

## LANGUAGE AND 'GLOBAL' POLITICS: DE-NATURALISING THE 'GLOBAL'

Sabine Selchow

**Setting the scene: language and politics**

Civil society, communication and democracy are inherently and in various respects linked to the issue of language. Most obviously, of course, it is language that distinguishes humans from other creatures and makes them social beings in the first place. Language is an essential ingredient in the formation of individual and collective identities; the exercise of civil rights rests on the linguistic competence of individuals and the concept of the public sphere, which is one of the fundamental structural components for (deliberative) democracy, can hardly be thought of without considering language questions (see Box 11.1). More generally, as long as politics is not about coercion and violence, it is about symbolic action and about language, as one of the critical aspects of communication and social exchange. But language and linguistic signs, and the meanings that are associated with them, are also essential in that they construct social reality.

This Chapter explores the latter understanding of the role of language with regard to politics. It aims to raise awareness of the significance of the term 'global' in contemporary political, public and political studies discourses. Although 'global' has become an important political currency worldwide, it has triggered very little interest, investigation or critical engagement. It has been widely naturalised, which means that it is taken for granted and treated as an 'innocent' or descriptive attribute – both in political practice and in the contemporary political studies discourse. The Chapter illustrates the political dimension of the term 'global' and draws attention to the paradox that, although contemporary political practice seems to be permeated by unilateralism and explicit national interests rather than by (the ideal of) 'global governance', it is increasingly embedded in a 'global' rhetoric. By analysing the use of the term 'global' by US President George W Bush, this Chapter illustrates the importance of taking 'global' seriously in the study of contemporary politics.

To start with, the political nature of linguistic signs in general and the social nature of meanings in particular will be highlighted. This perspective is rarely considered in contemporary political science approaches to world politics, particularly in the Anglo-American political studies discourse.

**Words, meanings and politics**

Today, it is 'a truism that social reality does not fall from heaven' (Risse 2007: 128); rather, social reality is constructed through language. In this sense, language is not simply a neutral tool for describing an extra-linguistic reality, because it is only through language that this reality emerges, in that it is defined in language, thereby acquiring meaning. It is impossible to know how something 'really' is or was, before its 'distortion' by language, because we cannot think and conceptualise without language.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, language and meaning are much more complicated phenomena than everyday life might suggest; this is because linguistic signs are differential rather than referential. The very existence of some 6,912 different languages reveals that 'things' in extra-linguistic reality do not naturally prescribe what they should be called. Rather, the relation between linguistic signs and their referents is arbitrary and purely conventional. The meaning of a linguistic sign cannot even be thought of as a 'thing' in empirical reality in the first place; rather it is a mind image.

This mind image is itself the product of a process of differentiation between an indefinite number of other meanings; as Terry Eagleton puts it: meaning is a 'constant flickering of presence and absence together' that passes through language like a net (1983: 128). Hence, although everyday communication

<sup>1</sup> For this notion and what follows see the theory of structural linguistics as it was developed by Ferdinand de Saussure ([1916] 2000) and the works of his post-structuralist predecessors, such as Jacques Derrida (1976); see also literary theorist Terry Eagleton (1983).



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works quite well and it is usually clear what a linguistic sign means, meanings are less stable than they appear initially. Not only are linguistic signs differential rather than referential, and not only is social reality constructed through language, but meanings themselves are the product of social processes; they are based on a constant process of social ratification in communication. This points to the essentially social and political nature of language and meanings that goes beyond the politics of language.

If meanings evolve from within an infinite web of other meanings and are constantly socially ratified in communication, they are the product of social processes which, based on a broad definition of politics as, for example, suggested by Leftwich (1983), makes them political *per se*. Using linguistic signs entails contributing to this social process of meaning production and ratification, through which supposed 'natural' meanings or 'descriptions' of the world are strengthened or challenged. That is why a focus on language in the study of politics is not only interesting with regard to language politics or from a pragmatic perspective, in that language in political practice 'does' something. Rather, terms can even be understood and investigated as nodal points in which collective knowledge and social perceptions of political reality 'appear' (Fraas 2000 in reference to Knobloch 1992).

This is especially true and fruitful when it comes to terms that are more 'abstract' (Fraas 1998) than others, such as 'freedom', 'justice', 'civil society', 'democracy' – and 'global', which is of extraordinary significance in contemporary political discourse.

In contemporary (Anglo-American) political studies, language, in the sense outlined above, is rarely considered a worthwhile object of research in itself. Yet political practitioners seem to be very consciously aware of the construction and political nature of linguistic signs. To find an appropriate label for events and phenomena is an important and an explicit aspect of political practice. This is most obvious when it comes to applying (or avoiding) terms that are associated with (international) law. For example, in 1956 then British Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden told the House of Commons, 'We are not at war with Egypt. We are in an armed conflict' (Eden 1956). It is further evidenced in the persistent official US use of the term 'unlawful combatants', as opposed to 'prisoners of war', for detainees at Guantanamo Bay, and in the debate about the use of the term 'genocide' for the mass killings in Darfur, in which civil society activists press (Northern) political authorities 'to call a spade a spade' and use the term 'genocide' in order to trigger the associated legal, political and moral consequences.

### Box 11.1: Multilingualism and transnational public spaces in civil society

Scene: the arena of a public theatre, Genoa, July 2003. Activists and organisations in the global justice movement have returned to the place where demonstrations against the G8 summit occurred in 2001. Lost in the media cacophony about violence between police and protesters was the role of Genoa as a catalyst for diffusing the idea of cosmopolitanism, inspired by the social forums and communicative democracy practised in the global justice movement (see della Porta and Mosca, forthcoming; Glasius and Timms 2006).

Now, in 2003, the activists are engaged in a social forum process to discuss the future of 'another Europe'. Their meeting, the European preparatory to the European Social Forum (ESF), is just one in a series of regular preparatory sessions. In European preparatory assemblies, such as in Genoa, nearly 400 activists coming together in cities as diverse as Moscow, Sofia, Stockholm, Istanbul and Glasgow, discuss and make collective decisions in a seemingly Babylonian mix of languages. When misunderstandings occur, speakers try to help each other, which can be complicated and takes time. Those who are bilingual switch, for instance, from Italian to French or English; others make their claims in Spanish or Turkish. Most participants listen to simultaneous translations via headphones. Those contributing to the debate are frequently reminded by voluntary interpreters to speak slowly.

As the participants come from such contrasting cultures and speak so many different languages, how democratic can such emerging transnational public meetings and discussion forums in civil society be? To tackle this question, I studied the preparatory assemblies of the ESF between 2003 and 2006. Considering that fewer than half EU citizens speak more than one language (de Cillia 2002) one must take seriously the discriminatory potential of a 'linguistic divide' in Europe (Wodak and Wright 2006). However, evidence from the ESF process, including these transnational meetings, suggests a more pluralistic and procedurally open setting than similar preparatory assemblies at the national level. Based on this unexpected set of results, I concluded that multilingualism in such emerging transnational spaces 'from below' stimulates participative and inclusive decision-making, instead of preventing it. As a result, formerly marginalised groups, such as migrants, find it easier to make their claims and to build alliances in these cosmopolitan European meetings. A better gender balance and the inclusion of migrants in such meetings are just two illustrations of the difference between European and national level meetings (Doerr 2007).

A study of transnational public spaces in movements like the ESF shows that structural obstacles to participation mainly emanate from exclusion based on both non-material and material aspects, such as lacking resources and access to the relevant information to participate. However, in relation to their linguistic diversity, the comparison between European preparatory meetings and those at the national level in Germany and the UK indicates that the European meetings were more democratic internally. In particular, new participants and activists from horizontally organised groups that lacked material resources perceived the European preparatory assemblies to be more transparent and procedurally democratic than the domestic, country-wide preparatory assemblies. This was due to the fact that the difficulties of communication, both political and linguistic, were made explicit in the European meetings and an inclusive procedural setting was created to find common agreement. This is not to say that participants found the European preparatory assemblies particularly open participatory spaces, especially as the ESF process was dominated by a vanguard of professional activists and informal decision making. However, in such multilingual assemblies a 'culture of mutual listening' predominated. Participants made a conscious effort to listen to speakers from different countries and groups and allow them to be heard. In addition to translating, the volunteer network of interpreters, dubbed 'Babels', sensitised participants to the need to speak clearly and to respect the languages, cultures and backgrounds of others.

At the national level, institutions such as Babels and activists with multiple political backgrounds or transnational life histories, for example, those who could mediate between different languages and political cultures, were either absent or were not accorded the importance given to them in the European meetings. In Germany the meetings were dominated by a highly controversial style of decision making, in which a few activists backed by big organisations made the decisions, and in which gender aspects of democracy and

groups of migrants or activists that lacked resources, were more easily ignored. In the UK ideological difference created misunderstandings and conflict, which made dialogue and decision making very difficult. In both countries the discussion style of meetings privileged the socio-linguistic codes of traditional 'gatekeepers' in the public sphere, that is, 'powerful actors' 'who speak, write and understand the right language at the right moment' (Wodak 2002). These were mostly professional activists of large, well-funded organisations such as non-governmental organisations, political parties and trade unions.

These findings indicate that the democratic participation of citizens in transnational public spaces in civil society can emerge even in the absence of a shared idiom, common culture or communitarian foundation. In the case of Europe, multilingual public spaces built by non-established civil society actors under the conditions of inclusive procedures and using agents who facilitate access, might be more democratic than national public spaces operating in a single language. This questions theories of citizens' participation and democracy in Europe, in which the public sphere at the national level is often presented as an ideal, homogenous political public (Fraser 2005). I argue that ongoing transnational alliances and spaces created by civil society actors from below might open a window of opportunity for domestically marginalised groups to make their views known to a wider public. For example, activists from different local social forums in the UK have utilised the European preparatory assemblies in order to undermine the strength of influence of groups perceived as dominant at the national social forum process in the UK.

These findings support the idea that a *lingua franca* model in the EU context may be linguistically discriminatory (de Cillia 2002; Kraus 2004; Phillipson 2003), and suggest a conceptualisation of communicative democracy in transnational spaces of civil society that treats linguistic pluralism as a precious resource. Instead of making democratic discourse impossible, a multilingual setting – provided that no single language dominates and an open institutional setting prevails – makes traditional mechanisms of discrimination and exclusion, as experienced in the building of the nation state and its public sphere, more difficult. 'Different languages are problematic without translation, as they are open to manipulation', says Souad, an ESF participant from London:

*However, the main effect of multilingualism is to make everything go more slowly, which is important, because then it gets politically more balanced. The European level is more public and pluralistic; people speak in front of many people who are backed by many movements. (Quoted by Doerr 2007)*

Multilingualism can thus be seen as an asset, rather than an obstacle to the democratisation of global civil society.

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**Nicole Doerr, European University Institute, Florence**

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An overt awareness of the political significance and nature of words is also apparent in other instances that do not have potential legal consequences, such as US President Franklin D Roosevelt's explicit endeavour to find an appropriate name for the 1939–1945 war:

*So I am looking for a word – as I said to the newspapermen a little while ago – I want a name for the war. I haven't had any very good suggestions. Most of them are too long. My own thought is that perhaps there is one word that we could use for this war, the word 'survival'. The Survival War. (Roosevelt 1942a)*

As we know, the name 'Survival War' did not take hold. But even 'World War II', which became the common label in the West, was not used worldwide. The Soviet Union, for instance, chose 'The Great Patriotic War', which gave the (supposedly objective) historical event a completely different meaning in that it 'linked the conflict with the struggle against Napoleon ("The Patriotic War")' (Reynolds 2003: 14).

In more recent times, the German Conservative Party, CDU, after its defeat in the 1972 elections, established a 'project group for semantics' whose task it was to develop strategies to, as they called it, 'occupy' terms with meanings according to the party line (Klein 1991).

Elsewhere, the Jubilee2000 campaign consciously chose the name 'Jubilee2000' in order to trigger associations with the 'pattern of the Biblical jubilee of debt remission and freedom for debt slaves which was ordained to occur every fifty years in the old testament' (Jubilee2000 URL). According to Joshua Busby, this was an important aspect of the campaign's success in the US.

After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon Building in Virginia on 11 September 2001 (9/11), the politics of naming (political) opponents took on a new dimension: the frame of the 'global war on terror/ism', established by President Bush as the all-embracing label for much of US post-9/11 politics, has added a new and peculiar value to the term 'terrorist'. The institutionalisation of the 'global war on terror/ism' narrative made it easier for governments, such as the Russian and Columbian administrations, to apply the term 'terrorists' to rebel groups in order to depoliticise them. After 9/11 the Sri Lankan Government saw the chance of labelling the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) not only 'terrorists', a term used by much of the international community anyway, but 'global terrorists', thus situating their struggle against the LTTE within the wider 'global war on terror/ism' campaign and thereby encouraging international support. In contrast, in an attempt to position themselves as political actors and 'freedom fighters', and to challenge their condemnation as 'terrorists', the LTTE explicitly condemned the 9/11 attacks as acts of illegitimate violence (Kleinfeld 2003).

As feminist theorist Dale Spender notes: 'Those who name the world have the privilege of highlighting their own experiences – and thereby identify what they consider important' (quoted in Bhatia 2005: 9).

Political investigations should therefore consider language: in particular, the political investigation of contemporary politics needs to interrogate the term 'global' because it has captured *contemporary* public,

political and academic discourses in an unprecedented way.

### The 'global'-isation of politics

The term 'global' has become a significant part of the world political lexicon. No political actor can do without it and it is widely used by the general public.

The quantitative dimension of the 'global'-isation of contemporary public and political discourses, the increase of what Robert Holton (1998: 1) calls 'globe talk' has been noted since the 1990s. Martin Albrow, for instance, even uses this observation as one of his arguments to illustrate the birth of a new age, the 'global age' (1996: 80).

However, 'globe talk' is not only about the ubiquity of single terms such as 'globalisation'; the 'global'-isation of public and political discourses is not only about the *quantitative* proliferation of 'glob\*'-vocabulary. Rather, it is about the qualitative penetration of language through 'glob\*'-words. This pervasiveness is seen in creative word constructions, such as globaphobia (Lawrence and Litan 1997), globo-cop (Lewis 1992), neoglobalism (Gorbachev in Hoffmann 1987), globaldegook (*The New York Times* 1985) and globalution (Friedman 1997). It is further seen in words such as globaloney, anti-globalisation, global-minded and globe-trotting, which in the past were used occasionally, but have since become commonplace neologisms, which means that they have been socially ratified in communication. This social ratification indicates the high degree of social acceptance of 'glob\*'-language.

Of all 'glob\*'-words, 'global' is the most popular. The use of the term increased more than tenfold in *The New York Times* between 1980 and 2007. But the 'global'-isation of language is not only about quantity. Examples such as Sam Sifton's restaurant review in *The New York Times* illustrates the embeddness of the term 'global' such that its meaning is assumed to be clear:

*Oceo's menu is probably best described as post-global. A warm salad of curried chicken, with tiny dumplings flecked with coriander and lemony yogurt sauce, sits beside a delicate salad composed of hearts of palm with earthy pickled mushrooms and a piquant lemon-chili oil.* (Sifton 2004)

Apparently, there is no need to explain 'global' or in this case, 'post-global', in a restaurant review; nor in

other cases such as when applied to the former Pope, John Paul II (*The Age* 2005), to poverty in African countries, to the 'war on terror', various 'terrorist groups', the 'environment' and to the 'HIV/AIDS crisis'.

First and foremost, 'global' seems to serve as the linguistic label of the *Zeitgeist*, or spirit of the times. This is seen, for instance, in the increasing appearance of the term in institutional names and official events and conferences, such as 'The Global Fund', 'UN Global Compact', 'Global Alliance for Information and Communication Technologies'. Although the database of the Union of International Associations (URL) shows that the absolute number of civil society groups with the term 'global' in their names is lower than names containing terms such as 'international' or 'world', it also reveals a striking and increasing trend towards 'global' names since the 1990s. However, more interesting than the increasing number of new institutions choosing a 'global' name is the fact that established organisations actually 'global'-ise their existing names. Thus, the Evangelical Missionary Alliance founded in 1958 changed its name to Global Connections in 2000 (URL); the Australian Baptist Foreign Mission of 1913 became Australian Baptist Missionary Society in 1959 and Global Inter-Action (URL) in 2002; Global Impact (URL) was founded as International Service Agencies in 1956; Citizens for Global Solutions started off in 1975 as Campaign for UN Reform; and the International Association on the Political Use of Psychiatry, which was founded in 1980, was renamed Global Initiative on Psychiatry (URL) in 1991.

The settling of the term 'global' in contemporary vocabulary is also seen in the increasing number of 'global' co-occurrences, of which 'global warming' is one of the most prominent. The mainstreaming of 'global warming' was sealed with its entry into the dictionary of new English words in the 1990s (Tulloch 1991). The 'global war on terror/ism' is another popular contemporary term that, in the time since it was introduced by the US administration in September 2001, has become a fixed linguistic short-cut for a complex narrative within which political decisions are framed worldwide, from military engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq to broader issues such as migration and, in the near future, possibly environmental measures (2007 report by the US Centre for Naval Analyses URL). In the US, the



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expression the 'global war on terror/ism' became institutionalised through the establishment of the 'Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal' and the 'Global War on Terrorism Service Medal' in March 2003 (US Executive Order 13289); and through the use of the acronym 'GWOT' in official documents which first appeared in a 2002 fact sheet of the US Department of State (URL).

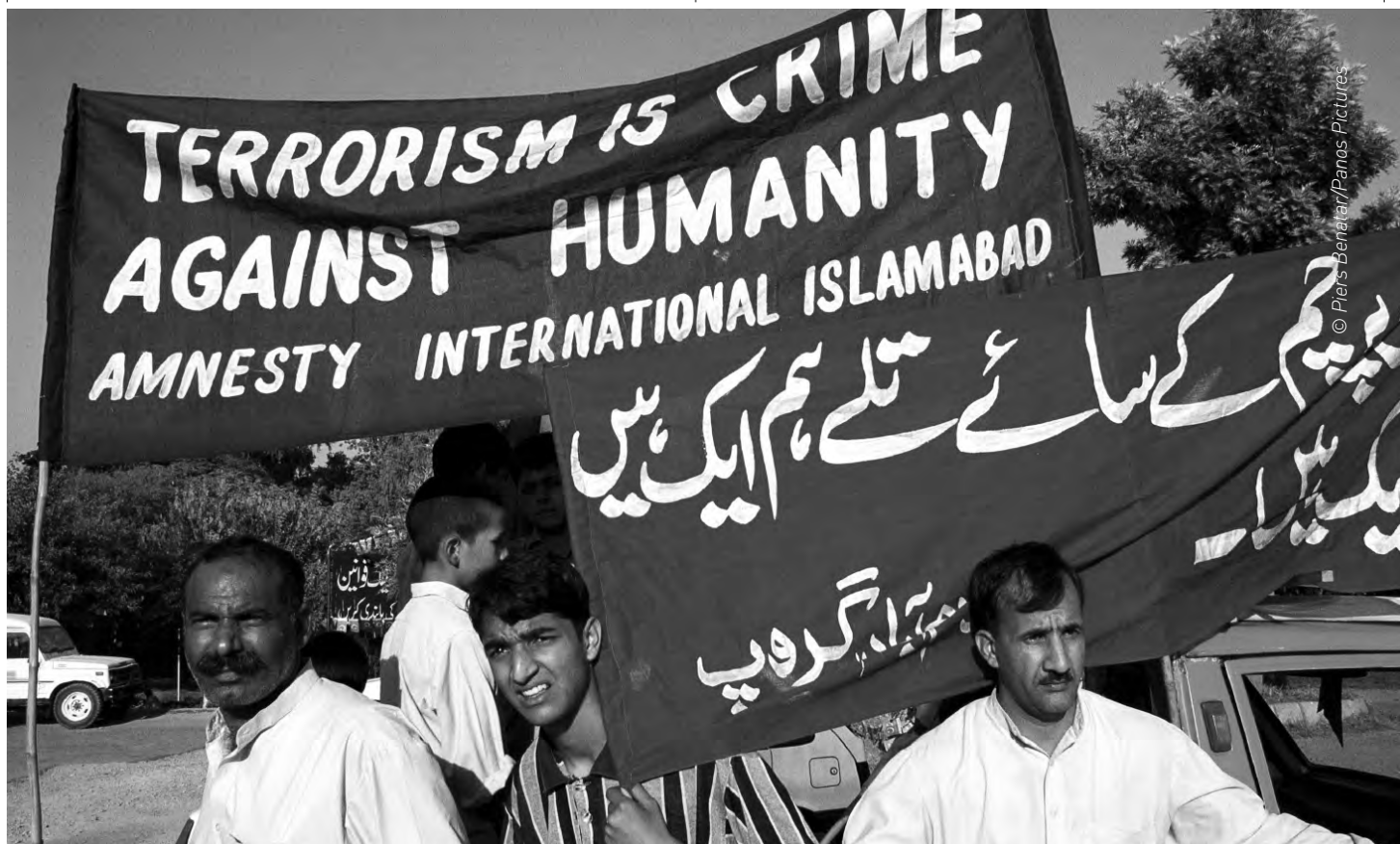
It can be argued that 'global' has become a political currency – the term has become so embedded in the discourse that it is a socially ratified label now, rather than simply a frequently used term. As the earlier mentioned trend of 'global' re-branding and re-labelling indicates, it appears to be important and often essential to be associated with 'global' and to position oneself as 'global', at the same intensifying the 'global'-isation of the discourse. The term 'global' has gained an aura sufficient for it to be perceived as 'doing something' to something; it seems to add value and a certain status. It appears that 'global' gives credibility and importance to things and events; it even seems to be perceived as being able to transform, what Roland Bleiker (2003: 434) calls, the 'chronically tragic', like poverty, into something more 'spectacularly tragic'.

Today, in order to have a chance of reaching the world policy agenda and attracting broad public attention, to a high degree an issue needs to be perceived and ultimately socially ratified as being 'global'. Certainly, if an issue becomes 'global' it has succeeded in getting onto this agenda and powerholders cannot ignore it. Bleiker points out how the 'market-dependent and entertainment-oriented television networks favour heroic and spectacular images' and tragedies' (2003: 434), and in this sense it can be argued that the attribute 'global' appears to add a sense of 'spectacularity' that helps to make

something fit for this context. The term 'global' seems to be strangely embracing; it is used everywhere and appears to appeal to everybody and ultimately seems to refer to everybody.

This is obvious in the institutionalisation of the categories 'global issues' and 'global threats', which have become commonly and officially used to make sense of contemporary social reality. Both labels constitute two indispensable categories in contemporary world politics under which issues are reassembled and gain 'authoritative status'. Today it appears that no political organisation involved in world politics can do without an explicit 'global issues' agenda. Yet a brief look at the list of 'global issues' provided by different organisations reveals the arbitrary nature of such selections. While the UN lists 50 issues under the rubric 'Global Issues on the UN Agenda' (URL) covering a pool of concerns from 'Africa' via 'Indigenous People' and 'Outer Space' to 'Youth', the US Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs (URL) calls six issues 'global issues', namely, 'Democracy', 'Human rights and Labor', 'Environment, Oceans and Science', 'Population, Refugees and Migration', 'Women's issues' and 'Trafficking in persons'. Human Rights Watch deals with 27 issues under the label 'global issues', of which the UN, with its 50 'global issues', is one. The Global Civil Society Yearbook series has, to date, covered 16 issues that were introduced in the first edition as 'global issues' (Anheier et al. 2001: 7).<sup>2</sup> The constructed nature of the institutionalised category 'global issues' is further evidenced when one attempts to define what it is about these issues that makes them 'global'. On the UN 'global issues' list, for instance, 'Ageing', 'Youth' and 'Children' seem to be considered 'global issues' because they refer to humanity, and 'Persons with Disabilities' and 'Indigenous People' appear to be considered 'global' because these minority groups exist all over the world. In contrast, the 'global' nature of issues such as 'Iraq' and 'Question of Palestine' seems to evolve from geopolitical perceptions, while the 'global'-ness of the issue 'Outer Space' appears to relate to the

<sup>2</sup> These are: capitalism, biotechnology, conflict/humanitarian intervention, corporate responsibility, the Statute of the International Criminal Court, oil, democracy, climate change, HIV/AIDS, the movement of labour, UN reform, biological and chemical weapons, violence against women, economic and social rights, water, war and peace.



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globe understood as one of many planets in space. The variety of ideas and understandings of the term 'global' behind the apparently uncontested category of 'global issues' could not be more evident.

The communication material of civil society actors, such as that on the websites of, for instance, Greenpeace, Amnesty International, WWF, and Oxfam, further supports the argument that the term 'global' has become a popular political currency. Hardly anybody can do or will do without this term. Similar to the cataloguing of 'global issues', we find categories that have been institutionalised in civil society, such as 'global campaign', 'global call to action', 'global week of action'. However, the ubiquity of the term is not matched by its coherent use. Strikingly, in the communications of actors above, 'global' is often used interchangeably with 'international'. The 'About Us' document of Oxfam International (URL) aptly illustrates this observation:

*Oxfam International is an international confederation, comprised of 13 independent non-government organisations dedicated to fighting poverty and related injustice around the world. Oxfam International is a global group of independent non-governmental organisations dedicated to fighting poverty and related injustice around the world.*

The apparent lack of awareness of the difference between 'global' and 'international' supports the above assumption that, more than anything, 'global' expresses the *Zeitgeist*. In contrast to the term 'international', not only does 'global' appear to be perceived as less technical, with an almost emotional dimension, it is also simply more fashionable than 'international', adding a sense of 'spectacularity' to things and embodying a sense of (allegedly) embracing and appealing to everybody.

There are two main ways in which Oxfam, Greenpeace, WWF and Amnesty International use 'global'. First, it is used in the sense of 'across the world'. Oxfam's definition of the organisation, described above, falls into this category, as does Amnesty International's 'go global' strategies that imply, for example, that 'all over the world Amnesty International members and activists are campaigning to stop violence against women'. Although they are situated in the North, civil society organisations position themselves as being 'global' in the sense of being active everywhere.

The second use creates and emphasises the (hierarchical) distinction between 'local' and 'global'. Here 'global' refers to a (Northern) audience whose support is requested but, more commonly, it refers to (Northern) governments and international institutions that are being required to act. In contrast, 'local' refers



to (primarily) Southern communities and regions. The self-description of WWF illustrates this point:

*The organisation is almost unique in that it has that local presence to global presence – talking to tribes of Baka pygmies in the central African rainforests, through to face-to-face discussions with institutions such as the World Bank and the European Commission.*

Similarly, Oxfam's 'global calls' are exclusively and explicitly addressed to primarily Northern donor countries and it is to them that the issue at hand needs to appeal – hence, needs to be perceived as 'global'. Civil society actors and international institutions have adopted the term 'global' with enthusiasm, but the popularity and omnipresence of 'global' is not restricted to the public and political discourse; it has become a significant term in contemporary political studies too.

### The 'global'-isation of political studies

Since the 1990s there has been an increasing 'global'-isation of the political studies discourse; the term 'global' has become commonplace among political scientists today. Its striking proliferation and widespread use defies attempts to draw a comprehensive picture of its application but, generally, the term is primarily used as an adjective

- meaning 'worldwide'
- in contrast to 'local', and 'regional'
- in contrast to 'national'
- in contrast to 'transnational' and 'international'
- in linguistic units such as 'global governance', 'global democracy', 'global market' and 'global civil society'; namely, in connection with 'traditional' social and political science concepts.

Here, as in the context of political actors, the last two points in particular reveal that, more than anything, 'global' is applied as an expression of a general *Zeitgeist* rather than as a robust concept. For example, in the Introduction of the first edition of the Global Civil Society Yearbook the editors challenge the notion that the 'global' in 'global civil society' 'sounds too grandiose' by pointing out that alternatives, such as 'transnational', simply understate 'what is really out there' (Anheier et al. 2001: 16). This illustrates the way that 'global' is often used, on the basis that it

'somehow suits and captures' contemporary phenomena without attempting to define why this is, and what the term actually implies. The 'global'-isation of concepts seems to be a reaction to the dilemma of contemporary times, which seem to be 'different in kind'; as many argue we might be experiencing the 'early stage of a profound ontological shift' (Rosenau 1996: 248), a 'brave new world' (Bartelson 2000: 192) that challenges established social and political science concepts. The application of the term 'global' to traditional concepts appears to be a way of facing this 'new world'.

This reveals that, in general, in political studies 'global' is mainly used as a derivation of 'globalisation' which, in turn, has come to be 'a talismanic term, a seemingly unavoidable reference point for discussions about our contemporary situation' (Low and Barnett 2000: 54). 'Globalisation', then, is understood in two broad senses in the present discourse: (a) globalisation associated with an increasing interconnectedness and (b) globalisation associated with a growing 'global consciousness'. These two associations, in turn, implicitly lead to two broad understandings of 'global' as worldwide (in a spatial sense) and the 'world as a whole' (in a normative sense).

Given the proliferation of the term 'global' and its multiple uses it is surprising that 'global' is rarely reflected upon critically. The opening sentence of Peter Berger's study of global civil society and religion is symptomatic of the common treatment of 'global':

*Let us assume that we are reasonably clear about what is meant by 'global' and by 'religion'. But what about 'society'? (2005: 11)*

### The naturalisation of 'global'

In political practice, one of the few fields in which the use of the term 'global' is occasionally the subject of discussion is in the environmental discourse, in particular in the debate about the reform of the environmental activities of the UN and the (dis)advantages of upgrading its Environment Programme (UNEP) into a specialised agency. In this context, there is occasionally the conscious and clear distinction between the terms 'world' and 'global'. While 'world' is used explicitly in the sense of 'universal', 'global' is very consciously used in opposition to 'local' (Esty and Ivanova 2001). As Biermann (2002) mentions, this has provoked rejection

of the term in the past – especially by ‘developing countries’, which fear that the explicit ‘global–local’ distinction would imply they alone would have to deal with (local) environmental problems such as water pollution, while issues of interest to the ‘developed world’ are honoured with the term ‘global’ and hence are privileged. This explicit awareness of the implications of the label ‘global’ is, for instance, seen in the statement by Indian activist Vandana Shiva that:

*The notion of ‘global’ facilitates this skewed view of a common future. The construction of the global environment narrows the South’s options while increasing the North’s.* (Shiva 1998: 233)

Other instances in which the use of the term ‘global’ is explicitly questioned, however, are hard to find. In March 2007 US Democratic staff director Erin Conaton wrote a memo in which she advised her colleagues in charge of the preparation of the US defence authorisation bill to “avoid using colloquialisms,” such as the “war on terrorism” or the “long war,” and not to use the term “global war on terrorism” (*International Herald Tribune* 2007). But her concern focused mainly on the term ‘war’. In fact, the public discussion about the linguistic unit ‘global war on terror/ism’ is an excellent illustration of how much the term ‘global’ is taken for granted. From the beginning of the conflict there was a debate about the appropriateness of the label the ‘global war on terror/ism’. Yet it is the term ‘war’, rather than the term ‘global’ that is publicly discussed and questioned, as can be seen, for instance, in Jeffrey Record’s examination of the features of the ‘global war on terrorism’, published by the Strategic Studies Institute, which talks of ‘two issues that continue to impede understanding of the GWOT: its incomplete characterisation as a war, and the absence of an agreed upon definition of terrorism’ (2004: 2) – omitting ‘global’ as the third.

This ‘naturalisation’ of ‘global’ is also obvious in many parts of the political studies discourse. Although there is an increasing ‘global’-isation of the discourse, there is at best rudimentary and sporadic reflection of the various uses of the term. It can be argued, but would need more space for proper elaboration, that so far the ‘global’-isation of concepts that so obviously permeates contemporary political studies merely entails a re-labeling, not a profound

re-conceptualisation. The (alleged) ontological changes that ‘global’ is supposed to highlight are rarely reflected in the way the term is added to ‘traditional’ concepts today.

Peter Berger’s symptomatic belief that ‘global’ does not need further elaboration because one can be ‘reasonably clear’ about what it means seems to evolve from two things. The first is its derivation from ‘globalisation’. While ‘globalisation’ is subject to rigorous definition, ‘global’ slips under the radar screen. In fact, it is exactly the popularity and constant focus on ‘globalisation’ in much of the political studies discourse that blurs the need to investigate ‘global’ in its own right. This is connected to the second thing, namely, the fact that ‘global’ is simply considered a neutral term; such that one just needs to look it up in the dictionary. But a brief reflection on the term as such and its dictionary definition reveals the challenges associated with it.

### The political dimension of ‘global’

The word ‘global’ is first of all an adjective, and as such it refers to a state of being. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) ‘global’ means:

*pertaining to or embracing the totality of a number of items, categories, etc.; comprehensive, all-inclusive, unified; total; spec. pertaining to or involving the whole world; world-wide; universal.* (OED URL)

In this sense it dates back to the late nineteenth century. ‘Global’ is associated with the term ‘globe’, which, in the English language, dates back to the mid-sixteenth century when it meant ‘the earth’. The term ‘globalisation’, which entered the (economics) discourse as a neologism through Theodore Levitt’s 1983 *Harvard Business Review* article, ‘The Globalization of Markets’ (Teubert 2002: 157),<sup>3</sup> is listed as one of the derivations of ‘global’; it does not have a separate entry but it is defined as ‘the act of globalising’. To ‘globalise’, in turn, is defined as ‘to render global’. Hence, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, both latter terms are derived from ‘global’.

The problem with accepting that ‘global’ is a clear and neutral descriptive term is apparent from a

<sup>3</sup> Although the term was used before Levitt’s 1983 article (see Modelski’s work in political studies), Levitt’s article is commonly acknowledged as having contributed to its use as a neologism.

## Box 11.2: Wikipedia

Wikipedia is the name of one of the most successful inventions in the recent history of the worldwide web. It is an online encyclopaedia that was launched on 15 January 2001 by the US entrepreneur Jimmy 'Jimbo' Wales and the philosopher Larry Sanger as an 'effort to create and distribute a multilingual free encyclopedia of the highest possible quality to every single person on the planet in their own language' (Wales 2005).

Wikipedia is a web-based platform that is potentially global because it is accessible via the Internet and therefore not bounded by national borders. Instead of being a national-territorial project it is divided into separate language editions. Access depends not on nationality but on possession of the requisite language skills and a connection to the Internet. Currently, Wikipedia exists in more than 250 languages and contains a combined total of approximately 7.5 million articles. The English-language version is the largest, containing almost 1.85 million articles (Wikipedia 2007). Fourteen of the other language versions each contain more than 100,000 articles. Wikipedia is therefore the most comprehensive encyclopaedic companion published to date. Apart from that, it ranks among the top ten most visited sites on the Internet. According to the latest survey in April 2007 by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, about 36 per cent of adult US Internet users consult Wikipedia and 8 per cent use it every day (Rainie and Tancer 2007).

Wikipedia is operated by the Wikimedia Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation that relies primarily on private donations and holds regular fundraising events. Its software and content are licensed under the GNU<sup>1</sup> general public licence and the GNU free documentation licence, respectively. These licences give users the rights to copy, redistribute and modify the software, as well as the content of Wikipedia.

The name Wikipedia is made by a combination of 'encyclopedia' and 'wiki'. A Wiki is a type of collaborative website, a set of linked pages that enables documents to be authored collectively. The first application was developed by programmer Ward Cunningham in 1995 and named after the Hawaiian expression *wikiwiki*, meaning 'fast'. Today, Wikis are widely used, for example, in business, universities, schools and libraries. A Wiki provides open access so that anyone can edit documents, allowing users to rewrite, add, remove and link material. Thus, its structure and content are open to editing and evolution. Surprisingly, all forms of activity, even if undesirable, such as 'editorial vandalism', are allowed and there are no software features to prevent problematic user behaviour. Normally, modifications of text are not reviewed. Therefore, by their nature, Wikis are susceptible to vandalism and disruption. Instead of a team of editors that reviews new content, Wikis rely on the concept of soft security: damage is not prevented in the first place, but it is easy to undo. This is possible because every activity is registered and can therefore be monitored and, if need be, reviewed. For that purpose, most Wiki software applications possess additional functions to combat their vulnerability, such as the 'recent changes' page where each alteration is recorded, the 'history of changes', a chronological list of all versions of an article, and the 'diff function' that allows for a comparison of consecutive versions. Moreover, every entry is accompanied by a 'talk page', which is designed to resolve editing conflicts, and to permit planning and other types of coordination.

The functions outlined above are central to the collaborative open content system of Wikipedia. In this way, Wikipedia marks an important step in fulfilling the promise of the Internet to challenge the biased production and distribution structures of the mass media and the asymmetrical relationship between the producer and recipient of media messages. Thus, Wikipedia makes real alternative patterns of knowledge production through its online participation and cooperation.

However, the openness and the absence of formal editorial supervision of Wikipedia has led various critics to question its reliability and accuracy. They argue that it exhibits systemic bias and inconsistency, that articles often lack proper sources, that the same value is attached to expert and lay opinion. Most seriously, Wikipedia is accused of prioritising consensus over authoritative and well-established views, because conflicting viewpoints are given equal weight, which can lead to ambiguity (Matei and Dobrescu 2006).

Several contentious entries have nourished these objections. For example, the Wikipedia biography of former administrative assistant to Robert Kennedy, John Seigenthaler Sr, accused him of involvement in both Kennedy assassinations. This information appeared under his name for 132 days. Writing in *USA Today*,

Seigenthaler (2005) argued that such misleading and false information was a result of user anonymity, because Wikipedia does not require users to disclose their identity. Wikipedia is also subject to corporate and political spin. For example, the Siemens press office, under its then chief executive officer Klaus Kleinfeld, was accused of rewriting passages in the Wikipedia article about him.

Yet some initial comparisons between Wikipedia entries and articles in printed encyclopedias suggest that the levels of accuracy in both are similar. The scientific journal *Nature* (Giles 2005) asked 42 reviewers to examine articles from both the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and Wikipedia. Only eight serious errors (four from each source) were detected. Smaller errors were also identified: 162 in Wikipedia and 123 in Britannica. In addition, linguistic studies concluded that the language of Wikipedia's co-authored entries is formal and standardised in a way similar to that of traditional encyclopaedias (Emigh and Herring 2005).

Moreover, the users of Wikipedia seek to address the problematic issues of quality and discontinuity of information. Although the project is accessible to all and unregistered visitors can perform most of the key functions, such as editing articles, a few features are restricted to particular user groups. Thus, a hierarchy of users with special access rights has emerged. For example, the administrators can safeguard delicate entries (such as on the Holocaust and George W Bush) to protect them from further editing, or block persistent vandals. Furthermore, Wikipedia has developed a set of policies and guidelines governing editing activities, central to which is the idea of consensus. Its core aim is a collectively produced encyclopaedia – Wikipedia does not have ambitions to publish original research or to be a platform for ongoing debate. Users are expected to respect other contributors and copyright restrictions, avoid bias and add information only if it is based on reliable sources, in relation to which a comprehensive system of rules and advice has been formulated.

An interesting question is why most Wikipedia users obey the norms in this comparatively unregulated online environment, where the enforcement of desirable behaviour remains difficult at best. It has been argued that when users move from peripheral to full participation, their activities and their perception of specific user roles (such as writers, administrators or stewards) are transformed. When novices contribute regularly they become aware of the community and start to learn its rules and guidelines (Bryant et al. 2005). Nevertheless, the motivation to contribute to Wikipedia, which can be time consuming and without financial reward, is still unclear. In contrast to other voluntary online projects, such as the Free and Open Source software development, there is no established public recognition system that could, for instance, be used in job applications. Some have pointed to the low transaction costs of contributing to Wikipedia (Ciffolilli 2003). Additionally, surveys refer to users' identification with the Wikipedia community, and the fulfilment that comes from using one's initiative and a variety of skills (Schroer and Hertel 2007).

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**Christian Pentzold, University of Technology Chemnitz**

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<sup>1</sup> GNU is a recursive acronym for 'GNU's Not Unix', chosen because its design is like Unix but differs from this computer operating system in being free software and not containing any Unix code.



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simple reflection on the above definition. If 'global', an adjective, refers to the totality of a number of things, it connotes two things. First, it means that whatever 'global' refers to is either 'global' or not – 'global' refers to a state of being, of totality, hence, by definition, there cannot be degrees of 'global'. This makes comparative expressions such as 'a more global world' (Annan 2000: 14) hard to grasp – or at least intrinsically unclear if one follows the common dictionary definition. By contrast, the term 'globalisation' implies a process (however defined). Accordingly, the process of 'globalisation' can vary and variations can be measured on the basis of the definition of the process and its indicators.

The same applies to the adjective 'globalised'. 'Globalised' refers to the state of being of 'a thing' that has been influenced by the process of 'globalisation'; like the term 'globalisation', 'globalised' implies that varying degrees are possible – hence, a thing can be more or less 'globalised'. The contrast between 'globalised' and 'globalisation' on the one hand and 'global' on the other, reveals the second connotation of the apparently straightforward idea of 'global'. By definition, the attribute 'global' appears readily verifiable, at least easier to verify than attributes that imply degrees. In order to verify and agree that something is 'global' one just needs to know the unit of the items which it refers to. Thus, the second

connotation of the OED definition of 'global' is that it implies a pre-assumption about a pool of items that are then categorised into being either 'all-embracing' (= 'global') or not.

This reflection on the term 'global', as defined by the OED, and its derivations, 'globalisation' and 'globalised', shows that discussing and thinking about 'globalisation' depends ultimately on the definition of the concept. Indeed, discussions about the concept of 'globalisation' fill libraries. Discussions about 'global', on the other hand, do not so much depend on the definition of the term as such, and in this respect (if one takes the dictionary definition) one can actually agree with Peter Berger that it is 'reasonably clear' that the term 'global' refers to some sort of totality of items. Rather, the evaluation of and discussion about 'global' depends on the definition of the pool of items to which the adjective refers. In order to be able to critically discuss, assess and ratify whether something can be reasonably considered 'global', one needs to know the underlying pre-assumed idea to which it refers. Yet, as this chapter argues, there is hardly any critical reflection on the use of 'global' in public, political and political studies discourse.

This lacuna appears to exist because of the general assumption that the underlying unit is clear: as the OED suggests, it is 'the globe'. Indeed, many writers on 'globalisation' start by referring to the dictionary

and pointing out the relation between the terms 'globe' and 'global' (for example, Scholte 2005). As is seen, for instance, in Martin Albrow's linguistic elaborations, the 'globe' is then associated with something material:

*It [global] refers back to the globe, but the subtleties of the expansion of the idea depend on the different place given to human agency in a global as opposed to a national context. The nation occupies a contested natural/ideal status; the globe has an undisputed materiality, however, far removed it is from the daily behaviour of those who refer to it in their thoughts and deeds. (Albrow 1996: 81)*

Thus, based on the 'natural' unit 'globe', 'global' is then often automatically associated with 'humankind as a whole' and 'everybody around the globe'.

If one accepts the theoretical premises of the political dimension of language sketched here and the nature of linguistic signs and meanings, it is evident that the idea of 'an undisputed materiality' is problematic. But even if one does not sign up to a postmodern theoretical point of view, 'global', in the sense of 'worldwide' as well as 'humankind as a whole', cannot be used in an absolute sense, at least not in a 'natural', descriptive way, because it cannot be empirically verified. Hence, from the beginning there is always an element of construction in it, which means that it is never neutral but always a political statement. 'Global' per se makes whatever it 'describes' a political issue and asks for a revealing of the pre-assumption of the pool of items it is applied to refer to.

With regard to the study of contemporary world politics, the 'naturalisation' of 'global' is particularly surprising. Even if one does not start from the position that terms and language are essentially political in nature, the current critique of 'globalisation theory' in general, and the argument of political scientist Justin Rosenberg in particular (albeit inadvertently), reveal a paradox that readily raises interest and suspicion about the term 'global' and its application in contemporary politics.

### **The 'global' paradox of contemporary politics**

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and their aftermath, which, to a great extent, have been permeated by the influence of what is called 'the global war on terror/ism' in

general and the US-led military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq in particular, have triggered much discussion about the state of 'globalisation' (Held and McGrew 2007). In this context, Justin Rosenberg announced that "'the age of globalisation" is unexpectedly over' (2005: 2) – 'unexpectedly' because, for him, the idea of globalisation was never more than a 'craze', the 'Zeitgeist of the 1990s' (2005: 2). Consequently, it was only a matter of time until the 'follies of Globalisation Theory' (Rosenberg 2000) were exposed and the idea of 'globalisation' was revealed as the basis for a 'systematic misinterpretation of the 1990s' (Rosenberg 2005). The fact that this (finally) happened, thanks to 9/11 and its aftermath, according to Rosenberg, is obvious in the 'recent disappearance of this word [globalisation] from Anglo-American media and governmental commentaries [that] has been almost as sudden as its meteoric rise a decade ago' (Rosenberg 2005: 3).

Whether or not one agrees with Rosenberg's overall assessment that 'globalisation theory' is the result of a 'subjective correspondence to the lived experience' (2005: 2) that 'elbowed out the assumptions and resources of more traditional approaches' (2005: 10), and whether or not one is convinced by his praise of Marxism, it is evident that recent political developments suggest a (re)turn to concepts such as 'unilateralism' and 'geopolitics'. Indeed, hopes that 9/11 would strengthen institutions such as the UN and readjust the unilateral direction of the pre-9/11 Bush administration were disappointed – most obviously in the face of the so-called Bush Doctrine and its emphasis on pre-emptive military strategies, as outlined in Part V of the 2002 US National Security Strategy (URL).

Assumptions such as the belief that the US 'military autonomy is decidedly compromised by the web of military commitments and arrangements in which it has become entangled' (Held et al. 2003: 144) simply do not correspond to recent US foreign policy practice. Likewise, the unprecedented scale of civil society mobilisation on 15 February 2003 barely affected the British government's decision to support the invasion of Iraq. In general, the concept of a 'global civil society' still triggers much critique because it does not very obviously resemble everybody's perception of social reality. Rather, contemporary post-9/11 social reality seems to be about 'heightened nationalism, the reassertion of geopolitics, US military hegemony, the

strong state and the closing of borders' (Held and McGrew 2007: 1). Yet Rosenberg's assumption that the term 'globalisation' has disappeared from Anglo-American public and political discourse is proved wrong by empirical evidence. As outlined above, 'globe talk' is not decreasing in the 'Anglo-American media and governmental commentaries' at all. In regard to 'globalisation', a study of *The New York Times*, for instance, reveals that during the first five years of the new millennium the term appeared in 2,850 articles, and was used more often than in the last two decades of the twentieth century (1980–1989, 606; 1990–1999, 2164; total = 2770), with a constant rise in its annual use. And, as was outlined above, so did 'glob\*' -vocabulary in general; most prominently the term 'global' itself.

Thus, Rosenberg's globalisation critique inadvertently highlights the necessity of taking the term 'global' seriously in that it raises awareness of an (alleged) paradox: although contemporary political practice seems to be permeated by unilateralism and explicit national interests rather than by (the ideal of) 'global governance', it is more than ever embedded in a 'global' rhetoric. This paradox is especially apparent in regard to current US President George W Bush.

### For example: George W Bush's 'global' politics

The term 'global' has a history in the US presidents' public papers going back to 1942, when it appeared for the first time in a remark at a press conference by US President Franklin D Roosevelt (1942b). In fact, the term was then used in a context that has become prominent again today; namely, in the context of a 'global war'. In 1942 Roosevelt persuaded US citizens to be more supportive of the 'global war' that the country was fighting against Nazi Germany and its allies:

*The Nation must have more money to run the war. People must stop spending for luxuries. Our country needs a far greater share of our incomes. For this is a global war, and it will cost this Nation nearly \$100,000,000,000 in 1943.* (Roosevelt 1942c)<sup>4</sup>

The papers of both US Presidents Clinton and George W Bush reflect the above mentioned trend of the striking 'global'-isation of political discourse. By 25 April 2007 President Bush had used the term in a total of 839 public papers.

### 'We live in a global economy, as you well know'<sup>5</sup>

The first thing that attracts one's attention when reading President Bush's public papers with a particular interest in 'global' is the strategic application of the term.<sup>6</sup> 'Global' is applied remarkably often as a rhetorical device in order to justify a political decision. The reasoning behind this justification is that because something is 'global', something else needs to be done. Through this strategy political actions are framed and justified as political reactions to something 'global' 'out there' which, by default, implies a logic of inevitability. The link between what is (called) 'global' and a particular political decision is explicitly established through terms such as 'therefore', 'because', 'that is why', and 'so'. This rhetorical strategy is used particularly often in regard to economic issues and issues of US competitiveness as in the following examples:

*In other words, we've got to get education right not only because it's a national responsibility but because we're in a global world.* (Bush 2006b)

*We got to make sure there's math and science in our high school classrooms so our kids have the skills necessary to compete in this global economy.* (Bush 2004a)

The intriguing aspect of this rhetorical strategy is that the term 'global' is not explained. Though it serves as the central component in the justification of political decisions, it is naturalised. President Bush does not reveal what this term actually implies and why and how the 'global' nature of, let's say 'the world' (inevitably) leads to the political decision suggested. In addition, the impression that this 'global' nature leaves no space for alternative political (re)actions is further actively constructed as a 'fait accompli' through the use of expressions such as 'see', 'you know', and 'as you well know':

<sup>4</sup> *Of course, in contrast to Roosevelt's 'global war', George W Bush's war is linked to few, if any, civilian sacrifices, such as tax increases, on the US home front.*

<sup>5</sup> *Bush 2006a*

<sup>6</sup> *The analysis in this section is based on a computer-assisted analysis of the corpus of all public papers by President George W Bush that include the term, 'global'. The corpus contains 839 documents. The documents were filtered from the online database of the American Presidency Project ([url](http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu)) which holds all presidential papers.*



*See, this is a global economy, whether people like it or not.* (Bush 2006c)

*See, we're in a global conflict.* (Bush 2006d)

*We live in a global economy, as you well know.* (Bush 2006a),

culminating in statements such as 'Blair knows what I know – Prime Minister Blair knows what I know, that 'we're in a global war' (Bush 2007). Thus any questioning of the link between the 'global' nature of the world and the proposed policy decisions or President Bush's underlying 'global' world view are ruled out. Yet 'global' is used as *the* argument.

### '[G]lobal means global'<sup>7</sup>

The strategic use of 'global' as a justification for policy decisions is fundamental for President Bush's 'global' rhetoric. Though the underlying idea of 'global' is rarely explicitly revealed, a close reading of the papers shows that it is exclusively based on a US perspective. The term, as it is used in President Bush's papers, has nothing to do with 'humankind as a whole', let alone with any kind of 'cosmopolitan' ideal or even the idea of an 'international community', except when it comes to climate change.

The issue of 'climate change' is the only one in which President Bush uses the term 'global' in the sense of 'everybody's responsibility'. Here, again, the term 'global' is strategically used in order to support the current US policy strategy: to remind others that climate change is a 'global' issue, in the sense that everybody is equally obliged to act. Thus, he justifies the 'hesitant' and in some respects even unilateral US position in regard to 'global' climate change initiatives, such as the Kyoto Protocol, by arguing that since it is a 'global' issue, the US is not willing to take significant

<sup>7</sup> Perino 2007

steps first, let alone without parallel action by developing countries, in particular China and India. This is illustrated in the following remark at a press briefing:

*When you're talking about global emissions, that means – global means global. So everyone is emitting up into the air. And if there are no actions taken by the major developing countries, like China and India ... you're going to put the American economy at a great disadvantage.* (Perino 2007)

### From 'global terrorism' to 'global war'

An analysis of 'global' co-occurrences offers further insight into the ways in which the term 'global' is applied and the ideas associated with it.

Prior to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 the most frequent 'global' co-occurrences were 'global economy' and 'global trade', both in President Bush's papers and in the 2000/1 President Clinton's papers. This changed after 9/11. 'Global economy' was replaced by 'global terror', followed by 'global terrorism'. Though it is unsurprising that the frequency of the use of terms such as 'terrorism' and 'terror' increased after 9/11, because the 9/11 attacks were interpreted as 'terrorist attacks' by the US administration, there is nothing 'natural' about its co-occurrence with the term 'global'. So what does the 'global' 'do' and mean in these contexts?

First of all, as noted above, 'global' is very much based on a US perspective. Immediately after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 'global' was used in the sense that something 'global' had attacked the US. Since 'terror' and 'terrorism' was 'global', the US was no longer safe and needed to take measures to defend itself against a 'global' threat, a threat of 'global reach'. In this context, the term 'global' referred to the nature of the 'new' threat: in fact the 'global' was very much associated with 'American' in the sense that this new 'global' threat was perceived as 'global' only when it suddenly reached American soil. The reaction was to fight against this 'global' threat by launching a war against 'global' terror/ism:

*Today I am pleased to issue the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism. This strategy outlines the effort our Nation is making to win the war against global terror.* (Bush 2003)

*America will not rest; we will not tire until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, has*



*been stopped, and has been defeated.* (Bush 2002a)

*... our Nation is just beginning in a great objective, which is to eliminate those terrorist organizations of global reach.* (Bush 2002b)

At the end of 2004 a shift in rhetoric is noticeable. From October 2004 onwards, 'global terror' which was until then the most frequent use of the term 'global' is replaced by 'global war'. The shift in the use of 'global' can be traced to a particular event, the Presidential debate between John F Kerry and George W Bush on 30 September 2004 (Bush–Kerry 2004). During this debate John F Kerry is asked about his position on the concept of pre-emptive war, to which he answers:

*The president always has the right, and always has had the right, for preemptive strike. ... But if and when you do it, Jim, you have to do it in a way that passes the test, that passes the global test where your countrymen, your people understand fully why you're doing what you're doing and you can prove to the world that you did it for legitimate reasons.*

Asked for his position, President Bush responded:

*Let me – I'm not exactly sure what you mean, 'passes the global test,' you take preemptive action if you pass a global test. My attitude is you take preemptive action in order to protect the American people, that you act in order to make this country secure.*

From then on 'the war against global terror/ism' became the 'global war against terror'. At first sight, this may appear to be a minor rhetorical shift, but actually it signals a significant shift of perspective and attitude. Suddenly, it is not the threat that is 'global' but the American action that is justified as being 'global', which implies a more offensive position following the attitude that '[i]n our time, terrible dangers can arise on a short moment anywhere in the world, and we must be prepared to oppose these dangers everywhere in the world' (Bush 2005b):

*And so long as I'm sitting here in this Oval Office, I will never forget the lessons of September the 11th, and that is that we're in a global war against coldblooded killers.* (Bush 2005c)

*We are now waging a global war on terror – from the mountains of Afghanistan to the border regions of Pakistan, to the Horn of Africa, to the islands of the*

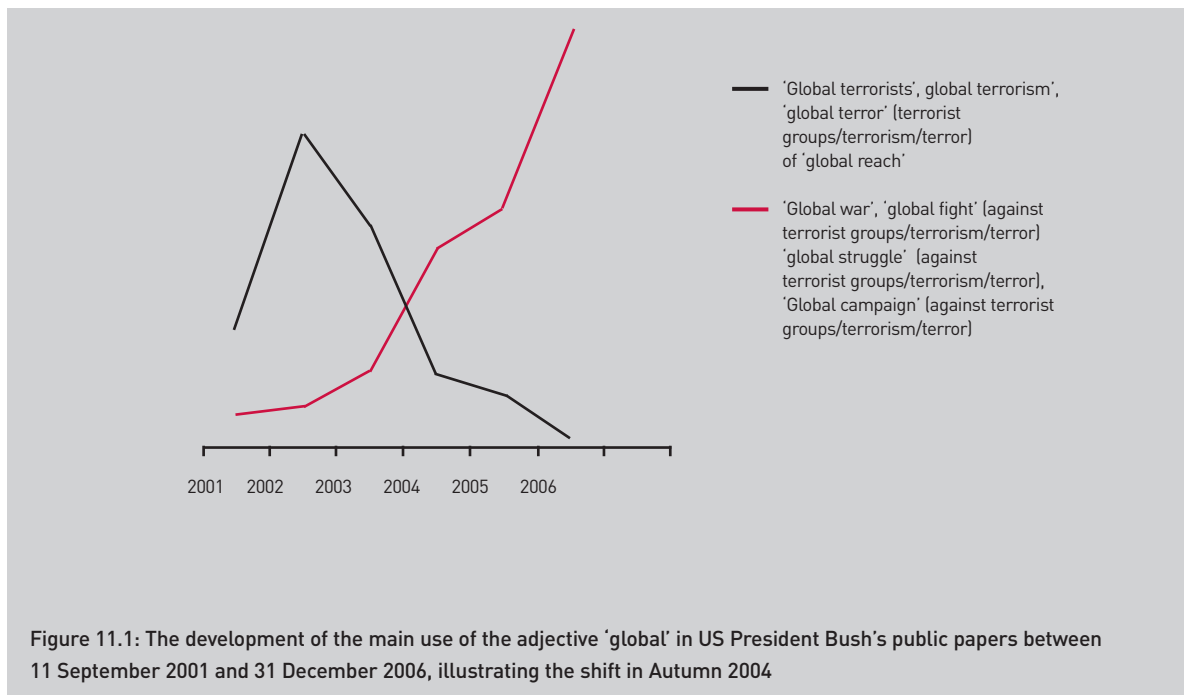
*Philippines, to the plains of Iraq. We will stay on the offense, fighting the terrorists abroad so we do not have to face them at home.* (Bush 2005a)

A shift in the use of key vocabulary can be generally seen as impacting on political identity and can read as a predictor of tendencies in future (foreign) policy (for example see Hellmann et al. 2005). In regard to President Bush's application of the term 'global' two things can be observed: first, a shift to a more offensive position is evident, which gives us reason to assume that US foreign politics will further shift towards unilateralism and a foreign policy that is based on an extreme national interest. Second, this foreign policy is (nevertheless) embedded in a 'global' rhetoric, in which a systematic and strategic use of the political currency 'global' is supposed to make US foreign policy discourse applicable to the 'global discourse' in general, which, to some extent, obscures its narrowly US-focused premises.

## Conclusion

This Chapter has argued that the term 'global' constitutes a significant political currency today. Contemporary public, political and academic discourses are characterised by the use of the term 'global' in new ways and to an unprecedented degree. Yet because reflection on the diverse applications of, and ideas associated with, the term is rare, it is naively assumed that the proliferation of the term 'global' means that 'global' is 'global'. The term 'global' is naturalised, and taken for granted. Where it is interrogated, it usually centres around the idea of 'worldwide', reflecting the *Zeitgeist*, 'everybody around the world', 'humankind as such' and a sense of 'cosmopolitanism'. This 'naturalisation' of the term 'global' is problematic, though, because the idea(s) associated with it potentially challenge traditional perceptions of socio-political reality and address the important social coordinates of 'we' and 'them'; at the same time they (potentially) blur power relations and particular interests in that they cover them in (supposedly) all-embracing, 'global' terms.

Based on a post-structuralist understanding of the relation between reality and language, and based on the premise that the meanings that construct social reality are products of social processes, it should be acknowledged that whatever is brought into the discourse inevitably affects it by shaping the basis on



which future communication and reality construction is built. This is especially true for strong and influential (political) voices, such as that of the US president, but also of prominent civil society groups. Hence, the investigation of contemporary 'global' politics comes with the imperative to investigate the term 'global' as the significant, discourse-shaping term.

With regard to the use of the term 'global' by prominent civil society groups, this Chapter illustrates that their use of the term is primarily associated with a feeling of the *Zeitgeist*, but also with 'the North'. Hence, it could be argued that major civil society groups are discursively supporting a traditional idea of a world order in which (Northern) nation states are the predominant actors. The analysis of the term 'global' in President Bush's public papers shows how the term is used strategically as part of a policy attitude which is profoundly nationally focused or US-centric. The analysis of his use of the term revealed a shift in the rhetoric that indicates the strengthening of the US's unilateral position under a 'global' roof.

Overall, this Chapter advocates a greater openness towards the analysis of language in the investigation of contemporary world politics. Since the term 'global' has become a valuable political currency worldwide it needs to be critically addressed through further

analyses of what it implies and which coordinates of 'we' and 'them' are established, both in the context of political discourses and with regard to political studies. The term 'global' has become too important and influential to continue taking it for granted.

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