
Globalization: Beyond the Ultra-Modernist Narrative to a Critical Realist Perspective on Geopolitics in the Cyber Age*

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The discourse of globalization in the 2000s

A new eschatological narrative haunts the consciousness of the world. The spectre of globalization appears in two guises. In the first it appears as the doom-laden, dystopic future of rampant manipulative data corporations and the data gangsters who prey upon them, depicted in disturbing near-future graphic reality by William Gibson (1984; 1993; 1996; 1999). And in the second, as the universal homogenized free-market utopia through which the Anglo-global-speaking consumer flits on the endless quest for ever greater material satisfaction, as promoted by those global-spanning data corporations epitomized by the virtual Amazonians and the many-tentacled financial behemoths.

The massive explosion of literature on globalization of the last few years (approximately 1000 items in English alone in the bibliography of the most comprehensive book — Held *et al.*, 1999) is testament to the sudden irruption of this new master concept into public consciousness. Everyday we are assailed from all media forms by constant talk about and much uncritical representation of the globalization story. But already there is great discontent among social scientists with the content and use of this concept. In the space of less than a decade, globalization discourse and research has moved well past the stage of invocation of a 'buzzword', of obeisance to the power of the internet and global finance, or of predictions of the demise of the state. These are all features that can readily be discerned still in the press and among politicians and hyperglobalizing advertisers and finance-sector 'gurus'. These groups seem still to be locked into the first wave of globalization euphoria consequent upon the supposed 'triumph' of capitalist neoliberalism after the collapse of the bi-polarity of the cold war and the slightly later advent of the internet. Second and third waves of enquiry have since arisen in which scepticism about globalization (in the second) is giving way to more detailed empirical enquiry into the actual processes and transformations that might or might not be occurring (for some recent discussions in addition to Held *et al.*, see Robertson, 1995; Albrow, 1996; Boyer, 1996a; Mander and Goldsmith, 1996; Scholte, 1996; Altvater and Mahnkopf, 1997; Poppi, 1997; Sandler, 1997; Scott, 1997; Gray, 1998; Sassen, 1998).

In 2000, still the idea of globalization is still under strong criticism, the nature, degree and local impacts are being given more attention. And the pace of transformation

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in technology and culture especially, in the places where it is most being felt, is severely disorienting in its rate of change. Notwithstanding the exhilaration felt by globalized elites who are able to switch their consumption to the new Americo-centric opportunities and believe they are now globalized beings, probably the vast majority of the impacts around the world are corrosive of communities. These corrosions are not well-reported in the weekend magazines produced by the global media corporations who wish to see their products penetrate to the very hearts of all the world's spaces.

There can be no doubt that the world system in 1999 is exhibiting many features of rapid transformation. Do they constitute an entirely new form of transformation? Yes and no. Globalization, as a generalized concept for a real social process or for a sociopolitical project, is unlike any prior episode or process or project. The profundity of the globalization project should not be doubted; it is nothing less than the total social, political, cultural and economic integration of all people, such that local boundaries, frontiers, cultures and languages become submerged in a universal, planet-wide, single society and culture. But this abstract, idealized vision is clearly absurd as either a description of an actual process or of a practically realizable project. Nevertheless, such a vision, as an eschatological determinant, has come to haunt society and social science, for whatever the degree of scepticism there may be, certain elements of such a process can indeed be discerned in the present.

For social scientists of all kinds, whose general task it is to try to reveal and explain the processes and hidden structures that are the systemic causal context of the minutiae of social interaction, the problem of globalization presents a difficult new dimension to the basic problem at hand. How are we to conceptualize globalization? Is globalization just the latest in a series of economic transformations, akin to industrialization? Is globalization in fact a reality or a shibboleth? What is the connection between the public discourse and the structural processes? How should we approach the task of researching and explaining the basic processes of the early twenty-first century? What seems to be most needed in the present context of these questions is criticism of the globalization hypothesis and mythology. Moreover, globalization must be understood and criticized as a *project* of certain economic and political elites (cf. Gray, 1998). We must try to untangle the myth and the project from the historical reality.

A paper of this size is too small to provide a thorough discussion of all these issues or to try to map the globalization problem. Instead, I want to make two arguments that bear upon how we should approach the problem. The first is that the concept of globalization should be considered as the ultimate form of a modernist narrative — taking the latest and purist form of a series of such narrative structures that began in the late eighteenth century and have formed the basic conceptual apparatus for avant-garde collective thought and action ever since. As such, the concept has to be criticized for its explanatory power as well as its sociological significance. The second is that, notwithstanding the argument about narrative frameworks, there has to be a critical realist approach to the reality of globalization as an object of enquiry on both the levels of discursive narrative (including its political agenda) and of social structural transformation.

Even though globalization should rightly be seen, I argue, as a narrative framework that determines to varying degrees the public consciousness of the late twentieth century, that framework draws its strength and power to persuade us from its (very problematic) connection with the real processes of the social world beyond the intellectual milieu that we think we inhabit. Such problematic connections should be a prime concern for social scientists. Part of that concern involves unravelling the real connections between scientific concepts and the narrative structures of the general consciousness of our time. In short, I argue that globalization does not represent the supersession of modernity into a state of apparently unresearchable 'postmodernity', but represents the latest (but not the final) state of modernity, which we have not just to analyse but try to ameliorate and mould into a viable, planetary-sustaining, public program. Social scientists should not

stop work at the conclusion of their descriptions or analyses (as postmodernists are wont to do), for social richness and planetary survival behove they move to the stage of practical policies for constructing sustainable social and natural environments. The hyperglobalization project of the neoliberals (or the ‘Washington consensus’ in John Gray’s [1998] terminology) tries to obscure or deny any connection between economic globalization and the destruction of the political and social structures and natural environments that nurture social life within its myriad communities.

After having sketched these arguments about narratives and realism, I want to say something briefly about two connected key empirical issues in the final part of the paper — the issue of the role of the state under globalization, and the issue of the place of local or regional identity within an allegedly emerging, geopolitical global system that is being constructed inchoately around the misery of the Balkans.

Modernity and capitalism

In order to sketch the argument that globalization is the ultra-modernist (rather than postmodernist) metanarrative framework of the 1990s and the 2000s, we need to know something about modernity and its connection with the history of capitalism during the past two centuries or so.

Modernity is often misunderstood. It should not be understood as a fixed state of affairs — not a stage of history, not a structure, not an outcome of a process, not a state that a society or person really achieves. Rather, it is a *happening*, a process of being continually rationally renewed, continually striving to move into or remain in the absolute present, which is continually coming into being — the not-yet-existing future that is becoming concrete and being made concrete in the present but only fleetingly existing and then passing over into the realm of the past. Being truly modern is being in constant movement, continually striving to stay abreast of the always receding, just-out-of-reach future; trying to remain at the moving horizon where the future concretizes. A truly modern person or group or social organization is thus radically avant-garde, radically new and renewing; and the adherents of a modern cultural formation continually strive to remake themselves and rationally redefine themselves in opposition to the past; in opposition to concrete, fixed, fast-frozen objectivity. Modernity can only objectify itself as the negation of itself. Modernity tries to remain without objectivity. Insofar as objectivity, and thus stasis, are avoided there is modern progress. To become objectified is to be frozen, static, and hence conservative, backward, negative; bypassed by the constant, restless rush of creation and renewal.

Modernism thus ideally reads and defines itself as constant movement, constant process, constant progress. And so it conceptualizes and narrates its own past as the superseded record of all those moments of newness, of innovation, that can be understood as steps of concretization along the path towards the future and so towards modernity. Modernization, the description from within modernity of the past as success, the past as historical in that it was superseded and transcended, as opposed to the past that never truly ‘happened’ — the past as unchanging ‘tradition’ or ‘stagnation’, devoid of history and so devoid of movement. Tradition exists; it does not happen so it cannot present a history that modernism can recognize. Modernism thus narrates the past as steps towards success, steps towards achievement of modernity, which is the ‘achievement’, in fact, of the power of transcendence and avoidance of becoming fixed.

The contradiction, then, of modernism’s reading of the past is that while modernity always tries to escape from becoming fixed, from becoming traditional, it leaves behind itself a supposed series of concrete forms or stages of progressive liberation from tradition along the way — like a vapour trail from which it always progresses and which is never part of it. This trail of supposed concrete moments or stages of progress or liberalism is

narrated as modernism's necessary birth, prehistory, early formations and, finally, full existence. But the constant attempts to escape the fixed, objective form in fact produce a *teleology* of modernization. That is, the process of history is given a subject and a goal in the form of the present. The present tells us that the past, or at least those progressive moments and processes of the past, could only have become the present, there was no other possible path. The present thus defines and controls the past and so constantly requires the past to become elements in the constantly unfolding narrative of the ever-moving, ever-changing present. The past as either progressive or traditional serves a purpose in the present as markers along the way for all those who wish to achieve transcendence of objectivity, to become subjective *makers* of history in the constantly changing present. Subjectivity in the present is aided by attempts to control the future so that the future becomes a controllable, a *created* present, a present in which modernity can be at home. Futurism is therefore the ultimate expression of modernism, a futurism that extols absolute simplicity of form in which all unnecessary baggage from an irrational past has been stripped away to reveal the purity of subjectivity.

Absolute subjectivity in the ever-changing present is thus the teleology of modernism. The teleology in turn can be avoided, it seems, only by indeed transcending modernism itself and so, in the condition of postmodernity, allowing freedom from all objectivity and therefore freedom from all history and all space — the apotheosis of subjectivity. The 'past' is not denied by those sublime postmodern souls who have achieved pure subjectivity, it just ceases to have any meaning, any real existence, or any concreteness that can be understood within some narrative of progress. Postmodernism casts its disembodied souls adrift from all anchors in any concrete objectivity of external nature or history. For postmodern souls, like all weightless, drifting, unrooted, nomadic beings, the result is the nausea of weightlessness. This is the condition of fully realized modernity — absolute individually realizable subjectivity — which permits the passing over of souls into the purity of disembodied freedom, beloved of a certain genre of futuristic fiction. But the advocate of postmodernity is doomed to disappointment, for the state of disembodiedness, alas, cannot be achieved this side of the grave. We are condemned to live within the structures of the world.

Modernists are obsessed with novelty and temporality — with the speed of time and the struggle by individuals to stay abreast of time's arrow, which is represented by the unceasing march of technological innovation. The logic and power of technology seem to pull humanity continually into the present. Faster and faster speeds the technological locomotive of humanity and greater and greater is the distance between modernity and its superseded antecedents. And technology seems to be liberational. The application of rational science to nature seems to permit human liberation from nature and thus from objectification. Subjectivity is expressed largely through technological innovation or at least the mass consumption of its products. To live a modern life is to live a life of technological liberty and consumption. But the dialectic of modern consumption is continuing dissatisfaction. The act of consumption leads inexorably to new material desire and the desire is never satisfied. It is thus unrequited desire for novelty, for more material consumption, for constant modernity, that is produced and released by modernity itself. A condition of constant disappointment dogs the fully modern person, staring at us from the pages of weekend magazines amidst the engineered, surreal products of modernity's apogee.

Metanarratives of modernization began to be constructed as soon as the condition of capitalist modernity began to become pervasive in a few regions of Europe. Modernist historiography began almost with the emergence of capitalism as a socioeconomic formation, and with the related 'discovery' and entry into consciousness of 'primitive' people, for modernism is quintessentially concerned with narrating its own progressive path — publicizing its perceived genealogy. Historicity is the negation of non-history, of stagnation and tradition. Modernists cannot but strive to live at the ever-changing, ever-

dissolving horizon of capitalism's restless logic of ever-moving to survive. Like a shark that must constantly swim and so constantly eat to survive, capital must constantly circulate, constantly valorize, constantly multiply or die. That great early student of the logic, morality and history of capitalism — Adam Smith — understood the restless logic of capitalism and began the process of narrating the progressiveness of modern capitalism's past. The Four Stages theory of Smith and the Scottish school contained the necessary teleology. The past was perceived as nothing but the progressive steps towards what would later be called modernity's self-realization but for Smith was the rational market economy. Since then there have been a series of recastings of modernity's meaning as the outmoded forms have fallen behind. The greatest prophet was Marx who saw clearly for the first time that within modernity all were stripped of their irrational, ahistorical affinities and left naked before the cold wind of capitalist rationality. But other winds of rationality, especially nationalism and racism, have also continued to blow in seeming opposition to the force of capitalism, though in fact harnessed by it.

The metanarrative of modernization, then, has been the talisman of the second half of the twentieth century. The history of the world in this era has been marshalled and interpreted by this master narrative. Modernization has taken several forms in the twentieth century — capitalist, fascist, communist — and all have extolled the virtues of (at least for a chosen people) forsaking the old ties of locality and tradition for the joys of embracing the future of rational mass affinity, free from the confining milieu of limited local horizons.

Hyperglobalization as the ultra-modernist narrative of capitalism

Given that the modernist strives for constant change, constant liberation from the limiting past, a state that can probably only be fully realized in a virtual world of cyberspace beyond the realities of our everyday existence, the nearest approximation on earth to such a heaven would be a fully globalized world in which all internal barriers to absolute freedom and communication and creativity could be eliminated. The globalized world is thus the ultimate form of modernity. The history of the process or project of globalization is already being written in many places. It is a history that narrates the coming into being of globality as the necessary unfolding of the logic of the market and capital. Capitalism requires, so the narrative goes, ever greater efficiency derived from ever greater scale, ever greater speed and ever greater elimination of barriers to transactions. The transacting person is the ultimate rational being, pursuing only consumption but never satiated or satisfied. The whole, frictionless globe has to be the ultimate marketplace where producers and consumers meet completely free from local specificities and peculiar needs. The achievement of this outcome will be the triumph of the teleology of capitalist modernization as told by the narrative.

This uncritical narrative or ideology of globalization has been called 'hyperglobalization' (Held *et al.*, 1999: 3–5). It can be compared with more subtle and partial concepts of globalization and with sceptical anti-globalization ideas, including internationalization. Following Held *et al.*, we can say that hyperglobalization has the key features of celebration of the coming into being of a borderless world in which there is no impediment to the freedom of movement of capital, goods and services; the withering away of nation-states to be replaced by global markets and corporations that will ensure greater human freedom and equality through competition; and the emergence of a global 'market civilization'. These developments are thought to be, as the narrative of ultra-modernization extols, the inevitable outcome of the 'logic' (read teleology) of capital. The hyperglobalization narrative is an ideology because it contains a political project for the world of the twenty-first century. This project masquerades as a defence of economic freedom or laissez-faire.

Hyperglobalization has its critics and opponents, of course, most notably from internationalist, regionalist (especially intra-national regionalism), and class perspectives. They usually centre on the view, held with varying degrees of conviction, that states and regions and classes are not disappearing and have much actual and potential power to control global corporations and markets (Hirst and Thompson, 1996; Weiss, 1998). Furthermore, their view is that transnational corporations and world market exchange are not enhancing human freedom or equality or welfare — just the opposite. The sceptics wish to expose the myths of the hyperglobalizers and to show through empirical enquiry that the world is far more complex and uneven, both globally and nationally. The critics argue that international and intra-national regions are now more important locations for economic integration via networks and institutions, but also that these nations and regions are threatened by the globalization project (Held *et al.*, 1999: 5–7).

Towards a critical realist framework for globalization studies

Let us further consider the issue of globalization from the perspective of scepticism and empirical enquiry and especially from the perspective of resolutely non-teleological science. Science was born from, and became devastatingly critical of, teleological master narratives and explanatory frameworks such as Christian revelationism and its associated progressivist philosophies. The historical sciences of cosmology, geology and biology all struggled to free themselves from teleology and to base themselves now in the most part upon a conception of process and history that has no overall subjectivity and no eschatology. The sciences of nature have flourished because non-teleological science is necessary to grasp the non-teleological reality of nature. The natural sciences now have a critical realist framework for their methodology. The social sciences are still engaged in the struggle of eliminating teleology. The employment of a critical realist scientific approach to the problem of globalization would show the way to go beyond an analysis of master narratives and attempt to penetrate to the structured, historical reality of the real social processes and *critically examine* the claim of the *necessary* emergence of a globalized world. This may seem to some as very obvious and already widespread, but there is a great deal of discussion about globalization that either simply assumes its inevitability, or indeed its actual reality, or just reads the popular cultural discourse of the western media as if it exactly represented the socioeconomic structural reality, or is still groping towards a framework for studying social transformations. Globalization, like all such teleological narratives, has to be criticized and replaced by a constantly critical and self-critical social scientific perspective. This goal of constant criticism must be the regulator of our practice, while building explanations that are adequate to the complexities of the social world. A critical realist history of the present world would be able to investigate the globalization narrative for its antecedents, conceptual genesis and explanatory power derived from its verisimilitude.

Critical realism as a methodological framework for social enquiry has several key features. First, there is a necessary interconnection between conceptions of social reality, methodologies and theories employed in studying it, and explanatory accounts that are developed. Put more philosophically, ontology strongly influences methodology, and methodology strongly influences explanation. There must be a conceptual consistency between them. In the critical realist conception of science, there is a transcendental relationship between methodology and objects of enquiry such that natural science can only exist and be successful in its interventions into and manipulations of autonomous nature if the world is indeed as science takes it to be. Thus, for social science to exist there must be a pre-existing emergent structure or order which science seeks to uncover and which has a dynamic and semi-autonomous relationship with human agential action.

Second, critical realism rejects individualism and holism but, unlike structurationism (most closely associated with Anthony Giddens), does not conflate individual and

structure via the concept of agential social practices. Structure is not virtual. Instead, there is relative autonomy of social structure and social agency such that structure has a discoverably real and powerful *emergent* existence that is the context for but not reducible to agency.

Third, the transformational model of social action and structure sees a set of necessary systemic connections between all aspects or levels of society — economy, social structure, culture, politics. Each is enmeshed with and necessary to the others and separable only abstractly. The structured and institutionalized systemization of society cannot be disassembled somehow without removing the very reality of emergent complexity. This is a fundamental contrast with neoclassical economics and rational choice theories, the main theoretical drivers of the globalization project. In the realist model there is morphogenesis and morphostasis of structure, processes which require human agential action working upon *pre-existing* structure. That is, in the words of Margaret Archer (1995: 15):

the morphogenetic/morphostatic framework is put forward as the practical complement of social realism because it supplies a genuine method of conceptualizing how the interplay between structure and agency can actually be analyzed over space and time. It is based on two basic propositions:

- (i) That structure necessarily pre-dates the action(s) leading to its reproduction or transformation;
- (ii) That structured elaboration necessarily post-dates the action sequences which gave rise to it.

Thus, social action and behaviour always occurs within, is conditioned by and made possible by the pre-existing social structural context in which it occurs. Social agents reproduce and transform their structural context in intended and unintended ways and so social processes and transformations are the result of normal collective social action.

A critical realist theory and practice seeks to discover the real history of social reproduction, elaboration and transformation that occurs ‘behind the backs’ of collective agential social action over time. Structural history is a result of structurally conditioned human agency and requires a ‘structuralist’ methodology for its study, which emphasizes the relative autonomy of structure and agency, unlike either methodological individualism or methodological holism (Lloyd, 1993: 44–7).

Fourth, social structural processes and outcomes are not random or unpatterned or unordered. We can readily discern with hindsight that history has followed particular courses and particular directions at particular times. Continuities of pattern and order (morphostasis) have persisted for long periods because of the institutionalized reproductive power of social behaviour. There have also been exogenous shocks, endogenous disjunctures and revolutions, catastrophic shifts and breakdowns of certain levels of order while others have been maintained. Above all, we see, or should see if examining scientifically the history of society, that over the long term no direction towards global simplification or unification of society has emerged. This is crucial. The globalization project of the hyperglobalizers is based in part upon the simple premise that globalization is a natural, unidirectional process that has to be facilitated to be achieved all the sooner for the benefit of humanity. Critical realism in both natural and social science rejects such teleology.

The historical perspective is as essential for understanding globalization as it is for all other real social processes and institutions. From the historical standpoint, the dominant idea that globalization is a new process or project in the late twentieth century can be criticized and opposed by the historical understanding that many of the processes associated with it have long roots and have not suddenly become a fact (see Schwartz, 1994). For example, the decline in population, infrastructure and economic significance of much of the rural regions of developing countries as well as of developed ones, such as Australia and other settler capitalist societies, has been going on for a century or more as

part of the process of capitalization and industrialization of agriculture. But 'globalization' was not employed as the narrative explanation of these processes until very recently. Indeed, we should really attribute such social consequences to a more general process which has been occurring for many hundreds of years, perhaps even thousands in some places. Even in the time of Alexander the Great and his successors in the third century BC, a kind of Hellenized, quasi-globalized world existed across the vast reaches of Eurasia from the Gates of Hercules to the Indus River. Unification of markets on greater scales and the widening powers of imperial states and now firms to create and manipulate markets have been features of particular historical eras in many times and places in the past. Most recently, the late nineteenth-century world economy can be considered as an era of at least nascent globalization.

Thus, within a critical realist perspective the problem of globalization should be seen as an object of enquiry that is both a hypothesized outcome (largely unintended) of social structuring in late-modern (post-bi-polar) capitalism, and a geopolitical project of certain neoliberal economic and political elites, requiring investigation on the several levels at which it is said to be occurring. And it is indeed a multidimensional and multilayered problem. While we might readily understand that the financial sector of the world is among the most rhetorically and actually hyperglobalized sectors, it is by no means the case that even this industry is approaching the ideal of globalization. Against these seeming tendencies towards simplification of the world into a single unified economic system or market, we can see a process of forcible delinking from the globalizing world of many regions, locales, social groups and individuals. We also see much destruction of social cohesiveness in many local places and the lack of the replacement of a stable, supportive social structure at a higher global level than the uncritical hyperglobalizers advocate.

Differential dimensions of globalization — beyond simplification of the present

Among all the contending views about globalization, there is little disagreement that globalization is first and foremost a process of adoption and spread — and the social consequences — of technologies of transport and communication such that distance loses, in some cases altogether, its power to act as a barrier to exchange and communication. There is a compression of time and space, as David Harvey (1989) famously argued. With electronic communications and high-speed jet transport, the possibilities of virtually eliminating all mediation or transaction costs as a determinant of communication and transactions are transforming the spatial structure of world-spanning exchange and culture. No longer does a von Thunenian technologically determined spatial structure have to exist, particularly with regard to the movement of liquid capital and information. Thus, technology makes possible a 'stretching' (Held *et al.*, 1999: 15) of activities across traditional frontiers constructed by geographical and/or political structures, which calls into question those frontiers and weakens the spatial determination of activities. It is this, more than anything else, that sets the context for globalization as a problem.

But within a broad agreement about the power of technological potentials, there is much fundamental disagreement about globalization. There is, of course, no simple connection and there never has been between the possibilities opened by technology and the socioeconomic-political organizations of the world. Thus, a second level of analysis, beyond the role of technology, in the study of globalization has to be the detailed examination of the complex interconnections between the power and influence of technologies of exchange and the social organization of the world. Power structures have social determinants as well as technological ones. It is these evolving power structures

that are producing a partially globalized world through the employment of the technologies of globalization.

Thus, globalization is essentially a process of becoming 'globalized' through the use of technologies of time-space compression. To be 'globalized' can be contrasted, as a hypothetical state, with 'localized', 'nationalized', 'regionalized' or 'internationalized', as Held *et al.* aptly put it (1999: 16). In past eras, such as in the ancient Hellenistic era in southern Europe and western Asia, to which I previously alluded, there have been globalized elites who thought of themselves as universal people in the sense of belonging to and participating in a 'global' culture and society that transcended all local particularities. It is only in the modern era that we equate 'global' with 'world' in the planetary sense, having pushed back our understanding of the physical frontiers of the earth to their absolute limits. The conscious distinctions between locality, kingdom or empire (or state) and world have been a part of human consciousness for thousands of years in some places. Throughout all this time in these places we can be fairly certain that many people have been able to situate themselves within this, often dimly perceived, hierarchy of location. There have also always been more metaphysical hierarchies of location that contrast physical, celestial, spiritual and temporal dimensions and which also draw contrasts between local and universal location and time. The difference between ultra-modernist 'globalization' and other such modes of understanding is that the modern form has tended to strip away all dimensions except the physical and so modern globalization tends to be one of space alone and how technology shrinks or compresses that space by its power to transcend physical distance. In non-modern thought, to be 'globalized' (or its local synonym) could well mean to be a transcendent being, devoid almost of physical determination, or a universal being in the sense of participating in a universal culture or society that mediates all local differences. This latter sense must have been present in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds among the elites who could travel the length and breadth of their 'globe'.

For such elites of the ancient and medieval world, becoming global meant speaking the *lingua franca* of the known world; perhaps controlling or administering a vast territory which contained thousands of differing localities with hundreds of local cultures and languages; certainly travelling extensively among and experiencing this vast range of localities (*à la* Herodotus); trading widely; consuming in great entrepôts and metropolises the wide range of goods produced and marketed from those thousands of localities; and generally feeling no limitations of a cultural or spatial kind on human transactions and communications. Globalization, then, did not imply the destruction of local peculiarities and identities, for the globalized world was and remained heavily stratified. Only the tiny elite class was globalized, all else remained localized.

In the modern world, by contrast, the process of becoming global (as opposed to international) now carries a foreboding negative connotation of destruction of local peculiarities, traditions and communities. Not only do the elite participate as globalized beings but now all are forced to varying degrees to enter the global stratum on pain of loss of social power and effectiveness. The dreadful requirement to choose between traditional local, denigrated and denied identity and global integration is forcing all people to face 'with sober senses' the real conditions of their future. This, at least, is the usual interpretation of the current condition that we all face, the very spectre that haunts the world. This sense of destruction of local differences, and therefore of local identity, sets late twentieth-century globalization firmly apart from all previous 'shrinkings' of the world, such as in the late nineteenth century with the rise of the world economy and interstate system. Not only is the technological basis for globalization now more profound, but all people on the planet are affected by it.

The alternatives to globalization, then, are localization, regionalization and national/internationalization. Conceptually, only the last contradicts globalization directly. The others are perhaps compatible to a degree, although hyperglobalization contains the

teleology that denies a future for local and regional specificity and identity. The alternative teleology or project, or (more empirically) the alternative historical trajectory to globalization, is internationalization. This hitherto dominant political ideology of the twentieth century carries the strong implication, which its liberal social-democratic proponents have often tried to ignore or suppress, of nationalism. There can be no internationalism without nationalism. And it is nationalism that is the only force that is capable of withstanding, even defeating, globalization. The nationalist teleological project still has considerable presence and perhaps even has not yet reached its full potential. Nationalism/internationalism has the power to permit localism and regionalism to survive under certain circumstances. If nationalism is construed in the pure form of equating ethnic purity with the nation, there is the potential to permit national identity to all ethnic groups. In that case ethnic identity could be seen to override state identity and so the concept of the territorial state would evolve to encompass multi-ethnicity/multinationality. The multinational state would then be a state of equal but different nations coexisting within a single state territory. Such a possibility has seemed far away during the twentieth century, especially again during the savage Balkan conflicts of the 1990s. But there are other hopeful signs elsewhere, including the European Union, which could be understood as an emerging multinational state, and the recent political histories of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa, where there are limited intimations of multinationalism involving the rights being returned to indigenous and other minority peoples under the umbrella of the broader state. But, more pessimistically and ironically, these counter homogenizing developments could come too late, for the remnant indigenous populations and cultures in these states are fast being eroded by the global capitalist impact, from which they cannot be sheltered any longer. Mexico, Brazil and other Latin American states also have elements of the multinational state model, but those residual elements have been declining under the onslaught of global capital in recent times, as evidenced by the resistance engendered by many indigenous peoples (e.g. in Chiapas, Amazonia, Irian Jaya) to the predations of these states or of those groups who have the implicit support of the state.

The technology and associated ideology of globalization have a great corrosive effect on local social relations. Just as the adoption of *laissez-faire* in the second half of the nineteenth century by Britain and its imposition on the empire helped destroy indigenous economies and societies, the technology of transport and communications makes (in the terminology of free traders) 'market widening and deepening' possible. The new technology behind the *laissez-faire* of the 1990s and 2000s permits the globalization project to be pursued in a way that the Manchester liberals could not have envisaged. Now state borders can be ignored entirely, whereas once they had to be broken down or subverted. But could we envisage this same technology being harnessed to a different ideology, a different project — one of preservation and enrichment of local communities and cultures? That hasn't happened because the hyperglobalizers label all attempts to control the 'globalization imperative' of capital and markets as socialistic subversion of the natural state of affairs, which results in denial of human freedom. But there is potential via the new technology to build new communities of support and resistance, as the Zapatistas and the East Timorese have shown.

The problem of the state and public policy under globalization

Thus, one of the key issues of the globalization problem concerns the future of states. The concept of globalization seems to imply, and its proponents advocate, a frictionless world devoid of barriers to transactions imposed by states or other extra-economic formations. A globalized world is one in which, supposedly, global corporations displace state and communal organizations as the dominant actors in the world system. A corporately

organized and dominated world is supposed to be a freer, more efficient world, devoid of distorting, non-economic diversions of wealth into areas of unproductive wastage. Everything in this world is reduced to rational choices on the basis of perfect knowledge of market signals and of self-activation devoid of non-monetary constraints. This conveniently ignores, of course, the barriers to free transactions imposed by corporations themselves.

Will states survive the erosion of the boundary policing and maintenance role that they have always had? Will state sovereignty and state policy have a role to play? Or will they wither because corporations will not just elude their power but reject and overthrow their power? Thus, one of the key issues is that of autonomy of social policy and, by implication, the possibility of an anti-neoliberal policy (for discussions of these issues see Miyoshi, 1996; Petrella, 1996; Strange, 1996; Wade, 1996; Cox, 1997; Gray, 1998; Brenner, 1999; Habermas, 1999). The answer to these questions has to be sought in part in an examination of the origins and foundations of state power and in the terrain on which state power is supported by social classes and groupings that are constituted on the basis of ethnicity, culture and other non-economic foundations. The state-formation and state-building project still has a long way to go in the world and corporations have formidable opponents in the form of states constituted as nations. The nationalist project that draws its strength from ethnicity is still some way from realizing its full potential. There is much distance to travel in places such as Russia, Indonesia and large parts of Africa. Founding or refounding and building ethnic states is a project that has returned with a vengeance in the post-bi-polar world.

Another part of the answer lies in the ways in which state power could be used this century. So long as states retain a quasi-monopoly of coercive apparatus that is legitimated by public support from the civil society, corporations will not be able to completely dominate and destroy states. The extent to which corporations can manipulate and undermine states is very great, however, especially while the anti-state ideology of the present prevails. And it is just another ideology rather than an objective assessment of the ability of states to survive and exercise significant public power at the behest of public opinion. The rediscovery of the possibilities of states to exercise significant social ameliorative and redistributive functions is far from exhausted. Thus, the future of state power, and therefore of public policy, lies partly in the role that will continue to be played by alternative narrative frameworks that link past, present and future. The narrative of globalization and neoliberalism holds sway, but, I suggest, it will be seen as no more than just another phase in the ongoing fearful struggle between modernizers and their desire to avoid the inevitable ossification of their moment in history.

Geopolitics under globalization — the Balkans' crisis of the 1990s

It is surely disturbingly and grimly ironic that the geopolitics of the twentieth century drew to a close at the very place where it began — the nationalist struggles by the Balkan people within a context of great power hegemony. Just as the intersection of ethnicity, religion, nationalism, ideology, imperialism and history in the region of south-west and south-central Europe sparked the greatest struggles of the world in the twentieth century, so the final act of the century is occurring there too. But of course we would be very myopic if we thought that western or central Europe is the only place where these kinds of conflicts have or will occur. In Timor and throughout Indonesia the same kinds of conflicts have been occurring (cf. Anderson, 1999), as they are in other parts of Asia and in Africa. What is the future for violent geopolitics born of these ancient roots in a globalized world? Clearly, these conflicts are occurring within a world geopolitical system characterized by powerful *states*, as well as by other kinds of social organizational forms, and the incomplete project of nationalism in a world of empires or quasi-empires.

The United Nations organization presides over an *interstate* system but one in which great powers and their non-UN alliances have greatly disproportionate power. Big states still rule the world. They still want to intervene in the affairs of other states and to redraw the maps of the world, just as they have after all the European conflicts of the past two centuries and as they have throughout Asia, the Americas and Africa. But is there a new system emerging? Perhaps the Gulf War and, even more so, the current Balkan wars are harbingers of a new order. That at least seems to be the vision of Tony Blair, the quintessential globalist 'new order' politician.

In a recent (April 1999), somewhat Churchillian, speech in Chicago, Blair had the following to say:

We cannot refuse to participate in global markets if we want to prosper. We cannot ignore new political ideas in other countries if we want to innovate. We cannot turn our backs on conflicts and the violation of human rights within other countries if we still want to be secure.

He proposed six initiatives to modernize the ability of the international community to respond to crises:

In global finance the postwar institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank should be overhauled and reformed; the World Trade Organisation should be given a "new push"; the role and workings of the United Nations should be reconsidered; NATO's organisation and structure should be re-examined; developed and developing nations must work far more closely on environmental issues; and the G8 economic summit should reconsider the issue of Third World debt.

Should we read this as an updated version of the American cold-war 'global policeman' doctrine of the 1950s and 1960s? I think not. What we are seeing, I believe, is the emergence of a globalist geopolitical perspective that is only possible in a post-bi-polar world where there is a single pole of power (NATO) with a dedication to 'opening' the world to the ideology of the free-market and associated liberal-democratic institutions, with a tempering by modest social democracy and an emphasis on 'civility', 'citizenship', 'human rights' and 'decency'. We can be too cynical about this new interventionist agenda. Much of the left wants to read this as a hypocritical post-hoc justification for oppressing the just aspirations of underdeveloped countries and for opening them to global capital. Much of the right sees it as either too little too late or as a waste of resources on meaningless twaddle about human rights. And there is a very selective morality at work in the Blairite vision. Apparently it is acceptable for NATO to facilitate the ethnic cleansing of the Krajina Serbs from Croatia, to ignore the wholesale repression of democracy, civil rights and ethnic minorities by the Burma regime, stand aside while Russia destroys the Chechens and while the Armenians and Azeris fight a savage irredentist conflict, and to ignore the nationalist aspirations of the Kurds. In spite of these glaring examples of recent selectivity we should assess the Blairite doctrine in abstract before assessing its validity relative to whether it could work if implemented in some sort of consistent and forceful manner. That is, could we conclude that the Blairite doctrine of 'global New Labourism' represents a way forward to a better global situation compared to the present massive inequalities, oppressions and injustices meted out to the bulk of the world by internationally unaccountable and unchecked repressive state regimes?

The Blairite program is quite removed from the 'Point Four' doctrine of Harry Truman and the cold-war rhetoric from Kennedy to Reagan and Thatcher, as well as from social democracy and the anti-developmentalism of the Club of Rome. The first aimed to intervene with the express purpose of saving the world for capitalism irrespective of the local situation and often in spite of local interests. The social-democrats thought they could solve international conflict through negotiation, aid and persuasion. The anti-developers seemed to think third-world peasants wanted to remain as peasants.

The nub of the issue here is the old one of the relationship of world system to local or

regional complexity. It is clear that the world system of today has a single pole of global military power and an ability and emerging willingness by the wielders of that power to use it to intervene on behalf of certain local aspirations for peace and civility. What this could be seen as representing, in a sense and on one level, is the latest stage in the development of the western European Union towards a supra-state that has a Europe-wide mission to pacify and incorporate the whole of Europe into a quasi-federation that will then remove all internal interethnic conflict by force and facilitate the subsequent development of democratic civil institutions on the western model. This is the extension, culmination and full realization, then, of the 1945 outcome from which western Europe rebuilt the Pax Romana from the treaty of 1957. On another level, the Blairite doctrine goes further and hints at a global regime of pacification and development of a kind we have not had before. The interstate system of late-1940s institutions has failed and the recent flexings of NATO muscles (which is itself a partial exception to the 1940s interstate institutions in that it has a more or less unified control system) shows how a genuinely *global* (rather than an imperfect international) system based on western European notions of human rights could come into being (for discussions of NATO strategy see Gowan, 1999). It is no accident that it is William Jefferson Clinton, perhaps the most Europeanized of American Presidents since his namesake, and who has failed at home to move America in a slightly more social-democratic direction, who has joined forces with the Europeans in this new global vision.

Our judgement of the Blairite vision has to be negative, however, for several reasons. The first problem is that it smells of a selectively moral version of North Atlantic neo-imperialism, imposed only within a certain sphere of influence and ignoring ethnic and political repressions outside that sphere (Blackburn, 1999). Second, there is no global regime of regulation or governance in place that can secure and guarantee the Blairite pacification. The global economy is groping towards a new mode of economic regulation but at the moment is in a chaotic state between poles of attraction. And third, the form of civil society that the vision propagates is far too limited. There is bound to be a structural deficiency in a civil society born within the limited horizon of western globalizing, Murdoch-delimited capitalism. Until the Blairites propose a vision for how civil society can be given room to flourish free from the inherently deficient vision of global-capitalist corporations we must view their programme as self-serving, narrow and hubristic.

A critical geopolitical view of the 1990s and 2000s can unmask the limitations and distortions in the NATO vision of the future. The new critical geopolitics (see Cox, 1994; Keyman, 1997; and the essays in O'Tuathail and Dalby, 1998), drawing in part on Foucauldian themes, has the following features. First, it critically analyses the 'geopolitical imagination' (its foundational and exceptionalist lore) of the state. Second, it analyses and criticizes the various boundary-drawing practices and performances of states by affirming the multiplicity of possible constructions of space. Third, it argues that geopolitics has a plurality of representational practices at different levels and aspects of society. Fourth, it criticizes the dominant politics of 'official' political discourse. And fifth, it situates itself as an engagement with traditional geopolitical discourse, which has been the ideology of state expansion (O'Tuathail and Dalby, 1998: 3–7). Drawing on these themes, a critical geopolitical view of the Kosovo crisis would attempt not just to delve beneath the official rhetoric of NATO but analyse the multiple levels of ethnicity, history, culture and politics throughout the Balkans and the place of this Balkan crisis in global issues of reconstruction of 'new orders' after the end of bi-polarity. Geopolitical processes have become far more complex in the 1990s but the Blairite NATO vision is attempting to construct a new global hegemony (for critical perspectives see Blackburn, 1999; Hagen, 1999).

Conclusion: Towards retention of local identity under globalization? The necessity of global regulation and governance?

Could the global system of capital be regulated at various levels in such a way, as Blair hopes, that it enhances rather than undermines and stunts local differences and richnesses? Can a locale or intra-national region prosper and retain its identity within the global system? There would seem to be several requirements.

The first is ethnic and/or cultural cohesiveness. The history of the world in the twentieth century and including the present situation would seem to urge great caution in thinking that a multi-ethnic or multicultural region can develop the political cohesiveness to develop institutions and policies to control its relationship with global markets. However rational intellectuals might decry ethnic divisions and conflicts and however irrelevant they might be to the fundamental economic and political processes that should be occurring, ethnicity is a powerful determinant of identity and exclusion. Even multicultural settler societies can experience severe ethnic conflict and oppression. But multi-ethnic societies can flourish cohesively if they can somehow forge a rich density of civil institutions, and there the interconnections with the state are crucial. A kind of partnership with an active state would seem to be essential.

Second, the economic relationship with the globalizing economy has to be controlled in some sense and that is difficult to achieve. The failure of many intra-national regional economies stems partly from the severely unequal exchange that many regions experience. But that has been occurring for centuries. Under the social democratic/Keynesian model of the postwar years up to the 1970s there was an attitude of inclusiveness that no longer exists or is dying in those places where it once flourished. Can it be resurrected? With John Gray, it is difficult to believe so. Globalization to the extent that it is occurring is altering the world so much that a return to old institutionalized values and policies, such as protectionism, is difficult if not impossible to achieve. A reintroduction of Keynesian social democracy would now require a delinking of a whole state from the world economy and the consequences of that would be dire. But more limited partial delinkings are still possible.

Third, regulation of the world markets has to be achieved on a world scale. The unsustainability of quasi-free markets for capital and manufactured goods is apparent to most people, especially since the financial crises of the 1990s. And in spite of the urgings of GATT/WTO there is no global free market for agricultural products or for services, for good reasons to do with local historically derived and institutionalized cultures of production and consumption. Those parts of the world that have introduced quasi-free markets for agriculture, such as New Zealand and to a lesser extent Australia, have seen large parts of their rural communities decimated in the 1990s with the rise of underclasses of the permanently unemployed. A similar thing can be seen happening in Mexico for reasons partly to do with the NAFTA arrangements. It is worth asking what would have happened to European social stability in the postwar years if the EEC had introduced *laissez-faire* instead of the common agricultural policy? The GATT/WTO and IMF philosophy of global *laissez-faire* is understood by most people in the world (especially indebted rural dwellers) to be a disaster. In fact, of course, *laissez-faire* does not really exist except in the fevered imaginations of the hyperglobalizers. What exists, rather, is a set of manipulated marketplaces dominated by powerful corporations posing as the friends of free consumers.

We are between regimes of world economic and political regulation. Fordist production has all but disappeared, protectionism is declining, the welfare state is under siege, communist regimes have died or converted themselves to quasi-criminal capital accumulators. Even the *laissez-faire* of the neoliberals is declining in legitimacy. The attempt to somehow isolate the economy from social, political and environmental

structures and consciousness is failing in terms of both the official ideology (neoclassical free market economics) and the political processes. New right ideology and policy is in decline around the world but just what is replacing it is very uncertain. The moderate left in liberal democratic states is searching for a framework with which to grasp the reality that they are attempting to manipulate. But there is no way back to Keynesian social democracy. The internationalist system of the postwar decades has declined in vitality and its structure has been subverted and partially destroyed. Global corporations are struggling to break free from political constraint. The UN, the quintessential but always weak internationalist institution of world governance, has lost power and legitimacy after a brief renaissance in the early 1990s.

Whence the way forward? Part of the answer must be that the way has to be based on empirical social science — a science that is concerned to investigate empirically, historically, the real structures of the world. Only a science that is concerned with research into how social life is organized, structured and systemically integrated can succeed. The great failure of orthodox economics is that it has become an ideology, based upon a discredited methodology and a falsified theory of behaviour. Rational choice theories in economic and political theory offer no solution to the unwarranted split between studies of social systemics and human action. A social science that is adequate to the complexities of the socially structured world that we inhabit needs to be constructed. Such a social science is closely associated with a moral imperative. And there is no shortage of candidates for new analyses of the present structural situation. Institutional, sociological and political economics are experiencing revivals (cf. Rutherford, 1996), a new critical geopolitics is being constructed, new theories of world social structure and regulation are being proposed (cf. Bienefeld, 1996; Boyer, 1996a; 1996b; Boyer and Drache, 1996; Aglietta, 1999; Brenner, 1999). But until a well accepted and confirmed general framework for social science is constructed, perhaps the only certain answer is that there is uncertainty. On the other hand, we can be certain that the metanarrative of the ultra-modernist hyperglobalizers, with its teleology of utopian simplicity, is at best a naive fairy tale, far less plausible than the dark (if partial) Gibsonian vision of the near future (or the present already?) of sinister data corporations and their symbiotic Mafiosi.

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