

**The political to come.
Notes on the transformation of the public space in the late globalization¹**

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Abstract

These notes are intended to explore the transformation public space is undergoing in the time of globalisation by reviewing the work of some most reputed social scholars, particularly Saskia Sassen, Manuel Castells, Arturo Escobar and Doreen Massey.

The notes move from a preliminary description of the routines, procedures, institutions and cultures in which globalisation materialises. Social and political consequences of economic and financial globalisation are considered together with the re-conceptualisation of some crucial categories of political studies (such as the concept of collective identity, power relations, political actor and public space). Specifically 'public space' is defined as the space where political life deploys through material and discursive practices endowed with collective relevance.

Three crucial topics are focused. The first one relates to the space *for* the public space, i.e. *where* the public space happens to take place; it particularly refers to the growth of global cities and the emerging network topography. The second pertains to political agency, by considering how the loss of power of traditional political institutions at national level is compensated by the raising of new forms of power, determined by socio-economic actors able to influence public affairs. The third is represented by the transformation of local actors into global actors whose collective identity has been radically re-shaped by the use of ICT. These actors are actively involved in the structuration of 'the political', interpreted as the domain where non-institutional (or non-formal) agents give rise to social, economic, cultural and political negotiations. These actors adopt a broad array of diverse means, and, eventually, originate a constructive social antagonism that shapes the current form of the public space.

On the basis of these considerations, these notes suggest some peculiar characteristics of the current 'late globalisation', that are suggested as worthwhile of further exploration.

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Introduction

Financial crisis currently affecting the western world have brought to everybody's attention the evidence that traditional political actors are not anymore the only artifices of political events (in the case of the recent financial crisis in the US and now affecting Europe a decisive role has been played, for instance, by rating agencies, central banks, informal social movements, financial intermediaries, etc.). Economic, financial, political and social consequences of global events affect our way of thinking about relevant concepts in social science (such as the concept of local identity, geographical proximity, virtual space, people's participation, etc). The main purpose of these notes is to consider how globalisation is changing *per se* and how this change is modifying the public space – and at what price.

Most social scientists, particularly Critical Thinkers,² contributed in the past decades to drawing a portrait of globalised world that is now broadly accepted as the conventional wisdom. Specifically, they suggested a contemporary world to be characterised by a huge number of planetary connections that produce the disembedding of the social and natural environment, the deterritorialisation of culture, and the people's disengagement from social and political participation (Taylor 1990). Virtual relations have been regarded as overwhelming physical and geographical dimensions of ordinary life, traditionally linked through places. This makes it difficult to sustain any notion of place as settled, bounded and homogenous and, as a consequence, it induces people to believe they are living in a mutable world and they need to struggle for a secure and stable place to dwell (Harvey, 1989). Paradoxically, the universal search for stability and security, which is hardly viable in the dispersed landscape of late modernity, made it possible the coexistence of cosmopolitanism and parochialism (Geertz, 2000); it is not surprising, indeed, that globalisation, while advocating for interrelatedness, also produces claims for local autonomy. Today, the need for a place to call home is often instrumentally revitalised in form of exclusivist nationalism, regionalism and localism that results in a romanticised and jingoistic form of localism (Massey, Jess, 1995, p.49).

The fear of local places de-territorialisation and traditional values vanishing becomes endemic as far as places are not perceived anymore as protective nests (Taylor, 2007; 2004). Places are progressively transforming into non-places and this induces a broad array of 'spatial pathologies' (the sense of being lost, of being offsite, the permanent inattention to the physical context, the indifferent relation toward every local orientation system, etc.) (LaCecla, 1988). As Marc Augè reminds us "in opposition from the sociological notion of place, associated by Mauss and a whole ethnological tradition with the idea of a culture localized in time and space" (Augè, 1995, p.34), modernity requires the existence and worldwide diffusion of non-places. Those are places that cannot be defined as relational, historical, or peculiar; they are functional places with no spirit, everywhere similar everywhere in the world (airports, hospitals, hotels chains, refugee camps, supermarkets, etc.). In this portrait of globalisation, local places and local people are considered as the losers, because 'the locale' is regarded as a remnant of the past and it is associated with labour, tradition, minorities, poverty, etc., while the future is appropriated by the global and everything it is associated with (urban centres, History, market, action, etc.) (Massey, 2005).

However, despite this view appropriately reflects the birth of modern globalisation, it needs today to be integrated with some considerations about the internal (and more recent)

² Differences and affinities in contemporary political thinkers are hard to be schematized, nonetheless, by following S. Best's and D. Kellner's *Postmodern Theory. Critical Interrogations* (The Guildford Press, New York, 1991), those who recognise their inspiration in Frankfurt School or explicitly reject postmodernism (such as J. Habermas, K. Eder or U. Beck...) can be defined Critical Thinkers.

transformations of globalisation into 'late globalisation'. The main references to this work are Saskia Sassen's analysis of globalisation and global cities' role in the international arena; Manuel Castells's work on the relation amongst local, global and collective identities; Arturo Escobar's insights on the social movements agency; and Doreen Massey's masterpieces on contemporary space. These authors do not share a common background, neither do they work in the same theoretical field, but by integrating their analyses it is possible to obtain an interesting and coherent interpretation of the dramatic symbolic and material transformations public space is experiencing.

1. Globalisation on the borders

Globalisation entails two different dynamics: the formation of institutions explicitly global (such as the WTO, the UN, the IMF.); and a number of processes that are part of globalisation even if they do not necessarily occur at the global scale (e.g. the trimming of financial nets) (Sassen, 1988). The increasing globalisation of the world-economy challenges the role of national politics, and induces a disarticulation of the regional and sectorial economies by decentralising production chains and facilities provision, so that multinational corporations keep the economic (and, consequently, the political) power over the fate of States. As a matter of facts, States have lost control over a number of processes that were traditionally amongst their prerogatives: the financial and exchange markets, the internal market (that largely became dependent on the global capital and the supranational economic organisation), the welfare States and the environmental issues, the intervention of privatised charities, foundations in humanitarian crisis, the control over separatist forces, the regulation of labour and workers market influenced by transboundary flows of people, etc (Sassen, 1998). Other locations for legitimacy emerge in new institutional and non-institutional arenas and compress and compress the autonomy and authority of the State. For instance, because large companies do not establish their residence necessarily inside the borders of the nation where they produces goods (off shoring practices), there is no correspondence between the localisation of productive processes and the scale over which the governments may exercise fiscal pressure. Another example is provided by the automation of financial markets by means of information technologies: as financial markets operate in economic space, this leaves central banks incapable of controlling interest rates as they should (Sassen, 2007). The geographical dispersion of factories and firms induces a decrease of relevance of local policies that become largely irrelevant face to face with the international regime (Sassen, 2007). Hence, States becomes a mere implementer of global economic system blessed by capitalist model.

Putting together these instances affect two crucial features of the States, i.e. national sovereignty and exclusive territoriality (Sassen, 2006). Territorial land is partially denationalised and sovereignty is shifted away from national toward international or transnational institutions.³ While, in the past, borders were intended to control, to protect and to govern, today we are assisting to the progressive and inexorable crumbling of the borders that have become porous (Elden, 2010). States borders are continuously eroded and became extremely permeable to the traffic of ideas, investments, goods, money, etc. and this exposes national (and local) territories to external influences that overwhelm the geographical possibilities of the single governments to control over them. Furthermore, an expanding fraction of economic activities takes place in electronic spaces that overrides all jurisdictions and produces a decline of States control over their economies.

Borders, nonetheless, are not only geographical lines but they also materialise in treaties, agreements, diplomatic negotiations, etc. (Sassen, 1996). As a consequence, cross-bordering

³ The recent phenomenon of land grab is a clear example of denationalisation of national territories.

processes do not always imply the physical passage through the frontiers (still remaining this the principal form), but they also occur via the adoption of commercial treaties, economic agreements, and juridical provisions. Indeed, differently from what is commonly thought, globalisation does not entail the absence of regulatory regimes or the vanishing of institutional authorities; rather it implies the existence of different rules and institutions with comparison to the traditional ones (such as the international commercial arbitration or rating and advisory agencies).

Globalisation does not merely create a space out of the regulatory power of the States; it downgrades and reshapes it. New claims that guarantee the domestic global right of the capital emerge. In the past decades a number of prerogatives traditionally under the authority of the State, have been conferred to UN agencies implementing Human Rights or cognate treaties, which gain authority and independence, while States have maintained their role of guarantors of people's rights as far as citizens. Similarly, global capital markets became independent and advanced specific claims that lead to the production of innovative forms of legality, thanks to the diffusion of free market mainstream, liberalist political models and a new legal regime for governing cross-border economic transactions. In this context, it is not surprising how deeply the growth of the global economy affected and reconfigured the idea of States governance and accountability through *ad-hoc* practices and institutions (i.e. the creation of global financial markets, the ascendance of Anglo-American law firms in international businesses transactions, the setting up of the Uruguay round and WTO, the power gained by credit-rating agencies, the GATT and NAFTA provisions for the circulation of workers, etc.).

Nonetheless, despite these conditions create an economic and political space that goes beyond the regulatory umbrella of the States, real territories, material processes and States institutions still are crucial for globalisation. As a matter of fact, the strategic space for many global processes to take place is the one where national institutions (together with the infrastructure of the international arena) set up the appropriate conditions for them to be implemented. States are not only the losers in the global era but they are also the sources of a new political regime determined by the negotiations between national sovereignties and transnational practices of corporate private actors, international institutions, and worldwide citizens (Thrift, 1996).

2. The space *for* the public space

Globalisation influences the constitution of public space, both at the local and the global level, the formation of new claims and the entering of new actors in the political arena (Andersen, 2011). In these notes, the idea of public space is made coincident with the idea of political space. This means that public space is not considered as opposed to private space, rather as the space where 'the political' may deploy and assume different forms. Borrowing Chantal Mouffe's definition (still not totally sympathizing with her position),⁴ politics can be defined as the "ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and organise human coexistence" (Mouffe, 1999, p. 754); while 'the political' is defined as "the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in different types of social relations" (Mouffe, 1999, p. 754). In this work's view the political is regarded as a broad array of (not merely antagonist) practices, thoughts, movements, assemblages; despite the fact that some of them may seem distant from what has been generally interpreted as political, they are nonetheless *intrinsically* political as their aim is to set up public life and societal organisation. The space where political life happens to take place is here referred to as public space.

⁴ Mouffe largely build upon Carl Schmidt's insights (particularly on his account of 'the political' as the product of friend-enemy relations) but she does not follow him in the rejection of liberal democracy.

The growth of global economy, the power acquired by financial institutions, and the rapid diffusion of new technologies has profoundly destabilised and reconfigured some classic features of the political domain, which proved to be sensitive to spatial transformations. Particularly, the formation of new (and multiple) economic systems centred on cross-border flows and global telecommunications affects the distinction between territorial and non-territorial processes; geographically dispersed corporate activities contribute to the growth of centralised managerial functions; specialised services proliferate; and non-local based socio-political networks are enabled by the expansions of transnational urban systems. The profitability for geographical dispersal of firms' plants, offices and production facilities is clearly exemplified by the delocalisation of assembly lines in manufacturing, or for the export-processing zones (Sassen, 1998). These are areas subject to special tariff and taxation regimes that allow firms to export semi-processed components for further processing in low-wage countries and to re-import them back to the origin country without tariffs on the added-value obtained through processing.

Despite the decentralisation and even neglect in the global era, caused by the displacement of locally-based production processes, geographical localisation does not lose its relevance. Indeed, many of the resources necessary for global economies are inextricably rooted in specific places (in extractive areas, in global cities, in territorial economies, etc.) (Sassen, 2006). The local, as these notes claim, still constitutes the very matter of the global. Neither States nor national institutions completely lose their relevance because geo-political localisation plays a significant role in defining the fate of economic activities. Even if the establishment of a firm in a State does not mean that it can be defined as 'national' (because it can be economically, legally and symbolically localised in the global space), however, States are fundamental agents in the implementation of globalisation processes and in providing the location for them to exist (Sassen, 1996).

Diverse places have diverse relations with international economy, some of them are outstations of production for multinational companies, others are the base of financial empires, others are global amusement locations, etc. Nonetheless, all of them share some common features: they all provide the very substance for the global imaginary that may assume different spatial forms by shaping local territories: edge cities (core business areas where financial and economic management concentrate), suburban residential areas, exopolis, marginalised peripheries, historical centres, commercial boroughs, etc. (Sassen, 2006). Space needs thus to be read as "a network topology, which is [...] as an undulating landscape in which the linkages established in network draw some locations together while at the same time pushing others further apart" (Murdoch, 2005, p.86). In the network topology, proximity cannot be defined anymore in terms of spatial distance, rather it is better described in terms of relation proximity amongst diverse spots of the net on the base of their similarity linkages (Certomà, 2009).

Thus it becomes, thus, evident the need for re-scaling social analysis, i.e. for destabilising old scale hierarchies in the face of the emergence of new scales that transversally cut the institutional dimension and the territorial organisation determined by national States geometry – which has been long assumed as the 'natural' and primitive object for political science. While the hierarchical model seems not to be adequate anymore, neither the nested hierarchy model (which assumes the local to be part of a hierarchy of nested scales determined by territorial closeness) serves the purpose (Sassen, 2007). The multi-scalar character of globalisation processes (e.g. the operative space of multinational companies that requires diffuse networks of worldwide affiliates and concentrates strategic functions in one or few places) and the growing net of global cities makes evident the inappropriateness of hierarchical or nested model of analysis because they determine a new geography of centrality and marginality in which several global processes assumes localised forms. Geography of centrality and marginality cuts the division between North-South and produces a

reshaping of global politics by stressing interurban configurations, intense financial transactions, worldwide services, etc., and the related inequalities in the concentration of strategic resources. Global cities (for instance, New York, Tokyo, Paris, Frankfurt, Zurich, Amsterdam, Hong Kong, Taipei, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, Mumbai, etc.) have a leading role in the emerging configuration of the global public space. Since the '80s onward, major transformations in the world economy renewed the importance of cities, and turned them into hotspots for the analysis of social transformations. Cities are clear examples of how global processes extended into national territories and national institutional arrangements, because in the cities a large part of what we perceive as local is a micro-environment of global range and condenses several 'locales' in the same space (Sassen, 2006). While cities were traditionally embedded in the territorial economies, nowadays they become strategic sites largely disconnected from the spatial context. Because of the weakening of States authority, economic globalisation and interconnected communications contributed to the creation of urban centres connecting transboundary nets and territories provided with great resources concentration.

At the same time, re-introducing cities in the social analysis allows consideration of the actual and situated economic complexes; to appreciate the multiplicity of economies and work cultures in which global information economy is embedded; to recover the localised processes and multiculturalism as part of globalization; to draw a new geography of political engagement for traditionally disadvantaged actors; to break down national States monoliths into a variety of components; to shift the focus from the power of multinational corporations over governments and national economies toward the organizational arrangements necessary for the implementation of global network factories and markets. Cities are strategic sites for the expansion of global capital and, at the same time, for the empowerment of 'others' cultures and identities generated in the postcolonial discourse. This combination occurs because cities articulate a large number of transbordering movements (international migrations, civil society activism, cultural trends, new political identity, etc.) and recompresses them in a relatively small fraction of space. They are the location for global capital to expand, as well as the ground for contesting it.

It goes without saying that the huge varieties of overlapping histories taking place in the global cities determine/are determined by an internal geography of marginality and centrality (downtowns, metropolitan business centres, low income areas starving for resources, commercial boroughs, etc.). Alongside spatial dispersal of economic activities, also new forms of territorial centralization of top-level management appear, as well as form of marginalisation of neglected industrial areas and working people. Cities are today the new frontiers where, on the base of undefined rules, inhabitants of very diverse – still contemporary- worlds meet: managerial elites coexists and interacts day by day with outsiders, minorities and disadvantaged people.⁵

International business people's claims on the city contribute to change the morphology of the metropolis and shape them as manifestations of late-modernism, characterised by hyper-concentration of facilities, highly specialised services, and speed telecommunication infrastructures (Sassen, 2006a). In a global economy that allows ipermobility (i.e. instantaneous circulation via globally-extended digital nets) of capital and goods, a crucial role is played by central corporate functions. Despite its virtual character, high-level business companies rests in the city because by moving they would devaluate the fixed assets represented by the investments in real estates; and because face to face relations are crucial for business, as it often requires marginally illegal negotiations. Cities concentrate infrastructures and services for global control and this makes them adequate sites for command and control of the global economy, key locations and marketplace for

⁵ Frontier that were traditionally at the border of the empires, now have been internalised (Elden, 2010).

leader productions (particularly finance and specialised services) and innovation. In fact, there are no completely virtual companies, neither completely digital works because they all require strategic sites for infrastructure, laboratories and resources. In order to provide telecommunication services, companies need land, materials, cables, machines – and, by the way, in here resides the possibility of control by the State (Barry, 2001), in the *topoi* of e-space.

Cities also generates low income unskilled jobs because global networks of production need not to internalise workers and suppliers; they merely need to access them when and however required in any particular instance (Sassen, 2006a). As a result the expansion of city functioning increases flexibility and adaptability in the work market and this, in turn, pushes disempowered actors to emerge as political subjects, thanks to the diffusion of ICT that relocate politics away from conventional political arenas. They rise for a new kind of politics characterised by the competition for urban space - a space that is usually defined by local contents but whose character is global (Harvey, 1973). In doing this, they participate in the emergence of transnational collective identities that are deeply embedded in particular locations because they originate from people's self-perception as part of global nets - a vision of the global in the micro-space of daily life.

In contrast with Sassen, Manuel Castell affirms that the increment of home-based ICT is inducing the decline of the dense urban forms (city agglomerates) and of spatially localised interactions (Castells, 1998). He names the new rarefied cities as 'informational cities', and describes them as processes (rather than forms) characterised by structural domination of flows. Flows are supported by three layers. The first represents the very material base and it is constituted by electronic impulse (microelectronic, computer processing, broadcasting systems, high speed transportations, etc.); the second is composed by nodes and hubs for smooth interaction; while the third is given by the spatial organisation of society characterised by the opposition between the space of flows and the space of places. Global society is constructed around flows (of capital, information, technology, symbols, images, etc.) that generate a new spatial logic. Flows are purposeful, repetitive and programmable sequences of interactions between physically disjointed positions. On the base of recurrent flows elites form their own space and build up symbolically secluded (i.e. self-excluded) communities (Massey, 1999); they are cosmopolitan, while people are local. According to Castells, people do not actively participate in the space of flows; rather they live and act in the space of place. This is characterised by permanence (or slow changes) as its form, function and meaning are self-contained within fixed geographical and temporal boundaries.

However, despite the space of flows is altering the meaning and the internal dynamic of space, nevertheless places still occupy a core position in the late globalisation (Barry, 2001). And, together with places, also people inhabiting them (and participating in translocal solidarity activities, international political engagement, transborder business, intercultural education, etc.) they are claiming their seat in the global arena.

3. The reconfiguration of political agency

The loss of power at national level produces the possibility for new political forms at subnational and supranational level to emerge, because the outward delocalisation of political agency allows unexpected actor to sit in the political arena; it is not a case that the quest for alternative forms of political representation emerged when the traditional ones lost popularity. This can be interpreted in terms of an incipient unbinding of the exclusive authority over territory and people that has been long associated with the national States (Massey, 1991), as relocation of authority produced a governance without government. Under these conditions, globalisation implied the attribution of some sovereignty prerogatives of the States to other political actors (Stengers, 1997).

Non-State actors enter in the international public space as individuals and collectivises. Supranational institutions, multinational companies, civil society associations, think-tanks, etc., are all emerging political actors - still obviously not all of them have the same weight in political negotiations. These new political identities ask for the acknowledgment of their presence, relevance and role in the public space and make possible new forms of politically relevant engagements outside of the Parliaments (Latour, Weibel, 2005). Thus, the global public space became a borderless space where heterogeneous and multiform actors take their seat and advance their instances by deploying a broad array of tools, some of which are very unconventional and radically different from the classic political tools adopted in democratic regimes (i.e. propaganda, demonstrations, elections, petitions, etc.) and much more similar to those adopted in business sectors (i.e. trading, marketing, acquisitions, fusions, investments, lobbying, etc.).

These notes particularly focus on the social movements side, a complex political universe that includes a plethora of different groups whose aims (taking power, contesting power, abolishing power, etc.) and means (pacific protest, guerrilla, up-raising, riots, cultural opposition, etc.) are definitely heterogeneous. While these movements may seem not so different from those which populated the piazzas some decades ago, nonetheless their identities, objectives and strategies are radically changed in the present days.

The extensive use of cyberspace ICTs has been, and is indeed, crucial in the formation of a cross-bordering public space that does not need the mediation of global institutions and does not depend on all actors being present in the same location. They allow corporate sector and civil society (the main users) to bypass the control of central authority and to take part in global affairs while sitting in one's own local place (Marres, Rogers, 2005). ICTs enabled firms to adopt agile management approaches and to foster services development; and, at the same time, internet, peer-to-peer and wiki technologies are exploited by civil society to create new forms of activism. New types of practices and new political subjectivities emerge because ICTs stress local's acting capability to engage (and, at the same time, to contest) the *globalocentric* perspective and allow even those geographically immobile (such as indigenous people, peasants, etc.) to claim their seat in the international political arena (Escobar, 1994). As a matter of fact, cyber-tools provide a prime mechanism for scaling-up the networks "through which subaltern groups seek to redefine power and defend and construct their identities" (Escobar, 1990, p.50). Cyberpolitics operates in two directions: by connecting a local struggle with similar struggles in the world, and by engaging global actors on local issues. The creation of social networks (originated by transbordering geographies) is a crucial element of cyberpolitics, as well as the development of appropriate technical infrastructures. While local networks existed for centuries, nonetheless in the global era the number of possible connections largely transcended any physical constraint (and often, any imagination). Thanks to the digital links between organisations that involve informal actors, the political is assuming a new shape. As philosopher Thomas Lemke puts it: "What we observe today is not a diminishment or a reduction of States sovereignty and planning capacities but a displacement from formal to informal techniques of government and the appearance of new actors on the scene of government (e.g. NGOs), that indicate fundamental transformations in statehoods and a new relation between States and civil society actors." (Lemke, 2000, p.11).

Contrary to the common wisdom, cyberpolitics does not (or, at least, not exclusively) produce a form of disembodied and disembodied politics, rather it enhances a form of politics deeply embedded in people's action and activities, still deploying internet-based communities. Web activism effectively shapes places in different ways: by requiring material devices (infrastructures, cables, etc.), by entailing the existence of public and private services (telephonic contract, norms, etc.), and by supporting the emergence of web-based political collectives. The electronic space itself

is embedded in broader social dynamics; it is inscribed and shaped by power and allows spaces of contestation as well as new ways for governance (Sassen, 2006). We think at it as characterised by absence of hierarchy and enabling a form of distributed power, because the World Wide Web is regarded as a (virtual) space free from direction centre, monopoly or privilege (Castells, 1998). Nonetheless, the growth of economic value and the profitability of communications create a pressure for its deregulation and privatisation; public networks are commercialised and hierarchies emerge in private networks and produce cyber-segmentation (Sassen, 1998). Cyberspatial inequalities arise, for instance, between those who can pay for faster connections and those who can't; sharp separation in services distribution increase inequalities both in the physical world and in electronic space. Several forms of exclusion are determined by the distinction between easy accessible contents and tools for the masses, and exclusive areas only accessible by the class-society (Bard, Söderqvist, 2002). Technological goods constitute a divide because the development of integrated digital networks depends on the possibility to operate on a technological base. Thus, ICTs at the same time reduce the relevance of material relations (with all the disembedding effects outlined in the first chapters) and enact them because "despite the importance of cybertools [...] a lot of what needs to be changed depends on power relations in the real world"(Escobar, 1999, p.50). Furthermore, ICTs diffusion makes possible several forms of power, such as the expansion of financial market (based on speed, simultaneity, and interconnectivity of the web), that, in turn, largely influence the fate of national governments and national politics.

4. Local actors as global actors

Network technologies strengthen the map of transboundary relationships while places work as starting points for cross-borders struggles. The relevance of physical places in the digital era is a big issue because, as geographers Michael Keith and Steve Pile remind us, "politics is necessarily territorial but these territories are simultaneously real, imaginary and symbolic" (Keith, Pile, 1993, p. 224). In the time of globalisation, territorial and extra territorial matters are linked together in a constant dialectic, as territorial claims arise in response to extraterritorial initiatives (Agnew, 2002). From a geographical point of view, this means that scales of actions are intertwined: different levels may interact and set up agreements, cooperation plans or compete. As a consequence, globalisation stimulates regionalism because regions – rather than nations - are closely dependent on global activities and restructured to directly compete in the global arena. Localism resurgences may surprised after the globalisation of economy, the internationalisation of political institutions, and the constitution of a universal culture broadly diffused by integrated communication systems - and particularly after the assault on the concept of nation declared to be imagined communities (Anderson, 1991). Anyway, it should be noted that, even today, political and cultural identities are deeply related to local territories. Despite the celebrated possibilities for access and communication, the fate of the majority of people in the world still remains closely tight with the places they inhabit. This partially explains the emergence of localist movements whose propaganda is based on the rhetoric of ethnic and national belongingness. Nonetheless, these movements do not actually advance new issues in the political space; they merely use new technologies as communication tools. Their claims do not represent a novelty in the international political landscape because they are nothing more than a technologically advanced version of the classic localist movements.

As a matter of fact, in the global cities a progressive 'denationalisation' of the inhabitants occurs - especially the outsiders, the migrant workers, and the youth in the suburbs. The really new political identities emerge 'behind' the claim for ethnicity and 'behind' national interests; they have their foundation in people's belongingness to transnational groups operating both in the physical

and virtual proximate space (Escobar, 2001). This evidence suggests the existence of a strong correlation between cyberpolitics (the political activism on internet) and place politics. According to Arturo Escobar, localised political actions are increasingly based on the constitution of cybercultures “that resist, transform or present alternatives to the dominant virtual and real worlds” (Escobar, 1999, p.32). However, this does not mean materiality does not count; rather places are central in virtual world, being these “the physical locations at which the networker sits and lives” (Escobar, 1999, p.32). By adopting cyberpolitics tools, local actors contribute to the formation of the global public space, and, thereby, to a type of local-based political subjectivity that needs to be distinguished from what we usually consider as ‘local’. Territorial issues are the result of the practices through which people build places even as they participate in translocal network, and of the practices through which they endorse transnational identities. Emerging actors operating in very different sectors – and inspired by very different principles - actually share something in common, such as the brokers in the city of London and the Greenpeace activists. They share a transnational identity because they are global actor whose working practice is located in local place; both use cities as places for conflict and political practice; and both affiliate on the base of the issue they are involved in. Again, they use a common – or, at least, a comprehensible – language in order to debate, a common arena where to engage, common issues to assemble around. And, most frequently than imagined, they even use the same methods to affirm their points.

In the public space of late globalisation, a new kind of citizenship emerges; it is a form of ‘practiced citizenship’ that can be endorsed even in absence of the formal criteria for citizenship attribution, and that takes form in a broad array of very different engagement practices whose contents, form and effects are political (‘illegal’ migrants’ protests, non-resident people grassroots activity, etc.). This politics occurs in specific places endowed with global relevance and it is acted by informal political actors that gain visibility in the international arena despite they are invisible in the space of institutional national politics. Their local instances are the result of the participation in translocal networks that produces a non-cosmopolitan form of globality, i.e. a mix of practical engagement and imaginaries upon place-specific issues and struggles, shared in other parts of the world. These actors determine a new type of political local subjectivity that does not exclude the attachment to a country or to a nation but includes transnational communities of practices and belongingness as sources of identity. It induces the raising up of hidden or slowly working powers and focuses on the similarities between political actors conventionally regarded as opposed.

Places become ‘laboratories’ of politics, spaces where heterogeneous visions overlap, entangled into complex networks “composed of heterogeneous actors and sites, each with its own culturally specific interpretative system, and with dominant and subaltern sites and knowledge” (Escobar, 1999, p.43). Despite globalisation frequently produces undemocratic and disempowering effects, at the same time, it also fuels local strategies of resistance by means of supra-local social movements and progressive NGOs that “propitiate the reorganization of space from below and some measure of symmetry between the local and the global” (Escobar, 2001, p.18).

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