as not every resident represents the abstract citizen who is ‘writ large’ by the nation, so globalization is not evenly represented by all locales (or by all inhabitants within each locale), despite the fact that globalization claims universality more explicitly than the nation ever did.

The analogous ideological work performed by these two narratives, however, should not obscure their important differences. Perhaps most importantly, where the national narrative stages a collective subject whose unity is based on identity, the global narrative displaces human subjectivity, dramatizing instead the integration of markets. It is perhaps for this reason, the decentering of culture, that one might be tempted (like Readings) to read globalization as post-ideological. Unlike the national narrative, the global narrative does not presume a world protagonist subject to interpellation. In a narrative about a market, totality is not achieved through shared identity, a ‘hey you’ that speaks to all.<sup>10</sup> Instead, totality derives from mutual exchangeability (a relation neither of homogeneity nor heterogeneity, the two options allowed by national narratives). ‘Globalization’ offers a story in which the new world order will culminate, not in an undifferentiated whole, but in an endlessly differentiated circuit of exchangeability. It tells a story, not about our sameness, but about our fungeability.

Nevertheless, the narrative of globalization performs important ideological work that enables post-Fordist capital accumulation. The creation of new political agreements and institutions, for instance, seems predicated on asserting the inevitability of globalization, even at moments like the present when its assurity has grown fragile. Clinton, at a ‘brighter’ moment, campaigned for NAFTA by asserting that there is no ‘going back’, that we can only choose between harnessing globalization to our own benefit or losing out as weaker players with less exchange value in the new worldwide marketplace. Bush campaigns for his hemispheric trade agreement along much the same lines. The very fact that his argument lacks credibility more in today’s climate than it might have five years ago reveals the ideological laboring of globalization as a narrative. Like national narratives, globalization’s imaginary force must have ups and downs. Also like national narratives, its political meaning remains open to contestation of many sorts. Individual nation-states, for example, routinely deploy the rhetoric of globalization when it is advantageous to ‘their’ corporations, selectively appealing to the inevitability of a free market for certain commodities, while disavowing their own protectionist sites within the post-Fordist global economy. The more economically advantaged the nation-state, the more generic assertions of free trade rhetoric serves its interests. For Bush himself (and for his unlikely ally Thomas Friedman as well), even the war in Iraq is

10 As noted earlier, my inference is that Louis Althusser’s classic “ISA” essay argues from inside the historical context of Fordism, a moment in the history of capitalism when the nation-state monopolized the ideological apparatuses. What we have now is a different practice of ideology, one whose material basis and whose mode of address demand major re-theorization.

ultimately justified by a narrative of globalization, a shining future in which post-Saddam Iraq leads the Middle-East into the neo-liberal world economy.

## Counter-narrating globalization

If globalization represents the ‘dominant ideology’ of post-Fordist capitalism, then for that very reason it also represents our principal site for waging ideological struggle against it. Whatever progressive political prospects we possess, in other words, hinge upon our capacity to revise the meta-narrative of globalization, as the discursive battles fought by the ongoing WTO protest movements demonstrate. One finds, for instance, critics of the post-Fordist division of labor advancing worker rights by warning of a global ‘race to the bottom’ in wage levels. Environmentalists meanwhile circulate narratives of global warming or ozone depletion.<sup>11</sup> Transnational economic processes do not have to call into existence meta-narratives of globalization. Yet both gurus and critics of contemporary capital have openly adopted them because, like nationalism, they have proved to be ideological potent.

This suggests enormous strategic implications for both post-Americanist studies and postcolonial studies. Perhaps the first thing to note is that globalization is itself simultaneously a postcolonial and a post-Americanist narrative, and presumably the hegemonic version of both. Like other postcolonial narratives, it asserts as outmoded the Third Worldist projects of national liberation, and offers in their stead a cosmopolitan vision of freedom. Like post-Americanist narratives, meanwhile, globalization urges us to relinquish originary and parochial myths of American exceptionalism – ‘New World Adams’ or ‘Errands into the Wilderness’ – in favor of a larger hemispheric or global perspective. Celebratory American multiculturalism, as Tomo Hattori (1999: 229–230) demonstrates brilliantly for the scene of Asian American studies, performs necessary if disavowed ideological work for the advancement of a global capitalist civil society. Indeed, globalization discourse generally shares even a left multiculturalism’s distaste for national cultural homogeneity, and both elevate in place of the nation such transcultural settings as borderlands or ‘global cities’.<sup>12</sup> Both postcolonial and post-Americanist narratives therefore must take great care to recognize that a post-national imagination does not of itself make for a progressive vision in a post-Fordist age. The question is not ‘whether transnationalism’, but rather whose.

Several possibilities follow for activist scholarship. In lieu of national studies, one might pursue a political knowledge of the local as a unique intersection of specific regional histories and the exploitative reach of global capital. Yet one would want to take care not to celebrate the former as the alternative to the latter. Fetishizing the local may risk, in Rob Wilson and

11 See Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello’s *Global Village or Global Pillage* for a particularly powerful, early example of the “globalization” of leftist discourse and strategy.

12 See Saskia Sassen’s *Global Cities*, which argues that the great metropolises in the age of globalization end up having more in common economically and even culturally with one another than they do with the region or national territory that surrounds them. In her estimation, then, globalization can be visualized through a network of planetary pathways between these cities, while the areas around them remain tied to more parochial and local markets.



Wimal Dissanyake's (1996: 4–5) sharp words, naively consecrate the cultural hybridities of the local as 'postcolonial resistance', when these transcultural forms might well express the new logic of global capital and its latest commodity forms. It may also pass up opportunities for insight into how local forms of resistance might be coordinated alongside broader anti-systemic movements or affinities.

On the other hand, playing global capital off of local narratives might suggest how locales are being drawn into post-Fordist markets, sometimes without undergoing the processes of cosmopolitanization foretold in the global narrative. Aiwa Ong's (1999) study of the hierarchies and honeycombs of 'flexible citizenship' in the postcolonial networks of the East Asian Chinese diaspora, for example, might be fruitfully paired with Mike Davis's (1992) 'post-Americanist' studies of Los Angeles.<sup>13</sup> Both investigate the imbrication of local community and global capital in ways that decenter national narrative. As both Ong and Davis's 'local' studies also show, however, nation and state both remain crucial players in one's analysis: just because 'Americanness' or 'Chineseness' no longer represents one's object of academic inquiry, does not imply that these national imaginaries or the state agents affiliated with them do not structure the analysis. It is obviously not the case that national imaginaries have withered away. Rather, I would argue that the national imaginary is, to pilfer from Readings's vocabulary, a ruined 'ideology', still ideologically potent, yet failing to provide a map of post-Fordism through which people might effectively negotiate the gaps between their desires and interests. The state, though increasingly disarticulated from the national imaginary, nonetheless remains a territorial institution. It therefore continues to produce political if not cultural space. It too cannot be easily dropped from a persuasive analysis of the local.

This makes for a project of daunting complexity for the activist-scholar, far more so than was the case when a counter-hegemonic narrative of national liberation (for postcolonial studies) or of immanent national critique (for progressive American studies) seemed suited to the ideological task. A progressive narrative of the California border in the late twentieth century, for example, fails to intervene in an ideologically effective manner if it aims to use the borderlands simply as a challenge to the American national narrative. What makes Jose Saldivar's book *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies* valuable, for example, is not (as the author actually claims) that it disputes the imagined 'homogeneity of US nationalism and popular culture' (Saldivar 1997: ix), but rather that it elucidates transcultural practices on the United States-Mexico border that imagine from 'below' the emerging system of exploitation we call NAFTA. Studies of the United States-Mexico border today must of political necessity acknowledge the role of a global narrative in privileging borderlands all over the world as opportune sites for the creation of new economic regions. This is so

13 The texts I have in mind are Aiwa Ong's *Flexible Citizenship* and Mike Davis's *City of Quartz* and *Ecology of Fear*.

precisely because of the transactability of the ‘difference’ of the borderlands – differences in currencies, laws, military/political power and labor power, as well as cultural formations and identities. Borderlands have become privileged in the global narrative as places where local differences may be developed into relations of profitable exchange. Finally, these new borderlands are precisely derivative of the state, whose territorial borders become definitional and productive of so-called ‘transnational relations’.

What one might hope to gain from such a post-Fordist redescription of border regions is the possibility of tapping, and ultimately radicalizing, these new global imaginaries. Which transnational stories get told will determine how the globe gets visualized, and hence what sorts of ideological feelings and affiliations will be forged by and between differently positioned people. Activist-scholars also face the challenge of determining what institutions one might hope to animate with these feelings and affiliations given the lack of any singular global analog to the Fordist state. Without politically legitimated institutions attached to the global imaginary, it becomes very difficult to translate any ideological interventions into practical power. If we want to tell post-Americanist narratives with the aim of rearticulating the dominant narrative of globalization, where are the institutions that will enable such a new understanding to make any political difference?

Here we must return to the earlier point that post-Fordism is still primarily regulated by the states of the world. It is therefore still possible to intervene in global issues at the level of the state. Arguably, some of the few hopeful developments in recent global politics would include the election of governments across Latin America prepared to challenge the so-called ‘Washington consensus’, but also the election of the Socialists in Spain, as a direct challenge to Bush’s militant vision of the global future. Both events show that it is possible for workers, anti-globalization and anti-war activists to exert enormous political pressure from below that force the hands of a reluctant state in ways that still remain less feasible with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the WTO or World Bank. The importance of such developments is not merely in what any one government might do differently in the short term within its territory, but rather how progressive pressure might affect how states will negotiate the long-term institutional framework of the globe within which social movements will have to work. As noted earlier, states remain the institutions that negotiate trade agreements, and through them, the global regulation of labor, the environment and immigration. States are also the depositors that fund the IMF and World Bank and, most importantly, the agents of the so-called ‘war on terror’. The decline of the nation-state coupling therefore should not be confused with the idea that social struggle is no longer best waged through the state. If anything, the state becomes more important than ever, as the only global

institution to which non-corporate agents have some political claim and access.

Counterintuitively, however, the state and its ideological apparatuses now become pressing, not only as sites of struggle over a national imaginary, but also a global imaginary. The narrative of one (corporatized) world will not be democratized in an abstract realm of ideas, but only through the material institutions that employ it: governmental agencies, NGOs, the media, the schools and – significantly in this article – the universities. It will not do to return to national interest as our defense, because this cedes the field of global narration entirely to capital. Such democratization entails the globalizations of sovereignty and citizenship concepts, making the earth itself into the territory of a cosmopolitical imaginary. If this seems far fetched, I would argue that this is already happening, primarily at the hands of corporations who demand – and gain – global rights, both as sovereign collectivities (pseudo-nations) and as citizens (pseudo-individuals). On the one hand, TNCs present themselves as the heirs of nation-states, as the institutions that should be determining economic, labor and environmental policies. At the same time, they claim rights, like corporations also have, as individuals, not as massive conglomerate of wealth and power that threaten democratic process. The question today is not whether sovereignty and citizenship will be globalized, but rather how they will be re-distributed and who will end up possessing them.

This returns us at last to the question of transnational American studies in the post-Fordist academy. Readings is right that the contemporary American university has become yet another market-driven site of capital accumulation, but it remains a vital ISA as well, reproducing the preconditions of the post-Fordist world economy through its growing emphasis on such ‘internationalizing’ interpellative projects as multiculturalism, globalization studies, world history, postcolonial studies and now even transnational American studies. Post-Fordism defines the very conditions of possibility for our new modes of knowledge even as these modes of knowledge play their part in constructing our (and our students’) imaginary relations to these new post-Fordist conditions of existence.

For engaged scholars in both postcolonial and American studies, this analysis has the following implications. First, and perhaps counterintuitively, our post-national narratives should aim to bolster, not weaken, the still anemic ideology-function of post-Fordism. Ideology is not simply a means for securing the domination of ‘what is’, but also the medium for conducting struggle against it. This means we should engage the narrative of globalization while trying to rewrite it. Specifically, we need to critique the undemocratic discourses through which the global imaginary is usually expressed, but also look to invent democratic alternatives to them. Here, the versions of cosmopolitanism deployed by environmental and human rights

movements might provide us with some models worth exploring. Simultaneously, we need to critique the paucity of global institutions that could be linked to a democratic global imaginary and therefore be opened up to political struggle. Our work, in short, needs to insist that transnational capital is already being regulated, if poorly, and that this must be conducted on behalf of the many social interests not accounted for by transnational capital itself.

How best to do this? I want to address this question by emphasizing one more important formal difference between the narrative of the nation and that of globalization. If the nation is emplotted by way of an origin, producing a useable past for a present-day national self, then the globe is emplotted by way of a destination. The future-orientation of this narrative is inherent in its form. We talk not about the ‘globe’, but about the process of ‘globalizing’ or of ‘globalization’. In this way, the ‘globe’ itself is endlessly deferred. It becomes an asymptotic totality that we are always approaching, but never reach. The ideological power of ‘globalization’ is that it is always happening, that it is inexorable. If one is against globalization, one is reactive and can only lose in political discourse. However, the ideological opening presented by ‘globalization’ is that it is never ending, and hence its course is never fully determined. In this respect, the narrative of ‘globalization’ is more pliable than that of the ‘nation’, since the past is accorded a fixity not assumed for the future. There is considerable room, therefore, for authoring alternative narratives in which globalization might take us to some place other than to where post-Fordist capital wants and expects.

In postcolonial studies, such critiques of panglossian linear futurity are already quite familiar through the rich challenges to Fordist-era development discourse that began with Nkrumah’s coinage of neo-colonialism and continued through the academic analyses of structural underdevelopment and dependency theory.<sup>14</sup> Postcolonial studies have since traced this historicist temporal discourse back to colonial ideology itself which, as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000: 8) argues, consigned colonized peoples to a sort of ‘waiting room of history’ in which they were always ‘not yet’ ready for independence.<sup>15</sup> This logic, he observes, surreptitiously smuggled its way into the development discourse of decolonization, where the history of the postcolonial nation ‘tended to become variations on a master narrative that could be called the “history of Europe”’ (Chakrabarty 2000: 27). American studies, by contrast, has little experience with such critiques, focusing as it has on national origin stories. This suggests that, once post-Fordism is recognized as an external condition that animates the transnational turn in American studies, we might best respond politically by aggressively altering the ‘tense’ of our post-Americanist narratives. If globalization is always a narrative of becoming, then the ideological work of our age seems bound up less in producing a different historical memory in itself, than in deploying

14 See Robert Young’s concise summary of this tradition in *Postcolonialism*. (44–56).

15 See also Johannes Fabian’s unsurpassed work on the topic of colonial construction of asynchronous time in *Time and the Other*.



16 Anti-imperialist scholarship grew directly out the student anti-war movement, in the foreign policy histories of William Appleman Williams and Walter LeFeber. The Vietnam War was often explicitly

such memory on behalf of alternative prognostication or futurology. It is true that redescriptions of the once-national past, when they reveal previously repressed transnational dynamics, lead to decisively post-national narratives. However, such post-national projects can only mount challenges to a national narrative, and not to a global one, if they do not also address futurity. If our social movements are to reimagine globality, their questions must address not only where 'we' are from, but what this implies for where 'we' are going, with full cognizance of the tremendous ideological weight carried by the interpellative 'we' when one thinks and imagines transnationally. Once it has avowed the post-Fordist conditions of its own emergence, post-Americanist American studies can collaborate with post-colonial studies to perform some of the most pressing ideological work of the moment: a ruthless denaturalization of the future-tense meta-narrative of globalization.

### From empire to global hegemony

compared to the imperial mythologies of U.S. westward expansion, as may be seen in the work of Michael Rogin (both his *Fathers and Sons: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* and *Ronald Reagan, the Movie* and Richard Drinnon's *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire-Building*. Most recently, and explicitly tied to the Gulf War, are Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease's collection *Cultures of United States Imperialism* and William V. Spanos's *America's Shadow: Anatomy of Empire*. See also John Rowe's meticulous study *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism*.

During the Fordist era, amid a prevailing Cold War national ideology of American exceptionalism (hailing Americans as a uniquely democratic, freedom-loving 'people of plenty' who had enriched themselves through the application of their characteristic virtues), radical critics within American studies mounted its most salient critique by foregrounding the centrality of imperialism in shaping American national self-conception. While the United States never became much of an overseas colonial power in the formal manner of Britain or France, its militant westward expansion can be usefully compared to the overland empire-building of Russia, Austria or even the Ottomans. Moreover, by the mid-nineteenth century it had begun to establish an informal system of political and economic control over the Caribbean and Latin America that, as several scholars argue, prefigured the postwar model for maintaining empires without formal colonies. By the end of the Second World War, as the European powers relinquished their formal colonial holdings, the United States and its model of imperial indirection rapidly replaced the regime-forms of the European colonizers. Nevertheless, much like the British in the era of high imperialism, the Fordist-driven American empire never achieved genuine global dominance, encountering as it did the countervailing presence of the Soviet Union (and sometimes mainland China) as its imperial rivals. It was the quagmire of the Vietnam War that generated the first wave of anti-imperial American studies scholarship, and that work has continued right through to the present moment, with a second 'culturalist' round of such scholarship prompted in the 1990s by the first Gulf War.<sup>16</sup> As Amy Kaplan (1993: 17) rightly notes, the study of American imperialism has largely been omitted from post-

colonial studies and vice versa because of the temporal mismatch between the histories and strategies of the American and European empires. Nevertheless, one could argue that these two activist-scholarly traditions ran in parallel, and that critics of American imperialism from the 1960s right through the 1990s wrote in implicit solidarity with postcolonial Third Worldism.

Today, we are told by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), the demise of the Second World has ushered in a truly global system of (primarily juridical) regulatory power that they call ‘Empire’. Hardt and Negri, however, insistently distance this empire from the prior history of Euro-American imperialism, and particularly from any equation of ‘empire’ with unimpeded American imperial domination of the world. Theirs is a non-Eurocentric and non-Americo-centric global order whose capillary density and complexity belie any definite metropolitan center. For all the sophistication of this analysis, I would suggest that Hardt and Negri’s conception of empire reproduces in its own way a version of the future-tense globalization narrative. To the extent that, as I noted earlier, capitalism always requires a mode of regulation, the global scale of post-Fordism’s aspirations certainly demands an international scale of regulation. Yet it is far from clear that, as Hardt and Negri assume, such an ‘empire’ already exists or even that it is a *fait accompli*. As Paul Smith (1997) has argued, globalization remains at present more of a post-Fordist fantasy than an achieved fact. What, after all, are the endless negotiations of the WTO, the planning sessions of NAFTA, the European Union and the G-7, or the deliberations of the World Economic Forum all about but a somewhat desperate attempt to constitute a functional ‘empire’ in its still general absence? The more striking is the present schism between Europe and the United States on the use of force: even the ‘police action’ of empire’s alleged project of global pacification remains at a deadlock. Globalization discourse is thus best understood as an assertion of empire’s inexorable becoming (‘there is no alternative’) that belies and disavows its non-existence.

Hardt and Negri assist us tremendously, however, in describing how the present international effort to construct genuinely global regulatory institutions enables the United States, for the first time, not merely to maintain or expand its empire, but also to construct global hegemony. I employ the term ‘hegemony’ here, not in a broad polemical sense, but rather in the narrower Gramscian sense, as a sophisticated alternative to the classic Marxist theory of the state as the political instrument of a ruling class. Hegemony, as Gramsci famously argued, describes the process by which a ‘ruling class’, through complex and negotiated political alliances with other class factions, consolidates a dominant historic bloc capable of capturing the state. In its simplest terms, then, hegemony describes a form of political domination that



relies upon negotiated consent to state power rather than on coercion, something it accomplishes through the uneven and partial accommodation of a multiplicity of social interests. If post-Fordist capitalism requires a global level of regulation, then it also requires the construction of global agents of governance that become, for the first time, susceptible to a hegemonic model of power.

Reconceiving Hardt and Negri's Foucauldian analysis of the circulation of global power from such a Gramscian perspective, 'empire' would appear to offer a name for what the United States hopes to achieve by positioning itself as the central agent in an emergent 'world historic bloc' that will manage the very global institutions now under construction. Clinton openly pursued this result through his unstinting negotiations of global trade agreements, but it would be a mistake to think that Bush has retreated from this vision for the sake of old-style imperialism. The current wars in Afghanistan and Iraq aim not merely to secure for the United States an oil-rich sphere of imperial influence in central Asia. Rather, as made clear by the *National Security Strategy of the United States* document now guiding current American policy, these wars aim to position the United States at the center of what Bush Sr. once called a 'New World Order'. If the universal jurisdiction of this order is to be different from (and larger than) the American empire *per se*, even at the level of the interests it implemented, it would all the same be effectively hegemonized by the United States. Imperialism and global hegemony, unfortunately, may prove themselves to be perfectly compatible ventures.

Whither, in such times, a progressive American studies? It is worth recalling that in the title of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's now classic study, hegemony functions, not as pejorative, as the term for political subjection, but as a dynamic field of political possibility that also allows for the articulation and redefinition of social interest (Laclau and Mouffe 1989: 134–145). What, then, can such strategic counter-hegemonic work look like for the foreseeable future of American studies? Presumably, it cannot consist simply in unmasking American empire as a means to disrupting the self-aggrandizing American national narrative. Instead, this task will need to be combined with what is now a more urgent one: underwriting alternate global visions so that post-national American studies becomes, not just the intellectual voice of anti-war sentiment in the United States, but also a participant in the attacks on actually existing globalization as waged by anti-capitalist and anti-war movements outside the United States. American studies cannot afford to be satisfied with its post-national or transnational turn. Rather, it must explicitly deploy emergent post-national imaginaries on behalf of a counter-hegemonic globalization, oppositional narratives of cosmopolitan interests 'from below' that confront the interests of post-Fordist capital with those of the life that it exploits (human and natural alike).<sup>17</sup> Little wonder that, in a world with such urgent political

17 See my "Globalization as Narrative: Three Critiques," a companion piece to this essay where I draw together, through a politic of life, the Marxist critique of labor exploitation, the environmental critique of non-sustainable natural exploitation of nature, and a Foucauldian critique of global biopower.

imperatives, a dialogical convergence between postcolonial and American studies seems so timely.

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