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The Global Ideology: Rethinking the Politics of the 'Global Turn' in IR

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Abstract

Many commentators appear to take for granted that fact that the sphere of political power and contestation has shifted from the national level to the global level. This article seeks to question the assumptions made about politics at the global level, highlighting the elision of ‘global politics’ with the globalisation of the political. It will be suggested that major changes have taken place in terms of political subjectivity and how we view political community, blurring the lines of distinction between the domestic and international realms. The understanding of these changes in primarily spatial terms – from the level of the nation state to the global – mystifies the qualitative shift in political consciousness, political engagement and political instrumentality involved. In fact, the relationship between political subjectivity and the external world is inversed. The Global Ideology posits material changes at the global level as the explanatory factor for the breakdown of state-based forms of political identification and collective engagement, understanding these changes as marking the birth of global politics. In relocating this shift in consciousness in the attenuation of political engagement and collective identification it is possible to explain the shift in political subjectivity in terms of the globalisation of the political – as the result of our more individuated relationship to our external world.

Keywords: *global ideology; territorialised and deterritorialised politics; global politics; globalisation of the political*

Introduction

There is a consensus today that politics, power and resistance operate at the global level rather than at the level of nation states – the traditional subjects of international relations. The attenuation or hollowing out of state-based politics has created a crisis of traditional frameworks of political theorising. Territorially-defined and constructed political communities are suffering from a generic lack of cohering values and sentiments, expressed in regular discussions of the meaning and relevance of different national values, symbols and traditions. Governments have great difficulty in

legitimizing themselves in traditional ways. With the decline in party membership and voting, even holding elections every five years does little to legitimate governing elites or to cohere political programmes for which they can be held to account. Traditional framings of foreign policy in terms of the national interest appear problematic and are often buttressed with claims of ethical or values-based foreign policy which seek to secure the interests of people elsewhere rather than collectively expressing the interests of their citizens. In the face of this crisis in, and transformation of, traditional ways of understanding and participating in politics it is of little surprise that discussion of the shifting location of the political from the level of the nation state to the global level has taken centre stage.

This shift, from the national to the global, is asserted as much by representatives of leading Western states and international institutions as it is by the radical critics of the international order. This article seeks to question this consensus, not by a contrary assertion that politics, power and resistance operate only at local, national or regional levels, but by attempting to conceptually unpack what is meant when we talk of global politics, power and resistance. The thesis will be developed that the meaning of global politics cannot be found through the investigation of global interconnections, global spaces of communication, or global threats. Instead a framework will be built up on the basis of understanding the ‘globalisation’ of politics as a product of political disconnection between state elites and societies and a popular disengagement from mass politics. Politics becomes globalised when political actors experience a loss of social connection and political aspirations are expressed in increasingly abstract and unmediated forms. In this sense, discussion of a shift from ‘territorialised’ to ‘deterritorialised’ politics reflects the decline of strategic, instrumental, engagement concerned with transforming the external world and the rise of a more atomised politics of self-expression – of awareness, of identity, and of values.

A discussion framed in the terminology of the different natures of political ‘spaces’ - the territorially-bounded and the unbounded; the domestic and the global – in fact, has less to do with essentialised spatial conceptions than with our contingent social and political bonds of connection. The less socially- or collectively-mediated our engagement with the external world, the more we appear to inhabit a ‘globalised’ world. The less our political engagement is socially-grounded and constrained – for

example, by the need for electoral or representational legitimacy or the strategic constraints of armed struggle or war against a clear enemy – the more abstract and globalised this engagement becomes. The pre-eminence of the global, whether we talk in terms of global governance, global security or global resistance, highlights a lack rather than a presence. It is the lack of clear sites and articulations of power, the lack of clear security threats, the lack of strategic instrumental policy-making and the lack of clear political programmes or movements of resistance which drives the conceptualisation of international relations in global terms.

This article attempts to begin the process of explanation of how it is that the weakness or hollowing out of politics, the problems of articulating power, and the problems of political resistance are portrayed in conceptual frameworks which appear to turn reality on its head. The globalisation of problems, the globalisation of political claims, and the globalisation of frameworks of political engagement, presents the shift up towards the ‘global’ as one which necessarily invests global actions and ideas with greater importance, greater meaning, and greater urgency than their territorially-restricted counterparts. This positive view of the global, as the key site for power, policy and resistance, is one of the most striking aspects of social theorising today.

However, few commentators have critically reflected on why it is that our conceptualisation of politics and power has been transformed, or globalised, so rapidly. For some advocates of global frameworks of understanding, the apparent globalisation of political life is a reflection of the extension of our sense of political community and a radical challenge to the hierarchies of power. For others, the shift to global frameworks is a response to threats and insecurities which have taken on increasingly complex and interconnected forms. While for others, the shift towards the global reflects new frameworks of hegemony understood in terms of neoliberal or biopolitical governance and intervention. While the political content of many aspects of globalised politics are subjects of disagreement, the globalisation of politics itself appears to be beyond debate.

This article will be set out the consensus on the globalisation of politics and summarise the problematic nature of these assumptions about the shift of politics to the global level. It particularly focuses on theorisation of the shift from the

international to the global within the academic subject area of International Relations. It highlights that the dominant analytical frameworks take the global level as the explanatory one and the domestic level as secondary, responding to these changes. This dominant framing starts with the assumption of the primacy of the global which it reaffirms. Here it will be suggested that this framing naturalises and reifies our understanding of the global, downplaying the importance of political subjectivity in our relation to, and understanding of, the world around us. It then sets out an alternative perspective, which understands our conceptions of politics and views of individual and social agency as socially and historically mediated through our experience of political engagement and social struggle. From this perspective, the implosion of political collectivities and the weaknesses of governmental capacities, which drive our conception of the global, are contingent factors rather than inevitable consequences or products of ‘globalisation’.

It will be suggested that our conception of politics and power as ‘global’ is not just a contingent one; it is also constitutive or constructive. Taking a more subjectivist or constructivist approach to the globalisation of politics enables the question to be posed of how we construct the ‘global’ in certain ways, rather than merely understanding it as a secondary political effect of primary social and economic transformations. Politicising our understanding of the globalisation of politics leads to a reconceptualisation of politics, power and resistance at the global level. If the globalisation of politics is conceived of as a historically specific reflection of our political and social disengagement, rather than the product of new social and political forces of transformation, it can help explain the disjunction between the claims made on behalf of allegedly immanent global political subjects - highlighted in discourses of global neoliberalism, global biopower, global civil society and the emerging ‘multitude’ – and the domestic experience of the attenuation of political collectivities.

The Global Ideology

What this article describes as the global ideology is not a particular political or ethical standpoint, but the globalisation of political discourse: the understanding of the world in globalised terms. The process of the globalisation of our understanding of politics has been remarkably rapid and unquestioned. This shift has been particularly striking

within the subject area of International Relations. From its development as a post-war academic discipline up to the 1990s, the study of international relations was dominated and shaped by the realist approach, which understood the international sphere as politically constituted through the interaction of sovereign states. Various competing theories within the discipline sought to explain the nature of this interaction and to ameliorate the threat of conflict; with different perspectives dominating in different time periods or with regard to different subject matters. Nevertheless, the subject matter of international relations was understood to be one (as the title of the discipline suggested) of analysing state interaction. Today, few theorists of the international sphere would see state interaction as a key area for study. In fact, the study of state interaction appears to have increasingly become the non-disciplinary study area of diplomacy, while the discipline of International Relations has focused on understanding the diverse interactions of 'global politics'.

Reifying the 'Global'

This shift towards global theorising has been primarily understood as a response to economic and social developments which are occurring at the global level. In other words, our theorising or understanding of our place in, and relationship to, the world is held to lag behind social and economic changes which are seen to have globalised our social existence. Even commentators who emphasise the importance of new global norms and globalised frameworks of understanding present these as a response to changes in the external world and as heralding the emergence of new global social forces which as yet are immanent rather than fully developed.

The starting assumption is that we live in a 'global' or 'globalised' world; in which case, it is held that the globalisation of politics - the understanding of politics as taking place primarily at the global level - is inevitable. As long as we or others are held to resist this we will be unable to engage progressively with the world we live in and unable to understand the impact of external changes on the creation of new global threats and possibilities for social transformation. In understanding the globalisation of politics as a response to processes of social and economic change, the shift towards the global has been essentialised or reified. Rather than the shift from national to global conceptions of politics, power and resistance being a question for investigation,

it has been understood as natural or inevitable; as a process driven by forces external to us and out of our control.

In this dominant framework of thinking and understanding our relationship to our external world, the only question is how we can adapt to our globalised world; how academic theorising and government policy-making can overcome the political and theoretical baggage of the past to meet today's challenges and possibilities. It is argued that we need to ditch previous frameworks of social theorising for their 'methodological nationalism' (Beck 2007) or 'methodological territorialism' (Scholte 2000): rather than understand political communities as bounded by the nation state, we should instead conceive of ourselves as political subjects constituted and acting on a global level. Similarly, at the level of political practice, the nation state is increasingly seen to be a barrier to progressive political movements rather than the object of political struggle. William Connolly is not exceptional in arguing that the state imprisons citizens through confining democratic possibilities (1991: 476) or in questioning the view that to be a democrat one has to be committed to a particular territorial community. In fact, it appears that while economic and social actors have taken on global engagement 'only democratic citizens remain locked behind the bars of the state in the late-modern time' (ibid.: 479). Theorists across a broad spectrum, from liberal theorist Mary Kaldor (2003) to postmodern radicals Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2001) share the view that nation states restrict and constrain the possibilities for political progress.

The key point, shared by analysts, about the globalised world is that territory is no longer especially significant. We no longer live in a territorialised world, where we are mapped in terms of bounded political communities with clear points of connection between states and citizen-subjects (Ruggie 1993; Scholte 2002). The reason for this shift beyond modernist conceptions of statehood and citizenship is held to be 'globalisation': the remarkable shift in the speed and spread of economic and social communications and interactions, which is held to have negated previous frameworks of political theory and practices. For some analysts, the depth of change in our speeded-up and integrated global order is held to have transformed the nature of the political entirely, merging the economic, the political and the social, in a new 'biopolitical' global order (Hardt and Negri 2006).

For most analysts of our new globalised world, the intellectual challenge is that of understanding why it is that our political frameworks seems to lag so far behind the changing economic and social contexts. Within the academic study of International Relations, the explanation has been sought in an understanding of our subjective frameworks as socially constructed; as not directly reflective of external reality, but rather as constitutive of it (see further, Hollis and Smith 1990; Smith 2001). The understanding of the academic study of international relations as a socially-mediated product, rather than one based on an unmediated relation to ‘objective facts’, has become much more generally accepted over the last two decades.

Leading the understanding of theorising in this area as a ‘social construct’ have been advocates of developing frameworks of ‘global’ rather than international politics. Central to this shift have been commentators working within critical and constructivist frameworks who argue that the realist approach, which dominated Cold War thinking, was a self-reproducing one based on the power and interests of Western elites. Long-standing critical theorist, Richard Falk, argues that realist approaches merely reflected back the outlook of Western elites:

The realist mindset... forecloses the political imagination in several respects: it dismisses moral and legal criteria of policy as irrelevant for purposes of explanation, prediction, and prescription; it grounds speculation on an assessment of relative power as perceived by rational, even ultrarational, actors, essentially states, and is therefore unable to take account of passion, irrationality, and altruistic motivations of political forces, or of the impacts of non-state actors. (1995: 37)

For leading constructivist theorist, Alexander Wendt, in naturalising and essentialising the practices of international relations, realist frameworks become ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ (1992: 410). According to one of the leading undergraduate textbooks in the field: ‘Realism purports to describe and explain the “realities” of statecraft but the problem with this claim to objectivity is that it is the realist mindset that has constructed the very practices that realist theory seeks to explain.’ (Wheeler and Bellamy 2001: 490)

While the Cold War discipline of International Relations is understood in ideological terms of power and interests, the critical and constructivist theorists who regularly assert the constitutive nature of theorising rarely understand this as a socially-mediated relationship. Following the rather crude counter-position used by Robert Cox (1981) in his breakdown of social theorising into ‘problem-solving approaches’, which restrict themselves to attempts to resolve problems on the basis of existing interests and relations of power, and ‘critical approaches’ which posit alternatives based on oppositional emancipatory forces in society, critical theorists tend to view the act of theorising idealistically (Jahn 1998). Theorising is seen to construct society in line with the political interests or class position of the theorist, as Cox famously argued: ‘Theory is always for someone and for some purpose.’ (1981: 128)

In this context, global understandings of community and political interaction are seen to be progressive and a challenge to the power and interests of (nation state-based) political elites. In the 1990s, critical theorists led the call for the globalisation of our conceptions of the international sphere, highlighted in the shift away from understanding security in terms of state security to the security of the individual. It was argued that the expansion of the security referent, from the state to the global level, and the expansion of our understanding of threats, from narrow military concerns to concerns of environmental degradation, poverty and women’s rights, would transform the international agenda. States were seen as barriers to a new, more progressive, world order based on shared concerns and interests. Rather than being the bearers of security, protecting their citizens, states were increasingly conceived of as a threat to their citizens’ security, through their abuse of human rights, genocide and war.

These critical concerns were swiftly taken up by Western governments, international institutions and NGOs and, as they did so, critical theorisation became increasingly part of the political mainstream. For some critical theorists, working within constructivist frameworks, the emergence of global politics is seen as less directly confrontational to the interests of states. Instead, it is argued, state political elites have begun to conceive of their self-interests in a more enlightened way, one which is less confrontational and more cooperative. This shift in the perception of state interests

and the manner of their projection in the international sphere is understood to be a product of global interaction and the construction of new norms of behaviour and ideas of global citizenship. These new norms are often seen to be driven by NGOs and other ‘norm entrepreneurs’ acting in the global political sphere, shaping public perceptions of the global political agenda and forcing states to respond and gradually to take on board assumptions about the importance of issues such as human rights and the rule of law (see for example, Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse, Ropp and Sikkink 1999). Global politics were conceived not in geo-political, territorial terms of *realpolitik* but in ethical terms of a contestation between global approaches and state-based ones, which pitted cosmopolitanism and human rights against narrow national interests which were alleged to hold back the consistent implementation of emerging global norms.

1990s frameworks of global politics tended to contrast the international sphere of progress and NGO activism with an increasingly moribund domestic sphere of political party competition. In the 1990s, power was still seen to reside at the level of states, even though the agenda was being set by global interaction and politics operating at the global level. It was not until the 2000s that the globalisation of politics became complete with the erosion of distinctions between the global and the domestic. This globalisation of power was commonly articulated in terms of the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism, empire, or of biopower. The globalisation of politics became the starting assumption in the discipline rather than a question to be investigated. If power was located at the global level then resistance was as well. This resistance no longer took the form of narrow NGO activism and lobbying but was often expanded to include all forms of protest and dissent, from ethical shopping to protests against free trade or the destruction of the rain forests.

While critical and constructivist theorists often read the shift to the global as a product of an emancipatory social force emerging from below the level of the nation state and acting in an immediately global manner, over the next decade this view was challenged by poststructuralist approaches. Where critical and constructivist frameworks read the globalisation of politics as a challenge to power, poststructuralists often saw this as being driven by the needs of power and as reproducing the hierarchies and exclusions of the Cold War order, except upon a

global scale. It was argued that universal theorising could only be the product of liberal frameworks of power: reinforcing global hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion. Here, politics was forced onto the global plane through the globalisation of biopolitical production making the global the only possible terrain of struggle. In this framing, opposition to the universalising liberal hegemonic project necessarily meant counter-posing alternative global approaches which rejected liberal universals and instead emphasised the importance of recognising and respecting difference.

In the dominant frameworks for understanding the globalisation of politics, the problem is not that politics is represented in global, deterritorialised, terms but that our understandings of the global as the political sphere for contestation and progress lag behind the economic and social transformations which have created our globalised world and with it the globalised nature of threats – from global warming to the global war on terror. This framework closes off any need for questioning the politicisation of the global level, suggesting that the only questions concern the manner in which we undertake global politics and/or reorganise our political institutions to adapt to the threats and possibilities of our ‘global world’. This demonstrates the power of what is here conceptualised as the ‘global ideology’: an ideological framework which naturalises and reifies its subject matter; posing the globalisation of politics as a matter of imposed necessity rather than a social construct which is open to critique.

Demystifying the ‘Global’

Demystifying the ‘global’ involves articulating the mediating links between our subjective understanding of the globalised world and the attenuated nature of social and political struggle. It is possible to understand the globalisation of politics as a social construct without theoretical positions being directly understood as unmediated reflections of clashing political interests or subject positions. Critical theorists and constructivists tend to conceive of their work as advocacy on the part of the progressive forces of global civil society in its political struggle against powerful elites, defending the status quo of state-based international relations. In the same way, critical poststructuralists tend to understand their work as part of the struggle against the power of liberal ‘empire’ ranged against the radical challenge of the ‘multitude’ (Hardt and Negri 2001; 2006).

In these frameworks of understanding global politics, the shift towards the global is seen as indicative of new lines of political struggle which have replaced those of the territorialised framework of Left and Right. For liberal and critical theorists, this is the struggle for human rights and emancipation against the sovereign power of states. For poststructuralist theorists, this is seen as the struggle for autonomy and difference against the universalising war waged ‘over ways of life itself’ by neoliberal biopolitical governance. However, these struggles remain immanent ones, in which global political social forces of progress are intimated but are yet to fully develop. There is a problem of the social agency, the collective political subject, which can give content to the theorising of global struggle articulated by academic theorists (see Chandler 2009).

Without a social agency, which can give global politics the content which academic theorists insist is immanent, there seems to be a weak link in the chain of argument which asserts that the globalising nature of economic and social transformations has run ahead of our capacities to engage with the world politically. On the one hand, there appears to be a crude technological determinism at work: somehow, speeded up communications are held to have transformed social relations to such an extent that we need new frameworks of social and political theorising and practices. On the other hand, there appears to be a crude idealism, the enlightened advocates of global progress are held to represent or express the immanent or arising progressive forces – from global civil society to the ‘multitude’ - which are yet to make their own appearance. How can the theoretical and practical gap be bridged between assertions of transformed social relations, which are alleged to have created a deterritorialised world, and the fact that the social forces, alleged to reflect or be agents of these changes, remain immanent or marginal? It seems that we live in a world where politics has become globalised in the absence of political struggle, rather than as a result of the expanded nature of collective political engagement.

One of the few academic commentators to have critically engaged with the global discourse is Justin Rosenberg. In his book *The Follies of Globalisation Theory* (2000) Rosenberg highlighted the weakness of theories which sought to assert that ‘globalisation’ had transformed social relations and led to a deterritorialised world. He

made the point that capitalist modernity consisted of both deterritorialised relations (of the market) and territorialised relations (of the political sphere within and between states). On a theoretical level, he argued that capitalist social relations were inherently deterritorialising, with production and exchange on a global scale an intrinsic and essential part of its workings, rather than the result of recent technological developments (2000: 33). If global capitalism can be dated from the early nineteenth century, then two hundred years of deterritorialised social and economic relations had not been sufficient to undermine the territorial division of the world and the system of inter-state relations. Rosenberg argued succinctly that the argument that 'globalisation' had transformed social relations was an ungrounded one, despite the fact that it is the starting assumption for globalisation theorists.

If 'globalisation' cannot be a causal factor, providing the answer to why it is that we appear to live in a 'global world', the question remains: 'What drives the understanding that politics has shifted from the national to the global sphere?' Rosenberg does not seek to go beyond a theoretical critique of globalisation theory in his 2000 book but he suggests, in a follow-up piece (2005), that globalisation theory was materially grounded in the appearance of rapid transformation with the opening up of the world economy following the end of the Cold War. For Rosenberg, globalisation theory extrapolated from the experience of a particular historical conjuncture of factors, reading them as an epochal shift (2005). The collapse of the Soviet regimes, the discrediting of independent national paths to development in the postcolonial world and the deregulating thrust of neoliberalism in the West, gave the sense of a rapid transformation and expansion of capitalist relations within a highly compressed period of time (ibid.: 42). He argues that the *zeitgeist* of globalisation theory was dead by the mid-2000s with the resurgence of international politics in US opposition to climate accords and the International Criminal Court and, in particular, with the international divisions occasioned by the US-led 2003 war against Iraq (ibid.: 3).

Rosenberg materially grounds the global *zeitgeist* of the 1990s in external changes in international politics, much as theorists of deterritorialised politics do. Where he differs is in arguing that these changes cannot intellectually substantiate the view that state-based international politics have been superseded by global politics. Because

these theorists extrapolate from a historically specific period of conjunctural changes, he argues that the global *zeitgeist* will inevitably be short-lived. The problem with these approaches - that they start from the assumption that the world has been transformed - will inevitably confront them with insuperable problems in explaining why it is still very much the same. For Rosenberg, the return to 'normality' of the international rivalries expressed in disagreements over climate change, international law and the Iraq war, therefore heralds the demise of globalisation theory.

Rosenberg is right to critique the global *zeitgeist* on its own terms as explanatory theory and in historically grounding its existence to attempt to explain the intellectual appeal of its conception of global politics. Where he is mistaken is in looking for the causes of the belief that we live in a 'global world' solely within the changes in the international sphere itself. Globalisation theories - despite being poorly grounded in terms of explanatory changes at the international level, as Rosenberg highlights - have not been discredited, but rather have multiplied. More radical versions explicitly assert that the divisions of capitalist modernity, which relied upon the formal separation of public political (territorialised) and private social and economic (deterritorialised) relations, have been superseded in emerging networks of biopolitical production and forms of biopolitical resistance (Hardt and Negri 2006). It is common to read critical and poststructuralist theorists asserting the global nature of war and conflict under the 'late modern condition' with 'its intensified social relations' (for example, Jabri 2007: 1). The desire to theorise the transformation of social relations to stress their deterritorialised and global character appears to be driven by more enduring factors than the heady sense of transformation in the aftermath of the ending of the Cold War.

It appears that our subjective understanding that politics has been globalised has undergone a transformation which bears little direct relationship to changes in the processes of economic and social relations. It seems clear that the end of the Cold War is the constitutive point of transformation and yet this cannot, in itself adequately explain why there has been such a radical shift in perceptions of the political. At the level of geo-politics, it is not clear why the end of the Cold War, understood as shaping international relations through super power rivalry and maintaining a balance of power, should result in the globalisation of politics. Clearly there are less barriers

to the expansion of market relations and to the return of Western domination and intervention, but why should this take the form of globalised discourses? The end of the Cold War appears to have had a much more fundamental impact than merely facilitating the expansion of the market and undermining the balance of power. To understand this impact, we need to locate any historically specific critique, of global assertions of transformed social relations, in the context of the attenuated nature of social and political contestation.

As Zaki Laïdi has theorised in his path-breaking book, *A World without Meaning* (1998), the globalisation of politics should not be confused with globalisation as a description of economic and social change. Economic and social changes are responded to and understood as positive or negative depending on the frameworks of meaning generated in societies. The more anxious and atomised a society is, the more economic and social change appears to confront society as alien and threatening. Laïdi argues that the Cold War gave meaning to political life through ‘freezing’ or institutionalising the politics of Left and Right. What ended with the end of the Cold War was not just a framework in which international politics was conducted and managed, through super-power politics. For Laïdi, the end of the Cold War constituted a fundamental crisis of political meaning, revealing the weakness of political frameworks shaped by the articulation of politics on the axis of Left and Right. These frameworks were institutionalised through the Cold War, while their content, in terms of people’s engagement and relation to them, had weakened. The end of the Cold War left them exposed as lacking a social basis, causing a fundamental crisis of political meaning and the implosion of party-based social connections. It is this political context which would appear to be vital to the understanding of the globalisation of politics.

The deconstruction of the ideological consensus of the global ideology is a necessary starting point for the development of the thesis of Hollow Hegemony. This consensus is understood as reflecting and expressing genuine political and social experiences, rather than being merely a product of poor or ungrounded theorising, which has mistaken transient factors for transformational change. The global ideology posits the global as the explanatory level for our conceptions of politics because it assumes that the breakdown in connections between citizenship and statehood, the breakdown in

collective identification around territorialised nation states, is a product of external social and economic forces. This is ideological because it inverts the relationship of cause and effect, sticking to the realm of appearances. The world has not become more 'global' but rather the breakdown in social connections framed through the political process of representation means that we have become increasingly 'deterritorialised'. The more socially atomised we are as individuals - the more we confront the world without mediation through social and political collectivities - the more we appear to live in a 'globalised world'.

The global *zeitgeist* may no longer be the promise of progress, expressed by liberal theorists in the 1990s, but our globalised conception of politics will remain until new political collectivities arise to give shape and meaning to social and political engagement. In the 2000s, our global world became much less one of promise than one of threats and insecurity, highlighted in concerns over global terrorism and global warming. Demystifying the shift towards the 'global', as a product of our own lack of social connection rather than external changes in the international sphere, sets up a way into understanding the peculiar characteristics of globalised politics today. It also enables us to overcome the dichotomy between our allegedly globalised world and our lagging capacity to give subjective agency to immanent understandings of global power and global resistance. If the shift towards the global reflects the breakdown of collective political identification and engagement then it is unlikely that global politics will consist of clearly defined political subjects. Rather than global politics superseding the limits of domestic politics it appears that the limits of domestic politics and the inability to create new collective frameworks of meaning will be projected into the global sphere.

Politics, Power and Resistance

Through inverting the traditional understanding of the relationship between global change and political subjectivity, the framework developed here seeks to highlight that the globalisation of our conception of politics is not politics writ large with global stakes but the attenuation of political contestation. Politics has never been restricted to the national level: the conceptions of Left and Right, which framed understandings of politics from the French Revolution until the end of the Cold War, were universal in

nature. Politics has always been deterritorialised in terms of its conceptualisation, in terms of the aspirational content of political demands: for women's rights, for democracy, for national independence, etc. However, it is necessarily territorialised in terms of the specific strategies and articulations of those demands, with a view to influencing or gaining political power to put those demands into practice. The globalisation of politics maintains the appearance of deterritorialised political claims and counterclaims for progress and rights but lacks the territorialised organisational aspects which sharpened and clarified political positions and enabled strategic instrumental engagement with political institutions. This shift in political levels evades the transformational tasks which were central to traditional views of political activity in liberal modernity.

The lack of strategic engagement, which appears central to globalised conceptions of politics, is fundamental to the appeal of the global ideology. Time and space really do contract and appear to be meaningless once politics is globalised. Space is no longer relevant once deterritorialised activists can travel from the US or the UK to protest for the freedom of Tibet at the opening of the Beijing Olympic Games or can demonstrate their solidarity - with Palestinian women, Indian farmers protesting against dam constructions, or the Zapatistas in the Chiapas - in their local college or shopping centre. Time is no longer relevant once the goal of political protest becomes increasingly an end in itself in the form of awareness-raising. The wearing of a pin or ribbon as an expression of solidarity makes the action itself valuable regardless of its consequences. With the decline of representational forms of politics - which involved winning people to ideas or political platforms rather than just expressing one's own awareness - political practice becomes much more immediate and unmediated. The deterritorialisation of politics is a one-sided expression of politics without the territorial grounding, which imposes the need to engage and be accountable to others. Deterritorialised politics, without these social bonds, can easily result in political action revolving around personal expressions rather than external engagement.

The globalisation of politics is not the same as global politics: it is not the extension of political struggles and contestation on some higher or greater level. In order to analyse the globalisation of politics it is necessary to grasp this process as a reflection of a general disengagement from political struggle and a historically low level of

political contestation. The suggestion that the globalisation of politics is a retreat from political engagement and the bearing of political responsibility is, of course, a counterintuitive one. However, it is one that appears to be borne out through an investigation of the contradictory nature of our new global political order. One contradiction is particularly apparent: the gap between the urgency and necessity of ambitious, transformative, global political claims and the lack of political will to act on them; whether this is troop commitments to the war on terror or humanitarian intervention or the drastic actions required to address global warming. It seems that global politics are built on flimsy foundations and that beneath the rhetoric of global values and global struggles we find a remarkable absence of strategic clarity and political engagement.

Global struggles of transformation or of resistance lack a clear focal point or political project capable of cohering theoretical ideas or of creating collective political subjects. Through globalising their political engagement, governments can evade the accountabilities which come with representational politics and radical critics can similarly evade the need for representational legitimacy. A global problem cannot, by definition, be solved by a particular government: it is held to be beyond sovereign power, beyond political responsibility and accountability. There is no global government, no institutionalised political authority, which claims responsibility for formulating policy or for its implementation, or which can become a strategic object of global resistance.

Politics

Global claims are inherently contradictory in that at the same time as extolling their urgency and importance, governments are equally asserting the fact that their role in policy-making and accountability for outcomes is extremely limited. Paradoxically, the more globalised politics becomes, the more governments are reduced to the role of advocates and activists: they no longer govern but campaign or attempt to 'do their bit'. This process enables governments to make a claim of disempowerment at the same time as asserting radical and ambitious agendas – everything from world peace to environmental sustainability to the end of poverty. In this way, the claims made in the international sphere have increased so as to dominate the public agenda and new

international institutions have been established, in areas as diverse as international justice, climate change and development and poverty-reduction, while externally-orientated budgets have increased.

The globalisation of politics has been welcomed rather than challenged by national governments. Governments increasingly portray themselves to be activists at the global level and at the domestic level merely administrators or managers. Politics and power seem to have migrated beyond the boundaries of state sovereignty. At the level of domestic politics - of elections, of representation, of accountability – it appears that governments have little power to act or to inspire political loyalties. People are no longer as engaged in the formal political process, with voting and party membership becoming less meaningful. In the framework of the global ideology, the lack of meaning of domestic politics and lack of political contestation is a result of the development of global politics which has minimised the importance of political contestation at the state level. The alternative, which is put forward here, is that the globalisation of politics is an ideological conceptualisation of the lack of political engagement and contestation.

Without strong links to their societies, governments find it difficult to govern, to plan strategically: to generate policy and to implement it. These difficulties are naturalised or essentialised in the framework of globalisation, suggesting that the problems of governing are external rather than internal. The problems of governing are seen technically or administratively, as externally imposed consequences of social and economic interdependencies and complexities, rather than as political reflections of the problems of how political elites relate to and engage their societies. Once the problems of political connections and engagement are reified as external to society, the solution appears to be that of embracing, rather than challenging, the shift to the global. This shift, firstly, enables governments to formulate a programme in reactive terms of responding to external problems, secondly, it facilitates the outsourcing of policy-making in conjunction with external institutions and actors and, thirdly, it enables governments to evade policy responsibility.

Power

In the framework of the global ideology few issues are more mystified than the conception of power. Never in the history of political modernity have we been so alienated from the social power of humanity. From the French Revolution onwards, political contestation was concerned with attaining power: using the levers of government to effect social change. Current understandings of engaging in politics - without the strategic, instrumental, struggle for power - made little sense until the late 1960s, when the failure of radical protest movements to engage with the traditional Left and wider society was expressed in a rejection of the struggle for representation and the focus on self-expression (see, for example, Laclau and Mouffe 2001).

The more we engage in politics without a strong sense of collective social power the more we see power as alien and threatening to us. The New Left (post-68 or post-Marxist Left) were the first to express this alienation from power as they largely lacked trade union and political party influence and remained a marginal social force. Once the struggle for representation, for winning a broad base of societal support, was given up, social power appeared to be threatening rather than potentially liberating. The call for recognition on the basis of identity, which replaced the contest for representation, was an attempt to limit power rather than to use social power to transform social relations. The less connected we are to society the more social power is alien to us as it appears to be less under our control and therefore less able to address social or political problems. The globalisation, or deterritorialisation, of politics expresses our alienation from social and political power and attempts to evade questions of the location and responsibilities of power.

Resistance

It would appear that the main critics of the new global discourses of human security and universal rights are not realists but poststructuralists. For the most radical critics of this new order, we are witnessing the emergence of such a politically coherent and militarised framework of Western hegemony that it makes 19th century imperialism (hamstrung by inter-imperialist rivalries) appear weak in comparison. For some, this new global hegemony can be understood as a product of US exceptionalism and the impact of the world's sole surviving super-power (Zolo 2002; Kaldor 2003; Kagan 2003). For others, we are apparently witnessing the emergence of a new form of

neoliberal domination operating to fulfil the shared needs of Western states and global capital. In the terminology of leading critics Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, this new hegemony should be conceived in the global terms of ‘empire’ (2001). This sense of unlimited and universal domination is also described, in the terms of Giorgio Agamben, as a ‘permanent state of exception’, where the law becomes indistinguishable from the will of hegemonic power (Agamben 2005).

For poststructuralist theorists, the assertion of global frameworks of international regulation blurs the division between the international and the domestic through reproducing the dangers of sovereign rule. From this perspective, the problems of nation states are not resolved by global frameworks, but are merely reproduced in a global form. Rather than critiquing the international order for not being global enough, the poststructuralist critique asserts that power has now taken a global form through ‘empire’: the framework of universalising biopolitical production which now confronts global society in the form of the ‘multitude’ (Hardt and Negri 2001; 2006). Rather than an underlying incapacity and incoherence of policy-making and the exaggeration of global threats, power is being contested at the global level, with the stakes posed in the stark terms of ‘global civil war’. The rhetorical claims of global policy-making are taken at face value and held to be representing the rise of universalising neoliberal or biopolitical global governance, waging a war of annihilation against dissenting or unregulated ‘forms of life’. To critique this ideological framing of the international sphere it is essential to ‘reterritorialise’ the discussion. That is, to understand that it is the internal weaknesses of governments which drives the global agenda and that it is the isolation and disconnection of radical critics which leads them to read the extension of interventionist mechanisms as representative of a coherent and overwhelming project of domination by empire or neoliberal capitalism.

Conclusion: The ‘Flight from Sovereignty’

The globalisation of the political and of how we understand global power and resistance can be well described, in the words of Hardt and Negri, as taking: ‘the form of subtraction, a flight, an exodus from sovereignty’ (2006: 341). Their evocation of a ‘subtraction’, a ‘flight’ or an ‘exodus’ is very apt for two key reasons. Firstly, this

captures the fact that the shift towards the global is a retreat from social engagement and political struggle. The freedom of action provided by escaping the frameworks of representation and the demands of territorial control is the freedom of disengagement. It is a flight from the concrete to the abstract. Secondly, their description rightly focuses on subjective choice, that the flight to the global is a subjective and contingent act, not a product of forces beyond our control; of technical or natural changes. The framework of the Global Ideology poses the globalisation of the political as an external given, as a product of changes in the international sphere, whether in terms of new, interdependent, threats or in terms of a new global hegemony of power. This article has sought to bring the contingent nature of the 'global' to the forefront. Rather than naturalise or essentialise our conception of acting in a 'global world', the forgoing sections have suggested the need to deconstruct the discursive practices of the 'global', revealing the hollowing out of political and social content behind these abstract or idealised views of our relationship with the world around us.

However, while the conception of a 'flight from sovereignty' makes a good description, within the critical framework of Hardt and Negri, it stands reality on its head to assert that in acting 'globally' we are acting as meaningful subjects in the new circumstances of global politics. Above, a very different interpretation of the flight or retreat from territorialised politics has been suggested: one that highlights that the shift towards the global is only a freedom or a political act in the abstract. We, in fact, act much less as political subjects, capable of shaping our circumstances, when we engage 'globally'. Global politics has nothing to do with space or geography but with social relations: when we engage 'globally' we engage with less social connection, with less social mediation, making our actions less strategic or instrumental, less clearly goal-orientated.

The globalisation of politics is a way of expressing the fact that our political engagement has become increasingly abstract or idealised and less socially-grounded, less concrete. It is the abstract, disconnected nature of global politics that enables the rhetoric to far exceed the reality. While the assertions of global threats, global values and global wars, imply that the stakes are higher than ever - that politics is more focused and more urgent - the reality is that the growing level of abstraction reflects a

lack of engagement with these concerns. In fact, the ‘flight from sovereignty’ is less an alternative to today’s abstract approaches to the political than a reflection of the absence of social struggle at the heart of the political process. We already live in a ‘global’ world, where the ‘flight from sovereignty’ - the avoidance of the responsibilities of control - describes the practices of political elites rather than a radical challenge to power.

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