

# Globalization, the COVID Pandemic, and the Viral Visions for Global Futures

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## ABSTRACT

This chapter explores contradictory dynamics of the recent, current, and future prospects of globalization revealed by the COVID pandemic of 2019–22. Situating the analysis in the COVID-19 pandemic world, it examines how the COVID-driven process shaped/shifted ideals about community, belonging, and security organized around the citizen/nation/state trio in a globalized international system. It contends that the COVID pandemic may have stirred or animated simultaneously centrifugal nationalisms within the Western world and the richer countries, resulting in neopopulist policies and protectionist measures. It also argues that these same policies, exposing the structural precarities around the world, particularly acutely in the Global South, will likely fuel centripetal migrations across the globe. In the end, however, the chapter argues, both dynamics will likely further globalization, for both are a priori bound up with (and within) the already globalized productive infrastructure, composed of digital and knowledge industries, manufacturing and transportation sectors, and trade and finance institutions. Ultimately, it suggests that globalization is here to stay, though taking on different forms as evinced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## KEYWORDS

COVID-19, deglobalization, globalization, interdependence, precarity, state

Global responses to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2019–22 revealed two contradictory dynamics at work in contemporary globalization. On the one hand, many countries have scrambled to enact COVID-driven policies and practices that chip away from social, political, and even economic fluidity and interconnectedness in the world in the form of protectionist health measures, vaccine hoarding, and

travel restrictions. Some observers see such moves as evidence of deglobalizing tendencies. On the other hand, and paradoxically, the efficacy of many of the policies and practices is predicated upon the seamless work of the extant global economic infrastructure in manufacturing, transportation, and distribution. For example, some of the protectionist countries relied on India, a major vaccine manufacturer, for their vaccine supplies. Further, the COVID-driven nationalist practices in all countries relied on “knowledge globalization” (anchoring vaccine efforts). The same practices also exposed the structural vulnerabilities/precarities in many countries around the world in providing for their citizens—particularly acutely in the Global South.

In this chapter, I explore what these contradictory dynamics and paradoxical forces revealed about the current state and future prospects of globalization. Situating my analysis in the COVID-19 pandemic world, I examine how the COVID-driven processes have shaped/shifted ideals about community, belonging, and security organized around the citizen/nation/state triad in a globalized international system. I contend that the COVID pandemic is likely to stir or animate simultaneously centrifugal nationalisms (within the First World) and centripetal migrations (from the Global South). In the end, however, both dynamics, like the paradoxical dynamics I alluded to at the onset, will likely further globalization, for both are a priori bound up with (and within) the already globalized productive infrastructure, whether digital and knowledge industries or manufacturing or transportation sectors. Ultimately, I suggest that globalization is here to stay, though taking on different forms as evinced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### COVID-19 AND THE VIRAL ENDS OF GLOBALIZATION: A LITTLE VIRUS THAT COULD!

The COVID-19 epidemic catalyzed a crucial shift in thinking globally across the world’s countries. Some global flows present risks beyond ordinary challenges that rise to the level of security risk with implications for worldwide social and economic stability. COVID-19 quickly rose to such a level around the world, but not with an equal measure of alarm universally across the world’s countries. While the virus traveled at speeds equal to speeds of circulation of human matters in planetary circuits, its detection across the world varied from region to region or from country to country. Countries sitting at the nexus of global circulation detected the virus earlier in part due to their position in global circuits, and in part they had the resources to do so. France, Italy, Great Britain, Germany, and the United States were among those countries. At varying degrees of speed, these countries realized that the virus presented an uncertain future. But once the realization was in place, they moved swiftly to curb the flows of things, first the flow of international travel, then the mobility of citizens within, and, finally and unintentionally, the

flow of trade, that is, the flow of goods and commodities across the world. Other countries followed suit, first in the rest of Europe, East Asia, and also Australia and New Zealand, then in the rest of the world, such as in South America, where the responses imitated those of the richer countries of the world without being unable to muster similar resources of containment and alleviation. Within six months to a year, “the pandemic had caused the largest and fastest decline in international flows—including trade, foreign direct investment, and international travel—in modern history” (Altman, 2020). Such a snow-balling effect, curtailing if not decimating global flows so rapidly, was undesirable but not unexpected given the globalized capitalist infrastructure (of extraction, production, and supply chains) conditioning global interconnectedness and the networks of interdependence, more intense and coordinated, shaping the contemporary world.

Additionally, participants to the global knowledge economy, which permeated traditional fields of economic and political interactions, were suddenly thrown into a turmoil in terms of which “masters” (countries, companies, communities) to serve, and how and where, as they came under contradictory neopopulist as well as global, even cosmopolitan, pressures. Scientists, research centers, institutes, and universities situated around the global funding circuits shuffled their positions in pursuit of profitable partners. BioNTech, a German biotechnology company run by a Turkish-born scientist-couple, entered into a joint venture with the American pharma giant Pfizer in search of a vaccine. Astra-Zeneca, a British-Swedish multinational pharmaceutical and biotechnology company, teamed up with Oxford University. Russia and China had their own ventures with varying degrees of secrecy and success, as other countries scrambled to protect their own populations and institutions by isolation. The more they isolated, the more political and economic disjunctures in the global system were revealed. The COVID pandemic exposed or revealed many of these disjunctures. It revealed that globalization had not been a panacea for the world’s varied problems; that its promises of democratization of life across the planet had never fully materialized; and that the economic miracles foretold on its behalf had created untold riches for a few, uplifted many out of absolute poverty, but also either failed to free the broader masses from the extant precarities or created new forms of vulnerabilities in their lives, particularly through labor flexibilization policies.

Paradoxically, the COVID pandemic’s revelations showed that at stake was not the overall global capital-driven system’s strategic stability and survival, but rather its discursive internal constitution that served some at the expense of others. It revealed that countries and communities long taught to dictate the trajectories of globalization were themselves subject to the intended or unintended consequences of choices made and paths established. It became further clear that even their privileges within the system are precariously dependent on the complex interdependency that they helped to put in place but over which they now have limited or graduated control. For example, when medical-grade personal

protective equipment became scarce, thus most sought after, much of the world realized that only a few countries were designated by complex interdependence to make them. Similarly, the intensive care units (ICUs), specifically the parts, were increasingly up to China and India to supply even though the know-how was supplied to China globally. Especially in the “Western world,” the realization of this vulnerability to China or India or several other distant countries added fuel to the already raging neopopulist imagination dreaming of idealized autarchic societies and calling for deglobalization.

The COVID-19 virus was further revelatory beyond the West: it revealed that the complex interdependence had created a globalization through old and new hierarchies, rather than flattening hierarchies, as was promised in early pronouncements on behalf of globalization. Globalization had reached into the lives of people everywhere in the “Rest” beyond the “West,” but only to recalibrate their protracted subordination within the system. Ordinary peoples in some of the chronically exploited African countries can attest to their status. In countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, formal citizenship offers no meaningful rights and protections to citizens, but various modalities of subjection. Rare-earth minerals spirited out of the Congo through networks of globalization tell such a story of recalibration of subjection through desolation of their earth and abandonment of citizen bodies. Not even a faint trace of lives unearthing the minerals for the gods of globalization is duly accounted for in globalization tales. By virtue of their operating (ordering) logic anchored in capital accumulation and value extraction, globalizing agents, institutions, and structures intensified and deepened unequal exchanges regardless of which dominant actor was deriving the process. That was not the rhetorical promise of globalization when announced in the 1970s and 1980s, but largely became its reality in places like the Congo.

Impoverished communities not only in Africa but also in Asia and the Americas were made to realize once again that they are not any priority even if the strategically positioned few in their communities benefit from globally orchestrated structures arrangements. The Democratic Republic of the Congo’s president Laurent Kabila, along with his cronies, siphoned off billions of dollars, not unlike the former president cum dictator Mobutu Sese Soko, who went into exile with his loot of billions stashed in bank accounts of the global finance networks. Now the Chinese companies are said to own many of the Congo’s mineral mines, to the chagrin of Americans who used to be the orchestrators of wealth and poverty. Against this background of these enduring hierarchies highlighted by the viral disruption of COVID, the scramble by individual countries to “self-help” at any expense—closure of borders, lockdowns, hoarding of PPEs (personal protective equipment), pirating of ICUs (intensive care units), international monopolizing and prepurchasing of vaccine productions—further exposed the soft underbelly of affirmative pronouncements on globalization of and for humanity. A single virus

traveling globally had not only disrupted the mechanics of globalization but also shown fractures feeding on localization (and nationalization) of life.

#### DEGLOBALIZATION OR BUST?

Given all these revelations, it was not long before predictions about retreat or the demise of globalization were proliferating. Centripetal forces in the West and centrifugal pressures in the Global South appeared to add fuel to predictions. The Chatham House captured the consensus of those voices as to what is meant by deglobalization: “Deglobalization is a movement towards a less connected world, characterized by powerful nation states, local solutions, and border controls rather than global institutions, treaties, and free movement” (Kornprobst & Wallace, 2021). According to Irwin (2020), a process that was already underway was made more visible by the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic is driving the world economy to retreat from global economic integration. Policymakers and business leaders are now questioning whether global supply chains have been stretched too far. In an environment where alliances are uncertain and international cooperation is absent, they are also asking whether they should reduce their economic interdependence. National security and public health concerns are providing new rationales for protectionism, especially for medical gear and food, and an emphasis on domestic sourcing.

There is widespread agreement on this point among the observers. Some form of what might be called “deglobalization” has been occurring since the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. But “the coronavirus pandemic has accelerated the trend significantly,” stated a recent article (Marin, 2021). “Some issues are best handled domestically,” the Chatham House submitted, naming the supply-chain issue as the newly manifested Achilles’ heel of globalization during the pandemic. “The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates the danger of relying on global supply chains for essential medical supplies.” Ironically, what was once celebrated as the epitome of sophisticated globalization now presented itself as an underlying fracture or a disjuncture in the system. Untold riches were accumulated by a few companies strategically located as distributors of “things” in the cross-border value chains. Nevertheless, even those companies are having to recalculate their business models as observers predicted, “using data from the financial crisis, . . . that the COVID-19 shock is likely to lead to a 35% decline in cross-border value chains—the main factor driving globalization over the last three decades” (Marin, 2021). Similarly, other scholars observed:

The process of international economic integration, a major driver of the globalization process and of economic growth, has been slowing down since the global financial crisis (2008–09). The last decade has witnessed a decline in the growth of international trade in merchandise, a slowdown in the dynamism of global value chains (GVCs) and significant declines in international capital flows. (Akman et al., 2021)

Whether these are lasting trends in the *longue durée* of capitalism, or manifestations of an ordinary cycle of contraction or course correction in capitalist expansion, is up for discussion. Manfred B. Steger (2020: 129–30) offered three possible scenarios. Although envisioned long before the COVID pandemic hit, the first scenario presciently anticipated the potential for “backlash against globalization with the consequence of increased restrictions to movement and the strengthening of political authoritarianism.” An opposite scenario involved “the weakening of nationalist populism and a return to a neoliberal, left-leaning globalization, possibly with a high-tech face.” For some, the backlash appears to have the momentum in these days. Others, even those who recognize the power of “deglobalist sentiments,” see an inexorable global recovery in the years to come. Benedikter (2022: 8–11) captures the paradoxically interrelational and codependent dynamics of future globalizations, or reglobalization, when he points out that both the progressive idealist and conservative populist trajectories will feed off and animate each other even as they pursue their narrow objectives.

Since the 2000s, different concepts and practices of globalization have been in part at loggerheads with one another, in part coexisting with hardly any ideological value points of contact, despite close infrastructural, financial, economic or technological interlocking. (Benedikter, 2022: 8)

No matter the envisioned future, the discussions are bound to reveal that globalization is not an accidental value-free development, but a product of the value-laden orchestrations within the capital-driven worldwide system. Contemporary systemic shifts in multiple arenas of life ranging from political, economic, and technological fields all intersect through capitalist relations. Capitalism has functionally integrated all productive activities across the world, orchestrating their value or worth as part of its singular logic and ideology. As Steger put it, it has orchestrated “profound social transformations centered on the market” through “intensification and stretching economic connections across the globe” (2020: 38). Not only is there no outside to capitalism and market any more, as Jacques Derrida (1994) once suggested, but also, there is no uniform inside where differences should ideally melt into a productive cauldron in the service of the capital-driven system. Instead, presently all-encompassing, the system finds itself with deepening hierarches and sharpened internal contradictions and disjunctures. The COVID pandemic lifted the veil off of these systemic rifts. More lives have become economically precarious across the world both in the West and the Rest even as the capitalist economy grows and expands. According to the European Commission,

income inequality between countries has been decreasing but inequality within countries has been increasing. Seventy percent of the world’s population lives in countries where disparities between the wealthiest and poorest have grown over the last 30 years.<sup>1</sup>

While growing inequality does not directly correlate with precarity, it feeds precarity in the absence of policies and actions that would mediate the worst effects of inequality. There appears to be no sustained effort around the world to address dynamics other than rhetorical allusions to development, multilateralism, equity, et cetera. These patterns complicate the arguments that deglobalization is a return to the status quo ante, where the previously privileged West will turn inward, reshoring production in its economic realm once again and offering its citizens the economic privileges they once enjoyed. Given that capital is the driving force of global economy, this does not seem feasible, nor is it in congruence with the nature of capitalism. It's true that it is no longer the case that citizens of the Global West are the uniquely favored beneficiaries of global opportunities or that people of the Rest are condemned to suffer economically and politically. As Slavoj Žižek put it somewhat dramatically but succinctly, increasingly, "ordinary people all around the world are left behind or deserted by God and Country," now having to deal with their economic vulnerabilities on their own (Soguk, 2021). Similarly, more and more ecological and environmental degradation is introduced into the social and economic fabric even as the rhetoric of sustainability and resiliency is normalized and monetized in novel ways. According to the 2021 National Intelligence Council Estimate on Climate Change, global climate change alone will introduce unprecedented tensions and risks into the global geopolitical arena around cross-border issues like "the cost of decarbonization, predatory competition over scarce resources such as minerals, food and water, ungoverned geoengineering, and climate-induced human displacement" (NIC, 2021). Worse, universally, all living things, not least the actual human bodies, are being penetrated by a techno-logic, ever more effective and precise in its science and arguably more sinister and colonizing in its intent and reach. A RAND study on "Rethinking Security" for the Year 2040 lists some potential areas open to such eventualities:

AI exceeding human capabilities ("The Singularity" or "Super-Intelligence"); machines supplanting humans; and/or humans transferring their brains to computers ("eternalism"); AI rapidly displacing a significant portion of the labor force; genomic editing (CRISPR/Cas-9) becoming widespread; quantum computing [enabling nano technological subjectification of human and nonhuman life forms to intervention and surveillance]; Robotic and cyber warfare eclipsing human participation thus [delinking and distancing humans from destruction of human and nonhuman life forms]. (Hoehn et al., 2018: 8)

New forms of human and nonhuman life enslavement are indeed in the making! In his play *The Life of Timon of Athens*, Shakespeare has the character of Painter respond to the question of "How goes the world?" "It wears sir, as it grows" is the Painter's answer (Act I, Scene 1). The lesson here is relevant to the discussion on globalization at hand within the contemporary capital-driven system. As the world grows, it also wears itself down where the wears become the very price of

the world's capital-driven growth. While this growth characterizes itself as participatory or "democratic" in theory, in praxis, it has proven to be less than liberating, neither equality-envisioned nor equity-driven in intent or results. Wears and tears such as increasing precarity among people, mass migrations, ethnic, religious, and racial tensions, and climate change collectively compose a considerable part of the capitalist "inside" or "contents." None of these phenomena are exterior to capitalist "world-making" or "worlding." They are its frictional, if not functional, by-products or consequences in finance, trade, and technology. The COVID pandemic became the viral mirror on which all became visible even if only fleetingly.

### GLOBALIZATION REDUX

Planetary shifts bound up with relations and institutions of globalization are recasting the global geopolitics. As the proverbial world grows and tears and wears apart, producing wealth as simultaneously generating insecurities, capital's infrastructural forces as well as symbolic orders of the superstructure adapt and adjust both to secure the system and to suppress the dangers within. Dual demands weigh heavily on these forces and orders.

On the one hand, "globalization is associated with across-the-board liberalization, growing inequality, financial crisis, and a sense of not being able to control one's own economic and social destiny. COVID-19 has in many ways reinforced the belief that the pandemic wouldn't have been as bad if we weren't so open" (Massoud & Lee, 2021). On the other hand, and paradoxically, addressing many of the ill effects or the unexpected consequences of globalization will have to call upon the global relations and institutional mechanisms of coordination that have motored globalization in the first place. The first set of effects might fuel autarchic or even autochthonic tendencies. However, the level of economic integration that has fundamentally altered the world, especially through technology, will likely compel a return to the global framework in ideal and praxis. I see three reasons for such a future.

First, nothing has deeply shifted in the fundamental structure of the world economy. Comparative advantages, shifting as they are, still link the world's resources at once horizontally and hierarchically. Horizontal integration (linking) of peoples, places, and industries by their differentiation (hierarchizing) within the value exchange system will continue to spur globalization in light of the new global landscape. With new technologies enabling a global knowledge market, the drive for comparative advantage remains at the heart of the capital-dominated economies for which the entire world is a domain of activity. "Capitalism is rapacious, due to its quest for endless accumulation," wrote Charles C. Lemert. "But its obsession with change also makes it capacious, expanding and altering global capacity for new technologies, new relations, and speed . . . to overcome the conflicts arising" (Lemert, 2015: 166). Now more than likely, prolific discourse

on deglobalization being a possibility will “induce a significant qualitative shift in strategies, structures, and behaviors observable in international business (IB) . . . to develop a much deeper integration of politics” against antiglobalizing tendencies (Witt, 2019: 1053–58). Not only is there no fundamental evidence to the contrary along the lines deglobalization advocates suggest, but also the evidence shows that even the disjunctures and fractures, as exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, ultimately show that autarchy and autochthony are (a) not possible and (b) neither desirable (c) nor ultimately economically sustainable.

The case of vaccine manufacturing captures the dynamics of complex interdependence that cannot be undone without major ramifications. During the pandemic, India’s Serum Institute was named time and again as the largest vaccine producer in the world. The company is indeed a mega company that supplies India and the world with a plethora of vaccines. In 2020, the Serum Institute entered into an agreement with Oxford-Astra Zeneca to manufacture an affordable COVID vaccine, promising to reach a capacity of one hundred million COVID vaccines per month by April 2021 (Freyer, 2021). The company proved its worth during the Delta variant crisis by supplying Indian needs for vaccination. But its success in India came at the expense of the company’s promises to supply other countries. The primary reason for falling short turned out to be the company’s dependence for vaccine raw materials and equipment on its worldwide partners, especially in the United States. Among the capital equipment required for turning the drug substance into a vial are “bioreactors and filtration pumps . . . continuous supply of single use (disposable) materials such as bioreactor bags, filters, and tubing, as well as chemicals and cellular and other raw materials known as consumables . . . [finally] assembly lines to squirt liquid vaccine into millions of tiny vials, adding caps and labels, and then packaging them up for distribution” (Bown & Rogers, 2021). When a shortage materialized in this market, the Serum Institute’s capacity was hit hard, in effect, highlighting the complex interdependence at work in multiple directions. Interestingly, the United States experienced intensive care unit shortages for similar reasons in the supply chain providing parts for the devices. “Manufacturers of medical devices do not make every item that goes into their products by starting from raw materials . . . . They [buy] machined [*sic*] parts, electronic components, chemicals, and materials from suppliers around the world. Those suppliers, in turn, buy supplies from other suppliers, and so on” (Chen et al., 2021: 6). Examples along these lines abound, to show that despite disruptions, these global connections still afford comparative advantages and value, even as they sustain various economic hierarches and unequal relations across the globe. So long as comparative advantages retain their value and efficiency, they are likely to fuel globality through both scalable and nonscalable processes.

Second, the COVID pandemic proved revelatory of what may have gone wrong with globalization but also showed that a meaningful course correction will have to rely on the extant mechanisms and institutions of globalization. The well-heeled networks of trade, finance, capital, information, and people that regulate global

flows may be tinkered with in light of the discontents, but it would be unreasonable to expect substantive changes in their structures and objectives. Already, drivers of such networks, from major banks to transportation giants, are working to preempt the nature of the discussion about the discontents/disjunctures revealed by the COVID-19 crisis. The common message appears to be that the woes of globalization brought about by the pandemic are mostly over, as seen in the nearly full restoration of prepandemic global flows in four essential areas: trade, capital, information, and people.

COVID-19 has not caused globalization to collapse . . . . Trade in goods has surged to well above pre-pandemic levels, powerfully supporting the global recovery even as capacity challenges and trade tensions persist. The pandemic dealt a major blow to international capital flows, but portfolio equity flows stabilized in mid-2020 and foreign direct investment (FDI) rebounded sharply in 2021 . . . . The pandemic hit international people flows the hardest, and they are on track to recover the slowest . . . . Global flow patterns show no evidence of a major shift toward regionalization. Long-distance trade has grown faster than short-distance trade during the pandemic . . . . The world's poorest countries are falling behind in the globalization recovery. Stronger global connectedness could accelerate the world's recovery from COVID-19. Vulnerabilities highlighted by the pandemics should be addressed for a more prosperous and resilient future. (Altman & Bastian, 2021)

This DHL report was effusively received as great news. The World Economic Forum trumpeted it by declaring: “Globalization and world trade bounce back from the impact of COVID-19: report” (Broom, 2021). Linking the article to a piece on the “Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation,” a private-public partnership initiative of “Platform for Shaping the Future of Trade and Investment,”<sup>3</sup> the World Economic Forum asked, “Have you read? Why the world needs better—not less globalization” (Broom, 2021).

Tellingly, in all these conversations, there is only a whisper of an acknowledgment that return to “normal” demands attention to some issues. For example, the DHL report’s takeaways speak of the “world’s poorest countries . . . falling behind in the globalization recovery.” “Vulnerabilities highlighted by the pandemics should be addressed for a more prosperous and resilient future,” it insists (Altman & Bastian, 2021). Four areas are named as deserving immediate attention and coordination for a more prosperous future ahead: “Fortify global and regional supply chains; Bolster trade agreements and international institutions; Prevent the world’s poorest countries from falling further behind; [and] Secure the future of digital globalization” (Altman & Bastian, 2021). Ian Goldin and Robert Muggah similarly argue that “the pandemic offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reset globalization to ensure that the benefits are more widely shared and the threats it compounds—pandemics, climate change, inequality and so on—are greatly reduced” (Goldin & Muggah, 2020).

Conceivably, each of these areas can potentially fuel both competitive and cooperative orientations and capacities, especially given the intersectionality of

technology with global economic functions. However, as noted before, the transverse nature of the challenges to global capitalism's infrastructural and superstructural (symbolic) edifices, from global health crises and climate change to mass migration, are likely to induce substantial collective problem-solving capabilities beyond comparative competitiveness. For example, every predicted natural effect of climate change, ranging from extreme temperature variations, droughts, and heavy precipitation to sea level rise, is predicted to necessitate transborder collaboration and coordination. The imperative for cooperation is rooted in the objective to avoid exacerbating conflicts over natural and manufactured resources. "Epistemic communities of problem-solving" will likely emerge as reasoned responses. The drive to retain and enhance some national capacities may remain in the face of popular agitation in more advanced economies but will have to intersect with global risk management efforts that are needed for capital's mobility and access to resources around the world. Out of sheer necessity, the future is likely to be shaped in equal measure by pragmatic cooperation and reflexive competition.

There is now more noise about supporting multilateralism and international policy organizations and careful regulation to foster such a future. "The coronavirus pandemic has . . . demonstrated that unregulated globalization can be dangerous" (Farrell & Newman, 2020). "Building multilaterally with mega-regional bricks" is one idea in an effort to build consensus on world economy from the regional to the global level, as opposed to orchestrating consensus globally from the top down. The proliferation of voices on the whole is in favor of more globalization, not less, with some talking about reforming globalization by tweaking its functional cogs and others calling for more drastic shifts in its mechanical operations towards what they call "democratic globalization." Yet others assess an interconnected understanding involving "*refining, reframing, reforming, redefining* and/or *reversioning* [globalization's] current status and mechanisms, as well as its concepts and methodologies" (Benedikter & Kofler, 2019). With the latter, the hope is to envision concepts and practices that mediate a more inclusive and resilient globalization at all levels.

Third, at the outset of the chapter I argued that the COVID pandemic has already fueled centrifugal nationalist or neopopulist sentiments around the world, especially within the proverbial Western world and less vociferously in the Global South. Calls abound for "returning" to self-sufficiency on account of the "negative externalities" of global flows on national milieus. One group of observers contented that "externally networked structures at the global scale" not only fuel anxieties derived from immigration and "elevate risk of contagion in financial downturns," but also "increase inequality and social polarization" (Balsa-Barreiro et al., 2020). President Emmanuel Macron of France echoed the sentiment, stating that the COVID pandemic "will change the nature of globalization, with which we have lived for the past 40 years," adding that it was "clear that this kind of globalization was reaching the end of its cycle" (Irwin, 2020).

Accompanying these sentiments are messages from the “Global Rest” that a retreat from globalization, if feasible at all, will not deliver relief from what Edouard Glissant called the *chaos monde* (the world that contains immensely plural experiences resistant to control) that is nevertheless organized and choreographed into the global whole, the entire world in relations—*tout-monde* (1997: 94). The “echoes” of the world are already inextricably within the orchestrated “chaos” of global capitalism. Capitalism works to extract economic cohesion out of the world’s chaos. A neopopulist retreat without structural changes to the prevailing relations of unequal exchange will further exacerbate structural inequalities and exhilarate global migration. Ignoring transversally or transnationally generated precarities or vulnerabilities of the people in the margins is, as mentioned, sure to feed centripetal migrations (from the Global South). In the end, however, both dynamics, like the paradoxical dynamics I alluded to at the outset, will likely further globalization, for both are a priori bound up with (and within) the already globalized productive infrastructure, whether digital and knowledge industries or mining or manufacturing or transportation sectors.

For example, calls for a retreat from global integration in the West assume a return of the strong national state as an arbiter. Some countries such as Russia, Hungary, and Poland already bill themselves as exemplars in this regard. However, there are also calls for which “the retreat” means altogether something else in the Global South. Walden Bello expressed their underlying meaning as early as in 2002:

Deglobalization is not a synonym for withdrawing from the world economy. It means a process of restructuring the world economic and political system so that the latter builds the capacity of local and national economies instead of degrading it. Deglobalization means the transformation of a global economy from one integrated around the needs of transnational corporations to one integrated around the needs of peoples, nations, and communities. (Bello, 2002: 108)

We know that Bello’s vision has not materialized in any real measure. In some measure, Bello’s words still resonate when he argues that “the defining logics of contemporary capitalism—from the pervasiveness of debt to financialization, from the precarization of work to the penetration of entrepreneurial rationality into the institutional management of welfare and migration—are far from being challenged.” At the same time, neo-authoritarianist visions in places like Russia, Hungary, and China, always in need of continuing legitimacy, appear to call into question some of the mechanisms of capitalist logic—though not for the purposes of altering the fundamentals of capitalism but for making them serve their increasingly oligarchical interests. Ironically, challenges from the Left remain anemic against the background of Left politics that has largely jettisoned “class” as an organizing or ordering factor. Given these realities, overall, the conversations on the post-COVID world are already about affirmation of the fundamentals of the

capitalist logic, and nation-states' role within, not challenging these fundamentals. The UNCTAD declared that much under the "prosperity for all" slogan: "UNCTAD's Handbook of Statistics for 2021 published on 9 December nowcasts a strong increase of 22.4% in the value of global merchandise trade this year compared with 2020. The strong growth will push the value of world trade in goods about 15% higher than before the COVID-19 pandemic hit."<sup>4</sup> In its report "The Future of Globalization," Wells Fargo was similarly optimistic in its fidelity to capital-driven globalization. The report starts with an abiding confidence in globalization where national institutions simply serve as conveyor belts for global recovery: "We believe that crosscurrents in technological, economic, and political forces likely will change the contours of globalization but not end it . . . The familiar pattern of extended supply chains fragmented across multiple low-wage production centers appears to be evolving toward more concentrated, high-tech, and regional trade. We believe that globalization is evolving toward much broader and persistent opportunities in traded services and cutting-edge technologies."<sup>5</sup>

The role ascribed to the national states in his vision anticipates no change in position but in their proximity with levers of economic orchestration. The return of states does not demand distancing from the capitalist externalities beyond a nation's borders. Rather, it installs states as "regulators . . . in tight association with multinational private capitals, whose weight in national economies is growing more and more" (Mezzedra & Neilson, 2013: 178). The Atlantic Council prescribes the role for the United States starkly: "Seize the historic moment to lead" (Cimmino et al., 2020: 2). "With cooperation, determination, and resolve, the United States and its allies can recover from the crisis and revitalize an adapted rules-based system to bring about decades of future freedom, peace, and prosperity" (Cimmino et al., 2020: 2).

## CONCLUSION

Sandro Mezzedra and Brett Neilsen argue that "borders remain central to the heterogeneous organization of space and time under global capital." But, by borders, they refer not simply to state borders but to the boundaries constructed discursively. "Understanding the border in a wide sense," they argue, "is by no means limited to the conventional geopolitical line." It may mean, for instance, "urban divides within cities." It may mean "limits surrounding 'special economic zones.'" It may refer to the "shattering of old spatial hierarchies, the reshuffling of geographies of development, and the emergence of new regionalisms and patterns of multilateralism." It may also invoke the "resistance of the poor against the economies of urban extraction surrounding slums and the many struggles, which have sprung up in the world's factories and sweatshops" (Mezzedra & Neilsen, 2013). Capital organizes the world through these proliferating borders.

Thus, the discussion about globalization need not be, nor can it be, reduced to a certain territorial retreat from the world into nations' boundaries. The tendency to cast the discontents about globalization in such territorial terms also delimits the critical, even emancipatory, responses that can be imagined and activated. As much as territories are associated with sovereign statehood, peoplehood, and citizenship, they also have already been penetrated by global capitalism as "a political technology for organizing social and economic relations" (Mezzedra & Neilsen, 2013). While these relations have sovereign spatial dimensions in terms of a right of the state to regulate, they are also inflected by or incorporated into extrasovereign transversal interests that are not easily amenable to sovereignty claims and demands.

Ultimately, for all the noise around deglobalization, antiglobalization, or retreat from globalization, not to mention "slowbalization," globalization as a process appears to be here to stay for the foreseeable future (Feffer, 2019). The fractures and disjunctures exposed by the COVID pandemic may unleash both centripetal and centrifugal forces, but will do so into the already hyperconnected world. Paradoxically, what may simultaneously empower these seemingly contradictory forces and dynamics is the very infrastructure of capital-driven globalization, along with the "symbolic order" or the superstructure, as Pierre Bourdieu (1998: 82) called it, that discursively supports and legitimizes the capitalist world-making. Ironically, then, both the infrastructural and the symbolic networks that regulate capital's messages inevitably also host the global solidarities in resistance to capitalist projects and programs. Of course, the resilience of globalizing forces does not mean the "end of history" with globalization triumphing permanently, as there is no inexorability into the immediate future and beyond. The discursive formation of the constitutive elements undergirding globalization is always subject to historical shifts, now favoring capital but later, perhaps, favoring human (and nonhuman) solidarities defined beyond capital-driven "accumulation, dispossession, and exploitation." In a historical twist, an infinitesimally small virus revealed that change is always in the offing in all that may appear solid.

#### NOTES

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