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Genealogies of the Global

Mike Featherstone

Abstract The term global suggests all-inclusiveness and brings to mind connectivity, a notion that gained a boost from Marshall McLuhan's reference to the mass-mediated 'global village'. In the past decade it has rapidly become part of the everyday vocabulary not only of academics and business people, but also has circulated widely in the media in various parts of the world. There have also been the beginnings of political movements against globalization and proposals for 'de-globalization' and 'alternative globalizations', projects to re-define the global. In effect, the terminology has globalized and globalization is varyingly lauded, reviled and debated around the world. The rationale of much previous thinking on humanity in the social sciences has been to assume a linear process of social integration, as more and more people are drawn into a widening circle of interdependencies in the movement to larger units, but the new forms of binding together of social life necessitate the development of new forms of global knowledge which go beyond the old classifications. It is also in this sense that the tightening of the interdependency chains between human beings, and also between human beings and other life forms, suggests we need to think about the relevance of academic knowledge to the emergent global public sphere.

Keywords classification, culture, economics, global, globalization, integration, social life, social sciences, technology

The term 'global' suggests all-inclusiveness, along with a certain finitude and limit. It brings to mind connectivity, that space has somehow been shrunk, as we find in the popular phrase 'we are all in each other's back yard'. This is something which was represented for the first time in the photographs of the Earth from space in the 1960s. Planet Earth, the small blue and green globe set amidst the vastness of space, captured a certain sense of vulnerability – a reversal of thinking about the scale of our world. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the current meaning of the term global emerged in references to global trade in the 1920s and global war in the 1940s and 1950s (long-range American B-36s carrying the atom bomb were described as 'global bombers'). The term gained a boost from Marshall McLuhan's (1962) graphic reference to the mass-mediated 'global village'. In the 1960s, we also have the first use of the term globalization in the context of the economy and business. The earliest sustained academic discussion of the globalization of markets seems to have been a paper by Theodore Levitt published in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1983 (Dicken, 1998). In sociology, Roland Robertson (1992) was one of the first to use the term in articles published in 1985. By the early 1990s the term globalization was very much on the increase, and it had migrated into mainstream academic usage. In the past decade it has rapidly become part of the everyday vocabulary not only of academics and business people, but has circulated widely in the media in various parts of the world. It is in this decade that we find assertions that we now live in 'globality', a new 'global age'. There have also been the beginnings of political movements against globalization and proposals for 'de-globalization' and 'alternative globalizations', projects to redefine the global. In effect, the terminology has globalized and globalization is varyingly lauded, reviled and debated around the world.

The global is often counter-posed to the local, to suggest that the potential to influence and communicate with people in other localities has increased exponentially. People become bound together in longer chains of interdependencies and have great potential to communicate with and influence each other, depending upon their resources and capital. In effect, people's frame of reference becomes larger, as their reference group of regular contacts becomes more extensive. Ultimately there is the technical potential to communicate with every member of humanity and survey life in every corner of the planet. The potential scope of action becomes global. Whether or not this leads to global integration – to a new level of social life in which more and more people interact with others around the world through new communications systems – is a different question. This is dependent upon the power resources and projects of different groups of people. Not least on the shifting power balance between those groups who have the resources to communicate and those who do not, and those who can engage in extensive surveillance, information gathering and storage and those who cannot. If we pose the question in this way, we can see that globalization processes can lead to various types of global integration and de-globalizing reactions, to the extent that we cannot presume a single outcome.

Yet the rationale of much previous thinking about humanity in the social sciences has been to assume a linear process of social integration, as more and more people are drawn into a widening circle of interdependencies in the movement to larger units: from families to bands, to tribes to regions, to nations, to states, to blocs of states and eventually to the world-state or global level of social organization. In this sense the global is conceived as a limit, a final stage in the integration of humanity. Yet it is easy here to fall into a teleological narrative with human social life conceived as moving from tradition to modernity, to globalized modernity or globality. This approach misses the non-linearity of the process of global integration and the potential for it to have unfolded in different ways. It over-emphasizes the uniqueness of the current phase of globalization and misses earlier phases such as the one which occurred in the late 19th century and ended with the First World War in 1914, in which foreign direct investment was high, along with world trade, leading to the movement of a vast array of products around the world (Hirst and Thompson, 1996; Briggs and Snowman, 1996; cf. the popularity of World Fairs at this time, Simmel, 1997). Information also moved rapidly via a telegraph and cable network. In addition, the percentage of the world population migrating was larger than in the current phase of globalization (Friedman, 2004).

A shift in the global balance of power away from the West to Asia would potentially involve different accounts of global integration which could challenge Western narratives and provide the economic and symbolic capital to stimulate systematic research to develop alternative versions. We are already seeing the beginnings of this process with critiques of Eurocentric accounts of the emergence of the modern world system such as Wallerstein's. André Gunder Frank, for example, asks us to think back much further and consider that the system of world trade goes back not just 500 years but 5000 years, and to acknowledge the centrality of China in this process prior to what he startlingly refers, to as the 'Western interlude' (Frank, 1998; see also Pomeranz, 2000). The challenge is for us to think through what has been termed 'oriental globalization' (Nederveen Pieterse, Hobson, this issue). This is a view of global history in which Asia and the Middle East are seen as central to the development of a global economy, standing in sharp contrast to Weberian and Marxist accounts of the Western origins of a dynamic capitalism and modernity with their depiction of an ossified static Asia. Global history takes its impetus from this challenge to contest a diffusionist model in which the significant changes were seen as produced in one place (Western Europe), and seeks to think historical processes in a relational spatial dynamic. This goes beyond the idea of the history of societies or states, or their inter-societal or international relations; or the idea of history driven by a master process such as capitalism or modernization which spreads out from a (Western) centre, in favour of the focus on a complex assemblage which operates on a number of levels.

If the shifting balance of global power can give rise to an oriental globalization literature which disputes Western-centric theories and asks for a rewriting of history in a more relational and less linear way, then there are clear implications for knowledge, not just of the past, but

also of the present phase of globalization. If globalization points to the process of the integration of the world (often characterized in terms of space–time compression) and the increased consciousness of this process, then it should also give rise to emergent dimensions of social life, new social phenomena, which can challenge existing modes of conceptualization in the social sciences and humanities. It is this aspect which has captured the attention of Ulrich Beck (2002), who argues that we need a massive shift in our frame of reference to accompany globalization: if our object is no longer the nation-state society but the global, then we need a new epistemology to accompany this ontological shift.

Some academics are demanding that we globalize our courses, yet if we want to move beyond a ragbag global studies, the problems of selectivity of content (what do we put in?, what dare we leave out?) and the generation of new concepts have to be addressed. To consider globalization in terms of intensified flows of people, goods, money, information, images and technology (Appadurai, 1990) is a start, but we need to build on this inchoate image of flows to conceptualize the structures, barriers, and regulatory mechanisms within which things move, as well. Hence there is currently a good deal of interest in mapping the global economic, social, cultural, political and military emergent ‘dimensions’. In practice, it is of course difficult to separate these aspects of social life when we focus on lived practices and the generation of culture – we also need to be aware of the history of the formation of these allegedly differentiated ‘spheres’ of social life and the practices and disciplines that administer them (Featherstone, 1995). Clearly, in the current phase of globalization, the economy has been the dominant integrative force, but this is not to say that social, cultural and political ‘factors’ follow on meekly, or that culture and politics are merely defensive de-globalization reactions. Indeed, it may well be the case that an active sphere of global public life is in the process of forming, a space in which many conflictual images of the globe battle with each other over the emergent consciousness of a new global ontology based around the vulnerable planet Earth, the binding together of not just humanity, but life in general in a common fate and the possibility/impossibility of human intervention.

Globalization as a set of economic processes gathered pace with the neo-liberal deregulation of markets in the late 1980s. Indeed, marketization is often seen in the popular imagination as the defining characteristic of globalization: the ease with which capital investment can flow around the world to the most profitable (i.e. cheapest) labour markets – what Bauman (2000) refers to as ‘liquid modernity’. But we should not see this process as signalling the eclipse of nation-state power, the replacement of the modern nation-state system which has been dominant since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, by a totally ‘borderless economy’ (Ohmae, 1987). Rather, economic deregulation is also accompanied by re-regulation, by a raft of institution-building and legislation designed to give greater ‘sovereignty to the markets’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Ong, 2000; Sassen, 2000). It also depends on new infrastructures to sustain the flows of money and goods. Here we think of not just the new information technologies, the electronic networks such as the Internet and intranets, telephone systems and video-conference links, which increase the scope and speed of activities to permit 24-hour trading and the coordination of transnational corporations. Equally crucial are the new social infrastructures in the network of global cities: not just stock exchanges, corporate headquarters and INGO (international non-governmental organization) offices, but the work and leisure spaces for face-to-face encounters involving people who work in these places along with specialist business and management service professionals, the experts and intermediaries working in communications and culture industries. If there is globalization of the economy, we need to ask where are its effects most clearly manifest in terms of creating new forms of social relationships and practices. The various tiers of global cities linked together in a vast reference group provide not only command and coordination centres (the network nodes), but also the spaces for business and corporation people and specialists in the new middle class to jet in for face-to-face meetings. These cities, as Sassen (2000) and others emphasize, also attract another set of migrants, the mobile lower-class service workers and cleaners (largely women) who develop their own vernacular cosmopolitan networks (Werbner, 2006).

Economic globalization, then, gives rise to new economic and social forms and modes of connectivity which, in the current neo-liberal phase, is transforming social structures and generating new inequalities; the new mobile global elites (or 'transnational class' who enjoy 'Davos culture') along with their business, professional, knowledge specialist and culture industry new middle-class counterparts, are effective global winners. A sharp contrast to the many workers in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors who remain rooted in place, who have seen their incomes and life chances eroded. Yet the plight of such groups of 'global losers' is beginning to throw up and net together (often using new information technologies) activists and sympathizers to develop counter-globalization movements. In effect, a complex global dynamic is emerging which produces a new unstable field, which we are struggling to map. This process is generating a new patchwork of inequalities, pushing us beyond the existing terminology, such as 'the West and the rest' and 'the North and the South'.

In the West, the images of mobility in the media (global music, sport and news from around the world), the accessibility of the Internet and the increasing availability of food and consumer goods from all around the world in the supermarkets and shopping centres, create a sense that there is an emerging global culture. Yet this is often the banal cosmopolitanism of consumer culture, as opposed to a distinctive set of worked through value commitments. Indeed, the latter sense of culture, that a global culture should be somehow equivalent to the culture of the nation-state writ large, is a limited figure on a number of counts. It misses the ways in which national cultures were actively formed in the dynamics of the competing nation-state system. This is something which has little prospect of being paralleled on a global level. Indeed, it is difficult to envisage a global cultural integration process without something 'outside' which acts as the focus to bind humanity together (e.g. extraterrestrial threat or impending planetary ecological disaster).

There is the same problem for those who seek to equate the globalization of culture with Americanization. There is of course a good deal of evidence cited for Coca-Cola-ization, Disneyfication and McDonaldisation, given that these and other consumer culture brands and icons are visible in the consumer mediascapes around the world. We could also cite the increasing use of (American) English and forms of organization in business law and business practices, education, the Internet, etc. Yet, there are many counter-tendencies, such as the emergence of China, with its own diasporic and global communications circuits, such as finance, media and the Internet. Also noticeable is the development of new regional circuits, as we find with the success of Japanese media and culture in East and South-east Asia (pop music, television dramas, *anime*, Pokémon, etc.). Many of these cultural forms have reworked American popular cultural themes, but within modern Asian contexts (Iwabuchi, 2002). In addition to the enlarged transnational regional audiences, there are also a range of religious and other cultural movements which originated or have been sustained outside the West (Sai Baba, Hare Krishna, Tzu-Chi, Soka Gakkai, Opus Dei et al.) (Berger, 2002).

An emergent global culture, then, can be seen as far from being the culture of the nation-state writ large, despite various globalization projects arising from nation-states, or cultural and religious movements, to provide an all-embracing integrative culture. Rather, it is better to conceive global culture as a field in which many cultural forms are announced, accumulate, and collide. There is more cultural work going on today, which seeks to expand the circle of addressees and rethink the communal, audience or market relevance of cultural goods and media information. If globalization can be seen as a series of interlinked processes which are generating new forms of social life, then the impetus initially came from economic processes. But it has spread into the social and cultural arenas, not least in providing us all with more cultural work in understanding the others with whom we come into contact, along with the varying levels of construction and sedimentation of new conventions and habitual modes of interaction and communication.

There is also a fourth major social process, politics, to be considered. Here we need to think beyond existing international politics and the constraints on many international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), including the United Nations, to structure global

dialogues via people who are exclusively stamped as representatives of nation-states. There is an intensification of global politics from below, in part building upon the work of international peace movements and other INGOs which seek to construct new forms of global peace, inter-faith religious ecumenism or human, ecological and planetary solidarity. In addition to the current wave of 'third culture' institution building, it should be remembered that there was also a significant increase in this type of activity in the years leading up to the First World War (see Boli and Thomas, 1999).

Yet the current phase differs to the extent that an important dimension of global politics is the development of a global civil society. The anti-globalization protests in Seattle in 1999, and Cancún in 2003, suggest not only a defensive protest against economic globalization with its WTO-inspired punitive regimes of destruction of livelihood through the opening up of agriculture outside the West to the global market, but also a process of formation. The World Social Forum (initially conceived as a reaction to the neo-liberal global elite club, the World Economic Forum) has held various meetings in Porto Alegre from 2001 onwards, and a major congress in Mumbai in 2004, along with various regional assemblies. It is an emergent hybrid form, engaged in discussions and network-building to work out the agenda for an alternative globalization, under the ambitious promise that 'another world is possible'. This intervention in the formation of a global civil society aims to rethink global democracy and citizenship – a process which could well involve syncretisms from different globalizing traditions (the *ummah* and *ahimsa* and not just European human rights). The aim is to establish a new form of sovereignty which counters the sovereignty of the global markets and military force.

Military globalization is rarely talked about in the same context as economic, social, cultural and political globalization processes. Yet there is clearly a binding together and potential governmental disciplining of the people of the world through military force and technologies with their capacity for comprehensive global satellite surveillance and missile and weapon system targeting. This process of military globalization gave rise to the Internet and a host of other technologies which incorporate speed of delivery, scope of action and flexibility of response. As the power potential of economic and military globalization increases, there are those who see this as facilitating the global Empire, a new supranational form of sovereignty from above, which redefines the scope of action of nation-states. In effect, for Hardt and Negri (2000, 2005), we are moving into a new global era in which the US-defined state of emergency has the potential to undermine international law and define all wars as civil wars, or policing operations, under the new supranational umbrella, as war becomes a permanent part of biopower, or social reproduction.

Yet before we concede to the globalitarian bad dream of total surveillance and control, we should refer to Karin Knorr Cetina's (2005) recent discussion of global terrorism which suggests that the formation of world society may turn out not to be at all as people have envisaged and also casts doubt on the efficacy of social intervention, either for good or ill. Knorr Cetina points to the ways in which the new global terrorism can exemplify complexity by highlighting the major imbalances between cause and effect, unpredictable outcomes, and self-organizing, emergent structures. This contrasts with the earlier dreams of social science producing general explanations and the achievement of expert control. The management of uncertainty, task predictability and orderly performances were much easier to facilitate in the 'relatively complex' organizations of modern industrial societies. A global society, on the other hand, entails a different form of complexity: one emanating more from micro-structural arrangements that institute self-organizing principles and patterns. One of her most telling observations is that this new pattern of complexity is found both in the global markets and global terrorism, and in either case is exceedingly difficult to predict and control.

This point has important implications for global knowledge and the development of a global public sphere. As we seek to grapple with a new level of social life and the emergent global economic, social, cultural, political and military 'objects' and process, it is clear that our existing modes of analyses, often formulated with bounded-state societies, or working off simple games models involving one or two parties, are no longer adequate. Barbara Adam (1999) in her

discussion of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear explosion argues that it challenges our classical theoretical framework. She argues it could only be understood via a new approach which went beyond the traditional separation of disciplines to take into account the intermeshing of natural and social processes. There is also the need to go beyond the traditional focus upon intra-societal processes, with the need to make sense of a complex network which linked together a nuclear explosion, weather patterns, milk production, radiated babies and the overseas aid 'gifts' of the British government. It is in this sense that the new forms of binding together of social life necessitate the development of new forms of global knowledge which go beyond the old classifications. It is also in this sense that the tightening of the interdependency chains between human beings, and also between human beings and other life forms on planet Earth, suggests we need to start to think about the relevance of academic knowledge to the emergent global public sphere.

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