

Is the world today still a global village?

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*'Time' has ceased, 'space' has vanished.
We now live in a 'global village'..
a simultaneous happening.
Information pours upon us,
instantaneously and continuously.
As soon as information is acquired,
it is very rapidly replaced
by still newer information".*

(McLuhan, 1967: 63)

Abstract

The idea of a global village, as proposed by Marshall McLuhan in the late sixties of the previous century was widely (although not universally) acknowledged as a defining precedent for the understanding of the oncoming globalization process, noticeably accelerated at the end of the Cold War. Globalophobia and the reemergence of nationalism, xenophobia and protectionism among other fragmentary movements characteristic of the first decades of the 21st century, however, seem to suggest that the notion of a global village is now outdated and thus, practically useless for the study of the current status of international society. I argue in this essay, it is not. My central hypothesis is that, in spite of all the anti-globalization movements we see today, the idea of a global village, as suggested by McLuhan, is still as valid, useful and important today as it was when originally presented. My intention in this work is to demonstrate how and why this is so.

Keywords: global village, globalization, globalophobia, international relations, IR Theory

Resumen

La idea de una aldea global, tal como la propuso Marshal McLuhan a finales de los años sesenta del siglo pasado fue amplia (aunque nunca universalmente) reconocida como un precedente definitorio para la comprensión del emergente proceso de globalización que se aceleró marcadamente al término de la Guerra Fría. No obstante, la globalifobia, el resurgimiento del nacionalismo, la xenofobia y el proteccionismo, entre otros movimientos fragmentadores, característicos de las primeras décadas de este siglo, parecen sugerir que la idea de una aldea global ha pasado de moda y que, por lo tanto, ahora resulta prácticamente inútil para el estudio del estado actual de la sociedad internacional. Mi argumento en este ensayo es que esto no es así. Mi hipótesis central es que, a pesar de los movimientos globalifóbicos de hoy en día, la idea de una aldea global, tal como la sugirió McLuhan en su momento, sigue siendo tan útil, válida e importante como cuando se presentó

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originalmente y mi intención es demostrar cómo y porqué esto es así.

Palabras clave: aldea global, globalización, globalifobia, relaciones internacionales, teoría de RR. II.

Introduction

The usefulness of a concept is closely linked to the precision with which it relates to the object of study it attempts to describe. Most concepts, however, tend to be polysemic because the real world is far richer in nuances than our linguistic abilities to describe it and because our resources to perceive the world, both physical and cultural, vary immensely from one person to another. We should also keep in mind that no concept is reality in itself, but a pale attempt (sometimes more fortunate than others) to represent it. As such, the same word can suggest different meanings to different people, a fact that tends to complicate effective communication.

Social theorists, on the other hand, seldom elaborate their concepts in such detail as to leave no room for multiple interpretations. There are hardly any concepts at all in social theory, or in daily language for that matter, lacking need of clarification. It is, therefore, absolutely crucial for any meaningful conceptual discussion on any topic, to establish accurately whatever we are trying to convey with a given term, in order to avoid misunderstandings or futile dialogues.

What is a global village?

The notion of a global village raised different interpretations from very early on. As I see it, the term expresses the fundamental idea that most people² are nowadays deeply and profusely interconnected with the rest of the world through the use of new media technologies and thus one way or another affected by events occurring in distant places. Information (or misinformation) is normally behind the processes of decision-making of both individuals and collectivities, so, in a way, the flux of information humans has tended to shape their history.

Throughout most of historical times, communities lived in relative isolation. Processes of interaction occurred mainly at a regional level, so people from other regions were basically aliens who could well have lived on a different planet. The account of Herodotus or Marco Polo of their visits to foreign lands clearly illustrates the case. Contact with faraway groups could occur, although on a very limited scale, leaving ample room for imagination and exaggeration regarding who they were and how they lived.

² Even if it is true that a significant number of people in the world today do not even have access to new technologies, it remains a fact that their lives are affected by external events, often originated in distant lands; facts over which they have absolutely no control. Workers, peasants, artisans, etc. throughout the world are severely hurt in the global village by investors' decisions in financial centers they do not even know exist. People may know or ignore, understand or misinterpret events in the world; they may be concerned or not care at all about them, but the fact remains we are all affected by them.

With the development of new navigation technologies during the 15th century, overseas exploration became a regular practice, which in turn allowed for newer technologies that eventually interconnected the whole planet. By the turn of the last century, virtually all human groups had been forcibly incorporated into the Westphalian model of international relations.

The world had metaphorically shrunk and the lives of millions became affected by the process of inevitable coexistence that allowed us to think of humanity as a whole. Christians and Muslims had suggested the idea centuries before, and had spread their doctrines through large geographical areas, bringing foreigners together under the rule of one God. Such is the nature of the global village.³

The notion is fairly clear. Not everyone agrees with it though, but the main source of controversy seems to be regarding the implications of such community. What would life be like in the global village? As we will see, many critics assumed the global village actually implied direct contact and cultural uniformity, nonetheless McLuhan himself pointed out, the idea did not necessarily mean that there would be a single prevailing culture or a completely homogenized and harmonious way of life worldwide.

The more you create village conditions, the more discontinuity and division and diversity. The global village absolutely ensures maximal disagreement on all points. It never occurred to me that uniformity and tranquility were the properties of the global village. It has more spite and envy. The spaces and times are pulled out from between people. A world in which people encounter each other in depth all the time. The tribal-global village is far more divisive—full of fighting—than any nationalism ever was. Village is fission, not fusion, in depth all the time. (McLuhan, 1997: 57–58)

After such an explicit statement, Chrystall states, it still something of a mystery how Barbrook, having undertaken an extensive survey of McLuhan's commentators, was able to say that: "More than anything else, McLuhanism was identified with this prediction that the Net was going to create the new—and much better—social system of the global village" (Chrystall, 2012).

Barbrook was not alone in his interpretation. Umberto Eco considered McLuhan's global village a fallacy; he acknowledged an electronic global world had arrived, but he definitely denied it could be represented as a village, "if by village one means a human settlement where people are directly interacting with each other" (Eco, 1996: 304). No

³ The Spanish school of international law worked precisely from that principle and promoted the idea of universal human rights way ahead of our times. According to Sánchez: It was not a "school" in the classic sense. The different scholars were educated in various European universities, although their teaching and thinking were mainly developed at the University of Salamanca (Spain) and other European universities such as Coimbra (Portugal). They were the first who spoke out on rights, the first who wanted to establish norms for the conquest of America, and the first who defended the human rights of all human beings, including Indians. Among them, Francisco de Vitoria and Francisco Suárez were the main contributors to the Law of Nations (Fernández-Sánchez, 2013).

human settlement has such condition, but even those you do not see directly have an influence on events.

Following what McLuhan actually said, it is clear that more than harmony or even relative uniformity, his idea of a global village stresses the fact that information today flows around the planet in such a way that we can learn about events virtually anywhere in the world in real time without necessarily needing to have face to face contact with every other human being in the world; a fact that has considerable implications for the way we perceive social reality and our place in it, something that, in turn, influences our behavior. The flux of information thus, according to this notion, conditions social praxis. It is not, of course, the only variable to be considered, but it is definitely an indispensable point of departure.

In the beginning

This original idea is attributed to Marshall McLuhan, a specialist in communications science who reflected on the effects of the newer technologies that made instant communication possible, which from his perspective, not only allowed for a more expedite transmission and exchange of ideas, but actually reshaped some of our quintessential views of reality and would transform our ways of life.

As a communication theorist⁴, McLuhan seems to overemphasize the importance of information and turns it into a uni-causal explanation to account for the complexity of human affairs. Information and communication are undoubtedly important, but definitely not the only variables to be considered when we analyze social phenomena.

He seems to have been inspired, according to Chrystall, by the work of Wyndham Lewis since the late fifties, although the term did not become fashionable until some years later. In a letter to Edward Morgan from 1959, Chrystall tells us, McLuhan wrote: Another aspect of the same kind of pattern in the Electronic Age which results from instantaneous flows of information from every part of a situation, from every quarter, is that we develop a new attitude to space, a new attitude to time. The globe has become a very small village-like affair (Chrystall, 2012).

Talk of a global village at the height of the Cold War was indeed an audacious stand. With the world divided into two antagonistic camps confronting each other for supreme power in international relations, few would sympathize with the view of a culturally homogeneous international society. Although, as we have seen, he never really suggested the new technologies would create a uniform way of thinking or a harmonious type of

⁴ It should be stressed that McLuhan never thought of his work as theoretical. Eric McLuhan, his son, points out: When McLuhan insisted that he did not use theories, he meant that he did not use them in the way that people expect theories to be used. “I don’t have a Theory of Communication” means “I don’t work in the way of Normal Science. I don’t start with a theory to prove or disprove or submit to the torturers. I start with—and stick with—observation.” He cared less for ideas about actuality than he cared for actuality itself (McLuhan, E., 2008: 27).

society, some elements of his discourse have been interpreted in such direction, especially during the aftermath of the Cold War, with the advent of the internet and the fallacious idea that ideological disputes had finally come to an end since the liberal model had proved to be the best option for social organization (Fukuyama, 1992).

After all, the temptation to impose our ideas on others, either by conviction or by force, seems to be a characteristic feature of humans, both at the individual or collective level, throughout history, probably because social life is made easier (not necessarily better) that way. For this reason, some analysts reacted negatively against McLuhan's idea, for fear it would pave the way to excessive forms of cultural imperialism. I will return to this point later.

In an article published in the New York Times at the turn of the century, Stille explained:

McLuhan's meteoric rise rests principally on two early works, "The Gutenberg Galaxy," which appeared in 1962, and "Understanding Media," which came out two years later. In the first book, McLuhan examined writing as a technology and mapped the ways in which literacy and printed books had changed not just the external world but also people's behavior and modes of thought. Written as television was emerging as the principal source of information, McLuhan insisted that it had become possible to define and describe print culture because it was coming to an end and was destined to be replaced by the electronic age. "Understanding Media" took things further. The book, which introduced the phrase "The medium is the message," described how technology—from the wheel and the alphabet to the telegraph, airplane, typewriter and television—changed social relations and mental attitudes (Stille, 2000: B-9).

But, in spite of his meteoric rise in the sixties, by the end of the eighties he seemed all but forgotten: "Once exalted as oracular, Marshall McLuhan's theories now seem laughably inadequate as an intellectual guide to our times," one critic wrote in 1987, seven years after his death (*Ibid*).

Based on the misguided perception that he was a prophet of a devastating form of cultural imperialism, new critics associated his name with the idea of globalization as a destructive process of Americanization and rejected with a new impetus his idea of a global village. Treisman for example notes that:

The contrast between the soaring American markets, the globalist rhetoric of Wall Street, and the deepening squalor of parts of the Third World was one of several factors that fueled the emergence of a new international counterculture. Its members had little in common except a shared loathing for something called "globalization". Some cared about the poor of the Third World, others mostly about keeping them from stealing First World jobs and polluting the environment. Some warned of an international elite conspiracy, others wished there was more global economic coordination. Politically, the anti-globalists came from the left, right, underground, and outer space (Treisman, 2003: 2).

Clearly, life in the global village is far from being harmonious or culturally uniform. However, as already mentioned, nothing in the original idea seems to imply it would be. In reality, not even the most homogeneous communities are exempt from controversies and trouble, not even families with shared values and traditions. Causes for discord are ever present in human relations.

As a communication theorist, McLuhan saw the development of new technologies in his area as the main variable for social change. From his perspective, all human history could be divided into four great eras –the tribal age, the literacy age, the print age, and the electric and electronic age, each defined by a predominant medium of communication, which could be rendered responsible for the development of a characteristic world view in each, and the foundation of specific social structures. According to McLuhan, the crucial inventions that changed life on this planet were originally the phonetic alphabet, the printing press, and the telegraph, followed by a host of electric and electronic devices. In each case, the world was wrenched from one era into the next because of new developments in media technology (Griffin et al., 2019: 324).

He claimed that electronic media were retribalizing the human race, resting importance on the visual predominance of the literacy and print ages. Instant communication brought new life to the pre-alphabetic oral tradition, where sound and touch are more important than sight. He foresaw a scenario of “back to the future”, where we would become a village unlike any other previous village, such is the case of the global village (Griffin et al, 2019: 326).

Analysts still debate whether or not the notion of a global village constitutes a theory. I think the concept evolved from a process of theoretical reflection on the nature of human society and the way it functions, giving communication a central role in the process, but it is not a theory in itself. It is better seen as a metaphor for an international system, for the first time in history, of a planetary scale, with hegemonic powers that literally spread throughout the world, creating an international order that finally subdued all members of the system to the same basic principles of interaction, not necessarily the same culture. McLuhan did not live to see it, but it would seem that, intuitively he saw the coming of a globalized international order⁵, although he never made any serious attempts to characterize it.

He may have neglected other variables and overemphasized the role of the media, but he was definitely not far off the mark in foreseeing a deeply interconnected international society facing common challenges and needing to work together to face them. He may have failed to see what life and social organization would be like in the global village,

⁵ The idea of an international order refers to the guiding principles of international relations in a given period. They may not be necessarily mandatory from a legal point of view, but they constitute the basic rules by which members of international society are expected to abide. Henry Kissinger explained the idea in his book on World Order in 2014.

but he clearly anticipated a ‘coming together’ of human society that would affect us all. The global village may not be a theory, but it still seems a good metaphor⁶ to describe an interconnected world. As Chrystall points out:

Lewis’s image, replayed by McLuhan here, is used to characterize the media or communication(s) situation during the era of our electric extensions that amplify and extend the voice and speech—the telegraph, telephone and radio—and juxtapose or set in immediate proximity distant geographical locations. It is not a theory. Trednick is wrong to suggest that the “global village” is a theory that can be cast against and critiqued alongside other “theories” such as Toffler’s future shock, Bell’s “postindustrial society”, Lyotard’s “post-modern condition”, Fukuyama’s “end of history”, Castells’ “network society”, Cairncross’ “death of distance”, Taylor’s “moment of complexity”, and Keen’s “cult of the amateur” (22). Rather, it is an empirical observation of a situation that by the 1950s had been made readily visible as a figure by the new ground of Television (which had also retrieved the orality/literacy vortex as a contemporary concern) (Chrystall, 2012).

In spite of its shortcomings, the notion of a global village offered fruitful insights for social analysis which, carefully read give us a lead to understand many contemporary processes; Stille comments in this regard:

McLuhan hypothesized that borderless electronic media would undermine the nation-state, a notion that seemed unlikely at the height of the Cold War but that seems more relevant in an age in which people use fax machines, VCRs, satellite dishes, cell phones and computers to receive information their governments don’t want them to have. “When McLuhan spoke about the renewal of tribalism, it seemed to be about the hippie movement of the 1960s, which was just a passing fad, but today you can see a different kind of tribalism on the Internet, where people are affiliating online in various interest or discussion groups (Stille, 2000).

The global village, as a metaphor may be simplistic, but it offers solid ground to think about the structural unicity of contemporary international relations; a perspective which in no way denies the diversity of peoples and ideas present on the international stage. An apparent paradox that can be easily solved through the lenses of the complementarity principle suggested by Niels Bohr⁷; you can say different things, even apparently contradictory about the same object of study when you observe it from different angles and observe different of its distinguishing characteristics.

6 Not everyone will agree with this idea. A ‘village’ may be seen as a very rustic and simplistic form of social organization, lacking the complexities of industrial and postindustrial societies. Still, as a place in which communication flows intensely, everyone winds up being involved with everyone else’s business.

7 The essence of the principle of complementarity of Bohr in physics is as follows. In any experience with micro-objects, the observer receives information not about the properties of objects in themselves, but about the properties of objects in connection with a specific situation, including, in particular, measuring instruments. Information about the object, obtained under certain specific conditions, should be considered as additional to the information obtained under other conditions. Moreover, the information obtained under different conditions cannot be simply added, summed, combined into a kind of unified picture; they reflect different (complementary) sides of a single reality, corresponding to the object under study (Klimets, 2017:1).

Marshall's work, as we have seen, has at least two important corollaries that have been cause for debate among specialists for more than half a century now, both dealing with the actual meaning and the scope of the concept of 'global village' and its consequences. A 1970 Saturday Review article noted, "There are no boundaries in a global village. All problems will become so intimate as to be one's own..." (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Starting then, the idea of globalization began to take shape. But what exactly does this mean and what are the implications?

Most analysts today recognize the interconnectedness of our planet as an undisputed feature of contemporary international society; the exchange of data in real time is characteristic of our global village. As Dixon points out (2009: 1): The Internet has exploded with a boom in technology, providing individuals from all over the world the opportunity to communicate instantly with each other. Instant messenger, Facebook, Myspace and various online forums are examples of this instant communication.

Connected in this manner, human beings across the planet have become increasingly exposed to 'external' influences, thoughts, values, fashions, traditions, etc. coming from beyond their communities; this, in turn, has profoundly affected their lifestyles. The information being exchanged needs not necessarily be factual or accurate; in these days it is often not, exposing people to fake news and a fallacious sense of relativistic truths. In other words, cynical manipulation can be justified today as the notion of post-truth sets in. The flux of information keeps the world interconnected, but paradoxically, also misinformed. Certainly, not everyone is affected by the flow of information in the same way. Some interpret it in one direction, others react against it, but in the end, as I have pointed out, life in general is influenced by this process of increased interconnectedness.

Globalization

Globalization is a complex process of interconnection with a wide variety of angles of observation. I see it as the process of interconnecting all human groups in a single entity: an international system that, for the first time in history, has a planetary reach. The modern process of globalization may have started with the voyages of exploration by Western Europeans seeking routes for international trade with the far eastern part of the world towards the end of the 15th century.

On the way, they swept native cultures from the rest of the world imposing their beliefs and lifestyles and finally creating a global village after five centuries of imposition over the rest of the world and calling it progress; no moral judgement passed, such are the ways of the world. So, globalization implies much more than exchanges of information. It has a wide variety of causes and consequences (not all beneficial for the people involved, especially those forcefully incorporated into the global village).

Stiglitz commented on the impact of these changes and on how globalization had become, almost overnight, one of the most pressing issues of our times, discussed all over the world (Stiglitz, 2002: 4). Since then, a myriad of specialists from all fronts have presented their views on this, still highly controversial topic. Globalization seems to have laid the foundations for the development of the global village, which coming into existence reinforced all the defining variables for a globalized world.

Consensus regarding what globalization is and what it means is very hard to come by. Specialists tend to highlight causes and consequences in their own areas of expertise and according to their own ideological preferences. Stefania, for example, considers it is basically an economic process with a high financial profile. It is capital and financial assets moving freely around the world and affecting the rest of the social structure in different ways and degrees (2003). In a similar direction, Bhagwati defines it as the integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, direct foreign investment (by corporations and multinationals) short-term capital flows, transnational movement of workers and flows of technology (2004: 3).

Friedman sees it as a new era in international relations, originated at the end of the Cold War, based on free-market capitalism and made possible thanks to the democratization of new technological developments, especially in the area of communications. For him, it means the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never seen before -in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster and cheaper than ever before and vice versa (1999: 9).

For Petras and Veltmeyer, globalization is best understood as a socio-economic transformation of social structures which reenforces the capitalist mode of production and thus constitutes a class project that strengthens the hegemonic position of the ruling classes worldwide. In other words, it reproduces the contradictions of classical capitalism on a global scale (2001). In the same direction, Korten denounces that globalization is made possible by the alliance between the largest corporations and the most powerful governments in pursuit of their own interests (2001:4). The list of definitions can grow well beyond the limits of this essay but the sample is enough to see the complexity that the process entails.

Notwithstanding the clearly different views among these authors, they also hold the same common notion: the growing interdependence of countries into a single prevailing international order, by means of socio-economic and political transformations fueled by the new technology and common public policies of national governments, either pressed to adopt them or convinced of the need to do it. In any case, this growing interdependence also impacts the normative basis of international society and the cultural values of all polities, thus strengthening the metaphor of the global village. Advocates of a globalized world tend to emphasize the aspects they see as benefits, which include, increased free trade

among nations, increased liquidity of capital allowing further investment in less developed countries, greater flexibility for companies to operate abroad, global mass media bringing the world together, wider sharing of information, greater ease and speed of transportation, reduction of cultural barriers, spread of democratic ideals, greater interdependence among nations, greater ease to tackle common problems, etc.

On the downside: adversaries denounce an increased flow of jobs towards poor countries, but only because corporations seek cheaper labor; increased risk of global economic disruptions, normally affecting those in the lower classes of both, rich and poor countries, although normally with worse effects for the latter; corporate influence on national governments of poor countries, where those unwilling to cooperate run greater risks of social upheavals that throw them out of office; monopolistic control of mass media by hegemonic powers, with enhanced capacities to manipulate public opinion, greatest threats of cultural imperialism affecting values and beliefs of weaker groups, violent reactions against globalization, promotion of consumerism with an ensuing deterioration of the environment; violation of sovereign and human rights; a growing gap between the rich and the poor, even inside the most developed countries; decreased environmental integrity, among other things.

The world today

By now, few would doubt that this interconnectedness exists. Environmentalists are among the specialists most concerned with raising popular consciousness regarding this topic because of the growing threat of generating an imbalanced ecosystem to a point of no return, but they are not alone in their efforts. Human rights activists follow closely in line because billions on our planet lack the minimum conditions of existence to live with dignity. Many other specialists in different areas tend to agree that, in spite of the evident different interests at stake, common action is a must because we all inhabit the same and only planet.

However, opinions regarding its effects tend to clash, because globalization is a process that has caused both positive and negative consequences, depending on who tells the story and what their views are on the 'international'. Realist thinkers tend to emphasize the fragmented nature of the international system, where the parts are independent units struggling for themselves, they tend to be blind to a global village, whereas, from a systemic perspective, the whole has a recognizable life of its own and influences the behavior of the parts.

From a systemic point of view, it is easier to visualize humanity as a whole and to recognize the challenges of survival as a common threat. A global village comes as a natural proposal considering our common human condition. Fears among realist thinkers, however, run high regarding the dangers of the threat of homogenization posed by the idea of a global village, because they are more naturally inclined to the tribal mentality of a

fragmented world, so, they seem to prefer the ancient Roman motto: ‘to each their own.’⁸ The nature of the current problems facing humanity suggests we should think otherwise. There is, of course, no lack of evidence to justify an individualistic interpretation of history and social relations in general. The realist view of international relations is amply justified in political terms, however despicable it may seem from a moral point of view.

International society for realists is an empty concept. The international scenario is seen as a collection of separate entities characterized by their individualistic struggle for survival. The defense of national interest is for them the only public policy that makes sense. Universalist projects are for utopian dreamers and advocates of a global village fall under this category.

Staunch realists, in Hegelian mode, fail to see beyond the state as a form of political organization, which is just not possible beyond temporary agreements of convenience. From a systemic perspective, as Kant suggested, institutionalization in pursuit of the common good is effectively not only possible but in fact necessary.

At first glance, the profound difference between these two frameworks, of which Kant and Hegel are just two representatives, lies in their diverse, and altered, ontology: while universal and universalistic ontologies have notions such as ‘humanity’, ‘humankind’, and ‘men’ in general as their final referential focus, particularistic ontologies of international politics are ultimately focused on the individual nation-state, its welfare and power. The two different frameworks of universal/universalistic and particularistic thinking not only focus on different images of the world—one divided into individual, solipsistic units, the other constituted as a common assembly of peoples and political communities—but also are informed by different intellectual backgrounds. On the one side, we can observe a cosmos of universal anthropological, divine, legal, political, and ethical concepts which allow us to establish a likewise universal focus on humanity, humankind, and men; on the other side, we find particularistic conceptions of a national self, ‘national interest’, national sovereignty, and, overall, national moralities which establish an ontology which is referentially focused on self-contained entities (Berh, 2010: 2).

Since the days when McLuhan first proposed the idea of a global village, analysts started speculating what it meant. Historically, our world has been predominantly seen as a mosaic of peoples and cultures, separated by a wide range of factors, from the geographical to the historical, from the physical to the ideological, in such a way that, for a very long time it was widely believed that different groups actually had different origins, and inevitably, different ends. Linnaeus in the mid-eighteenth century still classified

8 Święcicka explains that the phrase *suum cuique* as an incarnation of “justice,” like many other Latin *dicta*, is deeply enrooted in the mental consciousness of mankind, and it lives its own life as a part of the so-called universal culture. She adds that generally speaking, reference to Roman justice served and still serves as a justification of one’s own actions when such actions cannot defend themselves by their own formal correctness. It is, therefore, recourse to the eternal values, the understanding of which, however, is determined by one’s own experience or by the experience of a particular epoch (2014: 269). In other words, the expression lends itself to an interpretation of a highly egoistic nature which disregards others when our own interests are affected.

modern human beings into four subspecies according to geographic origin: *H. s. asiaticus*, *H. s. europaeus*, *H. s. afer*, and *H. s. americanus*, a vision finally rejected during the 20th century on account of its Eurocentric prejudice about humans (Rafferty, 2020).

Only very recently has molecular biology proved beyond a shade of doubt the common origins of humankind, finally recognized as a single species. Britannica clearly acknowledges that: Currently, *H. s. sapiens* is the only widely accepted subspecies of *H. sapiens*, and the necessity of this designation remains a matter of debate, since traditional taxonomic practice subdivides a species only when there is evidence of two or more distinct subgroups (Rafferty, 2020).

Still, being a single species does not guarantee any form of homogeneity. The way humans spread along the planet contributed to distinctive phenotypes, lifestyles and worldviews in such a way that other humans were often perceived as aliens outside any given community. Foreigners, at first sight, were normally contemplated as enemies until proven otherwise and even then, the notion of self-preservation dictated careful caution in dealings with them; this view renders the idea of a global village as a utopian dream.

Interaction among groups, nonetheless, has been a constant throughout time, although mainly at a regional level. Human groups rarely exist in isolation. This type of interaction created international historical systems through early forms of 'globalization', seen as forms of growing interconnectedness among neighbors.

Polybius understood the process clearly once the Romans defeated Carthage during the Punic Wars. He writes in this regard: Previously the doings of the world had been, so to say, dispersed, as they were held together by no unity of initiative, results, or locality; but ever since this date history has been an organic whole, and the affairs of Italy and Libya have been interlinked with those of Greece and Asia, all leading up to one end. (Polybius, *Histories*, Book I: 9). The Roman world in this respect, is a good example of a globalized international society, (certainly not the only one, but probably the best known in the case of Western culture) indicative of a historical pattern of regularity that can give us a hint of things to expect regarding our contemporary global village.

Was the Roman Empire a peaceful, stable or culturally homogeneous polity? Far from it, yet close enough to become the basis of a solid civilization; the empire was a melting pot of peoples and cultures which managed to coexist in relative peace for several centuries. They were not a homogeneous entity, still, they developed common institutions of a hybrid⁹ nature that served well the principle of peaceful co-existence which accounts

⁹ Cultural hybridization is a term to describe the way in which different elements of various cultures interact and produce new views and products influencing all those engaged in the exchange. Elements such as ideas and beliefs, language, food or fashion, art, etc. travel back and forth from one culture to another modifying all involved. Such hybridization occurs when people of various cultures co-exist. The new products can even transcend time and become the legacy of new generations.

for the historical period of Pax Romana.¹⁰

Hybridization is still happening in the world today. Friedman characterizes it as glocalization when he writes:

I define healthy glocalization as the ability of a culture, when it encounters other strong cultures, to absorb influences that naturally fit into and can enrich their culture, to resist those things that are truly alien and to compartmentalize those things that, while different, can nevertheless be enjoyed and celebrated as different. The whole purpose of glocalizing is to be able to assimilate aspects of globalization into your country and culture in a way that adds to your growth and diversity without overwhelming it (Friedman, 1999: 295).

Hybridization is a historical process. It was not always as smooth as Friedman suggests, but even in those extreme cases of brutal imposition, dominated peoples tropicalized the alien values, beliefs and practices imposed on them and the dominant cultures did not get away untouched.

Interconnectedness tends to fuel globalizing processes. But these are never irreversible because their effects are never even. Spiritual leaders like the Buddha, Christ, Mohammed among many others exposed clear ideas about universal justice and the brotherhood of umankind, yet most of their followers normally fall short of fulfilling their master's expectations. Sooner than later all doctrines tend to diversify because their adepts naturally perceive their message in different ways and thus reinterpret according to their own view. Hybridization has also been present in the expansion processes of all doctrines, moral or otherwise. Orthodoxy is very hard to keep in line, thus universal uniformity of ideas is practically impossible, especially when the means to exchange them have grown so fast and efficiently.

Diversification is a natural process.¹¹ It fuels a system's capacity for adaptation and thus enhances opportunities for survival. In our case, diversity is the range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin, and political beliefs. (Ferris State University, 2023). Cracraft suggests that the diversification of species is largely determined primarily by large-scale changes in lithospheric (geomorphological) complexity and factors such as the degree of morphogenetic variability within species, behavioral-ecological variability within species, intensity of sexual selection among others (1985: 794).

¹⁰ Kuiper defines *Pax Romana*, (Latin: "Roman Peace") as a state of comparative tranquility throughout the Mediterranean world from the reign of Augustus (27 BCE–14 CE) to the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161–180 CE). Augustus laid the foundation for this period of concord, which also extended to North Africa and Persia. The empire protected and governed individual provinces, permitting each to make and administer its own laws while accepting Roman taxation and military control. (Kuiper, 2023)

¹¹ It is the process through which living organisms modify their original characteristics in order to confront the challenges of a changing environment. When they fail to do so, they become vulnerable to new conditions and face risk of extinction.

In the case of humans, cultural adaptation must be added; here biology, geography, history, psychology, politics, economy and ethics interact to allow group viability. Since each group inhabits its own microregion, cultural diversity becomes a must, rendering a single uniform cultural model for all humanity a virtual impossibility. Interconnectedness may well facilitate all sorts of exchanges, even among the most remote communities but it is unlikely to produce homogeneity at any time.

That is not to say similarities do not exist. Since the early seventies, it has become common talk to say young people throughout the world have more in common with themselves than with their parents. They might not hold identical views, but certainly have much more in common, namely a growing awareness of a shared destiny. McLuhan's dictum: "There are no passengers on spaceship earth, we are all crew" is clearly more meaningful today than when he originally proclaimed it in 1964 (McLuhan, Quotes, n/d).

Awareness of common threats may not have produced unitary responses from the world population and their respective authorities, but there is a growing sense of urgency for an answer to address topics such as global warming, climate change, depletion of resources, risks of extinction, human rights, migration, gender equity, among many others; that is precisely what a global village is mainly all about interconnectedness and awareness of a common fate requiring concerted action, due to ample recognition of the unicity of the real world underlying all its differences.

A recent poll conducted by UNICEF, together with Gallup concluded that the present generation is more likely to see themselves as global citizens and that they are more willing to embrace international cooperation to combat threats such as the pandemic and all the others facing humanity. The same poll also highlights other important aspects of young people:

- The survey also found children and young people are generally more trusting of national governments, scientists and international news media as sources of accurate information.
- They are also aware of the problems the world is facing, with nearly 80 per cent seeing serious risks for children online, such as exposure to violent or sexually explicit content, or being bullied.
- Young people want faster progress in the fight against discrimination, more cooperation among countries, and for decision-makers to listen to them.
- Nearly three-quarters of those surveyed who are aware of climate change believe Governments should take significant action to address it. The share rises to 83 per cent in low- and lower-middle countries, where climate impacts are set to be greatest (UN News, 2021).

So, why would anyone oppose the idea that we are still living in a global village? Expectations of a New World Order at the end of the Cold War ran high. Peace and

prosperity seemed to be just around the corner. The story ran that fascism, Nazism and communism were defeated, and that liberal democracy had been proven as the only viable regime to guarantee the common good. We had reached, according to Fukuyama, the end of history and there would be no further devastating ideological disputes.

In addition, amazing technological developments would pave the way to a better future for all. Instant communication and a free exchange of ideas, resources (material, financial and human) as well as merchandise would ensure benefits for everyone. All we had to do was to adopt the neoliberal proposal based on representative democracy, individual liberties and a free market economy throughout the world and everyone would be happy. Much easier said than done.

Most of the world was simply not prepared for any of those policies, and imposing them immediately unmasked the ugly face of globalization: unemployment, the rising cost of living, famine and debt. All of this soon generated an enormous discontent which fueled the first anti-globalization movements before the end of the century, less than a decade after the Washington Consensus was proclaimed. Kaplan (1994) accurately diagnosed the coming anarchy as a result of the imposition of a socio-economic and political model that most of the world was simply not prepared to implement.

Analyzing the geopolitical situation in West Africa he wrote: Disease, overpopulation, unprovoked crime, scarcity of resources, refugee migrations, the increasing erosion of nation-states and international borders and the empowerment of private armies, security firms and international drug cartels are now most tellingly demonstrated through a West African prism (Kaplan, 1994: 46). These, he foretold, were the issues the world would soon have to face. He was certainly not too far off the mark. In view of world events during the next two and a half decades, 24 years later he wrote in his concluding remarks to the anarchy that came: My vision, then and now of vast geopolitical disruption is not ultimately pessimistic, but merely historical (Kaplan, 2018: 6)

During that time, the world witnessed the violent growth of anti-globalization manifestations, the September 11th attacks, the beginning of the war on terrorism, the invasion of Iraq, the financial crisis of 2008, the upsurge of populist movements both from the left and right, the devastating and disappointing Arab Spring, the emergence of ISIS, increased migration flows towards the more developed countries, exacerbated nationalism, protectionism and xenophobia. Kaplan blamed it on various natural, demographic, and cultural forces underway in the world that would overwhelm America's classically liberal vision (2018: 1).

So, in his view, poverty, famine and corruption caused all the trouble, and there was no mention at all of the negative impacts of the neoliberal model. In any case, the picture

of the whole post-Cold War period is grim enough to nurture anti-globalization and anti-global village discourses and the fragmentary actions that disrupt the international order nowadays. The chaotic scene and alarming challenges facing international society today do not seem to allow any room for hope of a harmonious, peaceful and prosperous world scene. It really takes an overflowing optimism to suggest the future is better than you think (Diamandis, 2014) or to write a book calling for Enlightenment now (Pinker, 2018).

Under such circumstances, is it wise to talk about a global village? As I mentioned earlier, the global village is a metaphor of a profusely interconnected and interdependent international society, not of a peaceful and culturally uniform community. What I mean is that, in spite of living in a fragmented world, politically divided, culturally differentiated, economically uneven, and legally weak; in spite of such troubled times, we are a highly interconnected and interdependent entity where events in every corner of the world affect the rest of the planet and there's no way to escape the responsibility of a common future, which is the basis to consider that, notwithstanding all our troubles, we are living in an international system that can be profitably represented as a global village.

Long before McLuhan suggested the idea, keen observers of world affairs had already noticed the interconnectedness of international action. By the end of the first half of the 19th century, Marx (2022) and his followers understood the way in which the spread of capitalism progressively joined the world into a single economic unit, with political, legal and cultural implications.

Already during the first half of the 20th century, dependency theory (Sonntag, 2001), sponsored by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, following on the footsteps of Marxism, explained underdevelopment as a consequence of the interconnectedness brought about by the spread of capitalism, and towards the end of the century, later on, Wallerstein's world system theory (2004) continued the trend of representing the international scenario as a structure made-up of a metropolitan (colonialist) center exploiting a periphery of underdeveloped nations.

In the early forties, David Mitrany (1943) suggested that the State as a unit of analysis for international relations was increasingly inadequate to respond to the needs of humanity as a whole, because these clearly surpass political borders, which are too porous to withhold problems from moving in and out of each country.

Historians like Lamprecht (1905) Toynbee (1951) and Wight (1973), the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset (1985), Schwarzenberger, a specialist in international law (1951) all worked on the concept of internationality, which emphasizes the external influence (the international environment) to explain the unfolding of national events. Rosenau (1969: 45) uses the concept of linkage, to explain specific modes of

interconnection among national states to make the international system operational, and the trend keeps growing with globalization.

Nye and Keohane used the term interdependence in order to suggest the mutual dependence on nations on one another, as opposed to one sided exploitation by hegemonic powers. Benefits in this case would derive from fair negotiations by experienced diplomats, creating international regimes, even though these would never offer undisputed guarantees of success.

Rhetoricians of interdependence often claim that since the survival of the human race is threatened by environmental as well as military dangers, conflicts of interest among states and peoples no longer exist. This conclusion would only follow if three conditions were met: an international economic system on which everyone depended on our basic life-supporting ecological system were in danger; all countries were significantly vulnerable to such a catastrophe; and there were only one solution to the problem (leaving no room for conflict about how to solve it and who should bear the costs). Obviously, these conditions are rarely all present (2012: 7).

I feel it is absolutely valid to say, nowadays, those three conditions have come of age. Touraine asked an ominous question in 1997, Can we live together? Emphasizing that the destiny of humankind as a whole was at stake in the answer. Greider was pointedly specific when he wrote on the effects of the silicon chip on international relations: "Understanding this historical context will be comforting for some and dispiriting to others, but it is essential in order to appreciate how little these deeply driving forces depend upon the nationalist virtues claimed by different societies or the particular decisions of mere governments" (1997: 27).

Buzan points in the same direction when he explains that, while international society is focused on states, world society implies something that reaches well beyond the state towards more cosmopolitan images of how humankind is, or should be organized (2004: 1).

Globalophobia is an understandable reaction of all those who feel threatened by the speedy spread of globalization; many indeed have been affected in many ways, growing migration, unemployment, rapid environmental damage, stronger cultural hybridization, among other things. Under such circumstances, nationalism, protectionism and xenophobia are not so difficult to understand. It is comprehensible to see why those with a lineal vision of the historical process would be tempted to suggest the globalization process is over.

History, though is never linear, and in spite of the barriers, the interconnectedness of the world is still a fact, regardless of the opposition. Hence, viewing the world as a global village still makes sense. Such an image could help strengthen the will to act together and under consensus in the pursuit of international balance for the common good.☘

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