

# Vernaculars Cross-Dressed as Universals: Globalization as North Atlantic Hegemony

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## I. A Perspective on Globalization

*M*ost conceptions of “globalization” take the term to mean simply the various ways in which all corners of the globe are increasingly connected by trade, finance, communication, travel, cultural exchange, etc., *and* the degree to which the interconnections are of much greater volume and much greater speed than before. With the 2008 financial crisis in immediate view, one can appreciate the speed with which not only, say, jazz and pop music circulate the globe, but also the speed with which financial panics have been communicated and amplified.

I choose here a slightly different view by focusing on what globalization may eliminate, diminish, or replace: vernacular practices such as the cultures, religions, and languages of less numerous peoples, local forms of agriculture and land tenure, and other ways of life and institutions that appear to stand in the way of standardization. I posit this to be the dark side of standardization, although I am not unappreciative of the emancipatory effect of standardizations of human rights and access to justice.

## II. Vernaculars Meet Universals

I’ll begin with three anecdotes chosen to illustrate the troubled relationship between vernacular and local knowledge, on the one hand, and “official,” synoptic knowledge, on the other. They are all tales of standardization and legibility at the national level. After discussing

them, I will move to projects of standardization at the international level and therefore to “globalization.”

### **A. Roads**

A contrast between local names for roads and state names for roads will help illustrate two variants of legibility. There is, for example, a small road joining the towns of Durham and Guilford in the state of Connecticut. Those who live in Durham call this road (among themselves) the “Guilford Road,” presumably because it informs the inhabitants of Durham exactly where they’ll get to if they travel it. The same road, at its Guilford terminus, is called the “Durham Road” because it tells the inhabitants of Guilford where the road will lead them. One imagines that at some liminal midpoint, the road hovers between these two identities. Such names work perfectly well; they each encode valuable local knowledge, perhaps the most important fact one might want to know about a road. That the same road has two names, depending on one’s location, demonstrates the situational, contingent nature of local naming practices. Informal, “folk” naming practices not only produce the anomaly of a road with two or more names, they also produce many different roads with the same name. Thus, the nearby towns of Killingworth, Haddam, Madison, and Meriden each have roads leading to Durham which the inhabitants locally call the “Durham Road.”

Now imagine the insuperable problems that this locally effective folk system would pose to an outsider requiring unambiguous identifications for each road. A state road repair crew, sent to fix potholes on the “Durham Road,” would have to ask, “Which Durham Road?” Thus it is no surprise that the road between Durham and Guilford is reincarnated on all state maps and designations as “Route 77.” Each micro-segment of that route, moreover, is identified by means of telephone pole serial numbers, milestones, and township boundaries. The naming practices of the state require a synoptic view, a standardized scheme of identification generating mutually exclusive and exhaustive designations. This system can work to the benefit of state residents. If you have to be rescued on Route 77 by a state-dispatched ambulance team, you will be reassured to know that there is no ambiguity about which road it is that you are bleeding on.

All place names, personal names, and names of roads or rivers encode important knowledge. Some of that knowledge is a thumbnail history, e.g., Maiden Lane (the lane where five spinster sisters once

lived), Cider Hill Road (the road up the hill where the cider mill and orchard once stood), and Cream Pot Road (once the site of a dairy where neighbors went to buy milk, cream, and butter). At one time, when the name became fixed, it was probably the most relevant and useful name for local inhabitants. Other names refer to geographical features, e.g., Mica Ridge Road, Bare Rock Road, Ball Brook Road. The sum of roads and place names in a small place, in fact, amounts to something of a local geography and history if one knows the stories, features, episodes, and family enterprises encoded within them.

For officials who require a radically different form of order, such local knowledge, however quaint, is illegible. Local knowledge is privileged over synoptic, standardized knowledge. In the case of colonial rule, when the conquerors speak an entirely different language, the unintelligibility of the vernacular landscape is a nearly insurmountable obstacle to effective rule. Renaming much of the landscape, therefore, is an essential step of imperial rule. This explains why the British Ordinance Survey of Ireland in the 1830s recorded and rendered many local Gaelic place names (e.g., Bun na hAbhann, Gaelic for “mouth of the river”) in a form (Burnfoot) more easily understood by the rulers.

## **B. Communities**

The second anecdote is meant to illustrate how pre-modern vernacular identities are ill suited to state projects of synoptic order. It comes from a mediocre movie, *Witness*, which nevertheless provides an apt illustration of the point I wish to make. For those of you who were fortunate enough to have been doing something more productive with your time when it was playing, let me briefly recall for you the plot. Harrison Ford plays a detective trying to solve a crime committed in a bus station, in Philadelphia I believe, witnessed by a young Amish boy. Arriving in a town near the Amish community armed with only the last name of the young witness, let's call him “Boop,” the detective begins with the first and most reliable instrument of sleuths, the telephone book.

Notice, for a second, what a wonderful instrument of police work the telephone book is: a list of everyone in the community, arranged alphabetically by last name, complete with street address and the means, via a unique telephone number, for reaching them. But wait! This is an Amish community and virtually no one has a telephone. Strike one. The investigator does have the last name of the boy and begins to ask

around. The Amish have a small number of widely shared last names and there are a dozen or more families in the county who have the last name of Boop. Strike two.

The tools of modern police work are frustrated when faced with a traditional community. Here is where the “love-interest” in the movie comes in. Ford befriends a young Amish woman who becomes his local informant and tracker, and thus finally locates the boy. The point is simply that the traditional community is well-nigh impenetrable and opaque to modern police. Discriminating interventions, as opposed to blunt force, are difficult to devise without transparent, synoptic identities.

Until modern forms of legal identities and record keeping were devised, it is hard to exaggerate the degree of ignorance of state officials about the society over which they presided. State officials had only the most tenuous idea of the population under their jurisdiction, its movements, its real property, wealth, crop yields, etc. Their degree of ignorance was directly proportional to the fragmentation of their sources of information. Local currencies and local measures of capacity (e.g., the bushel) and length (the ell, the rod, and the toise) were likely to vary from place to place and with the nature of the transacting parties. The opacity of local society was, of course, actively maintained by local elites as one effective means of resistance to intrusions from above.

Having little synoptic, aggregate intelligence about the manpower and resources available to them, officials were apt either to overreach in their exactions, touching off flight or revolt, or to fail to mobilize the resources that were, in fact, available. To follow the process of state making, then, is to follow *the conquest of illegibility*. The account of this conquest—an achievement won against stiff resistance—could take many forms, such as the creation of the cadastral survey and uniform property registers, the invention and imposition of the meter, national censuses and currencies, and the development of uniform legal codes.

One crucial and diagnostic victory in this campaign for legibility was the creation of fixed, legal patronyms. If vernacular landscape-naming practices are opaque and illegible to outside officials, vernacular personal naming practices are even more so. The fixing of personal names, and, in particular, permanent patronyms, as legal identities seems everywhere to have been, broadly speaking, a state project. With the single exception of China, no one in the world had permanent patronyms until the 13th or 14th century and some nations have estab-

lished them only in the last century, for example, Iran, Turkey, and Thailand. As an early and imperfect legal identification, the permanent patronym was linked to such vital administrative functions as tithe and tax collection, property registers, conscription lists, and census rolls. To understand why fixed, legal patronyms represent such a quantum leap in the legibility of a population to state officials, it is first necessary to understand the utter fluidity of vernacular naming practices uninfluenced by state routines.

Vernacular naming practices throughout much of the world are enormously rich and varied. In many cultures, an individual's name will change from context to context and, within the same context, over time. It is not uncommon for a newborn to have had one or more name changes *in utero* in the event the mother's labor seemed to be going badly. Names often vary at each stage of life (infancy, childhood, adulthood, parenthood, old age) and, in some cases, after death. Added to these may be names used for joking, rituals, mourning, nicknames, school names, secret names, names for age-mates or same-sex friends, and names for in-laws. Each name is specific to a phase of life, a social setting, or a particular interlocutor. To the question "What is your name?," the reply in such cases can only be "It depends."

In the small vernacular community, of course, this cornucopia of names occasions no confusion whatsoever. As with the term "Guilford Road," local residents know the names they need to know, the codes appropriate to their use, the room for maneuver within these codes, and the ways in which these codes might be transgressed. They are rarely in doubt about who is who.

How is local confusion avoided in the absence of permanent patronyms? Let us take the simplest case in which there are a small number of fixed, given names (often called "first" or "Christian" names in Western Europe). It is claimed, for example, that around the year 1700 in England, a mere eight given names accounted for nearly ninety percent of the total male population (John, Edward, William, Henry, Charles, James, Richard, Robert). Without permanent patronyms, local people had innumerable ways of unambiguously identifying any given individual. A by-name, second-name, or (sur)name (not to be confused with a permanent patronym) was usually sufficient to make the defining distinction. One "John," for example, might be distinguished from another by specifying his father's name (William's John or John-William's-son/Williamson); by linking him to an occupation (John-the-Miller, John-the-Shepherd); by locating him in the landscape

(John-on-the-Hill, John-by-the-Brook); or by noting a personal characteristic (John-do-little). The written records of the manor or the parish might actually bear notations of such by-names for the sake of clarity.<sup>1</sup>

The vernacular communities of the past were quasi-opaque to state officials. Access to individuals was typically achieved indirectly through intermediaries: the local nobleman, village headman, imam or parish priest, tavern keeper, notary. Such intermediaries, naturally, had their own individual and corporate interests. They might profit handsomely from their gate-keeping role. In any case, their interests were never perfectly coincident with those of state officials, and often at cross-purposes. It is for such reasons that locally kept census rolls have often underreported the population (to evade taxes, *corvée* labor, conscription) and both arable land acreage and crop yields understated.

The problem of naming and identification can be expressed generally. Let us imagine a police official (it could be a tax collector or a conscription officer) who is trying to locate a specific, unique individual. Assume further that he is faced with a situation not unlike that of a small English town in 1700, but with *no surnames*, let alone fixed patronymic surnames. Take a comparatively simple case of a town with, say, 1,000 males bearing only one of eight names, which are, for the sake of this initial case, perfectly evenly distributed across the (male) population. How likely, then, is our police official to collar the man he is after? If he knows he is looking for a "Henry," there will be 125 Henrys in this village and 124 of them will be the wrong Henry. Without local assistance and under the assumption, for the sake of argument, that he actually knows the true given names of all villagers, he will almost surely fail. What if we imagine that all males in this village have *two names*, which vary independently? In this case, the chances that the police official will grab the wrong Henry are much reduced, but still substantial, as there will be about fifteen Henry Thomases, fifteen William Jameses, etc. Once we move to *three names* (also varying independently), it is likely that the police official will get his man half the time on average. The opacity of the villagers to outside identification is reduced radically by the use of each additional identifying name.<sup>2</sup>

If we arbitrarily impose on such a town a permanent legal patronym such that Thomas-son-of-William is registered as Thomas Williamson and his son as, say, Henry Williamson, and his son as Edward Williamson, and so on, we do not improve the odds for the police who want to identify an individual in his generation but we *do* vastly improve the odds of identifying his parents, grandparents, sons and daughters,

who must necessarily bear the same permanent patronym. Questions of inheritance, paternity, and household affiliation become far more transparent, but never entirely so.

Before the advent of internal passports, photographs, and social security numbers (let alone fingerprints and DNA), personal names were the form of identification most germane to police work. The use of personal names to locate a person depended, of course, on the compliance of the individual and the community in revealing true names. Where the community was hostile and the individual evasive, state officials were stymied. Hence the official predilection for internal passports that must be carried at all times under penalty of fines, or, better yet, for fingerprints which are unique and hard to efface or, still better, for DNA profiles, a unique marker present in any sample of tissue long after death.

Let us assume, for the moment, both a high level of compliance and a world in which the personal name is the key identifier. The police—here used as a convenient shorthand for any authorities wanting to locate a specific individual—may have their task complicated in either of two ways. The smaller the number of names in use within a population, the more difficult becomes the process of identification. We might think of this as the “needle” part of the “looking for a needle in a haystack” problem. How many needles look just like the particular needle we are looking for? The size of the haystack is also crucial. Broadly speaking, the haystack conundrum is a problem of scale. Once police work becomes a matter of finding a unique individual in a large town or a province, let alone a nation, the confusion of identical names becomes an administrative nightmare. The nightmare is further compounded by geographical mobility. If people are moving with any frequency, it becomes well-nigh impossible to know in which of many haystacks to search them out.

The modern state, by which I mean a state whose ideology encompasses large-scale plans for the improvement of the population’s welfare, requires at least two forms of legibility to be able to achieve its mission. First, it requires the capacity to locate citizens uniquely and unambiguously. Second, it needs *standardized* information that will allow it to create *aggregate* statistics about property, income, health, demography, productivity, and so on. Although much of the synoptic, aggregate information officials of the modern state require is collected initially from individuals, it must be collected in a form that makes it amenable to an overall statistical profile—a shorthand map of some social or economic condition relevant for state purposes.

### **C. Taxes**

The third anecdote is meant to illustrate that statistics or, more broadly, state forms of “vision” are not simply observations of reality without consequences. Any observation by a powerful institution with particular interests has the power, under many circumstances, to change reality.

My favorite example is the brilliantly conceived new “Window and Door” tax of the absolutist kings of France in the 17th century. Determined to institute a tax on houses but reluctant to incur the administrative cost of actually calculating the square meters of a house by measuring its interior or exterior—and surely incurring the wrath of the householder—the tax functionaries hit on the idea of simply circumnavigating the house, counting the number of windows and doors, and assessing a tax on that basis. It was an effective cost-saving idea. Given the building standards of the time, the number of doors and windows of a house was a virtually perfect proxy for its size/square meters of floor space, at least at the beginning of the exercise.

Once the tax was in place, however, the fun had just begun. As one can imagine, every house subsequently built or substantially rebuilt was constructed with one eye on the taxman so the number of apertures, whether windows or doors, were kept to a minimum. One imagines that, for the next 250 years, many thousands of peasants and artisans choked on the smoke that could not now easily be vented from the coal and wood fires used for cooking and heating. Because it was an observation with serious consequences, the Window and Door tax became something like a fiscal Heisenberg Principle, changing the reality it had initially only sought to observe.

### **III. Native Americans: Renaming and More**

A brief account of the “naming” of Native Americans seems germane here for two reasons. First, it makes clear the linkage between private freehold property and official names. Second, it concerns the founder of one of Macalester’s distinguished sister institutions, Grinnell College.

The story of conquest, particularly in European settler colonies where the conquerors held overwhelming power, could be written as a vast project of renaming the natural world. Presto! Native names for flora, fauna, insects, mountains, valleys, and birds were effaced and



replaced by the nouns and taxonomies of the conquerors. This process, too, is a project of legibility, a transfer of knowledge in which the mystifying (to Europeans) hieroglyphics of native naming practices was replaced by imported practices transparent to Europeans, and now mystifying to the conquered. Comprehensive re-labeling is a precondition for the transfer of power, management, and control. In the case of the United States, only on occasion do Native American names persist (particularly in the names of rivers, the great arteries of early colonial trade).

Nowhere is this hegemonic project more apparent than in the effort to rename the individual “native subjects” of this colonial enterprise in a fashion that would allow the colonizers to identify each (male!) unambiguously as a legal person. To grasp the importance and scope of this undertaking, its function in promoting legibility and its role as a civilizational discourse, it is helpful to appreciate just how illegible Native American naming practices were to Europeans.

### **A. Illegibility**

Officials encountered among “Indians” what they considered a radical instability and plurality of names. As in many small stateless societies, a person would have several names dependent on the situation of address (e.g., among age-mates, between generations, among close kin) and these names would often change over time. A child who ran screaming into the tepee on seeing a bear might be called “Runs-from-the-Bear.” Later on, if she rides a horse from which others have been thrown, she might be called “Rides-the-Horse.” A hunter who was called “Five Bears” may be called “Six Bears” upon killing another. Researchers tracing surname adoption among the Weagamow Ojibwa noted the plurality of names, in this case partly due to contact with Europeans. The same individual was variously known as Freed Smith, Banani, Nizopitawigizik, and Fredrick Sagachekipoo.

The plurality of names, as the previous example illustrates, was not simply a consequence of indigenous naming practices; it was substantially increased by overlapping jurisdictions and by problems of transliteration. An individual might have one or another of his names recorded by several authorities: a trading post, clerk, missionary, tribal scribe, or a military or civilian administrator. Each name might be different and, if the people in question were migratory, the places of registration would vary. Imagine trying to pin down the identity of

persons who have five or six names and who are constantly on the move! Here, of course, it is important to recall that the recording of names was either an attempt at translation into English (e.g., Six Bears) or a stab at transliteration for which there were no fixed rules. The result, in both cases, was names that bore an indifferent relationship to the indigenous appellation they purported to transcribe. In the case of translation, even an accurate one, the name became nothing more than a nonsense syllable for non-English-speaking Indians. In the case of transliteration, the problems were compounded by large phonological differences between English and native tongues. Thus, in the case of the Severn Ojibwa, such differences produced exotic local renderings of English given names: e.g., Flora=Pinona; Hector=Ehkitah; Telma=Temina; Isabel=Saben; Amos=Thomas; Louise=Anoys. In the case of direct transliteration of the indigenous names of different persons, as among the Crow at the Devil's Lake Agency in North Dakota, one imagines that the recorded names were only one of the many possible phonetic renderings: Eyaupahamini, Iyayahamani, Ecanajinka, Wiyakimaza, Wakauhotanina, Wasineasuwmani, Tiowaste. Had there been standard rules for transliteration and had the recorders of names followed these rules rigorously, the results would have still been mystifying and unpronounceable to white officials.

There were two further problems from the point of view of government agents. First, even translated names that could be understood came in an incompatible format. Take, for example, the names "Barkley-on-the-other-side," "Alice shoots-as-she-goes," "Irvie comes out of fog" (Montana, Crow). The given name is clear, perhaps, but what should be taken as the surname? The whole phrase, the last word...?

Second, and more serious, the indigenous naming system rarely gave any indication of sex or family relationship. Among the Southern Cheyenne, the following "family names" were recorded:

Father	Gunaoi
Mother	Deon
1st Daughter	Halli
2nd Daughter	Aisima
3rd Daughter	Imaguna
1st Son	Inali
2nd Son	Zepko

While the letter recording these names notes that they do not indicate the sex of the children, in fact what the writer means is that, if sex is indicated, it is not a code that he understands. Even when the translation into English names prevailed among the Cheyenne, the names very rarely indicated the roles in a nuclear family so prized by officials: thus, "Crow Neck," his 'wife' "Walking Road," and their sons, "Clarence Crow Neck," "Rested Wolf," and "Hunting Over." On the Arapaho roster there are "Bear Lariat," his 'wife' "Mouse," sons "Sitting Man" and "Charles Lariat," and daughter "Singing Above." As is evident, such illegible naming practices were unsuited to the twin normative legal requirements of "civilized" life: property ownership and marriage by law.

## **B. Property: The Dawes Act**

So long as the administrative regime governing Native Americans resembled indirect rule and so long as the aims of white officials were containment and military security, then the Native Americans' seemingly promiscuous and illegible naming practices were inconvenient, but not fatal. Officials worked through their own Indian employees and a handful of chiefs. They were dependent on "native-trackers" for detailed information or for locating a particular individual.

All this changed with the Dawes Act of 1887, which authorized the President to allot 160 acres to each family head (presumptively a male) on a reservation. The title to the land would be held in trust for twenty-five years (apparently to prevent victimization of the new landowners by speculators), after which it would revert to the allottee and *his* heirs. The goal, aside from seizing more tribal land for white settlers, was the cultural assimilation of Native Americans: "[A]fter receiving his allotment, which signified his severance from the tribe and its communal ways, he would become subject to the laws of the state or territory in which he resided." In this sense, the Dawes Act was "a mighty pulverizing engine for the breaking up of the tribal mass."

Now that many male Native Americans would become property-owning citizens—no longer exclusively under tribal jurisdiction, but citizens with rights and obligations under the laws of the larger society—their illegibility as individuals was no longer acceptable. Native American naming practices were suitable for a common-property regime with a loose family structure and nomadic ways. They were not suitable for a newly created, sedentary, property-owning citizen

yeomanry. As legal persons, Native Americans now needed a legal identity proper to the state.

The immediate impetus behind a standardization of Indian names was the institution of private property in land. Allotments meant deeds, titles, cadastral surveys, and inheritance rules. These, in turn, required an unambiguous legal identity—preferably one that reflected close kinship ties (i.e., the “normative” nuclear family). Reformers, who believed allotments were the route to a necessary and beneficial assimilation, were intent on avoiding the confusion and litigation that customary naming practices might encourage. They set about standardizing names to make sure that land was registered under an unambiguous identity: names with permanent patronyms that would reduce the legal confusion about exactly who were a deceased landowner’s heirs.

What is noteworthy here is the unavoidable, not to say coercive, logic joining standardized legal identities, on the one hand, and property ownership, on the other. As one official wrote, the American system of naming was a good system, for it fixes the name of each individual after an unvarying fashion, and establishes the same practically beyond alteration:

We cannot see how it could be otherwise than it is. Furthermore, and what makes it so important, it is practically the only system known to American law, and it is impossible not to see that in all things, prominent among which is the transfer of property or the bequeathing of the same to heirs, trouble must come to those who disregard this system.

Once the allotments were decided upon, a whole set of gears were inexorably set into motion. The process is a classic example of practical, systemic, hegemony; property deeds, land records, and property taxes require synoptic, standardized forms of identification.

The enormous diversity of Native American naming practices, the varying degrees of contact and assimilation, and the huge variety of administrative arrangements under which they were governed created nearly insurmountable problems of illegibility. The “Poet of the Prairie,” Hamlin Garland, made “the naming of the Red Men as they became citizens,” a personal mission, seeking the confidence of President Theodore Roosevelt in carrying it out successfully. In a letter urging Teddy Roosevelt to place George Bird Grinnell (a naturalist and ethnographer of the Cheyenne) in charge of a committee to rename all

Native Americans, his plea makes it clear that his proximate goal is to establish, for all Indians, a secure legal identity:

It is imperative that family names should be reasonable and according to some system. The whole list is an inextricable tangle...They must be named according to their family relation in order to prevent endless legal complication...The work should be done by a central committee and not by the various clerks of the agencies.

The overriding concern with establishing a systematic, centralized formula for renaming was echoed by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Thomas J. Morgan, in 1890. Although "the command to give names to the Indians and to establish the same as far as possible by continuous use had been part of the Rules and Regulations for years past," it had not been widely applied or generalized. He proposed general guidelines for the renaming exercise. A further regulation deplored the lackadaisical efforts to systematize and enforce the new names, leaving in their wake a host of confusing, unpronounceable, and insulting patronyms. He further scolded both his subordinates and his Native American charges:

Such Indian agents and superintendents of Indian schools have not sought to impress the Indian people with the importance of having their names fashioned after the whites, consequently they have had in this direction the opposition instead of the cooperation of the Indians. In this thing, as in nearly all others, the Indians do not know what is best for them. They can't see that our system has any advantages over their own, and they have fought stubbornly against the innovation.

Morgan, Grinnell, and Garland tried, by the standards of the time, to be as accommodating as they could to indigenous naming practices, so long as they conformed to minimal standards of legibility. Morgan and Grinnell were not opposed to retaining Indian names, providing that they were not "too difficult to pronounce." The rub, of course, was that this rationale referred to the difficulty experienced by native English speakers. Otherwise English names and translations were to be substituted whenever the original name was long and/or difficult. Garland agreed. Easily spoken names, such as "To-re-ach" or "Chonoh," might be retained while others would require translation and, frequently, shortening as well. "Black Bull" might be shortened to "Blackbill" or "Blackbell;" "Standing Bull" to "Stanbull;" "Albert

Spotted-Horse" to "Albert Spotted;" "Black Owl" to "Blackall;" "Brave Bear" to "Bravber." A Christian "given name" was normally appended as a first name, e.g., "Charles Stanbull." As Garland noted, the point was that, "*our* Indians should be entirely renamed according to some general system," retaining the Indians' own name whenever possible, shortening or modifying it so that it can be spoken by the Red Man's neighbor, "so that it name(s) all children after their father or a name chosen by their mother," in short, "a system which will show family relations, which will meet the wishes of the red people and be comprehensible to the white people." The aim, Garland wrote, was to start each allottee with a decent and reasonable name. Names that, when translated, seemed demeaning (e.g., "Ghost-faced Woman," "Drunkard," "Let them Have Enough," "Nancy Kills a Hundred," "Rotten Pumpkin") were to be avoided.

### C. The Civilizational Project

The renaming of Native Americans was a "civilizing project" in at least two respects. The first is most obvious. The "Red Man" was being inducted, through the Dawes Act, into a radically new life that would eventually lead, it was hoped, to complete assimilation. Just as the precondition for the emancipation and full citizenship of the Jews in Central Europe was the legal adoption of permanent patronyms along Christian lines, so was a fixed legal patronym a condition of post-reservation life. The creation of such a legal identity was the necessary "universal gear" which would then engage the other gears of the official machinery of the modern state.

In 1819, Congress established a "Civilization Fund" to introduce the Indian to "the habits and arts of civilization." In general, its goal was to transform what were seen (often mistakenly) as exclusively hunting-and-gathering cultures dependent on nomadism and communal ownership of land into a sedentary, agrarian (and artisan) society based on private property. The former condition, requiring bravery, shrewdness, and honor, was associated with savagery, whereas a settled life with cultivated property was seen as the handmaiden of civilization:

you may look forward to the period when the savage shall be converted to the citizen, when he hunter shall be transformed into the mechanic, when the farm, the workshop, the school-house, and the church shall adorn every Indian village; when the fruits of industry, good order, and sound morals shall bless every Indian dwelling.

Accomplishing this work, the Director of the Bureau of Ethnology, John Wesley Powell, reasoned, required new names which “tend strongly toward the breaking up of the Indian tribal system, which is perpetuated and ever kept in mind by the Indian’s own system of names.” The reservation system, as a structure of physical confinement and surveillance, was itself not conceived as a project of cultural autonomy but a prelude to transformation. “Restricting the tribes to a limited and permanent area was a prerequisite to successfully civilizing them.”

The second civilizing project—one embedded in the formula for renaming the Indians—was the restructuring of the family to bring it into line with the normative patriarchy of their white Christian neighbors. Family and kinship practices vary widely among Native Americans, but it is safe to say that they rarely resembled the codified religious and legal forms of the dominant society. Plural and serial unions, child-rearing by the extended family, and changes in the composition of bands over time were common and only served to confirm the need for civilizing efforts.

The illegibility of Native American kinship nomenclature was frequently taken by the would-be civilizers as a direct indication, **not** of a different kinship *order*, but of confusion and *disorder* among the Indians themselves about kinship relations. Just as the Spanish Governor General of the Philippines imagined that patronyms would help Filipinos figure out who their cousins were (and avoid marrying them), so did the namers of the “Red Men” imagine that they were helping their charges sort out the primeval mess of their savage ways. Hamlin Garland, for example, supposed that the mere absence of a common patronym joining siblings was evidence “that each child stands alone in the world.” Writing of the Southern Cheyenne tribal roll, he declared, “The whole list is an inextricable tangle. For example, practically only one man can straighten out the family ramifications among the Southern Cheyenne.” It is not entirely clear whether Garland imagined that the Cheyenne themselves were in doubt about their relationship to one another, but it is clear that he believed that they (as well as the white man) would be thankful for a kinship terminology that clarified matters. Reading the correspondence and official circulars makes it appear that the reformers believed that if they just got the kinship terminology right, the actual practices of Native Americans would soon fall in line.

## **D. Boarding Schools**

Nowhere was the civilizational project more in evidence than in the boarding schools set up for Native American schoolchildren. The logic behind the boarding school was precisely the logic of the “total institution.” One might flail away at effecting small changes among masses of Native Americans on the reservation or, alternatively, concentrate on a smaller number of children at an impressionable age, away from the contaminating influence of the tribe, and in highly controlled, disciplinary surroundings. By a reduction in scale, one achieved a commensurate increase in micro-control of the environment. Here the new elites could be shaped from the ground up, Pygmalion-fashion. The results were also more legible: so many graduated, so many literate in English, so many taught certain crafts and mechanical skills, etc.

A bit like the military model they mimicked, school techniques were meant to be a shocking and comprehensive baptism. The clothes students arrived in were discarded and military kits issued in their place; their diet was changed completely to a white diet; their hair (often an important cultural badge) was cut; facial paint forbidden; time discipline imposed; conversation in native languages severely punished; and, of course, new names mandated. A Sioux memoir of naming in the boarding school captures the atmosphere:

The new recruit's acquisition of a uniform was followed by the acquisition of a new name. Most often it occurred on the first day of instruction. In the case of Luther Standing Bear, he remembers that one day there was a lot of strange marks on the blackboard, which an interpreter explained were whitemen's names. One by one the students were asked to approach the blackboard with a pointer and were instructed to choose a name. When a name was selected, the teacher wrote it on a piece of white tape, which was then sewn on the back of the boy's shirt. When Standing Bear's turn came, he took the pointer and acted as if he were about to touch an enemy. By the end of the class, all the students had the name of a white man sewn on their backs. In the case of Luther Standing Bear, he needed only to choose a first name and was able to keep part of his Indian name in English translation. Not all the boarding school students had this luxury.

Like many utopian schemes of standardization, the project of renaming Native Americans was a messy affair. It was common, as in the Philippines, for one authority to codify names without noting, in



each case, the results of earlier naming exercises. Efforts to create new names in the boarding schools indicating paternity were seldom coordinated with renaming on the reservation where their fathers lived, thus leading to nearly hopeless confusion. Two brothers named in separate exercises might not be given the same last name. But, similar to the case of the Philippines, over several decades, the frequency of contact with officialdom ensured that most Native Americans had legal names that conformed to the Anglo-American normative patriarchal order. Practice, of course, was something else again.

#### **IV. Standardization and Control for Profit: McDonalds and Forests**

Assessing and controlling any activity encourages standardization. The more standardized the product and process, the easier it is to monitor from above and outside. It is easier to oversee a plantation with a single crop and a workforce in a barracks than to oversee a hundred individual farms. It is easier to oversee an assembly line with a rigidly defined division of labor than to oversee a hundred artisans producing the same product.

This is the logic that lies behind, for instance, the corporate model of the McDonalds franchises. Although under constant pressure to adapt to local tastes and cuisines, McDonalds has thrived largely by producing reliable, uniform products according to a carefully calibrated layout of the individual franchise, varying only by the relative size of the operation and façade now re-engineered to blend in with the local architectural styles. The standard layout and raw materials not only facilitate the reliable production of a standardized product but they are a crucial tool of management. The inspector from headquarters can arrive at a McDonalds restaurant, clipboard and checklist in hand, in order to rate the quality of the performance of a standardized ritual at this site. Everything should be in its place (fryers, oil, patties, lettuce, tomatoes, pickles); the standardized equipment should be clear and well maintained; and the division of labor in the management plan meticulously observed. It is the standardization of the McDonalds as units as well as the uniformity of the product that make this degree of management control possible. There is nothing particularly novel here. The same might be said for the standardized units of infantry divisions; historically they were designed to all match the same format and an officer could be transferred from one battalion to another and find

roughly the same table of organization, procedures, ranks, and, above all, training expectations.

In other work, I have tried to show how such schemes of standardization are likely to fail in contexts in which the tasks are complex and changing, or when they overlook external (boundary conditions) ecological limits, which they inadvertently violate. The late 18th century invention of scientific forestry is a case in point. Prior to that time, the princes of Saxony and Prussia auctioned off tracts of their domain forests to bidders who, in turn, estimated the profits they might expect from extracting fuel wood and lumber, and bid accordingly. The results were uneven. In an effort to ensure themselves steady revenue—and a sustainable yield—the princes turned to specialists in “cameral science,” as it was known in that day. It was the science of rationalizing the revenue and expenditures of the monarchy. To make a very long story short, these specialists selected what they judged to be a representative section of the forest, in terms of soil classes, tree-species distribution, and age of growth, and then surveyed it meticulously, conducting a census, as it were, of every single tree. Assistants equipped with trays with five bins of nails, each color coded to correspond to one of five size-classes of trees they had been trained to recognize, set out every morning, twenty abreast. As they came to each and every tree, they selected the nail corresponding to its size class (*Normalbaume*) and drove it in. At the end of the day, having begun with a known number of nails, they had a complete inventory of that section of the forest by size-class of trees. At the end of the whole exercise they had a complete inventory of the whole sector of the forest.

It was a comparatively simple matter, then, using solid geometry, to calculate the square meters of lumber and firewood that this representative sample of the forest contained and, assuming a certain market price, to calculate the revenue that might be obtained from it. Further, by making a few simple assumptions about mean growth rates of timber in average years, it was possible to devise a cutting schedule that would produce steady, reliable revenue, in principle forever. This exercise also has given us the basis of the logging-tables and cutting-schedules used by trained foresters ever since.

The next step, however, was in the direction of radical simplification and, as we shall see, fateful. Having narrowed their view of the forest to a simple one-commodity machine, they were inclined to take further steps to maximize its revenue yield. As the successful bidders felled sections of the forest (what we would today call clear-cutting)

that they had won at auction, the revenue advisors had already realized that the two fastest growing trees, depending on whether the soil were sandy or not, were the Scotch Pine or the Norway Spruce. Why not, they reasoned, replant the forest with one of these fast-growing species? And, while they were replanting the forest, why not replant it in alleys or straight rows that would make it easier to observe and manage and, when the time came, the trees could more easily be felled into the alleys and hauled away at less cost? At first, this scheme was a runaway success. At that time the normal rotation for a tree crop was 80 years and the replanted spruce and pines grew rapidly (probably because they took swift advantage of the accumulated soil-capital of the old growth forest and the felled trees' root channels.) In any event, the success lasted for a century (until roughly twenty years into the second rotation) and in this period became, and still is, the worldwide standard for scientific forestry.

What is important and most striking here is the determined, utilitarian, tunnel vision of the forest as a one-commodity machine. This vision is notable, above all, for what it leaves out. From a naturalist's perspective, nearly everything is missing. Gone was the vast majority of flora: grasses, flowers, lichens, ferns, shrubs, mushrooms, and vines. Gone too were the reptiles, birds, amphibians, and innumerable species of insects, not to mention most species of fauna, except those of direct interest to the crown's gamekeepers. The forest was managed not only as if it produced a single commodity but also as if it had but a single user. The popular uses of the forest for hunting and gathering, pasturage, fishing, charcoal making, tanning, trapping, and minerals were overlooked or, more commonly, suppressed as interfering with sound management. The imminent ideal at work here, never quite achieved in practice but ardently pursued, was a forest that would approximate a field of row crops managed for maximum production or, if you would prefer a military metaphor, a parade ground with the trees aligned in straight rows like so many look-alike conscripts. Quite apart from the utilitarian aims behind the scheme there was a visual idea, almost a secular religion, about how the forest should look. As with McDonalds franchises, the greater the uniformity of the forest, the greater the ease of inspection and management. Forest science, backed by state power, had the capacity to transform the real, diverse, and chaotic old-growth forest into a new, more uniform forest that more closely resembled the administrative grid of its techniques.

Heedless of the then (and today) poorly understood dynamics of forest ecology, the new scientific forestry was catastrophic for forest

health. It produced mono-cropped, same-age forests that were radically more prone to diseases and windfalls than the old-growth forests they had replaced. The single species forest, in turn, radically diminished the bio-diversity of the forest in terms of floral, faunal, avian, and insect life. After a hundred years of this great experiment, the failing (in pure economic terms) and diseased forests prompted the Germans to invent the term *Waldsterben* (forest death) and to devise a host of artificial measures to reintroduce habitats for the now absent insects, birds, and small fauna. Just as the Germans had invented forest science, they now became pioneers in “forest hygiene” and “restoration forestry.”

### **A. Standardization: National and International**

Lest I am misunderstood, I should make it clear that national projects of standardization are part and parcel of nation building and modern state formation. They are a technique, a capacity available to the state, and can be used for good or ill—in most cases a morally troubling combination of the two. Perhaps the greatest and most emancipatory simplification of the democratic state was the creation of the universal citizen in the French Revolution, an abstract person bearing rights before the law equal to that of any other citizen. As a radical simplification replacing the finely graded rights of the various medieval estates before the law, it was a step toward formal equality that still justifiably mesmerizes much of the world. At the same time, it is important to recognize that it also set the stage for universal conscription little more than a decade afterwards, under Napoleon.

### **B. Bi-Polar Projects of Standardization: 1945–1989**

There were, for nearly a half century after World War II, essentially two competing projects for governance at large in the world: the socialist bloc and the liberal capitalist democracies.

Each of these projects was something of a political module that its purveyors thought could be transferred as a package. Using their geopolitical power, their trade and aid, and their military alliances, each bloc endeavored (and to some real degree, succeeded) in reshaping their allies in the Cold War.

One could travel virtually anywhere in the Socialist Bloc, for example, Angola, Mozambique, Vietnam, Cuba, Bulgaria, or China, and find comparable practices adapted from the template (we might even

say Vatican) of the Socialist Bloc, the Soviet Union. Collectivized agriculture, a state-directed economy with ubiquitous five-year plans, the organization of civilian ministries and the armed forces, the same sacred texts, the same Central Committee of the Communist Party, and the same emphasis on rapid industrialization were strikingly familiar throughout the socialist world. Even tiny Laos, a subsistence economy if there ever was one, had to have its Five-Year Plans and even its May Day parade, a very “low church” copy of the May Day parade in the Kremlin.

### **C. Uni-Polarity and the Washington Consensus: Post-1989**

After the Berlin Wall was breached, the socialist project of standardization no longer had a hegemon behind it and was quick to dissipate. None of us have any strong reason to be nostalgic about the Cold War and the disappearance of Soviet-style economies and polities. It is worth noting, however, that the existence of a competing paradigm had real-world consequences for each of the competitors. It is fairly clear that during the Civil Rights Movement, the Kennedys were exquisitely sensitive to the political capital that the Soviet Union could exploit by portraying the United States as a racist social order. It is more than likely that this consideration helped trump the backlash expected from Southern Democrats to incline the Kennedys to a more active intervention on behalf of civil rights in the south than they would otherwise have considered. The same could be said for U.S. policies in the Third World. In places like the Philippines and Vietnam, beset by communist insurrections and characterized by massive inequalities in landownership, the United States actively backed some modest measures of land reform. The idea that the champion of liberal economies and the Lockean defense of property rights should actually pursue the redistribution of the most important asset in these agrarian economies was surely the result of the attractiveness of the land reforms undertaken in China and the North Vietnam to landless peasants and tenants. It is also diagnostic that programs of “land reform” disappeared altogether from the agenda of USAID and the international agencies under strong United States influence after the collapse of the Socialist Bloc in 1989.

The neo-liberal new order, I believe, can be usefully seen as a vast anti-vernacular machine. Its immanent logic, never fully realized, is to replicate the institutional order and practices of the developed, liberal democracies of the North Atlantic (overlooking, for the moment, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand). The institutional lords of this project are

the great multinational institutions controlled by these liberal democracies: the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO), European Union (EU), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The consistent effort to replace illegible, vernacular practices with the standards of these agencies is typically described euphemistically by the term *harmonization*, a brilliant slogan if there ever was one. It creates the image of a vast chorus being trained to sing a collective melody in unison and in tune. Who could object to “harmony” as opposed to, say, discord and dissonance? Although the process sounds innocuous enough, it is largely advanced by what some of my colleagues in political science have called “troffers” (a combination of a threat and an offer). Structural adjustment loans are of this nature. They offer a valuable loan on condition that the borrowing country brings its fiscal and governance practices into tune with the demands of the lender. My objective for the remainder of this essay is to call attention to the “sheet music” and “tune” that is being played here.

We might understand this process best by focusing on perhaps the greatest contemporary project of institutional standardization in the world today: the creation of individual freehold tenure throughout the Global South. There is hardly a country in the Global South that is not in the process of systematically surveying land and issuing titles to create a national cadastral, property map. The World Bank titling project is a neo-liberal property creating module. (Send US \$49.95 and receive the World Bank land titling “kit” with easy to follow instructions!) The goal of this effort to eliminate exotic forms of vernacular land tenure in all pre-liberal societies is two-fold. First, and most important, it aims to create secure and transferable title to land so as to create a national market for land. By neo-liberal logic, this will make it possible for land, like labor and capital, the other factors of production, to seek the highest return in the market and thereby spur economic growth. It will also make possible a national land tax register in which the state can rationally tax land to raise revenue and to promote its profitable use.

In many respects, land titling is the centerpiece for the creation of liberal economies in the Global South. Yet it is hardly the only project of the root-and-branch restructuring of institutions and economies throughout poor countries. Harmonization is also being fostered in a host of related fields: the creation of intellectual property rights on the North Atlantic model, easing restrictions on the movement of capital and the repatriation of profits, privatization of many public services,

standardized patent law, the creation of fully convertible currencies, standardized procedures for the incorporation of private enterprises, independent central banks operating according to accepted international standards, the collection of statistics and indices to accord with United Nations and OECD formats, standardized government fiscal and monetary accounts...the list is nearly endless.

The main point here is comparatively simple. All of these projects of standardization and harmonization are represented as cosmopolitan universals. They are, of course, anything but universals. Any practice, any institution that becomes internationally hegemonic, began, once, as vernacular practice at a particular time and in a particular place. Most of the practices we are describing are the vernacular practices and institutions of North Atlantic capitalist democracies, now "cross-dressed" as cosmopolitan universals. Riding the back of British and French imperialism and, subsequently, United States military and economic hegemony and the post-war Western institutional order, these quaint, vernacular practices have become hegemonic largely because their originators and carriers have become hegemonic. One might even say that the crucial stage of ideological and civilizational hegemony comes at that point when the institutions of the hegemon are no longer experienced as local and vernacular but are seen as universals. In just this way did Sung and Ming China and, for that matter, the Roman Empire come to see their governance practices and institutions as cosmopolitan universals to be copied by everyone.

The immanent logic of this vast standardization is different in scale but not in kind from the uniformity of the scientific forest or of McDonalds. To the degree that it is successful, it generalizes the institutional setting of the North Atlantic world. Let's imagine, for example, a North Atlantic businesswoman getting off a standardized jet at a standardized airport in Conakry, Maputo, Vientiane, Asuncion, Seoul, Rangoon, Ulan Bator, or Tirana. If the harmonization project has been largely successful, she would encounter a legal order, business laws, currency regulations, and a property regime that would be thoroughly familiar. And why not? They are precisely the institutions she left behind at home. They are her own institutions now transplanted to this new setting as the international standard. These institutions may be exotic and frustrating hieroglyphics to local people used to their previous vernacular institutions and practices, but to the cosmopolitan Westerner, they are familiar waters in which to navigate...and prevail.

Not everything, of course, will be the same. The “natives” will retain their languages, their cuisine, their music, their dances and their beaches and mountains and their geography—the more so if these differences are successful commodities that can be capitalized on the tourist market.

I want to qualify the assumption that the natives will keep their own languages. They will, but, to the extent that they harmonize their economy, their governance structures, and even their tourist economy, with international standards, they will have to produce a substantial population that also speaks the language of international harmonization: English.

### V. English as a Vernacular Cross-Dressed as a Cosmopolitan Universal

The “career” of English as a *soi-disant* “world language” closely tracks the standardization of North Atlantic economic and institutional forms. English is a once quaint, minor, vernacular dialect of the Germanic family of languages (as are Dutch, Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian). Inflected by the French of the Norman conquerors and the Latin of the church fathers, English, like individual freehold property, came to hegemony on the historical contingency of British naval dominance and American hegemony. Socio-linguists are fond of a joke that captures the process here. “What,” they ask, “is the difference between a dialect and a national language?” The answer: “A national language is a dialect with an army.” In the same way, it is the imperial might of the bearers of English that have made it into a world language and not just a minor dialect. As the hegemonic language of trade and imperialism, it was, and is, in the interest of millions across the globe to learn the recondite mysteries of English. (How many thousands of Chinese are, at this moment, studying for the Test of English as a Foreign Language-TOEFL? A photograph in the *New York Times* last year showed the T-shirt of a receding bicyclist in Beijing which bore the slogan, “F\*\*\* TOEFL.”)

However it may represent itself as a universal and however reinvented by speakers across the globe, English bears all the historical traces of its narrow, provincial, historical origins. One can scarcely find a figure of speech in the language that does not make direct or oblique reference to the peculiarities of its birth, e.g., “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence,” “Eating high off the hog,” or



“Make hay while the sun shines.” At every turn, the language encodes the history and practices of those who first spoke it as a native tongue just as the practice of freehold tenure encodes the cultural practices of the Anglo-American world in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Those of us who have had the unique good fortune to have English as our mother tongue are paid, as it were, a huge imperial dividend every day of our lives, simply because of the lucky coincidence that our native tongue has become the language of imperium.

## **VI. Counter-Hegemonic Projects?**

The rather bleak picture depicted here of the triumph of North Atlantic would-be universals over innumerable vernaculars disappearing every day might be seen as far too pessimistic. There are, after all, a host of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who do battle daily with the likes of the IMF, the WTO, and the World Bank at the G-8 Summits, Davos, and on the ground throughout poor countries. In fact, NGOs that are in one way or another opposed to these multinational agencies are something of a growth industry for the otherwise unemployed intelligentsia of the developed world. I would wager that such activities are a major employer of Scandinavian, Dutch, and German university graduates working abroad. Although agencies like the World Bank have increasingly tried to co-opt such NGOs as subcontractors for many of their interventions, there is little doubt that many NGOs have played a vital role, particularly in the environmental field, in thwarting the ill-considered schemes cooked up between national governments and multi-lateral lending agencies.

Most, but not all, of these NGOs are Western inspired, Western financed, and, in many cases, Western staffed. More importantly, such institutions are also typically themselves the bearers of North Atlantic institutional forms, notably human rights, women’s emancipation, voting rights and fair electoral rules, press freedom, habeas corpus, and transparency of financial transactions and official conduct. However emancipatory they may seem, there is no gainsaying that they, like freehold property, derive from popular vernacular struggles in the North Atlantic world over the past three centuries. Although many of these projects are opposed to the neo-liberal order of the Washington Consensus, they transpose lock-stock-and-barrel what was originally a Western vernacular debate to the Global South. It is something of a

left-handed tribute to Western hegemony that much of the opposition to it in the Global South is itself a Western import.

There is, I believe, a plausible objection to be lodged here. Many of the emancipatory struggles that originated in the West have gone on to have a vigorous vernacular history in the Global South. India now has well over a century of far more competitive party politics than that experienced by Americans, and it is clear that the average Indian peasant behind his plough is far more sophisticated about party politics than the typical American. Elections and party politics are therefore surely as—if not more—indigenous to India as they are to Great Britain or France. The problem with a sharp division between “imported exotics” and “local vernaculars” is that over time the former often become thoroughly naturalized. In such cases, the principles behind a Western-inspired NGO may have a great deal of local traction. Even so, the understanding of the principles involved may be far from identical. I am told that women’s NGOs in India, many of which are financed by Scandinavian women’s aid organizations, spend far more of their time and energy on spousal abuse, marriage rights, and divorce laws—issues of great concern in Europe—than do locally-rooted women’s organizations which devote their energies to issues of promoting economic livelihood, arguably more germane to women’s empowerment in the Indian context.<sup>3</sup>

Let me end with a question. This is not a rhetorical question; I do not know the answer, if indeed there is one. I believe, however, that it is a question that is “good to think with.” The question occurred to me as I realized that in most of the contexts in which the word “civilization” was used in the 19th century, the word “development” has been used throughout much of the 20th century. Is there a parallel between the relationship of the emancipatory NGO projects of which we have been speaking to the neo-liberal economic order, on the one hand, and the relationship between 19th-century Christian missionaries to the colonial authorities, on the other? Are they both Western civilizational projects in part at odds with one another? To put it another way, is the relationship between NGOs and the neo-liberal order of the World Bank the same as the relationship between Bartolomé de las Casas and the conquistadors?

However one chooses to answer this question one fact is not in doubt. There is an amazing institutional convergence afoot in the world and, correspondingly, a great loss in cultural and institutional diversity—eliminating both the ugly and the beautiful vernaculars. ●

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## Notes

1. Local practice in a contemporary Malay-Muslim village, where there are no permanent patronyms and where the number of given names is similarly limited, follows much the same pattern. Kasim, who owns a small store, is distinguished from four other Kasims in the village by being called "Kasim-kedai" (Store Kasim); Ahmad, who can read the Qur'an, is called "Lebai-[Ah]mat;" Mansor, who was tripped up when his sarong fell down while chasing children, is called (only behind his back, of course) "Mansur-terlondeh" (Mansor of the Accidentally Falling Sarong); and Zakariah, who has a harelip is called (also behind his back) "[Zakar]iah-rabit" (Hare-lip Zakariah). In this Malay-Muslim village, each of these names is locally, but *only* locally, definitive. Only a relative insider is likely to know who has the village reputation for laziness, who can recite the Qur'an, who tripped on his sarong, or which John is William's son. The vernacular system is perfectly discriminating for those with the requisite local knowledge to understand each reference. Without a local tracker to fill in the missing information for identification, the outsider would be at a loss.

2. Our hypothetical example is, in effect, a *best case* scenario, with only eight given names. Assume, for a moment, that the names are not evenly distributed; assume that the name, say, "William," is so popular that half the men in the village bear it, and the other seven names are evenly distributed among the remainder. In that case, the police agent, looking for a particular William, will face 285 aliases if the villagers have only a single name, 81 aliases in a village with two names, and 39 aliases in a village with three names. The point is that anything less than an even distribution of names appreciably raises the odds that the "suspect" with a more common name will elude identification.

3. In passing, it ought to be observed that a great deal of domestic NGO activity in India and in the United States is devoted precisely to opposing various North Atlantic universalisms in the name of vernacular practices. The Hindu right wing in India and the Christian and Jewish fundamentalists in the United States have adroitly used the organizational and mobilization techniques of the Left to defend vernacular practices against secular and civic universalism.