

**Review of Steven Flusty (2004), *De-Coca-Colonization: Making the Globe From the Inside Out*, New York: Routledge. ISBN: 0-415-94538-0, vii+235 pp.**

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Having recently completed a critical review of a modernist-inspired critique of globalization (George Ritzer's *The Globalization of Nothing*, 2004), I am very interested in this postmodern (ontological) and poststructural (epistemological) analysis of globalization. Framed in the theoretical tradition of discursive materialism (p.12), Flusty argues that globalization can be interpreted as "the increasing spatial reach of emplaced social relations" (p.4) particularly via world cities. In this book, he seeks to explore "the social construction of globalization within, between, and through world cities" (p.4).

To accomplish his aims, Flusty divides the book into three major parts. After a concise and rather useful introduction, the book begins with Part I that examines how globalization can be read and experienced from material conditions within world cities and its manifold landscapes. He offers an excellent critique of the world city literature and argues for an "unbounded" analysis of how world cities are indeed lived and experienced through everyday practices that easily transcend the bounds of these urban landscapes. Part II of the book deals with how globalization can be understood as processes of concretization or "an articulation of processes embedded in everyday practices" (p.61). Here, Flusty shows us how traces of globalization can be observed in different dimensions of world cities – from urban forms to everyday social relations among its dwellers and their distanced network connections. In the final part, Flusty illustrates how globalization is mediated and resisted everywhere, using examples of Nike and the Zapatistas uprising in Mexico in 1994.

I particularly like two aspects of this book that distinguishes itself from such "airport" books on globalization as Ritzer's *The Globalization of Nothing*. In the first place, Flusty has very successfully challenged the commonly held view of globalization as "a higher-order imposition" (p.3) and globalization from above. For example, the chapters on Los Angeles offer insightful readings into the various ways or "techniques" that the metropolis is segregating into cities within the world city that reflects the global division of labour. Flusty shows vividly how globalization is grounded in LA's own dynamic urban geographies. The chapter (8) on the Zapatistas uprising also shows very interestingly how anti-neoliberalism and anti-globalization movements are articulated in specific places and the interconnections of ideas, artifacts and people across these places.

This strive for interconnections brings me to the second aspect of the book that I like most. Flusty has been very skillful in making connections across the globe of such everyday stuff as persons, spaces, artifacts, and their practices. Very often, we read books on globalization that deal with such abstract processes as investment, production and circulation. *De-Coca-Colonization*, however, focuses on actors and actants as they experience and embody globalization. There are many examples of such actors and actants in this book. Of most interest to me are Flusty's barong shirt from the Philippines that he so well describes on pp.95-97, Meiji candies and the Taliban in Part III (pp.138-148), and the Muneca Zapatista doll as part of an actor-network in the mobilization of international support for the Zapatista uprising in Mexico in

chapter 8. Perhaps partly due to his background in architectural planning, Flusty is particularly good in illustrating these interconnections among actors and actants through visual displays and vivid descriptions.

I have several questions, however, on how globalization is analyzed in this book and its methodological implications. To me, I think the greatest difficulty in this book is to show how globalization is “immanent within, and an intimate creation of, our everyday undertakings” (p.5, see also p.103). This approach assumes *a priori* the existence of globalization and our analytical task seems to be just about disentangling its constitutive relationships. But then are these relationships the causes, processes or effects of globalization? Flusty notes that the key to his case “lies in identifying how particular everyday practices are brought together so as to embody the effect of a globalization from above” (p.6). This is fine insofar as it does not degenerate into a claim about the causal processes of globalization by unpacking its constitutive effects.

For example, Flusty describes in great detail how he obtained a barong shirt from the Philippines. On that basis, he concludes that “it could be said that I got the shirt on account of globalization” (p.97). So what is globalization? Is it just about a constellation of “specific people who, in the course of negotiating their daily lives, happened to find themselves coming together in particular places” (pp.97-98)? Clearly, there is a danger of reading globalization “from below” in such ways that renders globalization a virtually meaningless set of tendencies that are everywhere “readable” in our everyday practices. Do we need globalization to do such readings? What is the conceptual “value-addedness”, so to speak, to talk about globalization in this case? I am sure Flusty can explain how he got the barong shirt equally well without recourse to the phenomenon of globalization. Equally, I am sure such a complex actor-network in securing a barong shirt must have existed long before contemporary globalization – a world made up of disparate empires interwoven by long-distance trade and migration networks. This again begs the question of what globalization is. Do we need to know about globalization in order to understand how Flusty got his shirt? Does his barong shirt actor-network really embody globalization? Or does it simply represent a contingent and unintended outcome of globalization? Will he still get the shirt even if there is no globalization as we know it? The answers to these questions seem to me are critical to unravel the globalization puzzle as presented in this book.

In raising these further questions, I take this book as a documentation of the effects of globalization and their embodiment in everyday practices. It is not about what drives globalization, but rather what globalization leads to. In doing so, I sometimes find tensions and contradictions in Flusty’s poststructural analysis of globalization as everyday practices articulated in and through world cities. How does his “grounding” of globalization theories into “a chaotically relativized world system” (p.41) help us to understand the constitutive processes of globalization? It appears to be too easy and relativist for him to see globalization as “one consisting of multiple, ever-shifting, alternate globalities with highly differentiated spheres and degrees of dominance” (p.41). In his critique of globalization theories, I feel a danger of caricaturizing globalization studies as only dealing with globalization from above and the global-local dichotomy. Here, I can think of the excellent analysis of everyday resistance to the globalization syndrome in Mittelman (2001) and the critique of globalization theories in Rosenberg (2000) that are missing in Flusty’s critical review.

In methodological terms, I find it hard to refute the book's preferred focus on the mundanes and the anecdote (p.9). A looming question remains though – could it be a form of relativism? Flusty prefers a random walk on globalization in such a way that leaves “many threads loose at every end” (p.20-21). His style of analysis is to “digress a lot, frequently going off on tangents” (p.21), a reflection of his methodological infatuation with postmodernism. The main methodological issue here is how do we know his story is really valid? Reading through the text, it often appears to be a matter of trust and faith in him when he did the “kluging” (p.13) of adapting found objects to new purposes and “seized upon the stories of persons, places and things to turn them to the purpose of explicating global formation” (p.13). Is this global formation entirely his own dream or heterotopia?

Moreover, I wonder what happens to the non-urban experience of globalization, given the book's empirical focus on the urban experience of global formations. Perhaps because of its roots in the LA school of postmodern urban theory (see p.65) and his subjective positionality as a former resident in LA, there is a sense of universalism in that what happens to everyday life in LA is construed as representing the perils of globalization everywhere. Too little is said, for example, on how the happenings in LA are themselves highly contingent phenomena driven by LA's unique social formations and capital accumulation. While it is true that “globality is produced in our backyards” (p.92), such an effect of globalization must be analyzed in its highly differentiated historical and institutional contexts. After all, LA might just be a special case of hyper-globalization in the ways described by Flusty.

Written in fairly lucid but sometimes quite abstract and jargon-laden fashion, I suspect this book will be too hard a reading for undergraduate courses. However, it will be a very interesting read to those who have some solid grounding in globalization studies and world city debates. For Flusty not only challenges the established conventions and understanding in both strands of literature, but also tells his stories in such multi-faceted ways that go well beyond the wildest dreams of most analysts of globalization and world city formation. While you may not take everything described in this book seriously, *De-Coca-Colonization* is indeed a serious book that must be critically engaged with and reflected upon. I hope readers will find as much fun in reading and critiquing it as me.

#### **References:**

Mittelman, James H. (2000), *The Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rosenberg, Justin (2000), *The Follies of Globalisation Theory*, London: Verso.

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