# The Limits to Globalization Theory: A Geographic Perspective on Global Economic Change*

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**Abstract:** The nature of globalization and global economic change has been a subject of immense academic research during the past two decades. The Janus face of globalization, however, continues to obfuscate our understanding of its complex processes and alleged geographic outcomes. In this article, I theorize on the indispensable role of geography in conceptualizing *economic* globalization. I argue that economic globalization is an inherently geographic phenomenon in relation to the transcendence and switchability of geographic scales and discursive practices as sociospatial constructions. Given its complex spatiality, economic globalization is more a phenomenon in need of explanations than a universal *cause* of empirically observable outcomes in the so-called globalization theory. To illustrate my theoretical claims, I analyze the complex interrelationships between globalization processes and the recent Asian economic crisis. Some implications for future globalization research in geography are offered.

**Key words:** social theory, globalization, geographic scales, discourses, Asian economic crisis.

"Geography is still important. Globalization has not diminished the economic significance of location"—John Kay (2001, 14) declared in the headline of his column in the *Financial Times.* The fact that business gurus like Kay write about globalization is nothing new; indeed, some geographers (e.g., Taylor, Watts, and Johnson 2001; Cox forthcoming) have associated the dreaming up of "globalization" as *the* lexicon in the new century with such business gurus (as well as global financiers and international organizations). What is particularly interesting in Kay's column, however, is his unreserved defense of the importance of place and location in globalization. Coming from outside geography as an academic discipline, his views on globalization provide significant legitimacy for the claim that geographers may have some useful things to say about globalization. The missing link in Kay's polemical acknowledgment of the importance of geography in globalization, however, is what constitutes this importance. Does it refer to geography as preexisting spatial configurations that simply do not wither away in the midst of globalization processes? Or perhaps more significant, what is the explanatory relationship between geography

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and globalization? Is geography simply an outcome or *explanandum* of globalization that poses as the *explanans* (the cause)? How does geography matter in our explanations of globalization? This last question points to a significant inversion of *cause* (geography) and *outcome* (globalization). My aim in this article is to theorize how this inversion may be possible and plausible. In their laudable efforts to relate geography to globalization, Taylor, Watts, and Johnson (2001, 1) noted that "[w]hatever your own opinion may be, any intellectual engagement with social change in the twenty first century has to address this concept [globalization] seriously, and *assess its capacity to explain the world we currently inhabit*" [italics added]. Assessing the *capacity* of globalization (defined in the next section) as a concept and a set of tendencies to explain the geographic world is the primary focus of this article.

Rather than formulate a definitive framework on geography and globalization, the article seeks to open up a debate among geographers (and other social scientists) who are interested in studies of global economic change. It contributes to the current efforts in critical geography to move beyond "first-wave" analyses of globalization as a geographic phenomenon (see Amin and Thrift 1994; Cox 1997a; Dicken 1998; Herod, Tuathail, and Roberts 1998; Olds et al. 1999; Coe and Yeung 2001; Peck and Yeung forthcoming). Cognizant of the enormous amount of globalization studies, I did not intend this article to be a literature review or even a critical assessment of the globalization literature that is extremely diverse and, perhaps, chaotic (for an excellent recent review, see Guillén 2001). Instead, my aim is to develop a geographic perspective on globalization. I argue that globalization is an inherently geographic phenomenon, and therefore its *alleged* causality and outcomes may be better understood and accurately assessed from this perspective. Here, globalization processes are conceived as *spatial tendencies* that are contingent on, and accounted for by, certain stringent and necessary requirements, some of which are *geographic,* while others are political, economic, and/or technological.

Contrary to the efforts of what Featherstone and Lash (1995) called "the spatialization of social theory" that seek to inject globalization as the central thematic into social theory and to elevate the explanatory status of what may be termed "globalization theory," my theorization of the inherent spatiality of globalization attempts to destabilize the hegemonic mobilization of globalization as the universal explanation of empirical outcomes. My analytical concern is not to explain how globalization is reshaping our lives—a key observation by such social/globalization theorists as Giddens (1990, 2000) and Waters (1995) who assume that globalization is the *cause* of social change (cf. Hay and Marsh 2000). Rather, I am interested in what geographic preconditions enable globalization to take place in tandem with this reshaping of social life—a geographic theory *of* globalization. In this geographic perspective, globalization becomes the phenomenon to be theorized, and spatiality is critical—but only in a nonexclusive way. To avoid what Cox (1997b, 132) called "the overspatialization of social relations," I propose that the spatiality of globalization is an outcome of social constructions of space that are mediated through historically specific political, economic, and technological forces. As a description of spatial tendencies, globalization does not have an independent existence outside these forces and thus cannot be mobilized to explain empirical outcomes in the absence of these forces. My geographic perspective therefore does not commit the epistemological fallacy of what Rosenberg (2000, 14) termed "the systematic fetishising of spatial categories" by turning globalization theory into a spatial theory of supraterritoriality. This mistake of reifying space is commonly found in globalization theory in which, as Rosenberg (2000, 39–40) further pointed out, "the impact of particular kinds of social relationship on the spatial organisation of societies is instead imputed to the social impact of the geographical laws of location, distance and separation—and their transcendence via increased speed of communication and transport." As a theory *of* globalization—rather than a globalization theory that purports to explain global economic change—the proposed geographic perspective can make a potential contribution to demystifying, or at least qualifying, the alleged explanatory power of globalization and space.

Starting with certain necessary, but not sufficient, geographic preconditions for globalization to take place, the proposed perspective shows how these preconditions are socially and discursively constructed in ways that may explain empirical outcomes. Although globalization has been "short-circuited" in this theoretical linking of geographic preconditions and empirical outcomes, it remains an important phenomenon to be described and explained. In particular, I examine two geographic preconditions: scalar switchability and discursive spatial practices. First, geographic scales, defined as the hierarchical ordering of space, mediate how globalization is linked to empirical outcomes. The political, economic, and social processes through which geographic scales are produced and made "*switchable*," not globalization per se, directly shape how these empirical outcomes may be explained. Second, the discursive dimension of globalization is legitimized through the mobilization of spatial metaphors and geographic imaginations that, in turn, shape social practices and empirical outcomes. In this discursive realm, globalization becomes a discursive representation that has little capacity to produce empirical outcomes. It is the *politics* of discursive mobilization that effectively shape empirical events. By showing how these geographic preconditions enable the advancement of globalization, I suggest that geographers can avoid the pitfall of taking globalization as the cause of empirical outcomes, and focus fruitfully on its geographic preconditions, which may, in turn, provide a more nuanced explanation to account for global economic change. To illustrate my theoretical claims, I examine critically three causal explanations of the 1997–98 Asian economic crisis. Although the crisis has been represented as a crisis *of* economic globalization, it is neither logical nor empirically correct to explain it by conveniently labeling it as merely an outcome of globalization.

## Uncovering and Delimiting the "Globalization Problematic"

Anyone who is working on globalization these days immediately runs into a seemingly intractable problem of defining globalization. The definitions of globalization in the literature unfortunately remain largely elusive, vague, and, in Jessop's (1999) view, "chaotic." Geographers now generally agree that globalization should be viewed as a set of mutually constitutive tendencies comprising both *material processes* of transformation and countermovements, and *contested ideologies and discourses* that operate across a variety of geographic scales. Globalization is certainly not akin to a megatrend "out there" with which social scientists can objectively grapple. We cannot define globalization as concrete processes of socioeconomic and political restructuring on a global scale without underscoring the ideological foundations on which these processes operate. This definitional problem makes it incumbent upon us to present a specific and precise definition of globalization that, it is hoped, avoids the problem of "chaotic concepts."

In this article, I focus more specifically on *economic* globalization, defined as *the rapid proliferation of cross-border production, trade, and investment activities spearheaded by global corporations and international financial institutions that facilitate the emergence of an increasingly integrated and interdependent global economy* (see also Dicken 1998). There are three specificities to this definition of economic globalization. First, it includes only material processes of *economic* transactions and linkages across borders and excludes other globalization imperatives that may have economic consequences (e.g., migrations and civil society networks). Second, it encapsulates an *actor-oriented approach* to understanding economic globalization by focusing specifically on the transformative role of global corporations and international financial institutions. This specificity avoids the flawed structural view of economic globalization as some sort of megatrend "out there." It allows us to bring back the Prince of Denmark (social actor) in the discussion of *Hamlet* (economic globalization). Echoing Mittelman (2000, 2001), we need to identify the "captors" and "captives" of globalization. Third, it explicitly refers to *the global scale* as critical in defining economic *globalization*. Whatever its constituents, contestations, and consequences at different geographic scales, economic globalization is necessarily an integrating set of tendencies that operate on the global scale and intensify connections and flows across territorial borders and regions. This narrower definition of economic globalization avoids the dangerous tendency to use *globalization* as a catchall term to describe all kinds of contemporary processes of change. Despite its causal links with the contemporary capitalist imperative, economic globalization is certainly not just about the latest phase of uneven geographic development, deterritorialization/reterritorialization, or crisis-induced capitalist restructuring. Economic globalization indeed has much deeper historical roots in the founding of the modern nation-state during the seventeenth century (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton 1999; Hirst and Thompson 1999; Schwartz 2000).

The transformative capacity of globalization processes has commonly been associated with both material outcomes in such specific spatial units as localities, regions, and nation-states, and peculiar discursive practices by social actors. This Janus face of economic globalization, however, has continued to frustrate social science research into its *causes* and *outcomes*. We are often told by the popular literature and various politicized groups that economic globalization is responsible for virtually every good and bad thing or event that is happening in the global economy today. Even in the so-called critical theory of globalization, such an inversion of cause and outcome can be readily found. For example, Scholte (1996, 53) argued that "[t]o date, globalization has often perpetuated poverty, widened material inequalities, increased ecological degradation, sustained militarism, fragmented communities, marginalized subordinated groups, fed intolerance and deepened crises of democracy." Instead of being an *outcome* driven and explained by a multitude of interrelated processes and necessary preconditions, economic globalization has become conceptualized in mainstream economic thinking and radical political debates as the universal *cause*. In his provocative book *The Follies of Globalisation Theory*, Rosenberg (2000, 2–3) offered a compelling critique of the use of globalization as the universal explanation by social/globalization theorists:

> The term "globalisation," after all, is at first sight merely a descriptive category, denoting either the geographical extension of social processes or possibly, as in Giddens' definition, "the intensification of worldwide social relations" . . . And the globalisation theorists clearly intend something more than this. By asserting that the emergence of a single global space as the arena of social action increasingly outweighs in its consequences other kinds of causality which have traditionally been invoked to explain social phenomena; by extrapolating the geographical dimension of this process into an alternative, spatio-temporal problematic for social science; and finally, by pitting this new problematic not simply against competing perspectives in the contemporary social sciences, but also against the classical foundations of modern social thought as a whole—in all these ways, they have raised their sights beyond any purely descriptive role for the concept.

On the one hand, globalization has been naturalized as the inevitable pathway to economic prosperity and success. If a national economy is not performing well, it must be because the economy is not having "enough" economic globalization. On the other hand, antiglobalization groups—as manifested in the activism of those demonstrating in Seattle and Genoa—view economic globalization as the cause of all kinds of socioeconomic malaises. Whatever one's political position, the presence or absence of economic globalization has seemingly been conceived as a political "fix" to resolve the problems of economic stagnation, technological backwardness, and underdevelopment. This "globalization fix" clearly has both material and discursive consequences for all its participants—people, firms, state authorities and nonstate institutions, international organizations, and so on. It also underscores the central importance of understanding whether globalization should be the universal explanation in the first case.

## The Geographic Foundations of Economic Globalization

My geographic perspective begins by questioning the common assumption of economic globalization as a causal factor that has certain structural coherence and properties to cause empirically observable outcomes (see also Jessop 1999). This assumption is evident in such statements as "economic globalization leads to deepening income inequality and unemployment." Similarly, debates on the "winners" and "losers" of economic globalization have also demonized globalization as a mythical juggernaut that is powerful enough to cause all sorts of socioeconomic miseries and political problems (Kapstein 2000). Such typical and uncritical acceptance of globalization as causally efficacious is found in Kaplinsky's (2001, 46; italics added) argument that "the increasing globalization of factor and financial markets *leads* to growing inequality and poverty, both in developing and industrialized countries." For economic globalization to be causally efficacious, however, it must contain some inherent constituents that exist in necessary relation with empirically observable outcomes. More specifically, the intrinsic *spatiality* of economic globalization sets some necessary, but not sufficient, preconditions for it to effect empirical changes and outcomes. To define the spatiality of economic globalization, we have to look into specific geographic foundations that presuppose and legitimize economic globalization: the transcendence and switchability of geographic scales and discursive practices as sociospatial constructions. I argue that these geographic preconditions enable economic globalization to occur in the first place. When coupled with other substantive political-economic forces, these geographic preconditions—not economic globalization per se—help to explain empirical consequences and outcomes. This geographic perspective on economic globalization thus does not necessarily force us to make a false choice between geography and other political-economic factors as the preconditions of economic globalization. Extending the political economy tradition in economic geography, it makes a more explicit link between geography and globalization by synthesizing recent thinking in human geography about geographic scales and discursive representations in understanding global economic change.

### Economic Globalization as the Transcendence of Geographic Scales

If economic globalization is a set of processes and practices that transcend our commonly accepted nesting of geographic scales, one necessary precondition to enable economic globalization to take place is what may be termed the "switchability" of geographic scales. The issue of geographies of scales has received a great deal of attention in the recent geographic literature (Brenner 1999, 2001; Kelly 1999; Marston 2000; Herod and Wright 2002a). While many of these geographic interpretations have clarified the status of overlapping scalar geographies and the reconfiguring of territorial units in understanding globalization, few have interrogated and ventured into the ontological status of geographic scales and, therefore, fundamentally questioned the spatiality of globalization. As Brenner (2001, 609) argued, we have to pay attention to the specific properties of geographic scales as "the *hierarchization* of spaces in relation to one another which is the very essence of their scalar ordering/differentiation or 'rescaling.'" In this sense, economic globalization represents a significant "scalar problem" because its very processes are constituted by the rescaling of multiple and overlapping geographic scales that fundamentally challenges the preexisting hierarchy of geographic spaces and territoriality. Facilitated by the enhanced spatial connectivity across the globe, events at different geographic scales (e.g., the national and the local scales) are often connected via globalization tendencies. Economic globalization is therefore associated with such rescaling effects as global localization, or "glocalization" (Swyngedouw 1992, 1997) and changing urban/regional governance (MacLeod and Goodwin 1999). This phenomenon of scalar connectivity transforms our interrogation of economic globalization from simply an analytical problem of understanding globalization as a horizontal spatial reach—a common notion in globalization theory—to a "scalar problem" in which it is impossible to understand economic globalization without addressing what *enables* it to transcend different geographic scales and, in the process, to reconstitute and reconfigure relations between these scales.

In particular, the *global* scale has paradoxically been undertheorized in recent theoretical work on the (local and national) politics of scale and the rescaling of (urban and supranational) politics. This is what Shaw (2000, 14) alluded to as "the poverty of the understanding of the global in most globalization debates." We still do not know enough about the *transformation of scales* to an ontological elevation of the global scale. As Kelly (1999, 386) argued, ignoring the global scale effectively places one in an awkward position that defers to "the orthodox way in which it is represented and the neoliberal policy conclusions that are drawn." While it can be discursively constructed through political-economic projects oriented toward other scales (discussed later), I argue that the global scale has an independent material existence beyond mere social construction. Such natural phenomena as climatic change and sea-level fluctuations, for example, are global in their scale of occurrence, impact, and imagination (cf. Cosgrove 1994; Albrow 1996; Demeritt 2001). The global space is what Lefebvre (1991, 422) referred to as "the furthest edge of the possible," "the space of the human species," and "the social foundation of a transformed everyday life open to myriad possibilities." It is the *ultimate* space in which all possibilities for human emancipation lie, and, according to Shaw (2000, 11–12), a common worldwide consciousness of human society as the largest constitutive framework of all social relations emerges.

The ontological existence of the global scale implies that contemporary economic globalization is an outcome of, and can be explained by, the historical and social processes in the preglobalization period that subsequently emerged and operate on a global scale under certain necessary conditions. As I explain later, the switchability of geographic scales provides one such necessary precondition for economic globalization to take place. For example, industrialization in the preglobalization period occurred in specific territorial formations, such as England. But its subsequent impact on technological change and political empowerment greatly facilitated the transcendence of geographic scales by capital in such a way as to produce globalization tendencies in the contemporary period. The ontological existence of the global scale also means that contra the pro- and antiglobalization rhetoric, the outcomes and consequences associated with economic globalization cannot be determined a priori, but only empirically and contingently. Pointing to the analytical indeterminacy of globalization theory, Albrow (1996, 91–2) noted that "[t]here is no inherent logic to globalization which suggests that a particular outcome necessarily will prevail." We can assess their social consequences only in relation to the specific places and contexts in which these tendencies manifest and unfold (Amin and Thrift 1997; Dicken, Peck, and Tickell 1997).

How, then, does the ontological existence of the global scale matter, and how does it relate to the switchability of geographic scales? In this article, geographic scales are theorized as having a significant influence on the processes of economic globalization *if* these scales possess properties of *switchability*—defined as the ease in which particular material processes and social practices can be constituted or reconstituted *in relation to* different configurations of geographic scales. These scales are not spatial solutions pregiven at the ontological level such that they can be "crossed over by social actors" and "produced" by globalization tendencies; they are rather contested through social struggles and political means. The relational switching process of globalization may indeed reconstitute or reconstruct these scales in such ways that *new* configurations of scales occur. In this sense, social actors who drive economic globalization do not merely switch from one scale to another. Rather, as Herod and Wright (2002b, 13; italics omitted) argued, they actually "constitute scale through their social praxis." Thus, their action—not economic globalization—accounts for empirical outcomes.

Scalar switchability is different from spatial switching in that the latter refers only to the substitutability of processes within the *same* geographic scales (e.g., from one location to another) rather than between *different* geographic scales (e.g., from the national scale to the supranational and the local and regional scales). Scalar switchability implies that such economic processes as global production networks can be switched from the global scale in its strategic conceptualization to the regional or local scale in its operationalization. There is a continuous tension in these global production networks between capital's mobility on a global scale and its necessary spatial fixity at the local or another scale (Harvey 1982, 1996; Henderson et al. forthcoming). Different degrees of scalar switchability can be attributed to human imperatives (e.g., technological changes and political movements) and social constructions (e.g., geographic imagination and discursive practices). Scalar switchability, however, varies contingently, depending on specific globalization processes such that geographic scales may be much more switchable in some processes (e.g., global capital flows) and much less switchable in others (e.g., international diplomacy and antiterrorism activities). The operationalization of scalar switchability in globalization and its alleged outcomes thus becomes an empirical question.

The capacity for geographic scales to be switchable in relation to globalization processes explains the propensity for economic globalization—as a set of spatial tendencies—to occur in two ways. First, the lack of fixed ontological status among such geographic scales as homes, localities, and regions indicates that these scales can be (re)constituted, (re)structured, and (re)combined *through*—not *by*—various globalization processes. Such processes as investment flows and cultural diffusion can "switch" up, down, or simultaneously up and down these different geographic scales in search of profits and other benefits for actors in economic globalization (e.g., business and political elites). In this sense, an explanation of the switchability of such socially constructed geographic scales helps to explain globalization processes because this switchability enables globalization processes to transcend nested territories and overlapping scales and to reorganize them into perhaps different scalar geographies. Scalar switchability is, however, a necessary but *not a sufficient* geographic precondition for economic globalization to take place. Other contingent factors matter as well. It is intuitively possible to think of counterexamples that globalization tendencies are reinforced because it is impossible for these tendencies to switch "out of" the global scale (e.g., economies of scale attainable only on a global scale). Alternatively, downward scalar switchability may enhance the importance of the local scale relative to global processes, a case in which scalar switchability weakens, rather than strengthens, globalization tendencies.[1]

Second, economic globalization, at least in the version defined here, is both constrained and enabled by the fixed and nonswitchable ontological existence of the global scale. Economic globalization has its scalar limits because the Earth places an upper limit on the spatial reach of economic globalization that should be understood as a spatial-temporal tendency of becoming, not an end-state being or a finality (Dicken, Peck, and Tickell 1997; Yeung 1998). By effectively delimiting the spatiality of economic globalization, the global scale sets a precondition on how far economic globalization can go—as far as the Earth can be stretched. Quite literally, economic globalization cannot proceed beyond the global scale; if it did, it would no longer be deemed *global*ization. There are also other possible contingent scenarios that may limit scalar switchability. For example, a national government may decide to control the flow of capital and thereby effectively disenable the scalar switchability of that country at different subnational scales (local, regional, and national). For example, financial globalization owes much to the efforts by national governments to grant freedom to market actors through liberalization initiatives and not to implement more effective controls on financial movements (Martin 1994; Helleiner 1995; Watson 2001). How, then, do these actors and institutions create conditions that are conducive for economic globalization to take place? What kind of discursive practices do they engage to ensure successfully sociospatial constructions of economic globalization?

[1] I thank one anonymous referee for this important qualification of my argument.

## Economic Globalization as Discursive Spatial Practices

The spatiality of economic globalization is more than just about exploiting preexisting spatial differences and switching among different, but overlapping, geographic scales. Economic globalization has a significant *discursive* dimension as well, which is manifested in specific social-spatial constructions, or what Lefebvre (1991, 33) called "representations of space, which are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations." Globalization discourses, as we have now come to know, are highly motivated by economic gains and political legitimacy without which economic globalization, as a set of material tendencies, would have lost its appeal to different groups of social actors. Capable of producing significant material effects, these discourses and their counterdiscourses are fundamental in improving the political and social acceptance of economic globalization to *both* the political Right and the political Left. As Jacques Derrida (quoted in Shaw 2000, 4) noted in response to questions about globalization as a political phenomenon, "today it's a confused concept and it's the screen for a number of non-concepts and sometimes of political tricks and political strategies. . . . [And] as you know, using this word, this key word, allows a number of political appropriations—in the name of the free market for instance." Watson (2001, 86) also argued that "[g]overnments need only act on the *perception* of the structural constraints imposed by globalising tendencies in order to turn the globalisation hypothesis into a self-fulfilling prophecy. At no stage does globalisation have to come complete with an *actual* logic of political necessity for the effects of such a logic to become apparent."

From a geographic perspective, this discursive dimension of globalization is spatially construed in the sense that many globalization discourses mobilize *spatial* *metaphors* to legitimize and justify the intrusive nature of globalization. In this sense, we can analyze what may be termed "geographies of discursive practices." Spatial metaphors are developed from our geographic imaginations of the material world to "make sense" of this changing world. Smith (1991, 168) pointed out that "metaphorical uses of space inevitably refer to material space; the one is constructed from within the other." Spatial metaphors are grounded in specific ontological conceptions of scalar geographies (the hierarchical separation of the global scale as opposed to the local scale) and universal homogeneity (applicability in all temporal and geographic contexts). Grounded in certain imaginative geographies, economic globalization is presented in these spatial metaphors *as if* it corresponds to the real material world in which we live. Spatial metaphors serve as important hermeneutical devices for the social-spatial constructions of globalization tendencies without which globalization would face a crisis of legitimation. Spatial metaphors advocated in globalization discourses thus provide another necessary, but not sufficient, geographic precondition for globalization to take place. Material geographies facilitate the construction and mobilization of spatial metaphors that, in turn, legitimize globalization tendencies. Critically analyzing the evolution of the local/global as a spatial imaginary in globalization theory, Cox (forthcoming, 17) contended that "it is an abstraction from more complex socio-spatial relations; a construction, therefore, which simplifies, silences and can be turned to useful ideological effect. Spatial imaginaries, like the local/global, are always constructed from the standpoint of particular social positions, if not always in a very self-conscious manner."

This section seeks to unravel the meanings of these spatial metaphors and to show how they shape the practices of social actors. As Barnes (1996, 157) argued, "[t]o then demonstrate that the metaphor's meaning is in its use, we must in addition show that it allows people to do things that they could never have done before." One good example is Ohmae's (1990) representation of the "borderless world" that has been appropriated by the international business communities as if it were a reality (see also the "rape" script of globalization analyzed in Gibson-Graham 1996, Chap. 6). Protagonists of the metaphor would like to see the negation of all territorial boundaries in order to enhance capital's global reach. Many global corporations subscribe to this idea of the "borderless world" and take a "one world" view in their strategic intent and management. What these economic actors have obviously forgotten is the representational nature and underlying sociospatial relations that underscore the (re)production of this spatial metaphor (Miyoshi 1993; Yeung 1998).

The literature on globalization commonly mobilizes three spatial metaphors to represent economic globalization in sociospatial terms. First, all sorts of champions and opponents have constructed economic globalization discursively as an *external force* that impinges on specific scalar geographies (e.g., localities). This ontological separation of economic globalization as "out there" and places as "in here" is problematical. As Amin (2001, 6273) argued, this kind of metaphorical representation of economic globalization implies that "relations within localities are cast as good and meaningful, and contrasted to bad and totalizing external relations [at the global scale]" (see also Dirlik 1999; Cox forthcoming). The missing link in this problematical ontological separation between local (internal) and global (external) geographies is the necessary and integral relations between the local scale and the global scale (and other scales in between). Economic globalization is not an external force that is crushing self-contained localities and territories. Instead, these localities have always been socially constructed in relation to the global scale. Economic globalization is as internal to these localities as the localities are integral in the development and evolution of globalization processes. This ontological inquiry into the discursive representation of economic globalization as an external force has important implications for an understanding of its spatiality. It allows us to understand better the discursive strategies deployed by proponents of economic globalization, who would argue that we should accept economic globalization wholeheartedly simply because everyone "out there" has been involved in and is benefiting from it. We can also appreciate the problematic representation of economic globalization by its dissents, who would argue that without economic globalization, the good life in localities will return or remain intact. In either case, economic globalization is discursively constructed as a spatially external force that causes all kinds of prosperity and/or misery.

Second, economic globalization has been put forward in political campaigns and official speeches as *natural* and *inevitable*. This is typically a TINA argument ("There Is No Alternative"), as evident in earlier debates about market liberalization in the 1980s. For example, Leyshon (1997, 143) stated that "[m]ost of the globalization discourses which emerge from within political communities tend to be far more simplistic in their general tenor, if not evangelical in tone, and display a burning faith in the 'natural' benevolence and 'obvious' utility of markets." In this metaphorical construction, economic globalization is "naturalized" as a historical inevitability, which is clearly far from being true. As I argued earlier, economic globalization is *not* inevitable even if geographic scales are perfectly switchable; there are other necessary stringent conditions for globalization to take place. The inevitability of economic globalization remains a contingent issue. For example, economic globalization may not take place if we can minimize uneven development and disenable scalar switchability. It is thus reversible and can be stopped. Mittelman (2001, 7) contended that "if globalization is a contested and political phenomenon, then it cannot have a predetermined outcome. A political agenda of inevitability overlooks the fact that globalization was made by humans, and, if so, can be unmade or remade by humankind" (see also Gibson-Graham 1996; Petras 1999; Prakash 2001). In *The End of Globalization*, James (2001) showed how an earlier wave of globalization tendencies was disrupted by popular resentment against the hypermobility of capital flows, trade, and international migration during the Great Depression.

Third, economic globalization has been championed in the popular media and business literature as *universal* (e.g., in "the end of history" debate stimulated by Fukuyama 1992) and, by implication, beneficial to humankind globally. Again, this sociospatial construction of the universality of economic globalization overlooks its equally possible spatial logic of exploitation and uncertainty (Harvey 1982; Smith 1991; Yeung 1998). Although economic globalization, as a set of tendencies, has potential for planetary reach, its universality cannot be guaranteed on two counts. First, economic globalization requires the exploitation of spatial differences in different parameters, ranging from wages and labor productivity to the availability of venture capital and state regulation. While beneficial to the drivers of economic globalization (e.g., transnational corporations), this spatial exploitation may outstrip the short-term advantages that economic globalization brings to specific places (as in the "footloose capital" argument; see Watson 2001). Second, although the geographic precondition of scalar switchability allows different localities/regions to be "plugged" into the global economy in Castells' (1996) sense, it can significantly increase the vulnerability of these localities/regions to scalar switching processes that may be more harmful than beneficial (e.g., the sudden valorization of domestic productive capital into other forms of financial capital at different geographic scales, as in the case of the Asian economic crisis discussed next). Put in this perspective, economic globalization is neither always universal nor necessarily beneficial. It clearly depends on preexisting geographic foundations of particular globalization tendencies and their historically contingent realization through various political, economic, and social arrangements.

## A Crisis of Globalization? Interpreting the Asian Economic Crisis

If we are able to determine what the spatiality of economic globalization is really about, we will be in a good position to begin *analyzing* and *assessing* the explanatory capacity of globalization theory in terms of its alleged causes and outcomes. The 1997–98 Asian economic crisis (henceforth "the crisis") is a highly relevant concrete example that can shed light on the alleged causality of economic globalization for two reasons. First, the overwhelming amount of competing literature published on the crisis demonstrates a plethora of different ways of interpreting the crisis as an outcome of economic globalization. The crisis may be possibly one of the rare large-scale phenomena of global economic change in recent decades that has been associated so closely with economic globalization per se (see also Kelly and Olds 1999). In particular, the popular media and many people in Asia have become "globalization critics" by misrepresenting the crisis as an outcome of the globalization of Asian economies. The crisis also signifies the breakdown of "the last bastion of successful development in the world economy, following the 'lost decade for development' which has befallen a major part of the underdeveloped world since the 1980s" (Lo 1999, 18). Second, the crisis has been highly politicized to the extent that it is at least partially responsible for the downfall of several presidents in Asian countries (e.g., Suharto in Indonesia and Kim Young-Sam in South Korea). The discursive constructions of the crisis by different actors/elites with different motivations and their related strategies of negotiation may offer important insights into the sociospatial constructions of economic globalization.

In the following two sections, I first summarize the literature by presenting the Asian economic crisis as a crisis of economic globalization through linking concrete outcomes to what some observers allude to as globalization tendencies. In this way, I show how economic globalization has been conceived as the *cause* and the crisis as the *outcome*, particularly in some highly ideological and simplistic interpretations of the crisis. I then question the logic and evidence of explaining the crisis as the outcome of economic globalization. I elaborate on a geographic perspective that examines the relationship between the crisis and the spatiality of economic globalization, the impact of which is contingent on differentiated sociospatial structures of Asia and the global economy. This argument can be understood in two parts. First, the scalar switchability of capital allows national and local economies of Asia to be differentially incorporated into the global economy. In this process, generally known as global financial integration, global capital switches not only within scales (spatial substitution), but also between scales (scalar switchability). Whereas spatial substitution greatly increases the crisis tendency of the host Asian economies through greater ease of global capital inflows and outflows, scalar switchability works quite differently. By connecting local and/or national capital to global flows of capital, scalar switchability allows unprecedented global exports of capital from local and national economies in Asia that, in turn, increase these economies' vulnerability to global economic downturns. Second, the impact of this increasing crisis tendency clearly varies among Asian economies, depending on their differential institutional fabric and economic structures that explain the varying degrees of scalar switchability of their capital outflows in the first place (Yeung 2000a; 2000b). Economic globalization per se, understood here in terms of free flows of global capital across borders, does not provide a convincing explanation for the crisis as its outcome.

This geographic interpretation of the crisis offers a more nuanced analysis of the complex interrelationships between economic globalization and the crisis that have escaped the attention of most analysts of the crisis. I do not aim to refute alternative interpretations of the crisis because the task involves a detailed empirical analysis of the complex causes and effects of the crisis that clearly go beyond the limits of this article. Whatever the specific causes and effects of the crisis, this brief excursion into its spatiality should be considered a complementary effort to demystify the hegemonic discourse of globalization theory in which economic globalization is conveniently posed as the key explanation of the crisis. The following analysis should also not be considered as a stand-alone empirical analysis of what has caused the crisis. Indeed, it is intended to shed light on the general arguments of this article that economic globalization does not have enough analytical capacity to explain many empirically observable outcomes.

## Existing Explanations of the Asian Economic Crisis

There is now no shortage of explanations of why the 1997–98 Asian economic crisis occurred. In fact, an entire cottage industry has been established to produce all sorts of heavily contested interpretations of the crisis (Ariff and Khalid 2000; Chang, Palma, and Whittaker 2001). Nevertheless, three explanations stand out for scrutiny: (1) neoliberal arguments of moral hazard; (2) the political economy of globalization; and, more specifically, (3) the Marxist perspective. It is interesting that some of these explanations indirectly hinge on particular geographic scales, which tend to shape their different analytical foci that contribute to their "incommensurability" in both ideological and empirical terms. As an expectedly dominant discourse, the leitmotiv of the *neoliberal* literature is that the crisis can be largely explained by such internal factors as crony capitalism and excessive state intervention (infamously known as the problem of "moral hazard") in Asian countries severely hit by the crisis. The effective analytical focus on the *national scale* allows the neoliberals to point their fingers at the failure of national governance, not economic globalization, as the key explanation of the crisis. Aligning themselves with prominent economists from the United States (e.g., Krugman 1998), neoliberal thinkers maintain that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with economic globalization per se; in fact, they view it as a positive influence on economic development. Instead, they blame individual Asian economies that did not put their houses in order. The falling exports from Asia and the large trade deficits, the pegging of domestic currencies to the U.S. dollar, and the moral hazard of the state's bailing out crony businesses during the precrisis period are all relevant variables for explaining the crisis. Once the crisis began—particularly when massive outflows of portfolio capital occurred in late 1996 and early 1997, these neoliberals note that it had a strong contagious effect that spread the financial crisis from a few countries to the real economy in all the countries of Asia (Radelet and Sachs 1998). Productive activities were disrupted because of liquidity problems, and social contracts of secured employment were broken. Both effects occurred in combination in some Asian countries and led to dramatic political instability and other related outcomes. The intervention by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) from a distance in late 1997 and early 1998 did not help much either. In fact, Radelet and Sachs (1998) strongly argued that IMF intervention worsened the crisis by increasing financial panics and scaring away potential investors and depositors of domestic banks.

Critics of this neoliberal explanation, however, adopt a *political economy* approach and question why the crisis did not occur earlier when the problem of "moral hazard" and state intervention in the economic development of Asian economies was even more pronounced (given the relatively recent liberalization efforts of most Asian economies). This timing issue shows that the crisis has more to do with the advent of economic globalization associated with the so-called Washington consensus and financial liberalization (Wade and Veneroso 1998; Hamilton 1999; Henderson 1999; Chang 2000). Put another way, the Asian economic crisis represents a crisis of economic globalization that serves as a convenient platform for Anglo-American capitalism to take over—some may even say "colonize"—the burgeoning Asian economies. Domestic elites in many Asian economies have been quick to jump on this "globalization-bashing" bandwagon to denounce the crisis as a mirror image of internal governance problems and to ignore the argument that is an *outcome* of ruthless economic globalization (see Higgott 1998; Mathews 1998; Kelly 2001). By pitching their explanation of the crisis at the *global scale*, these antiglobalization critics blame economic globalization for all the social-economic problems in Asia and conveniently overlook the governance problems that surfaced at the national scale in most crisis-stricken Asian economies.

Amid these conflicting perspectives on the origin of the Asian economic crisis—just like the earlier round of explanations for the "East Asian miracle" (see World Bank 1993; Wade 1992; 1996), there is a third explanation that is based on a much more radical *Marxist perspective*. Drawing upon the Marxist theory of uneven development and capitalist crises to a varying degree, scholars in this admittedly less-developed literature argue that the crisis is not simply a financial crisis (Webber 2001) but, rather, reflects conditions in the real economy. Glassman (2001), for example, identified the crisis more generally as an *economic* crisis that involves all circuits of the economy, linking domestic and international capitalist accumulation processes, and stemming, in part, from contradictions and struggles over the appropriation of the surplus and valorization of (financial) capital. The crisis is explained in terms of neither internal governance problems nor economic globalization as an external shock. It is seen as an outcome of a much deeper capitalist logic and contradictions in accumulation strategies. In short, it reflects a serious breakdown in the capitalist regime of accumulation (Lo 1999; Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2001; Sum 2001). The lack of a clear analytical focus on a particular geographic scale in this radical interpretation of the crisis, however, contributes to its relative ambivalence toward the nature of economic globalization as the cause of the crisis. By focusing on the deeper capitalist structures and their crisis tendencies, the radical perspective cannot be used effectively to debunk the myth of economic globalization as the cause of the crisis.

## Toward a Geographic Perspective on the Asian Economic Crisis

Questioning these contradictory and seemingly more-or-less convincing explanations of the Asian economic crisis points to the importance of a particular mix of geographic scales in determining the validity of their arguments and in ascertaining the role of economic globalization as the key explanation of the crisis. How, then, does a geographic perspective inform us about the causes of the Asian economic crisis and its relation to globalization processes? As I have argued elsewhere (Kelly, Olds, and Yeung 2001, viii–ix), this geographic perspective is essential "not because geographers bring any specific technical or analytical skills to the debate, but rather because a geographical sensitivity to space and scale is needed to capture the complexity of events that are too easily explained through dogma." In particular, a geographic perspective on the crisis views it not as an outcome of globalization, but as a contingent development *within* the spatial logic of economic globalization itself. This perspective emphasizes the social construction of geographic scales and scalar switchability that offer useful theoretical lenses to examine the *spatiality of the crisis* and *its discursive representations*. My aim is not to deny the empirical relevance of the various factors reviewed earlier (e.g., rapid inflows/outflows of capital, crony capitalism, and the role of the IMF). Instead, it is to show how the *politics* of producing geographic scales and the discursive representations of the crisis in various Asian economies, not economic globalization per se, may have contributed to the unfolding of the crisis. In fact, economic globalization has been constructed in these discursive representations as a smokescreen to cover up the more direct causes of the crisis put forward in the literature.

Prior to the crisis, political elites in several Asian economies sought to legitimize their globalization efforts through the scalar production of an imaginary global economy as "out there." In this imagination, what prevails on the global scale is seen as beneficial to the domestic national economy. This discursive construction of the global-national scalar geographies, in which *national* economies in Asia were increasingly seen as significant players in the *global* economy, was used to justify the political legitimacy of powerful elites and their developmental policies. Geographic scales matter here because without relegating economic processes at the local and national scales to events at the global scale, these domestic political elites would have found it difficult to overcome economic nationalism that prevailed during most of the post–World War II and postcolonial period. Scalar geographies were constructed to convince social and economic actors that participation in the global economy would necessarily enhance the economic fortunes of the national economies. Massive liberalization and deregulation at the national scale further allowed "scalar switchability" through which local/national capital began to globalize itself and, in the process, massive foreign debts were accumulated that were highly vulnerable to major currency fluctuations. Insofar as the crisis was set in motion, economic globalization—once constructed discursively as beneficial to national economies—was blamed for the socioeconomic malaise in these national economies. The only difference was that economic globalization was now discursively constructed as the *cause* of the crisis, which presumably started with too much of a *national* drive toward economic globalization in the first place. Viewed in this perspective, economic globalization certainly cannot be accepted as the cause of the crisis; it is, indeed, an integral part of the crisis that remains to be explained by a combination of its geographic preconditions and other contingent political-economic and social factors.

South Korea may be used as an example to illustrate my arguments. Some scholars have argued that one specific cause of the crisis in South Korea was its untimely and wholesale adoption of financial liberalization and capital account convertibility in the early 1990s (though market liberalization began as early as the 1980s). This decision epitomized the political transformation in South Korea from state-driven developmentalism up to the late 1980s (Amsden 1989, 2001) to neoliberal developmentalism in the 1990s (Y.T. Kim 1999; Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2001). Under the Kim Young-Sam regime, South Korea was admitted into the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 1996 and, to qualify for this entrance, it had to embrace the principle of free capital flows. To justify this liberalization, the Kim administration discursively constructed the pressing need for South Korea to globalize itself to be qualified as having reached the status of a developed country. In his second year in office in 1994, Kim announced that *segyehwa,* or globalization, was his administration's main priority (Ungson, Steers, and Park 1997; S. S. Kim 2000). Haggard and Mo (2000, 204) argued that "[i]n the name of globalization, the Korean government eliminated many restrictions on the movement of capital, allowing Korean banks and firms to borrow from abroad and international investors to invest in Korean assets." South Korea's major business conglomerates, known as the *chaebols*, were encouraged to globalize their operations into Asia, Europe, and North America. The 1990s also witnessed the growing autonomous and structural power of these *chaebols* that were able to pressure the state to provide neoliberal business environments in which big businesses could prosper. As Y. T. Kim (1999) and Hart-Landsberg and Burkett (2001) contended, this growing institutional capacity and economic power of the Korean *chaebols* by the early 1990s began to undermine the "embedded autonomy" between the state and big businesses. Through their direct access to the global financial markets, these conglomerates took out excessive short-term loans denominated in foreign currencies to finance their long-term investment projects. In 1997, for example, more than 90 percent of Korea's external debt of U.S.$120 billion was in the private sector, and nearly two-thirds was short term (Y. T. Kim 1999, 453). The rest of the story is well-known now and will not be repeated here (Chang 1998, 2000; D.-C. Kim and Suh 1998; Haggard and Mo 2000).

During the crisis, the scalar construction of "Asia" in the media and other public domains might also have had a significant impact on material flows that, in turn, aggravated the damage and contagion of the crisis. Clark and Wojcik (2001), for example, found that senior analysts for the *Financial Times* and, by inference, the City of London, were particularly pessimistic about the crisis over a longer period than were those on Wall Street—an indication of the different interpretations of the crisis even within the "twin centers" of global capitalism. The study pointed to the domination of the City of London's interpretation of the crisis as herd behavior based on homogenous expectations (see also Amin and Thrift 1992; Sidaway and Bryson 2002). Although it focused on the role of information and uncertainty in global financial markets, Clark and Wojcik's (2001, 124) analysis showed that "the City of London was dominated by pessimistic expectations for much of the Asian crisis 1997–98." The tendency for the global media to speak of an "Asian" economic crisis delimited the scalar—read *regional*—extent of the events and their causes in a fundamentally "space-blind" manner. The representation of the crisis as pan-Asian implies that the problem really lies within Asia, not in the wider *global* financial system. This biased construction of the crisis as a regional crisis, when it actually had seriously affected only three Asian *national* economies (Indonesia, South Korea, and Thailand; see Henderson 1999; Sum 2001), led to significant capital outflows from virtually *all* the Asian economies. This phenomenon was paradoxically termed "contagion effects," on the assumption that national economies in Asia were homogenous and undifferentiated in their "resistance" to the effects. With few exceptions (e.g., Hong Kong and China), all Asian currencies were dragged down in late 1997 and early 1998 by the massive selling behavior of foreign fund managers and global financial institutions. It is interesting that an empirical study by Kaminsky and Reinhart (2000) found that the susceptibility of national economies to the "contagion effects" is highly nonlinear, indicating that it is impossible to extrapolate from the experience of a single national economy.

Another dimension of this discursive construction of geographic scales during the crisis is related to the ways in which domestic elites represented the crisis in specific *spatial metaphors* that were linked to discourses of political power and the construction of economic policy. On the basis of discourse analysis, Kelly (2001) examined and compared the cases of Singapore and Malaysia. He found that in Malaysia, metaphors of colonial domination and militaristic aggression dominated in such a way that economic globalization, particularly financial globalization, was seen as the main culprit of Malaysia's fate in the crisis. This representational strategy was adopted by Prime Minister Mahathir to justify the capital control measures he imposed in September 1998 to counteract the destructive effects of financial globalization (Prakash 2001). In Singapore, political elites actively represented the crisis as being akin to such "natural" phenomena as typhoons and tectonic shifts. This strategy allowed the political blame to be shifted from the *national* government to the unpredictable *external global* economy and the policy credits to be accrued to the national government should its economic policies work (Yeung 2000c). The crisis was discursively represented in Singapore as similar to "acts of God" and therefore a disembodied force. If this "natural" and "external" crisis could be contained by the *national* government's efforts, the political elites would gain all the credits. Otherwise, the government could not be expected to be accountable for such an externally imposed disaster. In the cases of both Malaysia and Singapore, economic globalization was discursively constructed as the cause of the Asian economic crisis, irrespective of whether the crisis was really explained by something else. Economic globalization became the convenient shorthand for political elites to shift their domestic accountability to national citizens in favor of naturalized events operating on a global scale. Economic globalization was "victimized" by these discursive constructions as the real cause of the crisis and therefore necessarily negative and uncontrollable.

The discursive construction of geographic scales, however, cannot explain all dimensions of the crisis that clearly has a material basis. The scalar switchability of global capital (and hence, financial globalization), for example, provides a material basis for explaining the occurrence of the crisis. This argument can be illustrated by the development of complex financial instruments in the global capital markets such that financial capital has a global reach. The global nature of capital, however, can be "switched" into productive activities at the *local* and the *national* scales (e.g., the construction of production facilities and the built environment). For example, the excessive borrowing of the South Korean *chaebol* from global capital markets effectively linked their localized production activities in South Korea and elsewhere to the rise and fall of global financial markets. This "scalar switching" would have been much less possible if the South Korean government had retained its tight control over monetary regimes and state-monitored banking and financing policies. Financial liberalization and the discursive embrace of economic globalization in South Korea allowed global capital to "infiltrate" into the country's economy, thereby significantly increasing its vulnerability and crisis tendencies. When the crisis broke out and the *chaebol* were burdened by massive short-term loans denominated in the U.S. dollar, the real economies of South Korea and other Asian localities in which the South Korean *chaebol* had large investments in production facilities also suffered from a massive disruption of their production activities. Consequently, their exports were halted and the crisis was deepened further (see also Hart-Landsberg and Burkett 2001). In summary, the crisis was not simply an outcome of economic globalization versus localities, but a consequence of the spatiality of economic globalization mediated through locally contingent conditions that varied from one country to another.

## Conclusion

Economic geographers can indeed make a significant contribution to the study of economic globalization through our theorization of its inherent spatiality and scalar effects. As Amin (2001, 6276) argued, "the distinctive contribution of this discipline [geography] within the congested study of globalization [lies] in the study of the spatiality—social, economic, cultural, and political—of what is increasingly being seen as a single and interdependent world." Instead of brushing aside the term *globalization* as too vague and useless for understanding contemporary global economic change, I believe there are some significant reasons why *globalization*—as mutually constitutive material processes and ideological discourses—will be used for a long time, not the least because the term has now gained so much currency in the political and business world. In the context of his critique of international relations and globalization studies, Rosenberg (2000, 14) further argued that we need to take globalization theory seriously, since its claims "combine to exercise a kind of theoretical veto over other, more valuable resources for understanding both the contemporary world in general and its international politics in particular."

This article has investigated the geographic foundations of economic globalization and argued that economic globalization is very much shaped by its own spatial peculiarities. Economic globalization does not have a life of its own because there are some stringent geographic preconditions for it to take place. As Cox (2002, 109) noted, "globalization is more product than condition." Guillén (2001, 254) also concluded that "[t]he most persuasive empirical work to date indicates that globalization per se neither undermines the nation-state nor erodes the viability of the welfare state." Rejecting the causal claims in globalization theory, I conclude that economic globalization is not capable of producing and causing empirically observable outcomes. This conclusion does not refute the material unfolding on globalization processes as a set of spatial tendencies in today's global economy. It merely places serious limits on the explanatory power of these processes in the absence of other necessary preconditions and contingent factors. In the final analysis, globalization is a spatial phenomenon worthy of further explanation, but it is certainly not a spatial explanation for empirical outcomes as alleged in globalization theory.

Using the recent Asian economic crisis as an empirical context, I have shown how the crisis has been discursively constructed by some actors (academic researchers, political elites, and media professionals) in all kinds of ways as an outcome of economic globalization. To them, the crisis happened in 1997–98 *because of* economic globalization. This historically and geographically insensitive explanation of the crisis is clearly biased and plainly problematical. Introducing a geographic perspective on the crisis, I have examined how the fulfillment of certain geographic preconditions of economic globalization (e.g., scalar switchability) can explain why the crisis occurred in a particular historical moment (e.g., South Korea's untimely embracing of *segyehwa,* or globalization). The fact that such fulfillment varies geographically explains why the crisis unfolded more dramatically in some Asian economies. The perspective also helps us understand how economic globalization has been discursively appropriated by political and economic elites in some Asian countries to reproduce their political legitimacy and power. In conclusion, economic globalization cannot be the singular determinant of the crisis. Its analytical relationships with specific empirical outcomes must be grounded in an understanding of its geographic constitution and other contingent peculiarities arising from specific political, economic, and social configurations.

What, then, are the implications of this geographic analysis of the uneven terrains of economic globalization for future geographic studies of global economic change? Although this article has examined two specific geographic preconditions of economic globalization, there must be other such geographic preconditions of globalization worthy of further theorization. For example, Amin (1997, 1998, 2001) developed a relational concept of place in his theory of the relationship between geography and globalization. He argued that "a relational or global sense of place will interpret the spatiality of globalization—however defined—rather differently from a territorial perspective" (Amin 2001, 6274). This relational perspective on the spatiality of globalization views such locales as cities as "a meeting place for diverse geographies of linkage" (Amin 2001, 6275) that clearly go beyond a territorial and scalar reading of the position and function of urban economies in globalization. Other economic geographers have recently developed the geographic concepts of "global city-regions" as "points at which globalization processes crystallize out on the geographic landscape and as active agents in shaping globalization itself" (Scott 2001, 7) and "global cities" as relational networks (Beaverstock, Smith, and Taylor 2000). Whether these concepts herald the sociospatial construction of new geographic scales is a moot point. But what is clear in these conceptual initiatives is the *explanation* of globalization tendencies in relation to their various sociospatial formations, not the other way around—as in globalization theory—where globalization is pretended to explain those very formations. Space does play an analytical role in explaining globalization tendencies, although this role is *not* exclusive to geography or other social sciences for that matter.

Another important implication of this article is related to an agency-focused approach to globalization research that places more significance on the transformation and resistance of actors. Much of the globalization literature takes on an abstract macro and structural view of the global economy. What is missing in this globalization agenda is the attention to *social actors* who are not only constructing globalization in their various capacities, but experiencing significant transformations in their own everyday social lives. By focusing on these actors in globalization processes, we can make a much better connection between the apparently nonhuman processes of economic globalization and their manifestations in all sorts of human activities, practices, and struggles. This approach also allows us to study the contested sociospatial production of scalar switchability and globalization discourses. In short, we have to pay attention to economic globalization as a *living* experience, which entails both transformations of social practices and resistance from social actors (see Mittelman 2000; Shaw 2000; Dicken, Kelly, Olds, and Yeung 2001). The empirical orientation of geography as an intellectual discipline allows us to bridge the still largely unfilled gap between overwhelmingly stylized abstractions in most globalization studies and the contradictory experiences of most people who are living with economic globalization as an everyday fact.

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