Social sciences and the global: new régime or new raison d’être?

The idea of ‘methodological nationalism’ as a fundamental obstacle to a deeper understanding of global civil society is one of the major concerns of the Global Civil Society 2003. Ahler, Ahler and Glassis (2003: 17–18), Kaldor, Ahler and Glassis (2003: 4–5). This is assumed to be the major challenge facing the social sciences, preventing us from grasping the complexity and significance of the emerging global civil society. The argument is that, due to the loss of the centrality of the nation state as an actor in international relations as a result of globalisation, there is an urgent need to rethink, at the theoretical level, its power and role.

In Global Civil Society 2003, Martin Shaw (2003: 37) wrote that, to date, the methodology in the ‘ancien régime’ was very much ‘domesticated’, and this obscured different aspects of global civil society. Ulrich Beck’s contribution (2003: 46–7) to the same volume mirrored this concern. He focused on the need for a new approach to the social sciences. One can describe the rationale of, and the concern behind, these arguments as fundamentally ‘spatial’. The implication is that we simply need to ‘expand’ the methodology and conceptualisation of the social and human sciences in order to match the cosmopolitan scale of civil activity.

My argument here is that this paradigmatic shift cannot take place without going beyond modernism and the assumptions that formed the fundamental philosophical underpinning of social sciences. To go beyond methodological nationalism would mean seeing modernism not only in terms of the way in which socio-political and economic structures are rapidly transcending the boundaries of the nation state, but also in terms of the essence and nature of that change and its theoretical implications.

In addition, it is essential to see modernism as a ‘rational mood’ (Rengger, 1995: 110–13), which has defined ‘reason’ in a very limited, utilitarian manner, according to which the rational individual is not influenced by emotions, metaphysical notions, inherited culture or ideological doctrines. Beyond the nation state as a locale that compartmentalised social science methodology, modernity has retained its grip on the social sciences even though it has lost its hold on the real world. The process of global change demonstrates that human beings do not always focus on a narrow understanding of self-interest but are influenced by such considerations as communal, national and universal solidarity. In other words, human beings are compassionate and are prepared to devote effort, time and money to worthy causes. Indeed, some global civil society activists are prepared to risk their lives for such causes.

The narrow rational mood that dominated thinking about international relations dramatically changed in the 1990s with the striking rise of global civil society as a key actor on the transnational scene. The morphology and genealogy of global social movements challenge the idea of ‘rational choice’, upon which realpolitik approaches in political science, international relations and other social sciences were based. The new transnational movements build their causes on more emotional, humane and a rational choices: they give environmental causes priority over economic profit, defy narcissistic individualism and transform urban spaces. Global civil transactions have a philosophical dimension and represent for many activists a search for meaning and identity that goes beyond the modernist philosophical notions of individualism, as well as beyond modernity’s central socio-political structure, namely, the nation state.

Those who study globalisation have tended to focus on socio-political-economic manifestations of global change. The ontological and philosophical dimensions, so far overlooked, have to be brought back into the construction of the global social sciences and their theoretical framework. Not only do we need to reflect on the theoretical problems raised by global social movements, but they should become the focus of a new philosophical anthropology, combining abstract concepts with concrete empirical indicators.

Bridging the gap between theory and philosophy on the one hand and day-to-day reality on the other would add dynamism to the approaches and tools of analysis, and allow researchers to see more clearly and profoundly the depth, as well as scope, of change (Kaldor, 1978; Geertz, 2000). Hence, it is important to investigate not only the factor of space in globality but its shifting logic (by the term ‘globality’ I mean the scale and nature of the new phenomena that emerge from the process of globalisation).

The geographies of globality are re-mapping the topographies of the individual and collective self. There is a new appreciation of the individual and his or her universal moral obligation, as well as a new understanding of individual capacity, not only to achieve self-fulfilment, but to go beyond that in the search for the global common good. It was mainly Held (1992; 1997) who wrote in Western modern philosophy about the relations between the self, place and time. The global transformation of the meaning of these three concepts necessitates some new reflections. Combining neo-Marxist ideas of anti-capitalism with existential ideas of the individual activist would represent a remarkable shift in our analytical capacity (Harvey 1989;1993; Held 1992; 1997).

Global civil society should not be investigated only at the macro level of movements, networks and collective strategies of resistance, but also at the micro, individual level as well. To achieve that, the new global social sciences first need to go beyond the ethno-centric bias of the Western imagination, recognising the historical experience of other regions, and exploring the institutions and strategies that facilitate social empowerment and social justice within different multicultural contexts. One example would be the Islamic endowments (Waqf) that can be found in many Islamic societies across regions and sub-cultures. They performed what could be called, in contemporary terminology, anti-capitalist functions, and were also vehicles for social welfare that were independent of – and a challenge to – state authority (see Box 2.1). Second, the new global social sciences should be also beyond the liberal bias of notions and institutional forms usually acknowledged by modernist models. The fact that the civil society is now seen through liberal lenses should not lessen the importance of past civil society endeavours that were rooted in different notions of socialism.

Global civil society began to emerge as a topic in social sciences in the same period as the fall of the Soviet Union. It was somehow assumed that no lessons could be drawn from it, as it had reached the ‘end of history’ enhanced the hold of the liberal perspective on the academic mind even further (Box 2.1). In order for the social sciences to become genuinely
global, it would be necessary to invent new approaches, functions and institutions, or develop unprecedented forms of civil association. Yet we could also find a wealth of capital that would keep it empowered vis-à-vis the state.

Waqf is rooted in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who said that the dead can still be rewarded by Allah in numerous ways; for example, if their pious children prayed for them, or the dead person bequeathed knowledge of benefit to humankind, or if their charitable actions kept others from dying too young. Waqf became common to dedicate to the memory of one’s parents, a practice that helped turn death into a constructive force for civil action. These funds were directed to all spheres of social welfare and addressed the needs of society in every domain.

In the West, the property of the church was originally paid for by the people and manipulated by the church, which resulted in its later's growing role in the political domain. This led to the secularisation of the public sphere, and the separation between church and state in order to empower citizens and democratisation. The Islamic model was very different. Waqf was the result of individual will, which turned metaphysical notions of life after death into a motivation for civil action, initiated and implemented by the people.

Islamic jurists and courts maintained the independence of Waqf from the state-dominated political sphere. This in turn, helped the balance of power, because the judiciary was funded by the Waqf and therefore remained independent from the state.

Waqf supported progressive social and environmental causes, including, for example, shelters for women subjected to domestic violence, building of schools and hospitals, assistance to the poor, orphaned elderly, the provision of clean water, cleaning of streets, care for abandoned animals, and seed for birds in public squares. Waqf institutions supported Muslim civil society from Morocco to India and Indonesia, offering a model of combined religious and social services, which was adopted by many communities within the Islamic world. By the beginning of the twentieth century, 30–50 per cent of land and real estate in the Arab region consisted of Waqf endowments.

After independence, Egypt began legislating to manipulate assets and control all civil activities, claiming that it was modernising religious institutions. Ministries of Waqf were established in Egypt and many other Arab countries, even though these amounted to a contradiction in terms. Civil society lost a major source of funding, as well as power and independence.

In recent years, there have been attempts to revitalize Waqf, combining the tradition with modern rules of accounting, management and transparency. In Kuwait, Morocco and other parts of the Muslim world, Ministries of Waqf are creating independent, tax-free Waqf units that would be accountable to the legal system, yet have their assets protected from governmental bodies. If Waqf can regain its original non-governmental logic, it could help civil society overcome the many challenges it faces, and provide funding to enable civic institutions to network regionally and globally.

Ibrahim B-Bayoumi Ghanem, National Center for Social and Criminal Research, Egypt
We notice also that many secular social movements draw heavily on religious notions of justice and equality; and different faiths are an inspiring source of a liberation not democratisation and progress, as in the European historical experience (Esposito, 2000: 10–12; Keane, 2000: 36–7). After 9/11 those interested in the world of Islam engaged in a major search for a ‘liberal’ Islam to combat extremism and terrorism. In the present context, one can also trace serious efforts to construct a radically democratic global and progressive Islam. The emergence of a political movement out of the anti-war coalition in the UK, where Muslims have a strong presence, or the solidarity between different ethnic, religious and political groups in defence of civil liberties in the US, indicates a substantial change in the nature of the ‘civil’ in the global society we are examining.

There is no way we can understand the logic, strategies and dynamics of civil society anywhere in the Third World unless we bring the transcendental dimension back into our theoretical tools suited to the virtual space as a neo-urban domain that transcends the global-local dichotomy.

I argue that the retreat of secularism would require more than just the simple ‘appropriation’ of social theory. The religious and transcendental dimensions need to become a part of the theoretical tools suited to the virtual space as a neo-urban domain that transcends the global-local dichotomy.

2. The civil and the uncivil

While globalisation has been explored and debated, civility does not have a clear definition. On the one hand we should not mix form with content, as Juliet Abou-Lughod (1998: 227–38) reminds us. Many associations and NGOs are situated in the ‘civil’ local or global public sphere, advocating or representing groups, but how can we assess the extent of their ‘civility’?

If we revise the nature, role and boundaries of the nation state, we should remember that a major ‘modern’ compromise was the nation state’s monopoly of the use of force. As a result, the ‘civility’ of civil society is determined by its commitment to abstain from the use of force. If we go beyond the nation state paradigm how far should this compromise be rethought? In addition, the nation state represents a civil and national (secular) apparatus, which supplanted religious (supposedly irrational) bodies. Civility was linked to notions of secular rationalism and measured in daily life by European cultural values that were heavily ethno-centric in this respect.

The religious factor was hence excluded (or rather expelled) from the semantic field and marginalised in academic debates. Revisiting the assumptions of modernist social theory, we can rephrased the notion of civility that does not insist on secularism. Indeed the active presence of religious associations in civil societies worldwide invites the de-secularisation of civil society. Therefore, I would argue that the religious element in civility in the West to be contextualised and reconstructed, challenging both the secularist and religious positions. Religions that seek to mix modernisation and post-modern images of anti-cultural fundamentalism.

We notice also that many secular social movements draw heavily on religious notions of justice and equality; and different faiths are an inspiring source of a liberation not democratisation and progress, as in the European historical experience (Esposito, 2000: 10–12; Keane, 2000: 36–7). After 9/11 those interested in the world of Islam engaged in a major search for a ‘liberal’ Islam to combat extremism and terrorism. In the present context, one can also trace serious efforts to construct a radically democratic global and progressive Islam. The emergence of a political movement out of the anti-war coalition in the UK, where Muslims have a strong presence, or the solidarity between different ethnic, religious and political groups in defence of civil liberties in the US, indicates a substantial change in the nature of the ‘civil’ in the global society we are examining.

There is no way we can understand the logic, strategies and dynamics of civil society anywhere in the Third World unless we bring the transcendental dimension back into our theoretical tools suited to the virtual space as a neo-urban domain that transcends the global-local dichotomy.

I argue that the retreat of secularism would require more than just the simple ‘appropriation’ of social theory. The religious and transcendental dimensions need to become a part of the theoretical tools suited to the virtual space as a neo-urban domain that transcends the global-local dichotomy.

2. The civil and the uncivil

While globalisation has been explored and debated, civility does not have a clear definition. On the one hand we should not mix form with content, as Juliet Abou-Lughod (1998: 227–38) reminds us. Many associations and NGOs are situated in the ‘civil’ local or global public sphere, advocating or representing groups, but how can we assess the extent of their ‘civility’?

If we revise the nature, role and boundaries of the nation state, we should remember that a major ‘modern’ compromise was the nation state’s monopoly of the use of force. As a result, the ‘civility’ of civil society is determined by its commitment to abstain from the use of force. If we go beyond the nation state paradigm how far should this compromise be rethought? In addition, the nation state represents a civil and national (secular) apparatus, which supplanted religious (supposedly irrational) bodies. Civility was linked to notions of secular rationalism and measured in daily life by European cultural values that were heavily ethno-centric in this respect.

The religious factor was hence excluded (or rather expelled) from the semantic field and marginalised in academic debates. Revisiting the assumptions of modernist social theory, we can rephrased the notion of civility that does not insist on secularism. Indeed the active presence of religious associations in civil societies worldwide invites the de-secularisation of civil society. Therefore, I would argue that the religious element in civility in the West to be contextualised and reconstructed, challenging both the secularist and religious positions. Religions that seek to mix modernisation and post-modern images of anti-cultural fundamentalism.

We notice also that many secular social movements draw heavily on religious notions of justice and equality; and different faiths are an inspiring source of a liberation not democratisation and progress, as in the European historical experience (Esposito, 2000: 10–12; Keane, 2000: 36–7). After 9/11 those interested in the world of Islam engaged in a major search for a ‘liberal’ Islam to combat extremism and terrorism. In the present context, one can also trace serious efforts to construct a radically democratic global and progressive Islam. The emergence of a political movement out of the anti-war coalition in the UK, where Muslims have a strong presence, or the solidarity between different ethnic, religious and political groups in defence of civil liberties in the US, indicates a substantial change in the nature of the ‘civil’ in the global society we are examining.

There is no way we can understand the logic, strategies and dynamics of civil society anywhere in the Third World unless we bring the transcendental dimension back into our theoretical tools suited to the virtual space as a neo-urban domain that transcends the global-local dichotomy.

I argue that the retreat of secularism would require more than just the simple ‘appropriation’ of social theory. The religious and transcendental dimensions need to become a part of the theoretical tools suited to the virtual space as a neo-urban domain that transcends the global-local dichotomy.

2. The civil and the uncivil

While globalisation has been explored and debated, civility does not have a clear definition. On the one hand we should not mix form with content, as Juliet Abou-Lughod (1998: 227–38) reminds us. Many associations and NGOs are situated in the ‘civil’ local or global public sphere, advocating or representing groups, but how can we assess the extent of their ‘civility’?

If we revise the nature, role and boundaries of the nation state, we should remember that a major ‘modern’ compromise was the nation state’s monopoly of the use of force. As a result, the ‘civility’ of civil society is determined by its commitment to abstain from the use of force. If we go beyond the nation state paradigm how far should this compromise be rethought? In addition, the nation state represents a civil and national (secular) apparatus, which supplanted religious (supposedly irrational) bodies. Civility was linked to notions of secular rationalism and measured in daily life by European cultural values that were heavily ethno-centric in this respect.

The religious factor was hence excluded (or rather expelled) from the semantic field and marginalised in academic debates. Revisiting the assumptions of modernist social theory, we can rephrased the notion of civility that does not insist on secularism. Indeed the active presence of religious associations in civil societies worldwide invites the de-secularisation of civil society. Therefore, I would argue that the religious element in civility in the West to be contextualised and reconstructed, challenging both the secularist and religious positions. Religions that seek to mix modernisation and post-modern images of anti-cultural fundamentalism.

We notice also that many secular social movements draw heavily on religious notions of justice and equality; and different faiths are an inspiring source of a liberation not democratisation and progress, as in the European historical experience (Esposito, 2000: 10–12; Keane, 2000: 36–7). After 9/11 those interested in the world of Islam engaged in a major search for a ‘liberal’ Islam to combat extremism and terrorism. In the present context, one can also trace serious efforts to construct a radically democratic global and progressive Islam. The emergence of a political movement out of the anti-war coalition in the UK, where Muslims have a strong presence, or the solidarity between different ethnic, religious and political groups in defence of civil liberties in the US, indicates a substantial change in the nature of the ‘civil’ in the global society we are examining.

There is no way we can understand the logic, strategies and dynamics of civil society anywhere in the Third World unless we bring the transcendental dimension back into our theoretical tools suited to the virtual space as a neo-urban domain that transcends the global-local dichotomy.

I argue that the retreat of secularism would require more than just the simple ‘appropriation’ of social theory. The religious and transcendental dimensions need to become a part of the theoretical tools suited to the virtual space as a neo-urban domain that transcends the global-local dichotomy.
While NGOs tend to professionalise and adopt corporate strategies (Kaldor, Anheier and Glasius, 2003: 9), movements tend to influence corporate bodies to humanise, to... to organise events, issue statements, exchange information, and hold simultaneous events, such as the anti-war demonstrations of 15 February 2003. How then should we conceive of the global public sphere?

In Spheres of Justice, Michael Walzer (1983) explored the concept of justice as a spherical notion, identifying various measures and criteria in each domain that form the meaning of justice. We can apply that complex and visionary approach here.

Global civil society is best understood not as being located in a single global public sphere but rather as existing within a matrix of spheres, which are inter-linked but can... can happen only through interdisciplinary research on the different spheres, their shifting nature and hybrid relations.

The shared, overlapping and converging spaces are many, but there is divergence too. Contradictions can... on issues such as human rights, environmental politics, global economic justice and equity between women and men.

3. The societal and the individual

The third semantic space of global civil society is the societal. Social theory was built upon the communal notion of society bound by place and originating in kinship relations and their contexts (tribal, ethnic, religious, and so on). When modernity attempted to ‘overcome’ pre-modern identities that were based on pre-capitalist social and cultural structures, the ‘civil’ bond was the substitute and national citizenship became central.

Here we should remember that the birth of civil society carried a genetic paradox. Modernity focused on individualism, a self-centred conception of the human self, and a liberation of the citizen from primordial identities. Yet, in order to defend him or herself from the market and the state, the citizen had to enter the public sphere, joining with others in socio-political endeavours, pressure groups, civil associations, trade unions and, more recently, global networks too. The modern social bond developed historically as a mix of communitarian (Gemeinschaft) and contractual (Gesellschaft) relationships. Gradually, individual and contractual associations became the dominant forms; while organic community-oriented societal bonds diminished. One of the consequences of globalisation is the decline of ‘society’, the transformation of community and the emergence of different spaces of ‘togetherness’. Alongside this developed the distinction between ‘being aside’, ‘being with’ and ‘being for’ (Bauman, 1995: 45–5; 2001: 39–49). These changes are very relevant to our analysis of the societal nature of global civil society.

While society as an entity is based on bonds of collective identity, rooted in history and shared by memories, language, moral commitments, established norms and common aspirations, these depend heavily on space as ‘common ground’, which in an age of globalisation and mobility is in flux. The question would then be: is global civil society a real ‘society’ or is it rather a ‘togetherness’, which brings to the same spaces of ‘globality’ movements and organisations that in essence share very little?

The second important issue in investigating this dimension of globality is the search for the ‘global agent’, the central analytical category of global social sciences. Is it the movement or the collective body (NGO), or should it be conceptualised primarily as the individual who is the actor on the global scene? As a discipline, sociology has turned to the study of collective units of analysis, giving attention to groups and movements even during the developmental era when the individual, conceived as an abstract entity or metaphor for the masses, was studied to explain collective behaviour. The return of the individual/individual in social theory supports the call for the individual to be the focal point of departure in any analysis of global civil society. If this society is mainly described as the ‘network society’, born in the information technology age, it is, after all, the individual who decides to communicate, network, act and move, travel and demonstrate, and embrace notions of moral responsibility on a global scale. She or he transcends national boundaries and bridges different public spaces – domestically and globally.

If the role of the individual is often overlooked in research, this is due to the image of global civil society as a counter-Lavishian resisting the Lavishian of the state, as Habermas describes non-territorial and non-national boundaries and challenging sovereignty as well as the modernist legacy of the nation state. This notion depends on how we perceive global civil society – as a counter-hegemony, counter movement or ‘infra-politics’, ie, a search for meaning and counter-discourse (Mintelmann, 2000: 165–78). The more we approach it as a counter-narrative, the more we can re-capture the individual dimension of global civil society. Currently the individual is marginalised by the focus on the ‘societal’ nature of global civil action, ‘social movements’ as frames of mobilisation, and ‘networks’ as modes of connection and communication. Looking at global civil society through the prism of individual agency can help distinguish between movements and organisations.

Within global civil society, movements differ from organisations in their ‘power relations’, a difference measured by the nature of affiliation, the role of the individual, and the logic and form of organising action and its direction.

While NGOs tend to professionalise and adopt corporate strategies (Kaldor, Anheier and Glasius, 2003: 9), movements tend to influence corporate bodies to humanise, to become less rigid and more responsive to moral and environmental causes. Here one should distinguish between movements and organisations on the basis of their mission and degree of utopianism. Within global civil society there is, of course, a rainbow of movements and organisations; some have a dual nature, while others present only one face.

These different dimensions include many variables, which need to be ordered into a meaningful picture. The following section will attempt to sketch some of the variables out of which we can construct a new theory of globality to contribute to the aspired paradigmatic shift.

3.1 Matrixing the global spheres of the ‘public’

The emergence of global civil society created a global public sphere. Variously described as post-national, transnational or intra-national, this sphere is somehow assumed to form the meaning of justice. We can apply that complex and visionary approach here.

Global civil society is best understood not as being located in a single global public sphere but rather as existing within a matrix of spheres, which are inter-linked but can happen only through interdisciplinary research on the different spheres, their shifting nature and hybrid relations. The shared, overlapping and converging spaces are many, but there is divergence too. Contradictions can emerge between the national public sphere and the ‘cosmopolitan public sphere’. Diverse cultural, economic and political differences, and contexts and histories, cannot be overcome simply by networking and mobilisation. An understanding of these differences should enable activists and organisations to avoid weaknesses inherent in global civil society as well as locate them in the hegemonic structures they are struggling against.

Box 2.2: The socialist legacy of the Nasser Bank in Egypt

While the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh has been widely celebrated as a model means of empowering women, the Nasser Bank, which has been fulfilling a similar role in Egypt, has received little attention.

The Nasser Bank was established 1972. Although set up during the second year of the rule of President Anwar Sadat, it was run according to the socialist principles of the Nasser era before Egypt adopted open market policies.

The Bank attempted to combine modern rules of administration with traditions of Islamic charity. The Bank collects Zakat (alm), which is calculated by each person according to his or her income, via a voluntary system of committees in the mosques. In 2000 there were 6,000 such committees. The collection system has built-in accounting and accountability measures.

The Bank upholds a socialist policy, using donations to address the charitable needs of lower-class, self-employed men and women, students and female-headed households. There are an estimated 96 branches, covering all parts of the country, which run microcredit schemes with a total budget of 400 million Egyptian pounds.

Recently the government has stepped in, pressuring the Nasser Bank to hand over supervision of the voluntary collection committees to the Ministry of Social Affairs. Lately the state has been attempting to control the Zakat money, which is estimated to amount to billions of pounds, of which only a fraction is handed to Zakat committees and the remainder distributed individually through kinship and informal social networks.
I would like to suggest a number of variables/spheres (six 'vs') that could be the subject of interdisciplinary research, which is designed to develop approaches and conceptual maps that would lead to the emergence of the new paradigm of global social science.

1. The virtual

Global civil society is embedded in the notion of the network society. The emergence of global civil society was facilitated by communications technology, in particular the Internet. Yet many questions can be raised across disciplines regarding the dialectic relationship between global civil society and cyberspace.

Beyond information and communication, cyberspace is a realm of virtual realities. It introduces a notion of time and space that is relatively new. Heidegger predicted that there might come a moment in history when time and space could be separated (Casey, 1997: 243). While virtual reality fosters the individuality of the Internet user, global agency promotes the logic of globality, the search for a universal common good and the sense of ‘being for’ peace, equality, and justice and against war, capitalism, violence, and so forth. So how can we examine this complicated relationship and its different dimensions?

Castells (1998: 376–468) describes cyberspace as a space of flows, a placeless place where there is timeless time. He notes that the Internet is more than just a tool, it fits with the basic features of the kind of social movements emerging in the information age (Castells, 2001: 139). Interdisciplinary research that explores the ontological and sociological implications of these developments could help build a new theory of the virtual as much as it can help us develop global social sciences.

Anarchy might be a useful analytical frame in this context. This point will be clarified shortly when we tackle the issue of the virtuous and utopian. Here we would like only to underline the conflicting relationship between the virtual and the historical. While the time factor is conceived of in terms of the ‘politics of everyday life’, which is a distinctive aspect of global civil society, we should consider time in terms of the long durée too.

It is difficult to understand global civil society, its shortcomings and paradoxes, without understanding the diverse trajectories of movements and civil societies in different regions, which have joined a global cause and in doing so reformulated their constituencies, strategies and actions. As much as they were transformed by going global, they cannot easily escape their cultural and socio-historical context, which in turn has an impact on the changing nature of the concept of global civil society. Virtuality should not obscure the fact that activists often meet, and that place in the global public sphere has diverse historical genealogies. The virtual, the real and the historical are interwoven and dialectic. In this context, a multimedia perception of global civil society defines the claim of the ‘end of history’. It challenges the modernist narrative on history, reunifies dialectics, and reformulates them dramatically. It recapitulates hope and confirms that ‘another world is possible’. Virtuality, which is usually conceived as being instant and of the present, does not nullify the historical. This is not a theoretical assumption, but is clear from the slogans of the movement, such as: ‘We are the stubborn history that repeats itself in order no longer to repeat itself’. ‘We are the end, the continuation and the beginning’ (Ainger, 2003: 387, 522, 525). Issues at the heart of anti-capitalism, like the debt burden of the South or the digital divide, cannot be understood outside their historical dimension.

These remarks may seem puzzling and even confusing, but that is the point. This is exactly why we need to develop a new theory, which will require deep reflection on the philosophical and theoretical implications of globality.

2. The visual

A new dimension of the social scene locally and globally is the rise of the ‘spectacle’. Visual messages and signals, pictures and images are increasingly becoming icons. They constitute the new vocabulary of the global age, transcending the barriers of language and culture.

On the Internet the visual is the instant medium of communication. In the broadcast and print media film and photographs summarise global shifts, reflect the scale of disasters and convey people’s suffering, as well as their aspirations. Social movements are often triggered by an image that can catalyse action and social change – often more effectively than dufficous NGO campaigns (Castells, 2001: 143). Sympathy for the victims of 9/11 was based on seeing the catastrophe on screen, and solidarity with the second Intifada in Palestine emerged after Agence France-Presse released footage of the assassination of the child Mohamed Al-Dorra by Israeli soldiers.

Environmental disasters, campaigning for relief and solidarity with their victims, and campaigns against HIV/AIDS, depend on shocking images to enhance global compassion. The ‘image’ of the US as the model of liberal democracy and land of civil liberties was strongly damaged (arguably beyond repair) by the pictures of caged prisoners of war in Guantanamo Bay and the appalling images of American atrocities against imprisoned Iraqis. The global circulation of such images via the Internet shows how the virtual overlaps with the physical, and how the imagination is triggered by the visual. Cognitive impressions are increasingly dependant on visual factors.

The media play a powerful role, not only as vehicles for disseminating images but as arbiters of how they should be perceived. The media can create a spectacle out of an image or trivialise its significance. Civil society activists need media coverage in order to attract attention to, and support for, their cause; particularly, for example, international anti-war and anti-capitalism campaigns. When the mainstream media distort the ‘image’ of global civil society’s agents, activists often seek to assert their ‘presence’ by creating alternative platforms or seeking different avenues. Cyberspace offers a major public platform and access to a significant targeted audience. Increasingly, global civil society actors are using alternative media platforms, often web-based, which rely heavily on the visual, in order to mobilise support.

In this context, the human body becomes a liberated space and a central platform for visual signs and signals. The physical appearance – as well as body language – of an activist in traditional clothes, a masked demonstrator against nuclear weapons, or a veiled French Muslim with the symbols of all religions drawn on her face, is a powerful medium of communication. The problem here is the focus on the spectacle rather than the action (Bauman, 1999: 70–1), which creates a false sense of achievement but does not change the structural relations that lead to global injustice (Harvey, 2000: 130).

This preoccupation with the visual also risks strengthening the modernist centrality of physicality (place and body) at the expense of reason and intellect (developing theories and polishing discourses). This aspect of modernity has been neglected by critics, who often assume modernity is about reason only. Their perspective ignores the inevitable shift to physicality if reason is defined solely in terms of secularity and temporality, and any transcendental or historical dimensions are rejected (Selig, 1998: 1–13).
3. The vocal

Global civil society manages difference and diversity by democratic conversations. These discussions do not aim necessarily to reach a consensus but to accommodate diversity in a soft, and flexible manner. In different forums and parallel summits, where activists and NGOs come together from different countries, there is a fusion of horizons of meaning (Giddens, 1990: 359). Coming from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, global agents engage in a process of ‘negotiation’ to reach agreement and debate mutual concerns. In this context ‘translation’ and ‘interpretation’ in the deep sense are inevitable (Bhabha, 1995: 236-56; Harvey, 2000: 150).

One can raise many questions, such as how language is used and how it can be manipulated. If different actors resort to the ‘global’ language of, let us say, English, how far does that affect their power to express themselves in their respective native languages and to what extent does that inhibit their ability to challenge globalism and to genuinely express an alternative model or conceptual framework? Also, what are the implications for the dominance of English on the Internet? How much is cyber-networking influenced by the dominant language, terminologies and cultural perceptions of the West?

4. The virtuous

If modernity is to be revisited and methodological nationalism challenged, this would return the question of virtues, values and morality to mainstream theoretical and methodological debates in the social sciences. If global civil society is to be the civic virtues, regard as essential, and how are they negotiated among different actors and reflected in strategies of action and circles of interest?

The nation state was not only a political apparatus but, it was argued, a moral agent as well, moral accountability shifting from the individual and community to the state, with its legal framework and educational institutions. Milligram’s classic study (1974) of obedience to authority and Bauman’s investigation (1993) of post-modern ethics suggest that rationality was gradually superseding morality; the result was a morality without ethics, subject to interpretations of national interest that had little to do with classic notions of ethics or morals.

The condition of globalization is paralleled by multiple and overlapping moralities. Causes that try to bridge different cultural values and synthesise moralities into a universal layer that is shared by all (yet retains distinct value systems) usually acquire moral legitimacy. Whether the cause is humanitarian, egalitarian or environmental, diverse moral codes provide it with their respective ethical underpinnings. Muslims, Christians, and Hindus use their religious or spiritual discourses, and neo-Manicheans their anti-capitalist ideological analysis, but they are united in their condemnation of human rights violations in areas of conflict or the degradation of the environment. The human being and nature are shared abstract entities with moral value, even if conceptions of the sacred and the profane are different.

Global civil society includes webs of normative meaning. It is mobilised around values, identity and culture, and the investment of this ‘moral capital’ (Cassells, 2001: 140; Kak, 2001; Kak, 2003: 194-6). We should identify those spaces where the different social science disciplines can meet to investigate the moral questions raised by global civil society. How are civil virtues within the global public sphere formed and transformed through direct contact and negotiated public interests? And then how are they synthesized and advocated on the basis of moral and ethical values? In its resistance to capitalism, war, abuse of natural resources, its keen attempts to end violence against women, bring criminals of war to justice, and advocate corporate transparency, we can see how global civil society draws on a rich moral discourse that is more relevant to the masses than ideological rhetoric.

This moral question deserves more examination. Here it is also important to consider the relationship between the virtuous and the virtual. How much cyber-networking is devoted to global civil causes compared with uncivil causes? Do Internet users recognize the importance of the web for global endeavours as opposed to individual communication or pleasure-oriented uses?

The problematic relation between the individual and the collective conception of the self mentioned above has ultimate moral implications as well. How can the absolute be advocated on a cyber medium that is essentially and existentially relative? And do civil virtues change when they become ‘virtualised’ (Schultze, Q. 2002)?

5. The violent

After 9/11, when the ‘war on terrorism’ was used as an excuse to tighten the legal constraints on civil society organisations and especially Islamic NGOs suspected of being anti-Western, basic rules of international law and human rights were violated. The blunt violence of some militant groups against civilian targets was met with uncivil actions, which violated the civil liberties of many people; and with the use of the law to exercise hegemony, and even violence, against civil bodies, which lacked protection under the obscure rules of the war on terrorism.

Although one of the promises of modernity was reaching civil peace after prolonged urban unrest and religious war, violence did not vanish. The monopoly over the use of force, in varying degrees, by global civil society actors should be open to debate. This has implications for the legal framework of global civil society, an issue that has been discussed in previous Yearbooks (Glasius, 2002; Fries, 2003). Global civil society needs to discuss this sensitive issue openly and make clear the difference between the legitimate use of force by, for example, civil actors acting in self-defense against forces of military occupation, and the immoral targeting of unarmed civilians by such forces. It also needs a more concerted mobilization when activists, who lack protection under international law, are subject to violence or become the targets of military action. This is an issue for movements such as Solidarity International, whose activists have been subject to deliberate military attack by the Israeli army in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. Such violence resulted in the deaths of two foreign ‘human shields’ in 2003, one American and one British.

Violence used unilaterally by a superpower does not necessarily require a violent retaliation by global civil society activists. Many adopt a pacifist response. But, if we are to understand that the nation state is challenged, then global civil society actors should be open to debate. This is an attempt to investigate avenues of expression and resistance that would allow a range of options, potential strategies and tactics beyond the bitter choice, enforced by an increasingly violent and anti-civil hegemony, between pacifism and another approach to global justice.
Box 2.3: The Anti-Globalization Egyptian Group

The Anti-Globalization Egyptian Group (AGEG) emerged in May 2002 as the antithesis of Egyptian politics. Representing a new form of political activism, it emerged as a result of a combination of factors: the stagnation of democratisation, the failure of political parties to address the challenge of authoritarianism, capitalist economic and political globalization, and antagonism among political parties. How do democrats remain active in an authoritarian context? Can a vibrant civil society survive without a legal presence? When official intervention under the pretext of “emergency laws” makes it increasingly difficult for citizens to engage politically or to form political parties or even professional unions, how can activists remain active? These were the questions a group of young and middle-aged leftist democrats had been asking themselves. In summer 2000, when the government issued Law No. 100 for Syndicates and Law No. 153 for NGOs, and with the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada in September, the political atmosphere changed. Sporadic and populist grassroot demonstrations took many people by surprise. For the first time in decades there were student protests in universities and schools. A new generation of student activists were chanting songs from the Nasser era, expressing pan-Arab nationalism and Egypt’s responsibilities towards Palestine. Ultimately, however, these protests failed to strengthen the student movement, which has been shrinking since the 1970s.

In October 2000 the Egyptian Popular Committee for Support of Palestine (EPCSP), formed by a group of leftist veterans, attracted a wider audience, offering it as a practical alternative to silent anger and sympathy. EPCSP and Itsance, which carried food to the Palestinians, became political events in themselves as they passed through cities on route to the border. Although the EPCSP lacked legal standing, and never attempted to become an NGO, it was not suppressed by the security forces.

The invasion of the West Bank between March and April 2002 strengthened the EPCSP’s hand. Popular anger against Israel had found a focus and a network. Some 20,000 people demonstrated for five hours outside Cairo University, the first of such a size for years, until security forces scattered protesters with tear gas and batons. At the same time, anti-capitalist discourse rose to the surface, starting with young leftists and gaining momentum among a broader circle of political activists. Many Egyptians from different backgrounds joined the campaign to boycott Israeli and American products. The public mood had changed and a committment was made to developing a “Third Place” between that of a legal NGO movement (which was politically impossible) and that of an old-fashioned underground cell.

Local activism and global networking

At the founding conference of AGEG in May 2002, 200 people exchanged ideas about how to move forward. The day event was held at the Syndicate for Accountants and was attended by leading socialists, including Samir Arrini. The first major event AGEG organised that year was a rally against the visit of World Bank Group president James Wolfensohn. This event, which included speeches by speakers from the international anti-capitalist movement, attracted more than 300 people and marked AGEG’s first link with the global movement. The small number of participants should not detract from the event’s significance – particularly with the usual exaggerated presence of security forces and riot police.

As the clouds of war were gathering in the region, AGEG was one of the key civil actors forming the anti-war movement in Egypt. In the run-up to the first US assault on Iraq on 20 March 2003, this movement attracted the support of a range of political persuasions and forces. The demonstrations in Cairo on 15 February were fairly small, but again significant. After the invasion, there were larger protests in Cairo’s biggest square, Tahrir. People spent the night on street, protesting against the first wave of attacks on Iraq but ending up discussing domestic concerns and shouting for democratisation. The result was the arrest of nearly 1,500 people, activists and non-activists alike. Five anti-war activists, including those from the AGEH founding committee, were prosecuted by the state for illegal political activity. Two opposition MPs were beaten up. One was arrested and detained for a couple of weeks, and the other was hospitalised with serious head injuries inflicted by the security forces.

Since the war on Iraq, AGEG has been going through a period of reflection. One particular issue is the development of a more regular (and patient) mode of operation. Currently our website provides the space for that discussion, as well as information about meetings and seminars. Our other concern is how to relate anti-capitalist discourse to the language of daily life, and to connect it to the suffering of ordinary Egyptians. We want to show people how rising costs of living, increasing unemployment and deteriorating basic services are linked to the structural adjustment programmes dictated by the IMF and World Bank. Networking with independent solidarity committees and global anti-war and anti-capitalist activists is a priority. Parallel attention is given to supporting grassroots community leaders in their struggles, which are inseparable from the globalisation of capital.

The activities of AGEG and the responses we receive – from journalists, academics and ordinary people – show how the local is very much linked to the global. Supporting the Iraqis and Palestinians did not prevent AGEG from simultaneously campaigning against a European multinational company that was brought in to replace the system of indigenous garbage collection in Greater Cairo. This devastated the lives of Egyptian garbage collectors, as well as imposing much higher charges on householders. Campaigners pursued the case in court, arguing that charging such fees would be unconstitutional. Lay people joined the lawsuit and victory helped raise awareness of citizens’ power. The court ruling was distributed during an anti-war event designed to express solidarity with Iraqis, a local victory for civil society celebrated in a global space.

A new political space

AGEG has no official legal status. It operates flexibly with respect to networks and uses cyberspace to share its passion for social justice and a humane globalisation. This approach allows news of events to be spread rapidly, resulting in actions that are almost instant and temporary, but which can catalyse change. In this way we operate in a new social space that is closely watched by the state. Not every group or network can claim all the credit or bear full responsibility for events and their consequences. This new form of civil action, which differs from established political and civil bodies, is constantly evolving. It is hard to predict how it will develop – something we see as a positive trend, allowing us to debate and innovate. It also makes state suppression or control difficult. Still, we have been subject to political harassment. A founding member was arrested by the security forces for a few weeks without charge, and another was accused of forming a Communist cell to overthrow the regime. This latter charge was rejected by the court.

Despite these challenges the Egyptian anti-war movement has grown, establishing links with the world movement and taking part in the global anti-war demonstrations of 15 February 2003. In December 2003, Cairo hosted the Second International Conference against Capitalist Globalisation and US Hegemony, in which activists from across the political spectrum participated. The conference attracted nearly 700 local and 200 international and Arab activists. It was run on a voluntary basis, with Egyptian participants hosting international comrades.

Despite the stagnation of formal political democratisation, there is much going on beneath the surface, emerging in various forms and networking with global civil society.

Wael Khalil, IT engineer, co-founder of AGEH

(whih by its nature often emaculates protagonists who lack any tact except “turning the other cheek”) and radical militancy. This should not be the concern only of peace and anti-capitalist movements but also a matter for socio-political comparative research that would contribute to the paradigmatic shift under discussion.

6. The visionary

Global civil society brought back the spirit of utopia. Movements do not want to give in to the ugly reality and many global activists genuinely dream of a more virtuous world where values and norms, in their diverse and global civil definitions, would become reality. Compared with the social movements of the 1960s, there is now a more utopian aspiration, a more public-oriented tendency, and a more universal and culturally sensitive awareness. Global civil society is not merely a manifestation of resistance but embodies a utopian world view as well (Keane, 2001: 23). In our context, we should stress that utopias are not merely simple-minded dreams or naïve aspirations,
Increasingly, there is a fusion of different ideologies in the major debates about social theory. The focus on the rights of the person, or the socio-political agent, and how to ... of the individualist-communitarian debates within liberal theory. Even here critics perceive elements of conservatism.

There are also the liberal-radical debates within democratic theory, the national versus the global in political science and sociology, and the secular versus the religious in the religious sphere, the biological versus the cultural, the scientific versus the moral and, last but not least, nature versus reason.

Emerging 'chosen' identities and 'invented' moralities have influenced the definition of community. Identity in an age of globalisation is becoming increasingly hybrid, constantly affecting the structure of ideological conceptual systems. Individuals belong to different communities that overlap and sometimes conflict. In many cases the sociological is very much affected by the technical and the scientific, hence the different sciences can not afford to remain isolated.

Bridging the boundaries between ideology and social theory

Fukuyama’s theory of the end of history, by which he meant the end of ideology and the ultimate triumph of capitalist liberalism, has proved to be false (Fukuyama, 1992: 45-205; Jacoby, 1999). Ideologies – as well as utopias – are conceptual systems that address issues of human nature, social goods, and notions of freedom and justice. Our aim is not only to redefine contested concepts (Gaus, 2000: 26–32; Freedon, 1996), but also to challenge the boundaries of different disciplines, create new spaces for research and develop innovative methodologies that can help us interpret new realities.

If core concepts, such as the nation state, are revisited, ideologies that have theorised about a post-state political society (mainly anarchism and Marxism) need to be revisited too. They have never been more relevant.

The new dimension in emerging approaches is that different concepts can be seen as variables in shifting conceptual systems. In the 1960s Nettle (1998) called the state a central ‘conceptual variable’ in the paradigm of the social sciences. It is remarkable how, 30 years later, Manuel Castells used a similar description, stressing that the relations between the self, the net, the state and capitalism are similar to a system of variable geometry (Castells, 1998: 3). Similarly, Michael Freeden (1998) sees ideologies, old and new, as conceptual systems with shifting meanings and open boundaries. These perspectives allow us to see the relations, transformation and cross-fertilisation of various ideologies and conceptual systems. More importantly, we can foresee potential rival trajectories and envision different scenarios, as the editors of this Yearbook attempt to do in their Introduction.

Bridging the boundaries between different philosophical traditions

If a philosophical approach is applied to research on global civil society, we need to develop a blend of various such traditions. Anglo-American and French schools of thought have dominated the formulation of theories of concepts and approaches, partly because of the lack of democracy that inhibits social science research in many parts of the world, not to mention the dominance of the North-South divide within academia. Recapturing the transcendental spirit of German and Eastern Europe – as well as non-Western – philosophies would be important in shaping the paradigm shift. Multiculturalism is not only necessary on the existential, practical and civil levels, but on the philosophical-epistemological level too.

A pro-Islam, anti-capitalism demonstration in Indonesia

Increasingly, there is a fusion of different ideologies in the major debates about social theory. The focus on the rights of the person, or the socio-political agent, and how to create a sense of identity that would hold society together, is at the heart of the individualist-communitarian debates within liberal theory. Even here critics perceive elements of conservatism.

There are also the liberal-radical debates within democratic theory, the national versus the global in political science and sociology, and the secular versus the religious in philosophy and sociology of religion. Other controversial discussions that should not be overlooked include the religious versus the physical, language versus the body, the biological versus the cultural, the scientific versus the moral and, last but not least, nature versus reason. Emerging ‘chosen’ identities and ‘invented’ moralities have influenced the definition of community. Identity in an age of globalisation is becoming increasingly hybrid, constantly affecting the structure of ideological conceptual systems. Individuals belong to different communities that overlap and sometimes conflict. In many cases the sociological is very much affected by the technical and the scientific, hence the different sciences can not afford to remain isolated.

Bridging the boundaries between the social and natural sciences

It is noteworthy that global civil society is heavily engaged in campaigns that challenge the absolute authority of science over human destiny and over nature, alongside more visible challenges to the market and the state. Yet little attention has been paid to scientific discoveries about the logic of the universe that have implications for social theory, which might be relevant to our understanding of the development and transformation of global movements.

Johnson’s book Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities and Software, encourages reflection on how movements alternate between a togetherness that celebrates independence, and the gradual and deliberate formation of new networks. To create a ‘road map’ for cross-disciplinary research, we need to bridge the boundaries that exist on many levels.

But are conceptual systems and have an ideological strength. They can also have methodological implications. Anarchy is one of the major ideas that can help us explain the global scene: the goal of many movements is not to restore order but rather to use the dominant anarchical dimension of international relations (Bull, 1999) to engage with the hegemony of the rising unipolar empire, in order to strive for justice and equality, challenging at the same time – and on a global scale – the authority of the nation state and its moral credibility. This will have far-reaching implications for theory and methodology if researchers take seriously different classical and contemporary ideas of anarchism, its theoretical notions and debates, and how they can reshape the structure and content of social theory.

Utopia is far more relevant to the paradigm shift and its theoretical and conceptual structure than the ‘utopian scenario’ that Marlies Glasius and Mary Kaldor (2002: 28) have sketched. The utopian factor in its more theoretical dimension can contribute to the transformation of the social sciences. Researchers can become agents of change and not mere observers of a major historical transformation in the course of humanity, as much as activists can become a source of theoretical ideas of extreme importance for academia. Through networks, mobilisation, fair trade, alternative media and grassroots sustainable development projects, global civil society can create spaces where utopia comes close to realisation. Although this is only on a small scale, the potential for the networks to grow and really make a difference in the long run is huge.

From debating networks to networking debates

There are currently many heated debates within the social sciences that are highly relevant to transforming the paradigm. Lack of progress to date is probably due to the absence of theoretical and academic networking. The importance of a project like the Global Civil Society Yearbook is that, it can become the platform for such efforts. To develop a new theoretical framework, social scientists, who are already investigating global transformations, coalition building and fragmentations, should pursue genuinely comparative multicultural research on global civil society. To create a ‘road map’ for cross-disciplinary research, we need to bridge the boundaries that exist on many levels.
While there is increasing interest among civil society groups in women’s rights, the wider democratic process is lagging behind. How far should official indicators of gender equality be seen as a positive sign? Would such developments be seen as empowering women or merely ‘feminising despotism’ by masking authoritarianism with deceptive statistics that show an increase in the presence of women in this or that sector? Furthermore if this development is supported by the global women’s movement, how can this asymmetric relationship between domestic and global civil society be evaluated, especially when it strengthens elites that would not – at least in the short run – initiate real democratic change? Indeed, instead of remaining at the forefront of the democratic struggle, many Arab feminists are co-opted by the state apparatus, while at the same time maintaining strong links with the global women’s movement.

The diverse and asymmetric levels of development and structural-financial power within the global public sphere, and between activists and bodies in the North and the South, must also be kept in mind if we want to achieve genuine social justice and global democracy (and equality) in the future.

**REFERENCES**


