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# The global division of labour as enduring archipelago: thinking through the spatiality of ‘globalisation in reverse’

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**Contemporary globalisation faces several challenges, for instance related to climate change, technological disruption and shifting geopolitics, that have repercussions for the organisation of value chains and the global division of labour. Analysing the long-term geographies of globalisation we observe how successive reconfigurations of ‘new’ and ‘newer’ global divisions of labour share an archipelagic socio-spatial structure. The paper theorizes the articulations of this archipelago spatial figure as a combination of de/bordering, dis/connecting and dis/association. We apply this framework to provide a nuanced assessment of how global capitalism might restructure when some processes that defined globalisation during the last decades kick in reverse.**

*Keywords:* International division of labour, uneven development, de-globalisation, world-economy, archipelago economy, macroeconomic geography

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## Introduction

Over the last thirty years, ‘globalisation’ has become a core conceptual anchor of curricular thought in economic geography. The fundamental economic shift from a situation often stylised as ‘containerised national economies’, to a system of ‘deeply integrated global interdependencies’ that accelerated in the 1980s has become the baseline for economic geographers

to explicate the state of the world (Dicken, 2011). However, how this globalised baseline might further evolve under contemporary political, ecological and economic shocks is far from clear (Sheppard, 2020). Although the 2008 financial crisis shook up the world, it ultimately did little to unsettle the globalisation narrative outside reminding us of the global economy’s inherent instability (Martin et al., 2018). A relative

decline of Europe and North America was to be expected in a globalised world where industrialising countries elsewhere are increasingly salient. However, the recent rapid succession of social, political and technological changes might finally lead economic geographers to reconsider the metageography of an ever more deeply integrating globalising world (Beaverstock et al., 2000), as the ‘global political economy is in the midst of highly turbulent and disruptive times, possibly a crucial historical juncture’ (Martin et al., 2018, 14). The question is how the world economy becomes geographically rearranged through what can be seen as the quadruple challenge affecting globalisation today: geopolitical and geo-economic changes (Horner et al., 2018), climate change volatility and its emerging risks (Davies et al., 2020), the expected disruption of digital and automated technologies (Clifton et al., 2020), and finally, global pandemics such as Covid-19 (Bryson and Vanchan, 2020).

We have to seriously consider that these four challenges and their interactions could potentially induce a major restructuring of the world-economy and reverse tendencies commonly associated with globalisation. Capitalist restructuring may result in a reduction of complexity in global production networks where more economic activity is locally organised. Consequently, some economic sectors’ location patterns might change, for instance by situating more stages of the commodity chain closer to the point of consumption and re-shoring certain production processes. Such changes might lead scholars back to thinking in terms of containerised nation-states. Nevertheless, we have to be wary of ‘appearances of globalisation in reverse’, where we falsely assume that such restructuring leads to a weakening of global economic interdependency. And if we do re-emphasise the importance of the national scale, we need to be aware what spatialities of capitalism we might render out of view (Sheppard, 2020). Capitalism has always been in a continuous state of spatial and technological metamorphosis where seemingly dynamic

equilibria lead to temporally stable spatial structures and divisions of labour (Sheppard, 2016). This spatial division of labour gets solidified because capitalism, as Harvey (1995, 6) puts it:

produces a geographical landscape (of space relations, of territorial organization, and of systems of places linked in a ‘global’ division of labour and of functions) appropriate to its own dynamic of accumulation at a particular moment of its history, only to have to destroy and rebuild that geographical landscape to accommodate accumulation at a later date.

In other words, a particular configuration of ‘the global economy’ is a geographical scale that gets produced and reconfigured through the uneven evolution of the capitalist system (Smith, 2008 [1984]). Any de-territorialisation of ‘the global’ will engender a different re-territorialisation of ‘the global’ (Brenner, 2004; Harvey, 1995). To us, the globalisation in reverse thesis indicates an acceleration of this metamorphic process of uneven development. Nevertheless, we do believe that we need to grasp the intricacies of the metamorphosis instead of just being swept away by the gales of uneven development. Instead of thinking of this global scale as an all-encompassing ‘largest possible scale’, we follow Urry’s (2005) suggestion that the materiality of the global has to be regarded as networked, patchy and uneven, made up by multiple systems of mobile connections and circulations. It is the articulations and disarticulations of capital (Bair and Werner, 2011; Bair et al., 2013; Pickles and Smith, 2016) that produce a particular scalar fix (Cox, 2002) of the global economy. The goal of this paper is to understand how this spatiality could change if some dimensions of globalisation kick in reverse.

We will construct our full argument as follows. We will first elaborate Braudel’s notion of ‘world-economy’ as a framework to understand the spatiality of global capitalism. In global capitalism’s historiography, a succession of world-economies has been theorised

as different rounds of ‘international divisions of labour’. The accelerated transitions between these divisions of labour denote capitalism’s ‘global shifts’ (Dicken, 2011; as elaborated in Hudson, 2016). A close and critical comparison of different instantiations of the international<sup>1</sup> division of labour reveals that each one has been described using the geographical metaphor of ‘the archipelago’. We then set out to distil why this archipelago spatial figure is so pervasive to describe the world-economy and define three mechanisms dis/articulated by the archipelago metaphor: de/bordering, dis/connection and dis/association. If previous instantiations of the global economy took the form of an archipelago, there is little reason to assume the emerging contemporary one will take a different socio-spatial form. We conclude by inferring some dynamics that will likely structure the next world-economy.

### **The world-economy’s divisions of labour**

Our conception of ‘the global’ follows Braudel’s (1984 [1979], 96) notion of the world-economy. With world-economy,<sup>2</sup> Braudel refers to ‘a fragment of the world, an economically autonomous section of the planet able to provide for most of its own needs, a section to which its internal links and exchanges give a certain organic unity’ (Braudel, 1984 [1979], 22), or ‘the largest coherent social order within which the subjects of his enquiry participate’ (Germain, 1996, 204). It is important to stress that the concept of world-economy does not mean that capitalist relations are equally salient everywhere around the globe (Germain, 1996) or that there are no relevant non-capitalist economic relations left in the world (Gibson-Graham, 1996).<sup>3</sup> In fact, world-economies with their distinctive division of labour were first alluded to by fourteenth century scholar Ibn Khaldūn (Boulakia, 1971) and thus precede modern capitalism (Abu-Lughod, 1989; Van Hamme and Pion, 2012). Nevertheless, as world-systems

theory posits, the world-economy as a structure has become instrumental to capitalist survival and growth (Hopkins and Wallerstein, 1977). Indeed for Braudel (1981 [1979], 24), ‘capitalism’ is a distinct ‘shadowy zone, hovering above the sunlit world of the market economy’ where powerful actors attempt to manipulate the world-economy into profitable monopolies for themselves. Contemporarily, the world-economy is primarily structured through the worldwide jumble of commodity chains articulated in global production networks (Dicken, 2011; Parnreiter, 2017; Werner, 2016a). The distinctive characteristic of world-economies is its division of labour. As Sayer and Walker (1992, 2) put it, the division of labour concept allows us

to grasp the sheer magnitude of millions of commodities weaving their way from one place of work to another, and from those to a vast number of sites of consumption. Along with these substantial things goes the equally vast flux of money, information, and ideas, and the swirl of people flooding in and out of workplaces, cities and countries.

The world-economy’s division of labour is a geographically articulated social structure, which emerges and is reproduced through the daily practices of all its participants. It has no grand design, yet as a social structure it crucially influences who does what in the world-economy and who reaps its spoils (Sayer and Walker, 1992). Alongside the division of labour’s spatial properties, it also has a technical and a social dimension that subsumes and actively and iteratively (re)produces class, race and gender axes of difference (idem; Massey, 1995 [1984]; Werner, 2016b). From its very foundation, including during the colonial slave-based plantation economy, the global division of labour has been entrenched through social constructions of race and gender (Mullings, 2017). Social hierarchies of difference and power, including racialised and gendered forms of labour continue to be (re)produced with

new cycles of (dis)investment (Werner, 2016b; Wright, 1997).

Re-globalisation implies a reconfiguration of these technological, social, and geographical relationships. New technologies might divide tasks differently and new axes of exploitation might be systematically incorporated or abandoned. Changing transport costs, technological regimes or legal institutions also impinge on which potential global divisions of labour prove durable. In periods where the division of labour was relatively stable, during what regulation theorists have called 'regimes of accumulation' (Lipietz, 1986), the international division of labour seemed geographically fixed and its various epochs were systematically theorised as the 'Old International Division of Labour' (OIDL) of the colonial era dominated by the capitalist merchant class (Braudel, 1982 [1979]), the 'New International Division of Labour' (NIDL) of the early postcolonial era dominated by the capitalist multinational industrial corporation (Braudel, 1984 [1979]), and the 'New(er) New International Division of Labour (nNIDL) of the contemporary era (Hudson, 2016), with an increased salience of financialised dynamics (Bassens and Van Meeteren, 2015; 2018). Lipietz, (1986); Coe (2011) and Hudson (2016) provide critical overviews of the evolution of the 'successive International Divisions of Labour (IDL) argument'. To give an extremely crude summary: the OIDL was between an industrialised 'core' in the Global North that needed markets and raw materials from the 'periphery' in the Global South. Hence it is a division of regional sectoral specialisations (Coe, 2011; Massey, 1979). The NIDL was based on different skill levels: simple routine manufacturing in the periphery profiting from low wages and low levels of unionisation with more complex and/or lucrative tasks in the core (Fröbel et al., 1980 [1977]; Massey, 1979). Theories proposing an nNIDL suggest a division of labour between financial capital and rentiership in what historically was called the core in the Global North and particularly industrial capital increasingly located in the

Global South (Bassens and Van Meeteren, 2015; Hudson, 2016), that nevertheless sheds many of its 'peripheral' characteristics in the process (Horner et al., 2018).

A key critical contribution from geographers to the various IDL literatures has been to question the simple geographical macrozones of 'core', 'periphery' and 'semi-periphery' accompanying the argument. Within the periphery macrozone, internal stratification quickly renders the picture of dichotomous core versus periphery polarisation geographically complicated when regional 'core' zones develop in the alleged periphery (Schoenberger, 1988; Scott, 1987). Although nation-states play a key role in stabilising the IDL (Lipietz, 1986), the increased role of urban-regional geographies as a salient scale of the IDL has been evident (Brenner, 2004; Brown et al., 2010; Van Hamme and Pion, 2012). Indeed, the world-economy is the product of a scalar scaffold in which the urban, the national and the macro-regional are continuously reworked into new polymorphic spatial figures of the global scale (Brenner, 2004, 53; Brenner, 2019; Urry, 2005). Lastly, as Massey (1979, see also Lipietz, 1986) made clear, older divisions of labour do not miraculously disappear but interact and are overlain with newer ones. In turn these unique localised combinations condition potential future economic development pathways. Reflecting on how complicated and exception-ridden the terminology has become, Peck (2016, 313) notes how the term 'nNIDL' is manifestly provisional and testimony to the 'comparatively neglected state of the theory language in this domain of macroeconomic geography'.

Luckily, geographers developed a theoretical vocabulary that goes beyond descriptive geographies of the division of labour as macroregional phenomenon. As Massey (1984) stresses, the spatial configuration of the division of labour is constitutive to its reproduction. It is an 'active ingredient' of uneven development (Barnes and Christophers, 2018, 37). Places within the spatial division of labour have a use value for the realisation of capital

(Walker, 1978). That use value is in part determined by how these places are plugged in the world economy. What are the local production regimes? What is the positionality and power position of workers and capitalists in that place (Sheppard, 2016; Werner, 2019)? If a place ceases to have that use value when the division of labour shifts, the place becomes part of the 'lumpengeography of capital' where it needs to renegotiate its position in the world-economy, often on more disadvantageous terms (Walker, 1978). But until that moment, it is in the interest of those profiting from the current configuration of the world-economy to keep the spatial division of labour in place (Harvey, 2008; Smith, 2008 [1984]).

### The global economy as an archipelago

Braudel (1984 [1979], 30), borrowing the term from Richard Häpke, characterised the structure of the nascent capitalist world-economy as an hierarchical archipelago of trading cities that drew wealth from their surrounding 'sea' of subsistence relations. Local geographies yielded certain commodities within a favourable environment for their production, often under precapitalist relations, that were then traded in supra-local markets (Abu-Lughod, 1989, 13). This section shows how this archipelago spatial figure keeps recurring, implicitly and explicitly, in the subsequent literatures on the different instantiations of the IDL under capitalism.

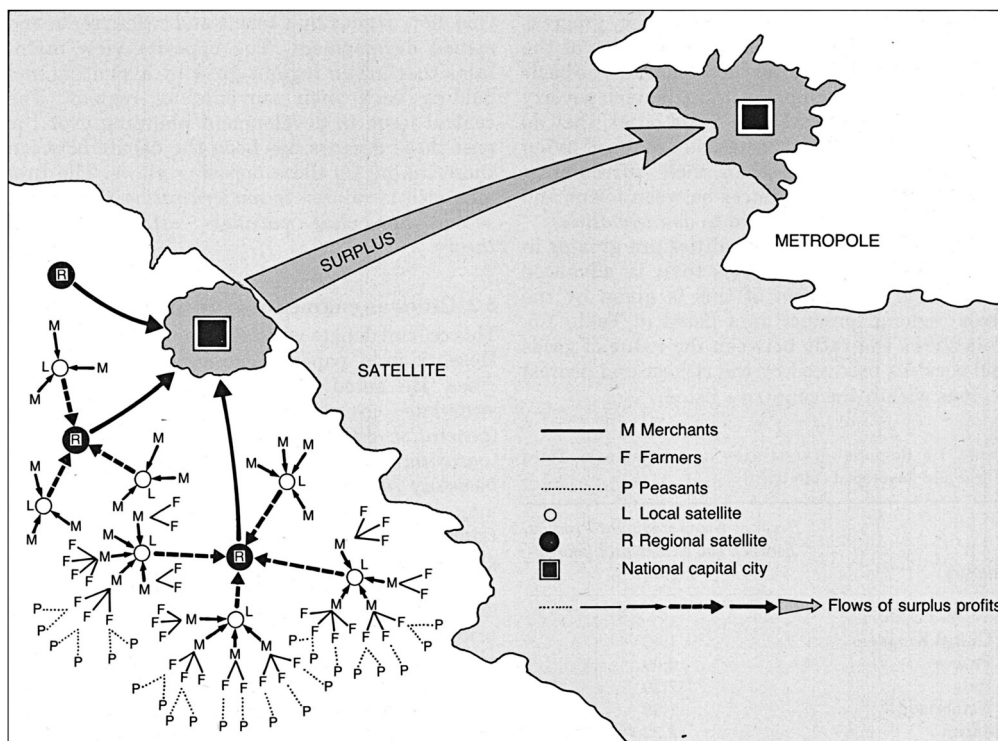
### OIDL

Marx (1976 [1867], 579–80) spoke of the international division of labour to theorise the need for an 'outside' of capitalist social relations, a notion that was later more fully developed in political-economic theories of imperialism (Harvey, 2003). Initially, the IDL often took the form of raw material extracted violently from colonial territories. Later from the 19th century onwards, these colonial territories also

increasingly became a market for manufactured goods from the imperial core (Coffey, 1996; Walton, 1985). As these capitalist 'outsides' gradually got incorporated into the world-system, the theorisation shifted to the unequal, dependent conditions through which this integration is perpetuated (Amin, 1974; Frank, 1966). While the violent aspects of 'accumulation by dispossession' might change shape or form after capitalist incorporation, they certainly did not cease (Harvey, 2003).

Accounts of colonial economic systems mention an 'archipelago logic' at work in the colonial territories (Verweijen and Van Meeteren, 2015, 100): only in the place of economic interest to the colonisers (often near mineral deposits or agricultural areas of interest to exports) was there significant development of political, social and physical infrastructure. This resulted in a spotted archipelago-like political system of governance and colonial presence. The resulting OIDL was theorised by Frank (1966) as an archipelagic stratified 'metropolis-satellite' structure where the core appropriates the surplus through intermediate nodes (Potter, 1992, 15, see Figure 1). Comparable to Braudel's account, economies reliant on raw material production and not necessarily under fully developed capitalist relations, were thus unequally incorporated in the world-economy.

The OIDL literature emphasises the importance of asymmetric trade relations and unequal exchange for the price of labour power (Jenkins, 1984). In the proto-capitalist world of Braudel this amounted to the sheer power of traders, who would use information asymmetries across places and the power of transportation monopolies to enforce these terms of trade (Braudel, 1982 [1979]). Even the slave-owning plantations of early colonialism were dependent on price-setting mechanisms coming from the merchants and the political centre, deepening the rate of exploitation of unfree labour conveniently out of sight of those making the largest profits from the exploitation (Braudel, 1982 [1979], 272–80). In the formal



**Figure 1.** *The Metropolis-Satellite Model* (Source: Potter, 1992, 15). Reproduced with permission from Oxford University Press.

colonial era from the 19th century, the unequal development of infrastructure geared towards the colonial metropolis reinforced these asymmetric relations. Examples of this system are treaty ports and free-trade zones established in the colonies and are often still visible in how the backbone of the infrastructural system of countries in the Global South is oriented towards export functions (Enns and Barsaglio, 2020). That said, such hierarchical relations were always more messy and multifaceted than the stylised account of the OIDL reveals (Van der Straeten and Hasenöhr, 2016). The importance of logistics infrastructure in the OIDL, reinforced by the visible hand of the colonial state, draws attention to the importance of differential cost of circulation (Danyluk, 2018), that is, the connectivity between places, that kept the archipelago of the OIDL in place.

### NIDL

The NIDL really became salient in the 1970s with the large-scale offshoring of labour-intensive manufacturing processes from the industrialised Global North to lower-cost locations, which led to a socio-spatial re-organisation of manufacturing tasks based on skill and wage levels (Fröbel et al., 1980 [1977]). The rise of global value chains that characterised this NIDL meant a shift from an exchange between raw materials and finished goods between Global North and South to geographically dispersed production. As this process deepened, transnational corporations increasingly organised their production across borders and became central in controlling processes of production, even outside of the firm's boundaries in vertically disintegrated production networks (Coffey, 1996).

The fostering of international connections through the global integration of production often meant that firms producing for export markets were largely decoupled from local or domestic economies. Writing contemporaneously, Santos (1979 [1975]) characterises the newly industrialised structures in the periphery as ‘extroverted relations’ (Amin, 1974, 288), only selectively coupled with the local economy. This decoupling required a process of bordering, carving out specialised spaces for global production and creating, above all, special economic zones (SEZs). SEZs are essential spaces within the NIDL and a paradigmatic example of how regulatory exceptions for capital accumulation are spatially articulated. Although SEZs constitute an incredibly versatile technology, most share a common feature of constituting a space relatively independent from domestic laws, offering financial incentives (for example tax benefits, waiver of import/export duties), subsidised infrastructure and eased regulations for foreign investors to stimulate exports (Neveling, 2015).

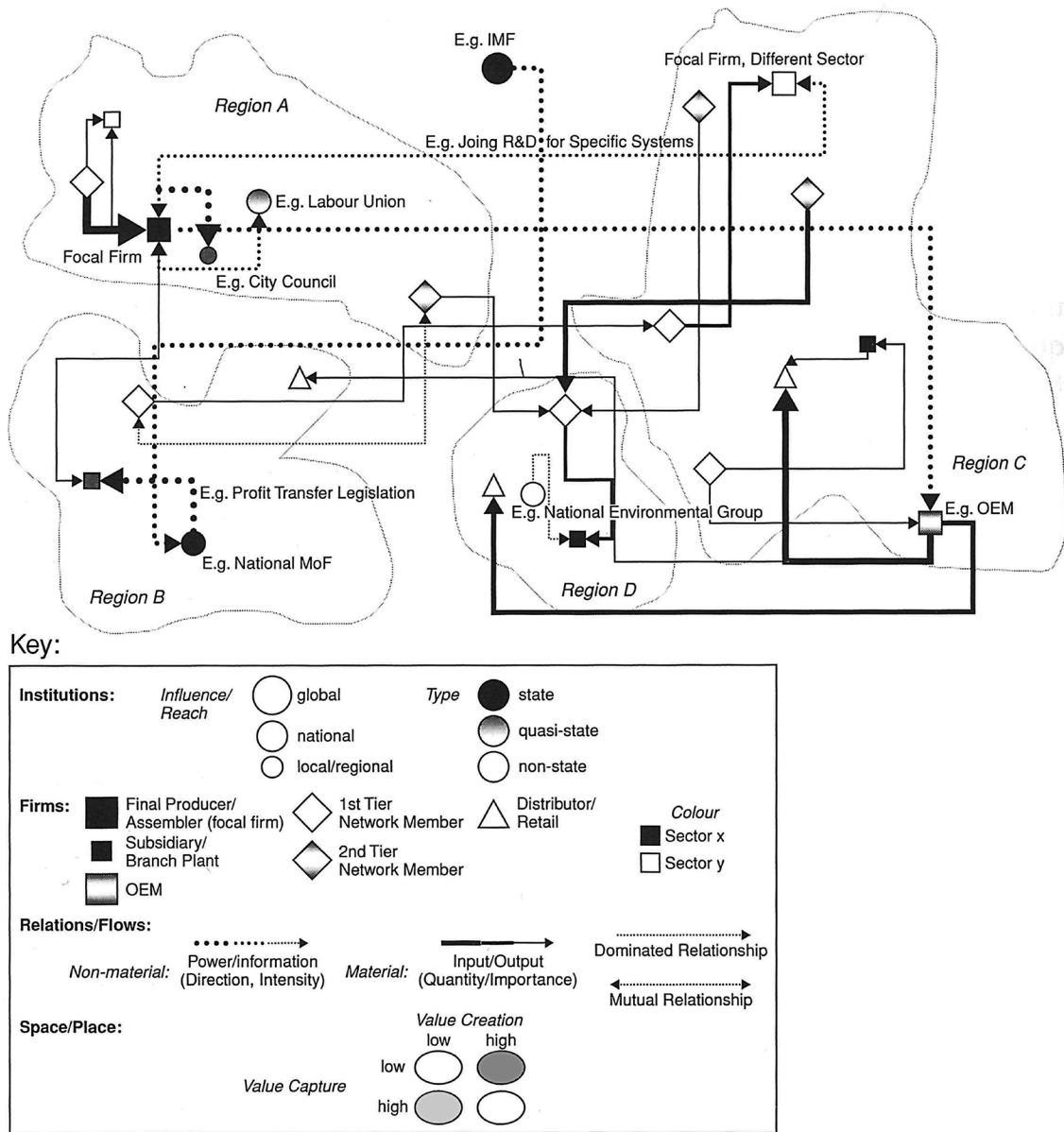
The NIDL literature emphasises the role of the SEZs as enclave-like structures that reap advantages of local workforces but produce for an ‘outside’ (Fröbel et al., 1980 [1977]). Networks of special economic zones have similarly been described as an archipelago structure (Mountz, 2014). As the NIDL debate gradually transformed in a discourse on globalisation, the archipelago metaphor only became more explicit. Dollfus (2000 [1990]) and Veltz (1996) explicitly theorise the spatiality of globalisation as an ‘archipelago economy’ where highly developed centres bypass the in-between space (Graham and Marvin, 2001; Hess, 2009). Henderson et al. (2002, 456) literally choose a stylised map of an archipelago to draw the ‘arch-visualization’ of the Global Production Network (GPN) approach (Figure 2). While this archipelago notion of mature globalisation did become less hierarchical and determinist, it arguably is not without

stratification and hierarchy (Van Meeteren and Bassens, 2016).

### **nNIDL**

Given the increasing complexity of the global economy defying the stylised facts of the NIDL thesis (Coe, 2011), there have been calls to designate the era of ‘mature globalisation’ as the ‘newer international’ or ‘global’ division of labour (Coe, 2011; Coffey, 1996). Hudson (2016, 218), however, explicitly adds dimensions of financialisation and financial dominance as key aspects to understand the newest IDL. This nNIDL is an international division of labour of production, including highly specialised production, on one stylised pole, and financial activity with the routing of financial flows on the other. Within this division, contributing zones are described as enclave spaces contributing distinct pieces to the global division of labour (Kleibert, 2015; Phelps et al., 2015; Sidaway, 2007). Here we will elaborate how financial logics further reinforce the archipelagic structure of the world-economy. For instance, the world-city structure that orchestrates and financialises the world-economy is described as a world city archipelago (see Taylor and Derudder, 2016, Figure 3; Van Meeteren and Bassens, 2016). Within this archipelago, offshore spaces play a key role in how money is routed (Ogle, 2017; Opitz and Tellman, 2012) and how individual zones within the world-economy are designated and bordered/ordered as ‘established’ and ‘emerging’ spaces to invest capital (Santos and Bassens, 2021; see also Sheller, 2018). These worldwide flows of circulating money are still predominantly orchestrated from the same old ‘alpha cities’ in the Global North, despite the deeper integration of China into the system (Taylor et al., 2021; Figure 3).

Financialised capitalism depends less on facilitating the production of commodities in organisationally complex and geographically-stretched GPN’s through which exchange value is obtained by the production and sale

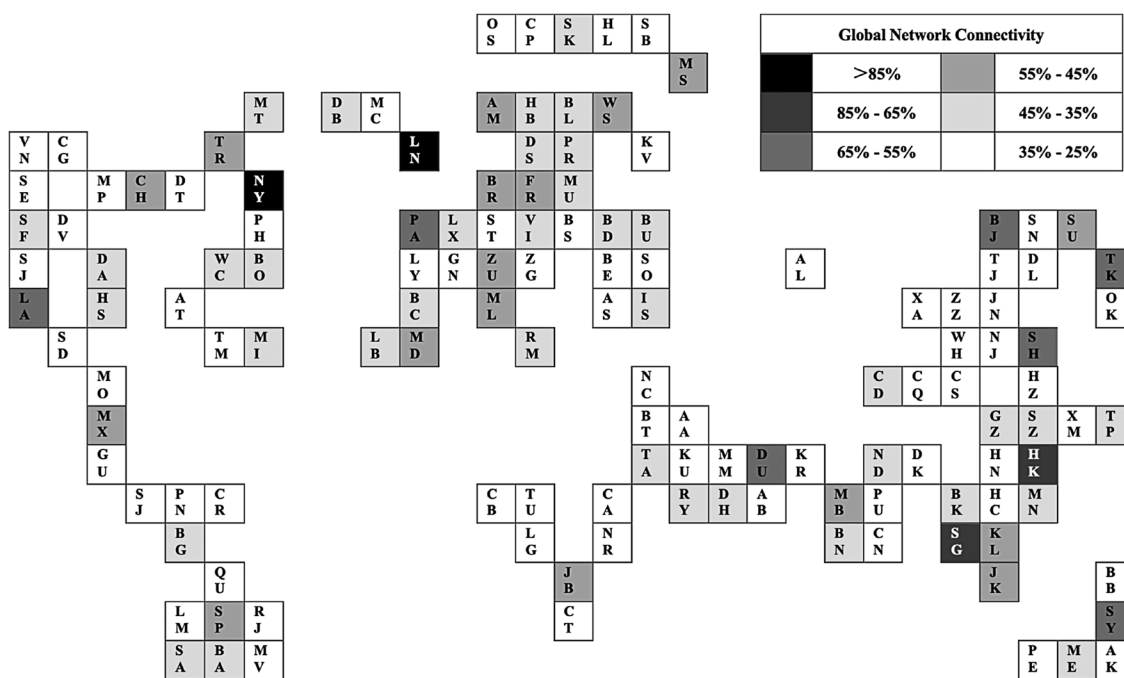


**Figure 2.** Mapping Global Production Networks (Source: Henderson et al., 2002, 456). Reproduced with permission from Taylor and Francis.

of commodities. Instead, financialisation and its attendance to shareholder value, as well as the rising importance of immaterial inputs (services) in value chains have increased the stakes for the organisation of complicated

webs of value transfer through rent extraction (Arboleda and Purcell, 2021; Bassens and Van Meeteren, 2015; Pažitka et al., 2022). Financial and taxation considerations tend to outweigh geographies of production and consumption in





**Figure 3.** Global Network Connectivity in the 2020 World City Archipelago. LN is London, NY is New York (For method see Derudder and Taylor, 2020; for full legend see Taylor and Derudder, 2016, 72). Map kindly provided by Ben Derudder.

how corporations are structured geographically (Sigler et al., 2020). Although many offshore finance hubs are literal islands (Mullings, 2004; Roberts, 1994), offshore spaces refer to islands metaphorically to mean ‘a different legal regime’ (Palan, 2003) or the creation of ‘juridico-political constructs’ (Opitz and Tellman, 2012) carved out as exceptions from surrounding territory.

It is important to situate these individual offshore spaces as part of an overarching structure that enables the geographical transfer of value (Parnreiter, 2017). Shaxson (2011) argues that the different ‘treasure islands’ are only important through their connections in a larger archipelago structure, the ‘offshore system’. To him, ‘the offshore world is not a bunch of independent states exercising their sovereign rights to set their laws and tax systems as they see fit. It is a set of networks of influence controlled by the world’s major powers’ (Shaxson,

2011, 23, see also Bassens and Van Meeteren, 2018; Fernandez and Hendrikse, 2020). This networked offshore system has literally been termed ‘archipelago capitalism’ by Ogle (2017). In the case of tax havens, Shaxson (2011, 28, emphasis in original) argues that ‘the activity doesn’t happen *in* any jurisdiction, it happens *between* jurisdictions’ but is coordinated from the established power centres of the world economy. A second aspect is a shifting out of view, as ‘secrecy jurisdictions routinely convert what is technically *legal*, but abusive into what is seen as *legitimate*’ (Shaxson, 2011, 25). The reworking of visibility thus entails a simultaneous attempt at moral justification of what may be perceived as immoral practices. We could argue that the offshore systems are in fact the semi-peripheral spaces of (financialised) capitalism that place ‘the dirty work’ out of sight and out of mind (Sheller, 2018; Van Meeteren and Bassens, 2016).

## Theorising the archipelago and its mechanisms

The appeal of the archipelago metaphor to describe the world-economy was presaged by Neil Smith who argued that in the process of uneven development, capital tends to produce geographical patterns appearing as ‘islands of absolute space in a sea of relative space’ (Smith, 2008 [1984], 119). In other words, he discusses how islands (places) with a clear geographical identity are interspersed by unnamed space (the sea) subject to processes associated with relative space such as the changing friction of distance, differential cost surfaces and the politics of circulation (cf. Harvey, 2008). The clarity of the archipelago metaphor brings abstract topological spatial relations into focus, and spawned a literature explicitly theorising the archipelago as a spatial figure (Arrault, 2005; Mountz, 2014; Pugh, 2013; Sheller, 2018; Stratford et al., 2011; Stevens and Martínez-San Miguel, 2020). The archipelago itself is like a network of regions, with ‘islands’ being the nodes, and the ‘sea’ being the space between the nodes. Indeed, the notion of ‘offshore’ spaces (Palan, 2003; Sheller, 2018) fits the same metaphorical register. The relations among islands, whether directly connected or not, denote relations of similarity, as in a prison or extractive archipelago (see Mountz, 2014; Swann-Quinn, 2021), or signal complementarity across islands, as in the world city archipelago (Van Meeteren and Bassens, 2016). The ‘sea’ is traversed through connections between islands, but access to those connections may be conditional or restricted. In other words, the boundaries between them are ‘semi-permeable’: some persons, goods or information may pass, but not unconditionally.

The different islands collectively work as an archipelago to achieve a particular goal, such as realising a global production network, or the geographical transfer of value (Parnreiter, 2017). However, assigning a ‘goal’ to a spatial figure risks reification and erases agency from

the analysis. Hence we follow Yeung’s (2019) call to specify the concrete mechanisms that enact, modulate and construct geographical processes. Within the archipelago figure, islands integrated into global circuits and flows act as *modulators of connectivity* and make global circulation possible precisely through their particular (re)arrangements of borders, (dis)connectivity and visibility (Opitz and Tellman, 2012). From our review of the three historical archipelagos of the global division of labour we distil three crucial mechanisms that collectively constitute the ‘active ingredient’ dis/articulating global value chains across space (Bair and Werner, 2011; Bair et al., 2013) resulting in the archipelago spatial figure. We develop these further as (i) de/bordering, (ii) dis/connecting and (iii) dis/associating.

(i) *De/bordering*. Globalisation is often understood as the overcoming or abolishment of borders as barriers to trade. Contrary to discourses of a ‘flat world’ or a ‘borderless economy’, borders have not been anomalies to globalisation that dissolve over time (Christopherson et al., 2008). Instead of becoming obsolete, borders need to be made and unmade precisely for the contemporary global economy to operate (Martin et al., 2018). Similarly, and despite the popular idea that money is footloose and makes the world go round, financial accumulation mechanisms revolve around the erection and dissolution of borders (Santos and Bassens, 2021). As Mezzadra and Neilson (2013, 6–8) argue in their book *Border as Method*: ‘far from serving to block or obstruct global flows [borders] have become central devices for their articulation [...and] regulate and structure the relations between capital, labour, law, subjects and political power’. Processes of bordering need not necessarily occur at the level of the nation state. The creation of sub-national borders with clear inside/outside relations is fundamental to the functioning of regional enclave-type islands that for Mezzadra and Neilson (2013, 238) is a ‘general characteristic

of the emerging spatiality of globalization'. Ong (2006, 103), similarly draws attention to 'spaces of exception' formed by states through technologies of zoning and bordering that lead to the creation of an archipelago structure: 'by deploying zoning strategies, sovereign states can create or accommodate islands of distinct governing regimes within the broader landscape of normalized rule. The political outcome is an archipelago of enclaves, the sum of which is a form of variegated sovereignty'.

(ii) *Dis/connecting*. Barriers erected at borders stimulate sites of exchange. The semi-permeability of the border enables, conditions and disables circulation of goods, people, information and money, for instance by modulating transport costs (Chua et al., 2018; Danyluk, 2018). As such, borders help determine which places are connected and which places are disconnected in different types of circulation. Often within the archipelago, the islands themselves are largely disconnected from their immediate sea-surroundings and only selectively connect to these environments to tap into labour or resource reserves, while being tightly integrated in global flows, enabling long-distance connectivity and transfer of value with the other islands in the archipelago. Sheppard (2016) asserts that such connectivities are not given but actively produced and shaped by pre-existing differential socio-spatial positionalities. The 'production of accessibility as a commodity' (Sheppard, 2016, 124) thus becomes a central concern for the geographical political economy of transportation and communications (idem, 159). Transportation and communication infrastructures assume a central role to connect the islands within the archipelago through a *selective* regime of accessibility and connectivity (Sheller, 2009). A selection resulting in dis/connecting places to circulations of money, people, goods and knowledge.

(iii) *Dis/associating*. Beyond technically enabling select connectivities that underpin the directions of capitalist economic circulation, island spaces and their semi-permeable

connectivities to other places perform another critical function for capitalism: they create cognitive associations and barriers. Sheller (2009) argues how cognitive associations of the Caribbean are assembled together in an archipelagic paradise for capitalist consumption, showing how spatial figures are the product of associations. But the converse, utilising geographic and relational distance to hide certain practices from the scrutiny of civil society is equally important. The concept of 'geographies of dissociations' (Ibert et al., 2019; Thomsen and Hess, 2021) is based upon the idea that the value of commodities needs to be socially constructed through associations and dissociations. The commodity fetish, where certain ugly but deemed necessary parts of the production process are concealed out of sight and mind of the consumer, fundamentally works through these dissociation practices (Ibert et al., 2019). As Christophers (2011) notes, the abstraction of social relations into money relations is a powerful way to put these dissociations in place. The archipelago structures reinforce the dissociations with places and practices that are necessary for the world economy to reproduce itself, but nevertheless need to remain outside of view to keep consciousness of exploitation and economic inequalities at bay.

### **Shoring up the archipelago and the quadruple challenge to globalisation**

We now turn to the current situation, exemplified by four challenges that together might stimulate 'globalisation in reverse': geopolitical and geo-economic shifts, climate change, digital transformation, and the global Covid-19 pandemic. These different challenges interact, reinforce, but also counteract each other. Of course, the exact outlines of what may be identified as a new phase of the global division of labour is yet opaque. Nevertheless, imagining future global divisions of labour and their geographical mechanisms as archipelagic structures can prepare us for what is to come.

First, the geopolitical and geo-economic shifts challenging doctrines of economic globalisation, particularly in the Global North (Horner et al., 2018). The rising importance of borders to trade is observed in protectionist trade policies that have been introduced in the US under Trump and the UK's exit from the European Union as well as in sanction regimes, for instance in response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, whereas much older globalisation literature de-emphasised the role of the state and its border-erecting powers (Beaverstock et al., 2000), the current moment is one of a renewed state capitalism (Alami and Dixon, 2021) and associated de/bordering processes. However, borders do not block connectivity, but modulate it, enabling new forms of dis/connection. Following the renewed salience of the EU–UK border, firms have started to re-evaluate the division of labour between UK-based subsidiaries and the European mainland (Fuller, 2021). The financial sector has relocated activities to the EU in order to be able to continue their operations (Heneghan and Hall, 2021), as have several British universities (Kleibert, 2020). Global value chains, while heavily affected by the new regulations, do not cease to exist but morph into new forms and in- and exclude different territories.

Second, climate change presents the biggest challenge to humankind and pressure is building to create more sustainable economies around the globe. While this creates impetus for developing more localised production chains to minimise CO<sub>2</sub> emissions during transportation, certainly in the web of dis/associations spun over the notion of sustainability, we similarly see how the 'green economy' remains fundamentally global in scope and involves a renewed run on ever scarcer 'natural' resources often again located in the Global South. Despite its green character, there is little change in the capitalist mechanisms how these are selectively integrated in the global system (Dunlap and Fairhead, 2014) through processes of dis/connection. On the other hand, climate change does rework the global map of

riskscapes (Davies et al., 2020) and de/borders which sites in the archipelago can accrue risk rents and where in the archipelago rents are at risk (Taylor and Aalbers, 2022).

Third, digitisation and technological innovations, such as the Internet of Things and 3D-printing, potentially enable the re-shoring of certain production processes and might involve more localised value chains (Livesey, 2018). Nevertheless, there is little evidence that these developments lead to a large-scale backshoring of labour from the Global South to North (Fuchs, 2020). Moreover, the associated digital innovations only make capitalism more resource hungry for raw materials and energy (Taffel, 2021). Digital technologies have also established the 'platform capitalism' business model. Platforms parcel out protected spaces of economic interaction through virtual de/bordering processes. The resulting 'walled gardens' (Hendrikse et al. 2018, 166) function as checkpoints that determine the rules of platform involvement, dis/connecting certain products and players from participation. Digital platforms enable 'digital economic circulation' through intermediation in multi-sided markets (with large numbers of producers and consumers) and act as nodes where power is concentrated and value gets accumulated by extracting monopoly rents (Hendrikse et al., 2018; Langley and Leyshon, 2017; Peck and Phillips, 2021). Platformisation allows appropriation of profits in different islands of the archipelago than where either the producer or the consumer is located (Howson et al., 2021), reminiscent of the nNIDL pattern.

Fourth, the Covid-19 pandemic has clearly and severely disrupted global circulation. If the 2008 financial crisis showed what could happen if the circulation of money stops flowing across the world (Tooze, 2019), the Covid-19 pandemic showed how the free circulation of people cannot be taken for granted. Accelerating de/bordering made national and even sub-national borders increasingly salient and the risks associated with being dependent upon and dis/connected from distant global production networks

for key supplies were clearly felt in many places (Bryson and Vanchan, 2020). Global production networks may thus be re-oriented from a focus on cost reduction to enabling ‘just in case’ production as contingency planning against circulation disruption becomes important (Brakman et al., 2020). However, mobility restrictions of capital, cargo or people are largely temporary in nature and borders have again shown their semi-permeability during Covid-19 with respect to select travel corridors or eased restrictions for business travellers. This need to flexibly modulate de/bordering and dis/connecting strengthens rather than diminishes the archipelagic character of the world-economy.

### **Conclusion: de-globalisation and re-globalisation**

Our long-term analysis of the different instantiations of global divisions of labour has shown that despite the disruption and fundamental novelty assumed in each new instantiation, expressed by the term ‘new’ and ‘newer’, we would rather not add the term ‘newest’ to characterise yet another disruptive moment in the geographies of globalisation. The idea of a static division of labour is problematic, given that the world-economy is in a constant state of evolution and even if a temporal ideal-type exists in real life, it will hardly last longer than a proverbial day. We hope to have shown that there are surprising continuities, amidst the obvious differences, in the fundamental geographical structures of the world-economy. The long-standing metaphor of the archipelago has been able to capture these continuities well.

Two key arguments emerge from our analysis. First, we are unlikely to see the kind of reversal of globalisation where a return to the containerised model of the economy based on nation-states would be analytically fruitful. Rather than dissolutions of economic relations, we are rather more likely to see a ‘reworking of the geographies of globalisation’ (Kleibert, 2020, 17), such as in the wake

of Brexit and the UK’s relations with the European Union. Global value chains, while heavily affected by the new regulations and institutions, will not cease to exist. While digitisation, geopolitics, climate change and pandemics will certainly lead to a re-organisation of global value chains, the archipelago structure will likely also undergird future global divisions of labour.

Second, the quadruple challenge implies that uncertainties in the global economy are increasing, making hedging against risks a crucial strategy. The risks and vulnerabilities characterising the archipelago structure of a globalisation in crisis are unevenly distributed across different ‘islands’ that struggle for their position within the global economy. Consequently, a distinction between ‘islands able to shield themselves from risk’ and ‘islands that bear risks’ could become a key differentiating factor in the future world-economy, and strategies of de/bordering, dis/connecting and dis/associating will play important roles in determining future riskscapes. As calculating, hedging and moving around of risks is a defining property of the financial sector (Christophers, 2015), we expect finance to consolidate its dominant position in the emergent restructured capitalist system. Nevertheless, this future archipelago structure will likely continue to incorporate new combinations of previous international divisions of labour’s logics around trade, skills and finance. When we consider the global division of labour a spatio-temporal scale that is in constant evolution but whose topological form tends to remain in the archipelago shape, more gradual assessments of the spatial evolution of the world-economy come into focus. Unpacking these will require further empirical research.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> We concur with Coe (2011) that nowadays ‘global’ is preferable to ‘international’ when describing this division of labour. We use ‘international’ when our sources do.

<sup>2</sup> Braudel (1984 [1979], 96) builds on a debate about ‘*Weltwirtschaft*’ in German-language historiography, which he translated to a hyphenated *économie-monde* in French. This hyphenated concept denotes something different than the all-encompassing nature of the world economy notion (without hyphen) in the English language (Van Hamme and Pion, 2012, 80).

<sup>3</sup> In our reading, Braudel’s (1984 [1979]) concept of the world-economy is congruent with the polymorphic rendering of the global scale discussed by Brenner (2004, 2019) and Urry (2005).

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