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Title	Processes of social flourishing and their liminal collapse: elements to a genealogy of globalization
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Publication date	2016-08-17
Original Citation	Szakolczai, A. (2016) 'Processes of social flourishing and their liminal collapse: elements to a genealogy of globalization', British Journal of Sociology, 67(3), pp. 435–455. doi:10.1111/1468-4446.12213
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.1111/1468-4446.12213
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Download date	2026-11-06 05:24:18
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Processes of social flourishing and their liminal collapse: elements to a genealogy of globalization

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Abstract

This article aims at exploring a long-term historical perspective on which contemporary globalization can be more meaningfully situated. A central problem with established approaches to globalization is that they are even more presentist than the literature on modernization was. Presentism not only means the ignoring of history, but also the unreflective application to history of concepts taken from the study of the modern world. In contrast, it is argued that contemporary globalization is not a unique development, but rather is a concrete case of a historical type. Taking as its point of departure the spirit, rather than the word, of Max Weber, this article extends the scope of sociological investigation into archaeological evidence. Having a genealogical design and introducing the concept of 'liminality', the article approaches the modern process of globalization through reconstructing the internal dynamics of another type of historical change called 'social flourishing'. Taking up the Weberian approach continued by Eisenstadt in his writings on 'axial age', it moves away from situations of crisis as reference point, shifting attention to periods of revival by introducing the term 'epiphany'. Through the case of early Mesopotamia, it shows how social flourishing can be transmogrified into globalizing growth, gaining a new perspective concerning the kind of 'animating spirit' that might have driven the shift from Renaissance to Reformation, the rise of modern colonialism, or contemporary globalization. More generally, it will retrieve the long-term historical background of the axial age and demonstrate the usefulness and importance of archaeological evidence for sociology.

Key words: axial age; comparative historical sociology; Max Weber; genealogy; liminality; religious experience

Introduction: Overcoming presentism

That we now live in a global age seems to be beyond question. However, what globalization really means, together with its exact dynamics and possible outcomes, is very much up for interpretation. And some aspects of the dominant, even taken-for-granted, view are puzzling, problematic, or deeply questionable.

Globalization is generally identified as a paradigm replacing modernity or modernization (Giddens 1990) – the distinction between globality and globalization being perplexingly unclear (Pieterse 2012: 12). In this context, a most evident aspect of globalization concerns the reduction of distance, expressed in the 'time-space compression' idea of David Harvey (1989), due to epochal changes in transportation and telecommunication. This perspective can be traced to the origins of the concept in business studies, particularly visible in the literature celebrating new stages in forever accelerating technological revolutions, linked to the 'experience economy' (Hawken, Lovins and Lovins 1999; Pine and Gilmore 1999).

However, globalization, especially through the 'global city' (Abu-Lughod 2000; Castells 2000; Sassen 1991), also entails the reduction of living space, which is much more problematic, concerning both desirability and rationality. Just as problematic is the conviction, rarely stated though almost always implied, that living in a global age means that whatever happened in the past is radically losing its value and relevance. The result is that the current literature on globalization is even more encircled by the present than the sociology of modernization was (Inglis 2014; Elias 1987). Following Nederveen Pieterse (2012: 19–20), this article agrees with Jerry Bentley that such 'modernocentrism', or presentism, is a greater problem than Eurocentrism, as it was 'an enchantment with the modern world that has blinded scholars and the general public alike to continuities between premodern and modern times' (Bentley 2006: 17). This represents an evident methodological problem for sociology, as it means generalization out of a single case.

Furthermore, presentism is not limited to ignoring history, but can be detected even in most of those approaches that attempt to reconstruct the historical forces that led to the rise of the modern global world. The problem is that even the most influential approaches unthinkingly apply conceptual tools to the past that were developed in and for modern societies. These include the efforts to apply to earlier periods the framework of world systems theory developed by Wallerstein (Algaze 1993; Frank and Gills 1993), itself a version of neo-Marxism; or the monumental work of Michael Mann (2012-3),

whose four-factor model of the sources of social power (presumed to be universally evident throughout the course of history) was in fact simply the product of a Parsonian neo-Kantian reading of Max Weber. Both approaches share a 'faith in the power of social theory generated on the basis of modern experience to guide scholarly analysis of the past ages' (Bentley 2006: 17).

As a further shortcoming, such efforts, taking their lead from nineteenth century German philosophies of history, come across as over-generalizing and bloated exercises in intellectual geopolitics. Thus, for example, in his preface to the new edition of Volume One, when defining the method followed in his work, Mann indicates that his focus will be on the ' "leading edge[s] of power" ' (Mann 2012-3, I: viii). This seems self-evident, yet – and in radical contrast to the approaches of Weber or Foucault – in doing so, Mann simply skips the sociologically much more interesting question of how the moving force driving such an entity comes into being. This was the concern motivating Max Weber's work focusing on the 'spirit' of capitalism, where Weber, instead of reducing religion to an 'ideological factor', recognized the central role played by religious factors in historical dynamics.

The aim of this article, having a genealogical design, guided by the Nietzschean concern with 'backward inference' and introducing the concept 'liminality', is to understand the modern process of globalization through reconstructing the internal dynamics of a type of historical change called 'social flourishing'. Far from offering either a critique or confirmation of neoliberalism or neo-Marxism, the aim is to understand, through the distant and singular but quite significant historical case of early Mesopotamia, how social flourishing all-too-easily mutates into globalizing growth. In this way we can gain a new perspective concerning the kind of 'animating spirit' that might have driven not just contemporary globalization, but the shift from Renaissance to Reformation, and the rise of modern colonialism. In order to situate globalization properly within a long-term historical perspective, this article will take up the approach pioneered by Weber and continued by Eisenstadt in his writings on the 'axial age'. But it will move away from situations of crisis as unique reference point, shifting attention to – prior or subsequent – periods of revival or rebirth. Thus, without belittling the significance of Weber's shift of emphasis away from an Enlightenment-inspired (mis)reading of the Renaissance as a period of secularization, this article will pay careful attention to the type of period to which a major part the Renaissance belongs, defining this as a period of social flourishing, and will conceptualise globalizing processes as

inflexions of social flourishing into an unlimited, thus necessarily violent, expansion. More generally, it will retrieve the long-term historical background of the axial age and demonstrate the usefulness and importance of archaeological evidence for sociology.

Beyond conventional globalization theory: Weber and Eisenstadt

As a point of departure, this article turns to the work of Max Weber. Weber redirected the historical understanding of modernity in two ways, both in two consecutive steps. First, while, since the Enlightenment, the temporal horizon for the rise of the 'new age' was the Renaissance, Weber shifted focus to the Reformation. In his later work, he traced the distant roots of Puritan 'rationalization' to Antiquity, focusing on classical Hebrew prophets and jumping over the Renaissance, a period Weber never discussed in substance.

A second redirection concerns the revalorization of religion for the rise of modernity. It is a commonplace to identify modernity with secularization. Following Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, Weber attributed a direct and decisive role to religious factors in the emergence of modernity – a radical shift whose significance even today is not fully appreciated, much due to the general neglect of Nietzsche's impact on Weber.

Though not 'Nietzschean', Weber used Nietzsche's writings as a source of inspiration, complementing Nietzsche's concern with resentment with a focus on the experience of suffering as central source for religious revival. Yet Weber still got entrapped in the modality of Nietzsche's fundamentally negative interpretation of religion. Religious experience, for Weber, remained tied to events dislocating the ordinary course of life. This is visible in several aspects of Weber's work, especially when taken together: ignoring the Renaissance in the genealogy of modernity; the focus, in the title of a major essay, on the religious *rejections* of the world (Weber 1948a); connecting charisma to periods of '*extra*ordinary needs' and 'moments of distress' (Weber 1978: 1111);[1] coming close to reducing religious experiences to psychological, even psychopathological states (1948b: 279–80, 1978: 1112–3, 1117–8, 1121); and in his intellectualizing of religious leadership (1948b: 280).

S.N. Eisenstadt and the study of the 'Axial Age'

In contemporary historical sociology, a major way to keep Weber's legacy alive is the 'axial age' discussion. Coined as 'axis time' just after WW2 by Karl Jaspers, Weber's

closest disciple, the central idea is that the period 800BC–200BC represents the main turning point in the history of humankind, as it was during this period that 'parallel spiritual outbursts' took place, involving all the major world religions and philosophies or their sources (Jaspers 1953). Ignored during the period of the Cold War, except for Eric Voegelin's *Order and History* project, Eisenstadt pioneered its re-launching (Eisenstadt 1982, 1986, 1992; Arnason, Eisenstadt and Wittrock 2005). The project involved a number of major sociologists and scholars from around the world, among others Bjorn Wittrock, Johann Arnason, Alessandro Pizzorno, Saïd Arjomand, Jan Assmann, Christian Meier, Wolfgang Schluchter, Bernhard Giesen and Peter Wagner. The central aspect of Eisenstadt's contribution was to bring together 'in a systematic fashion' the discussion on the 'axial age' and comparative civilizational analysis (Arnason 2005: 19; see also Wittrock 2005).

As presented by Jaspers and continued by Voegelin, the 'Axial Age' was bound to be a major way to situate globalization on a comparative historical framework. Eric Voegelin, who as a visiting student met Jaspers in Heidelberg, comparable to the manner in which Parsons studied under Alfred Weber there, argued that the period following the 'axial age' was a kind of 'global' age: the 'ecumenic' age, the age of world-conquering empires (Persian, Macedonian and Roman), animated by 'concupiscential conquest' (Voegelin 1974). Weber's concern with 'world rejection', Voegelin's 'ecumenic age' and contemporary 'globalism' or *mondialisme* all capture the same movement: a sudden predilection with limitless expansion, a titanic effort to extend into the entire known or inhabited world – whether by conquest, exploration or market-building. Given Eisenstadt's prior study of empires (Eisenstadt 1963), and the close connection Jaspers and Voegelin perceived between 'global' empire-building and the axial age, one could expect Eisenstadt to turn the axial age discussion into a vehicle for contextualizing globalization. Yet Eisenstadt's interest in axial age faded, and he launched instead the – quite different, and highly problematic – 'multiple modernities' project (Eisenstadt 2000). This is visible through a recent, prominent publication about the axial age (Bellah and Joas 2012), where Eisenstadt only resumed his previous work, the connection to 'multiple modernities' (mentioned only once; see in Bellah and Joas 2012: 288) remaining unexplored. This might be due to the inherent tension between a Weberian reckoning about the fateful forces launching modern globalization, and the celebration of the many paths available to reach the promised lands of modernity.

In spite of the importance of Eisenstadt's work in keeping alive the Weberian interest in long-term historical sociology, and in particular its potential usefulness for understanding globalization, his approach has serious shortcomings. To begin with, Eisenstadt never clarified the exact character of the religious developments that took place in the axial age. He repeatedly asserted the fundamental novelty of the axial age in contrast to all other cultures and religions, focusing on its transcendent character and prominently using the expression 'transcendental vision' (Eisenstadt 1982, 1988). As he describes it, however, this vision was limited to a cognitive, reflective elaboration of a systematic, normative, moralizing world-view, having little substantive religious content. For Eisenstadt the carriers of 'transcendental vision' are intellectuals, following Weber's occasional leaning towards intellectualism and the related downplaying of transcendence to situations of crisis. Thus, as Eisenstadt neither connects the spiritual breakthroughs of the axial age to the existential threat of empire-building, nor to an autonomous religious experience, it ends up being perplexingly close to the manner in which modern French rationalism or German idealism proposes to build purely intellectual, idealist systems, little connected to substantial religious experiences. Eisenstadt also reproduced the Weberian restriction of interest to male prophets hearing voices, excluding – mostly female – visionaries seeing scenes, central also in the Weberian exclusive preference for the Reformation over the Renaissance.

Part of the problem with Eisenstadt is that, in spite of taking into account the work of Jaspers, he still reads Weber through Parsons, rather than through Nietzsche. Nietzsche's works, in particular *Genealogy of Morals* (1967), offer guidelines about reading history as it was effectively made, and not glancing at it through our concepts and interests, as the only way to recognize the basic role played by religious factors in early history. As elaborated immediately below, in order to make it effective for sociological analysis, however, genealogy as a method should be complemented by two anthropologically derived concepts: liminality and imitation.

Methodology: Revisiting genealogy through liminality and imitation

This study is guided by the Nietzschean concern with 'backward inference' (Nietzsche 1974: 329) – the idea that one must intuit the forces that contributed in the past to the emergence of certain social or political practices and institutions that later became taken for granted, reconstructing their 'conditions of emergence'. The central idea, particularly

clear in geology or archaeology, disciplines that exerted a great impact on the mode of thinking exercized by both Nietzsche and Foucault, is that the present 'surface' is only the visible part of a number of layers built successively upon each other. If we move through such layers backward from the present, the first layers uncovered are the most recent ones, which themselves often modified or altered the previous layers; but if we try to understand the dynamics of historical processes, we have to start from the most distant ones (in so far as they can be evidenced), 'bracketing' – as if through a series of Husserlian epochés – the later layers of modification and interpretation that hinder the reconstructive understanding of earlier layers.

Nietzsche-inspired genealogy will be complemented with liminality (Van Gennep 1960; Thomassen 2010, 2014; Turner 1967, 1969) and imitation (Girard 1977, 1989). Developed by anthropologists studying rites of passage, liminality is particularly helpful for historical sociologists, as it performs the almost impossible: how to analyse, in a coherent manner, what happens in those moments of transition when existing boundaries are dissolved and new ones come into being. Weber's 'out of ordinary' situations can thus be considered as real-world large-scale liminal moments, while genuine epiphanies are those experiences of the sacred that are not directly called forth by liminal situations of emergency.

Imitative processes are closely associated with liminality (Horvath 2013). Under liminal conditions, when limits or boundaries are lifted, imitative forms of behaviour can quickly proliferate in the social body, generating rivalries and breaking down social order through the mimetics of desire, and at the extreme, setting the scene for ritualistic scapegoating and sacrifice. Girard did well to return our attention to rituals of sacrifice, whose centrality for social life was earlier emphasized by Durkheim and Mauss. However, he over-extended his case by considering the sacrificial mechanism as not only the sole origin of culture but seeing it in dissociated terms, failing to incorporate the specific connections between technology (understood as the mass-production of identical objects of prestige and warfare), and rituals of sacrifice.

Genealogy, following Nietzsche, Weber and Foucault, requires us to reconstruct both the means and prevailing conditions through which early religions emerged. But we are faced by a scarcity of data particularly an absence of written documents. Happily, however, recent archaeological discoveries offer new means to study the force that eventually gave birth to globalizing processes.

The use of archaeology in sociology

Of all social sciences, perhaps archaeology has the fewest connections with sociology. Yet ignoring archaeology deprives sociology of a valuable resource.

Such a claim can be supported through the classics. Weber and Elias, and likewise Durkheim and Mauss, had a vital interest in the present, yet, in order to see behind the taken-for-granted, their most mature work was searching for reference points in the distant past through history or in faraway places through anthropology. Through archaeology, such a gaze can be extended to 'prehistoric' civilizations, enlarging the time horizon and retrieving links with anthropology.

Archaeology, furthermore, is at once the most and least 'scientific' social science. Both excavation methods and subsequent dating of findings require highly specialized training. Yet, in dealing with cultures that disappeared many thousand years ago, the lines of contemporary specialization become meaningless, while the nature of an excavation, involving the literal destruction of the site in the process, requires that archaeologists must gain a vision of the whole.

Familiarization with archaeology requires heavy investment. Yet the benefits derived, concerning both new methodological perspectives and substantial findings, are huge. Concerning the former, archaeology has a special affinity with genealogy. Social scientists have a tendency to see the past through the present, transferring contemporary categories onto past realities. Archaeologists, however, are forced by the very logic of their excavations to abandon this perspective: removing accumulated material from the present surface, they must reconstruct the site from its earliest beginnings (see Simonetti 2013). Concerning findings, a series of decisive discoveries over the past decades (in particular Chauvet, Göbekli Tepe and Atapuerca) radically altered our vision of the distant human past, breaking with the linear, materialist evolutionism that still dominates much of the social sciences and assigning primacy to religious factors (see Cauvin 2000; Schmidt 2000). The two central terms around which much of this archaeologically based revalorization of religion seems to converge are epiphany and pilgrimage: places where a certain presence was felt, and which therefore became centres of human movement.

It is quite risky for non-experts to venture into interpreting archaeological evidence. However, as nobody can be 'expert' concerning the manner in which human beings lived many thousand years ago, an imaginative reconstruction based on the available evidence requires manifold collaboration by social scientists. Historically and

anthropologically oriented sociologists might claim a legitimate place among such efforts, following jointly the footsteps of Max Weber and Marcel Mauss. In the following, a model is offered to identify a type of social process that could have been sparked by epiphany experiences, eventually inflected into globalizing growth.

A typology of social dynamics: From epiphany through social flourishing and globalization to dark ages

Archaeology, by the nature of the undertaking, is replete with signs of destruction. Yet some of the most important archaeological sites also contain findings that excavators interpret as venerations of divine presence (epiphany or hierophany).

Hierophany, or the sudden manifestation of the sacred, is a central term in the work of Mircea Eliade, a major historian of religion, for whom it is such a presence that establishes the distinction between the sacred and the profane, securing the reality of the first, its location becoming venerated as the centre of the world (*omphalos*; Eliade 1959, see also Burkert 1985). Such epiphanies are just as often the origins of new religions as are the appearance of charismatic prophets; in fact, Christianity is not a prophetic religion, but rather is rooted in epiphany. Places of epiphany, furthermore, usually become centres of pilgrimage. The religion of Minoan Crete, distant source of classical Greek culture, is also traced to epiphany experiences (Kerényi 1976; Matz 1958; Marinatos 1993). Central for the emergence of epiphany-based religion is the absence of preceding crisis. In sociology, epiphany was recently theorized by Bernhard Giesen as an exceptional encounter with the sacred that leaves a lasting mark on those effected, possibly altering the course of history for entire cultures, even though it 'defies any profane reasoning' (Giesen 2006: 338).

Epiphany experiences might lead to 'social flourishing'. This expression will be used as a technical term, in contrast to 'growth' or 'development'. The various development paradigms that emerged in the post-war period (modernization, economic development, even sustainable development) have run out of steam. The problem goes beyond the limits of economic indexes in measuring quality of life. Economic theory emphasizes individual consumption as measure of prosperity, an approach pushed beyond any meaningful limit; while normative political philosophy, as exemplified by the paradigmatic work of John Rawls, is entrapped in the impossible double negation of eliminating all suffering.

This is why the term 'social flourishing' carries an important message. Rather than contrasting 'individual' and 'society', and beyond merely quantitative measures, social flourishing is secured by care for the quality of being, evoking a concern with overall harmony and beauty and reclaiming the 'rational' from 'rational choice' theory that starts from the isolated individual, instead of proportionality (*ratio* in its etymological sense). For this, limits must be respected, resisting the pressure of the unlimited (*apeiron*; see Plato, *Philebus*) or the 'liminal', producing a harmonious growth that transcends the opposition between unbridled dynamism and legalistic stability. Social flourishing as a concept can help to revalorize periods called 'renaissance',[2] again complementing the sociology of Weber by a type of period ignored by him.

Using the methodological framework outlined above, social flourishing and limitless globalization can be conceived of as two different modes of liminality, the focus being on the point of inflection between the two. This happens when the former is replaced by exclusive emphasis on quantitative matters, on numbers, growth and extension, ignoring limits and thus inevitably promoting aggressiveness against fellow humans and nature. Limitless globalization thus inevitably leads to conflict and violence, setting into motion the sacrificial mechanism analysed by Girard and replacing a renaissance with the onset of a 'dark age'.

As a concrete case study for the inflexion of social flourishing into globalizing growth, this article will present the case of early Mesopotamia.

Early Mesopotamia

Mesopotamia is the standard starting point for studies about the history of civilizations – though not always for the right kind of reasons. Since the first excavations took place there in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was widely recognized that the first large cities, and then states, emerged there (Wengrow 2010; Yoffee 1995). However, such concerns were much dominated with Enlightenment rationalism, Napoleonic conquests, colonialism and the Hegelian elevation of the Prussian state into a model, culminating in the idea that human civilization is identical to state formation, bureaucracy and writing, rooted in the 'Westphalian framing' (Salvatore 2007), and the technological transformation and exploitation of nature.

In recent decades, a series of excavations in south-eastern Turkey and northern Iraq, together with a reinterpretation of previous findings, shed new light on this process. While it was long since recognized that the sacred city was the characteristic form of early civilization in Mesopotamia (Clark 1977: 77), these findings demonstrated the religious roots of civilizational outbursts. They also shed new light on the long-standing controversy between Lewis Mumford and Jane Jacobs about the relationship between agriculture, village and city in generating civilizational dynamics.

According to the materialist-evolutionist reading codified by V. Gordon Childe, historical changes are driven by technological advances; thus the 'agricultural revolution' was followed by settlement in villages and the rise of the cities. In contrast to this, in his classic *The City in History*, Lewis Mumford (1966) made the stunning claim that cities grew out caves, not villages. As part of her long-standing criticism of Mumford, Jane Jacobs promoted large and dense cities as ideals, arguing that the rise of the city came before agriculture. Her argument was recently taken up by Peter Taylor (2014), who largely ignored archaeological evidence (Smith, Ur and Feinman 2014), except for the case of Çatal Höyük, and imposed a modernist, economistic framework on the past. Yet this approach contains a modicum of truth, indeed confirmed by contemporary archaeological evidence. The city as regional centre, and not simply a large agglomeration of houses, grew out of sanctuaries, centres of pilgrimage, preceding the rise of agriculture and even sparking this development (Schmidt 2000, 2010).[3] This is the context in which the rise of the first cities and states in Mesopotamia can be meaningfully situated.

In light of the available new evidence and with the help of comparative archaeological, anthropological and historical perspectives, this article will shift the time horizon from the early processes of state building (3rd millennium BC), to an earlier period of social flourishing (6th millennium BC), reconstructing – no doubt in a highly tentative manner – the experiential bases of Mesopotamian temple cults. The first global city, Uruk, will be situated in this context, connected to the rise of metallurgy in southern Turkey and the subsequent development of Arslantepe into the first centre of mass industrial production and standardized bureaucracy.

A study of early Mesopotamian religion is difficult, as it not just religious texts that are lacking – images are scarce as well. This led to a genuine prohibition of study by Leo Oppenheim, a distinguished Assyriologist who published an influential book on Mesopotamian civilization with the subliminally misleading subtitle 'portrait of a dead civilization'. The first section of its fourth chapter was entitled '[w]hy a "Mesopotamian

religion" should not be written', its central argument being that 'a systematic presentation of Mesopotamian religion' cannot be done, due partly to the scarcity of available sources, and partly to our – presumed – inability to understand them (Oppenheim 1977: 171–2).

Reconstructing the experiential basis of Mesopotamian religion

Paucity of evidence can be alleviated by insights gained through comparative perspectives. A particularly perceptive analysis of the earliest available images is offered by Henrietta Groenewegen-Frankfort (1951) as part of her pioneering and still unique comparative study of Egypt, Mesopotamian and Minoan Crete. According to her, images from the sacred enclosure of Eanna, the oldest area of Uruk, exude intimacy with the deity, in contrast to representations of the human and the divine in the Akkadic period, characterized by widespread warfare (Groenewegen-Frankfort 1951: 168). Groenewegen-Frankfort's intuitions were confirmed by Marcella Frangipane, current excavator of Arslantepe, who also interpreted the earlier findings, going back as far as the 6th millennium BC, as indicating openness and confidence (Frangipane 1996: 81–6).

A complementary understanding of early Mesopotamian religion can be gained through the imposing stone temple structures. Here I will take as my guide Jean-Claude Margueron, the most distinguished contemporary French scholar of Mesopotamia, director of the excavations at Mari from 1979 to 2004. Margueron's essay, in the best tradition of comparative archaeology as championed by Henri Frankfort (Wengrow 1999, 2010), analyses the physical shape of the over 150 temple structures in Mesopotamia and the Levant (Margueron 2005). The aim was to recover the type of ritual practices performed in these temples and their meaning. A central finding concerned the spatial continuity of the temple's centre, the 'holy of holies': no matter how much a temple's outline changed over time, its location persisted. It was a genuine *omphalos*, identifying the spot of divine apparition: the temple was built 'at the place where the god decided to show himself to men' (Margueron 2005: 14).

The long-term continuities in Mesopotamian civilization are confirmed by a recent study of the earliest texts, going back to the 4th millennium BC. These pictographic texts, discovered in 1931, were published in 1936, but not read as texts until the late 1980s, demonstrate the 'extraordinary continuity […] in between the archaic and later Sumeric texts' (Liverani 1998: 14–6).

The question now concerns the character of the civilization that can be associated with this presumably epiphany-based religion. The starting point given by the most recent evidence is negative, provided by a caesura: the imposing megalithic sanctuaries of the earlier period (10th–8th millennia BC, Göbekli Tepe, Nevali Çori and Çayönü; see Sagona and Zimansky 2009, Schmidt 2010) were abandoned in what is now interpreted as the crisis of the Neolithic around 7000BC (Frangipane 1996: 51ff; Verhoeven 2002: 10–1).[4] It is only from about 6000BC that a new dynamics of prosperity, arguably amounting to social flourishing, appears with the Samarra, Hassuna and especially Halaf cultures in northern, central and eastern Mesopotamia. Such flourishing is particularly evident in high-quality hand-painted pottery. Fine quality decorated pottery, connected to new forms of community rituals and communicative symbolism, emerged around 6200BC, culminating in the Halaf culture, where pottery has 'become an important symbolic medium', with decoration carrying a meaning, as revealed by the stylistic rules guiding the designs (Verhoeven 2002: 9–10). The striking beauty of hand-painted ware, including bowls, plates and vases (Frangipane 1996: 73–6; Matthews 2003: 20; Wengrow 2001), used in the everyday life of a society lacking signs of institutionalized social differentiation (Frangipane 2007), not only intimates high aesthetic standards, but also a markedly harmonious relationship between human beings and their surroundings, recalling Minoan Crete or the Italian Renaissance.

The decorated objects were not exchanged within a commercial or mercantile system, but were part of a gift network (Frangipane 1996: 84–5, 2007: 62–3), underlying the need to interpret archaeological evidence in the context of Maussian anthropology and not neoclassical or neo-Marxist economics (Calasso 2010; Wengrow 2010). The logic of gift exchange was pervasive in the region throughout the sixth and fifth millennia BC, animating the single most important new development, creating the conditions of future transformations: the establishment of intensive relationships among settlements across a vast interregional area (Frangipane 2007: 87). These findings again confirm the insights of Marcel Mauss: civilizations emerge out of networks of relations, rather than 'grow' as if organic, and in isolation (Mauss 2006; see also Ingold 2000).

Further novelties include the use of stamps and sealings. While previously it was thought that this technique emerged due to centralization and state-building, the great diffusion of such objects in the sixth and fifth millennia BC convinced scholars that things happened the other way around, just as concerning agriculture and sanctuaries: communal practices established in the context of gift exchange were later used by

emerging central authorities and turned into commercial use (Frangipane 1996: 138). From a sociological perspective, the central points are the primacy of gift network and the later, joint development of centralization and commercialization. Here, as elsewhere, commercialization and governmentalization (Foucault) are parasitic developments, using and abusing previous centuries, even millennia of community and personality building.

These developments were significantly altered around 4000BC when, in a series of steps, the logic of the entire system got inverted. These changes can be associated with the rise of metallurgy, and arguably resulted in the first period of 'globalizing growth'.

Uruk, Mesopotamia: The rise of the first 'global city'

The significance of Uruk culture is well known for experts. According to Roger Matthews, Mesopotamia in the 4th millennium BC offers a unique opportunity, in the sense that 'the primary states' were 'originating in pristine condition on the plains of Mesopotamia' (Matthews 2003: 109). In a similar light, Marcella Frangipane argues that the period and the region offers an 'ideal laboratory' for studying the origins of institutionalized power and central political authority, including the 'birth of the control of the economy by privileged classes' and the 'emergence of the first central public institutions and bureaucracy', which happened even before the invention of writing; in sum, a new perspective on 'the birth of the state' (Frangipane 2004: 13). Mario Liverani uses similarly momentous terms, arguing that the 'so-called Uruk culture marks the emergence of the first urban society' (Liverani 1998: vi); or that Uruk was the 'first complex society' (1998: v). In the last page of his book, Liverani resumes the 'extraordinary achievements' of the period as being at the same time 'urbanistic and architectural, artistic and literary, technological and ideological' (1998: 111) – a list directly comparable to summary characterizations of Athens (Hall 1999: 24). Matthews is similarly resolute: the 'Uruk phenomenon' is simply 'unique' (Matthews 2003: 109), given that 'the extent and intensity of the Uruk expansion, as materially attested in the archaeological record, are such that historical analogies, even from places and times historically contiguous to those of the Uruk, totally fail us' (2003: 125).

The relatively abrupt shift around 4000BC from qualitative to quantitative is quite striking. At the beginning of the period, the size of individual temples and the entire temple complex started to grow out of bounds in Uruk. Already during the 5th millennium BC, there was a spectacular increase in temple size when, from modest-sized

buildings, they grew into imposing, 200 square metre structures (Liverani 1998: 31–3), showing a certain affinity with the megalithic sanctuaries of Nevali Çori and Göbekli Tepe (Sagona and Zimansky 2009: 42). But, from around 4000BC, there was a genuine explosion of the temple complex, including an exponential growth in building size, with single temples covering 1500 square metres.

Growth in temple size was followed by expansion in the surface of the city area. Around 3200BC, within a relatively short period, population density in Uruk increased tenfold (Matthews 2003: 110). As a result, by 2900BC the city grew to the staggering size of 5.5 km^2, containing nearly 100,000 inhabitants (Nissen 1990: 80–1). In comparison, classical Athens extended to about 2.5 km^2, while Jerusalem was only 1 km^2 (50AD), and even Rome at the height of the Empire (100 AD) was only about twice the size of Uruk (1990: 80–1).

The phenomenon takes off in the transition phase in between Ubaid and Uruk cultures, at around 4000BC: a 'shadowy period' (Matthews 2003: 108) about which we still possess little evidence (Frangipane 1996: 168). Apart from growth in temple and city sizes, this period is marked by significant changes in material culture. The centre of agricultural innovation is now the south, or Mesopotamia proper, where a series of technical inventions, focusing on irrigation, radically increased productivity (Nissen 1990: 21–4; Frangipane 2007). The 'long field' method, the sowing plough and the terracotta sickle enabled a five- to tenfold increase in crops (Liverani 1998: 20–25).

Following standard logic, such growth in productivity is expected to increase leisure time and improve artistic creativity. In fact, the opposite happened: the high quality hand-painted pottery marking previous cultures disappeared in the Uruk period, being replaced by low-quality mass-produced ware, the so-called 'bevelled rim bowls', used for fast meals by workers employed in the central administration (Frangipane 1996: 147–51, 169–71; Matthews 2003: 106–7; Nissen 1990: 91–2). Growth in productivity instead led to an accentuation of social stratification, producing two classes, functionaries and workers (Frangipane 1996: 174–5). Similar utilitarian mechanization characterized building technology, where brick-laying was replaced by the application of flat bricks, more like tiles, which could be thrown upon each other quickly, without need for care, being kept together by their own weight (Nissen 1990: 102–3).

This change became particularly intense around the middle of the millennium, amounting to a 'Great Transformation' (Frangipane 1996: 177).[5] A central role was played by the discovery of metallurgy in Southern Anatolia and the rise to prominence of

Arslantepe, a liminal site between Anatolia, the Trans-Caucasus and Mesopotamia. Metal objects were already used in the 8th millennium BC but, at that time, only the technique of 'cold hammering' was known. Melting was first experimented with in Yümük Tepe, Mersin (a port in Cilicia), during the late 5th millennium BC (Sagona and Zimansky 2009: 139, 205). The large-scale production of metals, however, only took place in Arslantepe around 3500BC (Frangipane 1996: 165–7, 203; 2004: 59, 66). This technological development had two main aspects: advanced experimenting with arsenic and tin made copper stronger, producing more resistant bronze, pioneering a transition to the Bronze Age, identified as the 'age of warriors' in both Greek and Hindu mythology; while experiments with aesthetic forms resulted in the emergence of an artisanal class, but soon also the mass-production of identical items, imitating the same forms. The invention of bronze swords illustrates well the process. At first, high-quality artisanal swords were made for ceremonial purposes, probably sword-dancing, around 3500BC; this was followed by hand-made military swords for the elite, and eventually mass-produced swords for ever larger armies.

Arslantepe is a site excavated by Italian researchers, and knowledge about it is still rather limited. This settlement, going back to about 4250BC, is liminal not only in a geographical and thus cultural sense, but also as it represents the point of encounter between agricultural and metallurgical innovativeness. The character and speed of transformation can be captured by changes in the size, shape and function of large buildings. Monumental, terraced palaces appeared between 3500–3200BC, replacing the previous, smaller temple structures (Frangipane 1996: 234–7, 2004: 47; Sagona and Zimansky 2009: 155–62). The significance of changes is convened through momentous expressions: this 'Great Transformation' marks a shift 'from Temple to Palace' (Frangipane 2004: 59), with the Arslantepe terraced complex representing 'the most ancient palace complex' in the world (2004: 60). Temple-palaces were decorated by wall paintings, another innovation, again advancing both Minoan Crete and the Italian Renaissance, present especially in storage rooms, and transit areas or passages (Frangipane 1996: 241, 2004: 47–59).

This type of change, pioneered by Arslantepe, was fed back into the South, generating the explosion of Uruk in size around 3200BC.

The emergence of the Uruk system is a process of vital importance for social theory, as it can be considered the first 'global village' (Wengrow 2010: 54), or rather city,

centre of the first global network. The high degree of interconnectedness only became visible due to the drawing up of 'survey maps', an approach pioneered by Thorkild Jacobsen, an important associate of Henri Frankfort, and continued by Robert Adams (Liverani 1990: x–xii; Matthews 2003: 47–51).

During the fourth millennium BC, it was not only contacts between the south and the north that intensified and homogenization that deepened, but the network also became extended, incorporating areas such as Malatya and Susa (Elam), which never before or after became subordinated to Mesopotamia (Frangipane 1996: 174, 7, 205–6).[6] By the middle of the millennium, this resulted in a new practice of population movements (Frangipane 1996: 212–28). In contrast to previous periods, when people shifted location mostly within a relatively limited area and only small 'elite' groups maintained contacts between regions, now, on the one hand, settlements became much more stable as local communities were no longer split due to population surplus moving to new areas and, on the other, large groups of people were continuously moving out of the south, either founding new towns or settling inside existing ones, radically altering local ways of life.

Interpreting these developments is a central preoccupation of archaeologists. It cannot be considered an early example of international trade, as settlers from the south did not set up trading networks, rather brought their entire agricultural package to northern towns, which then came to function on the basis of autarchy, not being interested in sending the surplus back into the mother town. It was not a colonial expansion either, as satellite towns were not subjugated and integrated into a hierarchical system, which in itself invalidates Guillermo Algaze's (1993) attempt to apply Wallerstein's 'world system' theory. If anything, the practice recalls the Greek type of colonization (Frangipane 1996: 227), though with a major difference: 'colonisers' remained physically and culturally separate from indigenous population, with no intermarriage taking place (Matthews 2003: 119–20, based on the excavations of Hacınebi by Gil Stein).

Reading these attempts at understanding is quite fascinating, as they exude a palpable atmosphere of intense reflection and thinking (Matthews 2003: 115–6; Frangipane 1996: 226–7). Not simply general, modernist interpretive frameworks, but even basic assumptions that drove archaeologists for long decades had to be abandoned. These include attempts to justify Old Testament narratives; predilection to invasions, a secular legacy of the previous; excessive emphasis attributed to written evidence; and the

assumption – for long treated as evidence – that changes in pottery style automatically imply the arrival of new ethnic groups. This led Nissen to suggesting that the division of 'prehistory' and 'history', based on the presence of writing, should be abandoned (Liverani 1990: ix–x).

A central recent development concerns the novel significance attributed to religious factors. In his later Preface, Nissen expressed regret to have devoted so little attention to religion in his original edition (Nissen 1990: xix); while a recent survey recognizes a general shift away from materialist and economic explanations (Sagona and Zimansky 2009: 40–2; see also Insoll 2004). The reasons for Uruk globalization might thus lie, 'in contrast to our contemporary bias', in religious considerations (Matthews 2003: 120). Such an idea is even self-evident, as Uruk was a religious capital even before the Uruk system; but, in trying to capture the character of such a religion, Matthews suggests moving beyond the framework still applied by Liverani: priestly strata manipulating masses through imposed ideology (Liverani 1998: 33–4). Uruk temple religion, though well-organized, was originally not despotic, as the central concern of its buildings and ceremonies was divine presence (Matthews 2003: 116), and behind this, one can even intuit the idea of human indebtedness towards the divine (2003: 121). Strikingly, Matthews' argument leads back to Nietzsche's (1967) *Genealogy of Morals*.

The Uruk dynamics is not due to religious factors alone, but rather the particular inflexion given to Mesopotamian cultic religion by the rise of metallurgy. In modernity, religious developments and technological innovations are considered to be unrelated. The historical connection between religion, magic and metallurgy, however, is well established – it is enough to evoke the ritualistic role played by smiths in many cultures (Blakely 2006; Horvath 2013; Popov 1933). It is through this combination of the religious-cultic and the technological-scientific that the Mesopotamian case can help sociologists capture the 'spirit' of globalization, adding the Newtonian obsession with the void and limitless to the Weberian concern with Puritanism.

It is here that the crucial significance played by Arslantepe – excavated only recently – for Uruk culture can be captured, through the methodological perspective offered by liminality, offering broader relevance for understanding the rise and dynamics of globalizing processes. Arslantepe is at a liminal position, in between Anatolia and Mesopotamia, thus at the borderline of two different cultural entities. Such a position helped it become a centre of innovation through the rise of metallurgy. As a consequence of taking over these technological innovations, Uruk, the traditional

religious centre, was transformed into a 'bureaucratic' political-administrative centre and then exploded in its population, resulting a growth that became unsustainable and brought about the collapse of the entire system.

The collapse of the Uruk global network

Around 3000BC-2900BC, the global network exploded. The crisis affected all areas, so it can be compared to the catastrophic events around 1200BC (Drews 1993), of which memory survived in the form of the 'Trojan War'. Destruction, just as in the latter case, was not uniform. It was greatest in the liminal zone, with Arslantepe burnt and destroyed around 3000BC, while relatively minor in the Southern Mesopotamian alluvial area. Still, the entire network was disorganized and never reconstituted.

Led by the south, few centuries later, a new dynamism called 'second urbanization' took off (Liverani 1998: 108). Amongst and out of the ruins, a renewed practice emerged: human sacrifice. There is no evidence for this practice in the region for 6000BC–3000BC, though it was present in Çayönü earlier; even the structure of temples is unsuited for performing such rituals (Abusch 2002; Margueron 2005). Prime examples include the Royal Tomb of Ur, dated 2600BC, and the ritual sacrifice of four young adults (three females) around 2700BC in Arslantepe, discovered in contorted poses around a princely tomb (Frangipane 2004: 115–21).[7] The case is again similar to Minoan Crete, where evidence of human sacrifice is only available from the last periods of Minoan civilization (Driessen 2001).

Even apart from human sacrifice, the second urbanization did not simply imitate the first. While temples as centres maintained their continuity and importance, there emerged 'a royal power which in certain cases assumed characteristics that were conspicuously militaristic (Akkad) or mercantile (Ebla)' (Liverani 1998: 109–10). These developments were amply preserved in writing and images, misguiding posterity about their primacy.

Conclusion

The central claim of this article is that modern globalization is not a unique development, but rather can be meaningfully situated as a concrete case of a historical-type globalizing processes. Other such types include periods of social flourishing or dark ages, while

other cases of globalization are the ecumenic empires after the axial age, or Uruk culture. Such types can even be arranged alongside a sequential order.

In approaching modern globalization, this article followed the inspiration of Max Weber, but went beyond his words in three senses. Methodologically, it followed Weber's Nietzschean genealogical design, in contrast to the neo-Kantian or neo-Marxist orientation of most works in contemporary historical sociology, focusing on Nietzsche's concern with backward inference, adding the anthropologically derived concepts 'liminality' and 'imitation'. Concerning the range of evidence, it went back to the distant past, and – beyond Antiquity – it incorporated archaeological evidence. Finally, in terms of the moving forces behind historical changes, it not only focused on religious developments, but – beyond the concern with charismatic prophets responding to societal crises – turned to epiphanies, or sudden experiences of divine presence, thus focusing on the type of periods to which the Italian Renaissance belonged, rectifying Weber's relative ignoring of this case.

Based on these considerations, the article identified the following hypothetical sequence concerning the genesis and dynamics of globalizing processes. Epiphany experiences may give rise to genuine processes of social flourishing, manifested by the relative absence of violence and the widespread presence of beautiful, carefully crafted objects in everyday life, having deep, communal symbolic meaning. Social flourishing can be maintained for a long time, but eventually, due to a loss of measure or limits, can become inflected into a process of unlimited quantitative growth. Processes of globalization, however, become much more quickly unsustainable, exhausting their own resources, at which point the system breaks down, globalization being replaced by a 'dark age' in which social order is assured by systematic warfare, even human sacrifices. As concrete example, the article presented evidence from early Mesopotamia, going back to the 6th to 5th millennia BC, arguably a period of social flourishing, which led to Uruk becoming the first global city and culminated around 3000BC in the collapse of the Uruk system.

Keeping in mind the delicacy of using historical analogies, the storyline reconstructed for Mesopotamia can help sociologists make sense of the sequence of events from Renaissance through Reformation, Enlightenment and modernity to the current process of globalization. Beyond secularization, the Renaissance was a period of social flourishing after the 'dark ages' that followed the collapse of the Roman Empire, influenced by epiphany experiences. This process got inflected from about the late

fifteenth century, with the collapse of the Byzantine Empire and the ensuing discoveries, followed by early colonialism and the religious and civil wars of the sixteenth–seventeenth centuries, where limits were radically redrawn, first of all concerning the realm of religion, which eventually resulted in an increasingly limitless, technologically driven expansionism. Technological development, however, as the Mesopotamian case suggests, is by no means a panacea, as transforming qualitative distinctions into quantitative deviations on a single scale provokes endless mimetic rivalries and resource exhaustion until certain ultimate natural, societal and human limits are reached that threaten the survival of the entire globalizing system.

(Date accepted: November 2015)

Notes

[1] It is not possible to discuss in detail here the revolutionary aspects of Weber's charisma. Weber conjectures an elective affinity between out-of-ordinary crisis situations and the appearance of persons possessing charismatic qualities (1978: 1121). This presumes that any such situation will automatically produce charismatic leaders taking care of the solution, while ignoring the possibility of sui generis religious developments such as epiphanies.

[2] For extending 'renaissance' to a type of period, see also Coldstream (1977); Snodgrass (1971).

[3] For a similar argument concerning the rise of Greek cities, see Polignac (1995). Schmidt's ideas sparked a debate in the October 2011 issue of *Current Anthropology*, which it is not possible to discuss here.

[4] Continuity persisted in Çatal Höyük, an important Neolithic site not discussed here.

[5] The allusion to Karl Polanyi's work is by no means fortuitous, as parallels with the modern industrial revolution are manifold.

[6] While the names Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran belong to contemporarily terminology, continuities in cultural and political differences between the respective geographical areas can be traced back to the early Neolithic.

[7] The title of this section is 'The oldest royal tomb'.

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