

**“What Is Globalization? The Definitional Issue – Again”**

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## **What Is Globalization? The Definitional Issue – Again**

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### **Abstract:**

Knowledge of globalization is substantially a function of how the concept is defined. After tracing the history of ‘global’ vocabulary, this paper suggests several principles that should inform the way globality (the condition) and globalization (the trend) are defined. On this basis four common conceptions of the term are rejected in favour of a fifth that identifies globalization as the spread of transplanetary – and in recent times more particularly suprateritorial – connections between people. Half a dozen qualifications are incorporated into this definition to distinguish it from globalist exaggerations.

Keywords: globality, globalization

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*There are few terms that we use so frequently but which are in fact as poorly conceptualized as globalization.*

Anthony Giddens<sup>1</sup>

*We don't know what globalization is, but we have to act.*

Veerapon Sopa<sup>2</sup>

## **Introduction**<sup>3</sup>

Definition is not everything, but everything involves definition. Knowledge of globalization is substantially a function of how the word is defined. Thus every study of globalization should include a careful and critical examination of the term itself. A muddled or misguided core concept compromises our overall comprehension of the problem. In contrast, a sharp and revealing definition promotes insightful, interesting and empowering knowledge, an understanding that helps us to shape our destiny in positive directions.

Notions of globalization have grabbed many an intellectual imagination over the past two decades. In academic and lay circles alike, many have pursued an intuition that this concept could provide an analytical lynchpin for understanding social change in the contemporary world. 'Globalization' is not the only entry point for such an enquiry, of course, but it has seemed a pretty good one.

Yet what lies in this word? What, precisely, is 'global' about globalization?<sup>4</sup> The present paper develops a definition in five main steps. The first section below traces the rise of the vocabulary of globalization in academic and lay thinking. The second section elaborates some general principles about the nature and role of definition. The third section identifies several analytical cul-de-sacs with respect to globalization, that is, definitions that generate redundant and in some respects also unhelpful knowledge. The fourth section sets out a

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<sup>1</sup>'On Globalization', excerpts from a keynote address at the UNRISD Conference on Globalization and Citizenship, 1 December 1996 – at [www.unrisd.org](http://www.unrisd.org) (under 'viewpoints').

<sup>2</sup>Peasant activist in North East Thailand, interviewed in Bangkok on 10 June 2002.

<sup>3</sup>An earlier version of this paper was presented at a symposium of the International Political Science Association in Montreal, 24-26 October 2002. The paper revises the second chapter of *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), in preparation for a second edition of that book.

<sup>4</sup>J. Maclean, 'Philosophical Roots of Globalization: Philosophical Routes to Globalization', in R. Germain (ed.), *Globalization and Its Critics: Perspectives from Political Economy* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 3-66.

conceptualization of globalization as the spread of transplanetary and, in present times more specifically, supraterritorial social relations.

To stress that this analysis does not succumb to globalist exaggerations, the fifth section discusses half a dozen key qualifications to this definition. First, territorial geography continues to have importance alongside the new supraterritoriality. Second, globality is interrelated with, rather than separate from, other social spaces. Third, the global is not logically contradictory to the local. Fourth, globalization is not intrinsically a culturally homogenizing process. Fifth, global relations have spread unevenly across regions and social sectors, so that people experience globality to different extents. Sixth, globalization is a thoroughly political question, significantly empowering some and disempowering others.

### **The Rise of Globe-Talk**

Although the term ‘globalization’ was not coined until the second half of the twentieth century, it has a longer pedigree. In the English language, the noun ‘globe’ began to denote ‘the planet’ several hundred years ago, once it was determined that the earth was round.<sup>5</sup> The adjective ‘global’ began to designate ‘world scale’ in the late nineteenth century, in addition to its earlier meaning of ‘spherical’.<sup>6</sup> The verb ‘globalize’ appeared in the 1940s, together with the word ‘globalism’.<sup>7</sup> ‘Globalization’ first entered a dictionary (of American English) in 1961.<sup>8</sup> Notions of ‘globality’, as a condition, have begun to circulate more recently.

The vocabulary of globalization has also spread in other languages over the past several decades. The many examples include *lil 'alam* in Arabic, *quanqiuhua* in Chinese, *mondialisation* in French, *globalizatsia* in Russian and *globalización* in Spanish. Among the major world languages, only Swahili has not (yet) acquired a globalization concept, and that exception is perhaps largely explained by the widespread use of English in elite circles of the African countries concerned. In minor languages, too, we now find *globalisaatio* in Finnish, *bishwavyapikaran* in Nepalese, *luan bo'ot* in Timorese, and so on.

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<sup>5</sup>R. Robertson, ‘Globality’, in N.J. Smelser and P.B. Baltes (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Oxford: Elsevier/Pergamon, 2001), p. 6254.

<sup>6</sup>*The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989 2<sup>nd</sup> edn), vol. VI, p. 582.

<sup>7</sup>O.L. Reiser and B. Davies, *Planetary Democracy: An Introduction to Scientific Humanism* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1944), pp. 212, 219.

<sup>8</sup>*Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* (Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1961), p. 965.

When new vocabulary gains such wide currency across continents and cultures, can it just be explained away as fad? Or does the novel word highlight a significant change in the world, where new terminology is needed to discuss new conditions? For example, when Jeremy Bentham coined the word ‘international’ in the 1780s,<sup>9</sup> the concept caught hold because it resonated of a growing trend of his day, namely, the rise of nation-states and cross-border transactions between them. The current proliferation of global talk also seems unlikely to be accidental. The popularity of the terminology arguably reflects a widespread intuition that contemporary social relations have acquired an important new character. The challenge – indeed, the urgent need – is to move beyond the buzzword to a tight concept.

As a deliberately fashioned analytical tool, notions of the global appeared roughly simultaneously and independently in several academic fields around the early 1980s. In Sociology, for example, Roland Robertson began to ‘interpret globality’ in 1983.<sup>10</sup> Concurrently, Theodore Levitt of the Harvard Business School wrote of ‘the globalization of markets’.<sup>11</sup> These years also saw some researchers in International Relations shift their focus to ‘global interdependence’.<sup>12</sup>

Today the concept of globalization is deployed across disciplines, across the world, across theoretical approaches, and across the political spectrum. Countless academics have rushed to claim the cliché of the day. A host of research institutes, degree programmes, and textbooks now focus on the problem. Since 2000 several new professional global studies associations have also appeared. Some theorists have even presented globalization as the focal point for an alternative paradigm of social enquiry.<sup>13</sup>

Yet ideas of globalization tend to remain as elusive as they are pervasive. We sense that the term means something – and something significant – but we are far from sure what that

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<sup>9</sup>J. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (London: Hafner, 1948 [1789]), p. 326; H. Suganami, ‘A Note on the Origin of the Word “International”’, *British Journal of International Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3 (October 1978), pp. 226-32.

<sup>10</sup>R. Robertson, ‘Interpreting Globality’, in *World Realities and International Studies Today* (Glenside, PA: Pennsylvania Council on International Education, 1983).

<sup>11</sup>T. Levitt, ‘The Globalization of Markets’, *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 61, no. 3 (May-June 1983), pp. 92-102.

<sup>12</sup>R.O. Keohane and J.S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1977); J.N. Rosenau, *The Study of Global Interdependence: Essays on the Transnationalization of World Affairs* (London: Pinter, 1980); R. Maghroori and B. Ramberg (eds), *Globalism versus Realism: International Relations’ Third Debate* (Boulder: Westview, 1982).

something is. Persistent ambiguity and confusion over the term has fed considerable skepticism about ‘globaloney’, ‘global babble’ and ‘glob-blah-blah’.<sup>14</sup> True, many of the objectors have dubious motives, such as vested interests in orthodox theory or an intellectual laziness that resists rethinking conceptual starting points. However, other doubters quite rightly demand clear, precise, explicit, consistent and cogent conceptualization before they will treat globalization as a serious analytical category.

### **Starting Premises for Definition**

Before addressing the challenge of definition here, it is well first of all to reflect on the nature and purpose of the exercise. Four methodological points deserve particular emphasis.

First, definition is more than a lexicographical pastime and on the contrary has key intellectual and political purposes and repercussions. Intellectually, a definition should pave the way to insight. To be maximally helpful, a new notion like globalization should be defined in a way that opens new understanding. It should not merely restate what is already known. Politically, the definition of a key idea should promote values and interests that the definer holds dear. No conceptualization is politically neutral. We therefore need carefully to reflect on the norms and power relations that any definition reflects ... and also (re)produces.

Second, every definition is relative. Each understanding of a key concept reflects a historical moment, a cultural setting, a geographical location, a social status, an individual personality and – as already noted – a political commitment. Indeed, in the details if not in the general framework, every account of an idea is unique. Each person develops a conception that corresponds to her/his experiences and aspirations. No universally endorsable definition is available. To ask everyone to conform to a single view would be to ask many people to abandon themselves. The object of definition is not to discover one understanding that secures universal acceptance, but to generate insight that can be effectively communicated to, and debated with, others.

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<sup>13</sup>J.H. Mittelman, ‘Globalization: An Ascendant Paradigm?’ *International Studies Perspectives*, vol. 3, no. 1 (February 2002), pp. 1-14.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. J. Rosenberg, *The Follies of Globalization Theory: Polemical Essays* (London: Verso, 2001).

Third, no definition is definitive. Definitions of core concepts are necessary to lend clarity, focus and internal consistency to arguments. However, knowledge is a constant process of invention and reinvention. Every definition is tentative and subject to reappraisal. Definition is in motion rather than fixed. The point of the exercise is not to end in a full stop, but to stimulate discussion that prompts further redefinition as situations change and (one hopes) wisdom deepens.

Fourth, the variability of definition means that each formulation should be as clear, precise, explicit and consistent as possible. With clarity, a good definition readily captures and communicates insight. With precision, it brings the issue in question into sharp focus. With explicitness, it leaves a minimum unspoken and to the reader's inference. With consistency, it lends internal coherence from start to finish of an argument. To be sure, no definition ever fully meets these criteria, but it is important to strive for the ideal.

Not everyone agrees with these starting premises, of course. For example, some commentators accept that globalization is a vague concept and see little point in trying to define it in a clear, specific, distinctive way. On this relaxed approach, globalization is a malleable catchall term that can be invoked in whatever way the user finds convenient. Thus many a politician has blamed an undefined 'globalization' for a variety of policy difficulties, sometimes to divert attention from their own failures. Many a social activist has rallied under an unspecified 'anti-globalization' banner, so that this movement has encompassed enormously diverse (and sometimes strikingly contradictory) elements. Many an author and publisher have put 'globalization' into the titles of writings that actually say very little on the subject.

While such loose approaches may be politically and commercially useful, they are deeply unsatisfactory for serious social analysis and the policy decisions that flow from it. Definitions fundamentally shape descriptions, explanations, evaluations, prescriptions and actions. If a definition of a core concept is slippery, then the knowledge built upon it is likely to be similarly shaky and, in turn, the policies constructed on the basis of that knowledge can very well be misguided.

Unfortunately, as the next section indicates, a great deal of thinking about globalization has not followed one or several of the above principles of definition. However, the fact that many

conceptions have gone astray does not mean that there is no way forward with the term. On the contrary, too much is at stake in globalization debates – both theoretically and practically – to abandon the journey.

### **Cul-de-Sacs**

Much if not most existing analysis of globalization is flawed because it is redundant. Such research does not meet the first criterion above, namely, to generate new understanding that is not attainable with other concepts. Four main definitions have led into this cul-de-sac: globalization as internationalization; globalization as liberalization; globalization as universalization; and globalization as westernization. Arguments that build on these conceptions fail to open insights that are not available through preexistent vocabulary. Deployed on any of these four lines, ‘globalization’ provides no analytical value-added. Commentators who reject the novelty and transformative potential of globalization in contemporary history have almost invariably defined the term in one or several of these four redundant ways.

#### *Internationalization*

When globalization is interpreted as internationalization, the term refers to a growth of transactions and interdependence between countries. From this perspective, a more global world is one where more messages, ideas, merchandise, money, investments and people cross borders between national-state-territorial units. For certain authors, like Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, globalization is an especially intense form of internationalization, so that the global is a particular subset of the international.<sup>15</sup> Many other analysts are less discriminating and simply regard the words ‘global’ and ‘international’ as synonyms to be used interchangeably.

Most attempts to quantify globalization have conceived of the process as internationalization. Thus, for example, Dani Rodrik has measured globalization in terms of the current account as

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<sup>15</sup>P. Hirst and G. Thompson, *Globalization in Question: The International Economy and the Possibilities of Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999 2<sup>nd</sup> edn), pp. 7-13.



a proportion of GDP.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the Globalization Index recently developed by A.T. Kearney consultants and *Foreign Policy* magazine is largely calculated with reference to cross-border activities between countries. That is, the index mainly relates to foreign direct investment, international travel, membership in international organizations, international telephone traffic, etc.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, these indicators are measured and compared on a territorial basis, so that one country is said to be more globalized than another.

Ideas of globalization-as-internationalization are attractive insofar as they entail a minimum of intellectual and political adjustments. Global relations of this kind can be examined on the same ontological and methodological grounds as international relations. Global Economics can be the same sort of enquiry as International Economics. The study of Global Politics need not differ substantially from traditional International Politics. Globalization-as-internationalization gives the comforting message that the new can be wholly understood in terms of the familiar.

Indeed, most accounts of globalization-as-internationalization stress that contemporary trends are replaying earlier historical scenarios. In particular, these analyses frequently note that, in proportional terms, levels of cross-border trade, direct investment and permanent migration were as great or greater in the late nineteenth century as they were a hundred years later.<sup>18</sup> The suggestion is that globalization (read international interdependence) is a feature of the modern states-system that ebbs and flows over time. So social researchers can relax and carry on enquiries as before.

Yet these very claims of familiarity and historical repetition constitute strong grounds for rejecting the definition of globalization-as-internationalization. If globality is nothing other than internationality – except perhaps larger amounts of it – then why bother with new vocabulary? No one needed a concept of globalization to make sense of earlier experiences of

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<sup>16</sup>D. Rodrik, *The Global Governance of Trade as if Development Really Mattered* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2001).

<sup>17</sup>'Globalization's Last Hurrah?' *Foreign Policy* (January-February 2002), pp. 38-51.

<sup>18</sup>E.g. R. Zevin, 'Are Financial Markets More Open? If So, Why and with What Effects?' in T. Banuri and J.B. Schor (eds), *Financial Openness and National Autonomy: Opportunities and Constraints* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), pp. 43-83; R. Wade, 'Globalization and Its Limits: Reports of the Death of the National Economy Are Greatly Exaggerated', in S. Berger and R. Dore (eds), *National Diversity and Global Capitalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 60-88; K.H. O'Rourke and J.G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

greater international interaction and interdependence, and this notion is similarly redundant today.

### *Liberalization*

A second common analytical dead-end in discussions of globalization has equated the notion with liberalization. In this case, globalization denotes a process of removing officially imposed restrictions on movements of resources between countries in order to form an ‘open’ and ‘borderless’ world economy. On this understanding, globalization occurs as authorities reduce or abolish regulatory measures like trade barriers, foreign-exchange restrictions, capital controls, and visa requirements.

Using this definition, the study of globalization is a debate about contemporary neoliberal macroeconomic policies. On one side of this argument, many academics, business executives and policymakers support neoliberal prescriptions, with the promise that world-scale liberalization, privatization, deregulation and fiscal restraint will in time bring prosperity, freedom, peace and democracy for all. On the other side, critics in the so-called ‘anti-globalization’ movement oppose neoliberal policies, contending that a *laissez-faire* world economy produces greater poverty, inequality, social conflict, cultural destruction, ecological damage and democratic deficits.

To be sure, large-scale globalization and widespread economic liberalization have transpired concurrently in the past quarter-century. Moreover, this wave of neoliberalism has often played a significant (albeit not necessary) role in facilitating contemporary globalization. However, it is quite something else to conflate the two concepts, so that globalization and liberalization become the same thing. Moreover, such an equation can carry the dubious – and potentially harmful – implication that neoliberalism is the only available policy framework for a more global world.

Indeed, on cross-examination most ‘anti-globalization’ protesters are seen to reject *neoliberal* globalization rather than globalization per se. True, some of these critics have adopted a mercantilist position that advocates ‘de-globalization’ to a world of autarkic regional,

national or local economies.<sup>19</sup> However, most opponents of neoliberalism have sought different approaches to globalization – or ‘alter-globalizations’ – that might better advance human security, ecological integrity, social justice and democracy. Many in mainstream circles, too, have recently suggested that globalization can be rescued with social, environmental and human rights safeguards. They, too, have thereby acknowledged that neoliberal policies are not intrinsic to globalization.

In any case, the language of globalization is unnecessary to rehearse arguments for and against liberal economics. People have debated theories and practices of ‘free’ markets for several centuries without invoking talk of globalization. For example, no one needed the concept of globalization when the international economy experienced substantial liberalization in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, globalization-as-liberalization opens no new insight today.

### *Universalization*

A third cul-de-sac appears in analyses of globalization when the notion is conceived as universalization. In this case globalization is taken to describe a process of dispersing various objects and experiences to people at all inhabited parts of the earth. On these lines, ‘global’ means ‘worldwide’ and ‘everywhere’. Hence there is a ‘globalization’ of business suits, curry dinners, Barbie dolls, anti-terrorism legislation, and so on. Frequently globalization-as-universalization is assumed to entail homogenization with worldwide cultural, economic, legal and political convergence.

Yet this conception, too, opens no new and distinctive insight. To be sure, some striking universalization has transpired in contemporary history. Moreover, substantial cultural destruction in recent times has appeared to lend credence to the homogenization thesis (although, as will be elaborated later, the dynamics of globalization are actually more complex). However, universalization is an age-old feature of world history. The human

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<sup>19</sup>E.g., J. Mander and E. Goldsmith (eds), *The Case against the Global Economy and the Turn to the Local* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996); K. Hewison, *Localism in Thailand: A Study of Globalisation and Its Discontents* (Coventry: ESRC/University of Warwick Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation, Working Paper No. 39/99, 1999).

<sup>20</sup>Cf. A. Marrison (ed.), *Free Trade and Its Reception 1815-1960* (London: Routledge, 1998).

species has spread itself through transcontinental migration for a million years.<sup>21</sup> Various aptly named ‘world religions’ have extended across large expanses of the earth for centuries, and several of these faiths have held explicit universalistic pretensions. Transoceanic trade has distributed various goods over long distances on multiple occasions during the past millennium. No concept of globalization was devised to describe universalization in earlier times, and there is no need to create new vocabulary to analyze this old phenomenon now either.

### *Westernization*

A fourth common conception of globalization has defined it as westernization. As such, globalization is regarded as a particular type of universalization, one in which the social structures of modernity (capitalism, industrialism, rationalism, urbanism, etc.) are spread the world over, destroying pre-existent cultures and local self-determination in the process. Globalization understood in this way is often interpreted as colonization and Americanization, as ‘westoxification’ and an imperialism of McDonald’s and CNN.<sup>22</sup> For these critics, talk of globalization is a hegemonic discourse, an ideology of supposed progress that masks far-reaching destruction and subordination.<sup>23</sup>

To be sure, a cogent case can be made that current large-scale globalization has resulted mainly from forces of modernity like rationalist knowledge, capitalist production, technologies of automation, and bureaucratic governance.<sup>24</sup> (At the same time, early global consciousness arguably facilitated the onset of modernity, too.<sup>25</sup>) In turn, contemporary globalization has often inserted patterns of modern, western social relations more widely and deeply across the planet. Sometimes this westernization has involved violent impositions that could indeed warrant descriptions as imperialism. Moreover, it is true that governance institutions, firms and civil society associations in Western Europe and North America have ranked among the most enthusiastic promoters of contemporary globalization.

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<sup>21</sup>C. Gamble, *Timewalkers: The Prehistory of Global Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>22</sup>Cf. B.R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Ballantine, 1996).

<sup>23</sup>Cf. J. Petras and H. Veltmeyer, *Globalization Unmasked: Imperialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London: Zed, 2001).

<sup>24</sup>Cf. A. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990); Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, ch 4.

<sup>25</sup>R. Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), p. 170.

Yet it is one thing to assert that globalization and westernization have had interconnections and quite another to equate the two developments. After all, modernity and western civilization have appeared in many other guises besides contemporary globalization. Moreover, globalization could in principle take non-western directions (e.g. Buddhist globalization, Islamic globalization, or possible future post-modern globalizations). Also, it is by no means clear that globalization is intrinsically imperialist, given that there are emancipatory transworld social movements as well as exploitative transworld actors and processes.

In any case, westernization, modernization and colonization have a much longer history than contemporary globalization. Perhaps currently prevailing forms of globality could be analyzed as a particular aspect, phase and type of modernity. On this reading, a definition of globalization would need to specify what makes *global* modernity distinctive. Yet in this approach, too, westernization and globalization are not coterminous.

In sum, then, much talk of globalization has been analytically redundant. The four definitions outlined above between them cover most current academic, corporate, official and popular discussions of things global. Critics of ‘globaloney’ are right to assail the historical illiteracy that marks most claims of novelty associated with globalization.

Of course, this is not to suggest that debates about international interdependence, neoliberalism, universalism-versus-cultural diversity, modernity and imperialism are unimportant. Indeed, a well-fashioned concept of globalization could shed significant light on these problems in the present-day context. However, it is not helpful to define globalization as – to treat it as equivalent to – internationalization, liberalization, universalization or westernization. Not only do we thereby merely rehash old knowledge, but we also lose a major opportunity to grasp – and act on – certain key circumstances of our time.

## **A Way Forward**

Fortunately, the four definitions critiqued above do not exhaust the possible definitions of globalization. Important new insight into historically relatively new conditions is available from a fifth conception. This approach identifies globalization as the spread of transplanetary – and in recent times more particularly supraterritorial – connections between people. From

this perspective, globalization involves reductions in barriers to transworld contacts. People become more able – physically, legally, culturally, and psychologically – to engage with each other in ‘one world’.

In this usage, globalization refers to a shift in the nature of social space. This conception contrasts with the other four notions of globalization discussed above, all of which presume (usually implicitly rather than explicitly) a continuity in the underlying character of social geography. To clarify this crucial point, the following pages first discuss the general significance of space in social relations and then elaborate on the features of transplanetary and, more specifically, supraterritorial links. The far-reaching methodological implications of this understanding of globalization are also noted. The next and final section of the paper then highlights several major qualifications to this definition.

### *Spatiality*

The term globality resonates of spatiality. It says something about the arena of human action and experience. In particular, globality identifies the planet – the earthly world as a whole – as a site of social relations in its own right. Talk of the global indicates that people may live together not only in local, provincial, national and regional realms, as well as built environments, but also in transplanetary spaces where the world is a single place.

Why highlight issues of space?<sup>26</sup> Indeed, most social analysis takes the spatial aspect as an unexplored given. Yet geography is a defining feature of social life. Relations between people always occur somewhere: in a place, a location, a domain, an arena, a situation. No description of a social circumstance is complete without a spatial component.

Moreover, no social explanation is complete without a geographical dimension either. Space matters. To take one ready example, geographical differences mean that desert nomads and urban dwellers lead very diverse lives. Space is a core feature – as both cause and effect – of social life. On the one hand, the geographical context shapes the ways that people undertake production, organize governance, form collectivities, construct knowledge, relate to nature,

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<sup>26</sup>On the significance of space in society see, e.g., H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]); D. Gregory and J. Urry (eds), *Social Relations and Spatial Structures* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985); D. Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994).

and experience time. Concurrently, culture, ecology, economics, history, politics and psychology also shape the spatial contours of social relations.

Given these dense interconnections, a change of spatial structure affects society as a whole. A reconfiguration of social geography is intimately interlinked with shifts in patterns of knowledge, production, governance, identity, and social ecology. So a transformation of social space – like globalization – is enveloped in larger dynamics of social change.

### *Globality: Transplanetary Relations and Supraterritoriality*

Globality in the sense of the world as a single social space has two qualities. The more general feature, transplanetary connectivity, has figured in human history for centuries. The more specific characteristic, supraterritoriality, is relatively new to contemporary history. Inasmuch as the recent rise of supraterritoriality marks a striking break with the territorialist geography that came before, this trend potentially has major implications for wider social transformation.

Globality in the broader sense of transplanetary relations refers to social links between people located at points anywhere on earth, within a whole-world context. The global sphere is then a social space in its own right. The world is not simply a collection of smaller geographical units like countries and regions, but also a spatial unit itself. We can therefore draw a key distinction between ‘international relations’ (as exchanges between countries) and ‘global relations’ (as exchanges within the world).

Of course, this more general kind of globality – transplanetary connections between people – is by no means new to the past few decades. As numerous researchers have stressed, the long-distance, intercontinental, world domain has age-old importance in human history. For example, following Martin Bernal, ancient Greek civilization developed from a blend of local, Indo-European, Egyptian and Phoenician influences.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, ancient Greek notions of *oikoumenê* conceived of the total habitable world as a single realm.<sup>28</sup> Janet Abu-Lughod

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<sup>27</sup>M. Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (London: Free Association Books, 1987).

<sup>28</sup>A.L. Kroebner, ‘The Ancient Greek *Oikoumenê* as an Historic Culture Aggregate’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 75 (1945), pp. 9-20; U. Hannerz, *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places* (London: Routledge, 1996).

describes a ‘world system’ of the thirteenth century that extended from Flanders to China.<sup>29</sup> Fernand Braudel and others emphasize that capitalism has had transworld components from its beginnings.<sup>30</sup> A global imagination inspired voyagers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to undertake the first circumnavigations of the earth. Cartographers in Europe elaborated maps of the world-as-a-whole from the sixteenth century, including the production in Venice in 1688 of a printed globe that measured more than a meter in diameter and included considerable detail on most of the world’s coasts.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, contemporary transplanetary links are denser than those of any previous epoch.<sup>32</sup> More people, more often, and more intensely engage with the world as a single place. Volumes of transworld communications, diseases, finance, investment, travel and trade have never been as great. DDT now appears in the eggs of arctic penguins, even though the pesticide has ever been used in the polar regions.

True, problems with data make it difficult to measure the scale of globality very precisely. Most established indicators refer to cross-border rather than transplanetary flows. Indeed, the term ‘statistics’ shares a common root with ‘state’ and has historically been a largely state-driven activity.<sup>33</sup> As things currently stand, therefore, we must often infer global connectivity from international data, and thereby can easily slip into a (redundant) conception of globalization-as-internationalization. The development of distinctively global measures is a priority for contemporary social studies.

For the moment, though, a number of international statistics suggest a substantial recent growth of global links. For example, world cross-border trade expanded from \$629 billion in 1960 to \$7,430 billion in 2001.<sup>34</sup> Outstanding balances on syndicated international commercial bank loans burgeoned from under \$200 billion in the early 1970s to well over

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<sup>29</sup>J.L. Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>30</sup>F. Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century. Volume III: The Perspective of the World* (London: Collins, 1984 [1979]).

<sup>31</sup>J. Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-visioning World Politics* (London: Routledge, 1998), ch 1; J.E. Wills, *1688: A Global History* (New York: Norton, 2001), pp. 9-10.

<sup>32</sup>See, for example, the large range of data assembled in D. Held *et al.*, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999).

<sup>33</sup>Cf. M. Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 308.

<sup>34</sup>NB: all \$ figures refer to United States dollars.



\$8,000 billion in 2001.<sup>35</sup> Transnational companies increased in number from 7,000 in the late 1960s to 65,000 today, with about 850,000 foreign affiliates between them.<sup>36</sup> Aggregate foreign direct investment went from \$1.7 trillion in 1990 to \$6.6 trillion in 2001.<sup>37</sup> In addition, thousands of strategic alliances between firms have further interlinked business activities across the world. The count of active transnational civil society associations multiplied from less than 2,000 in 1960 to over 20,000 in 2000.<sup>38</sup> International tourist arrivals totalled 693 million worldwide in 2001.<sup>39</sup>

No numerical measures of global consciousness are available; however, it seems safe to venture that people today are generally more aware than ever before of the planet as a single place and are more inclined to conceive of the earth as humanity's home. A hundred years ago global consciousness was generally limited to fleeting perceptions in limited elite circles. Today, with globes in the classroom, world weather reports in the newspaper and global products in the cupboard, globality is part of everyday awareness for hundreds of millions of people across the planet.

However, the distinctiveness of recent globalization involves more than scope and intensity. Qualitatively, too, much of today's global connectivity is different. Unlike earlier times, contemporary globalization has been marked by a large-scale spread of supraterritoriality.

As the word suggests, 'supraterritorial' relations are social connections that transcend territorial geography. They are relatively delinked from territory, that is, domains mapped on the land surface of the earth, plus any adjoining waters and air spheres. Territorial space is plotted on the three axes of longitude, latitude and altitude. In territorial geography, place refers to locations plotted on this three-dimensional grid; distance refers to the extent of territory separating territorial places; and boundary refers to a territorial delimitation of plots on the earth's surface.

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<sup>35</sup> 68<sup>th</sup> *Annual Report* (Basle: Bank for International Settlements, 1998), p. 144; *Quarterly Review, December 2001* (Basle: Bank for International Settlements, 2001), p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *World Investment Report 2002 (Overview)* (New York: United Nations, 2002), p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Yearbook of International Organizations 2001/2002, Volume 5* (Munich: Saur/Union of International Associations, 2001), pp. 33, 35.

<sup>39</sup> [www.world-tourism.org/market\\_research/facts&figures/menu.htm](http://www.world-tourism.org/market_research/facts&figures/menu.htm).

Yet territorial locations, territorial distances and territorial borders do not define the whole geography of today's transplanetary flows. These global connections often also have qualities of transworld simultaneity (that is, they extend anywhere across the planet at the same time) and transworld instantaneity (that is, they move anywhere on the planet in no time). Thus, for example, on average 3,000 cups of Nescafé are reputedly drunk around the world every second,<sup>40</sup> and telephone links permit immediate communication across the ocean as readily as across the street. Global relations of the supraterritorial kind are not adequately mapped on a territorial grid.

Globality-as-supraterritoriality is evident in countless facets of contemporary life. For instance, jet airplanes transport passengers and cargo across any distance on the planet within twenty-four hours. Telephone and computer networks effect instantaneous interpersonal communication between points all over the earth, so that a call centre for customers in North America may be located in India. The global mass media spread messages simultaneously to transworld audiences. The US dollar and the euro are examples of money that has instantaneous transplanetary circulation, particularly when in digital form. In global finance, various types of savings and investment (e.g. offshore bank deposits and eurobonds) flow instantaneously in world-scale spaces. In the field of organizations, several thousand firms, voluntary associations and regulatory agencies coordinate their respective activities across transworld domains. A global conference of the United Nations (UN) involves delegates from all over the planet at the same time. Ecologically, developments such as climate change (so-called 'global warming'), stratospheric ozone depletion, certain epidemics, and losses of biological diversity unfold simultaneously on a world scale. They envelop the planet as one place at one time; their causes and consequences cannot be divided and distributed between territorial units. Ideationally, many people have a supraterritorial concept of place, for instance, when watching televised moon landings and global sports events simultaneously with hundreds of millions of other people scattered across the planet. Global human rights campaigns do not measure their support for a cause as a function of the territorial distance and territorial borders that lie between advocates and victims.

With these and many more supraterritorial phenomena, current globalization has constituted more than an extension of the compression of time relative to territorial space that has

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<sup>40</sup>[www.nescafe.com/main\\_nest.asp](http://www.nescafe.com/main_nest.asp).

unfolded over a number of centuries past. In this long-term trend, developments in transportation technology like motor ships, railways and early aircraft have progressively reduced the time needed to cover a given distance over the earth's surface. Thus, while Marco Polo took years to complete his journey across Eurasia in the thirteenth century, by 1850 a sea voyage from South East Asia to North West Europe could be completed in 59 days. In the twentieth century, motorized ships and land vehicles took progressively less time again to link territorial locations. Nevertheless, such transport still required substantial time spans to cross long distances and moreover still faced substantial controls at territorial frontiers.

Whereas this older trend towards a shrinking world occurred *within* territorial geography, the newer spread of transworld simultaneity and instantaneity takes social relations substantially *beyond* territorial space. In cases of supraterritoriality, place is not territorially fixed, territorial distance is covered in no time, and territorial boundaries present no particular impediment. The difference from territorial time-space compression is qualitative and entails a deeper structural change of geography.

A number of social researchers across a range of academic disciplines have discerned this reconfiguration of space, albeit without invoking the term 'supraterritoriality' to describe the shift. Already half a century ago, for example, the philosopher Martin Heidegger proclaimed the advent of 'distancelessness' and an 'abolition of every possibility of remoteness'.<sup>41</sup> More recently, the geographer David Harvey has discussed 'processes that so revolutionize the objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves'.<sup>42</sup> The sociologist Manuel Castells has distinguished a 'network society', in which a new 'space of flows' exists alongside the old 'space of places'.<sup>43</sup> In the field of International Relations, John Ruggie has written of a 'nonterritorial region' in the contemporary world.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>M. Heidegger, 'The Thing', in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971 [1950]), pp. 165-6.

<sup>42</sup>D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Conditions of Cultural Change* Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 240.

<sup>43</sup>M. Castells, *The Informational City: Information Technology, Economic Restructuring, and the Urban-Regional Process* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 348; *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996-7); *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>44</sup>J.G. Ruggie, 'Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations', *International Organization*, vol. 47, no. 1 (Winter 1993), p. 172.

Might such a geographical transformation in the longer term prove to be as epochal as the shift to territoriality was at an earlier historical juncture? After all, social relations have not always and everywhere operated with a macro spatial framework that is primarily territorial.

For instance, cultures with a metaphysical cosmology have assigned only secondary if any importance to territorial referents. In fact, a territorial grid to locate points on a map was not introduced until the second century AD, by Zhang Heng in China.<sup>45</sup> Images of the world showing the continents in anything like the territorial shapes that are commonly recognized today were not drawn before the late fifteenth century. It took a further two hundred years before the first maps depicting country units appeared.<sup>46</sup> Not until the high tide of colonialism did a territorial logic dominate constructions of social space across the earth.

From then until the third quarter of the twentieth century, macro social spaces (that is, as opposed to directly perceived micro social spaces like built environments) nearly always took a territorial form. Indeed, one could say that a structure of territorialism governed social geography. In a territorialist situation, people identify their location in the world primarily in relation to territorial position. (In most cases the territorial reference points are fixed, though for nomadic groups the spots may shift.) Moreover, in territorialist social relations the length of territorial distances between places and the presence or absence of territorial (especially state) borders between places heavily influences the frequency and significance of contacts that people at different territorial sites have with each other.

However, territorialism as the prevailing structure of geography was specific to a particular historical and cultural context. True, many people today still use the terms ‘geography’ and ‘territory’ interchangeably, as if to exclude the possibility that social space could have other than territorial aspects. Yet world geography of today is not that of the period to the mid-twentieth century. Following several decades of proliferating and expanding supraterritorial connections, territoriality has lost its monopoly hold. Territorial domains remain very important, but they no longer define the entire macro spatial framework.

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<sup>45</sup>I. Douglas, ‘The Myth of Globali[z]ation: A Poststructural Reading of Speed and Reflexivity in the Governance of Late Modernity’. Paper presented at the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, San Diego, April 1996, p. 22.

<sup>46</sup>T. Campbell, *The Earliest Printed Maps 1472-1500* (London: British Library, 1987); P. Whitfield, *The Image of the World: 20 Centuries of World Maps* (London: British Library, 1994).

Most of the rise of supraterritoriality is recent. As with any development, longer-term antecedents can of course be found. For example, the Seven Years' War of 1756-63 was a 'world war' with simultaneous campaigns on three continents. Technologies for supraterritorial communications appeared in the mid-nineteenth century with the advent of intercontinental telegraph lines. This period also saw the emergence of transplanetary commodity markets, global brand names, a transworld monetary regime (in the form of the classical gold standard), and global associations in several social movements, including labour and women activists. The global swine flu epidemic of 1918-19 afflicted numbers of people (50 million deaths) comparable to the global scourge of HIV/AIDS today (20 million dead to date and another 42 million currently infected).

However, most manifestations of supraterritorial connectivity have reached unprecedented levels during the past half-century. Earlier periods did not know jet travel, intercontinental missiles, transworld migrants with transborder remittances, satellite communications, facsimiles, the Internet, instant transplanetary television broadcasts, intercontinental production chains, transworld retailers, global credit cards, a continuous diet of global sports tournaments, or transplanetary anthropogenic ecological changes. Contemporary world history is supraterritorial to degrees well beyond anything previously known.

To specify some further relevant indicators, the world count of radio receivers rose from less than 60 million in the mid-1930s to over 2,400 million in the 1997.<sup>47</sup> Mobile telephones proliferated from less than a million in 1985 to 700 million at the end of 2000.<sup>48</sup> The number of Internet users grew from 0 in 1985 to 606 million in 2002.<sup>49</sup> The annual count of international (thus excluding domestic) air passengers increased from 25 million in 1950 to 400 million in 1996. The average volume of daily transactions on the global currency markets (with simultaneous transworld determination of foreign exchange rates) went from \$15 billion in 1973 to \$1,490 billion in 1998.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>A. Huth, *La radiodiffusion. Puissance mondiale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937); UNESCO, *Statistical Yearbook 1999* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1999), Table IV.S.3.

<sup>48</sup>*Financial Times*, 8 October 1998, p. VIII; *Financial Times*, 20 June 2001, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup>www.nua.com.

<sup>50</sup>The introduction of the euro and other developments caused turnover to drop to \$1,210 billion per day in 2001. Figures taken from R. Gilpin, *Global Political Economy: Understanding the International Economic Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 261; 'Central Bank Survey of Foreign Exchange and Derivatives Market Activity in April 2001: Preliminary Global Data', Bank for International Settlements press release, 9 October 2001; *71<sup>st</sup> Annual Report* (Basle: Bank for International Settlements, 2001), pp. 98-100.

True, enthusiasm at discovering something new – a significant reconfiguration of social geography – must not allow us to overstate its extent. Globalization in the more specific sense of the spread of supraterritoriality has been less extensive than globalization in the more general sense of the growth of transplanetary connections. The supraterritorial aspects of contemporary globalization have far-reaching transformative potentials, but they only constitute part of the larger trend, and our assessments of currently unfolding social change need to be correspondingly tempered.

Nevertheless, the contemporary rise of supraterritoriality has been sufficiently large that we can link the move from territorialism in the field of geography with shifts in other social structures.<sup>51</sup> In terms of governance, for example, the end of territorialism has been interconnected with the eclipse of statism, that is, the previous situation where the formulation and administration of regulations focused almost exclusively on the territorial state. Instead, under the influence of intensified globality, governance today has become more multi-layered and diffuse, a change that has far-reaching implications for definitions and practices of citizenship and democracy. With regard to identities and social collectivities, the end of territorialism has gone hand in hand with a decline of nationalism, in the sense of a near-exclusive focus on territorially based nationality as the principal framework for large-scale social solidarity. In the area of production, the end of territorialism has been interrelated with the rise of finance, information and communications industries and the relative decline of primary production and traditional manufacture. As for structures of knowledge, the end of territorialism has been – or ought to be – accompanied by the abandonment of ontological and methodological territorialism, in other words the assumption that geography, and the study of geography, are always and only about territorial space.

### *Methodological Implications*

If contemporary social geography is no longer territorialist in character, then we need to adjust traditional habits of social research. Methodological territorialism has exercised a pervasive and deep hold on the conventions of social enquiry. The spread of supraterritoriality requires a major reorientation of approach.

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<sup>51</sup>The following points are elaborated in Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, part 2.

Methodological territorialism refers to the practice of understanding and investigating social relations through the lens of territorial geography. Territorialist method means formulating concepts and questions, constructing hypotheses, gathering and interpreting evidence, and drawing conclusions in a spatial framework that is wholly territorial. These intellectual habits are so engrained that most social researchers reproduce them more or less unconsciously.

Methodological territorialism lies at the heart of currently prevailing commonsense notions of geography, economy, governance, history, literature, collective identities and society. Thus the vast majority of social and political geographers have conceived of the world in terms of bordered territorial (especially country) units. Likewise, macroeconomists have normally studied production, exchange and consumption in relation to national (read territorial) and international (read inter-territorial) realms. Students of politics have conventionally regarded governance as a territorial question, that is, as a matter of local and national government, with the latter sometimes meeting in ‘international’ (again, code for inter-territorial) organizations. Similarly, mainstream historians have examined continuity and change over time in respect of territorial contexts (localities and countries). In studies of literature, research has generally been constructed in terms of national-territorial genres: English literature, Indonesian literature, etc. For their part, anthropologists have almost invariably conceived of culture and community with reference to territorial units (in the sense of local and national peoples). Meanwhile territorialist premises have led sociologists usually to assume that society by definition takes a territorial (usually national) form: hence Albanian society, Bolivian society, Chinese society, etc.

Like any analytical device, methodological territorialism involves simplification. Actual social practice has always been more complicated. Nevertheless, this assumption offered a broadly viable intellectual shortcut for earlier generations of scholars. Methodological territorialism reflected the social conditions of a particular epoch when bordered territorial units, separated by territorial distance, formed far and away the overriding framework for macro social geography.

However, territorialist analysis is not a timeless or universally applicable method. The emergence of the states-system, the growth of mercantile and industrial capitalism, and the rise of national identities all understandably encouraged researchers of earlier times to adopt methodologically territorialist perspectives. Yet today large-scale globalization – including

the substantial spread of supraterritoriality – should stimulate a reconstruction of methodology on alternative, nonterritorialist premises.

This call for different intellectual foundations no doubt provokes resistance in some quarters. It is difficult and even painful to change taken-for-granted knowledge, in effect to reassess one's entire understanding of society, to endure the disruption and confusion that comes in the transition between abandoning one set of first principles and consolidating another. Moreover, a post-territorialist methodology has political implications that vested interests could oppose. For example, post-territorialist knowledge would logically undercut the primacy of both state-centric research and state-centric governance.

Yet it can arguably be quite dangerous to give methodological territorialism further lease of life in the contemporary more global world. For example, territorialist assumptions are obviously unsuitable to understand – and address – transplanetary ecological issues. Likewise, if significant parts of capitalism now operate with relative autonomy from territorial space, then old intellectual frameworks cannot adequately address the issues of distributive justice that invariably accompany processes of surplus accumulation. Similarly, a political theory that offers today's world only territorial constructions of citizenship and democracy is obsolete. Hence the stakes in the call for post-territorialist enquiry are much more than academic alone.

## **Qualifications**

The preceding discussion has made a strong case for what globalization *is*, in terms of a change in social space that has in contemporary history been both quantitatively and qualitatively significant. However, it is equally important to emphasize what the growth in transplanetary connections and the spread of supraterritoriality do *not* entail. In particular we must reject the following six non sequiturs: globalism, reification, global/local binaries, cultural homogenization, universality, and political neutrality.

### *Globalism*

First, then, the rise of supraterritoriality in no way means that territorial space has ceased to matter. We should not replace territorialism with a globalist methodology that neglects



territorial spaces. We do not live in a 'borderless world'.<sup>52</sup> Although contemporary history has witnessed the end of territorialism (where social space is effectively reducible to territorial grids), we have certainly not seen the end of territoriality. To say that social geography can no longer be understood in terms of territoriality alone is of course not to say that territoriality has become irrelevant.

On the contrary, territorial production, territorial governance mechanisms, territorial ecology and territorial identities remain highly significant at the start of the twenty-first century, even if they do not monopolize the situation as before. For example, many communications links like roads, railways and shipping lanes remain territorially fixed. In addition, territorial borders continue to exert strong influences on trade in material goods and movements of people.<sup>53</sup> It can take months to complete the dozens of documents required to export legally from India. Meanwhile countless localized products remain bound to particular territorial markets. Territorially based commodities derived from agriculture and mining have persisted at the same time that largely supraterritorial commodities like information and communications have risen to prominence. While US dollars and Visa card payments cross the planet instantly, many other forms of money continue to have restricted circulation within a given territorial domain. Most people today still hold their bank accounts at a local branch or do no banking at all. Much ecological degradation is linked to specific territorial locations, for instance, of overgrazing, salination or dumping of toxic wastes. In terms of social affiliations, some observers have suggested that territorially bound identities could even have become more rather than less significant in a world of diminishing territorial barriers.<sup>54</sup>

So the end of territorialism has not marked the start of globalism. The addition of supraterritorial qualities of geography has not eliminated the territorial aspects. Indeed, contemporary globalization has been closely connected with certain forms of reterritorialization like regionalization, the rise of ethno-nationalist politics, and the proliferation of offshore arrangements.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>K. Ohmae, *The Borderless World: Power and Strategy in the Interlinked Economy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990); Ohmae, 'Putting Global Logic First', *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 73, no. 1 (January-February 1995), pp. 119-25.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. J.F. Helliwell, *How Much Do National Borders Matter?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1998).

<sup>54</sup>Cf. Z. Mlinar (ed.), *Globalization and Territorial Identities* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1992); D. Harvey, 'From Space to Place and Back Again: Reflections on the Condition of Postmodernity', in J. Bird *et al.* (eds), *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 3-29.

<sup>55</sup>*Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, pp. 124-5, 146-8, 166-9.

Clearly, social space in today's world is *both* territorial *and* supraterritorial. Indeed, in social practice the two qualities always intersect. Supraterritoriality is only relatively deterritorialized, and contemporary territoriality is only partly supraterritorialized. Territorial relations are no longer purely territorial, and supraterritorial relations are not wholly unterritorial.

Thus, for example, every Internet user accesses cyberspace from a territorial location. Global products, global finance and global communications always 'touch down' in territorial localities. Jet aircraft need runways. Supraterritorial military technologies like spy satellites are generally directed at territorial targets. So-called 'global cities' such as London and Tokyo still have a longitude and latitude. Global ecological changes have territorially specific impacts: for example, rising sea level has different consequences for coastal zones as against uplands.

In short, contemporary society knows no 'pure' globality that exists independently of territorial spaces. The recent accelerated growth of supraterritoriality has brought a relative rather than a complete deterritorialization of social life. Global relations today substantially rather than wholly transcend territorial space. Although territoriality does not place insurmountable constraints on supraterritoriality, the new flows still have to engage with territorial locations. The present world is globalizing, not totally globalized.

By the same token, however, little if any territoriality today exists independently of supraterritoriality. Most contemporary regional, national, provincial and local conditions coexist with – and are influenced by – global circumstances. Indeed, territoriality is changed by its encounters with supraterritoriality. For example, territorial states act differently in a globalizing world than in a territorialist one.<sup>56</sup> Territorial identities obtain different dynamics when they are associated with global diasporas (e.g. of Armenians, Ghanaians, Irish and Sikhs). Territorial environmental issues like local water shortages acquire different significance when they form part of a transworld problem.

In sum, current globalization is not replacing one compact formula (territorialism) with another (globalism). Rather, the rise of supraterritoriality is bringing greater complexity to

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<sup>56</sup>J.A. Scholte, 'Global Capitalism and the State', *International Affairs*, vol. 73, no. 3 (July 1997), pp. 425-52.

geography – and by extension to culture, ecology, economics, history, politics and social psychology as well. The relative simplicity of a territorialist-statist-nationalist world is fading fast.

### *Reification*

The preceding point regarding the interrelation of supraterritorial and territorial spaces points to a second caution, namely, regarding reification. While globality is a discrete concept, it is not a discrete concrete condition. It is helpful, analytically, to distinguish different spheres of social space; however, concretely, the global is not a domain unto itself, separate from the regional, the national, the provincial, the local, and the household. There is no purely global circumstance, divorced from other spaces, just as no household, local, provincial, national or regional domain is sealed off from other geographical arenas.

So social space should not be understood as an assemblage of discrete realms, but as an interrelation of spheres within a whole. Events and developments are not global *or* national *or* local *or* some other scale, but an intersection of global *and* other spatial qualities. The global is a dimension of social geography rather than a space in its own right. It is heuristically helpful to distinguish a global quality of contemporary social space, but we must not turn the global into a ‘thing’ that is separate from regional, national, local and household ‘things’.

For example, a government may be sited at a national ‘level’, but it is a place where supranational, national and subnational spaces converge. Thus states are involved in transworld law and regional arrangements as well as national regulation and relations with provincial and local authorities. Likewise, firms and other actors in today’s globalizing circumstances are meeting points for co-constituting transworld, regional, national, local and household aspects of geography.

Avoidance of reification is especially important in these early days of global studies. Several centuries of international studies have suffered dearly from a reified distinction between the national and the international, where the ‘internal’ and ‘domestic’ was separated from the ‘external’ and ‘foreign’. In practice, of course, the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of countries are

deeply intertwined. Such errors of reifying the international must not be carried over into research of the global.

### *Global/Local Binaries*

The interrelatedness of dimensions of social space (as opposed to the existence of separate domains) suggests that it is mistaken – as many have done – to set up oppositions between the global and the local. Such a binary resurrects in new form the misguided domestic/international separation of old. Typically, local/global polarizations have depicted the local as immediate and intimate, whereas the global is allegedly distant and isolating. The local purportedly provides security and community, while the global houses danger and violence. The local is the arena for autonomy and empowerment, the global the realm of dependence and domination. The local is authentic, the global artificial. On such assumptions, numerous critics have rejected globalization with calls for localization.<sup>57</sup>

Yet these binaries do not bear up to closer scrutiny. After all, people can have very immediate and intimate relationships with each other via jet travel, telephone and Internet. In contrast, many next-door neighbors in contemporary cities do not even know each other's names. Supraterritorial communities of people (for example, sharing the same class position, ethnicity, religious faith or sexual orientation) can have far-reaching solidarity, whereas localities can experience deep fear, hatred and intolerance. Indigenous peoples have used transworld networks and laws to promote their self-determination, while many a local elite has exercised arbitrary authoritarian power. Global flows frequently involve ordinary people leading everyday lives (listening to radio and munching brand-name fast food), while various exhibits of local culture are contrived. In short, there is nothing inherently alienating about the global and nothing intrinsically liberating about the local.

Instead, both the local and the global have enabling and disabling potentials. Indeed, as already stressed, the two qualities are inseparable in social practice; so terming one circumstance 'local' and another 'global' is actually arbitrary and confusing. A social condition is not positive or negative according to whether it is local or global, since the

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<sup>57</sup>E.g., C. Hines, *Localization: A Global Manifesto* (London: Earthscan, 2000); sources in note 18 above.

situation is generally both local and global at the same time. It is the particular blend of local and global (and other spatial spheres) that matters, not locality versus globality.

### *Cultural Homogenization*

The complexity of multidimensional social space likewise suggests that it is mistaken – as many casual observers have done – to link globalization with homogenization. The growth of transplanetary and supraterritorial connectivity does not ipso facto reduce cultural diversity. After all, the global, the regional, the national, the provincial, the local and the household aspects of social space can intertwine in innumerable different combinations. Indeed, by injecting a further dimension into the geographical spectrum – thereby adding to its complexity – globalization could just as well increase cultural pluralism.

True, the contemporary world has experienced considerable cultural destruction. For example, languages have been disappearing at rates as worrying as those for species extinction.<sup>58</sup> Indigenous peoples' heritages have been undercut or erased across the world. A high tide of consumerism has seemingly imposed cultural levelling across the world, including via a multitude of global agents such as Carrefour, Michael Jackson, Microsoft and Madison Avenue advertisers.

On the other hand, perceptions of cultural homogenization in the context of globalization can be exaggerated. What appears on the surface to be the same transplanetary language can in fact harbour widely varying vocabularies and understandings across different social contexts. So the English of Nairobi markets is not the English of the Scottish Highlands, and the Spanish of East Los Angeles barrios is not the Spanish of Santiago office blocs. Likewise, as reception research has shown, different parts of a transworld audience can read hugely different meanings into a Hollywood blockbuster. In this regard it can be questioned how far the diverse viewers actually 'see' the same global film. Similarly, global marketers often have to adjust the design and advertisement of transworld products in ways that appeal to diverse cultural contexts. Even an icon of global Americanization like McDonald's varies its menu considerably across the world in relation to local sensibilities.

In any case, decreasing cultural diversity is not intrinsic to globalization as such. On the contrary, transplanetary and supraterritorial relations can host great cultural heterogeneity. Thus multiple world religions occupy sites on the Internet, and all manner of peoples from ethnic diasporas to sexual minorities have formed transborder associations. Indeed, globalization has offered opportunities to defend cultural diversity, as when indigenous peoples have used UN mechanisms and electronic mass media to promote their particularity.<sup>59</sup> Globality can also foster cultural innovation. To take one specific example, youth in Frankfurt-am-Main have combined aspects of African-American rap music and hip-hop culture with elements of their North African and Turkish heritages to create novel modes of expression for their hybrid identities.<sup>60</sup>

So globalization can have heterogenizing as well as homogenizing effects. The overall balance between cultural divergence and convergence lies not in globality as such, but in contextual circumstances. The social power relations that shape transplanetary connections are particularly important in this regard. Thus, to the extent that cultural imperialism afflicts contemporary history, it is largely a problem of the voracity of western modernity rather than an outcome of globalization per se.

### *Universality*

A further qualification to notions of globalization as increased transworld and supraterritorial connectivity must note that the trend has not touched all of humanity to the same extent. Globality links people *anywhere* on the planet, but it does not follow that it connects people *everywhere*, or to the same degree. To repeat the earlier disclaimer, under the definition suggested here globalization is not universalization. On the contrary, the incidence of contemporary transplanetary connectivity has varied considerably in relation to territorial and social location.

In terms of territorial position, global networks have generally involved populations of North America, Western Europe and East Asia more than people in other world regions. Variations

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<sup>58</sup>S.A. Wurm (ed.), *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 1996).

<sup>59</sup>T. Dowmunt (ed.), *Channels of Resistance: Global Television and Local Empowerment* (London: BFI/Channel 4, 1993); F. Wilmer, *The Indigenous Voice in World Politics: Since Time Immemorial* (London: Sage, 1993).

in the intensity of globality have also occurred among regions within countries. For example, coastal provinces of China have undergone greater globalization than the interior of the country. In the USA, residents of Silicon Valley have been more enveloped in global communications than inhabitants of the Dakotas. Across the world, patterns of contemporary globalization have broadly followed urban-rural lines, with cities and towns generally experiencing more supraterritoriality than countrysides.

With regard to social position, wealthy people have on the whole accessed transworld connections more than the poor. While those with the means rush from their global bank to the airport lounge, hundreds of millions of low-income people alive today have never made a telephone call. With respect to gender, men have linked up to the Internet much more than women.<sup>61</sup> Other patterns of uneven entry to, and benefit from, global flows can be discerned in respect of civilization and race.

To be sure, contemporary globality has not been an exclusively Northern, urban, elite, male, western, white preserve. At the territorial margins, for example, transworld links have extended even to remote villages in Africa.<sup>62</sup> At the social margins, the homeless of Rio de Janeiro often request a television even before running water.<sup>63</sup> Yet, although globality may have become pervasive, prevailing cultural frameworks, resource distributions and power relationships have produced a highly uneven spread of transplanetary and supraterritorial relations in today's world.

### *Political Neutrality*

The foregoing remarks concerning unequal opportunities to use and shape transworld connections highlight the thoroughly political character of globalization. Human geography is no more politically neutral than any other aspect of social relations like culture or economics. Space always involves politics: processes of acquiring, distributing and exercising social

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<sup>60</sup>A. Bennett, 'Hip Hop am Main: The Localization of Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture', *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 21, no. 1 (January 1999), pp. 77-91.

<sup>61</sup>UNDP, *Human Development Report 1999* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 62.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. C. Piot, *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); E. Mendonsa, *Continuity and Change in a West African Society: Globalization's Impact on the Sisala of Ghana* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2001).

<sup>63</sup>Mariana, activist with the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST), interviewed in Rio de Janeiro on 28 January 2002.

power. Thus transplanetary and supraterritorial connections invariably house power relations and associated power struggles, whether latent or overt. Global links are venues of conflict and cooperation, hierarchy and equality, opportunity and its denial.

Indeed, nothing in globalization is apolitical. Even questions of transplanetary technical harmonization have provoked power struggles. For example, in the nineteenth century the British and French governments competed to have the prime meridian (for the measure of world longitudes and universal standard time) pass through their respective capitals. More recently, different computer operating systems have offered users different degrees of initiative and control.<sup>64</sup>

Any analysis of contemporary globalization must therefore examine the political aspects involved. On the one hand, these politics involve actors: that is, power relations among individuals, households, associations, firms and governance organizations. In addition, the politics of globalization involve social structures: that is, power relations between age groups, between civilizations, between classes, between genders, between races, between sexual orientations, and so on. Like any significant historical trend, the growth of transplanetary and supraterritorial connections empowers some people and disempowers others.

So, as a political process, globalization is about contests between different interests and competing values. The spread of globality is – and cannot but be – normatively laden and politically charged. It is important to determine whose power rises and whose suffers under currently prevailing practices globalization and to consider whether alternative policies could have better political implications.

Indeed, much of the politics of globalization is about choices. Multiple globalizations are possible. True, powerful forces connected with dominant actors, deep social structures and long-term historical processes have promoted the recent large-scale expansion of transplanetary and supraterritorial connectivity. However, all social actors – including the writer and readers of this paper – have opportunities to respond to and mould this trend. There is nothing inevitable about the scope, speed, direction and consequences of globalization. In particular, as stressed earlier, globalization and neoliberalism are not the



same thing. Alternative paths of globalization might be more desirable than the directions that have prevailed over the past quarter-century. Personal and collective decisions (both active and passive) can make all the difference.

These ethical choices and political moves include the way that one defines globalization. As ever, theory and practice are inseparable. To deal with the challenges of contemporary globality people need a conception that not only provides intellectual clarification, but also helps to make relevant, wise and responsible decisions about how to engage with globalization. As I have tried to show in other writings, notions of globality as transplanetary and supraterritorial connectivity can well serve the promotion of human security, social justice and democracy in contemporary history.<sup>65</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This paper has argued that, when conceived in a particular geographical fashion, notions of ‘globality’ and ‘globalization’ can be valuable additions to the analytical toolkit for understanding contemporary social relations. Yes, much globe-talk of recent years has revealed nothing new. And yes, loose thinking and careless politics has devalued many ideas of ‘globalization’. However, these shortcomings do not discredit the concept in every form. After all, widespread sloppy usage of other key ideas – ‘class’, ‘democracy’, ‘rationality’ and ‘soul’, to name but a few – has not been reason to discard these notions altogether.

On the contrary, a definition of globalization as a respatialization of social life opens up new knowledge and engages key policy challenges of current history in a constructively critical manner. Notions of ‘globality’ and ‘globalization’ can capture, as no other vocabulary, the present ongoing large-scale growth of transplanetary – and often also supraterritorial – connectivity. Such an insight offers a highly promising entry point for research and action on contemporary history.

To reiterate, this conception of globalization has a distinctive focus. It is different from ideas of internationalization, liberalization, universalization and westernization. The trans-

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<sup>64</sup>Cf. E.S. Raymond, *The Cathedral and the Bazaar: Musings on Linux and Open Source by an Accidental Revolutionary* (Cambridge: O’Reilly, 1999).

territorial connections of globality are different from the inter-territorial connections of internationality. The transborder transactions of globality are different from the open-border transactions of liberality. The transplanetary simultaneity and instantaneity of supraterritoriality is different from the worldwideness of universality. The geographical focus of globality is different from the cultural focus of western modernity. Although globalization as defined in this paper has some overlap with, and connections to, internationalization, liberalization, universalization and westernization, it is not equivalent to any of these older concepts and trends.

Of course, the conception of globalization elaborated in this paper is in no way intended to be the last word about what the term might mean. As stressed earlier, no definition is definitive. The aim of this paper has not been to issue a final pronouncement, but to offer ever-provisional ideas that provoke further reflection, debate and, eventually, another rewrite of this text.

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<sup>65</sup>Esp. Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, part 3; Scholte, *The Sources of Neoliberal Globalization* (Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 2003).