1 Introduction: globality in historical perspective

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there is a sense of living in a period of great change, which goes far beyond the coincidence of the new millennium. As ever in the modern world, there is a sense of traditional cultures and institutions under challenge from remorseless technological change and commercial expansion. At the same time, there is a profound sense of a significant historical movement: that the processes of change in our time are different from those that, in earlier periods, have made modernity.

There is deep uncertainty, however, about the definition of change. It is not clear what kind of transition this is, what sort of world it is producing, or whether it is desirable. Although there is a widespread sense of transformation, the problem of understanding is exacerbated by the difficulty of applying previous concepts of change to the new situation. As in all big transitions, the nature of change is a part of the novelty of the change itself. To illustrate this point, I shall explain later why the concept of revolution is appropriate to the current transformation. But this is not just another revolution in the sense in which revolutions have been understood in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the present transition, the nature and meaning of revolution are also changing.

The aim of this book is therefore no less than an answer to the question of defining the change that is taking place. In the first chapter I give a general outline of the historical and conceptual problems. In the following chapters, I first indicate the comprehensive nature of the theoretical challenge posed by the transition from a national-and-international to a global world. Second, I develop a historical account of the current transition, outlining the interactions between structural transformations of state power and popular movements. Third, I

discuss the developing state structure of globality, together with the problems of its coherence, which are of profound importance to the future of human society. Finally, I address the politics of unfinished global revolution.

This book proposes, therefore, that we should understand our historical transformation through three major concepts: *globality*, the *global revolution* and the *global state*. In this chapter I attempt to explain the need for these concepts, by examining existing models of contemporary change. First, I discuss three narratives of transition that have been bequeathed to us from late twentieth-century debate: postmodernity, the end of the Cold War and globalization. By locating these three narratives historically, I attempt to show the limitations of their understandings of the transition. Second, I examine the concepts of change that are involved in these narratives: transformation, transition and process. I advance my concept of global revolution as a more inclusive concept that embraces all three aspects. Third, I discuss the meaning of globality itself.

Three narratives of transition

As the sense of transformation grew at the end of the twentieth century, three kinds of narrative achieved wide currency. The accounts overlapped, but they have been only partially related to each other. Although versions of the narratives coexist in contemporary literature, they appear to have risen to prominence in a particular sequence. Each has come to dominate both public and academic debate in a given phase of the late twentieth-century historical transition. Understanding the sequence of the three narratives helps us towards a deeper understanding of the character of the transition itself, of which each is only a partial reflection.

The first idea was that of *postmodernity*. Its core was the denial of the certainties of the modern world. From a postmodern point of view, the only certain thing was that the old forms should no longer be considered fixed reference points. In postmodern accounts, the flux was the thing. However, the process of change could not be encapsulated in a single concept, leading to a new consensus. Postmodernism challenged all traditional models of understanding, denying itself the status of a new 'meta-narrative' of change. Zygmunt Bauman, its foremost sociological exponent, articulated the intimate links of postmodernity to modernity by proposing that '[t]he postmodern

condition can be . . . described, on the one hand, as modernity emancipated from false consciousness'. However, he is less convincing when he argues that it can be described 'on the other, as a new type . . . a self-reproducing, pragmatically self-sustainable and logically self-contained social condition defined by distinctive features of its own'.[1] For many, the idea that there is a definite postmodern 'social condition' is a contradiction in terms.

These built-in tensions of postmodernity mean that its theorists oscillate between the denial of certain meaning, an echo of earlier 'nihilist' philosophies, and the assertion of new meaning, which reconnects to the emancipatory tradition of modernity. Thus Bauman denies that it is a simple negation of modernity: 'A theory of postmodernity . . . cannot be a modified theory of modernity, a theory of modernity with a set of negative markers.'[2] However, he confirms its negativity with the striking claim that 'The theory of postmodernity must be free of the metaphor of progress that informed all competing theories of modem society.'[3]

The second idea was that of *a post-Cold War world*. This reflected the apparently dramatic significance of changes in international politics. At the centre of post-Cold War narratives was the idea that winding down political and military conflict between blocs would involve fundamental transformations of political – and hence perhaps social and cultural – relations in general. One strand of post-Cold War thought advanced shallow claims for the victory of a particular version of the modernity which postmodern theorists questioned. According to Francis Fukuyama, the 'Worldwide Liberal Revolution' left 'only one competitor standing in the ring as an ideology of potentially universal validity: liberal democracy, the doctrine of individual freedom and popular sovereignty'. Liberalism was defined 'simply' (Fukuyama acknowledged) as 'a rule of law that recognizes certain individual rights or freedoms from government control', democracy by 'a strictly formal definition' stressing procedurality.[4] However, most post-Cold War accounts were more open-ended. Thus the international relationist James N. Rosenau argued that the new stage was one of 'post-international' politics, characterized by a fundamental 'turbulence' as a variety of new actors entered the arena.[5] As with postmodern accounts, the indeterminacy of change

[1] Bauman (1992: 188). [2] Bauman (1992: 187–8).
[3] Bauman (1992: 189). [4] Fukuyama (1992: 44). [5] Rosenau (1990).

was important to such articulations of the 'post-Cold War' idea. The literature expressed, but did not generally resolve, this tension between the realization of modernist goals such as democracy, and the novelty (sometimes even taking 'regressive' forms) of the politics of the new era.

The third idea was, of course, that of *globalization*. This emphasized technical, economic and cultural transformations that were 'undermining' the significance of boundaries between nation-states. This narrative was often presented as a new certainty. It reflected, its proponents suggested, powerful, indeed unstoppable social forces, which were weakening traditional forms. Globalization appears more determinate than the other two accounts. Whereas their names imply no more than going beyond existing forms – whether of modernity in general or of the Cold War in particular – globalization suggests a positive content, a quality of the 'global' which social relations are acquiring. However, the one thing that few globalization theorists define is the meaning of the global. The idea of globalization appears as a step towards determinacy, but at its heart is still a basic uncertainty about the meaning of change.

The difference between 'postmodern' and 'global' concepts is therefore often less than might appear. Many 'global' theorists embrace the indeterminacy of postmodernity; conversely, postmodernists, when pressed to give a name to the 'new' condition, cite globality. Thus Jacques Derrida agreed, in response to questioning, that the political phenomena to which he refers are what are conventionally called 'globalization'. He explained that he didn't use the name 'globalization',

> Because today it's a confused concept and it's the screen for a number of non-concepts and sometimes of political tricks and political strategies. Of course something like globalization is happening – not only today of course, it started a long time ago – but today there is an acceleration of this *mondialization*, but as you know, using this word, this key word, allows a number of political appropriations – in the name of the free market for instance. People try to have us swallow the idea that globalization means the free market, or that the concentration of tele-technological communications beyond the States are what makes globalization possible, and should be supported or simply accepted. So I have, and I'm not the only one, many, many, reservations about the use one makes of this word: but I agree . . . this is, if not the ground (because I don't think it is a ground), but this is the space in which these problems take their

> shape. I agree . . . but I wouldn't simply rely upon the word 'globalization' in order to name this phenomenon.[6]

Postmodernity and globalization both began to emerge as serious concepts of change in the 1970s.[7] This was the decade of *détente*, the period in which Cold War rivalries appeared to have relaxed, yet the crisis of the post-war boom produced great global economic instability, and there was a widespread sense of the dissolution of traditional cultural and social relations. The idea of the post-Cold War became a part of discussion later, when at the beginning of the 1980s the final phase of the Cold War heightened the sense of needing to move beyond its dangerous and constricting environment.[8]

In the 1970s, however, although there was a widespread sense of crisis and dissolution after the relative stability of earlier post-war decades, there was not yet a strong feeling of *transition*. Indeed the Second Cold War of the early 1980s reinforced awareness of a definite world structure, after the loosening of the previous decade. It was only when this faded, in the middle of the 1980s, that the sense of transition came into its own. It is from this point onwards that we can trace the definite influence of narratives of change.

First, postmodernism came to dominate a wide area of cultural and social debate in the mid- to late 1980s. Postmodern ideas were influential first in aesthetic discourses, from literature to architecture, but later came to affect social and political debates. Second, post-Cold War discourse gained credence in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, as *perestroika* was followed by the east European revolutions, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gulf and Yugoslav wars. Third, globalization became dominant in the mid- and late 1990s, as the realities of increasingly global markets

[6] Derrida (1997). This was part of his response to my question: 'You don't seem to be able to name the process through which [political transformations are] happening, and it seems to me that one could understand what you're talking about in terms of globalization, the formation of a common social space, a single world-meaning within which all these old structures which try to absolutize and fix differences are changed, but this, it also seems to me, is a ground on which to found a new form of democracy, and that ground has to be found in the concept of globality and in the concept of world unification.'

[7] Anderson (1998: 15–46) gives the best account to date of this process, but he goes on (1998: 47–76) to make the more contestable claim that the debate was subsequently 'captured' by Frederic Jameson (1998).

[8] Thompson (1981) was an important early statement of this idea.

and communications seemed to eclipse (at least partially) the significance of the residual divisions between states.

The sequence of influence of these three grand ideas of the late twentieth-century changes is suggestive of the relations between them. Postmodernism, the least determinate of the three narratives – the one which emphasized uncertainty, relativism and fragmentation even to the point of celebrating them – came to the fore in advance of political change. As often in periods of transition, the strongest early intimations of change appear in culture – before politics or economics – but these are also the least clear indicators of the eventual shape of the new order.

Post-Cold War discourse, which was more determinate in centring the transition in key political and military changes, dominated during and immediately after the major political upheavals. It reflected the moment in which the 'new world order' of President Bush appeared to promise the 'end of history' which Fukuyama rashly proclaimed.[9] During this period there was a general optimism, even if many commentators were not so certain that the content of a post-Cold War world could be encapsulated in the comfortable verities of traditional liberalism.

Globalization, in turn, became dominant once the political transition ceased to impress, and the most pervasive forms of change appeared to be located in the expansion of market relations, ubiquitous commodification and the communications revolution that mediated them. The global remained largely undefined, however, because the content of globalization seemed little more than a speeding-up of the marketization of the previous, neo-liberal decade. The global meant principally, it seemed, the negation of the national boundaries which had defined the old order; it did not have a core meaning of its own.

We can understand these three accounts of change, therefore, as partial narratives of the same large set of events and processes, the same world-historical transition. Each overlaps with the others, while emphasizing aspects which the others tend to downplay. All of them are suggestive but none is adequate as an overall account of the change that has marked the end of the twentieth century. What they suggest are the need for, first, an integrated historical account which links the postmodern, post-Cold War and global moments, and

[9] Fukuyama (1992).

second, a more careful investigation of the only positive meaning which the transition has thrown up, the idea of the global.

Conceptualizing change

The debates of the late twentieth century have left considerable uncertainty about the ways in which contemporary change should be conceptualized. Uncertainty exists not only about the direction and meaning of change, but also about how change itself should be represented. This is a fundamental issue: the means and forms through which change occurs are important as both determinants and indicators of the content of change.

The three narratives suggest different understandings of this issue. For postmodern theorists, change is above all *transformation*. The very forms of cultural, social and political life are altering in a plurality of directions that were not, and could not have been, previously conceived. The whole point of the postmodern conceptualization is the denial of a unified process, let alone a single transition. Postmodern accounts suggest the diffuse, fragmentary dissolution of previously fixed relations, institutions and traditions.

For post-Cold War theorists, at the heart of contemporary change there is a very definite *transition* – or a set of transitions – from Cold War to post-Cold War, from history to post-history, from nation-state to newly legitimate international institutions. Despite the commendable reluctance of some early post-Cold War thinkers to foreclose the nature of change, the idea of transition has become entrenched, particularly in debate in and about the post-Communist, market societies in the former Soviet bloc.

For globalization theorists, contemporary change often has the relentless aspect of a single *process* – or a closely related set of processes – through which the market system colonizes new social space. Globalization renders territorial boundaries irrelevant – or in the more cautious versions which have become increasingly prominent, less significant. It also nullifies the cultural, political and technical boundaries that defined distinct worlds, isolated some social relations from world markets, and inhibited communications.

The three accounts of change correspond to the social arenas that they specify as core. In postmodern narratives, cultural change tends to be central to political and social change, and cultural change appears naturally as relatively diffuse transformation. For post-Cold

War narratives, political and military changes are central to wider social and economic changes, and these changes appear more as defined transition. For globalization narratives, technical and economic changes are central to cultural and political changes, and these changes appear as process.

Each of these images corresponds to important aspects of change at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Each, by emphasizing certain major areas and qualities of change, makes a contribution to our understanding. But each, by de-emphasizing other major areas and qualities, places obstacles in the way of our understanding the change of our times in its entirety. We need a new concept of change that suggests its broad, inclusive but uneven character. I propose that the concept of *global revolution* can be developed to encompass all these demands on our understanding.

The concept of revolution is now loosely, and sometimes trivially, employed to suggest radical or fundamental change in any field. My proposal should not be seen as trying to legislate its broader usage, but as a serious attempt to encapsulate the breadth and depth of contemporary *social* change. The global revolution differs in important respects from national and international revolutions, as I shall explain later in this book. But my use of the term suggests that contemporary change can be understood through an expansion of this classic historical social and political concept.

In particular, I use the term revolution in order to suggest that the political-military transitions of the current period have a particular significance for the development of cultural, economic and technical processes and transformations. The rupture in recent world politics has a meaning for the broad, general processes of global change that has hardly been grasped. The global revolution involves a transformation of social relations in general, but at its heart are key upheavals in relations of political and military power. As in classic revolutions, it is the connections between wider social and more narrowly political processes that give the changes of our times their distinctive revolutionary character.

So far, I have used domain terms such as economic, social, cultural, political and military as if their meanings were clear and self-evident. I am aware that they are not: these meanings change, and changes in them are important to the character of the global revolution. In my argument, the global revolution is not constituted by changes in given political or state spheres that alternately reflect and influence given

spheres of economic and cultural life. As Michael Mann has written, in important transitions, the very meanings of terms such as 'society' undergo transformation.[10] In this book I want to explain how both changing meanings of, and relations between, culture, economy, society and state are involved in the fundamental changes of our time.

The meaning of global

If we are to understand the global revolution, we must first extricate the idea of the global from simple concepts of the process of globalization.[11] As I have already suggested, the latter term logically implies an understanding of the former: globalization must be the way in which things are made global. Yet it is evident, as I have noted, that the meaning of the global is often uncertain in the literature. I will go further: where it is specified, it is often simple and impoverished. In order to define 'global', I will first examine what seem to be the common ways in which this term is used. I will then discuss how we might expand our understanding. In this way, the definition of the global will lead us to the concept of globality, the first main concept of this book.

We can identify three accounts of the meaning of global that are implicated in recent debates about globalization. In much social-scientific as well as everyday usage, global is used interchangeably with world and international simply to indicate *areas of social life beyond the national level*. This weak, vague usage clearly reflects thought which has hardly begun to grapple with the distinctiveness of global relations. In this way of thinking, the difference between global and international cannot really be indicated, and a 'global world' is a tautology. The use of the word global rather than the other terms is little more than homage to intellectual fashion.

Beyond this confusion, the first substantive meaning is connected to the literal meaning of the word, belonging to the globe. Here global means *connected with the natural habitat of humankind*, our global planet, Earth. The understanding of the world as round is a fundamental tenet of distinctively modern thought. In recent decades, however, images of the world from outer space have enabled us to visualize the

[10] Mann (1993: 9).

[11] In this sense, I agree with the comment of Derrida (1997), quoted above, on the function of the word 'globalization'.

planet's global aspect very concretely. This understanding has been powerfully reinforced by many new insights into relationships between human social activity and the natural environment as a whole. Thus the new environmental literature is paradigmatic of global social science, in its disregard for – or relegation to secondary status of – national boundaries.[12]

Even more widespread, and more directly connected to the technological, economic and communications mainstreams of globalization debate, is a concept of the global as *the quality involved in the worldwide stretching of social relations*. In this concept, global social relations are relations that spread easily across the world, again increasingly disregarding national boundaries. Whereas the environmental concept of the global stresses the connection between human activity and nature, this concept is defined by transformations of human relations themselves, in which the changing relation to the natural environment is only one part.

According to Giddens, for example, the transformation of time-space relations means that social linkages are not merely spread over long distances but also intensified – leading to instantaneous world-wide connections. For him, 'globalization can . . . be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'.[13] For many, what is also involved is the spread of a supraterritorial dimension of social relations.[14]

Both the environmental and the time-spatial concepts of the global give it a content beyond the confused equation with world or international. The environmental concept indicates that an important dimension of common global consciousness is our recognition of the physical habitat that we share. However, in some versions of it, a primacy of nature is proposed: human activity is seen as a problem for the planet. This interpretation of the global can lead, then, to the subordination of human society to the physical environment.

Compared with this, the spatial, or time-space, concept is more sophisticated. Nature, in Giddens' account for example, is no longer raw and unmediated, but socially transformed. Our altered relations with this socialized nature are part of the general transformation of

[12] See for example Smith and Warr (1991).
[13] Giddens (1990: 64). [14] Scholte (1999: 11–14).