

Introduction

A Shrinking Planet

Although the term globalization is recent and came into widespread use only in the early 1990s, the phenomena to which it refers are older, since transnational connections have existed far longer. However, global consciousness, the awareness of being part of global networks, is recent as a mass phenomenon. Globalization refers to transnational connectedness and encompasses important economic, political, cultural, and environmental dimensions. It creates new opportunities and constraints, possibilities and vulnerabilities. In most parts of the world, there is a continuous tension between globalizing and localizing tendencies, and this relationship constitutes the central dialectic of globalization.

The very popularity of the word globalization signals a need for caution. Although the first usage of the word can be traced back to the early 1960s (Steger 2009), it was scarcely used before the late 1980s, even in academic circles. Today, you can hardly open a newspaper without encountering the term. It may easily appear to be a fashionable label used to designate phenomena one has the vaguest ideas about but that somehow represent newness and a new stage in the history of modernity. Globalization has rapidly become a basket concept, which seems to include anything from climate change to terrorism and petty market trade in the Global South. Yet to discard the concept of globalization on such grounds would be foolish. There is a real need for a common, generic term to describe the manifold, ambiguous, complex ways in which the world is, and increasingly so, interconnected. However, used by itself, the word globalization is empty or at least fuzzy. Before moving to some substantial areas of globalization research in the subsequent chapters of this book, it is therefore necessary to do some sorting and sifting, to delimit some fields of enquiry, and to propose a theoretical approach.

Globalization in Earlier Times

The fact that the term globalization is new does not mean that various parts of the world have not been interconnected before—nor that people were not thinking and

theorizing about global interconnectedness in earlier periods. Perhaps the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831) was the first theorist of globalization proper, since he did not merely talk of connections between disparate areas and places but about the emerging consciousness about such connections. Through his famous concept of the world-spirit (*Weltgeist*), an abstract entity immanent in all peoples but unevenly developed, Hegel saw the possibility of imagining all of humanity as a kind of community. However, Hegel's older contemporary Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) had already developed, chiefly in his late essay on eternal peace (Kant 2001 [1795]), an idea of cosmopolitanism that demanded equitable and respectful dialogue between the peoples of the world, regardless of their differences. In these philosophical reflections, we see the incipient notion of a global conversation, which, in the view of many, is being realized now, not least thanks to the technologically induced shrinking of the world in contemporary times. The philosophies of Kant and Hegel were developed in the same period as modern nationalism, and as will later become clear, the ideology of nationalism, although it is often contrasted with and seen as an enemy of globalization, shares many of its characteristics.

The nineteenth century was an era of colonial expansion, scientific discovery, and industrialization in the North, and accompanying these processes were new forms of thought, new models of the world. Karl Marx's political philosophy was certainly global in its scope and ambitions, and nineteenth-century cultural historians in the West tended to include all of humanity in their vast treatises, which often had an evolutionist bent, placing the author's own society at the top of a developmental ladder. Thanks to industrial development, colonial expansion, and technological change (the steamboat first appeared in the 1780s but became widespread only in the 1830s), the growth in international trade was formidable in that century. Another important nineteenth-century invention, the telegraph (1839), made it possible for the first time in human history to move a message independently of an object physically carrying it. With the opening of the first functioning transatlantic cable in 1866, messages could be sent from London to New York in a matter of minutes. It goes without saying that such innovations changed the perception of space and distance. In terms of speed of communication, New York was now closer to the London telegraph office than any suburb only a few miles away.

Technological development in both main forms of communication technology—that transmitting messages and that transporting physical objects—continued in the twentieth century with the invention of the airplane, the radio, and so on. In the 1920s, the Marxist theorist Leon Trotsky argued that socialism in one country was impossible since the world was too interconnected for separate development at the national level to be feasible, and he agitated in favor of a world revolution. The Second World War was, despite its name, the first truly global war that involved fighting in, and troops from, all continents (the First World War was mainly European).

In the first postwar decades, global interconnectedness continued to intensify. The number of transnational companies grew from about seven thousand in 1970 to about eighty thousand in 2013, as did the number of transnational NGOs (nongovernmental organizations)—from about one thousand in 1914 to more than forty thousand in 2013.

The United Nations grew from relatively modest beginnings in 1945 into an immense conglomerate of suborganizations with offices in nearly all countries. International travel became easier, cheaper, and more widespread. In the 1960s, the Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan coined the term “global village” to designate the new mass media situation, where television in particular, in his view, would create shared frames of reference and mutual knowledge between people across the globe (McLuhan 1994 [1964]). In this period, global change—economic, environmental, political—became the subject of many new scholarly books. Many used the term development, intimating that the poor countries would eventually catch up with the rich ones (e.g., Rostow 1960). Others, especially voices from the political left and/or the Third World, preferred to use the word imperialism, suggesting that the rich countries were actively exploiting the poor ones and preventing them from developing (e.g., Amin 1980; Frank 1975). The term Westernization, usually used in a derogatory way, became common. Around this time, the historical sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein developed his influential world-system theory (1974–79), which traced the development of the contemporary world system to the intercontinental trade beginning in the fifteenth century. In Wallerstein’s view, a permanent international division of labor subsequently developed, dividing the globe into the core (the rich countries), the periphery (the poor countries), and the semiperiphery (countries like Russia, Brazil, and China). Elaborating on world-system theory, Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas Hall (1997) take a longer view than Wallerstein, describing the development of transnational systems in a perspective spanning ten thousand years and showing that a multicentered world was finally becoming integrated at the outset of the nineteenth century, in the sense that all major centers were by then in regular contact. Focusing on cultural processes as well as economic ones, the anthropologist Eric Wolf’s *Europe and the People Without History* (1982) marked a decisive departure from anthropology’s tendency to study ostensibly isolated, small groups. The book, which analyzes imperialism from the perspective of the conquered, showed that most indigenous peoples “stopped being indigenous a long time ago” (Lewellen 2002: 14) and explores the process of colonialization as it was perceived and experienced not by the colonizers but by the colonized.

Globalization Today: A Compressed World

Various parts of the world were interconnected, and there was considerable awareness of this, long before the recent coinage of the term globalization. The Hellenistic Empire, founded through the conquests of Alexander the Great (323–30 B.C.E.), and the Roman Empire (ca. 30 B.C.E.–476 C.E.) are the best known examples of expansive transnational networks from European antiquity, but Chinese, Mongols, and other steppe peoples connected groups across the Eurasian continent and beyond, the most famous trade route being the Silk Road. As the centuries went by, trade, conquests, cultural borrowings, and migration increasingly brought people across the world in contact with each other, directly or indirectly. The late nineteenth century, when the

British Empire was a realm where “the sun never set,” marked a high point in early modern globalization.

Yet, it can be argued that there is something new to the present world, that is to say the world that began with the end of the Cold War in 1989–91, which goes a long way to explain the meteoric rise of public interest in globalization and transnational phenomena more generally. Three factors, roughly coinciding in time, may be mentioned here:

- The end of the *Cold War* itself entailed a broadening and deepening of global integration. The global two-bloc system, which had lasted since the 1940s, had made it difficult to think of geopolitics, transnational communication, and international trade in terms not dictated by the opposition between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. With the dissolution of this conflict, the world seemed to have been left with a one-bloc system (notwithstanding the continued existence of a few states, such as North Korea, which continue to stay largely aloof). The world appeared to have become a single marketplace.
- The *Internet*, which had existed in embryonic form since the late 1960s, began to grow exponentially around 1990. Throughout the 1990s, media buzzwords were about bandwidths, websites, portals, the new economy, and its business opportunities. The World Wide Web was introduced in 1992–93, around the same time as many academics and businesspeople grew accustomed to using e-mail for their daily correspondence. Cell phones became ubiquitous in the rich countries and the middle classes of the poorer ones. The impact of this double delocalization—the physical letter replaced by e-mail, the fixed landline replaced by the wireless mobile—on the everyday life of millions of people has been considerable, but it remains undertheorized.
- *Identity politics*—nationalist, ethnic, religious, territorial—were at the forefront of the international agenda, both from above (states demanding homogeneity or engaging in ethnic cleansing) and from below (minorities demanding equal rights or secession). The Salman Rushdie affair, itself an excellent example of the globalization of ideas, began with the issuing of a fatwa by Iran’s ayatollah, Khomeini, following the publication of Rushdie’s allegedly blasphemous novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988). It soon became apparent that Rushdie could move freely nowhere in the world since the fatwa had global implications. Only two years later, Yugoslavia dissolved, with ensuing civil wars based on ethnic differences. In the same period, debates about immigration and multiculturalism came to dominate political discourse in several Western countries, while the Hindu nationalists of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party, or “Indian People’s Party”) came to power in India.

These three dimensions of globalization—increased trade and transnational economic activity; faster and denser communication networks; and increased tensions between

(and within) cultural groups due to intensified mutual exposure—do not suggest that the world has been fundamentally transformed after the late 1980s, but that the driving forces of both economic, political, and cultural dynamics are transnational—and that this is now widely acknowledged. As a pioneering theorist of contemporary globalization, Roland Robertson succinctly puts it: “Globalization as a concept refers *both* to the compression of the world *and* the intensification of consciousness about the world as a whole” (1992: 8, emphasis mine).

The compression of the world, in all of its forms, brings us closer to each other for better and for worse. The consciousness about these connections gives a sense of both opportunities and of vulnerability. This dual aspect of globalization—increased interconnectedness and increased awareness of it—can be studied from a myriad of empirical vantage points. It would be perfectly feasible, within the compass of globalization studies, to write a dissertation on, say, European and American reactions to the Asian bird flu in 2006. The impact of, and local perceptions of, globalization among the small, until very recently illiterate and stateless peoples in Melanesia, has long been a subject in anthropology (see Martin 2013 for a recent, excellent treatment). Human geographers write about the displacement of people in India as a result of climate change. Sociologists study the growth of slums in Africa. Anthropologists and others try to figure out the effects of the phenomenal rise of the Chinese export economy and its implications, locally as well as in China itself. Thousands write about migration, again from a variety of perspectives. Others are concerned with the distribution of economic power in the global economy, or the distribution of symbolic or definitional power in the global media world; some write about standardization of goods and services as an outcome of the globalization of the economy; others write about the spread of certain consumer preferences, yet others about the global tourist industry and the commodification of cultural identity; others again study international law, with human rights as a main dimension of globalization, or the *antiglobalization* or *alterglobalization* movement, which opposes the inequalities and power disparities created through processes of economic globalization. Just to mention a few subject areas. As far as academic disciplines are concerned, globalization is a central topic in sociology, political science, cultural history, geography, anthropology, media studies, education, law, cultural studies, and so on. The examples in this book, I should emphasize, are meant to indicate variations over a (large) theme and do not claim to be representative in a statistical sense.

What Globalization is Not

Before outlining some central analytical dimensions of globalization, it seems pertinent to mention a few notions often associated with globalization, either simplistically or wrongly:

- *Globalization is really very recent and began only in the 1980s.* This view betrays the beholder’s poor knowledge of history. World-systems have

existed earlier in the sense that people all over the world have participated, often involuntarily, in political and economic systems of a huge, often intercontinental scale. The European colonial era is the most obvious instance, but one might argue that the Roman Empire, encompassing as it did most of the known world (for Europeans), or the Aztec Empire, shared many of the characteristics of today's globalization (Friedman 1994). Indeed, Nayan Chanda (2007) begins his compelling narrative about the "traders, preachers, adventurers and warriors" who shaped globalization, with the exodus from Africa and pays considerable attention—rightly so—to the mobilities of people, goods, plants, and ideas during colonialism. However, the inhabitants of earlier world-systems were rarely aware of each other beyond their own experience, or only dimly so through the presence of rare objects from afar and tall stories told by travelers. As a form of human consciousness, globalization is new as a mass phenomenon. The labor market situation in Oslo has been known to thousands of Pakistani villagers for decades, and reggae music in Melanesia, advertising in Central Africa, and the rhetoric of the political opposition in South Korea all indicate the existence of a global *discourse*, a shared (but not uniform) communication system. In this cultural sense, globalization is recent as a mass phenomenon, and the number of people who are unaware of the existence of television, chewing gum, and basic human rights is decreasing every year.

- *Globalization is just a new word for economic imperialism or cultural Westernization.* This view reduces the vast range of transnational processes to certain economic ones. Although it is tautologically true that rich countries are dominant, the situation is not static. Not only China, but India, South Korea, and other formerly poor countries are emerging as equal players, and regional powers such as South Africa and Brazil are both exploited and exploiters in the global economy. However, the main problem with this view is its neglect of the noneconomic dimensions of globalization. The direction of transnational flows is not unilateral: Some things flow from north to south, others from south to north, and there is also considerable movement between east and west and within the south. The millions of pirated CDs and DVDs sold in Mexico have been imported, illegally or semilegally, from China (Aguilar 2012). The violent uprising in Mali, beginning in spring 2012, was ideologically inspired by ideas originating in the Arab peninsula. The largest group of Somali refugees lives in neighboring Kenya. And the main groups of labor migrants in South Africa come from other African countries, notably Zimbabwe and Nigeria. Westernization is not a good synonym for globalization.
- *Globalization means homogenization.* This view is always simplistic and usually misleading. First, the participation in global, or transnational, processes often

entails a vitalization of local cultural expressions, be it African art, Caribbean popular music, or Indian novels, which depend on an overseas market for their survival. Second, large segments of our everyday lives are hardly touched by globalization. Although Taiwanese, like people from the North Atlantic, wear jeans and fiddle with touch phones while eating burgers and drinking Cokes, they do not thereby become Europeans or Americans. However, as will be argued in a later chapter, it is true that similarities between discrete societies develop as an integral dimension of globalization.

- *Globalization is opposed to human rights.* On the contrary, the global spread of human rights is one of the most spectacularly successful forms of globalization witnessed in the world. It is true, of course, that transnational companies operating in poor countries do not necessarily recognize workers' rights, but it is only thanks to the globalization of political ideas that local communities and organizations can argue effectively against them and canvas for support from transnational NGOs and governments overseas.
- *Globalization is a threat to local identities.* At the very best, this is a truth with serious modifications. Since tendencies towards globalization (understood as the dissolution of boundaries) usually lead to strong, localizing counterreactions favoring local food, local customs, and so on, some theorists have followed Robertson's (1992) lead in talking about *glocalization* as a more accurate term for what is going on. Local identities are usually strengthened by globalization because people begin to emphasize their uniqueness overtly only when it appears to be threatened. The emergence of identity politics, which explicitly aims to protect and strengthen local identities, is a reaction to perceived dominance from the outside and dissolving boundaries. On the other hand, it is evidently true that local power is often weakened as a result of globalization. It nonetheless remains indisputable that globalization does not create global persons; people continue to live in particular places with a unique mix of the old and the new, the near and the distant, change and continuity, and these places do not become identical overnight, or indeed ever.

Globalizers and Skeptics

Not everybody who writes about the contemporary world agrees that it has entered a distinctively global era. Some, in fact, argue that the extent of global integration was just as comprehensive, and in some ways more encompassing, in the belle époque of 1890–1914 than it is today. Others claim that the nation-state remains, even today, “the pre-eminent power container of our era” (Giddens 1985: back cover; he would later revise his position, cf. Giddens 1999). Yet others point out that a large number of people, and huge swathes of social and cultural life, are relatively untouched by

transnational processes. It may be useful, following David Held and Anthony McGrew (2000: 38; see also Steger 2009), to distinguish between *globalizers* and *skeptics*, to highlight some of the debates and the positions taken by different scholars.

According to the skeptics (see, e.g., Gray 2005; Hirst and Thompson 1999), we are witnessing a process of *internationalization* and *regionalization* rather than the emergence of one integrated world of rapid communication, transnational networks, and global financial capital, which is the view of globalizers. Skeptics argue further that the nation-state remains the most important political entity, while globalizers claim that state sovereignty is on the wane and that multilateralism and transnational politics are replacing it. While skeptics have identified the development of regional economic blocs like NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and the EU, globalizers see the world economy as "a single playing-field" (Friedman 2005: 7) with diminishing obstacles to truly global competition. Skeptics see a continuation of the classic North-South divide in terms of prosperity and power, while globalizers argue that inequalities are chiefly growing within and not between societies. While skeptics believe in the continued or indeed increasing power of national identities and cultures, globalizers describe hybridities and cosmopolitan orientations as an outcome of intensified interaction.

The skeptics do not deny that massive changes are taking place, but they emphasize continuities with the modern world of the nation-state at the levels of politics, economy, and identity, while globalizers are concerned to show that the world is going through a series of qualitative changes.

There is no reason to take an unequivocal position here. Few are simply globalizers (or even *hyperglobalizers*) or skeptics, and both positions can often shed light on the issues. For example, the extent of global solidarity in environmental and human rights questions is no doubt enhanced by extensive travel and global communication and media, and this lends credibility to the view that cosmopolitanism and cultural hybridity (mixing) results from increased interconnectedness. Yet at the same time, identity politics based on religion, ethnicity, or nationality aimed to strengthen social and cultural boundaries is also on the rise. Both phenomena coexist side by side and are possible responses to the opportunity space created by intensified transnational contacts. There can be no effects of say, global capitalism, the Internet, or politicized Islam, that are not mediated by human understandings and experiences, and they vary. Most empirical generalizations about globalization are therefore false. At the same time, it is possible to delineate a framework for global or transnational processes, objective changes, or features of the world that people everywhere have to relate to, but they do so in different ways.

A related debate concerns the moral, or normative, dimension of globalization: Is it chiefly good or is it mostly bad? This is an even more impossible dichotomy to relate to than the (hyper-)globalizer versus the skeptical one. Neoliberal capitalism, characterized by the deregulation of markets and a strong emphasis on free trade (in theory if not always in practice), has its winners and losers; it produces wealth as well as poverty. Neoliberalism also necessarily leads to local reactions from persons,

groups, and communities who resist its flattening and homogenizing tendencies, insisting on basing their economy on local needs and skills rather than global markets (see Hann and Hart 2011). Indeed, already in the 1940s, the economic historian Karl Polanyi (1957 [1944]) saw what he described as a “double movement” between global standardization and local autonomy in the economy. Migration regimes, whether restrictive or liberal, create both opportunities and constraints. Even global climate change, virtually unequivocally seen as perilous, creates new opportunities—for example, for farmers in cold regions. The effects of globalization are, thus, not good or bad but complex and influence people’s lives differently in different societies and different groups in the same society.

Overheating as a Metaphor

A number of key features of contemporary globalization can be captured through the metaphor of overheating. In physics, heat and speed are synonyms, and the present globalized world is one of intensified tensions and frictions linked with an increase in the speed of change. One need only count the present number of transatlantic flights or the number of transpacific telephone connections to realize that the webs of connectedness are hotter, faster, and denser than in any previous period, with repercussions virtually everywhere. There are areas in rural West Africa that until a decade ago had no paved roads but that now experience traffic jams; there are villages in New Guinea that had existed for millennia in relative isolation until the 1970s but whose inhabitants are now wage earners, voters, and students—and there are millions of Indians who logged on to Facebook for the first time last year.

Overheating is a way of talking about accelerated change. It is the kind of change that can be depicted as exponential growth. The rise of the Brazilian economy, the growth of Chinese cities, the increase in the number of cruise ship passengers, e-mail servers, television channels, or transnational remittances—these are just some examples of global processes that have accelerated in the last few decades and are, in ways that are still not fully known or understood, transforming the planet.

The first subject area that comes to most people’s minds when the term overheating is mentioned is climate change, which will be discussed in a later chapter. Although the average global temperature has only risen by 0.8 degree Celsius (1.44 degrees Fahrenheit) since the early twentieth century, the amount of CO₂ has grown far more significantly, and many climate researchers believe that an exponential growth in temperature change is imminent. However, overheating also fits developments in the financial economy, where pundits and dealers occasionally speak literally about overheated markets, economic meltdown, and the need to cool down the economy. This is a way of describing a situation where too many transactions are taking place at the same time, leading to a loss of overview and unpredictable outcomes. Moreover, in the realm of identity politics, to mention a

third example, the metaphor also often seems appropriate. Violent clashes, hateful exchanges, and mutually exclusive claims to scarce resources, which are all too common in this twenty-first-century world, all result from perceived frictions, which in turn are the outcome of increased contact.

An overheated world is one of frictions and tensions, simply because there are more of us, with more activities, projects, opportunities, and technologies than ever before in history. We are now 7 billion; a century ago, there were only 1.7 billion of us. In research on traffic, it is sometimes pointed out that there essentially exist only three kinds of traffic—free flow (when there is scarcely anybody else on the highway), synchronized flow (when you have to take others into consideration), and traffic jams. We may think of the contemporary world as one characterized mostly by synchronized flows at a high speed, where the occasional crash is, perhaps, inevitable.

Dimensions of Globalization

Whether we look at global capitalism, trends in consumer tastes, transnational migration and identity politics, or online communication, the globalizing processes of the early twenty-first century have a few salient characteristics in common. These features are dealt with in detail in the main chapters of this book, and I shall only briefly mention them here:

- *Disembedding*, including delocalization. Globalization implies that distance is becoming irrelevant, relative, or at the very least less important. Ideas, songs, books, investment capital, labor, and fashions travel faster than ever, and even if they stay put, their location can be less important than it would have been formerly. This aspect of globalization is driven by technological and economic changes, but it has cultural and political implications. Disembedding, however, also includes all manners through which social life becomes abstracted from its local, spatially fixed context.
- *Speed*. The speed of transport and communication has increased throughout the twentieth century, and this acceleration continues. It has been said that there are no delays any more in an era of instantaneous communication over cell phones, Internet servers, and television satellites. Although this is surely an exaggeration—delays exist, even if only as unintended consequences—speed is an important feature of globalization. Anything from inexpensive plane tickets to cheap calls contribute to integrating the world, and the exponential growth in the numbers of Internet users since the early 1990s indicates that distance no longer means separation. However, acceleration is uneven, and relative slowness may be just as significant as relative speed. Different parts of

societies and cultural worlds change at different speeds, and there are places and countries where change takes place at a different, more sluggish rate than elsewhere.

- *Standardization.* Continuing the processes of standardization begun by nationalism and national economies, globalization entails comparability and shared standards where there were formerly none. The rapid increase in the use of English as a foreign language is suggestive of this development, as is the worldwide spread of similar hotels and shopping centers, as well as the growing web of international agreements and industry standards.
- *Connections.* The networks connecting people across continents are becoming denser, faster, and wider every year. Mutual dependence and transnational connections lead to a need for more international agreements and a refashioning of foreign policies and create both fields of opportunities, constraints, and new forms of power.
- *Mobility.* The entire world is on the move, or so it might sometimes seem. Migration, business travel, international conferences, and not least tourism have been growing steadily for decades, with a number of important implications for local communities, politics, and economies.
- *Mixing.* Although *cultural crossroads*, where people of different origins met, are as ancient as urban life, their number, size, and diversity is growing every day. Both frictions and mutual influence result. Additionally, at the level of culture, the instantaneous exchange of messages characteristic of the information era leads to probably more cultural mixing than ever before in human history. However, cultural mixing does not necessarily lead to the breakdown of boundaries between identities.
- *Risk.* Globalization entails the weakening, and sometimes obliteration, of boundaries. Flows of anything from money to refugees are intensified in this era. This means that territorial polities have difficulties protecting themselves against unwanted flows. Typical globalized risks include AIDS and other epidemics, transnational terrorism, and climate change, but there is also increased attention to ecological disruptions caused by invasive species, like the Caribbean cane toad in Australia or the Burmese python in Florida. Most of these risks cannot be combated efficiently by single nation-states, and on a more general note, it has often been pointed out that the planet as a whole lacks efficient political instruments able to deal with and govern the technology- and economy-driven processes of globalization.
- *Identity politics.* Politics founded not in ideology or quests for universal rights but in the maintenance and strengthening of particular collective identities are related to globalization in two main ways. First, identity politics, whether nationalist, ethnic, religious, or regionalist, are direct responses to globalizing

processes, which seem to threaten the local and unique by introducing new, often standardizing or universalistic values, ideas, and practices. Second, identity politics in itself has a universalistic dimension in that the grammar, or rhetoric, used to promote the rights of particular groups has important similarities across the world.

- *Alterglobalization*. Reactions to global neoliberalism were initially described in the media and by analysts as antiglobalization, which is a simplistic and misleading term (see Graeber 2001). The new social movements, ranging from ATTAC in France to the Occupy movement in the United States, the Slum Dweller Alliance in Mumbai, and *los indignados* in Spain, are not opposed to global connectedness as such but reject the narrowly profit-seeking neoliberalist version of globalization, which they see as dehumanizing and oppressive. What these diverse organizations have in common is resistance to the disembedding tendencies of globalization, and they may be described collectively as reembedding movements. In fact, all the key features of globalization mentioned above have their countervailing forces opposing them and positing alternatives. The fragmented, fleeting social world made possible through disembedding processes is counteracted through strong networks of moral commitment, concerns with local power and community integration, and a “human economy” embedded in social life as an alternative to neoliberal capitalism operating at a global level (Hart 2013: 1).

Moreover, acceleration is counteracted through social movements promoting slowness in many guises, standardization through uniquely fashioned one-of-a-kind goods and services, transnational interconnectedness through localism and nationalism, movement through quests for stability and continuity, mixing through concerns with cultural purity, and vulnerability through attempts at self-determination and relative isolation.

Globalization is not a unidirectional process. It has no end and no intrinsic purpose, and it is neither uncontested, unambiguous, nor ubiquitous. If we want to get the whole picture, it must include both benefactors and victims, both the active globalizers and those who are merely globalized, both those who are caught up in the whirlwind of global processes and those who are excluded. Huge, atrocious slums mushrooming all over the poor parts of the world are products of transnational economic processes (Davis 2006), but they are generally seen as the debris of the global economy—the people living there cursorily defined as problems not resources.

Ways of Looking at Globalization

A few further distinctions should also be made initially. The examples in this book deal with economic, political, cultural, aesthetic, and environmental aspects of globalization,

but the boundaries drawn between such domains are largely artificial and will be dispensed with when they are not needed. It should also be kept in mind that different threads, or domains, in transnational processes do not necessarily move in the same directions, at the same levels of intensity, or at the same speed. This means that all societies are unequally affected by different tendencies. Such disjunctures or discrepancies will be explored further.

Globalization can take place, and can be studied, from *above* or from *below*. A problematic but necessary distinction, this dichotomy refers to the state, to major international organizations, and to powerful business enterprises on the one hand and to interpersonal relationships on the other hand. I shall show that the interpersonal globalization from below is far more encompassing and more important in shaping the world than often assumed.

A distinction between *objective* and *subjective* globalization, also not unproblematic, must also be made initially. Objective globalization means that something is being incorporated into a global, or wide-ranging, transnational system without necessarily being aware of it, whereas subjective globalization amounts to the acknowledgement of such processes taking place (which they may or may not; citizens often blame globalization for changes wrought locally).

Finally, and this is a main point in this book, globalization does not entail the production of *global uniformity*, or homogeneity. Rather, it can be seen as a way of organizing *heterogeneity*. The similarities dealt with, for example, in the chapter on standardization are formal and abstract and do not necessarily lead to homogeneity at the level of *content* or experience. The local continues to thrive, although it must increasingly be seen as *glocal*—that is, enmeshed in transnational processes.

The growth of urban slums throughout the Global South is an indirect result of economic globalization, just as the relative disconnectedness from the Internet in Africa is a significant fact alongside the growth in text messages in China, from zero to eighteen billion a month in less than ten years. The networked capitalist world is a framework, or scaffolding, for almost any serious inquiry into cultural and social dynamics, and it is characterized by an intensification of processes of change, which makes it, in important ways, volatile and unpredictable.

Seven Key Debates about Globalization

Research on globalization is sprawling and multidisciplinary. It is not the ambition of this book to sum it up or even to do justice to the vast scope of globalization studies (most of which have been published since 1990). That would plainly have been impossible. Yet, it may be kept in mind that much of the research, and indeed much of the public debate in most countries, about globalization is concerned with a few central questions:

- First, a chiefly academic question: Is globalization new or old? I have already commented briefly on this. The answer has to be sphinx-like: it depends on

your definition. Sprawling, but well-integrated political systems with thriving trade, internal migration, standardized measures, and a common high culture have existed in several continents well before the modern era. However, there are so many characteristic features of our present age—even if we limit it to the post-Cold War era—that it merits treatment on its own terms. One of the leading theorists of the information society, Manuel Castells, mentions in a lengthy footnote towards the end of his monumental *The Information Age* that students have sometimes asked him what is new about the world he describes. His answer deserves to be quoted in full:

Why is this a new world? . . . Chips and computers are new; ubiquitous, mobile telecommunications are new, genetic engineering is new; electronically integrated, global financial markets working in real time are new; an inter-linked capitalist economy embracing the whole planet, and not only some of its segments, is new; a majority of the urban labor force in knowledge and information processing in advanced economies is new; a majority of urban population in the planet is new; the demise of the Soviet Empire, the fading away of communism, and the end of the Cold War are new; the rise of the Asian Pacific as an equal partner in the global economy is new; the widespread challenge to patriarchy is new; the universal consciousness on ecological preservation is new; and the emergence of a network society, based on a space of flows, and on timeless time, is historically new. (Castells 1998: 336)

- A few years later, he could have added the advent of deterritorialized warfare and humanly induced climate change to the list. Be this as it may, Castells adds that it does not really matter whether all this is new or not; his point is that this is our world, and therefore we should study it.
- A second question raised in the debates over globalization, academic and nonacademic, concerns the relationship of globalization to neoliberal economics—that is, the view that free trade will eventually lead to prosperity everywhere and that states should encumber the economy as little as possible. Severely criticized (see, e.g., Gray 1998; Klein 1998; Rodrik 2011; Soros 2002; Stiglitz 2002; among very many others) for not delivering the goods—many countries that have complied with measures imposed by international agencies like the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) have experienced a steep decline in de facto standards of living—neoliberalism is often associated with, indeed sometimes treated as a synonym for, globalization (Kiely 2005). Here it must be said that such a usage narrows the concept too much. The global spread of human rights ideas is no less a feature of globalization than the global financial market; the vaccination programs of the WHO (World Health Organization) are no less global than the moneylending of the World Bank, and the small-scale lending

programs initiated by 2006 Nobel Peace Laureate Mohammad Yunus and his Bangladeshi Grameen Bank have spread to other countries; one could go on. Global governance (see Held et al. 2005; Scholte 2011) is sometimes posited as an alternative to an anarchic market economy, which is, in any case, imperfect insofar as poor countries rarely get full market access in the rich ones. Globalization is form not content; it can be filled with neoliberal market economics, but this is not the whole story.

- A third, related debate concerns the relationship between globalization and democracy. Many scholars, politicians, and commentators are concerned about the loss of political power experienced by nation-states when so much economic power is diverted to the transnational arenas (see, e.g., Sassen 1998; Rodrik 2011). Clearly, there are some real issues to be tackled here: The institutions of the nation-state arguably lose some of their clout when capital and wealth are disembedded and become transnational. Yet, the spread of democratic ideas, institutions, and practices are also part of the global process. In other words, one cannot say that globalization is either favorable or detrimental to democracy; it is necessary to be more specific.
- A fourth, important debate deals with the relationship between poor and rich countries: Do the poor become poorer and the rich richer as a result of economic globalization? Again, there can be no simple, unequivocal answer. Who benefits in the long (or for that matter short) run from the globalization of economies? The answer is far from clear. Some countries mired in poverty, notably in Africa, are among the least globalized in terms of integration into the world economy. Their exports are modest, and foreign investment is considered risky and therefore is rare. Some rich countries, not least in Western Europe, begin to notice the competition from poorer countries (notably China and central-eastern Europe) as an unpleasant experience. In other cases, it can be argued that current trade regimes, such as the ones negotiated by the WTO (World Trade Organization), help rich countries to continue exploiting poor ones by buying cheap unprocessed goods from them and selling them expensive industrial products back. This would fit with the dependency theory developed by Andre Gunder Frank, Samir Amin, and other Marxist scholars, as well as its close relative, Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory (see Amin et al. 1982). However, this description fits the older neocolonial trade regime better than the current one, where China is fast making inroads into markets in Asia and Africa with its inexpensive industrial goods and willingness to invest in industrial enterprises. As argued by Daniel Cohen (2006), the poorest countries are not so much exploited as neglected by transnational investors. It has been proved conclusively that inequalities have grown in most of the world since the 1980s, but it is unclear whether this is a result of globalization or of domestic policies aiming to deregulate markets and encourage investment.

- A fifth, no less important, theme is that of cultural dynamics: Does globalization lead to homogenization or to heterogenization—do we become more similar or more different due to the increased transnational movement and communication? In one sense, we become more similar. Individualism, which we here take to mean the belief that individuals have rights and responsibilities regardless of their place in wider social configurations, is a central feature of global modernity. It is also easy to argue that similarities in consumer preferences among the world's middle classes indicate flattening, or homogenization. Yet, at the same time, local adaptations of universal or nearly universal phenomena show that global modernities always have local expressions and that the assumed similarities may either conceal real differences in meaning or that they may be superficial with no deep bearing on people's existential condition. Again, the question is phrased too simplistically to have a meaningful yes/no answer.
- Related to this problematic is a sixth area of debate—namely, that to do with identity politics. Does globalization, through increasingly exposing us to each other's lives, lead to enhanced solidarity, tolerance, and sympathy with people elsewhere, or, rather, does it lead to ferocious counterreactions in the form of stubborn identity politics—nationalism, religious fundamentalism, racism, and so on? This question has, perhaps, a short answer. Globalization does make it easier for us to understand each other across cultural divides, but it also creates tensions between groups that were formerly isolated from each other, and it creates a need to demarcate uniqueness and sometimes historical rootedness. The more similar we become, the more different from each other we try to be. Strong group identities may serve several purposes—economic, political, existential—in a world otherwise full of movement and turmoil. Divisive and exclusionary identity politics are a trueborn child of globalization, but so is transnational solidarity.
- Finally, an important question concerns how European (or Western, or North Atlantic) globalization is. The conventional view is that globalization is largely fuelled by the economic, technological, and political developments of Western Europe. Those who take the long view may begin with the Renaissance, the Italian city-states, and the European conquests of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; those who write about the present may emphasize transnational corporations, computer technology, and the dynamics of capitalism. However, other perspectives may be useful and indeed necessary. If we look at history, the powerhouses of transnational economies have been located in many places. Andre Gunder Frank (1998), a long-standing collaborator with Wallerstein, increasingly saw the latter's world-system theory as overly Eurocentric and showed, in one of his last books, that large-scale transnational markets were flourishing in Asia before and during the European expansionist period, centered on China and parts of India, and leading to both

migration waves and cultural exchange. Only with the last period of European colonialization in the nineteenth century did that continent become truly dominant in the world economy, according to Frank. Non-Eurocentric histories of the world, such as Felipe Fernandez-Armesto's *Millennium* (1995; cf. also Fernandez-Armesto 2000; Goody 2010; Morris 2010), also tend to emphasize important interconnections in the past outside Europe. If a Martian were to visit the Earth in the year 1300, Fernandez-Armesto (1995) says, the Martian would not be able to predict the rise of Europe as the center of global power. There were thriving civilizations in Mesoamerica, in the Andes, in West Africa, in the Arab world, in India, and in China, easily surpassing stagnant European societies in transnational trade, cultural achievements, and political might. As pointed out by Jack Goody (2010), if it is true that Asia is currently about to achieve dominance in the global economy, that would only entail a new spin on the historical oscillations between Eastern and Western hegemony.

If we restrict ourselves to the present, the picture is also less straightforward than a superficial look might suggest. In popular culture as well as literature, major achievements of global significance come from outside the West; Indian films (Bollywood movies) are popular in many countries, as are Mexican and Brazilian soap operas, Argentine tango, and Japanese manga comics. Major alternatives to Western ideologies, such as political Islam, are expanding, and China and India, which combined have 40 percent of the world's population, have economic growth rates far surpassing those of the North Atlantic countries. The division of the world into core, periphery, and semiperiphery, thus, is a model that needs to be tested and does not always yield the expected results.

* * *

We shall return to these and other debates as we go along. Before we move on, I should point out that unlike many introductions to globalization, this book does not suggest what to study in the sense of providing a catalogue of substantial topics deemed particularly important by the author. Rather, it suggests where to look and, to some extent, how to look for it. The dimensions of globalization presented in the chapters that follow—my key concepts—can be mined for insights through immersion into diverse empirical fields. In the following chapters, I will outline the main characteristics of globalization: It *standardizes*, *modernizes*, *detritorializes*, and, by dialectical negation, *localizes* people, since it is only after having been globalized that people may become obsessed with the uniqueness of their locality. I emphasize that although globalization is driven by powerful economic and technological forces, it takes place between people; the transnational webs of the world depend on interpersonal trust, and people often use the opportunities offered by globalizing processes in unexpected ways.

Globalization creates a shared grammar for talking about differences and inequalities. Humans everywhere are increasingly entering the same playing field, yet they do not participate in equal ways, and thus frictions and conflicts are an integral part of globalizing processes. This, too, will be evident in the chapters that follow.

- Globalization entails both the intensification of transnational connectedness and the awareness of such an intensification.
- Globalization is largely driven by technological and economic processes, but it is multidimensional and not unidirectional.
- Globalization entails both processes of homogenization and processes of heterogenization: it makes us more similar and more different at the same time.
- Globalization is a wider concept than Westernization or neoimperialism and includes processes that move from south to north as well as the opposite.
- Although globalization is old in the sense that transnational or even global systems have existed for centuries—indeed for millennia—contemporary globalization has distinctive traits due to enhanced communication technology and the global spread of capitalism.

Questions

- Discuss differences and similarities between contemporary globalization and the colonial world-system of the nineteenth century.
- In what sense does the author claim that the post-Cold War world entails a new phase of globalization? Do you agree?
- How can identity politics be said to be an outcome of globalization?
- What is the difference between globalization and Westernization?
- What is meant by glocalization?
- What does the author mean by overheating?

Further Reading

- Chanda, Nayan (2007) *Bound Together: How Traders, Preachers, Adventurers, and Warriors Shaped Globalization*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. An entertaining and erudite account of globalization, which takes the long perspective of several thousand years, with a consistent focus on the individuals that made the globally connected world come about, and their motivations—from missionary zeal to personal greed.
- Robertson, Roland (1992) *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. London: Sage. A collection of highly influential essays by one of the architects of current globalization theory, the book discusses conceptualizations of the global, the history of the global system, and introduces the term glocalization to overcome the artificial dichotomy of the global and the local.
- Wolf, Eric (1982) *Europe and the People without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press. A history of the last five hundred years, written from the perspective of the colonized peoples, offering an alternative and challenging view of the processes of globalization, so often seen from a Western perspective.