Globalization: The key concepts

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Preface

My office desk is large and sturdy, ergonomically adjusted to suit a person of my height and constructed by world-class Swedish engineers from the finest mock hardwood and real steel. Yet, lately it has been groaning audibly. The reason is simple: The desk is burdened not just by the usual pile of half-read books and exam papers; it carries the additional weight of a good-sized library on globalization, sorted roughly into about a dozen wavering stacks. These books, which comprise only a small fraction of the total number of volumes dealing with globalization and transnationalism since aruond 1990 (as well as a few older ones), form the bulk of the source material used to write this book - one is reminded of the old joke about a scholar being a library's means to create another library - together with countless journal articles, newspaper clippings, downloaded texts and a reasonable collection of personal observations. Even to begin to summarize the contents of each book and every important article would be a hopeless, endless (and rather boring) job. And then there are all the other texts, which I haven't read and probably never will. I am reminded of my countryman Tor Åge Bringsværd's short story about the man who collected the first of September, 1972. Realizing that it would be impossible ever to acquire an overview of everything, he decided to narrow his ambitions, and to become an expert on one single day, namely the first of September. However, the project soon required him to learn new languages, to order tapes of Russian radio broadcasts and late editions of Brazilian newspapers. Of course, although if he was at it for years, the poor man went insane long before he was done.

As I began to take notes for this book in February 2006, pondering where to begin to tackle the in every way huge topic of globalization, an event in the outside world came to my rescue, as is so often the case with us academics. I had just been reading two very different books about globalization. The American journalist Thomas Friedman, in his ambitious *The World is Flat* (T. Friedman 2005), described an increasingly integrated world market where 'the playing field had been levelled' in the sense that Indian, Chinese, North Atlantic and

other companies were competing with few impediments: His integrated world was a place where capitalism had won, and where the fittest would survive, like it or not. Worrying about the future of the American job market, Friedman noted the emergence of China as a rising power in the global economy, and spoke about the Internet and global financial markets as guarantors for global economic growth.

The other book was James Lovelock's *Gaia's Revenge* (Lovelock 2006), a deeply pessimistic book about climate change and environmental destruction, where the author argued that the Earth's self-regulating mechanisms were beginning to falter in the face of massive human energy use, with unforeseeable but doubtless enormous consequences. A different take on globalization from Friedman's upbeat assessment of global capitalism, Lovelock's book indicated an important way in which globalization creates universal vulnerability.

Thinking about these books and how to compare them, I glanced at my morning paper to be met by a picture from an animated demonstration in a Middle Eastern city. The reason for this demonstration, and subsequent acts of sabotage, consumer boycott and a brief diplomatic crisis, was the publication, some months earlier, of twelve cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammad in a leading Danish newspaper. Few of the cartoons could be described as offensive in their content, but there is a general ban against depictions of the Prophet in Sunni Islam, and many Muslims outside (and not least inside) Denmark felt that their dissemination was a deliberate act of humiliation. Regardless of his motivation for commissioning the cartoons, the Danish editor could not have anticipated the reactions, fanning out across the Muslim world and, through its repercussions, damaging relations between Denmark and several Muslim countries.

Thinking about the implications of the cartoon controversy for our attempts to understand globalization, it occurred to me that the affair had demonstrated that not only are political, economic, cultural and ecological issues globalized these days, but so are emotional ones, in this case the feeling of humiliation and offense. One can no longer publish a critique of Islam (or Judaism, or Hinduism

etc.) intended for a local readership assured that it will not be read and possibly misunderstood anywhere else. Not all messages travel freely and swiftly in a globalized world, but all have the potential to do so.

We live in a shrunken world, a world of contacts, frictions, comparisons, communication and movement which are unrestricted by distance. At the same time, many activities continue to take place without any consequences beyond the local. The aim of this book is to outline some of the main dimensions of globalization and to indicate some ways in which they are being studied and critiqued. Far from being a comprehensive overview of the area, at least this book is an attempt to open more doors than it closes and to point the reader in directions that I have myself found fruitful.

Not many people have been directly involved with this book, but those who have - two anonymous referees and Berg's Tristan Palmer - have given me enough resistance and encouragement to improve substantially on the first draft, and for this I am grateful. Kristin Opsahl Alvarez tracked down and copied a vast number of relevant articles for me - thanks Kristin! Of more enduring, if less direct, significance, is my association with the Transnational Flows group at the University of Oslo (2001-2004), directed by Marianne E. Lien (this book fulfils some of my outstanding obligations towards the programme); my more recent collaboration on the anthropology of human security with colleagues at the Free University of Amsterdam (2003-2006), under the leadership of Oscar Salemink; and, finally, my participation in various intellectual configurations over the years with Oscar Hemer and Malmö University College. Many others could have been mentioned, but one will have to do: It was Eduardo Archetti who put me on the track many years ago, and until his premature death in June 2005, we discussed the topics featured in this book (and many other things) so incessantly that I still feel him peering over my shoulder, eager to offer his views, as I try to write about globalization.

Introduction

The very popularity of the word globalization signals a need for caution. The word was scarcely used before the late 1980s, even in academic circles, but 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 but the vaguest ideas about. Yet to discard the concept of globalization, and the huge attention accorded the phenomena it encompasses, on such grounds, would be foolish. There is a real need for a common, generic term to describe the manifold, multisided 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.

The fact that the term globalization is new does not mean that people have not been thinking and theorising about global interconnectedness before. Perhaps the philosopher Hegel (1770-1831) was the first theorist of globalization, 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 Kant (1724-1804) had already developed, chiefly in his important essay on eternal peace (Kant 2001 [1795]), an idea of cosmopolitanism that entailed equitable and respectful dialogue between the peoples of the world, regardless of their differences. Now, 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 ambitions, and nineteenth-century cultural historians tended to include all of humanity in their often 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 steamship first appeared in the 1830s), the growth in international trade was formidable in this century. Another important 19th-century invention, the telegraph, 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.

Technological development in both main forms of communication technology – that transmitting messages and that transporting physical objects – continued in the 20th century with the invention of the aeroplane, the radio and so on. In the 1920s, the Marxist theorist Leo 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 agitated in favour of a world revolution. The Second World War was, despite its name, the first truly global war which involved fighting in, and troops from, all continents (the First World War was chiefly a European war).

In the first postwar decades, global interconnectedness continued to intensify. The number of transnational companies grew, as did the number of transnational NGOs (non-governmental organizations). The United Nations grew into an immense conglomerate of sub-organizations with offices in nearly all countries. International travel became easier and more common. In the 1960s, the Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan coined the term 'the global village' to designate the new mass media situation, where especially television, in his view, would create shared frames of reference and mutual knowledge between people across the globe (McLuhan 1964). In this period, global change – economic, environmental, political – became the subject of many new scholarly

books. Some used the term development, intimating that the poor countries would eventually 'catch up with' the rich ones (e.g. Rostow 1960). Others 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, Immanuel Wallerstein developed his influential world-system theory (Wallerstein 1974–79), which traced the development of the contemporary world system to the intercontinental trade beginning in the 15th century. In Wallerstein's view, a permanent international division of labour 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, Chase-Dunn and 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 multicentred world was finally becoming integrated at the outset of the 19th century, in the sense that all major centres 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* (Wolf 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).

Globalization today
Various parts of the world were interconnected, and there was considerable awareness of this, long before the recent coinage of the term globalization. Yet, it can be argued that there is something new to the present world, that is to say the world which 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 tighter 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 USA 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. Cellphones became ubiquituous in the rich countries and the middle classes of the poorer ones. The impact of this double de-localization – the physical letter replaced by email, the fixed phone line 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 – was at the forefront of the international agenda, both from above (states demanding homogeneity or engaging in ethnic cleansing) and from below (minorities demanding 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 came to power in India.

These three dimensions of globalization – increased trade and transnational economic activity; faster and denser communication networks; 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' (Robertson 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 interconnections gives a sense of both opportunities and of vulnerability. This dual character of globalization – increased interconnectedness and increased awareness of it – can be studied from a myriad of empirical vantage-points. It would be perfectly feasible (and it is probably already being done somewhere) to write a dissertation on European reactions to the Asian bird flu in 2006. The impact of globalization on tribal peoples in Melanesia has, moreover, long been a subject in anthropology. Human geographers write about the displacement of people in India as a result of globally driven economic deregulation. Many 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 about the spread of certain consumer preferences, yet others about the global tourist industry; while others again study international law, human rights as a consequence of globalization or the 'anti-globalization movement'. Just to mention a few subject areas. As far as academic disciplines are concerned, globalization is a central topic in sociology, political science, 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 any form of representativity.

What globalization is not

Before outlining some central analytical dimensions of globalization, it may be a good idea to mention a few things often associated with globalization, either simplistically or wrongly.

• *Globalization is really recent, and began only in the 1980s.* As shown briefly already, 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 (J. Friedman 1992). However, the inhabitants of such 'world-systems' were rarely aware of each other beyond their own experience, and as a form of consciousness, globalization is new as a mass phenomenon. The labour market situation in Oslo has been *known* to thousands of Pakistani villagers for decades, and the reggae fashion in Melanesia, advertising in Central Africa and the rhetoric of the political opposition in Taiwan all indicate the existence of a global *discourse*, a shared (but not uniform) communicational system. In this cultural sense, globalization is recent, 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. China, 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 non-economic 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. Westernization is not a good synonym for globalization.

• *Globalization means homogenization.* This view is 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 use iPods while eating burgers and drinking cokes, they do not thereby become Europeans or Americans. However, as will be argued later, 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 experienced in the world. It is true, of course, that transnational companies operating in poor countries do not necessarily respect 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, localising counterreactions favouring 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. 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'.

Globalizers and sceptics

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 – he has revised his position since then). 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 Held and McGrew (2000: 38) to distinguish between *globalizers* and *sceptics*, to highlight some of the debates and the positions taken by different scholars.

According to the sceptics (see e.g. Gray 2006, 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. Sceptics 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 sceptics have identified the development of regional economic blocs like NAFTA and the EU, globalizers see the world economy as 'a single playing-field' (T. Friedman 2005) with diminishing obstacles to truly global competition. Sceptics 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 sceptics 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 sceptics do not deny that changes are taking place, but they emphasize continuities with the modern world of the nation-state 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 of us are simply globalizers or sceptics; 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 is also on the rise. Both phenomena co-exist 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, which 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.

Dimensions of globalization

Whether we look at global capitalism, trends in consumer tastes, transnational migration and identity politics or online communication, the globalising processes of the late 20th and early 21stcentury 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 de-localization. Globalization means that distance is becoming irrelevant, relative or at the very least less important. Ideas, songs, books, investment capital, labour 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.

• *Acceleration.* The speed of transport and communication has increased throughout the 20thcentury, and this acceleration continues. It has been said that there are 'no delays any more' in an era of instantaneous communication over cellphones, 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 1990, indicates that distance no longer means separation.

• *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 e.g. similar hotels and shopping centres, as well as the growing web of international agreements.

• *Interconnectedness.* 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 forms of oppression.

• *Movement.* 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 various 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.

• *Vulnerability*. 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 now avian flu, transnational terrorism and climate change. None can effectively be combated by single nation-states, and 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.

• *Reembedding*. A very widespread family of responses to the disembedding tendencies of globalization can be described as reembedding. In fact, all of the seven 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, national and sub-national identity politics.

Moreover, acceleration is counteracted through social movements promoting slowness in many guises, standardization is counteracted by '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, 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 ubiquituous. If we want to get the whole picture, it must include both benefactors and victims, both the 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, but they are generally seen as the debris of

the global economy, the people living there cursorily defined as problems not resources.

A few further distinctions should also be made initially. The examples in this book deal with economic, political, cultural 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, major international organizations and wealthy enterprises on the one hand, and interpersonal relationships on the other hand. I shall argue, and hope to show, that the interpersonal 'globalization from below' is much 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 being incorporated into a global, or wide-ranging transnational, system without necessarily being aware of it; while 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 *globaluniformity* or homogeneity. Rather, it can be seen as a way of organising *heterogeneity*. The similarities dealt with, for example, in the chapter on standardization, are formal and do not necessarily lead to homogeneity at the level of *content*. The local continues to thrive, although it must increasingly be seen as *glocal*, that is enmeshed in transnational processes.

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 sphinxlike: 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, confesses, in a lentghty 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 patriarchalism 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 non-academic, 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. Klein 1998, Gray 1998, Stiglitz 2002, Soros 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 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 (Martin and Schumann 1996). 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 programmes of the WHO (World Health Organization) are no less global than the moneylending of the World Bank; and the small-scale lending programmes initiated by 2006 Nobel Peace Laureate Mohammad Yunus and his Bangladeshi Grameen Bank have spread to other countries; and one could go on. Global governance (see the debate in Held et al. 2005) is sometimes posited as an alternative to an anarchic market economy which is in any case imperfect in so far 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 necessarily happening.

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). 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 favourable 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 neo-colonial 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.

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 does it rather 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 makes 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 do 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 lots of places.

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, centred on China and parts of India, and leading to both migration waves and cultural exchange. Only with the last period of European colonialisation in the 19th century did that continent become truly dominant in the world economy, according to Frank. Non-Eurocentric histories of the world, such as Fernandez-Armesto's *Millennium* (1995, cf. also Fernandez-Armesto 2000), 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) points out, he would not be able to predict the rise of Europe as the centre 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.

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 per cent of the world's population, have economic growth rates far surpassing those of Western countries. The division of the world into core, periphery and semi-periphery, thus, is a model which needs to be tested, and which does not always yield the expected results.

To these and other debates we shall return 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*, *deterritorializes* 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 globalising 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 globalising processes. This, too, will be evident in the account that follows.

• 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 neo-imperialism, 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.