

Geographical perspectives on globalization

Globalization is not only a highly controversial concept, able to stir even the most violent debates, as the recurrent protests against the G8 meetings testify, it is also a complex concept, with economic, political, cultural and spatial implications. The analysis of every thread of the concept in isolation from the other, although useful in order to simplify the study of globalization, if carried out to the extreme, undermines its scientific value. The matter of the fact is that each aspect is related to the other: economic factors affect the political ones and vice versa and in turn both influence and are influenced by the cultural aspects of globalization. In turn most aspects have outcomes that affect and shape physical and non-physical spaces at every working scale.

It is necessary a holistic approach to fully understand the complexities and the nuances of this so widespread and far reaching process. Geography is the scientific discipline that more than others has conceptual tools useful to effectively and correctly explore this field of research, although, inexplicably, geographers have not been ready, not just in Italy, to venture in it. This reluctance to take the globalization phenomenon down the earth, to territorialize it, is “quite often due to “philosophizing” attitudes of many geographers hostile to map making and quantitative methods, and lost in ‘discourse’” as Pelanda puts it in his contribution to the present volume.

It is a fact that in absolute and relative terms geographers have not taken the lead in carrying out scientific research on globalization. The research centres specifically devoted to globalization are, generally speaking, part of economics facul-

ties (e.g. the Leverhulme Centre for Research on Globalisation and Economic Policy at the School of Economics of the University of Nottingham); but even where the point of view is more spatially oriented, geographers are not particularly numerous (e.g. the CSGR – Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation – at the University of Warwick, the largest of its kind in Europe has staff and associates drawn from the fields of Anthropology, Economics, Law, Politics and Sociology (but no Geography). Besides these academic research centres operate a number of private think-tanks on globalization, and a number of NGO devoted to gather information and data to feed their lobbying activities. In Italy the situation is no better and this special issue of *Geotema* seeks to fill a gap and to kindle the interest and debate within the academic community.

Globalization: a Penelope's web?

As Pelanda in his contribution has shown, there is a wrong belief that globalization has already taken place. As far as the economy is concerned, and particularly the web of commercial flows, it is clear that the majority of trade goes on within, rather than between regional blocks. Most of the inter-block trade, in any case a fraction of the total volume of trade, is polarized on the USA. The same can be said of most other exchanges: tourism, transport, culture.

Some researchers see globalisation as a process that is producing a transformation of the world, although there are many others who point out its

strong limits. Some research suggests that proportionately, the world economy was more integrated and internationalised at the beginning of the 20th century than at the end. Also, global processes impact differentially at the different geographical scales: interlocked causes and effects range at a multitude of scales between the global and the local exist. Cultural distinctiveness is the key to understand the different impacts. Space and scale in broad-based processes matter. In this context, a number of sectors are examined: transport, culture, language, the environment, war and geopolitics, demography and migration.

Transport: the weft of globalization

As globalization is the result of increasing integration and therefore of growing interconnection, transport is a key factor. Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution transport has enjoyed a significant space-time and space-cost convergence. This process has greatly accelerated after the Second World War and the transport revolution. The great majority of traded goods is waterborne. If it was not for shipping companies moving goods literally to and from every corner in the world, the level of integration would be extremely low. Transport is a facilitator of globalization, and it is helping to shape new spatial relationships and to consolidate their patterns. It is also true the opposite, i.e. if it was not for globalization, the development of shipping would be much lower, as integration creates a demand for ever growing levels of transport. Slack shows that, despite strong evidence for the impact of globalization on shipping, and particularly container shipping, there are significant local and regional distinctions resulting from limits to globalization. Shipping, and the same can be demonstrated for the other international transport modes, is simply mirroring more general trends. Global forces are important but local factors continue to exist and bring to bear a continuing influence. The transport revolution has been completed by the computer and telecommunication development. Internet has nullified the importance of distance as far as transport of information is concerned. The complete effects of the Internet development are still to come and to be fully understood. However, again, a real globalization, even in this dematerialised cyberspace, is a long way ahead: most of the connections are within cultural blocks rather than across the boundaries in the cyberspace. So far, the real world influences and shapes the virtual reality more than the opposite.

Culture and language: globalization's battlefield or meeting square?

Cultural homogenization is one of the most feared supposed outcomes of globalization. Noglobals of every colour accuse the western, Anglo-Saxon, mainly American, culture of annihilating indigenous cultures and languages, and imposing Western values, models of consumption and ways of life. Dongu suggests that a certain degree of cultural assimilation with American (or Western) values is unquestionable because English works as a bridge between people, easing the exchange of goods, opinions, images and knowledge, minimising friction due to cultural distance across linguistic boundaries. However, the statement that English will erase the diversity in the world is a gross simplification. Noglobals frequently draw a parallel between nature and culture, and state that in the same way that globalization is (supposed to be) destroying bio-diversity, it threatens cultural diversity as well. In both these fields the main problem is the conservative attitude shown in these positions: noglobals want to preserve what is currently existent in the present shape, but culture, like nature, is continuously changing and becoming something different. Culture is not a static heritage, but is an inherited set of tools continually reshaped by nations, groups and individuals, useful and used for transact between local action space and the outside, more or less globalized, world. It is sufficient even a superficial historical analysis to find out that lingua francas and vehicular languages have always existed, besides local languages and dialects. Multiculturalism, much more than universalism, has always been the characteristic of the world, probably because it is a deep necessity of the human beings to feel part of an in-group, but to be able to relate to the other out-groups. The action space of most people in the world is at a very local scale for most of the time. Language, and the culture it expresses, serves different functions (maternal, local or regional social relations, religious, trade, national official, diplomatic, international relations, scientific, etc.) and for each function may be used a different one: for example, it is quite common for an African to have a good command of up to six languages.

In the contest between languages, the hegemonic Anglo-Saxon culture is both a winner (as it is succeeding in making its language of widespread use) and a loser (its language is deeply contaminated and so are its values), suggesting therefore that globalization does not necessarily lead, and is



not presently leading, to homogenization. Globalization is instead an opportunity to enrich each culture thanks to the need to negotiate with an increased number of them and to set a boundary of distinctiveness not just between each group and its neighbours, but with the rest of the world.

Both the attitude in favour of English as the global language for every use and the absolute closure against English "contamination" are probably ineffective and useless in the long run. As shown by Arcangeli, even more unrealistic seems the hope of a successful establishment of artificial languages such as Esperanto or Europanto. The fortune of a language is related to the power and, particularly, to the prestige the society it belongs to enjoys. Is it not strange that the Italian language was widely spoken abroad before Italy became unified and ceased to be so immediately after? It is likely that English will continue to be the most spoken international language as long as America maintains its position as the dominant power. Spanish and Chinese might be probable candidates to substitute it, as they are spoken by huge populations, and the economic potential of Latin America and China is still developing. Dongu suggests that bilingualism is probably the solution to this complex situation: competence in more than one language will give people the opportunity to adjust the communication tool to the setting.

The quest for a sound environment

As Biagini pointed out in his contribution *the modern economy is by no means a "zero sum game"*. Which means not only that the rich are not so at the expense of the poor because of the dynamism and work of the society they live in, but also that development is not achieved at the expense of the environment. The true engine of an economic system is innovation, and very often an innovation is a way to satisfy more needs with less, i.e. to make economy more productive and efficient. They are also ways to produce less and less expensive goods granting a better quality of life and better prospects to more and more people.

What is most disturbing is that extremist ecologists, in order to make their point of view heard, do not hesitate to shamelessly lie, on the assumption that if you shout something loudly and obsessively enough people will end up believing you. The so called destruction of the Amazon rainforest, the "green lung of the earth", is just a case in point. The acid rains, that were so fashionable to blame for deforestation have instead a minimal

impact. The application of the Kyoto protocol, that is going to cost hugely on the world economy, aiming at reducing CO₂ emissions by 5.2 per cent, will simply delay the increase in temperatures of the so called "global warming" of six years (Lomborg 2003). Water is another cherished issue of environmental ideology but, instead of stigmatizing water consumption, there should be an interest in enabling people in need to access more water of better quality. Of course this has to be done taking into account the existing resources, soil physical and chemical characters, geology, economics and so on, as Corona has tellingly highlighted in her contribution. Environmental protection is a serious matter and the scaremongers are making a mock of it. Extreme ecologism, far from being science is just fashionable nature-worshipping pompously dressed in scientific jargon.

It is time to admit that in many parts of the world people suffer because of an "excess" of polluting nature. For example, more than 3 million people die each year because of malaria but none of the environmentalists suggests that wetlands should be drained and disinfested.

War and geopolitics: we have to give them a chance

Drawing future scenarios is an exercise clearly open to failure but it helps to make sense of the data at hand and to order them according to a probability scale. One thing is absolutely sure for the future: in the world there will certainly be warfare. War, as old as mankind, constantly present in history, will still be with us in the future. The problem is: who will be involved in it, and what kind of warfare will it be. Will it be a war between enemies divided by matters of interest, a prolongation of politics with other means, within an institutional framework, or between uncompromising enemies divided by reciprocally incompatible *Weltanschauungen* and political systems?

11 September 2001 has brought to the limelight a new enemy: Islamic terrorism. But is it truly a new enemy? Islamic terrorism is just one, although quite visible, thread of a more complex strategy of territorial expansion started in the 7th century. The inclusion of the West within the *Umma*, the Muslim community of the believers, passes through aggression to the *Dar el Harb*, the land of war, as other than *Dar el Salam*, the land of peace. This war is going to be asymmetric in character and its outcome is, in the short to medium range, far from certain. Europe and the West in



general find themselves with a diminished internal strength and will to fight, populated by a fifth column represented both by non-integrated Islamic immigrants and, more surreptitiously, by those who abandon the Christian religious tradition. This widespread attitude of submissiveness and timid attempt to please the invaders defined by Bat Ye'or with the word *dhimmitude*, has led some authors to describe this land slowly but surely acquired to the *Dar el Islam*, as Eurabia (Fallaci 2004).

Demography and migration: the Western sunset

As far as territorial conquests are concerned, the only victories that really last and therefore matter are the demographic victories. From the early 1970s, most western countries have entered a phase of demographic suicide, induced by socio-economic changes, the secularization of society, the introduction of contraception and abortion, the scarecrow, repeated to hysteria, of world overpopulation. Third World countries have instead continued so far to enjoy steady high birth rates and decreasing death rates, resulting in a huge population wave that has increased pressure on the developed countries borders. Strong immigration flows have been activated by differentials in wealth, standard of life, personal security, and possibly by conscious strategy. Official data on immigration are clearly underestimated; its clandestine component is extremely difficult to gauge, although it is clear that the phenomenon is growing fast and becoming a structural dimension of Western societies. Da Pozzo, in his contribution, talks of a paradox: "noglobol" movements find their most powerful allies asking the knocking down of any frontier and the complete right to mobility, in a class of big and small industrial entrepreneurs and their political mentors: precisely those interest groups that noglobals seem to fight against.

The main problem is not with immigration as such, although when huge numbers are concerned, there are always difficulties with inclusion. The problem arises when immigrants do not intend to become integrated, do not wish to become part of society and follow local mores and obey local laws and regulations. Even worse is the case of an explicit statement of creeping low-intensity territorial invasion. This is the case with the Muslim immigration, that is infiltrating most European and American large and medium cities, with its high birth rate that drugs Western birth rates giv-

ing an impression of false security: what is growing is not the Italian, German, French populations but an alien society within it. The same is true of the Chinese immigration: there is not a town in Italy of any significant size where there are not Chinese activities and immigrants. The main difference is that the Chinese seem to prefer to use economic warfare to gain political power: there is no price to stop acquiring shops, or sheds, or restaurants.

After all, it is Sun Tzu that wrote: in the practice of the art of war the best thing of all is to take hold of the country of the enemy living it whole and intact", and this can happen only by destroying the enemy and its capability or will to resist from within. The seizure of mass media, the connivance or cooperation of opinion-makers, journalists, intellectual has precisely the role to lower defences until it is too late. A lesson the Chinese, and the Muslims have known from long time, but the Western people seem to ignore. Or is it not? After every terrorist attack, there is no top-rank politician who does not appease his or her public opinion by talking about the involvement of the so called moderate Muslims to isolate terrorism, and sternly deny a clash of civilizations is underway. Why is it that all the footage about the beheadings by the terrorists in Iraq have never been broadcast? The excuse is that these are too strong images for Western stomachs. But the images on the Abu Graib shameful tortures have been obsessively broadcast for days and days. Why is it? Probably Huntigton's theory about the clash of civilizations should include the possibility of inner clashes besides external ones: a conspiracy that begun in the 18th century aimed at seizing power and destroy Christianity, by conquering France, by unifying Italy and deprive the Papacy of its territorial base on the assumption that the Church would then disappear, to destroy the last Catholic empire (Austria-Hungary) by waging the First World War, by infiltrating the Catholic hierarchy and undermine liturgy, by imposing laicist States as the only adequate form of government to grant peace, by destroying religions and using Islam as a battering ram against Christianity. Islamization of Europe has been wanted, planned by the European rulers as a decisive factor to erase from history the last two thousand years so as to create a 'melting-potted' population with no religious or cultural identity, making the European Union start from year zero (Magli 2004).



Globalization: a land of opportunity for geography

Globalization is a process towards stages of developments where space is more integrated and interconnected. As Biagini pointed out in one of his contributions, "the main points to be borne in mind in a general theory of development are: the nature (static or dynamic) of the society, the interaction of human activity with the physical environment, the Centre-Periphery relationships (essential for historical interpretation), the stages of development, and the unavoidable and ubiquitous conflict". There is plenty of geographical research to be carried out if this definition is applied at the global scale. Also the analysis of the regions which are active or passive globalizers and therefore contribute to the whole picture is still far behind.

Pelanda calls geographers to one of their specific tasks: mapmaking. In fact, a decent representation of the globalization of the economy is needed if we are to plan the governance of that phenomenon, so as to make nation-states and globalization standards become combined. In order to achieve this, knowledge of the nation-states and regions should be promoted. A suitable thematic mapping methodology is needed, showing economic, social and infrastructural variables in such a way as to gauge strength and weakness of each national actor, so that the present conditions, the trends and the needs may be clearly understood, i.e. to know the situation, and the likely advantages and liabilities of the participation to the global system. This is absolutely necessary if a nation-state or a region intends to partake in the global open market founding it on realistic grounds rather than mere political will. Far-reaching revolutionary socio-economic changes such as globalization must be managed rather than denied, but in order to achieve this, suitable tools have to be devised and geographers are called to provide such outfit.

There is a need for scholars and researchers to enter the quest for truth, to gather and analyse data and information as free as possible from the coloured deforming glasses of ideological political correctness. Development is a complex phenomenon and under-development has complex causes; blaming the West for every problem the so called Third World countries experience is simply a comfortable way of dismissing reality and the fastest root to miss solutions and fail the aim. Under-development has cultural causes much more serious than the economic ones. The pretence to have economic aid from the West but no cultural con-

tamination and to trigger development in such a way is vain desire. The Catholic missionaries of the Carmelite, for example, have to pass on cultural values if they want know-how to become effective. In fact, knowing how to do things is not exactly as having done them. If the West stops being proud of its own culture, its roots and its religion the other cultures will stop copying it and the development reached will be fruitless. Strangely enough, nobody questions the right of other non-western cultures to influence and contaminate our and indigenous cultures: the spread of communism was hailed with great satisfaction by the same people that today antagonizes globalization on cultural grounds. In the same way, not many voices are heard to condemn the aggressive and hugely-supported-by-petrodollars Muslim "missionary" effort.

Geographers should also approach the study of the environment that is in need of research aimed at safeguarding nature, not worshipping it, with mankind in focus, from the point of view of human needs. It is far too easy, from our Western comfortable lives, to pretend human beings (the others) do not (or should not) exist and make all the efforts to grant animals and trees a very natural life, while forcing people to live in danger, hunger or disease.

Nobody knows what future lies ahead, whether globalization will go on and allow the achievement of a better standard of living for growing numbers of people or if the disintegration forces will, for the time being, win the contest. In many ways, globalization has been planned by economic and political actors without the due consideration of religious and cultural factors, in other words foregoing identity, on the assumption that a new cosmopolitan human species, with no roots, no ties and no beliefs could be created. As Da Pozzo pointed out, there is a "return of the *espace vécu*, of strict territoriality as a feeling of spatial identity of human groups, through increasing localisms and regionalisms on an ethnic and/or religious base", a trend that calls for the development of a "geographic *glocal*, based on a renewed governance of the territory, the seat of local day to day activity.

There is plenty of scope for geographers and other scholars wishing to forsake the doubtful marshes of the weak thinking, and, as Biagini hopes for, to reject discourse and self-imposed blindness, and at last to look at facts with true faith in human reason.



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