Café Philosophy
"Viewed from space, our planet Earth doesn't look any bigger or smaller than it did ten thousand years ago."

However, look closely and you’ll notice less green, more artificial light and a fine ring of debris otherwise known as "space junk". Globalisation hasn’t literally made the world any smaller, although it might seem that way. But it has mixed people together, and changed their sense of identity.

Globalisation appears to threaten the sovereignty of the nation-state, which has become the basic political unit. This causes both alarm and celebration. Those for whom global problems like pollution require global solutions see separate states as inadequate tools to deliver these solutions. Yet national sovereignty is a powerful bulwark against borderless organisations that want control over resources for their own sake. The international telecom giant Huawei has raised nationalistic hackles in the West because of its connections to Chinese government, but such fears feed into a more general concern about global corporations having control over local processes.

According to author Jerry Everard (page 8), the function of the state is to draw boundaries between those whom you identify with (members of the collective ‘we’) and the foreign Other. Showing your passport while going through customs makes it clear as to which side of the boundary line you stand. With globalisation, these boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred as people start to identify with those outside the nation-state. The less people believe in the existence of boundaries, the more they start to crumble.

Socrates was said to have proclaimed his identity not as an Athenian or even a Greek, but as a “citizen of the world”. Globalisation presents the opportunity for a different, and much better, way of living together as human beings. But it could also mean the repetition of present problems on a larger scale. What kind of world do we want to be a citizen of? The so-called ‘anti-globalisation protesters’ are not necessarily against world citizenship per se, but against the loss of control that they associate with the consolidation of power on a global scale. Many are frustrated that a committee of bankers in Washington, D.C. can effectively set the pay rate for civil servants in Spain. New Zealanders wonder why milk produced by local cows is suddenly more expensive due to changes in the ‘global economy’. Because the international system is so complex, people feel at the mercy of forces they do not understand and aggrieved that their elected representatives seem powerless to stop them. Whether chaos or conspiracy is to blame, the result is unrest and the rise of counter-movements such as ‘Euroscepticism’. See page 16 of this issue for a detailed overview of globalisation in all its facets.

Globalisation could also be conceived of as a positive process in which we build upon existing kinship ties, slowly enlarging the circle of our heart’s acceptance to encompass a wider net of relationships. The kind of globalisation that imposes itself from above, that makes us cogs in an even larger machine than before, is inherently unstable and its future uncertain.

Whether we look at it from the perspective of genetics or religious mythology, humanity is an incredibly large family. I think most people would agree that what makes a true family is heartfelt connection and, ultimately, love. This cannot be imposed externally, but comes about in a natural and spontaneous way. Building up such a feeling among the human ‘family’ is a far more challenging project, but it may be the only lasting basis for a globalisation that really works.

The social effects of globalisation are perhaps the most obvious: families move further apart physically, and yet are increasingly connected by technology. Alexandra Dorca’s article (page 4) implies that all this electronic connectivity may simply mask or even contribute to a spiritual alienation. Dorca says that we increasingly live in what she calls ‘non-places’ such as airports, where large numbers of people inhabit the same space without sharing any sort of communal life.

What is also diminishing, just as surely, is the confident sense of identity that links who we are with stable traditions going back hundreds of years. Human society is operating more and more like a single co-ordinated organism. Human identity starts to overshadow ethnic and national identities. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the United Nations and its attempts to build up a universal system of law based on shared values.

The effects of globalisation are perhaps the most obvious: families move further apart. But it also has other important consequences. For instance, it has made it possible for people to travel to places they would never have gone before. My close relatives are dispersed through half a dozen countries around the planet, which is hardly unusual these days. Spread the net a little wider along my family tree and the number of countries radically multiplies. Yet, I know of Dutch people who have spent their whole life in the same village barely interacting with anyone who lives more than 10 miles away. Such isolation, far more prevalent than in the past, has developed a remarkable array of languages and cultures within a small area. However, it is diminishing as we come to know each other more and collectively create a super-cultural ‘global information field’ (as Mironov, page 12 of this issue, explains).

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My Globalized family/
Reflections on the spatial changes in the contemporary world -
by Alexandra Dorca

Last April, my 86 years old grandmother rediscovered, thanks to the Internet, her brother, after an absence of over 50 years.

He left Romania after the Second World War and finished by settling down in Australia, at the beginning of the 50’s. The mail censorship practiced by the Communist regime silenced abruptly their brotherly relation. She was therefore sure that he was no longer alive. Still, she insisted that I help her find his descendants. Since then, I witness her desire and stubborn willingness to recover this memory. Thus, I have learned that a letter travels for about 8 days between the town where my uncle lives, somewhere in the New South Wales, and the home city of my grandmother, in the Southwest of Romania. I have an aunt in Austria and another in London, UK. I have an uncle settled in Frankfurt and another one who lives with his family in New York State. I have relatives in Romania, in Resita, Bucharest, Timisoara, and Miercurea-Ciuc. This would be my mother’s side of the family.

On my father’s side, a cousin of mine lives in Florida and there are some others in the former Soviet Union that my grandmother left after the Second World War when she fled to Romania. Did that stop my family to exist? The answer is, of course, not. I am and will be my mother’s daughter, here and anywhere else. My aunt from London will continue to be my aunt, even if we have not seen each other for ten years now, maybe more. But the old family rituals and lifestyle were radically transformed. Nowadays, the spatial scattering of the family members changed the referential system and the family exists mainly through the individuals that form it: we talk more in terms of “me, you, and him/her” than of “us”. The e-mail, the webcams, and even Google Earth (that my grandmother uses to actually “see” where his Australian brother lives) replaced the long visits on Sunday afternoons. Christmas dinners were substituted by phone conferences. And my mother knows anytime what the temperature in Montreal or Bucharest is.

If I started by describing my family “map”, it’s not because I wanted to show a special condition, for I am convinced that my situation is far from being unique. From the beginning of the last century, people are moving: economic immigrants, political war refugees, temporary workers, ecologic refugees, populations are moving across the borders. Simultaneously, the borders are changing, too. Some disappear; others appear, whether because of the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Balkans War, the European Union expansion or the terrorism threat. The old lies de mémoire are vanishing; new ones will come to see the daylight. But nothing of that will prevent the migratory flows from growing and multiplying. New Diaspora communities appear and multiply their practices; the communication channels change and adapt themselves to the new conditions of life and to the new trans-border needs; a language universalizes itself and other “small” languages fade away. Although the new technologies facilitate the trans-border communication, it appears that, in the same time, they are restricting it. The family secrets, the family’s big events are not anymore announced during dinner at someone’s place, but online; the new family members are welcomed especially by sending an e-card; the family albums were replaced by Flickr’s accounts. For some years now the diaries have been substituted by the blogs; family, friends, and Diaspora groups strengthen their ties in the virtual space; hot-spots’ coffee shops are more and more silent, people preferring to discuss online than engaging in a conversation with others, sitting at the next table. At the office, the private-public separation is more and more visible. The old debates places (e.g., colleges or universities) are transferred to the virtual space (online courses, etc.). Last but not least, the “traditional” neighbourhouds are changing day by day and we don’t know anymore our neighbours by their name. This dichotomy, this lack of dialogue in a world of communications translates also to yet another level, of the space reorganisation: the old peripheries become new centres. This does not mean that peripheries disappear. On the contrary, the globalization creates new ones. The North descends to the South, the East comes to the West, the downtowns are inhabited by homeless, and the suburbs are transformed into elegant neighbourhoods. And with this physical and architectural reorganisation, we can remark that the space struggle seems to be more and more powerful, translating, in the same time, a radical fight for life and recognition. For instance, one of the interviewees that Philippe Bourgois quotes in “Homeless in El Barrio” declares: “I don’t want anymore to survive, I want to live!” (1993: 521). The survival question has been associated with the more diverse people, living in precarious conditions: the ghettos, the camps, the totalitarian regimes, and the’small’ suburban (1993: 521). In our days, the whole world seems to face the old suburb problems. The fear (of terrorist attacks, of otherness, diseases, unemployment, etc.) is ubiquitous, invading all types of spaces: public and private, Western and Eastern, urban and rural, centres and margins. The result is a complex fight for space and place: individual (spatial mobility, intra- or inter-generations) and collective (social dwelling, chic bourgeois). These mutations are even more terrible when they generate important conflicts, either within the families or within the social perimeter. Thus, new limits are being drawn and new walls are being erected.

On one hand, as we saw it recently in Europe, with the conflicts between the economical immigrants in the Western countries and the local populations, the peripheries are facing the same historical problems. They represent a fertile land for rumours, urban legends, and crime histories. They make us think of death, diseases, obscurantism, and moving. These places are characterized by a big absence: the one of the State (Bourdieu 1993). But, in the same time, the space is more than ever polarized.

On the other hand, State-in-State-like spaces are coming to life. Such would be the case of the gated communities, these closed communities, framed by walls, and under permanent surveillance. These luxurious spaces, generally populated by the middle upper-class, can be formed by one hundred to twenty thousand persons (Le Goix 2005). The golf courses and the country clubs distinguish them from the secured buildings where people often share only the parking lots. Neither private company, nor public local group, it’s more a form of voluntary segregation, of a local sovereignty. Noticed for the first time at the end of the 60’s, these segregations represent a very obvious phenomenon since the late 80’2. Nevertheless, in our time, the gated communities are an illustration of the fear culture: fear of the other, of the cultural diversity, fear of social changes3. Furthermore, they represent a new form of cultural intimacy, a new type of communitarianism: on one hand, there is “the good”, those that are part of the community, on the other, “the mean”, outside the walls. Subsequently, the frontiers seem to be drawn a second time. It is obvious that these voluntary or involuntary “deportations”, which are, by the way, more and more frequent, will have visible consequences on the people’s – adults and children – behaviour, on the social relations, briefly, on all the aspects which can, in one way or another, touch such a new level, of the space reorganisation: the old peripheries become new centres. This does not mean that peripheries disappear. On the contrary, the globalization creates new ones. The North descends to the South, the East comes to the West, the downtowns are inhabited by homeless, and the suburbs are transformed into elegant neighbourhoods. And with this physical and architectural reorganisation, we can remark that the space struggle seems to be more and more powerful, translating, in the same time, a radical fight for life and recognition. For instance, one of the interviewees that Philippe Bourgois quotes in “Homeless in El Barrio” declares: “I don’t want anymore to survive, I want to live!” (1993: 521). The survival question has been associated with the more diverse people, living in precarious conditions: the ghettos, the camps, the totalitarian regimes, and the suburban (1993: 521). In our days, the whole world seems to face the old suburb problems. The fear (of terrorist attacks, of otherness, diseases, unemployment, etc.) is ubiquitous, invading all types of spaces: public and private, Western and Eastern, urban and rural, centres and margins. The result is a complex fight for space and place: individual (spatial mobility, intra- or inter-generations) and collective (social dwelling, chic bourgeois). These mutations are even more terrible when they generate important conflicts, either within the families or within the social perimeter. Thus, new limits are being drawn and new walls are being erected.

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individualization, trans-global and trans-territorial issues, various translations and transcriptions distinguish a world crumbled more than ever. All these dimensions would characterize the new social map of the contemporary world. In order to better understand the new place phenomena and all the implications that transformation would have on the people's life style and individual/group relations, the social should be always imagined, la Boîrdieu, in connection with the physical space, and the habitats in connection with the body. For instance, in this context, an author like Bauman (1998) invokes the impossibility to find a chez soi; the impossibility to stop, to take a break; a sort of a universal, real or imagined, nomadization.

Hence, everybody is a traveller: on one hand, those who can travel even without papers and visas, on the other hand, those who are not able to do it, for they are "without-papers". The first ones live in a temporal dimension, the second ones in a spatial context. The first ones travel when they wish to, the latter are constrained to do it (ibid.), Bauman identifies them, metaphorically, as "tourists" and "vagabonds". The "tourists" will leave their places when they want to; the "vagabonds" know that they cannot remain long time in one place, because they are not welcome anywhere. The society, in late sensu, points the author, needs the two categories, since the "tourists" cannot exist without the recurrent picture of the "vagabonds".

Facing individuals that seem more standardized than ever, maybe, the statement of the anthropologist and psychoanalyst Pierre Legendre (2006) is just accurate: we are living in a world that seems to have lost its fathers. What is the meaning of "losing the fathers"? It's losing the references; it's losing the significant. What is the meaning of "losing the fathers"? It's losing the references; it's losing the significant. It's losing the references; it's losing the significant. It's losing the references; it's losing the significant.

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In this very sense, one of the authors of the last Debates in Anthropology course at Laval University (October 2005).

Notes
1. Original text in French: "J'veux plus survivre, j'veux vivre!"
2. The causes of their multiplication is due to the recapitulation explained by the economical major changes during those years and to the need to build a "fortress" in places as Nairobi and Mexico City, because of the risks involved by the militarization of these cities (LeGoi 2005).
3. In fact, in the interviews made by Setha Low(2003) in the gated communities of New York and San Antonio, the fear shows through the recordings in an evident way: the subjects speak about the fear to take useless risks, fear of death and diseases, etc.
4. See, for example, the recent report of the Romanian Soros Foundation, on the migration effects on children's behaviour in Romania (Toth, Toth et al. 2007).
5. In this gated communities New York and San Antonio, the fear shows through the recordings in an evident way: the subjects speak about the fear to take useless risks, fear of death and diseases, etc.

References
The State in many respects is like a piece of software - it seems stable enough while the power is on and it hasn’t run into a major bug yet, but interrupt the power supply, or corrupt it and it falls apart with startling rapidity. According to Rousseau, if at base it is about its own preservation, the sovereign state must have ‘universal and compelling power to move and dispose of each part in whatever manner is beneficial to the whole.’ Moreover, he argues that, in the same way that people have power over their own limbs, so too the social contract gives the state, as body politic, absolute power over all its members. It is this same power, Rousseau argues, when directed by the ‘general will’ is termed sovereignty. For him the ‘software’ of the social contract is corrupted when the best interests of the majority are not invoked by the general will of the people. The question of how to identify the ‘general will’ of the people when the people are engaged directly with global economic processes at a speed and in a manner barely discernible by the state is not addressed.

For Machiavelli the international society of states consists of competitive states that either become conqueror or conquered. The Prince must be powerful and skilled in military affairs in order to continue ruling the state, and the Prince is the person who holds the monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Machiavelli was well aware of the state as an essentially contested term, which is another way of saying that the state is historically contingent. He understood that the state was subject to reticulation and that it required vigilant maintenance in order to survive as a viable identity. What Machiavelli doesn’t address is how the security state can act nationally when the economic bases of its power are controlled offshore.

Thomas Hobbes 5 posits the state as a ‘Persona Ficta’ which exists within an anarchical system of states, each competing for diminishing resources. From this perspective the life of the state would be unstable, nasty, brutish and short. The state, for him is an idea - a legal fiction - that operates as an identity to which the domestic polity subscribe in order to marshal its resources more efficiently for the good of the people. What Hobbes’ Leviathan fails to address is how relevant that identity will remain when people are forming international communities and joint-ventures based around ‘virtual corporations’ that effectively by-pass the state in most of its dealings - the domestic policy is becoming increasingly globalised.

So we have a number of problems confronting traditional Realist approaches to the State and to (inter)national. These problems have a lot to do with the location of identity in an increasingly globalised and ‘wired’ world. Identity is produced through practices of boundary making, practices
that divide the idea of self from the idea of the Other (‘us’ as against ‘them’).

States. under this rubric, might be viewed as ‘symptoms’, or outward signs of their boundary-making practices. From this it follows that the state will have a multitude of facets - each reflecting aspects of what it means to be a state from a particular point of view. The state therefore would need to be conceived in a dis-aggregated form, existing as a function of its differences and dispersions, rather than as the rational, unified originary actor of modernist realist discourse.

The other side of this process is that the identity produced/invoked by practices of boundary-making itself forms the locus for further boundary-making practices. Which came first historically is less important than the recognition that these processes occur. Moreover these processes become arguably one of the key mechanisms of history - if states sprang fully formed from some ideal type there would be no shifting of boundaries across time.

Collective identities in the form of states can be invoked for specific purposes, such as treaty-making in international law, or the state setting of interests. But one aspect of this view of states as identities is that these identities themselves become visible where they are weakest - where they reveal a contested and contingent site of absence. The idea of statehood is arguably most strongly invoked when the place or importance of the state is placed in question by another identity, whether internal (insurgent) or external (from other states).

If states and other identity formations are at base produced through their boundary-making practices, then maintenance of those boundaries by those legitimated to act in the name of the state becomes a matter at least of credibility, and at the extreme, of state of collapse. So states (or more properly those who speak in the name of the state) are concerned to have internal policing and security mechanisms to ensure that those who are legitimated to speak for the state retain a monopoly on the power to do so.

So, whether about military or cultural violence, two points become clear: first, that nation-states have always been, in one form or another about the prince or his analogue having a monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Such force has always been about policing and maintaining boundaries between Self and Other. Indeed, it is no accident that the words ‘policing’ and ‘policy’ derive from the same roots.

Cognisant of this derivation, the Napoleonic-era strategist Carl von Clausewitz came to his now classic formulation of war as ‘a continuation of policy by other means’. Clearly Clausewitz was aware of the discursive nature of war. Thus the State as traditionally conceived in Realist accounts of international relations is perhaps more accurately termed the ‘security state’. I shall consider other modalities of state (economic, cultural, and political) later in the paper.

Second, in the foundational texts of Realist discourse, the state has always been recognised as a discursive formation - a legal fiction - articulated to (re)present the will of the people as an overarching identity to which the domestic polity subscribes. It follows from this, that the state in realist discourse (at least by the founding fathers - and I use the gendered term advisedly) has always been at its most visible at its moments of challenge, that is, at its boundaries. At the heart of this are sets of practices that speak the state (7). Indeed, as Dillon has recently argued, the constitution of what he terms (inter)national political order is a creation of power.

Considering that the development of internet arose from basic research sponsored by the US Defence Department to improve computer processing performance through networked computers, and considering it was taken up as having almost coincidentally solved a potential military problem, and considering virtual reality technologies are still at their most advanced within military systems, the globalisation of the internet scenario continues to have a role to do with nation states and power. Indeed security - a term arguably at the core of what international relations traditionally has been about - is still most usually defined in terms of military security. So I read with interest when writers, such as the Director of MIT’s Meda Lab, Nicholas Negroponte, assert the following.

Like a moth-ball which goes from solid to gas directly, I expect the national state to evaporate without first going into a gooy, inoperative mess, before some global cyberstate commands the political ether. (Negroponte, 1995, p.236)

He goes on to assert that: ...the role of the nation-state will change dramatically and there will be no more room for nationalism than there is for smallpox. (Ibid.)

What Negroponte seeks to point out here is that with the globalisation of the internet, there will be, as there are now, multiple sites of political activity.

Along with many classical Realist theorists of International Relations, Negroponte conceives of the nation-state as a unitary object. Something that, to use his terms, is tied to ‘atoms rather than bits’. He refers to the state as being tied to space and place, geometry and geography. In other words he sees states in terms of the physical traces - the manifestations in the walls, rivers, or mountains -of their boundaries or borders.

Rereading Machiavelli, Hobbes and Rousseau, one can locate a view along the lines that states are like software programmed to run in the wervere of the people who subscribe to the identity of the state. Like software the state exists while it is ‘run’ and maintained. It is a very complex piece of software written in a number of programming languages, such as economics, military security, and environmental discourse and so on. These exist as articulations of a particular mode of defining self and Other. It is about sets of relations between those who are included - us, and those who are excluded - them. It is about locating a sense of self and a sense of belonging - loosely and traditionally interpreted as a sense of place. It exists primarily as the result of a set of boundary-making practices that invoke and are invoked by the people subscribing to the idea of the state. And this probably explains the emphasis placed on military security when terms like security and sovereignty are invoked. But security is broader than military security.

States are above all cultural artefacts, or information produced by and through practices of signification - from the writing of foundational documents -constitutions - to the discourses of smart bombs and the global spread of Coca-Cola. Sovereign identity then is comprised of bits rather than atoms.

Moreover, it is relations of power that have characterised relations within the domestic polity, between the domestic polity and the broader interests of the State; and between states within the global system.

We can begin, then, to construct a grid to illustrate something of the nature of the complex of relations between actors. Such a grid arises from the boundary-making behaviours in which people participate in order to articulate their relations as identifiable ‘bodies’ with respect to the issues they invoke.

On the one hand we can look at issues of size or scale (individual, sub-state actor, state, system of states, transnational organisations or corporations, and the global). On the other hand we can look at a set of issue areas, or arenas in which these identities are produced (security, economic, cultural, environmental...etc). What becomes mapped as boundaries are those areas where relations between identities/actors come into conflict or collusion with other actors at the individual, state, transnational corporation or NGO levels, or within and between issue areas, for example, where environment and economics conflict. Add to this the additional dynamic of economic first world/developing world and the extent of complexity becomes clearer. Under this rubric we can examine aspects of the globalisation of communications technologies epitomised by internet in functional terms, rather than as an integrated set of overlapped assertions.

In the process of disaggregating the state, it becomes defined in terms of its relations with individuals and sub-state actors, with groups of states (such as APEC or the European Community), its relations with transnational organisations and its relation to global issues, such as refugees, pollution and so on. The State is also defined in terms of its ability to mobilise its sub-state actors to provide for their safety, economic well-being, cultural identity and its environmental concerns, such as emissions controlled/regulated by domestic legislation, and by the agreements signed in its name with other states, such as, for example, the Biodiversity Convention.

When people start to think in terms of the death of the state - usually they are saying that one or another of the faces of the state is taking on a more prominent role with respect to an issue area - ie transnational corporations are becoming more prominent in the arena of capital flows around the world. That does not of course mean that the state is necessarily less powerful in other issue areas, such as military security for example.

Pollutants do not recognise national boundaries, as was shown so poignantly by Chernobyl in 1986. Nautilus traffic and organised crime seem to cross national boundaries with impunity. With the development of sophisticated technologies...
of communication, international economics has taken a quantum leap, rendering states seemingly powerless to control their own resources, and with the globalisation of internet, even the cultural identity of individual nations is coming under threat. Pornography and the spread of the English language raise legitimate concerns in the hearts and minds of the developing world. I want to suggest that it is these questions among others that concern states, and that shape their reaction to the globalising power of internet.

This indeed seems to be the case, whether discussing the exercise of or struggle for power, the sanctioning and continuation of inequalities displayed in and through war – even down to the narratives of peace that serve to institute and inscribe a status-quo – these too are narratives of the effects of the conflicts that established these sets of relations through the inscription of boundaries by an arrangement of forces. Such a view becomes particularly evident when one analyses what various states have said about the growth of internet and what it means for them as states.

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Endnotes:
Citation
3 Ibid.

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In the modern world the field of global communications has an enormous influence on society. It has changed the way people interact with each other. Until relatively recently, interactions between cultures took place in ways which were relatively local (traders, soldiers and missionaries travelling slowly and expensively from place to place) or technically limited (such as sea-borne letters or chains of hilltop beacons). It is said that cultures changed very slowly, and most major changes were beyond the scope of a single life.

Such a conservative mechanism secured the stability of any local culture, while slowly adapting new components and gradually modifying the culture itself. This mechanism was based on two large components (upper and lower) which supplement each other. The traditions, preferences and ‘common-sense’ ethical standards of the majority are embodied in one part of the culture, often called ‘mass culture’. On the other hand, culture creates products that are far from standard stereotypes and concepts, and represent a unique cultural layer, sometimes called ‘high culture’ or ‘classical culture’. In principle it is far removed from everyday life. This idealised part of culture is stable, suspicious of change and has a secure, common base.

Thanks to that the culture becomes a dialogue in itself. Everything that belongs to the upper culture is seen as necessary for a truly educated person. Elements of ordinary life are regarded as being outside culture, sometimes even unworthy of it. The upper culture was always the culture of refinement and luxury which did not allow discussion of some aspects of human life.

Another important feature of high culture is the principle of completeness. The higher culture is isolated and self-sufficient. Its creative processes are realized in completed works, be they the works of a musician, an architect or a philosopher, and in completed literary texts as opposed to the incomplete, strange and even improper texts of the ‘lower’ culture.

The completeness and sufficiency of a local culture was revealed in its opposition – sometimes vehement opposition – to other cultures. Every culture developed a certain, ‘immunity’ to other cultures. That is why one of the central cultural oppositions was the opposition of ‘friendly-alien’, in which everything friendly (internal) to the culture was regarded as ‘mine’, i.e. genuine, and everything alien as a negation of ‘mine’ and consequently false.

Language is a basic element of culture, which is why a culture may be regarded as a semiotic system – that is, a system of signs. In this respect classical culture was a relatively isolated semiotic system. Accordingly, cultures were constructed with each other in a situation where the alien culture represented a coded system that needed interpretation. So acquiring knowledge of another culture required great efforts, which a person could only manage by absorbing it into the whole system of the original culture, including everyday life. In this respect the dialogue between two cultures was an ascetic or trans-cultural field, which Yuri Lorman (1922-1993) named the ‘semiosphere’. This semiosphere includes not only the languages but also the sociocultural contexts in which they function.

Within such a semiosphere the field of identity was relatively limited, but the field of non-identity was huge. In other words, only the smallest parts of the two cultures coincided, and the other parts required cultural adaptation. The sphere of identity stands as a prerequisite for penetration into the sphere of non-identity, i.e. into that which is unknown to the penetrating culture and therefore non-trivial and interesting.

The Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries witnessed increasing processes breaking down the local character of cultures in ways never before seen in the history of human society. Nowadays we observe a global information field coming into being. The information processes are so powerful here that they influence traditional elements of culture, first of all the traditional system of communication. Communication itself is an independent power arising out of cultural dialogue. The cultures penetrate into each other. The semiosphere was concerned with the difference between cultures which was regarded as a condition for communication. Now, on the contrary, the modern communication field creates the rules and ways of communication itself, making cultures speak in a language. As a result, a few languages become dominant due to political, scientific, technical and other conditions.

This modern integrative super-culture of global communications absorbs the variety of local cultures. We are able to understand any person in any place on the Earth – bar only to the extent that their notions coincide with or are identical to our own. This is communication for the sake of communication, communication without absorbing differences. The sudden surge in what only superficially seems to be cultural information hastens the ruining of old values, and prevents new symbols and signs from adapting to the traditional sign system of values. This happens during one person’s lifetime or even faster. Old systems of values and traditions that have predominated for many centuries collapse, and new values contradi the traditional ones to such an extent that their role in cultural formation is not always clear. As a result, the relationship between the ‘lower’ and ‘upper’ cultures is disrupted. The ‘lower’ becomes a popular one not only because of the number of the subjects involved but because of the simplified quality of

Communication, Culture & Philosophy
by Professor Vladimir Mirnov

Vladimir Mirnov on semiotics and postmodernism in a shrinking world.
the consumable products. 'Pop culture' as a modern version of mass culture is a typical product of the global information field. It exists under the condition of an integrated information sphere, realized through mass actions that we now regard as a simulation. In a certain way pop culture is a unified whole, in which a principle of simultaneous participation is realized and individual creative work does not prevail.

'Show' becomes a part of our everyday life, be it entertainment or politics. Many examples may be given to prove this. During the events of 1993, as people in Moscow gathered to await the bombardment of the White House [the Russian parliament building], the attack was postponed because the television cameramen hadn't arrived yet. Endless so-called 'reality shows', contests and lotteries predominate on TV, and they are the same throughout the whole world. 'Show', a modern carnival, has come to our lives. As a result we live in a society where the carnival goes on permanently instead of lasting just one or two weeks.

Thus the natural balance between the upper and lower cultures is destroyed. Carnival penetrates into everyday life and has become an ever-present phenomenon that pushes aside non-carnival lifestyles. What is more, under these conditions the artifacts of the upper culture may be replicated so that they become the objects of mass consumption too. People have no time to absorb new values. Show penetrates even into science, where a layer of results adapted for mass perception appears. Nowadays there are pop-scientists with features typical of pop-stars. This results in an imitation of scientific work similar to the imitation of the performer on stage who lip-synches to a recording. Philosophy as a self-expression of culture is also affected by these processes.

The principle of completeness was typical of classical philosophy as well as of the whole culture that it expressed. It is not by chance that criticism of classical philosophy is first of all joined with criticism of the completed text, and the principle of completeness regarded as the end of thought.

Deconstructionism, as a method of analysis, has become popular in modern philosophy and is the basis of a critical attitude to classical philosophy. But as culture as a whole is based on the text, postmodernism is itself a general cultural viewpoint reflecting modern realities. As for philosophy, there is nothing new in the thesis put forward by postmodern philosophers. New elements appear very seldom in philosophy, if at all, but the form and styles of intellectual thinking, experience great changes, reflecting the processes taking place in human culture and society (as described above). As rationalism in philosophy was once expressed as a system of statements interpreted by readers as a text created according to definite rules, now such a rational interpretation is called into question. But a serious thinker would hardly reduce everything to a narrow rational interpretation only.

Postmodernism is revealed in philosophy as a reaction to pure metaphysics and absolute rationalism, which makes us recollect that philosophy originated from literature and poetry, and we should take this into account. We cannot scientifically create philosophy in the image of other sciences. Existentialism changed our notion of value and of the emotional aspects of philosophy, and in postmodernism attention is paid to the self-expression of philosophy as an important aspect, the form of its self-expression creating and dominating reflexive thought structures.

It may sound strange, but perpetual efforts to ruin philosophy turn out to be not harmful but useful, as they cement philosophy's structure, inculcating it and making it formulate new fundamental arguments justifying its existence. In this respect postmodernism and deconstructivism are, ironically, very constructive.

Postmodernism was fortunate to have such promotion in modern mass culture. New communicative systems such as the Internet turn out to be a full realization of its theoretical aspirations. The 'death of the author', the variety of textual interpretations, the structural disorder – all this already exists in the Internet. In the classical text the topic is given by the author and it is the author who has chosen the succession of events. But in hypertext an absolutely different plotline can be developed, or even several plotlines at once. Thus, we have not only another type of text but new opportunities for creation.

Postmodernism stresses the problem of philosophical interpretation, but this has always been discussed in philosophy. What is more important: mirror-like reproduction of Plato's ideas, or interpretation of his texts and the addition of new philosophical meanings? These questions are not easy to answer, and they are eternal for philosophy.

Such promotion was necessary for postmodernism to protect itself in the academic sphere. Then it became almost invulnerable itself, just like a famous pop star. But popularity is also difficult, as it requires perpetual growth and the broadening of the sphere of influence. In other words, postmodernism now has to appeal to the mob. If it isn't interesting it will immediately be bypassed by other less interesting philosophical theories. This has already happened, as 'postmodernist classics' appear and their books with fancy covers stand on the shelves in the libraries and bookstores, attempting to replace the works of Plato or Hegel.

Postmodernism has reflected the fragmentation happening in modern culture. It has become some sort of a signal, stimulating philosophical reflections capable of combining the traditional values of classical culture with the present. And the importance of philosophy in this process will only increase, as postmodernism is superseded by some newer cultural movement.

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SEMIOTIC SPACE / SEMIOSPHERE


[For Lotman, a “culture” consist of multiple, permanent changing “languages” - like the “languages of art” (cinematography etc.), like the languages of science, like many others less defined “languages”. And a culture is dynamic field of tension, where permanently information is “translated” (> “binarism”), and thereby also transformed, from one language to the other ...]

The unit of semiosis, the smallest functioning mechanism, is not the separate language but the whole semiotic space of the culture in question. This is the space we call the _semiosphere_ - we justify the term by analogy with the biosphere, as vernadsky called it, namely the totality and the organic whole of living matter and also the condition for the continuation of life.

"Vernadsky wrote that ‘all life-clusters are intimately bound to each other. One cannot live without the other. This connection between different living films and clusters, and their invariability, [...] [...] A human being observed in nature and all living organisms and every living being is a function of the biosphere in its particular space-time.”
This collection originated in the French publisher’s desire to imitate one of the organs of the surrealism movement, which asked major thinkers to answer a seemingly obvious or banal question — and in our present age, the seemingly unquestioned. Everyone gives to democracy makes it a fitting target. The answers are various, drawing on the etymology of the word itself, the history of democratic movements and particularly of the French revolution and its aftermath, contemporary French debates around the concept (with Ranciere and Badiou figuring especially prominently in the others’ responses), and the relationship between democracy and communism. As the Amazon page contains summaries of everyone’s contributions, I won’t duplicate that here, instead focusing on points that particularly grabbed my interest. For me, Nancy had the most interesting discussion of the word “democracy” itself, pointing out that the other “standard” forms of government all end in -archy (monarchy, oligarchy, even anarchy), while only democracy is a -cracy — leading Nancy to claim that democracy is without origin or ground, a “principled anarchy.” Wendy Brown provided perhaps the most concrete thought-provoking read. The only complaint that I might register is that the volume could have been more clearly here!).

Of course, a large number of people in Europe will resist any further drift towards integration. To Eurosceptics, the new proposals simply confirm the omnipresent nightmare of a superstate in the making. They see both the commission and the German chancellorship as embarked on a long-term power grab, and they have no time for Barroso’s argument that, in the age of globalisation, pooled sovereignty means greater power for individual members. Indeed, the nationalist response across Europe is to claim the opposite — to insist that both political virtue and economic interest demand a halt to integration and a reassessment of the powers of national legislatures.

They are perhaps half right. For Europe’s dilemma is a historically unparalleled one. The intense pace of global financial integration during the last 30 years poses an acute political challenge. Can the members of the union, traditionally so wedded to their national institutions, keep these from being redefined by global influence? Not even the Germans would have the kind of standing they now enjoy if the union were to disintegrate.

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The Dynamic of Globalization

INTRO

Globalization is an abstract concept. It does not refer to a concrete object, but to (an interpretation of) a societal process. Therefore the concept cannot be defined easily. To make clear what one means with ‘globalization’ it is necessary to explain the whole theory in which one uses of the concept is embedded. For some, globalization refers to Americanization, for others it is about the growing importance of the world market, yet others use it to describe a cultural or an ideological reality: globalization as the victory of ‘market plus democracy’. For most authors, globalization is a complex concept that involves political, economic and social-cultural changes. Usually, globalization is also meant to refer to the consequences it has. Thus, globalization is often seen not just as a ‘one way process’, but as a dialectic dynamic. In this chapter we will discuss our definition and theoretical interpretation of the globalization process.

DEFINITION

Globalization is a process in which geographic distance becomes less a factor in the establishment and sustenance of border crossing, long distance economic, political and socio-cultural relations. People become aware of this fact. Networks of relations and dependencies therefore become potentially border crossing and worldwide. This potential internationalization of relations and dependencies causes fear, resistance, actions and reactions.

In this definition both the objective and the subjective aspect of globalization are captured. On the one hand geography is made less relevant thanks to new technologies, strategies of economic actors and policies of national and international political actors. On the other hand globalization gains strength because of the fact that people of flesh and blood acknowledge the possibilities opened up by technologies, strategies and policies. When they act in accordance with globalization, they make it happen. At the same time the fears, ideas, actions and reactions caused by the globalization process are a reality as well.

Geographic distance is becoming less an important factor, it is not ‘fading away’. The earth does not really shrink, but relative distances do. Therefore worldwide (networks of) relations can be established. As a consequence people, goods and symbols can be ‘liberated’ from their geographic context. In a fully globalized system they flow freely around the world, thus people and societies are no longer ‘protected’ by borders.

We also speak of potentially worldwide networks, potentially, because socio-cultural realities will influence the ‘logic of globalization’. An inward looking culture, isolationism, dictatorial political regimes, a fragmented international order, defensive regionalization etc. can change the globalization dynamic significantly.

WHAT’S NEW?

Globalization can be said to be centuries old. The first Homo Sapiens were nomads, traveling from one place to another, Indian tribes travelled ages ago from Mongolia to Northern America; products of the Inuit have been found at old sites from Australian Aboriginals; the story of Jesus has been told around the world from the beginning of our era. It’s clear: flows of people, products and symbols have existed for a very long time.

The special thing in our globalizing world is that dependencies within global networks are so great and interactions so dense that they form a sphere of themselves. The global institutional order has gained strength of itself, has its own logic more or less independently from the local configurations it encompasses. The movements and interactions in global space are now patterned and institutionalized to such an extent that local societies have to explicitly react and relate themselves to the global configuration.

The existence of this global configuration has consequences for national societies and actors. The institutional arrangement between state, national culture and national economy does no longer hold as an ‘ideal model’ for societies. Once societies acknowledge globalization, societal, political and economic actors have to act and react upon it. These reactions are intertwined: political policies affect economic strategies which affect social reactions and vice versa. Thus, in the globalizing world we do not only have to cope with the dependencies between local configurations and the semi-autonomous global networks, but we also have to pay attention to the intertwined actions and reaction from actors in the three societal spheres at different interconnected geographic levels.

DYNAMICS

To conceptualize this we need to abstract from reality. In describing and explaining the dynamic of globalization it is clarifying to distinguish between: The prime movers of globalization. And the consequences and the rebound effect of the globalizing world in which territorial borders become less relevant.

THE PRIME MOVERS

To describe the prime movers it suffices to distinguish between two main causes of globalization. The first is ‘globalization as a consequence of technological innovation’. This encompasses mainly information and communication technology (ICT). ICT has such an impact on mobility and communication that the ‘technological revolution’ implies a ‘social revolution’ and a decisive shift from industrial capitalism to a post-industrial conception (and reality) of economic relations. Alvin Toffler called this the Third Wave.

The second prime mover of globalization is the hegemony of the neo-liberal ideology. This is about the triumph of the market-ideology, the economization of life, mass-consumption and entertainment, deregulation and so on. It is a global ideological breakthrough in which democracy is considered to be a twin of the market-economy and these together are supposed to form a winning team. Of course there has been and still is an enormous interaction between technological and ideological globalization. This interaction has led to globalization of and by economy.

The reality of globalization can be understood by focusing on the two prime movers: ‘new technology’ and ‘hegemony of neo-liberal values’. Of course, the hegemony of neo-liberalism became especially visible and got an extra dimension after the end of the Cold War. The model of free market plus democracy became more convincing because of the collapse of the ‘empire of the evil’. The fall of the Berlin wall seemed to be the long awaited last victory of the Western winning team. However, the popularity of Thatcherism and Reagonomics started before that, while the economization of life, the on-going individualization, materialism and also the problems of the social-democratic ‘welfare states’ started already in the early seventies. Seen in that light, the collapse of communism was one important momentum in a process of ‘neo liberal victory’ that was already underway. One could also claim that it is not so much ideological or technological, but economic developments and turbulences that caused globalization. The internationalization of economic processes, both in production...
and consumption, the consequent emergence of a world market and Trans-National Corporations (TNCs) worldwide capital flows, growing economic interdependence between countries and so on gave birth to globalization. Borders ceased to be meaningful, states lost power to economic actors who had become ‘footloose’. The dynamic of the free world market thus forced us into globalization. This interpretation is actually quite popular, but inadequate. The internationalization of economic life could not have gained so much strength without state policies and policies of intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) supporting it. The neo-liberal ideology invited policymakers to liberalize markets, to deregulate economies and to privatize state-firms. Then, technological innovations, ICT in particular, made it possible for economic actors to take full advantage of the possibilities opened up in the free markets. ICT made it possible to let capital flow around the world within a split-second. Both ICT and the miniaturization process and the earlier transport revolutions made it attractive to produce several parts of a product in different continents, to later bring them together and then distribute them to consumer markets worldwide. Producing, selling and buying were less confined to actual geographic markets and production places as ever before. Lending and borrowing, investing and speculating became ‘around the globe’ activities. This was because the neo-liberal ideology urged policy makers to take away any ‘market barriers’ and because technological innovations made it possible for goods, money, symbols and people to cross borders fast and cheap.

In our view therefore it was not the economy that forced the world into globalization, it was human made technology and human made plus accepted ideology by which a collectivism of people forced itself into the process of internationalization. Or more precisely forced itself into creating a more and more borderless world, less and less characterized by territories with as a consequence a new ‘geography of power’ (see paper Sassen, 1998). This process than gained power of itself and became a no longer controllable force. In sociological terms we might state that globalization is a perfect illustration of the ‘Thomas-theorema: ‘if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences’. The acceptance of neo-liberal ideology, made people act in accordance with it, to the extent that the world became a world working according to the logic of that ideology. Globalization is then the ‘Dunkheimian social fact’ caused by neo-liberalism and made possible by technological innovations of the last half of this century.

Although the hegemony of neo-liberalism can be considered a driving force behind globalization, it cannot be said that all consequences of globalization were wanted or even foreseen by protagonists of that ideology. Neo-liberal ideology for example is based on the concept of democracy (with the nation as a political entity, the state as the exclusive authority within specific borders, with legitimacy of authority organized within national borders based on a constitution and the trias politica. In this model the international space is organized within an interstate system). Neo-liberalism took for granted the blessings of this system: via the democratic states both in- and external security would be guaranteed, the market both national and global would be organized and so on. However, due to globalization democracies based on territorial nation states began to fail. We will come to this later. The important point here is that neo-liberalism can be seen as a cause of globalization, but this does not mean that all the consequences of globalization therefore fit in the neo-liberalist ‘agenda’.

The consequences follow from the fact that the traditional tasks of states are being less fulfilled. This partly so because states, by acting in accordance with neo-liberal ideology and in adapting to globalization, have transformed themselves from ‘neo-Keynesian guardians of the national public good’ to ‘neo-liberal guardians of international private capital’ respectively of the functioning of a worldwide market system. On the other hand, since the globalization process has now gained strength of itself, states are also becoming objectively less powerful, less capable of fulfilling traditional ‘social’ tasks like redistributing welfare and protecting the environment. Furthermore, they are becoming less capable of fulfilling tasks necessary for international capital itself: securing property-rights and ownership, securing social order, fighting criminality, safeguarding peace and so on.

State authority is bound to a specific territory. With globalization, borders become permeable, more and more processes now have a trans-boundary character, some cannot even be localized (they come from virtual reality). It is hard, if not impossible for states to regulate these processes that have sometimes quite worrisome effects on national economies, societies and/or politics.

As we’ll see in a later chapter, states do regain some of their governance-capacity by pooling authority on a higher geographical level, in regional political institutions and in IGOs. Still, we can say that the governance capacity and the will to govern is diminishing. This threatens quality of life in the globalizing world in several ways. It particularly causes four ‘governance deficits’: a social, democratic, ecological and security deficit.

Social deficit

There exists a social deficit in two ways. First, globalization invites states to create ‘national comparative advantages’ with regard to other states, in favor of TNCs and investors. To create a competitive national economic climate, states run the risk of getting involved in a ‘race to the bottom’. Welfare arrangements are dismantled, taxes on capital gains, income out of capital and on easily geographically transferable income are lowered; subsidies with which the weak are empowered are lowered. Income gaps within countries thus grow.

Globalization also raises an international ‘fairness issue’. There is an intrinsic relation between the economic space and the social space, when it comes to redistribution aspects. An organized market-economy provokes social questions concerning redistribution aspects of the gross national product. This is undesirable to be fair and compelling, whatever the characteristics of the redistribution mechanisms. Now economic space is globalizing, so the social question is globalizing as well. Thus, globalization invites to broaden (territorially) the redistributive questions, while at the same time globalization weakens the potential for redistribution because of the primacy of the market and the weakness of the state.

Another social problem is that it is troublesome to create enough jobs for every potential worker on the right level. This is due to two factors. Firstly due to technological innovations labour market structures are changing: low-wage jobs for the low-educated become scarcer, the amount of low paid jobs for higher educated grows. This causes a mismatch between available labour and demanded labour. Those with a lack of vocational training are excluded. It becomes difficult for them to catch up. At the same time, because of globalization, the supply of labor from less developed countries affects the market position of all those who are not scarce. In short, only the strong can keep their relative income position. Even middle class people are losing out in comparison with those who have income out of capital and those who can take profit from their positions in management, scarce labour and training in new technologies.

At the same time in the less matured economies numbers of people are still excluded, living in poverty or being exploited. This is not only about income. An additional problem is the very bad labour conditions some of the labours have to work in. Especially in the so-called free trade zones in Sri Lanka and Mexico, but pretty much everywhere in the former third world, labour conditions are...
Next to the social, there is also a democratic deficit, this notion captures two problems. First, national democracies are weakening. The state is less effective in realizing societal values and therefore politics becomes less credible. Politicians and citizens often believe and vocalize that the government has to be based on ‘the voice of the market’ instead of the ‘voice of the people’.

The interstate/IGO system deepens the democratic deficit. Sovereignty of the people as guaranteed by national parliaments is limited to national policies. The more these policies are being embedded in and dependent on the supra-national juridical-political surrounding, the less meaningful parliaments can be.

On the international level, there is no representation of the people. With international treaties, parliaments only have the right to veto. Furthermore, international organizations usually have no parliament at all and if they do (the EU), parliamentary power is restricted. In short, the more the international and supra-national level gains in importance for world-governance, the less power there is for national parliament and the bigger the democratic deficit will be.

Thirdly, we have to speak of a security deficit. A threat to the global social order in today’s world is the violence within failed states: Rwanda, Congo, Yugoslavia, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sri-Lanka, and so on. It is difficult for the international community to interfere, partly because of the divided-nature of the international community and partly because interference in civil wars is limited by the UN-Charter to those situations that endanger the international stability.

This security deficit causes the refugee-problem. People from failed states seek asylum in safer areas. The number of refugees is growing very fast and for the receiving countries it is often impossible to determine whether an asylum seeker is a political or an economic refugee. Although the richer countries seem to complain hardest about the refugee-problem, usually it is the (often poor) surrounding countries that have to receive the most people. Security is furthermore threatened by the growth of international criminality and ‘national survival criminality’

The cry for values beyond materialism gains voice within Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), religious movements and New Social Movements (NSMs). The fear for the foreign materializes within extreme nationalist groups and conservative political parties. It is interesting to see that some of those institutions, strengthened by globalization, gain governance-capacity beyond the state within globalizing society.

The fear for the foreign is focusing on ‘economic governance’, environmental issues tend to be neglected. Besides, many environmental problems are not national, but global in character. National states do not feel responsible for them, while there is no powerful international body that can effectively protect the earth against the ‘self-destructive consumerism’ of the human species.

Lastly, there exists an environmental deficit. Our natural environment is deteriorating fast. This is caused by the negative external effects of economic production and consumption. With global economic growth, external effects grow as well. The situation is also less well manageable, since states hold on to different environment standards. In the global economy it is economically attractive to apply as low standards as possible (not only in relation to environment, but also to health and labour conditions), so there is a certain downward pressure. Because the state is focusing on ‘economic governance’, environmental issues tend to be neglected. Besides, many environmental problems are not national, but global in character. National states do not feel responsible for them, while there is no powerful international body that can effectively protect the earth against the ‘self-destructive consumerism’ of the human species.

The developments of and reactions against those deficits are also part and parcel of the globalizing world. Next to the consequences of globalization in terms of deficits, we can also see rebound effects, these are counter-reactions to globalizations:

- People react against the globalization of American images and values by stressing their own roots and local identity.
- People react against the primacy of technology and economy by (re)exploring emotions and spiritual values.
- People react against universal materialism by stressing non-materialistic values.
- People react against the globalization process its dialectical character. Some of these reactions get an institutional structure.

CONCLUSION

Globalization is about two prime movers:
01. Globalization by and of technology;
02. Globalization by and of ideology (American Values).

Globalization is also about two types of consequences, consequences in terms of the democratic, social, environmental and security deficit because of less territorial borders and the consequences in terms of attitudes and new institutions rebelling against globalization.

This matrix: ‘two by two’ is two dimensional and dialectical. It is about thesis and anti-thesis. Because we cannot yet clearly assess the strength of the prime movers and the consequences, we cannot predict exactly the outcome of the process.

The complexities of the process called into life by human technology, human ideology and human conduct are so great that the human mind, despite all the technological support available to it, cannot predict its course.
In late June of last year, the Sophia in Wonderland philosophical park opened. This particular project is part of a larger program to attract citizens, and in particular young students, to the world of philosophy.

The philosophical consultations she helped organise are proving popular, with around one in five of the town’s inhabitants flocking to the 15 euro ($19) an hour sessions hosted by philosopher Graziella Lupo. “People come and consult with me mainly on relationship dynamics,” said the bespectacled thinker.

"You’re not risking the pilot. The pilot is safe. He has edited a book – Killing By Remote Control: The Ethics of an Unmanned Military – to be published soon by Oxford University Press. As the CIA, often in conjunction with Department of Defense (DOD) Special Operations forces, becomes more and more deeply involved in carrying out extraterritorial targeted killings both through kill/capture missions and drone-based missile strikes in a range of countries, the question of its compliance with the relevant legal standards becomes ever more urgent. Assertions by Obama administration officials, as well as by many scholars, that these operations comply with international standards are undermined by the total absence of any forms of credible transparency or verifiable accountability.

by Rob Mason