Decentering Globalization

Abdelaziz El Amrani
ASCA, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

Abstract

After the bombardment of the Twin Towers in September 2001, the hallmarks of Western capitalism, a great number of critics have sought to re-define and re-negotiate the issue of globalization. Many others, however, have predicted the end of globalization. This paper, then, seeks to delve into the complex, contentious and ongoing debate on globalization and its position in the post-9/11 world order. It also aims to address the impact of contemporary globalization on culture, identity, geography and nation-state as well as the relationship between the global and the local.

Keywords: Globalization, localization, homogenization, Westernization, hybridization, culture, identity, geography, nation-state, 9/11

The dynamics of Globalization

The present article is not only concerned with mapping the many claims and counterclaims that have been made about globalization, but it also demonstrates the fact that globalization was and still is a thoroughly contested subject. Talk of globalization has become rife among academics, journalists, politicians, business people, advertisers, and so on. Interest in globalization and its theoretical and empirical impacts was at its peak in the 1990s amidst a flurry of intellectual debate and enthusiasm regarding a new internationalism. Globalization can be described as a reality which overwhelms and engulfs the rest of world. Roland Robertson, one of the most prominent theorists of globalization, has defined globalization as a growth in "the scope and depth of consciousness of the world as a single place."[1] Robertson uses globalization to refer both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole. In other words, Robertson has focused on the way our consciousness of the world and our sense of place in the world have changed. Globalization, according to Robertson, is not only about structures, institutions, and networks, but also about the ways in which we think of social life and our place within it. In a similar vein, David Morely and Kevin Robins assert that "globalization is about the compression of time and space horizons and the creation of a world of instantaneity and depthlessness."[2] This means that as globalization expands and intensifies, remote and local communications become instantaneous increasing sense of global interconnectedness and simultaneity of experience.

Tellingly, for some scholars, globalization is seen negatively and at times almost demonically, as the dominance of Western economic and cultural interests over the rest of the world. Globalization, according to them, brings about a worldwide 'cultural synchronization' and therefore it is considered as a particular type of universalization trampling on and destroying local cultures and communities. Globalization understood in this way is often interpreted as colonization, Americanization, or 'westoxification', to use Ali Ahmad's term.[3] In his book *Narration, Navigation, and Colonialism,* Jamal Eddine Benhayoun claims that

> globalization […] is a Western project, and its implementation is conducted not through universal suffrage but in the total exclusion of non-western opinions. It is a system of exclusion, and as a system, it is designed to manage and exploit the world against the will of the majority of its inhabitants. Globalization is almost a euphemistic expression for 'imperialism,' another complex and ambivalent system that also homogenises histories and centralises governance though not all the time militarily […] Also, like imperialism, globalization presents itself as a system of rational and liberal practices, as an ideal world order outside of which reign chaos and backwardness.[4]

Globalization, in this sense, imposes western and American meanings that both obliterate older traditions and restrict the development of new alternatives. So, talk of globalization is a hegemonic discourse, and an ideology of supposed progress that masks far-reaching subordination by the West and America in particular of the rest of the world.

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[1] Quoted in Jan Aart Sholte, *Globalization: a Critical Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 267.
[2] David Morely and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 115.
[3] Sholte, *Globalization: a Critical Introduction*, p. 58.
[4] Jamal Eddine Benhayoun, *Narration, Navigation, and Colonialism* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2006), p. 165.

However, defining globalization in terms of the expansion and dominance of Western culture seems to be short-sighted. Such an interpretation of globalization fails to recognize the degree to which Western culture interacts with and changes as a result of exposure to other cultures. Although globalization may yield a greater cultural similarity among peoples, this similarity tends to develop not through the imposition of one set of cultural values on another. Instead, cultural similarity tends to develop through the mixing of a diversity of cultural values, moving closer to Jan Pieterse's "cultural melange" than cultural hegemony. Thus, theories of globalization have moved over the last century from expressions of the process as 'cultural imperialism' or 'neo-imperialism' to analyses of the 'hybridization', 'diffusion', and interrelationship of global societies, the compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a single space.

Crucially, Craig Calhoun confirms that it is a serious mistake to see globalization simply as the spread of capitalism and Western culture.[5] To undermine the homogenizing thesis that sees globalization as a Western project, Jonathan Friedman emphasizes that "we are witnessing an emergence of an unstable phase of de-hegemonization"[6], and hence it would be wrong to say that transworld connectivity is uniquely western. Similarly, David Morely and Kevin Robins maintain that "globalization is also about the emergence of the decentred or polycentric corporation. Global operations treat all strategic markets in the same way, with the same attention, as the home market."[7] The processes of globalization do in fact extend to the whole world, making it quite difficult to differentiate between core and periphery.

Despite the amount of attention focused on globalization as cultural homogenization, many analysts question whether this portrays accurately what is indeed occurring in the world. Jan Pieterse, for example, argues that globalization, rather being viewed in terms of standardization and uniformity, should be recognized as a process of "hybridization" that gives rise to "translocal mélange cultures". To view globalization as one-dimensional process of homogenization obscures, according to Pieterse, its fluid, open-ended, and multidimensional nature.[8] Unlike the aforementioned definitions, Jan Aart Scholte defines contemporary globalization on the basis of its "supraterritoriality" and "deterritorialization". He claims that definitions of globalization as internationalization, liberalization, universalization and westernization are redundant and do not present new insight.

Refuting redundant conceptions of globalization, Sholte defines globalization as "respatialization with the spread of transplanetary social connections"[9], and affirms that important new insight is provided when globalization is understood in spatial terms as the spread of transplanetary - and in recent times more particularly surpraterritorial - connections between people. In this regard, globalization, for Sholte, refers to "the advent and spread of what are alternately called 'global', 'transplanetary', 'transworld' and in certain respects also

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[5] Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism, Modernism, and their Multiplicities," In *Identity, Culture, and Globalization* Eliezer Ben- Rafael and Yitzak Sternberg, eds (Leiden: International Institute of Sociology, 2001), p. 448.

[6] Jonathan Friedman, *Cultural Identity and Global Process*, *Identity and Global Process* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), p. 168.

[7] Morely and Robins, *Spaces of Identity,* p. 125.

[8] Cited in Sheila L. Croucher, *Globalization and Belonging: The Politics of Identity in a Changing World* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc, 2004), p. 26.

[9] Sholte, *Globalization: a Critical Introduction*, p. 3.

'supraterritorial' social spaces." What is crucial is that Sholte associates contemporary globalization with a tendency towards deterritorialization, "so that social space can no longer be wholly mapped in terms of territorial places, territorial distances and territorial borders."[10] Sholte's view actually seems to be insightful in the sense that it refers to a shift in the nature of social space and sheds light on supraterritorial relations or transplanetary social connections that substantially transcend territorial geography. In this description of globalization, social relations are viewed as decreasingly tied to territorial frameworks; global phenomena extend across widely scattered locations simultaneously, diminishing the significance of territorial distance and borders

Globalization, Geography and Nation-State

Major strands of contemporary globalization research have been permeated by geographical concepts such as, "space-time compression," "space of flows," "space of places," "deterritorialization," "glocalization," the "global-local nexus," "territoriality," "supraterritoriality", "diasporas," "translocalities," and "scapes," among many other terms. This indicates that geography or space matters in explaining and approaching globalization. Along these lines, Arjun Appadurai identifies five interrelated dimensions of globalization: ethnoscapes (flows of migrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and tourists); technoscapes (rapid movement of technology, high and low, informational and mechanical, across previously impenetrable boundaries); finanscapes (flows of money via currency markets and stock exchanges); mediascapes (flows of images and information via newspapers, magazines, television, and film); and ideoscapes (the spread of elements of the Western enlightenment worldview, namely, images of democracy, freedom, welfare, rights, and so forth).[11] So, national boundaries are broken down and transcended by these various global flows. In this context of accelerated globalization and its accompanying developments in technology and communication, "geography", Robert J. Holton puts it, "has been pronounced dead."[12] For example, much of today's foreign exchange, banking, etc. occur globally and with considerable delinkage from territorial space.

Additionally, globalization entails a reconfiguration of social geography with increased transplanetary connections between people. More people, more often, more extensively and more intensely engage with the planetary arena as a single social place and as a result national frontiers or boundaries are declared as porous and deterritorialized. Following several decades of proliferating and expanding supraterritorial connections, territoriality, Sholte ascertains, "has lost its monopoly hold. Territorial domains remain very important, but they no longer define the entire macro spatial framework."[13] One of the reasons of the relative death of geography is the fact that "marketing strategies are 'consumer driven' instead of 'geography-driven.'"[14] Accordingly, territorial distances and territorial borders, to use Sholte's terms, "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

[10]   Ibid., p. 17.
[11]   Arjun Appadurai, "Difference and Disjuncture in the Global Cultural Economy," In *Theory, Culture, and Society* (Duke University Press, 1990), p. 11.
[12]   Robert J. Holton, *Globalization and the Nation-State* (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1998), 1.
[13]   Sholte, *Globalization: a Critical Introduction*, pp. 63-64
[14]   Morely and Robins, S*paces of Identity,* p. 110.

anywhere across the planet at the same time) and *transworld instantaneity* (that is, the move anywhere on the planet in no time)."[15] Significantly, global relations today substantially rather than wholly transcend territorial space. Although territoriality does not place insurmountable constraints on supraterritoriality, global flows still have to engage with territorial locations. The present world is globalizing, not totally globalized.[16]

Furthermore, globalization has exerted new pressures on the authority and autonomy of the nation-state. What is clear is that technological and economic transformations are surpassing the regulatory capacities of the nation-state. For example, thanks to Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and Myspace, the Arab peoples managed to overthrow the dictators despite the tight censorship on the internet. Nation-States are therefore more permeable to both internal and external influence than ever before. The integrity of the nation-state is threatened not only by the expansionist ambitions of other states and the conflict of insurrectionary forces within its territory, but also by the disruptive influence of transnational corporations. There are many commentators who have declared the death of the nation-state. Benjamin Barber, for example, assumes that "Jihad" and "McWorld" make war on the sovereign nation-state and thus undermine the nation-state's democratic institutions.[17]

The events of September 11, 2001, in America might vindicate the fact that the nation-state is vulnerable to external influence. The attacks have exposed the contemporary vulnerability of states. 9/11, in fact, shows that the world's most powerful state is not inviolable. For Amine Saikal, "the attacks exposed US vulnerability to attacks and changed the USA's perceptions both of itself as the world's only secure superpower, and of the international order it had cherished since the end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union."[18] It is claimed that globalization is characterized by the disorder which empowers a vast network of so-called 'terrorists', who have come from more than twenty different countries and spread their organization across as many as sixty different states, to carry out their own political or ideological ends. The 9/11 and other events display the fact that the nation-state is no longer controlling its boundaries in the face of global flows. In certain ways, globalization has unsettled and indeed challenged the position of the nation-state as the predominant touchstone of collective identity in society.

Robert Holton, however, says that globalization has not yet overrun the nation-state. Nation-states still remain resilient in the face of globalization, but he admits the fact that "identity is increasingly determined by transnational developments rather than within the nation-state."[19] More interestingly, nation-states can no longer claim to exercise tight control

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[15]   Sholte, *Globalization: a Critical Introduction*, p. 61.

[16]   Ibid., p. 70.

[17]   Benjamin R. Barber, "Democracy and Terror in the Era of Jihad vs. McWorld," In *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order,* Ken Booth and Tim Dunne, eds. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 251. Barber is among those who have recently popularized the idea of an end to the nation-state. He writes of 'Jihad' as a shorthand for all the reactionary anti-modernisms and fundamentalisms of the world, and 'McWorld' as global economic integration (which he understands mainly in terms of the spread of Western consumer culture). He also claims that civic identity, which is one of the components of democracy and multiculturalism, is undermined by tow rival identities –ethnic and commercial (Jihad vs. McWorld).

[18]   Amine Saikal, *Islam and the West: Conflict or Cooperation?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 6.

[19]   Holton, *Globalization and the Nation-State*, pp. 2-7.

over the formation of identities and loyalties. The nineteenth century dream, that the nation-state should comprise a single culture with all the people cohabiting that space sharing a common identity, has proved to "be a bloody nightmare." Phrased in different terms, the nation-states presupposed that cultural harmony is based on uniformity and singular forms of allegiance and they sought to make exclusive citizens and create unique cultural context. Conversely, the mobility and complex affiliations of people today reveal that the dream of a 'pure race' or an identity or a culture bound to a given territory is no longer possible. People construct their sense of identity and communities, by defining their interests in ways that exceed the priorities of the nation-state.[20] Therefore, when nations-states once coerced people into expressing their allegiance, they are now being compelled to face the legal and social demands of political diversity and cultural pluralism. At issue here is that a major change of spatial structure affects society as a whole. Put precisely, the partial end of geography or territoriality has profound impact on the formation of identity

Debating Globalization after 9/11

In the torrent of prose that has flowed through the world after the events of 9/11 one common view was that the attacks have brought the end of globalization and the neoliberal world order. But although the destruction of the World Trade Centre does indeed deal a severe blow to an already-shaky global economy, it does nothing to slow down the other processes that are creating a more richly interconnected world. In some ways, it actually has accelerated the awareness of globalization by demonstrating the power of the communications media to turn local events into global events that capture the attention of all people everywhere.[21] So, obituaries for globalization are highly premature. In his article "History and September 11", Francis Fukuyama states that

> more than ten years, I argued that we had reached 'the end of history': not that historical events would stop, but that history understood as the evolution of human societies through different frame of government had culminated in modern liberal democracy and market-oriented capitalism. It is my view that this hypothesis remains correct, despite the events since September 11: modernity, as represented by the United States and other developed democracies, will remain the dominant force in world politics, and the institutions embodying the West's underlying principles of freedom and equality will continue to spread around the world. The September 11 attacks represent a desperate backlash against the modern world, which appears to be a speeding freight train to those unwilling to get on board.[22]

Although the most recognized symbols of the economic and military might of the biggest power on the planet were destroyed and damaged, Fukuyama agues that liberal democracies and capitalism, the major foundations of globalization, will remain resilient in the face of the so-called terrorism. Indeed, even after 9/11, cultural icons and information of all kinds still travel freely around the world, governments are still more connected with one another than they have ever been, and neither AIDS nor climate change has reverted to the status of a

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[20] Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), pp. 83-89.

[21] Walt Truett Anderson, "In the Wake of 9-11, Globalization Goes On - And On" (Pacific News Service, 2001). <http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=3b51bab2996aed604b15dd8e70b0d2f9).

[22] Francis Fukuyama, "History and September 11," In *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order*, Ken Booth and Tim Dunne, eds. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 27-28.

strictly local issue. Due to globalization, every single event can affect the whole world and swine flue and current global financial crisis are cases in point. Put in a nutshell, globalization is best seen as a process rather than an end-state.

Along similar lines, Noam Chomsky, a famous American linguist and critic, avers that what happened on September 11 has virtually nothing to do with economic globalization. He claims that "we can be quite confident that it had little to do with such matters as "globalization", or "economic imperialism", or "cultural values", matters that are utterly unfamiliar to Bin Laden and his associates."[23] However, after 9/11, the USA and some European states have engaged in activities that are in many ways anti-globalization in character. American Patriot Act (Uniting and strengthening America by Providing Approximate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) is a good example and it is designed to shrink civil liberties. Also, after the 9/11 attacks, immigration and immigrants have become targets of blame. Energy is immediately focused on fortifying U.S. borders, tightening visa requirements, and monitoring and restricting the rights of immigrants in response to the security and surveillance needs of the United States. Accordingly, all these measures and practices have a destructive effect on the question of cultural hybridity.

Nonetheless, as a consequence of 9/11, the impetus to increase security has come together with the enduring planning vision of a business-friendly cross-border region. The result involves increased plans and practices of regulating the border that aim simultaneously at easing obstacles for business traffic while strictly securitizing everyday and everything else.[24] Hence, globalization was, and still is, an irresistible social phenomenon that is engulfing the whole world, and owing to the strong forces that currently propel globalization, most current signs point to considerable additional increases of globality in the years to come.[25] For U.S. capital and the state, 9/11 provided a useful rationale to further U.S. domination of the neoliberal world order through war and occupation. In the name of spreading democracy and human rights, a country that is evacuating democracy and human rights promises war without end. This is to say that 9/11 has signalled the rise of military and political globalization. Equally important, the events of 9/11 could not have been planned or executed without the existence of and widespread access to advanced technology. In brief, 9/11 has dramatized that globalization is a defining reality of our time and that the much-celebrated flow of people, ideas, technology, media, and goods could have a downside as well as an upside, and expensive costs as well as benefits. By any standard, September 11 was a cataclysmic event, but it did not herald the end of globalization.

Globalization and Localization

Unlike those who see globalization as a phenomenon that excludes and destroys the local identities and cultures, Roland Robertson affirms that "it makes no good sense to define the global as if the global excludes the local."[26] He formulates the dynamic of globalization as

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[23]   Noam Chomsky, *9-11* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001), pp. 35-77.
[24]   Matthew Sparke, "Passports into Credit Cards," In *Boundaries and belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices,* Joel S. Migdal, ed. (Seattle: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 254.
[25]   Sholte, *Globalization: a Critical Introduction*, p. 86.
[26]   Quoted in Bill Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), p. 215.

"the twofold process of the particularization of the universal and the universalization of the particular."[27] So, Robertson suggests that the term 'glocalization' more adequately describes the relationship between the local and the global as one of interaction and interpenetration rather than of binary opposites. Instead of focusing on the global and the local as opposing forces, the term 'glocalization' is employed, Robertson argues, "to capture the dialectical and contingent interchange between local cultures and global trends."[28] Stated clearly, the global and the local interact, often to the point of drawing from each other, rather than being locked in mortal conflict in which local difference and particularity will be obliterated by global homogenization. On similar lines, Parekh Bhikhu says that

> globalization, of course, primarily originates in and is propelled by the West, and involves Westernizing the rest of the world […] Non-Western ideas also travel on its back and distort the West's own self-understanding ways of life […] Western exports do not make local sense unless they are adjusted to local culture […]Globalization, therefore, involves localization and at least some appreciation of and respect for cultural differences.[29]

Global communications, markets, etc, are often adapted to fit diverse local contexts. That is, through 'glocalization', global news reports, global products, global social movements and the like take different forms and make different impacts on local particularities. Hence, the local and the global should not be seen as simple opposites, but the local contributes to the character of the global. Stated concisely, neither the global nor the local ever exist in a pure form. They are not mutually exclusive and they are instead constantly in a state of interaction.

Just as globalization can enhance the capacity for world citizenship, it can also facilitate the maintenance and flourishing of particularistic identities and attachments. Both the fear of the global as well as the disdain of the local are positions that neglect to take into account that, in reality, culture is both local and global, both national and transnational, both particular and hybrid, both native and cosmopolitan.[30] Intriguingly, diasporic communities and post-colonial world have traditionally served as a bridge between the particular and the universal. Bill Ashcroft, in this regard, maintains that global culture becomes the object of a critical appropriation by which the character of local identity is strengthened. The experience of the post-colonial world shows, according to him, that change is not going to occur by futile attempts to establish fortress societies or to abolish globalism, but rather by strategies to transform it as global culture has been transformed by appropriation and adaptation. He writes,

> post-colonial experience demonstrates the fact that the key to the resistance of the global by the self-determination of the local lies not in dismissal, isolation and rejection but more often in engagement and transformation. The diffuse and interactive process of identity formation proceeds in global terms in much the same way as it has done in post-colonial societies, and it is the model of post-

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[27] Quoted in Krishnaswamy Revathi, "The Criticism of Culture and the Culture of Criticism: At the Intersection of Postcolonialism and Globalization Theory," *Diacritics*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Summer, 2002), p. 113.

[28]   Quoted in Croucher, *Globalization and Belonging*, p. 26.

[29]   Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (United Kingdom: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2002), p. 164.

[30]   Cheng, J Vincent, *Inauthentic: The Anxiety over Culture and Identity* (London: Rutgers University, 2004), p. 61.

colonial appropriation which is of most use in understanding the local engagements with global culture.[31]

Rather than being contradictory, it is self-evident now that the global and the local are in many ways complementary and necessary to each other rather than necessarily conflicting social forces. From this perspective, local culture is not dismissed, despite the imbalance and inequality in terms of power relations, at the expense of global culture. That is to say, "globalization does not mean the end of segments. It means, instead, their expansion to worldwide proportions. Now it is the turn of African music, Thai cuisine, aboriginal painting and so on, to be absorbed into the world market and to become cosmopolitan specificities."[32] In this sense, local products and cultural practices are transposed in a comodified global scale.

All in all, the most important point that can be drawn from the present article is that in spite of the fact that there is a huge literature on globalization, no universally endorsable definition is available as well as there is little consensus on the precise form globalization may take. As I have demonstrated above, globalization takes many forms including homogenization, polarization, respatialization and hybridization. Put differently, the definition of globalization is in motion rather than fixed and different definitions of globalization may promote different values and interests. Building on that, there is no definitive definition of globalization and hence globalization must be approached from various perspectives. That is, it is best thought of as a multidimensional phenomenon involving diverse domains of activity and interaction. Overall, globalization is not simply a new phase of Western domination of the non-western world, as many more traditional kinds of Marxist critics represent it to be, but also the means of new modes of resistance to the current international order.

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[31]   Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformation*, pp. 209-14.
[32]   David Morely and Kevin Robins, S*paces of Identity,* p. 113.

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