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# Globalisation and Social Imaginaries: The Changing Ideological Landscape of the Twenty-First Century<sup>1</sup>

Manfred B. Steger

*The proliferation of prefixes like 'neo' and 'post' that adorn conventional 'isms' has cast a long shadow on the contemporary relevance of traditional political belief systems like liberalism, conservatism, and Marxism. This article explores how the thickening of global consciousness finds its expression in the growing capability of today's political ideologies to translate the rising global imaginary into concrete political programs and agendas. But these subjective dynamics of denationalization at the heart of globalisation have not yet dispensed with the declining national imaginary. The twenty-first century promises to be an ideational interregnum in which both the global and national stimulate people's deep-seated understandings of community. The essay also offers a rough outline and basic features of a new classification scheme that divides contemporary political ideologies into 'market globalism', 'justice globalism', and 'religious globalism'.*

## **Introduction**

Debates on globalisation often revolve around the 'objective' dynamics fueling the worldwide interdependencies linked to economics and technology. While globalisation's 'objective' aspects are certainly important, it is crucial to note that these dynamics also involve subjective processes, particularly the thickening of people's awareness of the world as an interconnected whole. In my view, one significant impact of globalisation on the evolution of human consciousness has been the transformation of the ideological landscape reflected in proliferation of the prefixes 'neo' and 'post' that adorn conventional 'isms': neoliberalism, neoconservatism, neofascism, postmarxism, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and so on. This remarkable development casts a long shadow on the contemporary relevance of traditional political ideologies. Is there, indeed, something genuinely 'neo' about today's isms? Have we really moved 'post' our familiar political ideologies and social imaginaries?

In this article, I suggest that there is, in fact, something new about today's political belief systems: a new global imaginary is on the rise. It erupts with increasing frequency within and onto the familiar framework of the national, spewing its fiery lava across flattening geographical scales. Stoked, among other things, by technological change and cultural innovations, this global imaginary destabilizes the grand political ideologies codified by social elites during the last two centuries. Thus, our changing ideational landscape is intimately related to the forces of globalisation, defined here as the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world space.<sup>2</sup>

The rising global imaginary finds its concrete political articulation not only in the ideological claims of contemporary social elites who reside in the privileged spaces of our global cities. It also fuels the hopes, disappointments, and demands of migrants who traverse national boundaries in search of their piece of the global dream. Thus, the global is nobody's exclusive property. It inhabits class, race, and gender, but belongs to neither. Nor can it be pinned down by carving up geographical space into watertight compartments that reflect outdated hierarchies of scale.<sup>3</sup> The multiple inscriptions and incomplete projections of the global on what has been historically constructed as the national have become most visible in the proliferation and reconfiguration of what counts as community and who should be included. For this reason, one of globalisation's most profound dynamics has been the messy and incomplete superimposition of the global village on the conventional nation-state and its associated conceptual framework centered on such ideas as 'citizenship', 'sovereignty', 'territoriality', 'borders', and 'political belonging'. At a bare minimum, we are witnessing the destabilization of taken-for-granted meanings and instantiations of the national.

Consider, for example, today's asymmetric wars pitting shifting alliances of nation-states and non-state actors against amorphous transnational terrorist networks that nonetheless operate in specific localities—often in 'global cities' like New York, London, or Mumbai. New global pandemics like AIDS, SARS, and the H1N1 influenza ('swine flu') expose the limits of our nationally-based public health systems. Nationally-framed environmental policies cannot respond adequately to accelerating global climate change. Conventional educational and immigration schemes anchored in national standards and priorities are incapable of preparing shifting populations for the pressing tasks of global citizenship. Cultivating global fan clubs of millions members, European football teams like Manchester United or FC Barcelona have long escaped the confines of nation-based geography. And the list goes on.

This article can only offer a brief assessment of the changing ideological landscape, but I have provided a much longer treatment in a recent study (See Steger, 2008). Unfortunately, the fundamental changes affecting political belief

systems have not been adequately described or analyzed in pertinent literature. Well-intentioned attempts to 'update' modern political belief systems by adorning them with prefixes resemble futile efforts to make sense of digital word processing by drawing on the mechanics of moveable print. The failure to redraw our ideological maps appears most glaringly in leading academic textbooks where the grand ideologies of the national age—complemented by various neo-isms—continue to be presented as the dominant political belief systems of our time (See Ball & Dagger, 2003; Fesenstein & Kenny, 2005; Heywood, 2003). To grasp the novelty of today's political belief systems, we must realize that large chunks of the grand ideologies of modernity—liberalism, conservatism, socialism, fascism, and communism—have been discarded, absorbed, rearranged, synthesized, and hybridized with new concepts such as 'globalisation' or 'sustainability' into ideologies of genuine novelty. To better grasp the profound dynamics altering the ideological landscape in the global age, let us consider the crucial relationship between concrete political ideologies and various deep-seated social imaginaries.

### **Ideologies and Social Imaginaries**

Modern political ideologies emerged during the American and French Revolutions as malleable political belief systems which competed with religious doctrines over what sorts of ideas and values should guide human communities. Supposedly constituting 'secular' perspectives on these fundamental questions, ideologies nonetheless resembled religions in their attempts to link the various ethical, cultural, and political dimensions of society into a fairly comprehensive thought-system. Imitating their rivals' penchant to trade in truth and certainty, ideologies also relied on narratives, metaphor, and myths that persuaded, praised, condemned, cajoled, convinced, and separated the 'good' from the 'bad'. Like religion, they thrived on human emotions, generating rage, fear, enthusiasm, love, sacrifice, and altruism. Ideologies inspired mass murder, torture, and rape much in the same way as religious doctrines have run through the gamut of human vices (See Hazareesingh, 1994, p.13). Its pejorative connotations notwithstanding, however, 'ideology' deserves a more balanced hearing—one that acknowledges its integrative role of providing social stability as much as its propensity to contribute to fragmentation and alienation; its ability to supply standards of normative evaluation as much as its tendency to oversimplify social complexity; its role as guide and compass for political action as much as its potential to legitimize tyranny and terror in the name of noble ideals.

Drawing on this appreciative conception of ideology that takes seriously the indispensable functions of political belief systems irrespective of their particular contents or political orientations, I define ideology as comprehensive belief systems

comprised of patterned ideas and claims to truth. Codified by social elites, they are embraced by significant groups in society (See Steger, 2008; Sargent, 2008). All political belief systems are historically contingent and, therefore, must be analyzed with reference to a particular context that connects their origins and developments to specific times and spaces. Linking belief and practice, ideologies encourage people to act while simultaneously constraining their actions. To this end, ideological codifiers construct claims that seek to 'lock in' the meaning of their core concepts. Michael Freeden (1996) refers to this crucial process as 'decontestation'. Although successfully decontested ideas always require more explanation and justification, they are held as truth with such confidence that they no longer appear to be assumptions at all. Ultimately, the major ideational claims give each ideology its unique configuration. As Freeden (2003, pp.54-55) puts it, "An ideology attempts to end the inevitable contention over concepts by *decontesting* them, by removing their meanings from contest. "This is what justice means," announces one ideology, and "that is what democracy entails"". By trying to convince us that they are right and that they speak the truth, ideologies become devices for coping with the indeterminacy of meaning.<sup>4</sup>

Ideological 'morphologies' can thus be pictured as decontested truth-claims that serve as devices for decontesting meanings as well as instruments for facilitating collective decision-making. These interlinked semantic and political roles suggest that control over language translates directly into power, including the decision of 'who gets what, when, and how' (Lasswell, 1958). Thus, ideologies are not merely justifications of economic class interests or impractical metaphysical speculations, but fairly comprehensive maps that help us navigate our political universe. Far from being distortions fated to disappear with the emergence of rational political orders, ideologies are indispensable ideational systems that shape and direct human communities in specific ways (See Ricoeur, 1986; Steger, 2005, Ch.1).

To understand the fundamental changes affecting the ideological landscape of the twenty-first century, it is necessary to grasp the connection between political ideologies and their overarching 'social imaginary'. Constituting the macro-mappings of social and political space through which we perceive, judge, and act in the world, social imaginaries are deep-seated modes of understanding that provide the most general parameters within which people imagine their communal existence. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's account of the imagined community of the nation, Charles Taylor has recently argued that social imaginaries are neither theories nor ideologies, but implicit 'backgrounds' that make possible communal practices and a widely shared sense of their legitimacy. The social imaginary offers explanations of how 'we'—the members of a particular community—fit together, how things go on between us, the expectations we have of each other, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie those expectations. This background understanding is both normative and factual in the sense of providing us both with

the standards of what passes as common-sense (Taylor, 2004, pp. 23-26; 2007, Ch.4).<sup>5</sup> Much in the same vein, Pierre Bourdieu (1996, pp.54-55) notes that the social imaginary sets the pre-reflexive framework for our daily routines and social repertoires. Structured by social dynamics that produce them while at the same time also structuring those forces, social imaginaries are products of history that 'generate individual and collective practices—more history—in accordance with the schemes generated by history'.

Human thought is mostly unconscious and abstract concepts are largely metaphorical. Indeed, most of human reasoning is based on mental images that are seldom explicit; usually they are merely presupposed in everyday reasoning and debates. Thus, all social imaginaries consist of a series of interrelated and mutually dependent narratives, visual prototypes, metaphors and conceptual framings. Despite their apparent intangibility, however, social imaginaries are quite 'real' in the sense of enabling common practices and deep-seated communal attachments. Though capable of facilitating collective fantasies and speculative reflections, they should not be dismissed as phantasms or mental fabrications.<sup>6</sup> As shared visions of self and community, social imaginaries often find expression as namable collectivities such as 'Americans' or 'Hutus' (See Castoriadis, 1987, p.148). Endowed with specific properties, social imaginaries acquire additional solidity through the social construction of space and the repetitive performance of their assigned qualities and characteristics. Thus feigning permanence, social imaginaries are nonetheless temporary constellations subject to constant change. Social imaginaries acquire additional solidity through the (re)construction of social space and the repetitive performance of certain communal qualities and characteristics. And yet, they are temporary constellations subject to change. At certain tipping points in history, such change can occur with lightning speed and tremendous ferocity.<sup>7</sup>

The late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century social revolutions in the Americas and Europe, for example, made visible the transformation of the traditional social imaginary in a dramatic way. For many generations, the conventional modes of understanding had reproduced divinely-sanctioned power hierarchies in the form of tribes, clanships, trading city-states, and dynastic empires. Between 1776 and 1848, however, there arose on both sides of the Atlantic the familiar template of the 'nation' now no longer referring to the king at the pinnacle of the state hierarchy, but to an abstract 'general will' operating in free citizens fighting for their homeland. The political message was as clear as it was audacious: henceforth it would be 'the people'—not kings, aristocrats, or clerical elites—that exercised legitimate authority in political affairs. Over time, the will of the people would replace monarchical forms of communal authority based on transcendental powers emanating from a divine realm beyond the nation. Thus, modern nationhood found its expression in the transformation of subjects into citizens who laid claim to equal membership in the

nation and institutionalized their sovereignty in the modern nation-state. But who really counted as part of the people and what constituted the essence of the nation became the subject of fierce intellectual debates and material struggles. Seeking to remake the world according to the rising national imaginary, citizens exhibited a restlessness that became the hallmark of modernity. As William Connolly (1998, pp.2-3) observes, “Modern agencies form and reform, produce and reproduce, incorporate and reincorporate, industrialize and reindustrialize. In modernity, modernization is always under way”.

Countless meanings and definitions of modernity have been put forward in the last two centuries. They extend far beyond familiar designations referring to a historical era in the West characterized by its radical rupture with the past and its ensuing temporal reorientation toward notions of infinite progress, economic growth, and enduring material prosperity. As philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1987, p.7) reminds us, modernity is inextricably intertwined with an expanding “public sphere”—the incubator of modernity’s tendency to ‘create its own normativity out of itself’. Various thinkers have elaborated on the main dynamics of modernity: the separation of state and civil society; conceptions of linear time; progressive secularization; individualism; intensifying geopolitical rivalries that facilitated the formation and multiplication of nation-states; new orders of rationality and their corresponding domains of knowledge; the uneven expansion of industrial capitalism; the rapid diffusion of discursive literacy; the slow trend toward democratization; and so on. The detailed genealogy of these features need not concern us here. What we ought to consider straightaway, however, is the centrality of the national in the modern social imaginary.

### **Ideologies and the National Imaginary**

New treatments of nationality and nationalism appearing on the academic scene since the early 1980s have advanced convincing arguments in favor of a tight connection between the forces of modernity, the spread of industrial capitalism, and the elite-engineered construction of the ‘national community’ as a cultural artifact. As Eric Hobsbawm (1992, p.14) notes, “The basic characteristic of the modern nation and everything associated with it is its modernity”. Even scholars like Anthony Smith who reject the modernist view that nations were simply ‘invented’ without the significant incorporation of pre-modern ethnic ties and histories, concede that nationalism represents “a modern movement and ideology, which emerged in the latter half of the eighteenth century in Western Europe and America...” (Smith, 1998, p.1). Smith’s definition of nationalism as an “ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of a nation” usefully highlights the idiosyncratic ways of processing and disseminating secular ideas that emerged in the nineteenth century as



a distinctive feature of modernity. As Tom Nairn (2005, p.13) explains, “An ism ceased to denote just a system of general ideas (like Platonism or Thomism) and evolved into a proclaimed cause or movement—no longer a mere school but a party or societal trend”. In other words, ideas acquired alluring banner headlines and truth claims that resonated with people’s interests and aspirations and thus bound them to a specific political program. Having to choose sides in these proliferating battles of political ideas, like-minded individuals organized themselves into clubs, associations, movements, and political parties with the primary objective of enlisting more people to their preferred normative vision of the national.

There is, however, a serious downside to Smith’s definition: it turns nationalism into an ideology of the same ilk as liberalism or conservatism. This begs the question of how nationalism can be both a distinct political ideology and a common source of inspiration for a variety of political belief systems. Sensing the overarching stature of the national, Benedict Anderson and other social thinkers with an anthropological bent have resisted the idea that nationalism should be seen as a distinct ideology. Instead, they refer to it as a ‘cultural artifact of a particular kind’ that is, a relatively broad cultural system more closely related to ‘kinship’ and ‘religion’ than to ‘liberalism’ or ‘conservatism’ (See Anderson, 1991, pp.4-5; Geertz, 1973, pp.193-233; Dumont, 1994, pp.vii; Freedon, 1998, pp.748-765). Following their intuition, then, I suggest that we treat the national not as an ideology in its own right but as a crucial component of the modern social imaginary. As such, the ‘national imaginary’ corresponds to what Benedict Anderson (1991, pp.6-7) has called “modern imaginings of the nation” as a limited and sovereign community of individuals whose knowledge of each other is, in most cases, not direct, but mediated in linear time through the diffusion of discursive literacy. To a large extent, this was made possible by the invention of printing technology embedded in nascent capitalism (Ibid).

Assigning a prominent role to the national imaginary in the making of the modern world might strike some readers as idealist obscurantism, or—as some Marxist thinkers would have us believe—as a ‘reification’ or ‘mystification’ inherent in the class bias of this author. But most Marxist perspectives on modern social development propagated in the last century have been haunted by their consistent underestimation of nationalism’s generative power. As Cornelius Castoriadis (1987, p.148) puts it wryly, “That a “mystification” has effects so massively and terribly real, that it proves itself to be much stronger than any ‘real’ forces (including even the instinct to self-preservation), which ‘should have’ pushed the proletariat to fraternization long ago, that is the problem”. In short, the national decisively colored the modern social imaginary. Indeed, we ought to treat the national not as a separate ideology but as the background to our communal existence that emerged in the Northern Hemisphere with the American and French Revolutions. The national

gave the modern social imaginary its distinct flavor in the form of various factual and normative assumptions that political communities, in order to count as 'legitimate', had to be nation-states. (Greenfeld, 2004, p.40). Thus, the 'national imaginary' refers to the taken-for-granted understanding in which the nation—plus its affiliated or to-be-affiliated state—serves the communal frame of the political.

What, then, is the precise relationship between the national and ideology? Or, to reverse the question, what is the connection between political belief systems and the national imaginary? I suggest that ideologies translate and articulate the largely pre-reflexive social imaginary in compressed form as explicit political doctrine. This means that the grand ideologies of modernity gave explicit political expression to the implicit national imaginary. To be sure, each ideology deployed and assembled its core concepts—liberty, progress, race, class, rationality, tradition, community, welfare, security, and so on—in specific and unique ways. But the elite codifiers of these ideational systems pursued their specific political goals under the common background umbrella of the national imaginary. Liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism, and Nazism/fascism were all 'nationalist' in the sense of performing the same fundamental task of translating the overarching national imaginary into concrete political doctrines, agendas, and spatial arrangements. In so doing, ideologies normalized national territories; spoke in recognized national languages; appealed to national histories; told national legends and myths, or glorified a national 'race'. They articulated the national imaginary according to certain criteria that were said to constitute the defining essence of the community.<sup>8</sup>

But whatever ideologies purported the essence of the nation to be, they always developed their truth-claims by decontesting their core concepts within the national imaginary. Liberals, for example, spoke of 'freedom' as applying to autonomous individuals belonging to the same national community, that is, the liberties of *French*, *Colombian*, or *Australian* citizens. The conservative fondness for 'law and order' received its highest expression in the notion of *national* security. Even the apparent 'internationalism' of socialists and communists was not tantamount to what I call 'globalism'. First, the term 'inter-national' betrays its reliance on the 'nation' as its central conceptual category. The whole point of an ideational framework centered on the 'global' is to abandon the nation-state as the basic unity of analysis together with its associated methodological nationalism. Second, socialist internationalism achieved its concrete political formulation and manifestation only as *German* social democracy or *Soviet Russia's* 'socialism in one country' or 'socialism with *Chinese* characteristics'. Third, even the supposed *theoretical* "global" characteristics of communism/socialism reflect their unmistakable national rootedness in the basic documents of these two political belief systems. For example, in his popular commentary on the 1891 Erfurt Program, the acknowledged chief theorist of the German Social Democracy Party, Karl Kautsky (1922, p.234) prefaces a long

section on the alleged 'internationalism of social democracy' with the following remarkable concession:

The new socialism of Marx and Engels originated in Germany. Its two founders were Germans; its first pupils were Germans; and its first interpretative essays appeared in German. Although not the sole cause, these facts clearly show that it was Germany that provided the framework for the successful merger of the labor movement with socialism. It was in Germany that social democracy first took root, though it must be emphasized that Germany cannot be equated with the German Empire, but includes all territories inhabited by a majority of German-speaking workers'.

Much the same applies to Lenin. Although the Bolshevik leader routinely affirmed the internationalist character of revolutionary social democracy as a class-based movement firmly opposed to all manifestations of 'chauvinistic and reactionary nationalism', he was not above stoking his audience's sentiments of nationality with exceptionalist flattery at the opportune moment. At the end of 1914, for example, Lenin wrote a brief article 'On the National Pride of the Great Russians', which praises Russian revolutionaries for their love of country and their deep affection for the Russian language. More than a decade later, Stalin would use this essay to justify his efforts to build socialism in one country anchored in a single Great-Russian national ethnos. But already as early as 1902, Lenin had allowed himself to speak in glowing terms of a special 'national task' awaiting the Russian working class:

History has now confronted us with an immediate task which is the *most revolutionary* of all the *immediate* tasks confronting the proletariat of any country. The fulfillment of this task, the destruction of the most powerful bulwark, not only of European, but (it may be said) of Asiatic reaction, would make the Russian proletariat the vanguard of the international revolutionary proletariat' (Lenin, 1975, pp.20-22. Original italics).

For two centuries, then, the partisans of the major political ideologies clashed with each other over such important issues as participation, the extent of civil rights, the purposes and forms of government, the role of the state, the significance of race and ethnicity, and the scope of political obligations. Clinging to their different political visions, they hardly noticed their common embeddedness in the national imaginary. Insisting on their obvious differences, they hardly questioned their common allegiance to the overarching national imaginary. After all, the business of modern political belief systems was the formidable task of realizing their core values under the

banner of the nation-state—the ceaseless task of translating the national imaginary into competing political projects. By the early decades of the twentieth century, ideologies had been so successful in (re)producing the modern order of nation-states that national identity seemed to be the natural starting point for all humans. Thus attesting to the pervasive powers of the modern imaginary, significations of the national became so common that they turned almost invisible. Commenting on this process, Michael Billig (1995, p.6) has coined the term ‘banal nationalism’ to refer to ‘the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced’. These routines, Billig contends, “are not removed from everyday life, as some observers have supposed. Daily, the nation is indicated, or “flagged” in the lives of its citizenry” (Ibid., p.6). While embodying ideational diversity, the grand ideologies of modernity equally underwrote the common ‘banal’ project of flagging the nation.

### **Ideologies and the Global Imaginary**

In the aftermath of World War II, new ideas, theories, and material practices produced in the public consciousness a similar sense of rupture with the past that had occurred at the time of the French Revolution. For example, novel technologies facilitated the speed and intensity with which these ideas and practices infiltrated the national imaginary. Images, people, and materials circulated more freely across national boundaries. This new sense of ‘the global’ that erupted within and onto the national began to undermine the sense of normalcy and self-contained coziness associated with the modern nation-state —especially deeply engrained notions of community tied to a sovereign and clearly demarcated territory containing relatively homogenous populations (See Appadurai, 2006; Albrow, 1997; Beck, 2005).<sup>9</sup> Identities based on national membership became destabilized. During the early decades of the Cold War, the changing social imaginary led prominent thinkers in the ‘First World’ to proclaim the ‘end of ideology’. As evidence for their assertion, they pointed to the political-cultural consensus underpinning a common Western ‘community of values’ and the socio-economic welfare-state compromise struck between liberalism and democratic socialism. Conversely, detractors of the end-of-ideology thesis seized upon the decolonization dynamics in the ‘Third World’ as well as the rise of the counter-cultural ‘new social movements’ in the 1960s and 1970s as evidence for their view that the familiar political belief systems were being complemented by ‘new ideologies’ such as feminism, environmentalism, and postcolonialism.

But, as indicated by the new designations *First*, *Second*, and *Third World*, the most fundamental novelty of these ‘new ideologies’ lay in their sensitivity toward the rising global imaginary, regardless of whether they were formulated by the forces

of the New Left or the cohorts of the New Right. Starting in the late 1970s, and especially after the 1991 disintegration of the Soviet Union, the ideas of the New Right gained the upper hand across the globe. By the mid-1990s, a growing chorus of global social elites was fastening onto the new buzzword 'globalisation' as the central metaphor for their political agenda—the creation of a single global free market and the spread of consumerist values around the world. Most importantly, they translated the rising social imaginary into largely economic claims laced with references to globality: global trade and financial markets, worldwide flows of goods, services, and labor, transnational corporations, offshore financial centers, and so on.

But globalisation was never merely a matter of increasing flows of capital and goods across national borders. Rather, it constitutes a multi-dimensional set of processes in which images, sound bites, metaphors, myths, symbols, and spatial arrangements of globality were just as important as economic and technological dynamics. The objective acceleration and multiplication of global material networks occurs hand in hand with the intensifying subjective recognition of a shrinking world. Such heightened awareness of the compression of time and space influences the direction and material instantiations of global flows. As Roland Robertson has emphasized time and again, the compression of the world into a single place increasingly makes 'the global' the frame of reference for human thought and action (See Robertson, 1996, p.6).<sup>10</sup> Thus globalisation involves both the macro-structures of community and the micro-structures of personhood. It extends deep into the core of the self and its dispositions, facilitating the creation of new identities nurtured by the intensifying relations between the individual and the globe (See Elliot & Lemert, 2006, p.90).

Like the conceptual earthquake that shook Europe and the Americas more than two hundred years ago, today's destabilization of the national affects the entire planet. The ideologies dominating the world today are no longer exclusively articulations of the national imaginary but reconfigured ideational systems that constitute early-stage translations of the dawning global imaginary. Although my account of this transformation emphasizes rupture, it would be foolish to deny obvious continuities. As Saskia Sassen (2006, p.402) notes, the incipient process of denationalization and the ascendance of novel social formations depend in good part on capabilities shaped and developed in the national age. Today's discursive preeminence of the 'market', for example, harkens back to the heyday of liberalism in mid-Victorian England. And yet, this concept is no longer exclusively tied to the old paradigm of self-contained national economies but also refers to a model of global exchanges among national actors, subnational agencies, supranational bodies, networks of nongovernmental organizations, and transnational corporations. Our new world order contains a multiplicity of orders networked together on multiple levels. Disaggregating nation-states struggle to come to grips with relational concepts

of sovereignty while facing unprecedented challenges to their authority from both subnational and supranational collectivities.<sup>11</sup>

### **Toward a New Typology of Political Ideologies in the Twenty-First Century**

As I have argued elsewhere in much detail, 'market globalism' emerged in the 1990s as a comprehensive ideology extolling, among other things, the virtues of globally integrating markets (Steger, 2005). Ideationally much richer than the more familiar term 'neoliberalism' suggests, market globalism discarded, absorbed and rearranged large chunks of the grand ideologies while at the same time incorporating genuinely new ideas. The outcome was a new political belief system centered on five central ideological claims that translated the global imaginary in concrete political programs and agendas: 1) globalisation is about the liberalization and global integration of markets; 2) globalisation is inevitable and irreversible; 3) nobody is in charge of globalisation; 4) globalisation benefits everyone; 5) globalisation furthers the spread of democracy in the world.

The ideological codification and public dissemination of these claims fell disproportionately to global power elites enamored with neoliberal economics and consisting mostly of corporate managers, executives of large transnational corporations, corporate lobbyists, prominent journalists and public-relations specialists, media tycoons, cultural elites and entertainment celebrities, academics writing for large audiences, high-level state bureaucrats, and political leaders. They marshaled their considerable material and ideal resources to sell to the public the alleged benefits of the liberalization of trade and the global integration of markets: rising living standards, reduction of global poverty, economic efficiency, individual freedom and democracy, and unprecedented technological progress. Ideally, the state should only provide the legal framework for contracts, defense, and law and order. Public-policy initiatives should be confined to those measures that liberate the economy from social constraints: privatization of public enterprises, deregulation instead of state control, liberalization of trade and industry, massive tax cuts, strict control of organized labor, and the reduction of public expenditures. Other models of economic organization were discredited as being 'protectionist' or 'socialist'. Seeking to enshrine their neoliberal paradigm as the self-evident and universal order of our global era, these transnational power elites articulated the rising global imaginary along the lines of their five ideological claims.

But no single ideational system ever enjoys absolute dominance. Battered by persistent gales of political dissent, the small fissures and ever-present inconsistencies in political ideologies threaten to turn into major cracks and serious contradictions. As the 1990s drew to a close, market globalism found itself challenged on the political Left by what I call 'justice globalism'—an alternative translation of

the rising global imaginary propagated by the members of the ‘global justice movement’ (GJM) who argued for ‘globalisation-from-below’. At the core of global justice lies the ideological claim that the liberalization and global integration of markets leads, in fact, to greater social inequalities, environmental destruction, the escalation of global conflicts and violence, the weakening of participatory forms of democracy, the proliferation of self-interest and consumerism, and the further marginalization of the powerless around the world.

Hence, the chief ideological codifiers of justice globalism—often the leading voices of progressive networks and alliances connected to the World Social Forum (WSF)—seek to accomplish two fundamental tasks. The first is ideological, reflected in concerted efforts to undermine the premises and ideological framework of the reigning market-globalist worldview by constructing and disseminating an alternative articulations of the global imaginary based on the core principles of the WSF: equality, global social justice, diversity, democracy, nonviolence, solidarity, ecological sustainability, and planetary citizenship. The second is political, manifested in the attempt to realize these principles by means of mass mobilizations and nonviolent direct action targeting the core structures of market globalism: international economic institutions like the WTO and the IMF, transnational corporations and affiliated NGOs, large industry federations and lobbies, and the ‘American Empire’.

The justice-globalist vision is neither about reviving a moribund Marxism nor a return to the ‘good old days’ of 1968. Although justice globalism contains elements of Gandhian Third-World liberationism and traditional European social democracy, it goes beyond these Cold War ideational clusters in several respects—most importantly in its ability to bring together a large number of New Left concerns around a more pronounced orientation toward the globe as a single, interconnected arena for political action. One example of the GJM’s strong global focus is its publicity campaign to highlight the negative consequences of deregulated global capitalism on the planet’s environmental health. Indeed, in the first decade of the new century, the issue of global climate change has advanced to the forefront of public discourse around the world, second only to the specter of global terrorism and warfare.

Finally, the policy vision of justice globalism lays out in some detail by now rather familiar proposals. The programmatic core of these demands is a ‘global Marshall Plan’—now a fashionable buzzword that has entered the mainstream discourse as a result of the lingering 2008-9 global economic crisis—that would create more political space for people around the world to determine what kind of social arrangements they want. As Susan George (2004, pp.6-10), a seasoned GJM activist widely considered one of the movement’s premier ‘idea persons’, puts it: “Another world has to begin with a new, worldwide Keynesian-type programme of taxation

and redistribution, exactly as it took off at the national level in the now-rich countries a century or so ago". Justice globalists envision the necessary funds for this global regulatory framework to come from the profits of TNCs and financial markets—hence their worldwide campaign for the introduction of the global Tobin Tax. Other proposals include the cancellation of poor countries' debts; the closing of offshore financial centers offering tax havens for wealthy individuals and corporations; the ratification and implementation of stringent global environmental agreements; the implementation of a more equitable global development agenda; the establishment of a new world development institution financed largely by the global North and administered largely by the global South; establishment of international labor protection standards, perhaps as clauses of a profoundly reformed WTO; greater transparency and accountability provided to citizens by national governments and global economic institutions; making all governance of globalisation explicitly gender sensitive; the transformation of 'free trade' into 'fair trade', and a binding commitment to nonviolent direct action as the sole vehicle of social and political change.

Market globalism has also been challenged from the political Right by the forces of 'religious globalism'. Indeed, today are witnessing a weakening if not a reversal of the powerful secularization dynamic of the last centuries as a result of the decline of the national. Moreover, the rising global imaginary has been creating more favorable conditions for the convergence of political and religious belief systems. It is unlikely that secularism in the West will disappear any time soon, but the religious will give it a run for its money, forcing previously unimagined forms of accommodation and compromise. In short, the rising global imaginary will continue to create fertile conditions for 'religious ideologies' or 'ideological religions'. Consequently, we ought to treat religious ideas and beliefs as an increasingly integral part of competing "globalisms" that translate the rising global imaginary into concrete political programs. Al-Qaeda's 'Islamist globalism' represents one of the most potent religious ideologies of our time.

As can be gleaned from the vast literature on 'Islamism', this term has been used in many different ways by both Muslims and non-Muslims to refer to various 'movements' and 'ideologies' dedicated to the revival of Islam and its political realization. Related terms currently in circulation include 'political Islam', 'Islamic fundamentalism', 'Islamist purism', and the pejorative 'Islamofascism'.<sup>12</sup> Although different in causes, responses, strategies, and collective identities, various forms of Islamism share the common proclivity to synthesize certain religious elements of their traditional political discourses with certain elements of modern ideologies. Indeed, Islamisms are about the politicization of religion just as much as they represent the sacralization of modern politics.

This article's focus on al-Qaeda's Islamist globalism is neither meant to



downplay the diversity of ideational currents within Islamism nor to present one particular strain as its most representative or authentic manifestation. Rather, the doctrine articulated by the likes of Osama Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahri, or Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is the most prominent example of Islamist globalism. Second, its tremendous influence around the world points to the rise of new political ideologies resulting from the ongoing deterritorialization of Islam. Third, Islamist globalism constitutes the most successful ideological attempt yet to articulate the rising global imaginary around its core concepts of *umma* (Islamic community of believers in the one and only God), *jihad* (armed or unarmed 'struggle' against unbelief purely for the sake of God and his *umma*), and *tawhid* (the absolute unity of God). As Bruce Lawrence (2005) notes, the bulk of Osama bin Laden's writings and public addresses emerged in the context of a "virtual world" moving from print to the Internet and from wired to wireless communication. Largely scriptural in mode, the al-Qaeda leader's "messages to the world" are deliberately designed for the new global media. They appear on video and audio tapes, websites, and hand-written letters scanned onto computer disks and delivered to Arabic-language news outlets, including the influential Qatari satellite television network al-Jazeera (See Lawrence, 2005; Lewis, 1998)<sup>13</sup>

Decontesting their core concepts of *umma*, *jihad*, and *tawhid* in potent ideological claims, Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri develop a potent narrative predicated upon globalisation's destabilization of the national imaginary. Seeing themselves as members of a global *umma*, they consciously address a global audience of believers and non-believers. Al-Qaeda's desired Islamization of modernity takes place in global space emancipated from the confining national or regional territoriality of 'Egypt' or the 'Middle East' that used to constitute the political framework of religious nationalists fighting modern secular regimes in the twentieth century. As Olivier Roy (2004, p.19) observes, "The Muslim *umma* no longer has anything to do with a territorial entity. It has to be thought of in abstract and imaginary terms".

Although al-Qaeda embraces the Manichean dualism of a 'clash of civilizations' between its imagined global *umma* and global *kufir* ('unbelief'), its globalism transcends clear-cut civilizational fault lines. Its desire for the restoration of a transnational *umma* attests to the globalisation and Westernization of the Muslim world just as much as it reflects the Islamization of the West. Constructed in the ideational interregnum between the national and the global, jihadist-globalist claims still retain potent metaphors that resonate with people's national or even tribal solidarities.<sup>14</sup> And yet, al-Qaeda's focus is firmly on the global as its leaders successfully redirected militant Islamism's struggle from the traditional "Near Enemy" (secular-nationalist Middle Eastern regimes) to the "Far Enemy" (the globalising West). This remarkable discursive and strategic shift reflects the destabilization of the national imaginary. By the early 1990s, nationally-based Islamist groups were losing

steam, partly as a result of their inability to mobilize their respective communities around national concerns, and partly because they were subjected to more effective counterstrategies devised by secular-nationalist regimes.<sup>15</sup> Hence, Bin Laden and al-Zawahiri urged their followers to take the war against Islam's enemies global. Al-Qaeda's simple ideological imperative—rebuild a unified global *umma* through global *jihad* against global *kufir*—resonated with the dynamics of a globalising world (Bin Laden, 2005, p.91).

For example, in a videotaped address to the American people aired around the world only a few days before the 2004 election, Bin Laden managed to inject himself into a national electoral contest as the self-appointed leader of the global *umma*. Articulating the rising global imaginary as the familiar set of political claims, the al-Qaeda leader appeared on the TV screens of a global audience as the world's chief critic of American democracy. As Faisal Devji (2005a, p.2) notes, al-Qaeda's Islamist globalism projected no national ambitions, for it was as global as the West itself, both being intertwined and even internal to each other: "This is why Bin Laden's calls for the United States to leave the Muslim world do not entail the return to a cold-war geopolitics of détente, but are conceived rather in terms of a global reciprocity on equal terms" (See also Devji, 2005b, p.144).

Another videotaped message delivered by the al-Qaeda leader in September 2007 unleashed further verbal broadsides against the 'corrupt American political system'. He linked the Bush administration's involvement in Iraq to transnational corporate interests that held 'the American people' hostage to their all-out scramble for war-related profits. Moreover, Bin Laden charged 'the capitalist system' with seeking "to turn the entire world into a fiefdom of the major corporations under the label of "globalization" ..." (Bin Laden, 2007). Unsurprisingly, Bin Laden's first audio-taped message to President Barack Obama in June 2009 followed the same ideological pattern.

Although some political commentators have suggested that virulent forms of national-populism embodied by the likes of Jean-Marie Le Pen or Patrick Buchanan constitute the most powerful right-wing challenge to market globalism, I contend that this designation belongs to 'religious globalism'. Far from being a regionally contained 'last gasp' of a backward-looking, militant offshoot of political Islam, jihadism of the al-Qaeda (or Christian fundamentalist) variety represents a potent globalism of worldwide appeal. Indeed, unlike national-populism's defensive attempts to hold on to a declining national imaginary, radical Islamist globalism contains an ideological alternative that, despite its chilling content, imagines community in unambiguously global terms.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Potent as they are, the dynamics of denationalization at the heart of globalisation neither propel the world to an inevitable endpoint nor have these forces dispensed entirely with vast ideational and material arsenals of the nation-state. The geographical concreteness of global dynamics stares us in the face as the Cuban-Chinese restaurant around the corner or the Eurasian fusion café next door. These hybrid culinary establishments are serving us up a daily taste of a global stew that is slowly thickening but still needs plenty of stirring. The national is slowly losing its grip on people's minds, but the global has not yet ascended to the commanding heights once occupied by its predecessor. It erupts in fits and false starts, offering observers confusing spectacles of social fragmentation and integration that cut across old geographical hierarchies of scale in unpredictable patterns.<sup>16</sup>

As the national and the global rub up against each other in myriad settings and on multiple levels, they produce new tensions and compromises. Putting the analytic spotlight on the changing ideational structures not only yields a better understanding of current globalisation dynamics, but it also helps us make sense of the shifting conceptual and geographical boundaries that (re)shape individual and collective identities. Although globalisation unfolds toward an uncertain future, the first attempts to translate the rising global imaginary into concrete political agendas have yielded textual evidence to point to a profoundly altered ideological landscape.<sup>17</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This essay is a revised and expanded version of my article, 'Neo-isms: What's New about Political Ideologies in the Global Age', published in *Global Studies Journal* 1(4) (2008), pp.139-47 ([www.globalstudiesjournal.com](http://www.globalstudiesjournal.com)). It also draws on parts of my study: Steger, M. B., 2008. *The Rise of the Global Imaginary: Political Ideologies from the French Revolution to the Global War on Terror*. Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press.
- <sup>2</sup> For my definition of basic concepts related to globalization, see: Steger, M. B., 2009. *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- <sup>3</sup> For a masterful treatment of the 'multiscalarity' of globalization, see Saskia Sassen's pioneering work on the subject. Her most recent study is: Sassen, S., 2007. *A Sociology of Globalization*. New York: W. W.
- <sup>4</sup> The ideological function of 'fixing' the process of signification around certain meanings was discussed as early as the 1970s by the French linguist Michel Pecheux and intellectuals associated with the French semiotic journal *Tel Quel*. See:

- Eagleton, T., 1991. *Ideology: An Introduction*. London: Verso, 1991. pp. 195-7.
- <sup>5</sup> As employed throughout this article, my key concepts of the 'national' and 'global' imaginary draw on relevant arguments presented in the works of Charles Taylor, Benedict Anderson, Pierre Bourdieu, and Arjun Appadurai.
- <sup>6</sup> This propensity of social imaginaries to give birth to ideologies that serve primarily on the level of 'fantasies' constructing political subjects has been emphasized by Slavoj Žižek. See: Žižek, S., (1994). *Mapping Ideology*. London. pp. 1-33.
- <sup>7</sup> On the useful notion of historical 'tipping points' as particular combinations of dynamics and resources that can usher in a new organizing logic, see Saskia Sassen: Sassen, S., 2006. *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006. Ch.4; and pp. 404-5.
- <sup>8</sup> Craig Calhoun argues that such nationalist 'essentialism' represents one of the guiding assumptions in modern thinking on matters of personal and collective identity. See: Calhoun, C., 1997. *Nationalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. pp. 18-20.
- <sup>9</sup> Albrow's epochal theory postulates the 'end of modernity', whereas Beck argues for a seismic shift from a 'first modernity' to a 'second modernity'.
- <sup>10</sup> For many similar arguments see: Albrow, M., 1997. *The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press; Beck, U., 2000. *What is Globalization?* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press; Urry, J., 2003. *Global Complexity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press; Hannerz, U., 1996. *The Transnational Connection*. London: Routledge; And Waters, W., 2001. *Globalization*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London and New York: Routledge.
- <sup>11</sup> For a helpful discussion of 'disaggregating states' in the global age, see: Slaughter, A-M., 2004. *A New World Order*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- <sup>12</sup> See for example: Mozaffari, M., 2007. What is Islamism? History and Definition of a Concept. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8(1), pp.17-33; Barton, G., 2005. *Jemaah Islamiyah: Radical Islamism in Indonesia*. Singapore: Ridge Books; El Fadl, K. A., 2005. *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*. New York: HarperCollins; Roy, O., 2004. *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. New York: Columbia University Press; Karam, A. ed., 2004. *Transnational Political Islam: Religion, Ideology and Power*. London: Pluto Press; Simons, T. W., 2003. *Islam in a Globalizing World*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press; Kepel, G., 2004. *The War for Muslim Minds*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press; Kepel, G., 2002. *Jihad: On the Trail of Political Islam*. London: I.B. Tauris; And Ruthven, M., 2002. *A Fury for God: The Islamist Attack on America*. London: Granta Books.
- <sup>13</sup> For the most recent collection of writings by al-Qaeda leaders, see: Kepel, G and Milelli, G. P. Eds., 2008. *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap

Press of Harvard University Press.

- <sup>14</sup> For an insightful analysis of the tribal, national, and global dimensions in Bin Laden's discourse, see: McAuley, D., 2005. The Ideology of Osama Bin Laden: Nation, Tribe and World Economy, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, (10) 3, pp. 269-87. For a brilliant discussion of globalizing dynamics involving tribal identities, see: James, P., 2006. *Globalism Nationalism Tribalism: Bringing the State Back In*. London: Sage.
- <sup>15</sup> For a more detailed exposition of the reasons behind al-Qaeda's shift from the near to the far enemy, see: Gerges, F. A., 2009. *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; And Kepel, G., 2004. *The War for Muslim Minds*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- <sup>16</sup> For a discussion of such 'fragmegration', see Rosenau, J. N., 2003. *Distant Proximities: Dynamics Beyond Globalization*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

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**Manfred B. Steger** is Professor of Global Studies and Director of the Globalism Research Center at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. He is also a Senior Research Fellow at the Globalization Research Center at the University of Hawai'i-Manoa. He has served as an academic consultant on globalisation for the US State Department and as an advisor to the PBS TV series, "Heaven on Earth: The Rise and Fall of Socialism." He is the author of seventeen books on globalisation and the history of political ideas, including: *The Rise of the Global Imaginary: Political Ideologies from the French Revolution to the Global War on Terror* (Oxford University Press, 2008); the award-winning *Globalism: Market Ideology Meets Terrorism* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) and the bestselling *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2009).