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Friedman, Jonathan, 2004. 'Chaos, violence and the systematicity of declining hegemony' (original French title: 'Choc de cultures et logique du déclin hégémonique'). in Dawod, H. red. *Tribus et pouvoirs en terre d'Islam*. Paris. A. Colin, pp 261-279.

Chaos, violence and the systematicity of declining hegemony

The attack on the World Trade Center does not mark the beginning of a new age, but it is most certainly not a one off incident. Acts of terrorism have increased over the past couple of years even if they have not reached spectacular proportions. The reaction of the United States has been military. It has consisted in a vow to destroy the terrorists, but has displaced itself onto other objects the Al Quaida, first the Taliban regime in Afganistan and now Iraq. The arguments summoned are the links assumed to exist between these regimes and Al Quaida. It is worth considering before moving on the nature of the World Trade Center incident and the various reactions and interpretations that have been generated by it. What the latter express are the state of the power structure of the system, one that can be summed up by the terms "declining hegemony".

Predictable reactions and moralizing intellectuals

The attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon sparked panic, rage and a wide array of reactions, all of which are quite understandable in the situation of shock that resulted from the events. I am not so much concerned here with the more common attitudes of vengeance that have been expressed by many people as witnessed by the massive popular support for aggressive retaliation. This is to be expected. What is more interesting is the reaction of many representatives of Western cultural elites who identify as progressive. Stanley Fish in a very lucid and strangely modernist article in the New York Times (15-10-01) argues that we need to be relativists in the intellectual sense in order to make sense of what those who we have categorized as terrorists are up to. Relativism in the sense advocated by Lenin, know thine enemy. Why enemy? Because these are people who trying to kill us, not merely oppose us. Now this occurred some time after the events, but in the meantime there have been a series of reactions in the press and the academy that need to be assessed. Chomsky has written that we need to be relativistic about the deaths. After all, Americans killed many more thousands in its bombings in the Sudan, to say nothing of earlier escapades like the Vietnam war. In any case we have brought this upon ourselves (Americans at least) due to our basically imperialist foreign policy and its impoverishing results in the Third World. Said

refers to “the roots of terror in injustice”. Galtung and Fischer refer to a global class conflict pitting a Western upper class against the poor masses of the Third World. In this way, the Islamic extremists are made to represent the poor of the world and their actions are fanatically misplaced expressions of a real conflict based on exploitation and injustice. There is discussion of a Marshall Plan for the Third World as a direct reaction of liberals to the terrorism that may now also be taking the form of germ warfare. On one placard in London bombing was castigated in favor of negotiation. Thus the attack on World Trade Center is now understood as what the French call *téléguidé* by the United States itself. The terrorists are mere intermediaries, whose reaction against oppression and poverty is the displaced action of the imperial center upon itself. So the why of the how is the fundamental moral haughtiness of Americans.

...to most people in the Islamic and Arab worlds the official US is synonymous with arrogant power, known for its sanctimoniously munificent support not only of Israel but of numerous repressive Arab regimes, and its inattentiveness even to the possibility of dialogue with secular movements and people who have real grievances. (Said, NYT 16-7-01)

What is most interesting here is that why heads of Western states, the respectable few, especially Blair and Bush are clearly for aggression while others, more marginal intellectuals and cultural elites have taken the opposed position. The left is joined here by the Christian Right as exemplified in Patrick Buchanan’s assessment of the situation. In an LA Times commentary (18-9-01) he quotes one of his own presidential speeches to validate his understanding of the current situation.

How can all our meddling not fail to spark some horrible retribution...Have we not suffered enough from Pan Am 103, to the World Trade Center [the first bombing], to the embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salam – not to know that interventionism is the incubator of terrorism. Or will it take some cataclysmic atrocity on U.S. soil to awaken our global gamblers to the going price of empire? (cited in Buchanan 18-9-01)

The Western intellectual reaction has been very much organized along two vectors. First, this is a horrible thing and something ought to be done. Second, the reason it has happened is directly related to the behavior of the USA, whether general and arrogant imperialism or foreign policy errors such as the direct support of terrorists and dictatorships. We might summarize the different positions that have emerged in the following terms:

One reaction is a combination of fear and anger, driven by a strong emotion to defend the country from its enemies. It sanctions counter-attacks and invests itself in eradicating the terrorists who have done this thing and who would destroy our world. This is perhaps the secondary reaction of people who do not see themselves as living in the “belly of the beast”, who think well of their country and have invested in something they want to preserve.

Another reaction is the strained converse of the latter. It is critical of the United States as an imperial power, a power that has too often demonstrated the kind of arrogance that might incite this kind of action. Within this response there are a great majority who condemn the

action itself while finding a reason to engage in something other than retaliation. But there are also those who think that the US in some sense deserved what it got. The field of this reaction is complex and partly self-contradictory.

A third reaction is the real antithesis of the first one. It understands the attack as an act of righteousness by a civilization that has been dishonored by Western hegemony. It speaks in terms of *jihad*, in terms of the loss of the Caliphate at the hands of that Western agent, Mustapha Kemal, in terms of the necessity of instituting a new world order, one based on *sharia*. While not always expressed directly, as in the words and texts of certain extremist or fundamentalist organizations, it exists as a background text that can be elicited when needed. One should note here the possible importance of Wahabism, a sect originating in Syria but which became, at the turn of the last century, critical in the formation of the Saudite dynasty. Wahabism is based on an alliance between warriors and priests.

I shall not, in this short space, dwell on all these reactions but shall limit myself to one that is closest to home, the second response, one characteristic of liberal-left intellectuals and media people. The structure of this response is interesting in itself. It contains the following propositions

1. The West is the “bad-guy”. The United States in particular is an arrogant superpower today with no major enemies after the downing of the Wall. The US exploits the rest of the world and is the single most important perpetrator of global inequality and excessive poverty.
2. This exploitation and inequality is the root cause of the hate that has grown up against the United States in particular and against the wealthy Western World in general.
3. While no citizens of any country deserve to die as a result of this, we should understand that it is the long term effect of the arrogance of power.

Now a number of discourses can be deduced from these basic propositions. One, voiced early on by Chomsky and many others is that the attack on Americans is nothing compared to what Americans have done elsewhere in the world, the tens and perhaps hundreds of thousands of people that Americans have killed in various military actions and undeclared wars and campaigns of starvation. And of course there is the crucial issue of the state of Israel, supported by the United States in its war against the Arabs and more specifically its occupation of Palestinian territory. *It is interesting to note here that while for Western supporters of the Palestinians, Israel is an outpost or a lackey of American imperialism, for many Arabs, the United States is itself a Jewish controlled state, thus reversing the perspective on power.* Another is that while it is understandable that people should react to being attacked, making war on terrorists and on Afghanistan is no solution. Alternative solutions range from negotiation to a Marshall Plan for the world’s poor. The conditions which are assumed to be the cause of this attack must be changed.

Is there a connection between the inequalities of the world system and global terrorism directed against the US and perhaps other countries? The question is not asked. Instead we have mere assumption, a kind of doxa for many of the commentators referred to above. US foreign policy is the culprit, or US imperialism, or even some combination of US

superciliousness and imperial policies. And yet, Bin Laden has not represented himself as a social revolutionary. He is a multimillionaire who spent much of his youth as a playboy (according to some investigations. According to some unreliable sources, however, this may, consist in a confusion with one of his many brothers), and most of his fellow terrorists are members of Middle Eastern elites or at least middle and upper middle classes. Bin Laden has referred to a number of significant phenomena; the disaster of the disappearance of the last caliphate, the work of Mustapha Kemal Attaturk (an agent of Western ideas), the presence of a Jewish colony on Arab soil, the arrogance of US power combined with Jewish power, the identification of a Jewish conspiracy. Numerous Islamist groups refer explicitly to the never outworn Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

The distribution of current terrorist activity is one of its important aspects. It is unlike previous terror which was aimed at overthrowing state regimes from within. The current action is concentrated to Arab activists from a broad region and is aimed at the evil Empire. There is at least up until now, a glaring lack of East Asians, Africans and Latin Americans, some of whom represent areas where decline and impoverishment has been more marked than the Middle East. It is as if Bin Laden had read and assimilated the *Clash of Civilizations*, just as Western intellectuals deny that there is any connection to this dangerous book. His language is very much imbued with the clash. His goals as those of many of the fundamentalist movements is the defeat of a corrupt Western culture and the instating of a regime of *sharia* for the entire world (Khartoum protocol...*I have to find the date*). The sources of terror discourse are embedded in Middle Eastern history. The latter harbors a set of categories linked to the decline of the region and with the rise of European hegemony. Post-Ottoman depression, following the decline of the empire and the secularization of the Turkish state, which led to strong reactions and even suicides throughout the Middle East and Pakistan. This is not what everyone feels, but it is a potential representation of the world that can be summoned in situations of conflict, like other ethnic discourses. This might seem drastic to many, but I have, in fact, tried it out in a number of discussions with Arab intellectuals who seem to basically agree. Zaïki Laïdi, a well known researcher in politics has stressed the importance of a historical imaginary in the constitution of islamic extremism..

“Cette idée de déclassement du monde musulman est centrale. Dans l’imaginaire musulman, le fait d’appartenir à un ensemble civilisationnel puissant qui rivalisa, et parfois dépassa l’Occident est essentiel. Si ce fait historique, remontant à plus de dix siècles, ce sentiment de déclassement n’aurait probablement pas cette force auratique.” (Laïdi, *Liberation* 12-10-01: 14)

(The idea that the Muslim world has been demoted is central. In the islamic imaginary, the sense of belonging to a powerful civilizational complex which rivaled and even surpassed the Occident is essential. In the absence of this historical reality, dating back more than ten centuries, the feeling of degradation would probably not possess this forceful aura.)Laïdi...

The current situation may well be about American or Western world hegemony, but it is a hegemony that has been on the decline for quite a while. Since this assertion may seem counterintuitive to some, I add a very brief explanation. I have suggested elsewhere (1994, 1998, 1999a, b), and for many years, that declining hegemony cannot be read as simple

physical decline or collapse. It begins with a geographical decentralization of capital accumulation, a gradual decline in economic shares in the larger world arena, with a weakening of economic centrality. This is followed by internal fragmentation both social and cultural, with a decline of national projects, increasing polarization both in class and in cultural terms. It is not, however, with the reinforcement of military-political rule, even with the establish of empire, a phenomenon which in this approach, historically comes in the final phase of weakening hegemony. Thus the historical process to which I am referring is complex and even contradictory. Of course, one might counter that the collapse and disintegration of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the incorporation of Eastern Europe within the Western realm as evidence of American victory and expansion. But historical retrospect should remind us that the final collapse of the Ottomans and the Hapsburgs was also a period of rapid capitalist expansion, not least on the part of England, whose own hegemony was beginning a long decline (starting with a rapid decline in shares of world production. Britain was transformed from workshop of the world to the world's banker). In the this perspective, the shift from export production to capital export is always associated with long term hegemonic decline (Friedman 1978, 1999b, Arrighi and Silver, 1999). Britain had virtually no enemies at the end of the 19th Century and was the world's undisputed military power. There are important parallels with the U.S. Following Vietnam, the U.S. has been embroiled in a number of small scale military actions but it has nowhere been successful with respect to political outcomes. The advent of the Bush presidency represented a clear commitment to the restriction of US global involvement, at least until the 11th of September. Buchanan, at least, is clear on this point in his worries concerning the administration and again the right seems to express opinions that would normally be claimed by the left.

“Either America finds an exit strategy from empire, or we lose our republic”
(Buchanan op.cit.)

The point of this argument is that the confrontation with a new terrorism cannot be understood in terms of the arrogance of American power, nor in terms of increasing economic polarization in the world. “Arrogance” is not an exception, but typical of all power, especially international power, and the latter has, in the sense suggested above, on the wane. Economic polarization is not confined to North/South relations. It is characteristic of the centers as well as the peripheries and it is a crucial aspect of the reconfiguration world system that is associated with globalization. The terrorist networks that apparently have orchestrated the new culture of fear might better be understood as part of the general fragmentation of the world system, a fragmentation that has also produced criminal networks that dominate the drug, arms and people trades that have become so lucrative. What is specific about the Islamic networks is an ideology which seems clearly rooted in a broader base of the Muslim populations of the Middle East and even Southeast Asia. Here work on the Wahhabist movement which is at the origin of the modern Saudi regime is an important source of understanding. It should be noted that this 19th century movement consisted in an alliance between warriors and priests in the struggle to preserve Islam against the non-Islamic world (Dawod 2001), and that there is an important continuity in political representations involved in the current situation.

It should also be noted that much of the recruitment to the current terrorism has been from within the Western European diasporas themselves and, apparently, among people who

have led middle or upper middle class secularized existences, often well integrated, superficially at least, (survey of several French members of the Bin Laden network in Etchegoin, M. *Nouvel Observateur*, vol.1928, Oct. 24-28 2001) and who apparently “snapped” into Islamist reaction. Is this the fragility noted by some researchers implicated in the failure of modernity for such people, a failure of expectations, perhaps of integration, a contradiction between economic and cultural capital? (Khoshrokovar 1992).

Whatever the case with respect to subjectivities, the global situation might be interpreted in terms of a number of related arguments.

1. we are in a period of fragmentation of a formerly hegemonic world system that has passed through a period of dual power to apparent absolute hegemony. American hegemony which appears total is however faced with increasing decentralization of economic accumulation and the rise of new political networks and nations (whether geographically localized or not). To claim that we are moving toward a postnational state would seem to be wishful and highly ideological thinking. In the perspective suggested here, the state has had a tendency to leave the nation behind and become increasingly an instrument and regulator of global economic flows (Sassen 1996, 2001). So while the hyphen in nation-state is disappearing, there is no indication that we are entering a post-national world of cooperating diasporas as some have suggested.

2. the terrorist attack led to a temporary unification, even a cultural integration within the West, a solidarity against an ill-defined enemy (terrorists, Arabs, Muslims), an enemy that, no matter what caveats one might raise, has risen to the occasion, conjuncturally defining itself in terms of Islam and opposed to Western Christian and Jewish power.

3. This unification is already under attack and is at risk of disintegration as the new war drags on. Conflicts in Europe and between Europe and the United States as well as conflicts within the United States are mounting problems for its maintenance. These are conflicts concerning the effectiveness of bombing and the Western state-based warfare in this situation, conflicts concerning the morality of the war from quarters, cited here, who believe that terrorism is the product of American intervention.

4. The hegemonic is thus attacked from within and without. It is weakened ideologically and threatened more than psychologically from without. One well known French commentator, editor of *Le nouvel observateur*, and a historian, representing a country where there is strong republican/national tradition stated that the new terrorism has opened a major crisis of Western civilization: “En verité, nous ne sommes pas respecté parce que nous ne nous respectons plus” (Julliard, J. 2001 *Nouvel Observateur* vol. 1928 2001: 38)

Thoughts might go to Rome where “barbarians”, formerly in the employ of the empire, were, in the last centuries, often at the gates, burning cities and even Rome itself. They were not so much the cause the decline of Rome as its expression. Could we be in a similar kind of situation. After all the new terrorists are former warriors in the employ of empire who have changed sides. But the ideological structures of the situation are different and all the more important for that. If we are faced with hegemonic decline, one of the ideological frameworks within which this occurs is the historical representation of competition between Europe and the Mideast. The ideologies emergent on both sides of the divide, including

crusade and jihad ,are evidence of the reality of this historical framework and its usefulness in the process of mobilization. If it can be suggested that we are indeed in a period of hegemonic decline, then the loss of “respect” for Western power might well be represented in terms of the above framework. But if point 2 above holds then we might well be into a new Empire or at least an attempt to establish an empire (Hardt and Negri 2000). The odds, however, are clearly against its success, also for reason stated above. There may well be discussions of the necessity of global governance but there is no evidence that this is realizable.

Another thing is quite clear in all of this. We are not moving as globalization advocates have so often claimed into a new millennial globalized world of post national bliss. Appadurai, for example, cognizant of global violence reduces much of it to a war of transition between the diasporas of the future and the outmoded nation state of the past (1996: 169) when we shall "free of the constraints of the nation form..that cultural freedom and sustainable justice in the world do not presuppose the uniform and general existence of the nation-state." (Appadurai 1996: 23). In spite of the straw man argument concerning sustainable justice and cultural freedom (i.e. who has entertained such contentions?), it is difficult to discover the logic in such an assertion, other than an ideo-logic. On the contrary we are already in a world of network-organized projects, of localizing strategies and of globalized elite consciousness that has had a great deal of anxiety confronting the real fragmentation of the world. If there is a transition here it is to increasing fragmentation rather than real unification. The unification that is being promoted has taken the form of a larger international project, the struggle against terrorism itself. It is a unification among state elites and also, statistically speaking, among national populations in the West. But there is nothing necessarily permanent in this. On the contrary there are great risks that fragmentation will be the final state of affairs, at least, in the West. What we witness is not the scenario projected by those globalizing anthropologists who have predicted a postnational world of diasporic hybridity. In one of his speeches Bush has contrasted the project of religious purity of bin Ladin with the pluralism of the United States. The diaspora here represents ethnic purity while the territorial state represents plurality. Imperial centers are always plural with respect to their “barbarians”, especially in eras of decline. It is as if Bush were arguing multiculturalism and hybridity against what is fashionably called “ethnic absolutism”.

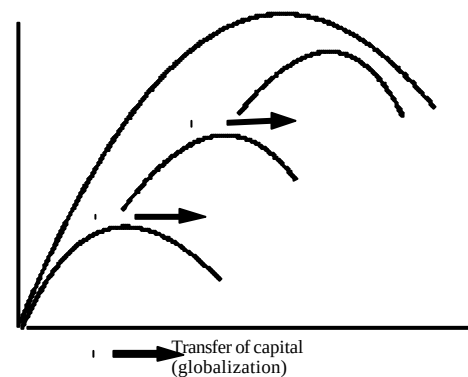
Fragmentations: global, national and local

The argument suggested in the above text is that the the contemporary world is at present undergoing a series of fragmentations that can be linked in my view to declining hegemony. The emergence of transnational terrorism is only one expression of the decline of Western power. New centers of accumulation in East Asia have already emerged. American hegemony has been questioned most seriously in all of Asia. This might be assumed to be an argument drawn directly from Huntington and there is ample evidence to support some version of the “clash of civilization” hypothesis. Many of the arguments against Huntington stress the multiplicity of religions and cultures in Asia, arguing that his dualism represents a gross simplification. Now while his early article might indeed be criticized for a simplistic dichotomization, he later book is far more nuanced and complex in its argument. The multiplicity of cultures is not the principal issue in this argument but the potential for

mobilization into larger entities. This is important when we consider segmentary organization that is characteristic of the Mideast. The former can easily be integrated into increasingly larger coalitions just as it can disintegrate into its smaller components. The politics of opposition is the key to this process. The old expression: “me against my brother, my and my brother against my first cousins, me and all my first cousins against my second cousins... and all the arabs against the jews.” accounts for the flexibility of such oppositional politics. While not agreeing with the kind of account offered by Huntington the following model of hegemonic decline certainly is compatible with much of what he has written.

Our suggestion is that we are in a period of declining hegemony, and this according to a general process that has occurred in the past. The establishment of Western power in the world arena began some 5 or 6 hundred years ago and led to a series of increasingly inclusive imperial orders. This process harbored its own internal shifts of hegemony, from Italy to Portugal and Spain and then to Holland and the United Kingdom which reigned dominant for almost a century. It was followed by the joint rise to power of Germany and the United States and the ultimate emergence of US hegemony after World War II. US hegemony began to decline in the 70's and has continued until today. The fact that this country appears to be absolutely dominant in military terms should not blind us the fact that its economic position has been declining for the past 20 years or more. Britain was for a short period unrivaled militarily as well, at the end of the past century, precisely in the period when it was losing its economic dominance and exporting capital on a massive scale. The usual cycle of hegemony is one that moves from conquest to becoming a “workshop of the world” where the ratio of export of manufactured goods to the export of capital is high to one where this ratio is reversed. The industrial growth of a hegemon is rendered impracticable by its own success which leads to rising costs in the center and the export of capital to cheaper/more profitable areas of production. The center is transformed from producer to consumer, consumer of the products of its own exported capital and to the investment that ensues in the new rising areas. The decline of a hegemon includes the financing of new centers as Braudel argued many years ago. This is what he referred to as globalization, a process of cyclical transition and not an evolutionary stage in world history. This kind of understanding has been formalized in the work of Arrighi who refers to the basic notions developed by Braudel in his important contributions to the economic history of the world system.

"To borrow an expression from Fernand Braudel (1984: 246)--the inspirer of the idea of systemic cycles of accumulation--these periods of intensifying competition, financial expansion and structural instability are nothing but the 'autumn' of a major capitalist development. It is the time when the leader of the preceding expansion of world trade reaps the fruits of its leadership by virtue of its commanding position over world-scale processes of capital accumulation. But it is also the time when that same leader is gradually displaced at the commanding heights of world capitalism by an emerging new leadership" (Arrighi 1997:2)



If there are systematic shifts of accumulation within the center of a system, each of

these is accompanied by major dislocations and crises, often with war and widespread violence as a crucial component. It might also be suggested that the shifts are themselves cumulative so that there is a tendency for each new hegemon to integrate the larger center and to intensify its relations to the periphery. If the crises of hegemonic transition can be understood as cracks in the system the latter become every more violent and destructive as the entire system develops. A simple graphical representation of this process might look as follows:

In this metaphoric representation the most important issue is the limits of expansion of the system as a whole. This is a hypothetical question of course, but it can be posed in relativist terms in which case we can suggest that the scale of the expansion process is expressed in the scale of the crisis as well. At each stage of the transfer of capital there are absolute increases in the extent of globalization, but the relations are fundamentally the same. At least it can be suggested that there are similar kinds of phenomena at work. If we envisage the current situation in terms of such parameters, then what we might well be witnessing is a crack in the hegemonic structure of the system at its highest level. The question of levels of political, economic and cultural integration is significant here. What Huntington describes could be an expression of this kind of a breakdown in control. But the issue is, of course, complex. In periods of major reconfiguration of accumulation we also find an increase in political competition at all levels. It is not the rising hegemonic area that is most prone to violence and aggression but the declining areas of the larger arena. Thus in a period in which there have been massive transfers of capital from the West to East Asia, to a lesser extent South Asia and to certain areas of Latin America, there are other areas that have experienced rapid decline. One of these areas is the Middle East at least in parts. Another is Africa in almost its totality. These are areas that have witnessed the rise of military dictatorships and vampire states, often dependent on a single resource such as oil, in which corruption is a very serious problem, where clientelism is the normal form of politics. There are of course great variations here, both in the degree of concentration of wealth and in the nature of investment. Certainly one cannot compare the gulf states with Iraq or Iran. Their respective political orders are very difficult to compare.

The particular historical situation of the Middle East is very unlike that of Africa. The historical relations between Europe and especially the Mediterranean and the Middle East are very old and represent a cycle of shifting hegemony that dates back to the bronze age. The historian Maurice Lombard outlined a process of shifting power and accumulation in which the rise of Rome and the decline of the Mideast is followed by a reversal in the decline of the Roman Empire and the rise of the Arab empires which in its turn is followed by the rise of Europe, primarily the Mediterranean at first but later the north as well as the great Islamic civilizations declined. The last of the great empires in the region was the Ottoman, and its decline entailed significant cultural transformations, one of which was the project of secularization embodied in the politics of Atatürk. The secularization of Turkey, its transformation into a "nation" state was part of the shrinking of the empire itself, a process that was fraught with economic crises and with a disintegration of imperial and even state control in general. This is important to keep in mind when understanding the contemporary situation. If the West is in a period of decline, then the renaissance of nostalgia for the Ottoman empire, or for other forms of world politico-religious dominance, clearly reflects a fragmentation of a former hierarchical relationship. This is not simply a question of the Middle East although the historical presence of the Ottoman empire is an important factor in the oppositional imagination. The same loss of acceptance of Western dominance and values

has been emergent for the past twenty years in various forms. There is a certain paradox in this alternative identification, for while at one level, westernization in the sense of objects, of music and of an array of interests and desires, is very strong indeed, the identity of those who have tried to absorb this culture has not been congruent with the actual content of their activities. In terms of identification, there is clearly a tendency toward an anti-occidentalism and especially an anti-Americanism. Singapore, with its own authoritarian forms of rule and with its Western influenced youth culture, is becoming increasingly oriented to China which appears crucial for their survival. But East Asia has not been the locus of aggressive anti-Western movements, except perhaps in crisis ridden areas such as Indonesia and to a lesser extent Malaysia. The Middle East, it might be argued is the area that has lost most by the rise of Western Europe and the United States. And its entire history is the history of the transfer of power to the West. So there are clearly representations that can be used in the promulgation of aggressive thought and behavior. The emergence of transnational terrorist organizations in this area can be understood as a confluence of several systemic processes. One is the imperial opposition which generates via historical representations, an imagination of a former glory and a moral order against what is perceived as a decadent West.

The cracks in the macro order of the global system descend to the lowest orders, territorial states, local communities and in worst scenario cases family structures as well. This is important to account for when assessing the emergence of new sodalities, the formation of networks, of mafias, religious terrorists etc. It is important to account for recruitment to these new organizations. This is ultimately an issue of individual engagement and the latter depends on a previous dis-engagement that often takes the form, as suggested above, of downward mobility, depression, loss of meaning in life, and excessive frustration. It can be understood in a reorientation of intentionalities toward new goals, and thus new forms of social integration. State organizations can dissolve into regional, ethnic, immigrant minority and indigenous collective identifications. These fragments recruit their membership from a population facing increasingly disparaging conditions of existence. The latter need not be related to poverty as such but to a social dis-integration, a failure to find one's place in life that leads to a re-rooting of the subject, a search for a solution to an untenable state of affairs. It might be argued that this accounts for the recruitment of middle class educated and often formerly secularized arabs into the ranks of Al Quaida. But it also accounts for the juxtaposition of nationalist, ethnic and internationalist movements in periods such as ours.

The fragmentation of imperial orders, and national or state orders produces smaller operative units that in their turn can be re-integrated into larger networks that are prevalent in reinforcing the fragmentation by transferring resources out of the larger vertically organized units. Terms such as "rhizomatic" capture this tendency without really accounting for it. The network tendency in the contemporary world is the result of the fragmentation of larger units that forge new connections as a strategy of survival, accumulation, terror. The largest trades in the world today, arms, drugs and people, are organized in such terms. But this is part of a larger process that includes the emerging post-fordist flexible regime of accumulation in which vertically organized corporations are transformed into networks of financial centers and sub-contractors.

This process is, however, quite complex and dialectical. The post attack strategy of the United States, seems to embody an intensification of an imperial policy, but one that is wary

of becoming isolated. At each step of the war against rogue states and other bad guys in the world arena, the US attempts to rally its allies and to establish new ones. It is obvious that support for the project is crucial to its success. The project consists for the time being in the overthrow of dictatorships in the Mideast and to a lesser extent East Asia (North Korea) that directly threaten the stability of the world, that might be linked to the decentralization of military clout and strategies that are at odds with the current world order. The argument for the control of Iraqi oil might be summoned here but it is not clear that this control did not exist previously. Rather it is a question of ensuring that the emergent networks of the world system do not become too independent of a centralized world hierarchy. This might be understood as an attempt to establish empire, but the latter is essentially to impose political control on a global system in a phase of strong decentralization. This decentralization has been an ongoing process for the past few decades. It is expressed in the reconfiguration of capital accumulation in the world. One of the massive expressions of this is the emergence of East and Southeast Asia as the third zone of the world economy, following the EU and NAFTA. This zone which was part of the underdeveloped periphery in the 70's has become the fastest growing region of the world economy in spite of the recent crisis. But there is another aspect of the decentralization that must be noted, one that is based on the networking of interests, economic and political in ways that are often illicit and certainly external to the control mechanisms of states. These networks are responsible for some of the major world trades in arms, drugs and people. They play an important role in the reorganization of a great number of societies. *Executive Outcomes*, for example, a firm of highly trained and armed mercenaries which work on contract all over the world, are also involved in banking and precious gems. Their activities consist in replacing functions that were formerly part of state power, now subcontracted. In Eastern Europe, Western NGOs have replaced many government functions. The state in this process becomes a group of powerholders, a kind of mafia which farms out essential functions to private operators. These processes divert capital flows into geographically decentralized operations that ultimately weaken state sovereignty. This does not mean that states become weaker as actors, but that they become increasingly privatized. They represent themselves rather than the larger populations that they purport to represent.

Tribalism?

Since “tribalism” is one of the buzz words that has appeared in current discourse on the contemporary situation it is important to place it proper context. What is detailed above is a process of fragmentation in which empire can be understood primarily as a reaction, an attempt to assure the central powers of continued control over a world that is becoming increasingly *unruly* in the literal sense of *un-ruly*. The notion of tribalism is sometimes invoked here to account for this situation. But tribe is perhaps a misnomer and certainly not a politically correct term. What is commonly expressed by this term is the fragmentation referred to above. But there are two sides to this issue. Fragmentation is a top down process of dis-integration. The forms which this takes depend largely on the substrate of cultural possibilities, i.e. possibilities for cultural and social differentiation and the formation of new collective projects. In previous publications (Friedman 1994, 1996, 1998)) I have referred to ethnicization to characterize the cultural form of fragmentation of larger polities. What is meant by ethnicization is simply the use of cultural identity in the constitution of

collectivities that distinguish themselves from others and engage in a politics of identity. If we are to use the notion of tribe we must contextualize it in its contemporary form, as *neo-tribal*. Neo-tribal organization refers to particular aspects of this phenomenon; the use of kinship relations or relations of clientship that are represented in kinship or clanship terms; its segmentary character, a particular form of politics which is sub-ethnic and can even cut across what are assumed to be ethnic boundaries in the formation of alliances.

It would be a mistake to use the word tribal here as a mere metaphor for a modern process since the articulation is historically more complex. Many populations in the global system have maintained a strong historical continuity in social as well as cultural form. Many of the minorities belonging to contemporary states are organized in ways that display such continuity and many state societies are themselves organized in terms of such continuities. An excellent analysis of the contemporary Maori (Rata 2000) describes the way the Maori cultural movement has re-instated principals of tribal organization in a capitalist economy producing a particular combination of capitalist ownership of fisheries with the hierarchical order of the conical clan. She refers to this as a *neo-tribal* regime of accumulation. A number of Third World states are dominated by kinship relations and practice clan politics in ways that are often hidden in usual reports which use standard categories of description. These phenomena are not new. They are evidence of what can be called *traditional* politics, practices and structures that predate the nation state organization that has been imposed on many a post-colony. The latter is reduced to a formality within which other strategies of dominance, of clientelism, clan distribution and big-manship are prevalent. The most obvious example of this situation is the “nation state” Papua New Guinea, a “country” of more than 800 languages where a large portion of the “national” population belongs to separate societies, not mere minorities or communities. There are innumerable examples of the way in which state level politics makes use of the categories of Western political organization and where, simultaneously, the actual relations within and between such categories are of a “traditional” nature. A description by a district governor of his job revealed a virtual identity with the activities of a bigman, the “traditional” leader of Highland societies. One might argue that the word tradition is a misnomer here. It has been suggested in recent literature that since societies are always changing the notion of tradition is simply a way of reifying a particular past. This may be true in a sense, but it is strongly overdrawn. Insofar as past social organizations are of a particular nature they must be referred to in some way. This does not mean that they are not always changing, but one might argue that the integration of populations into an expanding capitalist world system implies a contrast that is important to maintain, because the forms of change themselves are different. But it is true that if the culture of the contemporary world system generates what has been referred in all its vagueness as *modernity* the latter is just as much a tradition as any other tradition (Friedman 2001). It is not the opposite of tradition but another cultural form produced as all cultural forms within a specific social matrix. This can be further demonstrated by the quite recent history of the British elite, especially in the latter part of the 19th century. The Cecil dynasty led by Lord Salisbury, was a sprawling network of kinship and marriage alliance, and nepotism, that dominated the government of the empire for a period of several decades (Quigley 1981, chapter 2). In the sense used here, “tribal” can occur in many domains of a larger territorial state. It can characterize the organization of the state itself as well as of minorities. We must, then distinguish, the existence of tribal, kinship and clan based organization from the processes of disintegration which our argument is aimed to elucidate. Tribalization in this context refers to the particular form which

fragmentation takes, one in which the specificities of the tribal enter into the above process.

All of this is applicable to large areas of the world. The decline of state structures in many areas has been the renaissance of non-state often kinship based minorities. In the Middle East, countries such as Iraq where the state is itself organized in such terms, there has never been any strong national integration, and minorities, such as the Kurds, have been held in place largely by military force and direct political control. The minorities were never absorbed but inserted within the larger state system. The weakening of such states just as in the case of more integrated assimilationist states leads nonetheless to a process of dis-integration which is often of a violent nature. Minority structures that operate in terms of kinship networks are often structures that in international extension take the form of diasporas that maintain economic social and cultural ties over wide areas of the world. The practice of kin as opposed to geographical endogamy is an important factor in a process of transnational consolidation. The formation of such networks can serve as the basis for significant mobilization of resources. And such networks can of course serve multiple functions as well, from arms, to people to information to capital or any combination of the latter. The notion of network society can be seen here in its most accomplished expression. No network enterprise can compare in versatility with this diasporic organization. This may account for the ability of diasporic organizations to become involved in the aggressive dismantling of the state system that they inhabit.

Tribalization is a way of describing the process of ethnic fragmentation that occurs in the particular circumstances in which the emergent local forms are already organized in terms of kinship strategies. Clan solidarity, endogamy, segmentation and fission are common elements of the organization of tribal communities. The more general characteristics of periods in which tribalism rears its head are common to what I have called ethnicisation as an expression of the fragmentation of larger polities.

Conclusion

We have suggested here that a large number of phenomena that are currently rampaging through the world arena are closely related to one another. Cultural politics, from indigenous to ethnic minority, to regional to the ethnicization of national identities are all products of the same process of hegemonic decline. The logic of dis-integration also implies that fragments are increasingly reorganized into looser connections called networks, a process that is expressed in the neo-fordism and subcontracting of flexible accumulation to the formation of illicit trades in drugs, arms and people, to the diasporization of demographic movement. The tribal aspect of this phenomenon is merely an example of the particular circumstances in which historical structures based on kinship and clanship are integrated into the ethnic and political fragmentation. The primary argument is that the current violence can be understood as an aspect of the disassembling of the global system and its reconfiguration into a variety of new organizations, new strategies and new conflicts and violences. At the summit there is a strategy of empire formation primarily in order to contain the disintegrative loss of control by the West's centers that this entails. This strategy develops in face of a growing anti Western ideologies one of which is based on the nostalgia for a previous Islamic imperial order that is opposed to the immoral and decadent order of the West. This global conflict a fantasy that can easily become realized has been a powerful mobilizing factor in the past few years. It is the conflict that has been hotly debated, primarily in the publication and reactions to Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*. But as we descend the global scale we find a

proliferation of conflicts, also very much constituted in cultural terms. The breakup of the Soviet Empire, the increasing conflicts in Western nation states all based on the ethnicization of identity; national, indigenous, regional, immigrant. To these might be added a whole series of culturally based movements, the so-called “new social movements” many of which are frankly anti-Western. Irrespective of how one evaluates the content of these movements their structural properties are clearly destructive of the ideology of Western dominance. The combination of internal and external tendencies indicate the extent to which a hegemony which has been self-evident for more than a century is becoming undone. This does not, of course, mean that it's all over. As I have stated several times, these phenomena are expressions of declining power. The proliferation of moral discourses surrounding the new transnational terrorism that is displaying a tendency to spill over into other domains is from the point of view expressed evidence of intellectual paralysis rather than analytical understanding, one that is desperately in need today.