

UC Santa Barbara

UC Santa Barbara Previously Published Works

Title

Globalization – everything, everywhere, all the time

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7408j019>

Author

Nederveen Pieterse, Jan

Publication Date

2025-01-12

DOI

10.1177/29768667241306377

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Globalization – everything, everywhere, all the time

Jan Nederveen Pieterse 

Global Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA, USA

Dialogues in Sociology

1–5

© The Author(s) 2025

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/29768667241306377

journals.sagepub.com/home/dss



Abstract

Is globalization still a proper descriptor? Does globalization also include satellites and space shuttles in outer space? Recent work widens the definition of globalization: ‘Globalization is the trend of greater worldwide connectivity of people over time and the awareness of this happening.’ This shift of emphasis to connectivity as the driving force and the key point, implies that globalization is just one of the many forms this takes. Important is not the form, which changes according to circumstances, but connectivity and what it aspires and achieves. In an era of comeback of geopolitics this may be an important course adjustment.

Keywords

connectivity, geoeconomics, geopolitics, Cold War

Many accounts interpret globalization as trends toward worldwide economic cooperation with increasing flows of trade, investment, and finance. The timing when this takes place varies widely, from 1500 (Marx, modern capitalism; Wallerstein, world-system theory), 1800 (industrialism), 1950 (Cold War), or much earlier. By most accounts this is not a linear forward movement; it is marked by cycles, interruptions, and resumptions.

Along the way globalization processes intersect with crisscrossing dynamics and themes: (a) colonialism, empire, hegemony, along with dependency, Coca-colonization, and neocolonialism; (b) applied science and technical advances (steam engine, containerization, Information and Communication Technology, internet, drones, AI); (c) modernity, meandering globalization also encounters hurdles that cause breakdowns; (d) natural disasters, diseases, plagues; (e) economic crises, famines; (f) conflicts and wars over trade routes, resources, geo-strategic routes, and positions; and (g) wars of imperial or hegemonic rivalry.

Discussions of globalization frequently highlight, magnify, or rarify *segments* of these processes for reasons such as ideological leanings, analytical compulsions, or a need for drama. Many dynamics are short term, yet are also embedded in long-term transformations. The former and the latter are not always balanced or combined.

Globalization is multilayered and unfolds at multiple levels – macro, meso, and micro - which do not operate at similar speeds or under headings that rhyme. Arguably at any given time, some part, dimension, or layer of globalization is slipping away while another is coming up; deglobalization and reglobalization in different spheres take place nearly continuously and at times overlap.

Corresponding author:

Jan Nederveen Pieterse, Global Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93106, USA.

Email: jpnede@ucsb.edu

When social scientists and media commentators speak about this, they have in mind specific forms of global connectivity – economic integration, transnational trade, transnational corporations, investment, technological cooperation, spheres of influence or hegemony, security, interregional cooperation, and so forth. Economic cycles, whether business cycles or long waves, per definition imply an upturn sometime after a downturn. Algorithms and metric economists estimate the duration of the downturn and likely time options for an upturn. Many of these are short-term and partial diagnostics. Media crave drama, as do journals and publishers. What is life on the planet without dramaturgy? Hence, we receive recurrent announcements of deglobalization (e.g. Foroohar, 2019) and a few years later, predictably, reglobalization.

What kind of change matters? According to the historian Fernand Braudel (1980), ‘events’ are just ‘the dust of history’ while what matters are economic changes in production, labor relations, and trade that take shape over the *longue durée* and leave the imprint of structural transformations. Much discussion of globalization, however, is thinking in segments or snippets, at a remove from holistic horizons.

When the term globalization spiked in the 1990s, business journals had already noted multinational corporations and transnational economic interactions decades earlier. When globalization became a leitmotif, other dimensions of globalization also came to the foreground – social, as in travel, migration and intermarriage; cultural, as in music, cuisine, soap operas, and movies from other regions; political, when foreign affairs become as important as or more important than domestic relations; and so forth.

Globalization includes politics, economics, finance, culture, social life, art, fashion, imagination, security, securitization, sciences, knowledge, ignorance, specialization, depth, superficiality, quantum physics – and is multidimensional. Globalization is multilayered. Globalization is, so to speak, everything.

The ‘roaring nineties’ were a geoeconomic era. ‘The economy, stupid’. Growing transnational economic cooperation was a widely shared experience.

Yet conflict and war began to climb in headlines across the world – because of the invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War, 9/11 in New York, Afghanistan and Iraq, drones striking Waziristan, clashes in the Indian Ocean, skirmishes in Somalia, bombs in Yemen. The Pax Americana gave way to War Americana in the Middle East, the War on Terror, ‘color revolutions’ in East Europe and the Caucasus, the Arab spring, civil war in Syria (with over 600,000 casualties), the ‘pivot to Asia’, and the U-turn from US trade with China to US rivalry with China.

It was argued that Iraq and Afghanistan were ‘imperial overstretch’ (following the wording of Paul Kennedy (1988)). Many of these conflicts were unnecessary as armed conflicts, as they were wars of choice, vanity wars (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004), while they were also resumption and continuation of the Cold War.

Considering these assorted trends, it follows that globalization is *multidimensional*, not just economic or political economic, but involving other spheres as well. It is *multilayered* with pragmatic as well as esthetic and emotional layers, from fashion to cosmetics, from engineering to soap operas. It is multilayered in *geography* too, at regional levels as in regional cooperation, interregional, and intercontinental as in air travel and trade, local, and spatial. It is *multitemporal*, including phenomena that go back to time immemorial, from the Ice Age to the world’s oldest cities (from Uruk in Sumer to Mohenjodaro and Samarkand) as well as contemporary trends.

All the stops and starts, twists and turns of globalization that Victor Roudometof signals in globalization social science literature refer, of course, to specific forms of globalization – niches of meaning, avenues of drama such as globalization and modernization, colonialism, empire, hegemony, orientalism, Eurocentrism, Americanization. Discussions are contextual, of course, engagements with situations and ongoing discourses. Globalization has also been a relational and reflexive theme with changing colors, banners, and emphases according to the flavor of the month or century. Roudometof provides a capable overview of globalization babble over the past decades. Given the width and scope

of globalization, the overlap with dynamics and tales spans wide and in diverse directions. The reach of globalization is global, so globalization attracts reactions from Fiji to Greenland, that is, everywhere. Since globalization is multidimensional, per definition it involves processes in all domains of life and coexistence.

After postglobalization

Victor Roudometof's core question is 'How should we think about globalization in a postglobalization era?'. What is the difference between globalization and postglobalization? In Roudometof's approach postglobalization involves two strands. The major one is 9/11. In Roudometof's telling, starting with 9/11 it is all postglobalization. Second are economic crises from the Great Depression (1930s) to the Great Recession (2008).

However it is not difficult to acknowledge economic cycles as *part* of globalization. Besides, the crash of 2008 also led to the formation of the G20 (2009), that is, to a reorganization and reworking of globalization. And 9/11 as a turning point is posited, not argued.

This poses the problem of cherry-picking globalization, or as globalization we only count the pretty parts, the nice bits, such as jobs in developed and developing countries and cheap products from China and Asia that make up for austerity policies and stagnant wages. Growing trade means peace, according to Immanuel Kant and Adam Smith, for the interests of trade outweigh the gains of war. However, does not trade also involve competition and turf wars that can be bloody and treacherous?

Technologies of work are also tools of war. During the Bronze Age, bronze ploughs multiplied agricultural productivity, while bronze weapons boosted the warrior class (McNeill, 1982). Heavy industries in Britain, France, Prussia in the nineteenth-century also supplied arms industries, from Krupp onwards.

The US military-industrial complex boosts the development of technologies that help the military as well as corporations and civilian users. Boeing aircraft is both military and civilian – and when financialization took over, it produced the 'Boeing

problem'. The internet and email started as military inventions, were put to corporate use, and then served civilian use. Cold War supply lines were also put to corporate use. The Korean War and the Vietnam War spurred economic development in Japan, Korea, Thailand, and other parts of East Asia. The military-industrial complex, the US mega business that is now worth well over \$1 trillion a year, enables Silicon Valley and funds US research universities. Thus, the Cold War spawned and enabled the global connectivity of multinational corporations, and globalization is unthinkable without the Cold War.

The Cold War was an enabler of globalization, ergo, 9/11 too is part of globalization. In brief, the United States deployed a 'Green Belt' of Islam against the red Communist atheist danger for decades. Arming and training the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan, and later the Taliban, to combat the Soviets was part of this. After the end of the Cold War, Huntington's (1993) clash of civilizations argument targeted the very Muslim allies the United States had been cultivating for decades (Abrahamian 2003). Terrorism and 'War on Terror' became new mottos, and America's alliance with, support, and funding for Muslims ended abruptly. In combination with a presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia, this led to dismay and anger among Muslims. The 9/11 attack was an expression of this, hence, 9/11 is an extension, a continuation of the Cold War (which I develop elsewhere – Nederveen Pieterse 2024).

It does not work to neatly parcel out segments or dimensions of globalization. Geoeconomics and geopolitics are *both* faces of globalization, and background and foreground alternate. They are both business with different emphases, which from a high finance point of view, as Wall Street's patron, do not always make that much difference. NATO is business too.

My responses to Victor Roudometof's question are the following. First, globalization is long and wide, too long in duration and too wide in content to be easily cut off. Second, economic crashes (such as 1929 and 2008), crises, and cycles are part of globalization, not external countermoves. If they were, globalization would not have lasted that

long. Third, 9/11 is a breaking point, but it is more constructive to examine how it is part of dynamics of globalization, not an episode exterior to globalization, and to consider rather what it reveals about the character of globalization. Fourth, taking 9/11 as a break point, an attack on just one country, would be a bit America-centric. The US centrism, like Eurocentrism, is a very un-global point of view. Fifth, this account of postglobalization appears to be devoid of content; its content is a series of alleged ‘negatives’ of globalization – does that mean globalization is only positive? Sixth, postglobalization is a fad. ‘Postism’ (postcolonial, postmodern, postindustrial, post-industrial, post-feminist, etc.) is a variant of ‘endism’. Similar to postglobalization in format and structure is postdevelopment, a bestseller fad since the 1990s, the theme of countless papers, special issues, and conferences while essentially it is just criticism of development policies and perspective. Criticism of development is necessary and useful, and is also in large steady supply; however, postdevelopment or an end to development is a fiction that is empty of content (Nederveen Pieterse 2000). We are all becoming experts in ‘after post’. Deglobalization and reglobalization are just a letter away.

Globalization is local, global, glocal at the same time. It happens within and across borders. The United Nations was established in 1948. The Treaty of Rome (1957) established the European Economic Community, ASEAN was formed in 1967, the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981, to mention some successful regional formations. Regionalization became a new form of globalization and ‘borderlessness’ (Ohmae 1995; Stallings 1995). The Paris Agreement on climate change was signed in 2016. In effect, diverse units and modalities of cooperation come together in globalization, some of which are much older than ‘globalization’.

The deeper question is whether ‘globalization’ is still a proper descriptor. Does ‘post-global’ give too much credit to globalization? In recent work I widen the definition of globalization: ‘Globalization is the trend of greater worldwide connectivity of people over time and the awareness of this happening’ (Nederveen Pieterse 2021: 29). This shifts the

emphasis to connectivity as the driving force and the key note, while globalization is just one of the many forms this takes. Important is not the form, which changes according to circumstances, but connectivity and what it aspires and achieves. In an era of comeback of geopolitics, this may be a welcome course adjustment.

What we are experiencing is not just a resumption of the cold war. A McKinsey (2024) podcast asks ‘Is the world facing a state of permacrisis?’, in which top economists Mike Spence and Mohamed El-Erian observe ‘a pretty complicated and disorienting development.’ One account is that what we are experiencing is the end of American hegemony – which lands us in the series of ‘endism’, to a place where we have been before (from 1967 on).

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Jan Nederveen Pieterse  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4631-3956>

References

- Abrahamian E (2003) The US media, Huntington and September 11. *Third World Quarterly* 24(3): 529–544.
- Braudel F (1980) *On History*, orig. edn. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 1969.
- Foroohar R (2019) The age of deglobalization is here, *Financial Times* 7/22.
- Huntington SP (1993) The clash of civilizations. *Foreign Affairs* 72(3): 22–49.
- Kennedy P (1988) *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*. New York: Random House.
- McKinsey Global Institute (2024) Is the world facing a state of permacrisis? (October 4).

- McNeill WH (1982) *The Pursuit of Power*. University of Chicago Press.
- Nederveen Pieterse J (2000) After post-development. *Third World Quarterly* 21(2): 175–191.
- Nederveen Pieterse J (2004) *Globalization or Empire?* New York: Routledge.
- Nederveen Pieterse J (2021) *Connectivity and Global Studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nederveen Pieterse J (2024) Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan: Patterns, old and new. *Journal of Contemporary Iraq and the Arab World* 18(2&3): 117–133.
- Ohmae K (1995) *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies*. New York: Free Press.
- Stallings B Ed. (1995) *Global Change, Regional Response: The New International Context of Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.