

BEYOND THE DISCOURSE OF GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract: This paper deals with the ways in which discourse concerning planet earth is being transcended. Specifically, attention is drawn to the increasingly overlapping relationship between the work of philosophers and anthropologists, one the one hand, and astrophysicists on the other. Woven into the discussion are the issues of the neglect of global consciousness and culture in comparison with the more usual concern with global connectivity. In this respect it is argued that globalization, as it is normally understood, can be regarded as self-destroying when it is considered under the rubric of glocalization. The paper concludes with discussion of the possibility of some form of global governance in the light of the present chaotic state of global affairs. It is argued that some relatively clear-cut image of the world as a whole is a precondition of any systematic attempt to resolve this problem. The attempt to provide such an image rests upon the author's previous discussions of the global field.

Keywords: global consciousness, glocalization, governance, global problems, cosmos.

Even though my talk is entitled, *Beyond the Discourse of Globalization*, another title or, at least, subtitle might well be *Provincializing the Planet: Cosmology and Globality*¹. In any case, I would like to begin with a quotation from "The Guardian", the British newspaper that I read a few days ago. The quotation comes from a letter to "The Guardian" by Peter Dickens, a well-known geographer. Dickens wrote that the "the loss of Richard Branson's Spaceship Two in the Mojave Desert should give us pause for thought. Speaking just after the crash, Branson's team likened the British entrepreneur to Ferdinand Magellan the adventurer who opened up the globe to trade in the 20th century". In other words, he sees this as of equal importance to that of Magellan at the end of the 16th century. The comparison between Magellan and Branson is compelling. Magellan and other adventurers such as Columbus opened up the globe to trade and profit-making. In opening up the possibility of space travel Branson is obviously venturing beyond the globe. Branson and other would-be space travellers, including well known celebrities such as Angelina Jolie, Kate Winslet, Lady Gaga and others have already paid a quarter of a million dollars or more each to book their passages into space.

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It should also be noted that there is a completely separate contemporary mission, the Mars One Project. This is conceived of as a one-way mission to Mars and is intended to be an exploration of the possibility of populating Mars and other planets. This project is being financed by a Dutch non-profit organization. There are, of course, quite a large number of ventures of this kind. The latter have been analysed, to a large extent, by Dickens and James Ormrod (2007) in terms of their idea of the *humanitization* of the universe. This is a phrase that has been popularized by some scientists in their discussion of “space colonization”.

As Dickens and Ormrod argue in their book of 2007, *Cosmic Society: Towards a Sociology of the Universe*, much can be learned from exploring and speculating about what lies outside and beyond planet earth. My own reason for being particularly interested in this approach at this time is primarily because globalization centers (only) upon the word “globe”. So the idea of globalization is, in this sense, confined to planet earth. It is more than worth mentioning here that one of the significant influences in thinking about the globe per se was a journal launched by the Saint Simonians in France towards the end of the 19th century; a journal which was simply called “The Globe”. The latter was founded because of the opening of the Suez Canal, which the French regarded as a French innovation (which it largely, but not entirely, was). Of course, the development of the Suez Canal opened up a number of new trade routes and in fact it made it possible for thinkers, particularly French ones, to think of the world as inhabitable by all people. In other words, all those considered to be human could be joined together, if only indirectly.

What I want to emphasize at this point is that so much stress has been placed in the study of globalization on what is called either connectivity or interconnectedness; although the introduction of the concept of glocalization is an important corrective to this. We are used to defining globalization as a process of increasing connectivity, or increasing interconnectedness, across the world as a whole. I accept the importance of connectivity, but I want to emphasize a very important missing link in this equation. That is the notion of global consciousness – our *awareness* of belonging to this planet, of being part of this planet or dwelling on it. Roughly speaking, I refer to this as a matter of global culture, and I emphasize global culture because, until quite recently, when we have heard the word “globalization” used in newspapers, on TV, via the in-

ternet, on the radio and in everyday conversation, we tend to think of it as something which is sweeping all over the globe and overwhelming local and particular cultures. Many people here will recall that in the early 2000s a large demonstration was to be held at the meeting of the G10 in Genoa. This, however, was more or less cancelled because of considerable violence and the death of at least one demonstrator. It should be noted that the Genoa event followed upon the well-publicized demonstrations that had occurred shortly before in 1999 in Seattle, USA. The demonstrations in Seattle were widespread, drawing in people from countries from many parts of the world but, in particular, from the USA itself, in order to demonstrate against the World Trade Organization meetings of that year. This was thought at first to be a demonstration against global capitalism. But something was very significant about the Seattle demonstrations and other similar demonstrations that have occurred since. The significance lies in the fact that people steadily began to realize that they constituted a large collectivity, with supporters and followers from various parts of the world. They recognized that even though they were, for the most part, ostensibly demonstrating against an economic phenomenon, they were actually coming together in cultural, political and social terms. It was at that point that observers and participants began to talk about “globalization from below”.

From my point of view, and because I had been writing about globalization for many years before that, this realization was of great satisfaction to me; and not merely for political reasons, because I did sympathize with the demonstrators against the WTO. It was of considerable interest to me in an academic sense because I thought that people had at last begun to recognize that globalization was and is not simply an economic phenomenon. In other words, as I have consistently maintained since at least the early 1980s, globalization is what we should call a multidimensional issue; the major dimensions being: yes, the economic; yes, the political; yes, the social, and, of even more importance, the cultural. In other words I would reverse the conventional order and say, “cultural, social, political, economic”. My reasons for this are too complicated to discuss in any detail in the present context. Nonetheless it should be noted that I give strongest priority to thinking about the world as a whole and its “environs” in cultural terms. However, to a large extent the priority given to culture should become increasingly prominent in the rest of this presentation.

As I have already remarked, I think that much of our concern now should be with what lies *beyond* this planet. There is much contemporary discussion – not merely of space exploration and travel, and science fiction – but also the growing sense that we are just a little dot in the cosmos as a whole, in what some people call the multiverse or series of universes. (See Roberto Unger and Lee Smolin, *The Singular Universe and the Reality of Time*, 2015). I should emphasize that, in this connection, I am presently trying to become rather more expert in the field of astrophysics. With regard to the latter, I think that in the future people claiming to be dealing with globalization – or, indeed, glocalization – will need to know a great deal more about that particular discipline. One of the exceedingly few books that at least begin to take this argument seriously is that of Dickens and Ormrod (2007). Later, however, I will enter some reservations about the latter.

It is at this point that I must accord considerable praise to the very important institution that has been established here in Milan, namely *Globus et Locus* and its production of an important on-line journal, “Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation”. *Globus et Locus* is attempting to bring together the natural-scientific aspects of globalization and glocalization together with more social-scientific and humanistic aspects of the world as a whole, with a view to greatly improving the latter. This is what I am largely concerned with here. The great Marxist thinker, Rosa Luxemburg, observed that the accumulation of capital could not continue ad infinitum, largely because there would come a time when the resources of the earth would be exhausted and depleted. Exploitation would continue, but would eventually come to an end. (This kind of observation was not at all uncommon in the early years of the twentieth century. To take but one example, the highly influential German intellectual, Max Weber, had remarked a few years earlier than Luxemburg that human life would remain in the same condition until the last ton of fossilized fuel had been burned.) In her book, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1951) Rosa Luxemburg very briefly discussed the possibility of life beyond earth – or at least implied this. This could possibly have meant that the earth no longer had what she called “an outside” – it would not have a capitalist realm, in the conventional sense, in which investments could be profitably made. These comments by Luxemburg have proved to be remarkably prescient, for in a sense she anticipated the theme with which we have become increasingly concerned, i.e. the

theme as to what lies beyond the planet which we inhabit – not merely for economic reasons but also for cultural, social and political ones. However, my approach departs from Marxist or neo-Marxist approaches as exemplified in the book by Dickens and Ormrod (2007). The latter authors concentrate upon space exploration as a form of imperialism. While this is not entirely unfruitful, my own view is that it is much too narrow. To put it very simply theirs lacks, *inter alia* anthropological considerations. The argument of Dickens and Ormrod (2007) takes as one of its starting points the claim that capitalism expands into outer space as a result of its contradictions. They claim that the “humanitization” of outer space is the product of crises, particularly the attempt to re-assert “hegemonic authority”.

As I have remarked, most analytical approaches to globalization place great, if not increasing, emphasis on connectivity. While this is indeed a significant feature of globalization, I argue here that this focus has been perpetuated at the cost of the minimization of global consciousness. However, the latter cannot be fully appreciated without due attention to the position of the world in the wider universe. In this presentation, I attempt to approach this in terms of recent thinking about the cosmos. There are two aspects, or basic approaches, to the issue of the cosmos. The latter issue is the more physical, the more material sense of the cosmos as a place “out there”, as a kind of material concept which is studied in detail by astrophysicists and related specialists. On the other hand, the term cosmos can have a very different meaning, one that is much more concerned with the anthropological and spiritual aspects of the cosmos. In other words, all peoples, wherever they are located, wherever they may reside on this planet, have always had, as global anthropologists have shown us, particular conceptions of the creation of the world, where the world is going – a kind of teleological conception of the world.

What is coming to be realized is well-expressed in a very important book by Adam Frank, *About Time* (2011). In this volume he asks one very simple, but very important, question: what were people thinking about with regard to the origins of the world before the concept of the Big Bang? As Frank remarks “the knife-sharp separation of science from other human endeavors such as art, politics and spiritual longing is too abstract to be true or helpful”. He goes on to contend that we need a glimpse of the ways in which our science shapes and is shaped by experience *and the culture it creates*. Frank clinches

his point by saying that this task “demands we ask the deepest questions of all about the nature of time, the cosmos and their beginnings” (Frank, 2011: xv). Obviously there were various myths and ideas about creation long before the concept of the Big Bang was postulated. This theme is particularly evident in the book by G.R. Evans, *First Light: A History of Creation Myths from Gilgamesh to the God Particle* (2013). However, I will not go into the whole discussion about the attempt to discover the God Particle. All that needs to be said here is that myths are the oldest components of cosmology – more accurately – cosmogony. Indeed, it is very striking that there is a present trend for books and articles to be composed and co-authored by philosophers, and anthropologists, on the one hand, and astrophysicists or physicists, on the other (e.g. Nancy and Barrau, 2015 and Unger and Smolin, 2015. See also Nagel, 2012 and Frank, 2012).

Along such lines we may speak specifically about the relativization of planet earth. Although the word relativization has become quite common, there are still some who apparently have difficulty in understanding this term, so a brief explication is in order. When we say that something is being relativized, or is in the process of relativization, what we are in effect saying can be illustrated thus: “I stand for a particular principle, I have a strong idea about something or other, whether it is God, sexual conduct, or anything”. If somebody then comes along and says: “I have a completely different point of view, indeed an opposite point of view to yours”, we must ask what the person does who had the original idea. What did he/she do about this challenge that comes from the opposite end of the spectrum. These are two highly conflicting positions. He/she can say, on the one hand: “I stick steadfastly to what I believe, no matter what you say”. This is what is widely known nowadays as fundamentalism, at least since the explicit rise of Fundamentalism in the USA in the early twentieth century. On the other hand, at the other extreme it may be said that “Your idea is just as valid as mine and you have a more or less equal right to hold it”. This is what is called relativism – namely, the principle that every idea or commitment is relative to another. I think that it is very unwise to go to either extreme.

Both of these extremes are analytically unfruitful, even though for a considerable amount of time relativism was accepted in parts of the academy, notably in the discipline of anthropology. Aspects of this problem have been cogently expressed in a well-known article by the anthropologist, Clifford

Geertz where he addresses the issue of what he calls anti-anti-relativism. Specifically, Geertz (1984) is strongly opposed to those who oppose relativism but he is even more concerned to put anti-relativism in its place. More generally, I wish to emphasize that I regard relativization as being the major, general dynamic in the whole process of globalization, emphasizing that it is a multidimensional phenomenon. In arguing in this way I am maintaining that globalization, as well as glocalization, can be fruitfully regarded as inevitably involving processes of contextualization, placing what is the case at a particular point in time in a broader framework. In other words, globalization has historically proceeded by ideologies, institutions, and other such phenomena being overtaken by “successors”, which make the “items” concerned unstable. In fact, we presently live in a world of increasing instability and uncertainty – hence the ubiquity of fundamentalism in our time, as well as culture wars in every part of the world.

It is certainly worth mentioning at this stage that globalization has very often been used as a “blame word”, in the sense that numerous so-called social problems – such as teen pregnancy, crime, traffic congestion, etc. – are characterized as being the consequences of globalization. In this respect it is very important to stress that globalization also produces diversity and heterogeneity. In fact, recognition of diversity and heterogeneity has become much more common in recent years. One of the main reasons for this – indeed, perhaps the principal reason – is that introduction of the concept of glocalization into our discourse has done much to cancel many of the once – strong claims as to the homogenizing effect of globalization. I could provide numerous examples of the ways in which, either directly or indirectly, glocalization has been seen as a corrective to the homogenizing effect of globalization. However, one particular example should suffice. In the early 2000s upon arriving at Narita airport near Tokyo I purchased a copy of the English-language newspaper, “The Japan Times”. I was immediately surprised (as well as pleased) to see that on the front page the editor had claimed that “a new word” had entered Japanese discourse. The new word was no less than “glocalization”. The latter’s significance was stated to be a way in which native Japanese traditions could be preserved in the face of the homogenizing effects of Westernization and/or globalization. For me, this was particularly interesting – not to say paradoxical – for the simple reason that it was from Japanese business discourse that I myself had ob-

tained the alleged new word glocalization some ten years earlier. More specifically, the Japanese term for glocalization was, I had discovered in the early 1990s, *dochakuka*, a word that means, almost literally, to indigenize.

Turning directly to Europe we find much opposition presently to the whole idea of the European Union. In fact, opposition to the latter within the Union itself is a kind of microcosm of world-wide opposition to globalization; although I have attempted myself to apply the concept of glocalization to these various oppositions (Robertson, 2014^b). Many of these oppositional movements are very right-wing although a few are of the left. In any case, the desire to thoroughly reform or actually leave Europe has been centered upon the so-called problem of immigration, or free movement among European nations. The general idea is that if immigrants are expelled – or, at least, strongly resisted – all will be well. In other words, there is a strong nativistic sentiment all over Europe, involving the very nostalgic, reactionary idea that traditional ways of living should be restored. This is the broad approach that I have adopted in my most recently published book *European Glocalization in Global Context* (Robertson, 2014^b).

In my work on globalization and glocalization up to the present I have worked with the concept of the *global field*. There are four components to this: nation-state; individual selves; the system of international relations; and finally, but not least, humankind. I would like for a moment to address the topic of the nation-state since many academics and politicians think of the nation-state as disappearing under the impact of globalization (or, more narrowly, Europeanization). It should be emphasized that I thoroughly

disagree with this – unfortunately, very influential – proposition. My own position is that the nation-state is being reconfigured and altered under the conditions of globalization and Europeanization. In fact, these reconfigurations are best regarded as involving glocalization with increasing clarity. It would not be appropriate here to explore the other components of the global field. I simply wish to emphasize that globalization/glocalization are processes which have been thought of as occurring on planet earth. I would only say here that the relationships between the nation-state, individual selves, the international system of societies, and humankind, change over time and become increasingly problematic and difficult for humans to handle. A particularly vital aspect of this general picture is that individuals no longer belong simply to societies,

in spite of “extremist” rejection of such an idea. In varying degrees individuals are “torn” between their attachments to the four components of the global field. This dilemma that characterizes the sentiments of “global citizens” has become increasingly intense and apparent since the late nineteenth century; although the idea of global citizenship is a very old one. To put it succinctly, even bluntly, we must learn to live in a vigilant condition of ambivalence.

The form of the global field and its apparent but changing stability makes the entire issue of global governance particularly acute. I should remark, however, at this stage that the global reach and extent of world wars has both enhanced the need for global governance and at the same time made it increasingly difficult. The chaotic state of world affairs – particularly with regard to geopolitics and geoculture – has a great bearing on this issue. In any case it must be pointed out that what I have called in my own writing the take-off period of modern globalization occurred during the period lasting from the eighteenth century until the nineteen twenties (Robertson, 1992).

I now take a closer look at the theme of glocalization. It is particularly striking to me that the theme of the “glocal” has been adopted and pursued very evidently in Italy and I have direct and personal evidence of this trend in Rome and Milan. In both of these cities work has been produced that has greatly promoted and advanced the study of glocality and glocalization. I feel very secure in saying that the concept of the glocal is one of the most important of our time. Having just edited a book on Europeanization *as* glocalization (Robertson, 2014^b), I am even more convinced that the glocal perspective is vital to our understanding of the present state of the world as a whole. This understanding is not merely an academic one, for it clearly now has very significant political, practical use; although it should be stressed that it was almost certainly in the sphere of business and business studies that the idea of glocality and glocalization was first fully realized. In any case, adopting the glocal perspective enables us to gain a new purchase on such crucial issues as the sustainability, indeed the survival, of the European Union.

Taking a much broader historical and geographical perspective, even though this example may be quite controversial, we can see that the so-called world religions – at least the Abrahamic ones – can be regarded as glocalised versions of monotheism. This theme and the more or less simultaneous

rise of other world religions can usefully be regarded as glocal versions of the same mode of understanding the world as a whole, including its creation and origin.

Very significantly the organization *Globus et Locus* and its journal “Glocalism” are thinking in this way but not necessarily in precisely these terms. Perhaps the best example of this is the whole debate about global warming and climate change, a debate that began a long time ago with concern about the depletion of the ozone layer and is now becoming very broad and increasingly significant, with a large set of worries and concerns about food supply, water supply, salination and so on. In these particular ways we have begun to think increasingly about the *habitus* in which we live, the *habitus* being planet earth; but particularly in relation to the “world(s)” beyond. This is, at least in part, one of the ways in which talk of the post-human is increasingly on the academic agenda (Braidotti, 2013; Fuller, 2011; Coustenis and Encrenaz, 2013). In any case, many medical developments are occurring with respect to phenomena such as prosthetic limbs and various modifications of the human body. Historically speaking, what are presently known as cyborgs have been quite common both in mythology and reality. In other words, beings that are both human and more-than-human have been imagined for many, many centuries. However, it is only quite recently that cyborgs have been regarded as full-fledged beings and ubiquitously so. More specifically, it is only in recent decades that cyborgs have become a definite focus for academic study, even though the “robot problem” has been growing exponentially for fifty years or more.

So, all-in-all, we have reached a kind of post-global stage, one which is, indeed, closely connected to the idea of a post-human stage. However, none of this indicates that the nation-state is in decline. In any case, that does not mean that there cannot be, at least in principle, peace among nations.

I turn now to more direct discussion of the main topic of the present issue of this journal: global polity and policies. Generally speaking, this theme is related to the much debated contemporary phenomenon of global governance; but one of the specific questions raised in relation to this topics whether it is possible to identify a ruling global community and the issue of the origins of the world’s objectives. These are, indeed, crucial but highly problematic questions.

For many centuries, if only intermittently, there have been proposals for the shaping of the world as a whole. In my own

work I have specifically dealt with this issue by outlining a schema of world order (Robertson, 1985, 1992^a, 1992^b: 61-84). This schema involves depicting the world as a whole in terms deriving from my conception of the global field that I have previously identified. The main point of this depiction has been to ground the possibility of some kind of global governance or polity in the “reality” of the world as it has “evolved” over a very long period of time. This orientation rests on the point that there is little or no reason for making what would seem to be utopian proposals of the world polity without very serious attention to present world reality, including present thinking about what has been called by Dickens and Ormrod (2007) the humanization of the cosmos. On the other hand, there is much to be said for what has been claimed to be a new form of utopianism – a more realistic form, one that rests much more on empirical reality than previous forms of utopianism. The latter way of thinking might well apply to empirically based attempts to envisage a global ethic with corresponding modes of governance (cf. Robertson, 2001). Kishore Mahbubani’s *The Great Convergence* (2013) almost certainly falls into this category. Indeed, Mahbubani’s volume is one of the more serious and realistic attempts to envisage numerous and formidable problems as well as the hopes for a genuinely global polity. Mahbubani particularly attends to the question as to whether geopolitics will derail convergence. This is, indeed, a pivotal issue. Even though Mahbubani seriously attends to the issue of new contemporary forms of imperialism, notably those engaged in by the Chinese at the present time (cf. Mishra), he nonetheless is very optimistic about the possibility of achieving a much more empathic this-worldly civilization. In his volume (Mahbubani, 2013: 259) ends with his claim that we will “in the next few decades (...) increasingly realize that our village is a world and not that our world is a village”. This is based upon the condition that increasingly the world will continue to shrink and that technology will eliminate distance. I would argue that that these contentions are worryingly over-utopian themselves. Nonetheless, the search for what is called a new global civilization is certainly to be praised, even though this particular idea is not at all original.

Another kind of proposal concerning a new kind of world is that proposed by Mazower (2012) which involves the tracing of previous attempts to establish forms of world organization, more specifically, governance. Understandably and presciently Mazower ends his volume with a discussion of the cri-

sis in Europe. As Mazower's book was published in 2012 we can readily see that Europe, its allies, and its neighbours have drastically changed. I think here of such developments as a much more assertive Russia (under the authoritarian leadership of Putin), Russia's invasion of Ukraine, its annexation of Crimea and its ongoing threat to Baltic countries. Mazower's volume is much less utopian than that of Mahbubani and pays considerable attention to international law (as opposed to ethics).

A particular item that is missing from most discussions of global governance is that there is a great deal of rhetoric about the end of the world, at least as we know it. The editors of this issue of "Glocalism" ask whether it is possible that there could be such a phenomena as a global constitutional law and the degree to which such might threaten or foster the development of the present forms of demographic rule. Even though there are many cross-cutting laws concerning such phenomena as the sea, the Arctic, the climate, space and so on I am not at all optimistic that we are in sight of an end to world conflicts, quite to the contrary. My argument in this regard is that there are many religious or religio-political movements – particularly at this time what is usually called ISIS (or Daesh). Specifically I am thinking of the fact that there are numerous movements all over the world that look at the possibility of a very violent end of the world with anticipation. This is a matter that has to be given much more attention than previously. We are presently engaged – or at least this is my hope – on an intellectual venture that will take the relation between religion and politics very seriously. Those who praise the end of religion are almost certainly wrong. Indeed, they may well be as guilty as any other group in leading us towards disaster. This is not by any means intended to praise, so to speak, all forms of religiosity. It is merely intended as a warning – a warning that neglect of religious violence as well as religions of peace is what I would describe as the most neglected topic of the hour. A much more pragmatic approach to these kind of questions has been advanced by Micklethwait and Wooldridge (2014) in their volume entitled *The Fourth Revolution: The Global Race to Reinvent the State*. This volume should be read in conjunction with the book by the same authors, *God is Back: How the Global Rise of Faith is Changing the World* (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2009).

It is clear from the foregoing that the contemporary claim of ISIS to install a global caliphate (Pankhurst, 2013) threatens the whole world with increasing violence, quite apart from

new and aggressive forms of imperialism. To be sure there are oppositions to this – in fact *global* oppositions – as exemplified by the so-called Occupy movement that began in the USA but has not yet spread very widely. One should always remember that violence, particularly in the form of war (Barkawi, 2006), has almost always been concerned with claiming to be the *true* “definition” of the world and that the search for a viable and glocalized global imaginary (Steger, 2008) will undoubtedly continue. I believe that an adequately glocalized imaginary is our best hope in the face of the exponential increase in non-state actors, as well as the ongoing strength of the state; not to speak of the highly problematic strength of so-called multinational corporations.

NOTES

¹ This paper is based on a lecture given at the University of Milan on November 7, 2014.

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