History, Globalization, and Globality: Preliminary Thoughts

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GLOBALIZATION AND AUTONOMY
MONDIALISATION ET AUTONOMIE

Preface

This short working paper is an edited version of the text of the remarks that John Weaver gave at the opening session of the First Team Meeting of the "Globalization and Autonomy" project in October 2002. I asked Professor Weaver if I might publish them for the project members and the Institute for several reasons. First, in developing his remarks, Professor Weaver engages in a systematic dialogue with the definitional work of Jan Aart Scholte on the concepts of 'globalization' and 'globality'. (We are publishing Scholte's latest work on definitions as a companion working paper to this one). He uses Scholte's careful reflections on these concepts as a springboard to consider perhaps the most critical questions surrounding globalization and history. How should we understand the roots of globalization and of globality? Should we see the contemporary globalizing era as a rupture or a definitive 'break' in history? How would we recognize such a rupture or break? Of course, he does not answer these questions, but he does give us some ideas about how we might begin to think about answering them.

Second, he encourages us to think about both 'globalization' and 'globality'. The latter concept is not usually as central in theoretical reflections on globalization. Perhaps it should be a more central part of analysis. Globality refers to the consciousness of living in one world and it is seen to be a consequence of globalizing processes for authors like Scholte and Roland Robertson. Professor Weaver emphasizes that globality is a historical phenomenon as well. Consciousness of living in one world develops over time, taking a variety of twists and turns. Researching and understanding these twists and turns may give us further hints about the crucial questions surrounding globalization and history.

Finally, Professor Weaver's reflections provide the germ of a model for our interdisciplinary project. Deftly, he brings into the analysis the proposed work of a number of team members, some historians, but others who are social scientists and humanities scholars. He shows us how to begin the interdisciplinary dialogue over the core questions in the project by focusing on specific research projects. He also demonstrates how to begin to see linkages between these projects.

William D. Coleman
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Preliminary Thoughts

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During reviews of the project application by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, we were asked how the outcomes would differ from results achieved by funding the specific investigations - each of our projects - as standard grants. How would we achieve collaborative results? What would be gained from collaborative effort? What does society gain?

Initial collaborative effort produced excellent answers or we would not be here. Now we have to fulfil promises. That is a serious responsibility. In one response to questions about whether the whole would exceed the sum of the parts, we mentioned that the project fashioned a community of scholars; we would inform one another. Therefore, everyone was urged to read each team member's proposed research program, and a number of readings as well. It is humbling to read the projects. Due to their content, what I proposed 36 and even 3 months ago has changed. An explanation should promote some later discussion about the themes that could unite chapters in the volume on globalization in history.

Until a few months ago I had been writing about *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650-1900*, a book about the development of regimes of property rights that accompanied European colonization. I will lapse into a summary of findings, not to suggest that these specifics should be core ideas for the historical dimensions of the project, but as a personal way of forming hypotheses. My initial attitude as a historian-sceptic was to regard globalization, by whatever definition, as certain to have old foundations. I found too that discussions about the Westphalian world and the new world of globalization baffling, because historians are unaccustomed to thinking in terms of rude breaks and are suspicious of labels in any event. I share Tim Brook's[1] view about the deep roots of globalization, whether it is defined as various exchanges across continents and seas (crossing the seams of *Pangaea*, to use Alfred Crosby's term for the trans-continental movement of biota) or even as the consciousness as the world as a unitary place, a concept proposed by Jan Aart Scholte (2000). Tim Brook and others involved in this project also propose that globalization's forms have spread unevenly.

Distant roots and uneven development seem perspectives that could appeal to those historians who take the idea of globalization seriously. But does globalization amount to a new theory or an age of transnational business and politics? Perhaps, but I don't think historians are comfortable with a segmented model of the pre-Westphalian, post-Westphalian, and Globalized world; they surely find it odd. I opt for the idea that globalization is a phenomenon with roots, uneven distribution, but with impetus in a grooved course. Scholte's (2000) review of definitions of globalization is helpful for historians, and he embraces historical evidence when describing what is new about globalization.

"What is new about globalization?" he asks. He answers that what is new is the supraterritoriality of many transactions and the pervasiveness of the idea of the world as unitary place. This is *globality*. His concepts have merit. They propose a discrete phenomenon, whereas, he argues, globalization defined by trade or cultural exchanges can be studied without recourse to a new word. I find especially interesting the attempt to define globalization in terms of a growing consciousness of the world as a unitary place. World systems are nothing new to historical writing. Janet Abu-Lughod's conclusion from her book *Before European Hegemony* (1989) describes the open world system in the Indian Ocean prior to the appearance of the Portuguese, and she speculates on the impermanence of world systems and associates instability with centres of power,

whether diffuse as they were in the Indian Ocean in from 1250-1350, or whether they are dominated by a world power - "the undisputed hegemonic power of the United States" as she put it.

I do not think of globalization as a world [trade] system; it is far more. Consequently, history may not supply examples that support the idea of impermanence, but rather indicate how previous systems do not prepare us for understanding globality. As a phenomenon, globality may now have entered the time scale of deep, persistent cultural developments not transient political change. I *currently* think of globality as a bundle of phenomena not a theory, and the bundle seems to me unevenly distributed, relatively permanent, and still unfolding.

Much as I admire Scholte's approach, I feel there are problems with *globalization as globality. Globality* cannot be separated from the history of global exchanges of biota, people, goods, capital. Scholte's history of the growth of *globality* is fine, but those of us working with the past can perform a service to the project by looking for connections between the material evidence of global integration - the movement of biota, people, goods, capital, ideas, advisers, weapons - and the emergence of *globality* in all manner of eras and situations. I didn't find myself agreeing with all that one of Scholte's critics - Justin Rosenberg - said, but one remark I felt deserved consideration by historians. "Supraterritoriality is not something which has happened to capitalism as a result of late twentieth-century advances. It seems rather something intrinsic to capitalist social relations themselves." (Rosenberg 2001, 33) Seeking material foundations for globality is *one* goal for those of us contributing to history and globalization.

For historians - in fact all who seriously study the past - it is inadequate just to know that at certain dates particular expressions of global consciousness appeared; it is not satisfying even to realize that there is an accelerating pace in these articulations of *globality;* it is not enough to know that volumes of electronic transaction have soared. We want to know why and how this unfolded. Perhaps we can discover more about *globality* if we keep in view the dimensions of integration that Stephen Clarkson mentions in his research program: extensivity, intensity, enmeshment. Far-flung though they were, the European trade and musket empires of the 16th and 17th centuries did not have extensive and intensive impact, but those empires fostered the writing of influential tracts on international law and free trade: several empires generated a climate for articulations of the world as a unitary place. Douglas Irwin's *An Intellectual History of Free Trade* (1997) is instructive on this point. However, neither tracts on international law and free trade nor the disruptions caused by the empires had immediate extensive and intensive consequences. The material networks of contemporary global integration are remarkably different from those of the early European empires. Nonetheless, the similarities and differences among the Portuguese, Dutch, and British empires in the Indian Ocean region could be revealing when it comes to understanding what is new and old in the practices of current global corporations.

In between the era of European musket empires and the age of globality - two distinct conceptions of empire - there was another phase, that of the empires of settlement colonies. From these colonies - especially from British and American settlement frontiers - certain ideas formed that led firmly and directly to at least two powerful sets of ideas that have *globality* potential. These two sets of ideas were *the doctrine of improvement* and *the refinement of individualized property rights*. They informed classical economics and development theory. Proponents of these sets of values and formal ideas - let's call them ideologies - presented them as globally applicable. These ideologies travelled the world with Eurasian biota and were both installed in a multitude of places, whether the people-in place wanted them or not. The encroachment of these ideologies is not finished; their installation has been uneven.

The two ideas that nurtured both classical economics and development theory, namely the doctrine of *improvement* and the ideal of *individualized property rights*, will be prominent in what I propose as re-

search on globalization and autonomy. Property rights, in particular, guide the selection of topics. Before I lay out some of the historical projects for a study of property rights and globality, let me elaborate on what I see as the reciprocal connections between globality and property rights. I want to suggest that material life and thinking globally are associated reciprocally, enmeshed so to speak. Ties here with several of the non-historical projects abound.

I can point to Lesley Pal's discussion of the contest for control of the web between those who regard it as an electronic commons and those who think its future is as a form of private property; I can point to Eva Mackey's study of local conflicts over native title issues, and to Claire Cutler's intention to look at the global culture of law and the role of international law firms, to Tony Porter's interest in international accounting standards, and Monica Mulrennan and Colin Scott's examination of the native title and fishing rights. Will Coleman's recent working paper on the seemingly untethered financial derivatives markets holds further connections between rapid global capital flows and the way these affect perceptions about the world as unitary place. It is worth mentioning, for the sake of historical perspective, that derivatives trading had mid-nineteenth precursors, and it is probable that no one at the time understood the scale of transactions, and state regulation was non-existent. Here are two examples. Trading in abstracted forms of property electronically was done by telegraph once real estate could be described by a few numbers from grid maps or later precise longitude and latitude. Trading in commodity futures happened once commodities were graded according to internationally accepted standards which were established by brokers. The break-through in commodities occurred in the mid to late -nineteenth century, as did the remarkably efficient Torrens land title system. And that brings me to land.

From roughly 1750 to 1900, there occurred the greatest re-allocation of resources in history, including the twentieth century. In their narrow critique of the notion of globalization as a fad, Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson (1996; 31) argue that the world's underprivileged in the current make-up of power have little choice but to endure poverty. "The equivalent of the 'empty lands' available to European and other settlers in the USA and Canada, South America, Southern Africa, and Australia and New Zealand just do not exist today, with a concomitant loss of 'freedom' for the world's poor." They are right about the loss of relatively free land. On settlement frontier after settlement frontier, administrators attempted to bring land seizures and land allocations under systems of management that maintained some stability, security, and predictability, because land title provided a recognized asset for the credit necessary to leverage changes to the land's carrying capacity. In pursuit of order, British and American colonizers advanced the crafts of land surveying and cadastral mapping; they streamlined title registration and property law; they articulated a doctrine of native title in order to extinguish or ignore the same by a variety of mechanisms.

On British colonial and American settlement frontiers colonizers did something else. They established in law the allocation of land to people without capital. Lou Pauly, in his project description, wonders if the IMF and World Bank did not embark in the 1980s on programmes that took account of social justice issues. They may have done this, he notes, to achieve stability, to head off attacks on development programmes more generally. On British colonial and American frontiers, concessions to squatters and homestead laws helped maintain processes of land distribution that also saw grants to individual or corporate land consolidators. The concessions to small-holders were not retreats from the globalization of a particular conception of property rights - individualized, closely defined, and transferable - but a successful incorporation of potential dissidents.

The emergent globality of this world-wide activity was material, obviously so, because land was being parcelled and allocated. Yet an emergent or at least incipient globality - the idea of the world as a unitary place - is also evident. Colonies consulted one another; survey methods and law reforms circulated internationally;

international telegraph cables enabled cartographers to establish longitude with precision; the British survey of India became a world model for the scientific study of places; irrigation engineers hawked their expertise around the globe in the late nineteenth century, thereby not just changing places but eroding for awhile the idea that Nature set limits on improvement. Frontier land markets were linked to hierarchies of cities in which there is little evidence of national regulation, but plenty of state support for the definition of property. The profits were privatized and international; the costs were socialized and national.

The doctrine of improvement legitimized many land takings and re-allocations, and colonizers claimed that it was not just the land that would be improved, but also the indigenous peoples who would be improved, by being turned from allegedly wasteful ways. In the difficult article by Castoriadis (1991) circulated for our reading, the essential argument is that beneath the monopoly of legitimate violence - government's power of coercion - lies the monopoly of the legitimate word, layers of culture. Particular meanings of improvement and the ideal of individualized property rights, I propose, became legitimate *words* of global importance. A particular culture of property, not broadly European but specifically English, happened to acquire unique force.

The key words of this property culture did not lose force with the end of formal empires. In the age of decolonization, in the 1950s, the British, French, and Dutch empires consulted about how they intended to handle property rights as they faced a devolution of political authority. Modern empires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries - the British, American, French, German, and even the Dutch - were studying one another, consulting, borrowing, and thinking globally. My purpose in saying this is not to diminish the globalization of the last several decades, but to add the perspective of continuity, suggest origins for some features in the bundle Scholte (2000) called globality, and underscore the association between acts and ideas and the connections between historically identifiable global integration and historical conceptions of globality.

The governments of British settlement colonies and the government of the United States in its handling of the public domain had done more than any other colonization authorities to establish the idea that the greatest efficiency, the greatest improvement, accompanied individualized title. Even the British empire, however, in the 1950s recognized the importance of native collective title in certain non-settlement colonies. In UN debates over land reform in the 1950s and 1960s, individualized title was most strongly advocated by the US. Ron Pruessen's contribution to the history of globalization which will look at where the United States and its allies disputed theories of development is apposite.

The bedrock understanding was, however, that there should be development along certain general lines, lines perfected in what Alfred Crosby (1986) called Neo-Europes. The doctrine of improvement and individual property rights flourished in Neo-Europes. These twin concepts, I think, launched the conquest of place by space, to use Arif Dirlik's (2002) expressions. For him space is a product, "the geographical equivalent of the commodity." Greeks recently had this concept of space reinforced when their country's entrance into the European Union led to an EU sponsored land registry. Property rights advanced material ends; the doctrine of improvement and individual property rights legitimized and organized property on frontiers. These concepts also bolstered theories that influenced development policies, although there were bound to be variations in specific schemes.

Accordingly, I am making several suggestions. First, theories need to address better the continuity of globalization with the past. Second, we should consider the possibility of pursuing the roots of globality in material relations. Third, we need to look carefully at the reciprocity between action and ideas, and thus that globality might be anchored in material relations. Fourth, we need to assess the unevenness of globality. Finally, we should investigate the degree to which the unevenness of globality lessens and thus its durability increases.

Where do I go from here? At the moment, I am considering four studies, and then a synthesis for the chapter in the volume on globalization and history. The four studies are: 1) the twentieth century implications of the great land rush, a study that will look at cartography, property registration, and individualized title in places other than former settlement colonies; 2) the multilateral negotiations in the 1920s that allocated radio broadcast bands; 3) the movement internationally of universities into the field of intellectual property rights, and 4) an account of the workings of WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization). Plans may change, but my operating assumption is that in these cross-sections of history, I will find evidence of continuity with the great land rush, evidence of globality, evidence of unevenness and of connections between global integration at the material level and *globality*.

The unresolved question for me at the moment is how will these historical cross-sections and the other historical projects connect with the literature on *autonomy*. Perhaps the reading by David Held (1995) that we all read can inspire members of the history sub-group to coax out evidence of what Held calls *nautonomy*, "the asymmetrical production and distribution of life chances which limit and erode the possibilities of political participation." The connection I see between his assessment of autonomy and the work I have done on property rights in colonial and frontier settings is found in a famous caveat of John Locke. After justifying property on the basis of people's ability to mix with it their labour and allegedly to improve it, Locke warns that those who take property rights in the name of improvement must not leave the parties who may thereby have lost rights any worse off than they were before the transaction. This Lockean caveat has been sidelined in the material and ideological manifestations of a globalization of property rights that extended - unevenly - from the 17th to the 21st century.

POSTSCRIPT

By the end of the first team meeting, had I changed initial hypotheses? Whether I changed all my outlooks is doubtful for reasons I will explain, but the talented community within which I will be working alerted me to how and where I could loosen the hypotheses. So, the first region of modification can be identified. The group's formulation of history-related questions over two days exposed, at least, an issue of style. Whereas I proposed hypotheses, consensus formed around articulating *open questions* that presumed less about conclusions[2]. That inclination and the questions themselves will now inform how I think about my sub-project and others that investigate the past. Yet, as urban planner Hans Blumenfeld once said "it's harder to change grey matter than concrete." It's harder to change the bodies of scholarship we have worked with than it was to rejig the grant application. Can we reach consensus on answers, language, or methods, and not just questions? At this point, I do not know.

In their intimations at the meeting, Robert Boyer, Arif Dirlik, and Janet Abu-Lughod added a second major consideration. They accented crises and systems under stress; Janet sees the rise and fall of world systems, and the formation of new world systems on the ruins. In a note she wrote to me for the benefit of the project, she identified two ways of looking at globalization in opposition. The one is Weberian. The other engages criticism. What I prepared for Friday morning was a Weberian account; one that claimed to identify the persistence of Weberian ideas of the modern. I made a related claim as a challenge to seekers of crises: there will be a likely lessening of [globality's] unevenness and a strengthening of its durability of globality. *Homo oeconomicus*, saturated with the doctrine of improvement and surrounded by regimes of property rights, seemed to me a hardy sub-species with a capacity to adapt and endure. I have not changed my opinion.

Homo oeconomicus has survived crises, booms, bubbles, busts, and revulsion since the seventeenth

century, and seen off rivals. *Homo oeconomicus* fostered a number of innovations in thought and technology connected with *globality*. Are space-binding technologies and the tandem reconceptualization of many things into commodities fundamentally vulnerable? I wouldn't bet on it. Are they tractable? Maybe in five years I'll know how to answer that question with conviction and evidence from colleagues.

NOTES

1. When names are underlined in the printed text, they refer to MCRI team members. These names link to the team member's research proposal in the electronic version of the text.
2. These questions are listed as an appendix to this paper.

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APPENDIX

Histories, Legacies, Continuities, Discontinuities, Narratives

1. What are the historical roots of globalization and autonomy? What are the continuities and differences between past and present?

2. How has capital enlisted political authority (local, national, global), technologies, and communications media to open new opportunities for expansion and penetration? At what point does capital's enlistment of these factors permit us to speak of a globalization moment?

3. If we find a recent rupture and a decisive globalization moment, what is specific about the current moment? What are the deep foundations for this moment? For globality?

4. How has the practice and concept of autonomy changed over time? How are these changes related to class, citizenship and identities? How do social and historical memories influence class, identities, citizenship and autonomy?

5. How and in what ways are globalization and globality engaged and contested across historical moments? How does autonomy at particular historical moments facilitate or hinder the engagement and contestation of globalization and globality? To what extent is the engagement and contestation of globalization and globality a struggle for or against autonomy?

6. How does our research connect globalization and autonomy with the ideas of imperialism and empire? How do these connections and these ideas vary across time and at different globalization moments?

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Objectives:
To foster dialogue and awareness of research among scholars at McMaster and elsewhere whose work focuses upon globalization, its impact on economic, social, political and cultural relations, and the response of individuals, groups and societies to these impacts. Given the complexity of the globalization phenomenon and the diverse reactions to it, it is helpful to focus upon these issues from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

To assist scholars at McMaster and elsewhere to clarify and refine their research on globalization in preparation for eventual publication.

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