

## Globalisation and Regionalisation from a Spatial Perspective

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**Abstract.** Much of the debate on globalisation has been framed in dichotomous terms which juxtaposes the national state, a fixed territorial unit, to a world increasingly characterised by global flows which disregard boundaries. I suggest an alternative approach which goes beyond 'common sense' notions of space and views it as a social construct consisting of multiple, temporally coexistent layers connected by zones of ambiguous permeability. Using this perspective, the interplay of regionalisation and globalisation is viewed as the often contradictory efforts of specific social forces to formulate new spatial arrangements which seek to ameliorate the spatial limitations of the national state while maintaining some of the advantages offered by limited permeability between regions.

Globalisation in the late 1990s seems an old hat. Initially an academic concept, globalisation has penetrated public debate and is ever-present in the media coverage of global politics without necessarily having been clearly defined and with its meaning often taken for granted. This uncritical stance notwithstanding, there seems to be a general agreement that globalisation is here to stay and that the world has irrevocably changed over the past two decades. Opinions as to the nature of this change vary. On the one hand, commentators such as Ohmae (1990, 1995), Guéhenno (1995) and Reich (1992) claim to varying degrees that the state has lost its capacity to control significant aspects of policy which in the past fell into the domestic realm. On the other hand, there are those who counterpose that such predictions fail to recognise the continued ability of states to affect global politics (see Wade, 1996). This article intends to go beyond this global-state dichotomy and offer the notion of produced space consisting of multiple layers as an alternative approach to the analysis of global politics. My main point is that many analyses of global politics, be they 'globalist' or 'statist' in nature, fail to grasp the spatial nature of the global system due to their unquestioned acceptance of 'common sense' assumptions about space and time. In the following pages, I will start out with a critical investigation of the uses of the term 'globalisation'. I will then develop an alternative conception of the

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global system which assumes that space and time are not *a priori* givens, but are social constructs which both influence and are influenced by social action. This investigation in turn leads to a section which embeds the processes associated with the term globalisation within the larger context of shifting production and consumption models. Finally, I propose that regionalisation<sup>1</sup> can be viewed as an example of the search for a new spatial arrangement in which some of the barriers imposed by the national state are overcome while still maintaining the political advantages of a spatially partitioned global system.

### The Globalisation Discourse as the Ideology of the 'New World Order'

As with many slogans which gain currency at particular moments, the term 'globalisation' has acquired many meanings in a short period of time. The public debate on matters concerning the international political economy has for the past several years been dominated by the notion of an increasingly global marketplace where, according to Nestlé CEO Maucher, in order to survive, it is important to be more competitive than one's neighbour regardless of whether one is an individual, a firm or a country.<sup>2</sup>

In this post-Cold War era, the main threat to populations is no longer the ideological enemy, either capitalist or communist, but the movements of the global marketplace. Working people of every walk of life are pitted against those in other states. They are told that they must make sacrifices and improve productivity without necessarily expecting increases in remuneration because of 'global competition'. It impresses upon the populations of every state that some of the protection services for which states charge their taxes are no longer available and that the state can/will no longer protect its population from certain 'global' forces (see Tilly's (1985) metaphor of the protection racket). The protection services in question range from 'welfare reform' in the core states to the abolition of subsidies on food, health services and education in peripheral states. Whereas the Cold War opponents were portrayed as enemies which could be overcome with a sufficient national effort, the global market forces are depicted as inevitable, natural forces to which one has to adapt or fall by the wayside.

This unilateral end of at least part of the protection bargain between states and populations would probably have given rise to more trouble without another theme of the globalisation discourse: that of the promise of a global consumer culture with unlimited access to goods and service from across the globe. If the cancellation of some of the protection bargain is the disciplining—i.e. the 'stick' of globalisation discourse—the promise of access to ever more commodities serves as the 'carrot' of the new world order. The weakening of borders as economic safety barriers which serve to protect a specific standard of living has been accompanied by the promise that the unfettered flow of resources would bring two things, jobs and cheaper commodities. This positive potential of globalisation is actually, of course, only attainable to a relatively select stratum of the population, especially insofar as the declining wages which come in the wake of the redefinition of the protection bargain represent a limit which cheaper commodities can only partially overcome.

Globalisation, as it is often portrayed in the media, implies that the global market is a recent phenomenon, that today the economy of any particular national state is affected by global dynamics whereas previously it was not or

only to a very limited extent. Such a notion is, however, quite clearly mistaken. A better term to define the phenomenon to which 'globalisation' is meant to refer today would thus be 'internationalisation' in the sense that the latter term "refers simply to the increased geographical spread of economic activities across national boundaries" (Dicken, 1992, p. 1). Such a spread, moreover, is not at all unprecedented. Internationalisation of the world economy is a process which historically is subject to ebbs and flows. Thus, for example, if we define the ratio of total trade to GDP as a crude measurement of internationalisation, Britain, Germany, Sweden, Italy and France were all more internationalised around the 1880s than during the 1960s (Krasner, 1978, pp. 326–329). During the past two decades, of course, we have indeed witnessed such an increase in internationalisation as the cycle moves to increasing flows once again. At the same time, however, it is crucial to point out that a big share of this increase in trade at the global level has taken place between the OECD states and is therefore not a global phenomenon whose actions and effects are equally distributed across all states. The trade–GDP ratio for the OECD countries has risen from 24.2 per cent in 1960 to 36.7 per cent in 1994. As a comparison, the same ratio for the world amounted to only 32 per cent in 1993, up from 29.2 per cent in 1978.<sup>3</sup> Much of this increase in trade is not necessarily in trade of finished goods between producers in one state and consumers in another, but trade in unfinished goods between various branches of the same transnational corporation which happen to be located in different states (see Bush and Milner, 1994, pp. 268–271).

In addition to the general increase in the magnitude of trade, there have also been important changes in the composition of trade, as, for example, the increase in the amount of trade in commercial services from 19.5 per cent of total trade in 1985 to 23.29 per cent in 1995 (WTO, 1996, p. 126). Such services include transport, travel, communications services, financial services, computer services, royalties and license fees and assorted other services ranging from business services to cultural and recreational services (WTO, 1996, p. 165). But again, the increase in the share of services in total world trade is relatively small. Finally, there has been a dramatic increase in the magnitude of international financial transactions which have eclipsed traditional goods and service transactions by a factor of 30 (Ruggie, 1993, p. 141).

Internationalisation, despite the popular notions, is therefore not a secular trend which began with the emergence of the world economy and has progressed steadily since then. Rather, it is a cyclical process with long-standing historical precedents. If we compare this pattern of increasing/receding global flows with cycles of hegemony in the world system, moreover, we see that the last high point of internationalisation, as defined above, occurred roughly during the period of hegemonic decline of the UK (Shannon, 1989, p. 121)—exactly the period of transition to Fordist production methods in the core of the world economy. Today, the high point of internationalisation is again occurring during a period of hegemonic decline, this time that of the US, and once again during a time of transition to a new system of production organisation. Internationalisation is therefore arguably simply one indicator of hegemonic change in the global system. As Arrighi (1994) has pointed out, periods of transition from one hegemonic order to another have always involved changes in the manner in which global economic activities were organised.

Globalisation as an ideology of the post-Cold War era is by no means

uncontested. As Rupert (1997) has pointed out, the effort to establish globalisation as the basis for a new common sense in the US has not gone unchallenged. The recent rejection by the US Congress of additional funding for the IMF by an odd coalition of politicians with labour and right-wing ties is one example. Similar opposition movements have emerged in other parts of the world. The effort to see beyond the use of globalisation as a new basis for a common sense requires a careful analysis of the nature of the hegemonic transition currently underway. In my opinion, such an analysis requires an explicitly spatial approach because the reorganisation of global economic activities is always also a spatial reorganisation of both the ways in which economic production is organised and the manner in which political communities demarcate their spaces. The debate centred around globalisation is, at its root, a spatial debate. It abounds with images of borderlessness, global flows and seamlessness. However, this spatial aspect is rarely acknowledged; instead, the debate is typically situated in a temporal context where changes in the global system are attributed to historical—i.e. exclusively temporal—changes, rather than spatial changes. I will outline the components of such an approach in the next section.

### **The Space of Global Politics**

Space is not something we usually think about in our daily lives, except insofar as it manifests itself as distance to be overcome. Generally, we assume space to be a container of people and things. There is something 'natural' about this conception; after all, everything we see and do exists or takes place 'somewhere'. This 'somewhere', this place of our daily life, is what we experience, and is the basis upon which we build our conception of the world. We easily extrapolate from this concrete place in which we live to a general, abstract view of space which has the same characteristics—i.e. that of a universal container of beings and things. It is in this universal container that the story of our life, our history and ultimately all of human history unfolds according to a linear concept of time. For over two millennia, the Euclidean concept of space has dominated the mental representation of space. Euclidean space was homogeneous, smooth and infinitely divisible and constituted the basis for two- and three-dimensional geometry. The equivalent of this mathematical conception of space in physics was that of Newtonian absolute space which viewed space as "a neutral background against which the positions of objects can be pinpointed and their motions described" (Coucletis, 1992, p. 220). By now, centuries after Newton's time, this basic conception of space has helped us to understand the physical world, has provided the basis for the development of geography and other physical sciences, and has even come close to serving as the explanatory matrix for our personal experience of space.

This view of space-as-container has also been embraced by international relations (IR) theory in its treatment of the state. IR theory spends little time thinking about space because its practitioners assume that the question of space has already been settled. The state is seen as a fixed unit "of secure sovereign space" (Agnew, 1994, p. 106) and as a container of society (Taylor, 1994). The international system, in turn, has come to be regarded as an agglomeration of states and a region is simply a smaller agglomeration of states which happen to share a certain geographical proximity.

Yet within the span of the century that is now ending, the introduction of

relativistic space in modern physics has ended the Newtonian space-as-container notion and laid the foundation for a conception of space in which its structure "both influences the distribution and motion of objects and is governed by them" (Couclelis, 1992, p. 221). The classical distinction between matter on the one hand and the empty void on the other hand is untenable in this new physics; likewise, Einstein's relativity theory flatly states that "there is an infinite number of spaces which are in motion with respect to each other" (Einstein, quoted in Kern, 1983, p. 136) and these spaces are not voids but are full and dynamic, with the power of "partaking in physical events" (Einstein, quoted in Kern, 1983, p. 154). These dramatic changes have had few if any impacts on the conception of space in other disciplines. International relations (IR) theory in particular has persisted in embracing the view of space-as-container in its treatment of the state and the global system. One is left to wonder why, despite these dramatic new visions of the universe and space, the space-as-container view persisted. Lefebvre's observation regarding this question is worth quoting here:

To picture space as a 'frame' or container into which nothing can be put unless it is smaller than the recipient, and to imagine that this container has no other purpose than to preserve what has been put in it—this is probably the initial error. But is it error or is it ideology? The latter more likely. If so, who promotes it? Who exploits it? And why and how do they do so? (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 94).

A partial answer to these questions lies in the 'double illusion' of the transparency and opacity (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 27) which has informed past philosophical debates of space. The idealist approach, reflecting the former illusion, focused on space as mental construct understood through its representations; materialists, on the other hand, emphasised an objective, 'opaque' space as a natural thing (Soja, 1996, pp. 63–65).

I propose here that it is more helpful to think of social space as a social product (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 30), rather than as a pre-given normalised abstraction or a mere mental construct. Like any production process, the production of specific spaces, be they buildings, cities or states "imposes a spatial and temporal order upon related operations" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 71) so that the manner in which societies use and structure space ultimately determines the physical appearance of that space, which in turn has an impact on social practices. It is, for example, no accident of nature that medieval European cities were dominated by church spires, while cities in capitalism are dominated by office towers (Harvey, 1973, p. 32). But the claim that space is produced does not mean that "[s]pace is ... produced in the sense that a kilogram of sugar or a yard of cloth is produced" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 85). It exists both as the precondition for and the outcome of social action and, as such, articulates the relationships of things and actions in their simultaneity. "Itself an outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh action to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 73). This role of guiding social action while being the product of it is a crucial aspect of produced space. Since it prohibits specific social actions at any given point in time, those who wish to commit such action will always feel the need to resist, subvert and overcome space that has been produced previously and by others. Whether or not this need leads to action depends on the specific constellation of social forces. Social space will be altered

if the social forces which experience it as a constraint achieve sufficient weight. But the alteration itself again constitutes an obstacle to further social action in the future. In Harvey's (1985, p. 60) words, "[s]pace can be overcome only through the production of space". The specific space of any particular time period therefore reflects the general economic structure and mode of production of the society which produces it. Thus, for example, the space produced by capitalism is different from the space produced by feudalism. Capitalist production is commodity production and the space inherited from feudalism emerged as a prime obstacle to the realisation of profit because commodity production requires the constant reduction of turnover time and space represented and represents a primary obstacle to such a reduction.

The produced geographical landscape constituted by fixed and immobile capital is both the crowning glory of past capitalist development and a prison that inhibits the further progress of accumulation precisely because it creates spatial barriers where there were none before. The very production of this landscape, so vital to accumulation, is in the end antithetical to the tearing down of spatial barriers and the annihilation of space by time (Harvey, 1985, p. 43).

Historical periods are therefore not simply time-periods characterised by a beginning and ending date. They are also spatial referents, the boundaries and divisions which represent those social phenomena.

Wallerstein's (1974, 1980) achievement in charting the emergence of a world economy during the 16th century represents an important building block in the process of deconstructing the notion of fixed space. With the arrival of Europeans in the Americas, the entire world was in one way or another tied into this world economy which constitutes what I call global social space. This global social space consists of interconnected layers (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 86) whose texture and thickness are the result of human action. Texture and thickness in this particular context refer to the appearance—i.e. the landscape and the amount of layers that can be identified at any point in this space during a given time-span. States currently constitute one layer of this space with state boundaries conceived of as ambiguous continuities (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 87), rather than as clear divisions. National economies, understood here as identifiable centres of accumulation, constitute a different layer and national spaces, the spaces claimed by "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991) constitute yet a third. In short, the global system did not emerge as an additive outcome of the emergence of states, just as the global economy did not emerge out of the addition of multiple national economies (von Braunmühl, 1976, p. 276). Rather, states and national economies represent different layers of one global social space; they are the constitutive components of that space contributing to its richness and variation. These layers are historically contingent, not permanent, and subject to changes as the constellations of social forces which created them change. Layers may disappear and new layers may emerge in response to new and different dynamics. Particular layers may be more enduring than others and may appear as an obstacle to forces attempting to create new layers or consolidate existing layers. But the degree to which layers appear as obstacles depends on the relative importance of closure vs continuity, in other words, the ambiguous continuities referred to above.

This spatial image of the global system is first and foremost concerned with

the elimination of fixed categories such as states or national economies. Such an image rejects the reification of the state as a permanent object, or as a distinct entity separate from and independent of other states, existing, as it were, in a timeless, empty void. States as layers of a global social space remain connected to each other, both physically and conceptually through the concept of constructed social space. At the same time, states are put into the proper historical context in that they are not timeless entities as some of theorists would like us to believe, but specific spatial constructs of a particular historical period. (For a review of the emergence of states, see Tilly (1985, 1992); for a review of the spatial aspects of the emergence of states, see Foucault (1991) and Walker (1993, especially section 6).)

### **Globalisation as the Crisis of Fordism**

The spatial approach to the global political economy outlined above rejects the notion that globalisation is a phenomenon which occurred during the past two decades. Globalisation and the modern state system have emerged in tandem. However, for the past two centuries or so, a significant part of social activities around the world has been concentrated at the spatial layer of the state.<sup>4</sup> In light of the preceding discussion, the term 'globalisation' to be meaningful, must therefore be redefined to refer to a qualitative change in the manner in which social relations are organised "in real time on a planetary scale" (Castells, 1993, p. 21), albeit in an unequal and asymmetrical manner. While flows of commodities have always characterised the global system, they have tended to follow production and distribution decisions which were made mostly for segmented national markets. Today, such decisions are driven by the necessities of a single global market. Barnett and Müller's (1974) path-breaking work on global corporations first introduced the notion of corporations which viewed the existence of national states as a barrier to their operations. Today, this is true not only for the exclusive club of giant corporations but also for firms which hitherto never considered global competition as a credible threat/option.

Numerous causal factors contributing to this change have been identified. One of the most frequently cited factors, however, is the change in the basic structure of the production process (see Castells, 1993; Cohen, 1993; Cox, 1994; Dicken, 1992; Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 1994). Generally, the change in the structure of production is described as a shift from the Fordist<sup>5</sup> model of production to a new model of production which has been characterised as flexible production (see Cohen, 1993; and Harvey, 1989). A second recurring theme is that of significant changes in the international trading system: specifically, the slow but steady effort to eliminate barriers to trade at the global level through the GATT system and the corresponding near universal acceptance of international trade as the desirable means of fostering economic growth (see Cohen, 1993; Dicken, 1992; Castells, 1993).

Underlying each of these changes are more basic changes in the nature of technology which Castells (1993, p. 17) describes as the change "from material production to information-processing activities" and which Cox (1994, p. 46) refers to a shift "from economies of scale to economies of flexibility". These economies of flexibility are characterised by a

flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products

and patterns of consumption. It is characterised by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological and organisational innovation (Harvey, 1989, p. 147).

For Jameson (1991, p. 36), the result is a "purer capitalism" which has expanded "into hitherto unmodified areas" of economic and social life.

Usually, the term 'post-Fordism' is employed as a shorthand mnemonic to refer to these changed aspects of the production process. However, I agree with Peck and Tickell (1994) who make a strong case for the argument that what has been generally described as post-Fordism is *not yet* a new method of organising and regulating social production, but is rather the crisis of Fordism which has not yet found its resolution in a "new institutional fix". What many of the commentators who suggest the emergence of a post-Fordism tend to overlook is that Fordism represented not only a specific (spatial) organisation of labour and production but also, and in combination with the latter,

a stable mode of macroeconomic growth, ... a social mode of economic regulation [and] ... a general pattern of social organization involving the consumption of standardized, mass commodities in nuclear family households and the provision of standardized, collective goods and services by the bureaucratic state (Jessop, 1994, pp. 253–254).<sup>6</sup>

In other words, in Fordism, a specific spatial organisation of labour and production was matched by a specific spatial form of social regulation, that of the Keynesian welfare state. So far, flexible production does not seem to be paired with a new mode of regulation.

This combination of mass production methods and the Keynesian welfare state found its spatial expression in the national state as a unique layer of social space. The inherent contradiction between the claims of liberal democracy, a prerequisite for capitalist production, and the actual practices of Fordist capitalism led to various episodes of class conflict which were temporarily resolved through the institutions of the welfare state. These, in turn, relied to a large extent on the bordering practices which attempted to insulate the state layer from the global system at large. However, landscape produced during the emergence of Fordist capitalism, to paraphrase Harvey (1985, p. 43), which was so crucial for its success became the barrier which inhibited "the further progress of accumulation precisely because it create[d] spatial barriers where there were none before". Globalisation must therefore be understood as the manifestation of the crisis of Fordism both as a model of the organisation of labour and production and as a model of social regulation.

The crisis of Fordism as a model of social regulation manifests itself in the erosion of sovereignty and the increasing inability/unwillingness of states to continue to perform certain regulatory functions which had been assumed to be a normal part of state responsibilities. These functions include counter-cyclical fiscal policies to smooth out business cycles, the provision of public goods in order to facilitate mass consumption, the management of capital-labour relations in a corporatist fashion to lessen social conflicts, and the provision of welfare programmes in order to maintain minimum consumption levels (see Jessop, 1994, pp. 254–255 and Liepietz, 1994, pp. 341–342), processes which in the past



have been crucial to functioning of the system of mass production and consumption.

The origins of the crisis of Fordism lie in the collapse of the Bretton-Woods agreement which provided the basis for the management of global monetary relations from 1945 until 1971. The floating exchange rate system among the core countries which replaced the Bretton-Woods system limited the state's ability to manipulate interest rates—"one of the most important macroeconomic levers" (Peck and Tickell, 1994, p. 291)—to very narrow margins and thereby severely undermined the ability of states to regulate Fordism at the state level (Liepietz, 1994, p. 343). Crucial in this collapse of the Bretton-Woods system was the role of private, unregulated and increasingly unregulatable capital flows which served as the disciplining instrument against any state which attempted to venture too far from 'acceptable' monetary and fiscal politics, as was so quickly realised by François Mitterand and the French Socialists when they attempted to escape high unemployment rates through a typical Keynesian reflationary programme in 1981 (Peck and Tickell, 1994).

The reasons for the rise of private capital flows to such a pivotal position in the global system lie in dramatic improvements in information technology which made possible the creation of global computer networks, both private and public; the dramatic increase in available credit in the aftermath of the first oil crisis; and the ability of the US, as a hegemonic power, to treat the world economy as an extension of its domestic economy through the role of the dollar as a global reserve currency. Yet lest these explanatory efforts suggest that the emergence of global networks of private capital flows came as a 'natural' development, the result of unconscious actions or technological auto-determinism, let us remember that states, in particular the US and the UK, have themselves played a significant role in the development of this unregulated global financial system (Helleiner, 1994, pp. 166–172) which, paradoxically, helped to undermine those aspects of state power crucial to the maintenance of the welfare state, the social regulatory component of Fordism. Controls on capital flows were and still are possible. Most states in fact continued to impose them as late as the 1970s and even the IMF continues to allow for them today (Henwood, 1997, p. 107). However, the pursuit of particular and temporary politico-economic advantages, particularly by the US and the UK, led the way to global deregulation which undermined or circumvented whatever advances in social regulation might otherwise have been achieved in the context of the welfare state.

### **Regionalisation as the Spatial Manifestation of the Crisis of Fordism**

With globalisation defined as the crisis of Fordism—that is, as a period between one combination of production and regulation and another, still at least partially undefined and unconsolidated—the spatial implications of an understanding of regionalisation become clear. For just as capitalism continually seeks an "institutional fix" (Peck and Tickell, 1994), it also seeks a "spatial fix" (Harvey, 1985, pp. 51ff); the two are, in effect, two sides of the same coin. The spatial fix for the disruptions caused by the last hegemonic transition was the consolidation of the national state through the combination of mass consumption with Keynesian policies. Today, in contrast, regionalisation is a manifestation of the current transition, it is an in-between spatial layer which has emerged during an

in-between time-period, a period of crisis. Whether or not that layer will achieve any permanence depends on many factors which can, at most, be named, but whose interactions and effects cannot be predicted in advance. Even so, it might be possible to outline, albeit tentatively, under what circumstances it might achieve some staying power.

A good many serious commentators on globalisation have remarked on the manner in which time has accelerated at a hitherto unknown pace, which in turn "has had a disorienting and disruptive effect upon political-economic practices, the balance of class power, as well as upon cultural and social life" (Harvey, 1989, p. 284; see also Jameson, 1991, p. 38 and Virilio, 1995). Without attempting to minimise the importance of the speed-up in time and the time-space compression which has taken place, we must recognise that this is a phenomenon which is still limited to a relatively small segment of the world's population—chiefly, in fact, to those business people who participate in the global economy and those commentators who write about them. Even worse, it represents a thoroughly Eurocentric view of a much more varied set of processes underway in various places around the world (Massey, 1994, p. 147). Space continues to matter; location, place, everything we usually understand as the 'local' still has a pervasive influence on our daily lives. And not just because those who have already lost out in the process of globalisation still live off in some other place somewhere in which reduced state services quite typically lead to a time-space expansion of their lives (Massey, 1994, pp. 148–149).

More generally, the local is still important because where one is located, whether one is an individual or a corporation, still has a crucial impact on one's ability to participate successfully in this global economy and, most importantly, on one's ability to continue to do so in the future. Constructed space is, after all, constructed unevenly thanks in part due to 'natural endowments' and in part to differing local conditions of accumulation and regulation. Location, in short, always makes a difference. For example, research on micro-regions in the UK clearly demonstrates that micro-regional inequality is not only inevitable but that "... different forms of economic activity incorporate and use the fact of spatial inequality in order to maximize profits" (Massey, 1994, p. 51). Likewise, Carnoy (1993) has pointed out that, despite the dramatic proliferation of multinational corporations and their spread around the world, their activities and profits are still driven by their location, not in the sense of such corporations having a nationality but in the sense that their activities and revenues tend to be concentrated in particular spaces and therefore affected by the policies of states which occupy these spaces. This notion is further supported by a recent *Fortune* 500 list (1995) which indicates that US-based multinational corporations (MNCs) though similar in number to Japan-based MNCs (151 vs 149 in 1995) nevertheless realised a rate of profit significantly higher than that of the Japanese MNCs. *Fortune* attributes this difference to higher growth rates realised in the US. If, as Virilio claims, globalisation were truly virtualisation, such differences in location should have no impact on the rate of profit; but clearly they do.

Among the factors which make location important, Carnoy (1993, pp. 88–91) lists local infrastructure, labour structure and market size; local human capital policies; local protections of MNCs, be they direct or indirect in nature; local public-private research co-operation; and local innovation policies. Carnoy suggests that the ongoing relevance of these factors indicates that the role of the national state will continue to be of vital importance. Yet this argument does not

necessarily follow from the catalogue he provides. The fact that differences between localities have a significant impact upon the relative success of MNCs does not, in and of itself, require the continued functioning of national states. It simply indicates that states have performed these functions *in the past*—but there is no reason to assume that different institutional arrangements at other spatial levels could not perform these and similar functions in the future. If states, now disciplined by a global financial system, recognise their difficulties in continuing to perform these functions, a logical solution is to aim for a institutional fix which, through spatial reorganisation, attempts to resolve problems which they can no longer ameliorate.

Let me try to highlight my point with an example. The crisis of Fordism, as we have seen, is at least partially situated in the inability of states to manipulate interest rates in a manner inconsistent with the dictates of global financial markets. An interest rate significantly different from rates of other states results in financial flows (presumably out of the state, since lowering interest rates has usually been associated with reflationary programmes) which in turn decrease the value of the state's currency, which in turn leads to inflation when import prices and therefore prices in general increase. This in turn forces the state to take corrective measures, usually an increase in interest rates, thereby forcing it to abandon the reflationary programme which started the whole cycle in the first place. Such, in a nutshell, was the experience of the French Socialists in the early 1980s.

What is often overlooked is that the entire dynamic of such interlinked processes depends on the existence of different spatial layers; including and especially the existence of multiple bounded monetary systems at the level of the state layer contradictorily juxtaposed with a set of unrestricted capital flows at the global layer. Otherwise the entire dynamic could not take place since in the absence of different currencies, no currency speculation could occur; likewise, such speculation could be severely curtailed by regulating global capital flows. In other words, one of the contributing factors to the crisis of Fordism could be dealt with if there were either a global currency—i.e. a global monetary regime, or a global regime to regulate and control financial transactions. This, of course, would require a dramatic alteration of global spatial organisation, which in turn would require the disappearance of capitalism itself. For such a global solution would require the existence of one of two preconditions—the ability of capital to organise itself in such a way as to govern monetary relations altogether independently of state-level monetary systems or the creation of a global state—neither of these developments is possible within capitalism as an economic system. The former is impossible because capital, all evidence of trends towards monopolisation notwithstanding, is ultimately based on competition and therefore unable to govern its own affairs. As Polanyi (1944, p. 68) long ago pointed out, "regulation and markets, in effect grew up together". Otherwise, states would have been done away with some time ago. The latter is impossible because it presupposes a state which could act as the 'ideal general capitalist' at the global scale; yet capitalism would cease to exist as a global system if it were to be matched by a regulatory regime at the same level (see Chase-Dunn, 1981, von Braunmühl, 1976). The 'discipline of the market' which has forced states to implement policies which conform to the demands of 'the world market' is only possible if there is an outside by which the inside can be disciplined. Were outside and inside to be incorporated into one another, the resulting state would

no longer be subject to an external politically and economically disciplining force.

In effect, then, given the crisis of Fordism and the concomitant crisis of the welfare state at the spatial scale of the state, regionalisation must first and foremost be seen as the outcome of multiple efforts to create a regulatory regime at a spatial scale which can potentially overcome many of the limitations of the state scale and, at the same time, can provide the advantages of a specific, bounded location which can capture within a larger space at least those aspects of global accumulation which continue to be concentrated in that space.<sup>7</sup> I hasten to emphasise here once again, however, that the region is not (yet) the spatial manifestation of a new regime of accumulation. It is as of now the spatial manifestation of the crisis of the old regime of accumulation. It represents the search for a space which can offer a relatively stable basis for a new regulatory regime which can foster accumulation while overcoming the limitations which made the national state an unsuitable and/or ineffectual spatial arrangement.

### **Towards Radical Democracy or Corporate Empire?**

The admittedly dramatic fashion in which commodities now circulate the world is therefore *not* the crucial aspect of the late 20th century. Instead, it is the fact that the Fordist mode of production and regulation which had dominated the global political economy has entered a state of crisis. This mode was delimited by the border lines which demarcated the national state. There was therefore always an inherent contradiction within Fordism between the spatial extension of production and the social regulation of that production. This contradiction did not surface in any dramatic manner as long as the national regulation of the centrifugal forces of global accumulation did not pose a challenge to the extension process itself. Most states in the periphery, of course, never had the luxury of covering up this contradiction for any period of time. Their spatial delimitations could never be utilised in the same regulatory manner as that of the core states. Accordingly, the physical effects of globalisation appeared within their boundaries a long time ago (Massey, 1994, p. 147). However, for most of the core states, this period lasted until the 1970s. By that time, the significant redistributive achievements of the Keynesian welfare state limited or at least threatened to restrict the process of accumulation within the spaces of the national state.

The regulatory regime of the Keynesian welfare state was soon challenged by the dramatic increases in global financial flows which limited the ability of states to pursue counter-cyclical policies, thereby exposing populations to the effects of crises of accumulation in a more direct fashion. Again, the impact of these assaults varied dramatically between core and peripheral states; in the latter, austerity programmes required by international financial institutions created situations of deprivation in comparison with which the retreats from the welfare state in the former appeared as a mild reduction in benefits. But the differences in effect should not lead us to ignore their common origin in the slow weakening of the protective role of the state brought about in part by the policies of the core states. The weakening of the regulatory regime of Fordism has also eroded the ability of popular majorities to pursue redistributive policies. Even in the event of an electoral victory of parties traditionally associated with the Keynesian policies of the post-World War II years, we witness therefore a set of policies

which assume that there is no alternative to following the dictates of the global market. A most glaring example of this has been the post-*apartheid* government in South Africa where the statement 'there is no alternative' has become an ever-present explanation for the lack of structural change.

To state that regionalisation represents the *search* for a new regulatory regime rather its achieved shape or form, however, raises an obvious question: What possible options exist for the construction of such a new regime? Having excluded the two extreme regulatory regimes for global capitalism (a global state and a global corporate regime) from the realm of the possible, let us examine the viability of the region as a potential resolution of the global-state contradiction which has brought about the current crisis. It is clear that, from a spatial perspective, a successor regime to Fordism will have to incorporate larger spaces—possibly spaces as large as a whole continent, albeit spaces smaller than the globe. Global social space, after all, can never be without layers; but the number of layers—i.e. the thickness of space—is not predetermined and can vary depending on local circumstances. Regionalisation, then, is such an effort at creating a different, larger layer within social space in order to capture more efficiently the majority of flows in such a manner as to tie them to a new spatial demarcation, to create a layer in space large enough to contain enough flows in order to subject them to regulatory functions and controls.

The nature of these regulatory institutions, functions and controls is as yet to be determined. It is by no means clear what the new regime may look like. A worst case scenario is one of unlimited corporate control, direct or indirect, of the new institutions; such control would, quite clearly, further remove corporate activities from any and all forms of democratic control. A series of articles in *The Nation* (15–22 July 1996, pp. 9–32) reported on various real-life examples of the implementation of such scenarios, decrying globalisation as a corporate strategy for exploiting workers, both in the core and the periphery. If we concentrate on the example of the EU alone, we find some evidence that the fears expressed by the various authors in *The Nation* are justified. The continuously lamented 'democracy deficit' (Williams, 1991; and Dinan, 1994, pp. 288–292) is clearly present and growing as the EU proceeds to a common monetary system based on what Luttwak (1997) calls 'central bankism'. The power of national parliaments to determine a variety of fiscal and monetary policies has been undermined to a significant degree and there is not yet in place a mechanism to serve as a democratically elected substitute at the European level. The talk of 'subsidiarity' (Dinan, 1994) notwithstanding, the Commission of the EU and the Council of Ministers continue to exert significant amounts of power (see Cutler *et al.*, 1989). Likewise, the Social Charter while an important achievement has yet to deal with the impact of globalisation on the lives of real people (see Ramsay, 1995; and Teague, 1995). Other regional ventures, be they in central America or in southern Africa, have yet to show evidence of increased democratic participation (see Euraque and Niemann, 1994; Niemann, 1995).

On the other hand, there is at least some hope in various quarters that the weakening of the national state will lead to more democratisation and a return to more local initiatives. Such hopes are at times explicitly linked to post-modern debates about 'metanarratives' and the disappointments associated with the supposed failure of transformative strategies based on them, debates which have also privileged the local over the state (see Dirlik, 1996). In all such discussions, local movements are viewed as a better alternative to large-scale mobilisations

be they based on class, race or nationality which view "the state as the only space in which serious political activity can occur" (Walker, 1988, p. 86). The new social movements, as these groups have come to be called, thus come to represent the possibility of politicising the spaces of personal experiences, of decentralising and proliferating the spaces available to political action and emphasising small-group or individual over large-scale collective action in order "to extend people's horizons" (Walker, 1988, pp. 85–87, quote on page 87). In this context, once again the region covered by the EU (though not the space of the EU itself) offers again an interesting example or, more accurately, a wide variety of examples of micro-regional assertion of identity and power from Wales to Brittany to Catalonia to northern Italy. In the words of then Barcelona mayor Pasqual Maragall:

The fact that a united Europe exists gives more hope to the likelihood of self-government ... The states are too big to run everyday life but too small to run international affairs (*Wall Street Journal*, 24 February 1994, p. A6).

At the same time, however, we should be careful not to overemphasise the importance of the local and the role of social movements, nor to assume in advance the virtues of either or both. After all, as Dirlik reminds us, local movements are not by definition progressive and the local is not by definition a "wholesome" space (Dirlik, 1996, p. 37). It is with this warning in mind that we should examine the hopes expressed by many micro-regional and local groups around the world for a local autonomy increasingly defined less in economic than in political/cultural terms. To these groups, the Fordist state appeared first and foremost as an oppressive centralising institution and increases in corporate power at a macro-regional or even global level are not regarded as the primary threat.

But can local politics of identity recreate within such boundaries the kind of consensual hegemony produced by the Keynesian welfare state? Can such a politics contend and negotiate with both a global economic drive and the reformulated regimes at, for example, the macro-regional level which mediate that drive's imperatives? Such questions are a lot more ominous than the advocates of micro-regional autonomy would like to admit. After all, the standard critical response to globalisation is the invocation of the powers of the national state as a defence against the global forces (see, for example, the almost unanimous prescriptions of various authors in *The Nation* issue cited above). This response rests on a rather instrumental notion of the national state in that those who offer it seem to believe that if only the right people were to occupy its executive positions, the effects of globalisation could be ameliorated. If, however, we find the national state to be a temporary, albeit rather persistent, spatial form tied specifically to a particular period of development of the global economy, then hopes of capturing the state and utilising it as a tool against globalisation must be ill-founded. Indeed, the call to tie down capital to any localised spaces, to stop it from circulating anywhere it currently does sounds like whistling in the dark, since, as we have seen, tying capital to a local or national space, interrupting its global ties and ending its circulation would mean its end as capital. The national state is not just a tool to be used by whoever occupies its controls, it is the spatial manifestation of a particular social order at

a particular time. Its weakening means the weakening of that particular social order. What comes in its wake is not yet visible.

Regionalisation represents an effort at creating a substitute, but I remain dubious as to whether it is even feasible (not to mention desirable) to construct a counter-hegemonic effort at that scale. Doing so could mean falling into the trap which neo-functionalists have created for themselves with their conception of integration as a slow move towards a regional super-state. Social actors, institutions and movements who wish to create counter-hegemonic structures which can provide an effective counterweight to the forces of global/regional accumulation should take advantage of the weakening of the state, not to celebrate their cultural identity and autonomy, but to create a new layer of social space, a network of critical social movements which transcends old boundaries in order to challenge those structural and institutional apparatuses whose fundamental purpose is to further accumulation. Certainly, the creation of a network of social movements which is linked in such a way as to undermine the ability of capital to exploit the differences between various micro-regions would be a first step towards creating political community at a new spatial scale which would recognise the local while avoiding parochial isolation.<sup>8</sup> More generally, however, all efforts to construct and occupy strategic institutions at the regional level in order to counteract corporate power require a full understanding of all the levels of social spatiality at stake, the strength or weakness of the actors and processes located on those levels, and the typically conflictual/complicit nature of their relationship with a capitalism which is, by its very nature, simultaneously everywhere and nowhere at home.

## Notes

1. Throughout the paper, the term 'region' will refer to macro-regions which encompass more than one state and are therefore supra-national in character. Whenever I refer to a region within a national state, I will explicitly use the term 'micro-region'.
2. "Qu'on soit un individu, une entreprise ou un pays, l'important pour survivre dans ce monde, c'est d'être plus compétitif que son voisin." Ignacio Ramonet, "Davos" *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Online Edition, March 1996. (URL:<http://www.ina.fr/CP/MondeDiplo/1996/03/RAMONET/2471.html>).
3. Data for OECD are taken from OECD (1996, pp. 75–76) whereas data for the world are taken from IMF (1994, pp. 122–127) and World Bank (1994, pp. 28–29, 1995, pp. 28–29).
4. It goes without saying that the degree to which national states have been the primary spatial referent for specific societies varies dramatically depending on whether these societies were located in the core or the periphery of the global system. However, the fact that states have sometimes only a tenuous hold on the imaginations of people in the periphery does not change the manner in which states have ended up articulating the link between the global scale and the local place which people inhabit.
5. A succinct definition is given by Cohen (1993, p. 109) who summarised the basic aspects of Fordism as a complex process of production characterised by:

interchangeable parts, a minute division of the work process; complex, expensive, and specialized machinery, a moving assembly line; highly trained and highly specialized people to design the product and to design, organize, and run the production process; and large numbers of unskilled (or low-skilled) people to perform the simplest, more minutely choreographed tasks of making the product.

See also those parts of the definitions given by Amin (1994), Jessop (1994) and Liepitz (1994) which focus on the organisation of production, but see below for arguments which hold that there is more to Fordism than the organisation of production.

6. It is quite obvious that Jessop's concept of Fordism is derived exclusively from the experience

of a particular, albeit relatively broad, stratum of the population of the core countries. Neither the notion of mass consumption nor that of the nuclear family or the provision of public goods is a notion which ring true to the majority of the world's population. Yet the fact that most people in the world did not share in that experience and, worse yet, probably paid dearly so that a limited group of people could enjoy that experience does not mean that, subjectively, most people did not desire to live that experience. Consequently, we can regard Fordism as a dominant global model for the post-WWII years.

7. We must understand the drive towards regionalisation as the outcome of many conflicting interests, some of which may not necessarily have a regional outcome in mind while others may pursue regionalisation for reasons other than dealing with the crisis of Fordism. The European Union serves as a prime example of such multiple interests at work, but similar examples can be found in southern Africa and central America, to name two further examples.
8. The support offered by some US unions for organising drives among the *maquiladora* workers in northern Mexico is one example of this strategy (see Bacon, 1997).

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