



Bitter to the Loyal End: Notes on Resisting Left Melancholy, After Globalisation

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abstract

Drawing upon a series of events centred upon an isolated region of New Zealand, this paper explores the (im)possibilities of resisting left melancholy after the protests against globalisation. In the face of what seems to be symbolised by the protests as a return to traditional binaries of the oppressed and the oppressors, the local and global, and of economics and culture, we offer a reading that suggests that these binaries must continue to be kept in abeyance, at least essentially. Despite the obvious mobilising potential of the globalisation narrative, we suggest that there is much cause to resist the temptation to simply conjure up the spirits of the past to our service.

Introduction

There is a sense in which the recent public protests against globalisation have enabled critical scholars and activists everywhere to heave somewhat of a collective sigh of relief. After decades of fragmentation and division, we can once again see passionate collective action on our streets. Globalisation seems to signal a return to that which a collective left can once again be mobilised. And yet, perhaps the scene is a little too familiar. The protests against globalisation seem too readily to have conjured up the spirits of the past to their service. While it is encouraging, after such a long hiatus, to see a critique of political-economy once again placed on centre stage, it appears to have come at the cost of erasing the last few decades of struggle to negotiate a balance between a politics of redistribution and recognition.

One wonders if, perhaps, the protests against globalisation reflect what Wendy Brown (after Walter Benjamin) has called left melancholy. As Brown relays it, this left melancholy involves “a mournful, conservative, backward-looking attachment to a feeling, analysis, or relationship that has been rendered thing like and frozen”.¹ In this vein, globalisation has become an object, not so much of analysis, but simply collective

1 Brown, W. (2000) ‘Resisting Left Melancholia’, in P. Gilroy, L. Grossberg and A. McRobbie (eds.) *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*. London: Verso, p. 23.

opposition. As such, it does not represent the resolution of the political and intellectual difficulties that have so immobilised the left, but signals an emotional and intellectual return to a time when things were much simpler. A time when one could clearly identify one's foe and could work, in good conscience, towards its downfall. While the focus on multinationals and their concerted attempts to de-democratise institutions and processes across the globe affords much needed clarity to struggles against globalisation, there is a danger that the linkages with the ambiguous terrain in which people live their daily lives are not being made. As such, insights that might give others hope of resisting the predations of Empire are instead relegated to the status of merely local moments in local histories.

This note from the field offers a reading of a series of events centred upon the West Coast province in the South Island of New Zealand. In terms of a globalisation narrative, the events are entirely familiar. They involve a small community struggling against subjection from the will of a multinational that has the force of law behind its efforts to control not only the community's livelihood, but its history and identity as well. What is perhaps less familiar is that this multinational did not have it entirely its own way. In many ways, as employee Peter Low comments, this was "a victory for small town New Zealand".² And yet, in just as many other ways, the victory resided someplace else. The resistance that could so easily be articulated in terms of a win for the people against globalisation, could just as easily be articulated as a loss.

We focus upon these issues as a contribution to resisting left melancholy. This resistance, we hope, will emerge from a growing recognition that complexity and action are not mutually incompatible. If the public demonstrations against globalisation are to have wider effects, it seems to us that they must evidence an ability to grapple with the many ambiguities inherent in resisting globalisation. The bitter story we explore here does not revolve around a(n often much desired) simple centre, but a complex interplay of factors quite particular to the location in which they play out. This location cannot simply be reduced to the 'other' of globalisation. As a complex site within an overdetermined history, this location is neither local nor global, neither simply for nor against globalisation. We offer this reading as part of an effort, after the globalisation protests, to reconsider the limits of 'location' and 'resistance' in our tales from the global field.

Total Despair?

Our account begins with a local lad, Daniel O'Regan, who wrote to his local newspaper declaring: "I feel shattered. My soul aches. My stomach is queasy. My heart is in tatters. Yours in total despair".³ For Daniel, and many others, a visceral sense of loss and mourning was experienced upon hearing the news. For Daniel, and many others, their sense of where they had come from, and where they would be going, lay shattered. They

2 Quoted in *The Greymouth Evening Star* (28th March, 2001) 'DB's position remains unclear', p.1.

3 Letter to the Editor, *The Press* (27th March, 2001), p.4.

had, after all, stared into the abyss that naturally follows upon hearing of the closing of one's local brewery. The despair, however, was far from total.

In no time at all, what would normally have been a silent operational business decision – involving the 'rationalising' of brewery operations – was soon catapulted to the forefront of the New Zealand public's imagination and attention. Closing the Monteith's plant on the West Coast was quickly characterised as "the latest in a string of stupid decisions by greedy, arrogant overseas-owned corporations putting profit ahead of their staff and local communities".⁴ With characteristic West Coast candour, DB (Dominion Breweries) was transformed from purveyors of "the working man's brew," to simply a bunch of "Dumb Bastards".⁵

It soon became clear that there was more at stake than the closing of a factory. With everyone seemingly aware that Monteith's selling point "was the history, culture, and mystique of the Coast,"⁶ closing the plant seemed to strike at the heart of much more than just local jobs and community. The success that DB had in building the Monteith's brand through exploiting the mythology of the West Coast, and its centrality to idealised New Zealand identity, meant that conventional relations of commodification did not entirely apply. As the editorial in *The Press* made clear, while the rationale for closing the Greymouth brewery made sense if you were "an accountant", it did not "if you have half an ear for the heartbeat of New Zealanders".⁷

All across the country an extended debate quickly ensued over various aspects of the Monteith's case. Readers were informed that DB was not even a New Zealand company. As with breweries across the globe, DB had long since slipped from local ownership. It was, in fact, now owned by a large regional brewer called Asia Pacific Breweries (APB) based in Singapore, which in turn, was partly owned by brewing giant Heineken.⁸ The local quickly became global. We were soon reading about

4 Quoted in *The Greymouth Evening Star* (23rd March, 2001) 'DB - dumb bastards...', p.1.

5 Damien O'Connor's play on the acronym DB was picked up and widely reported in the various New Zealand newspapers. "They clearly have rebranded themselves 'DB – Dumb Bastards'." See, for example *The Greymouth Evening Star* (23rd March, 2001) 'DB - dumb bastards...', p.1; *The New Zealand Herald* (23rd March, 2001) 'DB drops bombshell on the Coast', p.3; *The Evening Post* (27th March, 2001) 'DB fronts up to bitter backlash', p.1; *The Dominion* (28th March, 2001) 'Monteith's still toast of the Coast', p.3; *The Press* (28th March, 2001) 'A toast to the Coast', p.1. Damien O'Connor is the Labour Government's member of parliament for the West Coast-Tasman electorate whose comments deriding DB's decision seemed to put him at odds with his government's policy of encouraging foreign investment and free trade.

6 Quoted in *The Press* (28th March, 2001) 'Consumer Power', p.8.

7 Quoted in *The Press* (26th March, 2001) 'DB brews up a storm', p.4.

8 DB's annual report for 2000 states that, following a successful takeover, APB had increased its shareholding in DB from 58.39% to 76.63% (DB Group Limited (2000) Annual Report to Shareholders). In 2001 this holding had increased to 76.93%. APB was originally established as a joint venture between Fraser & Neave Limited and Heineken N.V. in 1931. Today APB operates 14 breweries in eight countries. In addition to DB's portfolio of brands, APB's brands include, Tiger Beer, Heineken and Amstel amongst many others. APB is recognised as "one of Asia's leading multinational corporations." Fraser & Neave and Heineken N.V have retained control of APB with 37.9% and 42.5% respective, share of equity (Asia Pacific Breweries Limited (2000) Annual Report).

“multinational brewer DB,”⁹ and claims that parent company APB was reconsidering the future of their three remaining breweries in New Zealand.

Politicians from across the political spectrum made various contributions to the debate. Local Labour Member of Parliament (MP), Damien O’Connor used DB’s foreign ownerships links to mobilise and justify his call for a boycott of DB products as a way for the public to express their opposition to the “multinational consumption of minor players”.¹⁰ Conservative National MP, Nick Smith, declared that “DB have exploited the heritage and character of the West Coast to market Monteith’s and have made a serious error in now turning their back on the Coast”.¹¹ The Green Party’s co-leader, Rod Donald, highlighted the Monteith’s Affair as an example of the “fallacy promoted by the government that an open investment regime will have a net benefit for New Zealand”.¹² In his press release, Donald suggested that incidents like the Monteith’s Affair served as a double blow to New Zealand in terms of contributing to the Balance of Payments deficit and the loss of local jobs as multinationals once again “put profits ahead of local staff and the community”.¹³ New Zealand First leader Winston Peters argued that the Monteith’s Affair was symptomatic of the Government’s “lack of ideas on regional development”. According to Peters, the efforts of successive Ministers amounted to “weasel words” as industry still “drifts to Auckland while heartland New Zealand is left to atrophy”.¹⁴

DB’s decision was widely seen as another example of Auckland’s development coming at a direct cost to the West Coast and other regions.¹⁵ It was this sense of depredation of the regions, argued *The Press*, that was fuelling the anger of so many people.¹⁶ It was soon clear that this was not simply going to be one more factory closure in a long line; something was different. A raw nerve had been exposed. Publican Rosemarie Toal

9 For this description of DB and for variations see, for example, *The Dominion* (23rd March, 2001) ‘Brewery closure has West Coast MP foaming’, p.6; *The Greymouth Evening Star* (24th March, 2001) ‘Monteith’s boycott calls grow off Coast’, p.1; *The New Zealand Herald* (24th March, 2001) ‘Brewery’s end sparks call for a beer boycott’, p.13; *The Press* (24th March, 2001) ‘DB faces consumer fury over Monteith’s closure’, p.1; *The Evening Post* (28th March, 2001) ‘Bitter to the loyal end’, p.1.

10 Quoted in *The New Zealand Herald* (24th March, 2001) ‘Brewery’s end sparks call for a beer boycott’, p.13.

11 Quoted in *The Otago Daily Times* (24th March, 2001) ‘Green MP urges Coast to start brewery after Monteith’s move’, p.29.

12 *The Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand* (26th March, 2001) ‘Foreign ownership makes BoP deficit worse’, Press release.

13 *The Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand* (26th March, 2001) ‘Foreign ownership makes BoP deficit worse’, Press release.

14 *New Zealand First Party* (23rd March, 2001) ‘Spot the difference. Govt lacks regional policy’, Press release.

15 For a particularly vitriolic discussion of these issues see *The Press* (28th March, 2001) ‘Consumer Power’, p.8. For a more circumspect discussion see *The Press* (28th March, 2001) ‘Coast deserves its Brewery’, p.9.

16 See *The Press* (26th March, 2001) ‘DB brews up a storm’, p.4.

seemed to sum up how many felt: “We’ve been kicked in the guts too often and I don’t think we should stand for this ...I think the whole thing is very, very selfish”.¹⁷ From the very first days the public response was geared towards more than simply passive regional animosity. While there were those who suggested the move was “just another case of Auckland – A for abyss – sucking up this country’s resources,”¹⁸ there was a growing commitment to actually do something about it.

Bitter Retractions?

In the wake of extensive public pressure, DB was forced to re-evaluate what they largely considered a matter of management prerogative. Having made a press release on the 22nd of March advising of the closure of the plant, by the 27th they were advising that the decision had substantially been reversed. There was now to be a “significant volume of Monteith’s” that would continue to be brewed on the Coast. Mobilising the sort of PR speak that George Orwell would have had a field day with, DB explained their change of heart on the basis of a

...huge outpouring of support for us to retain the origins of Monteith’s beer on the West Coast. We have listened to people’s concerns and despite the fact the 150 year-old brewery is in major need of an upgrade, and has been struggling to keep up with demand for product for the past two years, we have decided to keep it open.¹⁹

The Press commented, rather laconically, that “DB’s change of heart also followed a 20cents fall in the company’s share price”.²⁰ Celebrations were short-lived, however, as concerns mounted for the fate of the 15 brewery workers made redundant the previous week. Reports that DB was “obviously” not going to revert to the brewery’s original staffing levels did little to allay fears that the plant would be turned into a museum-type brewery.²¹ Despite reassurance, less than 24 hours after the initial announcement, DB was served ‘union papers’ calling for “the immediate reinstatement of staff” and the ending of “an unlawful lockout”.²²

‘Talks’ over DB’s plans for the brewery’s staffing numbers and production levels soon stalemated. A meeting scheduled for the 29th was postponed with both parties heading for their lawyers as the risk of industrial action escalated. The following morning DB appeared to back down once again, announcing the withdrawal of the redundancy notices and a return to full production starting the following week while management

17 Quoted in *The Greymouth Evening Star* (26th March, 2001) ‘Shutters go up against DB products’, p.1.

18 Letter to the Editor, *The Press* (26th March, 2001), p.4.

19 Both of these quotations are taken from the *Dominion Breweries Media Release* (27th March, 2001) ‘DB Breweries Responds to Calls to Keep West Coast Brewery Open’, Press release.

20 Quoted in *The Press* (28th March, 2001) ‘A toast to the Coast’, p.1.

21 Quoted in *The Nelson Mail* (28th March, 2001) ‘DB reassures Coasters’, p.6.

22 Quoted in *The Greymouth Evening Star* (28th March, 2001) ‘Union goes into bat for workers’, p.1.

reviewed production and staffing levels.²³ The news quickly had the Food Service Workers Union claiming victory, while commenting that the solidarity shown by the West Coast community in particular was one of the many positive outcomes.²⁴

It wasn't until almost four months later that the turmoil and uncertainty over the brewery's future was in some sense settled. It took until the 16th of May for DB to reveal its plans publicly. Both Auckland and Greymouth would brew all five beers in the Monteith's range with the production split being determined by "ongoing market demand, brand growth, export opportunities and production scheduling".²⁵ Ten of the fifteen full-time workers were to be retained, while the other five were to be offered jobs at DB's Waitemata Brewery in Auckland, or redundancy.

With none of the staff taking up the transfer offer or accepting voluntary redundancy, it took until the 13th of July before it was known who the five redundant workers would be. When the announcement came, it was no surprise that those who had "campaigning hardest" to save the brewery had lost their jobs.²⁶ The five marked for redundancy were identified by *The Press* as "the public face of the campaign". Peter Low, union delegate, and one of those made redundant, commented: "I feel that they got rid of the people that actually worked extremely hard to reopen the brewery... Obviously they want to run the business with people who they think they'll have on their side..."²⁷

Resisting Left Melancholy?

Exactly what turned the normally effective rhetoric of being forced to make 'difficult decisions' in order to fully utilise existing capacity, into a nationwide debate over identity, history, and the obligations of companies to their community, is of course hard to say. What seems clear is that the central issues were not simply economic,²⁸ and that the processes at play were neither simply alien nor alienating. While one could certainly

23 The *Greymouth Evening Star* (30th March, 2001) 'All workers told to front up for work on Monday', p.1.

24 *Services and Food Workers Union Press Release* (30th March, 2001) 'Union claims victory as DB buckles', Press release.

25 Quoted in DB Group Limited (2001) 'Annual report to shareholders', p.9.

26 According to the headline in *The Press* (13th July, 2001) 'DB lays off staff who campaigned hardest for plant', p.3.

27 Both of these quotations appeared in *The Press* (13th July, 2001) 'DB lays off staff who campaigned hardest for plant', p.3.

28 It is important to note that DB's decision to close the brewery was not made on the basis of poor performance on the part of the brand. Rather, as many commentators dryly noted, Monteith's was a victim of its own success. DB's decision was justified because "[w]ith the increasing popularity of premium craft beers the West Coast brewery has been running at maximum capacity. Volume has grown by 250% since 1995 and to meet continued levels of production the brewery would have to undergo a significant and costly upgrade." *New Zealand Brewer's Network* (22nd March, 2001) 'Closure of West Coast brewery and transfer of production', retrieved from <http://www.brewing.co.nz>

construct the story in terms of resistance to globalisation, one could just as easily construct it in terms of community acceptance. This was especially the case in terms of the community's relationship with the brand. How we make sense of such seeming contradictions can perhaps lead us up the path to resisting left melancholy. Here the focus is not so much on the emotional retrieval of binaries that worked in the past and that provide consolation in the present, as it is on developing critique that attempts to grapple with the contradictions at play.

Questioning Location

Arif Dirlik argues that “global capitalism represents an unprecedented penetration of local society globally by the economy and culture of capital, so that the local understood in a ‘traditional’ sense may be less relevant than ever”.²⁹ What was increasingly obvious in the Monteith's Affair was that traditional conceptualisations of the local (and the global) in terms of a topographic imaginary were inadequate, and often obstructed our ability to account for the processes at play. The local and the global were not objects but discursive effects with a currency that was anything but essential. Making sense of location is not simply a matter of knowing a place on a map, as it is of articulating a relation within an overdetermined history. As such, we are drawn to exercise considerable caution over moving too quickly to accept any particular logic as the key to making sense of the issues at hand. Quite simply, neither topography, economics, culture, or class, can be turned to as an escape from complexity.

What we have seen in the Monteith's Affair is that location is intimately tied into the complex history of the region, the country, and indeed post-colonial relations more generally. In many ways, despite the affair ostensibly revolving around the quite precise material location of a factory, very little of the discussion and debate was actually centred on the material relations of the factory and the plight of the workers. As such, we can see that the location that mattered was in fact what might ordinarily be understood to be quite imaginary. And yet it was, perhaps, precisely this imaginarity that facilitated the widespread mobilisation of support. The ideal and the material were not so much poles apart, as intimately interrelated. Born and bred Coaster Selwyn (Sel) Thomas put it this way: “they [non-Coasters and Aucklanders in particular] may not know where Greymouth is, or want to come here, but they love the way it's made in some quaint town in the South Island and that's what they are paying for”.³⁰ While location may be a key part of the brand's integrity and appeal, it was widely recognised that this location did not exist in any simple one (or three, for that matter) dimensional way.

The Monteith's Affair reminds us that the truth of location is very much a socio-political and historical product. As such, we need to be focused not so much on what is

29 Dirlik, A. (1996) ‘The Global in the Local. Global /Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary’, in R. Wilson and W. Dissanayake (eds.) *Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics and Society*. Durham: Duke University, p.28.

30 Quoted in *The New Zealand Herald* (31st March, 2001) ‘Beer's secret is Coaster's pride’, p.21.

true in some essential sense, but what traffics as truth, and the processes that facilitate that traffic. Furthermore, we come to see that what comes to be accepted as true, to be *real-is-ed*, depends in no small part upon the active participation or consent of the actors involved. The logic of the truth that comes to matter is not the logic of calculation, but of history and politics.

Establishing concrete historical ties to the West Coast has been an essential ingredient in the make-up of the Monteith's brand, with each bottle boldly declaring "proud brewer to the West Coast since 1858".³¹ Yet as *The Evening Post* points out, "this was either a wild exaggeration or a simple error because the Coast was still an unsettled wilderness then, and the Reefton brewer where William Monteith made the first brew was not around until the 1880s".³² Consequently, the years in which the Monteith's legend was supposedly established, were years in which Monteith's never actually existed.

Indeed, if historical accuracy is as essential as the marketing suggests, then there are other breweries that have a greater claim to the "authentic West Coast" label than Monteith's. Miner's Brewery, for example, a 100% Westport owned and operated brewery, positions itself on the strength of "good beer and West Coast loyalty". Yet, Miner's Brewery remains a minnow outside of the West Coast region of Buller, supplying only a handful of outlets in other parts of the Coast. What we see here is that what counts as true has little to do with the authentic history but is instead largely a function of what is widely known as 'new paint and perks'. That is to say, as *The Press* reported, Miner's Brewery's modest success has largely been a function of having been squeezed out by "financial incentives offered to publicans by the brewery giants, such as new paint jobs, recarpeting, loans, and overseas trips".³³

To many of those involved in this affair, calling a beer 'Monteith's' implies, by definition, that the beer has come from the West Coast. The Monteith's Affair, in this sense, involves a violation of what seems to be fundamental truths concerning the relationship between production and place.³⁴ In a letter to the editor of *The Greymouth Evening Star*, Taryn Bell, Andrew Palmer and Allison Sullivan demonstrate this keen sense of kinship between production and place: "Speight's signifies the South. Lion Red is Auckland. CD from Canterbury. Monteith's is the Coast. Don't take it away – it is part of us and we are sure the brew, and sales, will suffer as a result".³⁵

And yet, when we look at the example of Speight's, a beer that is intimately tied to the uniqueness of the southern city of Dunedin and the Otago region in which it resides, we see a quite different structure of authenticity. For Speight's, there is little challenge to their claim to be the 'Pride of the South,' despite the fact that the closest most of their

31 Quoted in *The Evening Post* (28th March, 2001) 'Home is where the Monteith's (still) is', p.1.

32 Quoted in *The Evening Post* (28th March, 2001) 'Home is where the Monteith's (still) is', p.1.

33 All the quotes in this paragraph are taken from *The Press* (26th March, 2001) 'Angry Coasters boycott DB', p.7.

34 As Gerry Morris put it: "You wouldn't move Guinness out of Dublin." Quoted in *The Greymouth Evening Star* (24th March, 2001) 'Monteith's boycott calls grow off Coast', p.1.

35 Letter to the Editor, *The Greymouth Evening Star* (26th March, 2001), p.5.

beer gets to the Dunedin brewery is when it is driven past on the back of a truck on its 400km journey from Christchurch. Curiously, being the 'Pride of the South' does not demand that the contents of Speight's cans and bottles be, in fact, brewed in the South. For Speights' owners, Lion Breweries, such details are inconsequential. According to Lion Corporate affairs director, Graham Seatter, just because Speights' beer had traditionally been brewed in Dunedin since 1876, one should not infer "that anybody takes from that statement the meaning that the beer in that bottle is brewed in Dunedin".³⁶ This contradiction seems to be magnified when we note that part of the protest against Monteith's involved switching to Speight's. However we come to understand location, it cannot simply be reduced to an expression of the local and the global. The location that matters is more than a matter of empirical facts.

Questioning Resistance

In this case we have seen the calling into question of the hegemony that has maintained divisions between the interests of workers and consumers; that has enabled the commodification of tradition in the name of brand building and ownership, and that has installed performativity as the legitimate mediating logic between the community and its resources. And yet this frontline in the battle for democracy hardly signalled wholesale resistance. What makes this case so interesting is the complex interplay between complicity and resistance. And as numerous writers across the social sciences and humanities have recently come to realise, resistance is a far more complex process than the dominant image of a challenge to sovereign authority would have us believe. Questioning resistance is an important element in being able to resist left melancholy.

While some may wish to view this case as a moment of pure resistance to globalisation there is very much a sense that this resistance came by way of, and lent support to, that which is integral to globalisation. While it may, or may not, be the case that the West Coasters' are honest, blunt, and upfront, as Damien O'Connor suggests, it is certainly the case that they sought to exercise those traditional values by way of seeking to protect the very modern virtues of the "West Coast brand that we have promoted so proudly."³⁷ While *de jure*, the scene was one where corporate ownership and control of the brand was unquestioned, *de facto* this ownership and control was far more ambiguous. As one letter to the editor made clear, "DB may own the brewery and the Monteith's name. They do not own the people who keep the brand alive and built it into one of the company's most successful labels".³⁸

36 Quoted in *The Otago Daily Times* (3rd September, 2001) 'Trouble brews on label', p.3. Unfortunately for Graham Seatter at least one person did, lodging a complaint with the Commerce Commission that resulted in the phrase "traditionally brewed at Speight's Brewery, Dunedin, since 1876" being removed from the labels and replaced with "traditional brewers of fine ales since 1876."

37 Damien O'Connor quoted in *The New Zealand Herald* (24th March, 2001) 'Brewery's end sparks call for a beer boycott', p.13. Note the inherent contradiction here between truth and brands.

38 Letter to the Editor, *The Greymouth Evening Star* (26th March, 2001), p.5.

Here we see how brands have become inextricably tied to how people make sense of themselves and their communities. The public interest in this issue has been reflected in the popularity of Naomi Klein's book *No Logo*.³⁹ This book, as with many others, not only identifies how brands have come to dominate, but characteristically offers suggestions for how people might resist such domination. As the name suggests, this resistance typically takes the form of a denial of the meaning system mobilised by the brands. What is of particular note in the Monteith's Affair is that the meaning system was, if anything, over-identified with rather than resisted.

In the Monteith's Affair, people did not protest at the meaning being mobilised by the brand, but protested by way of that meaning. The corporate 'free-loading' upon the place of the West Coast within the local national imaginary, carried with it a cost that they had not accounted for. DB's ability to mobilise media and use its economic scale as a platform for building a proprietary brand was exactly what made them most vulnerable. This was a point not lost on the locals: "The big corporates only understand one thing, money. If you want to hurt them, hit them in the pocket. Don't drink at DB-owned pubs, don't drink DB products. And don't drink Monteith's until it returns to the Coast".⁴⁰

While authenticity was one of the central bases of the resistance – principally the possibility that the brew would no longer be true to its claim of being a West Coast beer and of valuing tradition and history – in many ways resistance depended upon, and recognised, the value of a certain kind of inauthenticity. The public support for the beer could well be characterised in terms of a melancholic response itself. The West Coast representing both that which has been lost, and that which is so central to contemporary New Zealand identity. *The Evening Post's* summation of the relationship between the location and the brand was typical of how many felt:

The brew is loaded with egalitarian symbolism; a beer made by craftsmen rather than machines, in a clean, green place where old values still matter. To drink Monteith's is to taste a slower, simple way of life. It is a slice of heritage.⁴¹

For many, what Monteith's had come to represent was not simply some story made up to sell bottles of beer but a reflection that was anchored in 'reality'. Moving production outside of the West Coast directly contravened the authenticity of the brand to such an extent, claimed public relations consultant Gerry Morris, that "DB's integrity and credibility was now totally suspect".⁴² The Mayor of Grey District argued: "Monteith's is a West Coast name. When it's made in Auckland it's not a West Coast product – and everyone will know it".⁴³ The public too were well aware of the selective nature of the reality of brands. In a letter to the editor, locals asked if "the sign outside the brewery

39 Klein, N. (2000) *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. New York: Picador.

40 Letter to the Editor, *The Greymouth Evening Star* (23rd March, 2001), p.6.

41 Quoted in *The Evening Post* (28th March, 2001) 'Bitter to the loyal end', p.1.

42 Quoted in *The Greymouth Evening Star* (27th March, 2001) 'DB bosses call for capital meeting', p.1.

43 Quoted in *The New Zealand Herald* (24th March, 2001) 'Brewery's end sparks call for a beer boycott', p.13.

proudly tells of the involvement in the local community since 1868. Is it now going to be replaced with one saying it was sold out to the masses in Auckland?”⁴⁴

The story we have told has not simply been a heroic tale of resistance in which the local community repels the domination of the insidious corporation. Such a story could have been told if we had simply retrieved, without question, any of a range of locating binaries. To do so would certainly have been easier. And potentially more politically digestible. The question then would have to be asked as to the nature of those politics. The problem of left melancholy is that of a politics of the past dominating our engagement with the present. Resisting left melancholy begins with recognising this.

Bitter Aftertastes?

David Held reminds us that globalisation involves processes that are not simply either ‘economic’ or ‘cultural’. He suggests that globalisation demands “rethinking the nature, form and content of democratic politics in the face of the complex intermeshing of local, national, regional and global relations and processes”.⁴⁵ Our engagement with the Monteith’s Affair has been motivated by the desire to translate some of its complexities and ambiguities into our collective reading of globalisation and its challenges. Whether or not we see the affair as having a somewhat bitter aftertaste – in terms of the (im)possibilities of resistance, the dynamics of brand culture, the marginalisation of workers, and so on – is in some sense conditional upon our ability to make linkages with other ongoing challenges and struggles. This process of articulation does not demand the reduction of globalisation to the binaries that all too often prevail.

Wendy Brown suggests that breaking free from left melancholy requires “a spirit that embraces the notion of a deep and indeed unsettling transformation of society rather than recoiling at this prospect”.⁴⁶ It is without doubt that much of the public protest against globalisation is infused with the spirit of transformation. What is less clear is that this hoped and worked for transformation is able to break free from collective desires that readily come to worship long lost gods. What these notes have sought to offer is a reminder of some of the complexities of contemporary processes of globalisation. These notes are not offered in what Gibson-Graham have called a debunking mode (describing what something is and should not be)⁴⁷ but in the spirit of making links between the protests on the street, and the complexities of the struggles of local communities. These links are not always obvious. And, in many cases, local struggles are not even recognised as struggles against globalisation, either by those who are involved, or those who are spectating.

44 Letter to the Editor, *The Greymouth Evening Star* (26th March, 2001), p.5.

45 Held, D. (1995) *Democracy and the Global Order: From Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, p.ix.

46 Brown, W. (2000) ‘Resisting Left Melancholia’, in P. Gilroy, L. Grossberg and A. McRobbie (eds.) *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*. London: Verso, p.28.

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