

Local-global-glocal

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Few terms come close to ‘global’ when we seek to understand our hyperconnected modern-day reality. From lifestyle to entertainment, education to technology, media to activism, the word global is ceaselessly whipped up to signify our *zeitgeist* and its endless tendencies, trajectories and tribulations. But since its popularization from the middle of the last century onward, ideas purveyed by the global – whether in terms of ‘globality,’ ‘globalism’ or ‘globalisation’ – have also had to increasingly reckon with an alternate emphasis on ‘local’ by way of critique. No matter what the reach or extent of the global, the argument goes, it is only via local iterations and in local contexts that the former can be experienced and made sense of. Tellingly then, a third term aims to bridge the oppositional dynamic implied by global’s expansiveness and local’s limitations: ‘glocal’.

And yet, notwithstanding its coinage, glocal’s hybrid appeal does not automatically dilute the deployment of global and local, given their diverse degrees of meaning-making and idiosyncratic interpretations. Resultantly, the hyphenated portmanteau ‘local-global-glocal’ playfully captures the inherent fluidity of the three intersecting concepts, while further underlining the paradox of dis:connectivity implicit in its evocation. Put another way, local- global-glocal by its very nature invites us to consider our contemporary condition in terms of inspirations, influences, adaptations, appropriations, collaborations and contradictions.

The widescale circulation of the term ‘global’ can be traced to the regeneration of the post-World War II economy, and especially to the liberalization of the last few decades of the twentieth century. But as Manfred B. Steger cautions, it would be erroneous to read the phenomenon’s significance purely from an economic standpoint, given that ‘globalization contains important *cultural* and *ideological* aspects in the form of politically charged meanings, stories, and symbols that define, describe, and analyse that very process’ (2013, 15, emphasis in original). He further argues that the processes entailing the germination and spread of the ‘global’ generally comprise four characteristics: (a) ‘a *creation* of new social networks and *multiplication* of existing connections that cut across traditional political, economic, cultural, and geographical boundaries’; (b) the ‘*expansion* and the *stretching* of social relations, activities, and connections’; (c) ‘an *intensification* and *acceleration* of social exchanges and activities’; and finally (d) an involvement of the ‘the subjective plane of human consciousness’ (33–34, emphasis in original). This in-built elasticity of features also renders a straightforward use of the term ‘global’ difficult and susceptible to criticism.

Global's material-affective changeableness that Steger alludes to finds resonance in Arjun Appadurai's 'global cultural flows' that are at the heart of globalisation (Appadurai 1990, 6). Appadurai identifies five dimensions of such flows, viz. the flow of people ('ethnoscapes'), the flow of technology ('technoscapes'), the flow of money and businesses ('financescapes'), the flow of cultural industries ('mediascapes'), and finally, the flow of ideas, imagination and their numerous permutations and combinations ('ideoscapes') (6–10). Other critics like Thomas Friedman (2005) specifically stress the role of technoscapes in levelling contemporary interconnectedness, which ushers in new networks of production and collaboration via offshore manufacturing and outsourcing. Simultaneously, such interconnectedness dilutes America's dominance as *the* global leader of science and technology.

But Joseph E. Stiglitz reminds us that the world is not necessarily becoming 'flatter' (as Friedman would have it). Rather, 'other forces are making it less flat', and the very technologies that Friedman praises as 'levelers have also given rise to new opportunities for monopolization.' In Stiglitz's assessment, what has enabled global cities like Bangalore to become high-tech success stories is 'that companies like Infosys have removed themselves from what is going on nearby', especially rural realities (2005). Far from heralding a vision of homogenized change then, global forces themselves work with an intrinsic unevenness, even if the public face of the digital and technological revolution seemingly wears an egalitarian patina. Thus, in the wake of global's characteristic dis:connectivity, the instabilities and ruptures influencing the immediate and nearby prompt scholars from a host of disciplines to perceive the local in complex and generative ways.

On the one hand, critics like Anja Mihir acknowledge that local leaders 'often adhere to patriarchal and traditional practices and are either ignorant of, or refuse, global standards' (2022, 18). Others, such as Peter J.M. Nas, uphold that the local is already imbricated in the processes of global, so that 'the local is not necessarily the passive, dominated receiver of worldwide influences, but it is busy selecting, reorganizing and reprocessing them in a creative way' (1998, 184). Finbarr Livesay even goes on to assert that the era of globalisation is now paving way for an age of localisation, given the rise in additive manufacturing, higher national wages, the detriment posed by global shipping costs, and the intensification of regulatory policies owing to nationalism.

At a more experiential level, the local is understood in terms of in-depth knowledge, everyday tasks and intimate relationships. The nature writer Robert Macfarlane, for example, rescues the term 'parochial', so often synonymized with local, from its negative connotations, by revisiting the root-word 'parish'. In direct contrast to the pejorative insularity and sectarianism that now define the notion of parochialism, 'parish' once used to signify a perspective-generating aperture 'through which the world could be seen', since we 'learn by scrutiny of the close-

at-hand' (2015, 62–64). The anthropologist Tim Ingold likewise values the knowledge accumulated through local attunement, anchoring it within the 'capabilities' or 'skills' of 'action and perception of the whole organic being situated in a richly structured environment' (2000, 5). Such skilful acts are inescapably embodied and operate with a sense of rhythmic adjustment to one's immediate surroundings. This adjustment is also echoed in Appadurai's emphasis on intimacy. As he puts it, 'however mobile the values and meanings of the [globalized] world in which we live, human life still proceeds through the practices of intimacy' (Appadurai 1997, 116). Moreover, these practices escape homogenization for they are, by definition, stamped with an indeterminable 'mystery' (116). Thus, while considering the intertwining of the global and local, the deterministic tendencies of the former are invariably filtered through the affective affinities of the latter.

We consequently approach the amalgamation of the two terms in the form of 'glocalism' that Mihir defines as 'a process of norm diffusion from the local to the global and from the global to the local' (2022, 15). Originally deriving from the Japanese agricultural principle of 'dochakuka', which refers to the adaptation of farming techniques to local conditions, 'glocal' as a term came into popular usage only during the final decade of the last millennium. Its earliest theoretical proponent Roland Robertson uses it in order to assess the ways in which the 'tendencies of homogenization and heterogenization [became] features of life across much of the late twentieth-century world', both being 'mutually implicative' (Robertson 1995, 27). Interestingly, Mihir maintains that 'glocalism is by no means sufficiently explained, neither academically nor in practice, to serve as a theory or as an ideology' (2022, 16). This inbuilt conceptual volatility once again leads us to the hybrid phrase 'local-global-glocal,' wherein a certain kind of 'dis:connect' haunts the three constitutive terms, attesting to their meandering, metamorphosing and incomplete proclivities.

One has only to look at the expressions of contemporary identity building in India (this author's country of origin) to witness such see-sawing in practice. Since 2014, when the Narendra Modi government came to power, it has ceaselessly emphasised its position as both a global leader and a local benefactor by harping on about two catchphrases: 'Vishwaguru' (Hindi for 'World Leader' or 'World Teacher') and 'Vocal for Local'. While the first refers to the government's aim and belief of becoming a global economic superpower (even as it literally intends to make India a leader in the field of education), the second encourages the manufacture and production of goods and services by local investors and businessmen in order to enhance income and employment. But as many critics have pointed out, these positions have been accompanied by a deep-rooted penchant for authoritarian politics, an unclear understanding of ground-level realities, an overwhelming agenda of right-wing populism, and an inability to actually address the continuing discrepan-

cies in resource distribution and social upliftment (Abbas 2020; Mannathukkaren 2023). In other words, the panacea of glocalism as a form of self-assertion is itself marred by ruptures, gaps and disjointedness.

Moving from political reality to the realm of personal selfhood, dis:connectivity in the glocal era acquires an even greater intensity as it develops a distinctly embodied expression. As the Indian social commentator Santosh Desai puts it, the effect of living in a hyperconnected yet disjointed world is profoundly emotional, one that is ‘vexed by paradoxes’ (2021). He writes that in the era of glocalism,

The individual realises herself more fully, while losing herself in many new collectives. We are highly networked and deeply lonely. Getting what we want is much easier, knowing what we want is becoming a problem. Choices free us while crippling us with anxiety. We can escape everything but ourselves. We are at the centre of our own universe but it has been created for us by the market. We can act in ever diverse ways but are divided along increasingly narrower lines. The more liberal our markets get, the more illiberal our minds (2021).

As a cultural historian and visual archivist of the Western Himalayas, much of my work has focused on making sense of such connections and disjunctions in the domain of modern-day mountain cultures. My core field site, the north Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, serves as a remarkable case in point, as it diversely testifies to the successes and challenges of local-global-glocal. These successes and challenges usually generate around the potent idea of ‘belonging’ (→ **Belonging**), especially because ‘life-worlds’ in the Himalayas have for long been defined and perceived in terms of their remoteness, regionalism and ‘local’ identities (Toffin and Pfaff-Czarnecka 2014, 2). In these mountains, the ‘force of belonging stems from the well-established modalities of interaction. . . and from shared values that are considered perennial. But they are [also] challenged by globalizing forces’ (3), rendering highland realms vulnerable to uneven and often negative repercussions.

While one could trace the onset of globalising forces in the Western Himalayas to ancient times, particularly to the period in which the Silk Routes were active, the widescale impact of the global in the modern times actively began in the 19th century, when the British started establishing a number of ‘hill stations’ across the mountain belt. These hill stations first sprang up as convalescent spaces for white expatriates and then morphed into retreats and political centres for half a year away from the proverbial ‘heat and dust’ of the plains. It was here that the British idiosyncratically practiced European ideas of home-making, including architectural, urban and social practices, such as promenading for leisure on the Mall flanked by Victorian cottages and neo-Tudor public structures. The most prominent of these stations was Simla (now ‘Shimla’), that was christened as the ‘Summer Capital’ of the British Raj in 1864 and informally came to be known as India’s ‘Little

England' ('Chhota Vilayat' in vernacular) right until Independence in 1947: a fascinating instantiation of the global and the local coming together.

But as scholars have shown at length, for all their use of European templates and technology, these hill stations from the very beginning also developed a pronounced local culture, given that their labour force was invariably Indian and always greater in number than the white holidaymakers (Kanwar 1990, Kennedy 1996). Compellingly, the majority of residential spaces built for the British in Simla involved construction methodologies deriving from local Himalayan practices, even as from the outside they came to bear an 'English', 'Scottish' or 'Swiss' look. The result was a never-before-seen 'glocal' architecture that still serves as an excellent example of sustainable design innovation, strongly in synchronization with the natural environment (Pandey 2014).

Postcolonial historians of the Western Himalayas argue that despite the large-scale use of natural resources in the region, the overall effect of colonization in the Western Himalayas (as compared to the plains) was 'non-cataclysmic' (Alam 2008, 307), because the 'forces released by colonial intervention. . . did not immediately throw overboard the basic premises that structured [the area]' (Singh 1998, 234). This was not because of any benevolent vision of colonialism; rather, the largely uncontaminated nature of local life stemmed from the specificities of geography and ecology that significantly challenged the spread of changes, allowing local practices of dwelling to persist for a long time.

Interestingly, after Independence, these hill stations were sympathetically and enthusiastically adapted into the fold of the new Indian ethos by the common citizenry, escalating the process of glocalization (Pandey 2014; Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2015; Miles-Watson 2020). The following decades also witnessed their transformation as popular tourist spots and locations for film shootings, increasing the appeal of Simla and the like at both national and international levels. Even so, notions of remoteness and smallness continued to define their identity well until the 1980s, when the first waves of ill-conceived modernization began impacting these regions. Haphazard construction and unsystematic development projects became the order of the day, which more than anything else punctured the delicate balance between ecology and dwelling, rupturing the localism of these places in highly damaging ways.

Writing about the forces of globalisation in fragile mountain environments, N.S. Jodha observes that they 'encourage intense and indiscriminate resource use, and lead to overexploitation of niche opportunities and resources with little concern for environmental consequences' (2000, 296). Such overexploitation has been ceaselessly exacerbated across the Himalayas, generating concomitant issues of waste disposal, deforestation and loosening of soil, not to mention the marring of natural beauty. Thus, even though Himachal Pradesh has routinely been lauded

as a state courting enviable success in the areas of health, education and other public services (Drèze and Sen 2013), its vision of material urban development has been heavily criticised (Panwar 2022). The latest model of the West-inspired ICT driven 'Smart Cities' project inaugurated by the Government of India in 2015 has likewise failed to address (let alone solve) the growing crisis of congestion and environmental degradation. The issue here is not so much the transnational inspiration for change but rather the inability of local governance and administration to adequately allocate funds and implement sustainable ideas in a genuinely decentralized fashion conducive to mountain ecology (Kaur 2022; Bhandari 2023).

The glocal present of the Western Himalayas is hence a fundamentally fractured one, where new-age development is frequently lamented in paradoxical terms as 'planned destruction' (Parashar 2023). More than any other descriptor, this phrase comes closest to capturing the tensions and contradictions in the context of highland dis:connectivity, for local environmental specificities ceaselessly find themselves at odds with a professedly global vision of urban regeneration. The outside and the inside continue to revolve in an uneasy relationship, and the dis:connections embodied by 'local-global-glocal' only seem to become starker.

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