

Globalization

Conceptualization, Origins, and History

Conceptualizing Globalization

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Chapter Summary

Globalization is increasingly omnipresent. We are living in a – or even *the* – “global age” (Albrow 1996). Globalization is clearly a very important change; it can even be argued (Bauman 2003) that it is *the most important change in human history*. This is reflected in many domains, but particularly in social relationships and social structures, especially those that are widely dispersed geographically. “In the era of globalization ... shared humanity face[s] *the most fateful* of the many fateful steps” it has made in its long history (Bauman 2003: 156, italics added).

The following is the definition of globalization to be used in this book (note that all of the italicized terms will be discussed in this chapter and will inform the remainder of this book):

Globalization: Transplanetary process(es) involving increasing liquidity and growing multi-directional flows as well as the structures they encounter and create.

globalization is a transplanetary process or set of processes involving increasing *liquidity* and the growing multi-directional *flows* of people, objects, places and information as well as the *structures* they encounter and create that are *barriers* to, or *expedite*, those flows ...

In contrast to many other definitions of globalization, this one does *not* assume that greater integration is an inevitable component of globalization. That is, globalization can bring with it greater integration (especially when things flow easily), but it can also serve to reduce the level of integration (when structures are erected that successfully block flows).

Transnationalism: Processes that interconnect individuals and social groups across specific geo-political borders.

A term that is closely related to globalization is **transnationalism** (Morawska 2007), or “processes that interconnect individuals and social groups across specific geo-political borders” (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007: 62). A related concept is **transnationality**, or “the rise of new communities and formation of new social identities and relations that cannot be defined through the traditional reference point of nation-states” (Robinson 2007: 1199–201).

Transnationality: Rise of new communities and formation of new social identities and relations that cannot be defined as nation-states.

Globalization and transnationalism are often used interchangeably, but transnationalism is clearly a more delimited process than globalization. Transnationalism is limited to interconnections that cross geo-political borders, especially those associated with two, or more, nation-states. An example is Mexican immigrants in the US sending remittances home to family members in Mexico. Globalization includes such connections, but is not restricted to them and encompasses a far wider range of transplanetary processes (e.g. direct relationships between people in many places in the world networking via the Internet). Further, geo-political borders are only one of the barriers encountered, and often overcome, by globalization. Some phenomena, labor unions for example, are better thought of as transnational than as global. That is, the relationship between labor unions in, for example, the US and Sweden is more important than are moves toward a global labor movement.

Transnationalism is most often used in thinking about, and research on, immigrants who move from one country to another, but who continue to be involved in various ways with the country from which they came (Portes 2001).

The case of baseball is useful in clarifying the distinction between globalization and transnationalism (Kelly 2007: 79–93). Baseball is a transnational sport because many of its fundamentals – techniques, strategies, etc. – and players have circulated across the borders of a small number of nations, especially Japan, Taiwan, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and, of course, the US. However, it is *not* global because it has not flowed on a transplanetary basis to a large portion of the world.

In contrast, soccer would be much more clearly a global sport because it exists in virtually every area of the world. For example, over 200 of the world's nations are members of a global organization, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). Another example of globalization in the realm of sports is the summer (and winter) Olympics, sponsored by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), in which about the same number of nations participate.

CONCEPTUALIZING GLOBALIZATION

In spite of the focus in this book on globalization, there are many scholars who do not accept the idea. Nevertheless, this book embraces, and operates from, a “globalist” perspective (Hirst and Thompson 1999) – globalization *is* a reality. Debates about globalization are one of the reasons that there is undoubtedly no topic today more difficult to get one's head around, let alone to master, than globalization. However, of far greater importance is the sheer magnitude, diversity, and complexity of the process of globalization which involves almost everyone, everything, and every place, in innumerable ways. (The concept of **globality** refers to the condition [in this case omnipresence] resulting from the process of globalization [Scholte 2004: 102–10].)

Before proceeding to the next section, a note is needed on the use of **metaphors** (Brown 1989), which will occupy a prominent place in the ensuing discussion. A metaphor involves the use of one term to help us better understand another term. Thus, in the next section, we will use the metaphor of a “solid” to describe epochs before the era of globalization. Similarly, the global world will be described as being “liquid.” The use of such metaphors is designed to give the reader a better and a more vivid sense of the global age and how it differs from prior epochs.

Globality: Omnipresence of the process of globalization.

Metaphors: Use of one term to help us better understand another.

From “Solids” to “Liquids”

Prior to the current epoch of globalization (as we will see in the second part of this chapter, most observers believe that there *was* a previous epoch, if not many

previous epochs, of globalization), it could be argued that one of the things that characterized people, things, information, places, and much else was their greater **solidity**. That is, all of them tended to be hard or to harden (metaphorically, figuratively, not literally, of course) over time and therefore, among other things, to remain largely in place. As a result, people either did not go anywhere or they did not venture very far from where they were born and raised; their social relationships

Solidity: People, things, information, and places “harden” over time and therefore have limited mobility.

were restricted to those who were nearby. Much the same could be said of most objects (tools, food, and so on), which tended to be used where they were produced. The solidity of most material manifestations of information – stone tablets, newspapers, magazines, books, and so on – also made them at least somewhat difficult to move very far. Furthermore, since people didn’t move very far, neither did information. Places were not only quite solid and immovable, but they tended to confront solid natural (mountains, rivers, oceans) and humanly constructed (walls, gates) barriers that made it difficult for people and things to exit or to enter.

Above all, solidity describes a world in which barriers exist and are erected to prevent the free movement of all sorts of things. It was the nation-state that was most likely to create these “solid” barriers (for example, walls [e.g. the Great Wall of China; the wall between Israel and the West Bank], border gates and guards), and the state itself grew increasingly solid as it resisted change. For much of the twentieth century this was epitomized by the Soviet Union and its satellite states which sought to erect any number of barriers in order to keep all sorts of things out *and* in (especially a disaffected population). With the passage of time, the Soviet Union grew increasingly sclerotic. The best example of this solidity was the erection (beginning in 1961), and maintenance, of the Berlin Wall in order to keep East Berliners in and Western influences out. There was a more fluid relationship between East and West Berlin prior to the erection of the Wall, but that fluidity was seen in the East as being disadvantageous, even dangerous. Once the Wall was erected, relations between West and East Berlin were virtually frozen in place – they solidified – and there was comparatively little movement of anything between them.

The Wall, together with East Germany and the Soviet Union, is long gone and with it many of the most extreme forms of solidity brought into existence by the Cold War. Nonetheless, solid structures remain – e.g. the nation-state and its border and customs controls – and there are ever-present calls for the creation of new, and new types of, solid structures. Thus, in many parts of Europe there are demands for more barriers to legal and illegal immigration. This has reached an extreme in the US with concern over illegal Mexican (and other Latin American) immigration leading to the erection of an enormous fence between the two countries. Thus, solidity is far from dead in the contemporary world. It is very often the case that demands for new forms of solidity are the result of increased fluidity. However, a strong case can, and will, be made that it is fluidity that is more characteristic of today’s world, especially in terms of globalization.

Of course, people were *never* so solid that they were totally immobile or stuck completely in a given place (a few people were able to escape East Berlin in spite of the Wall and many will be able to enter the US illegally even when the fence on the Mexican border is completed), and this was especially true of the elite members of any society. Elites were (and are) better able to move about and that ability increased with advances in transportation technology. Commodities, especially those created for elites, also could almost always be moved and they, too, grew more moveable as technologies advanced. Information (because it was not solid, although it could be solidified in the form of, for example, a book) could always travel more easily than goods or people (it could be spread by word of mouth over great distances even if the originator of the information could not move very far; it moved even faster as more advanced communication technologies emerged [telegraph, telephone, the Internet]). And as other technologies developed (ships, automobiles, airplanes), people, especially those with the resources, were better able to leave places and get to others. They could even literally move places (or at least parts of them), as, for example, when in the early 1800s Lord Elgin dismantled parts of the Parthenon in Greece and transported them to London, where to this day they can be found in the British Museum.

However, at an increasing rate over the last few centuries, and especially in the last several decades, that which once seemed so solid has tended to “melt” and become increasingly *liquid*. Instead of thinking of people, objects, information, and places as being like solid blocks of ice, they need to be seen as tending, in recent years, to melt and as becoming increasingly liquid. It is, needless to say, far more difficult to move blocks of ice than the water that is produced when those blocks melt. Of course, to extend the metaphor, there continue to exist blocks of ice, even glaciers (although even these are now literally melting), in the contemporary world that have not melted, at least not completely. Solid material realities (people, cargo, newspapers) continue to exist, but because of a wide range of technological developments (in transportation, communication, the Internet, and so on) they can move across the globe far more readily. Everywhere we turn, more things, including ourselves, are becoming increasingly liquefied.

Karl Marx opened the door to this kind of analysis (and to the use of such metaphors) when he famously argued that because of the nature of capitalism as an economic system “everything solid melts into air.” That is, many of the solid, material realities that preceded capitalism (e.g. the structures of feudalism) were “melted” by it and were transformed into liquids. However, while Marx was describing a largely destructive process, the point here is that the new liquids that are being created are inherent parts of the new world and are radically transforming it. In the process, they are having *both* constructive and destructive effects (Schumpeter 1976).

Marx’s insight of over a century-and-a-half ago was not only highly prescient, but is far truer today than in Marx’s day. In fact, it is far truer than he could ever have imagined. Furthermore, that melting, much like one of the great problems in the global world today – the melting of the ice on and near the North and South

poles as a result of global warming (see Chapter 9) – is not only likely to continue in the coming years, but to increase at an exponential rate. Indeed, the melting of the polar icecaps can be seen as another metaphor for the increasing fluidity associated with globalization, especially its problematic aspects. And, make no mistake, the increasing fluidity associated with globalization presents *both* great opportunities *and* great dangers.

Thus, the perspective on globalization presented here, following the work of Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 2003, 2005, 2006), is that it involves, above all else, increasing **liquidity** (Lakoff 2008: 277–300). Several of Bauman’s ideas on liquidity are highly relevant to the perspective on globalization employed here.

Liquidity: Increasing ease of movement of people, things, information, and places in the global age.

For example, liquid phenomena do not easily, or for long, hold their shape. Thus, the myriad liquid phenomena associated with globalization are hard-pressed to maintain any particular form and, even if they acquire a form, it is likely to change quite quickly.

Liquid phenomena fix neither space nor time. That which is liquid is, by definition, opposed to any kind of fixity, be it spatial or temporal. This means that the spatial and temporal aspects of globalization are in continuous flux. That which is liquid is forever ready to change whatever shape (space) it might take on momentarily. Time (however short) in a liquid world is more important than space. Perhaps the best example of this is global finance, where little or nothing (dollars, gold) actually changes its place (at least immediately), but time is of the essence in that the symbolic representations of money move instantaneously and great profits can be made or lost in split-second decisions on financial transactions.

Liquid phenomena not only move easily, but once they are on the move they are difficult to stop. This is exemplified in many areas, such as foreign trade, investment, and global financial transactions (Polillo and Guillen 2005: 1764–802), the globality of transactions and interactions (e.g. on Facebook, Twitter [Clive Thompson 2008: 42ff.]) on the Internet, and the difficulty in halting the global flow of drugs, pornography, the activities of organized crime, and illegal immigrants.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, that which is liquid tends to melt whatever stands in its path (especially solids). This is clearest in the case of the much discussed death, or at least decline, of the nation-state and its borders in the era of increasing global flows (see Chapter 5). According to Cartier (2001: 269), the “forces of globalization have rendered many political boundaries more porous to flows of people, money, and things.”

It is clear that if one wanted to use a single term to think about globalization today, liquidity (as well as the closely related idea of flows) would be at or near the top of the list. That is not to say that there are no solid structures in the world – after all, we still live in a modern world, even if it is late modernity, and modernity has long been associated with solidity. And it does not mean that there is not a constant interplay between liquidity and solidity, with increases in that which is liquid (e.g. terrorist attacks launched against Israel from the West Bank during the

Intifada) leading to counter-reactions involving the erection of new solid forms (e.g. that fence between Israel and the West Bank), but at the moment and for the foreseeable future, the momentum lies with increasing and proliferating global liquidity.

“Flows”

Closely related to the idea of liquidity, and integral to it, is another key concept in thinking about globalization, the idea of **flows** (Appadurai 1996; Rey and Ritzer 2010); after all liquids flow easily, far more easily than solids. In fact, it is the concept of flows that is widely used in the literature on globalization and it is the concept that will inform a good deal of the body of this book.

Flows: Movement of people, things, information, and places due, in part, to the increasing porosity of global barriers.

Because so much of the world has “melted,” or is in the process of “melting,” and has become liquefied, globalization is increasingly characterized by great *flows* of increasingly liquid phenomena of all types, including people, objects, information, decisions, places, and so on. For example, foods of all sorts increasingly flow around the world, including sushi globalized from its roots in Japan (Bestor 2005: 13–20), Chilean produce now ubiquitous in the US market (and elsewhere) (Goldfrank 2005: 42–53), Indian food in San Francisco (and throughout much of the world) (Mankekar 2005: 197–214), and so on. In many cases, the flows have become raging floods that are increasingly less likely to be impeded by, among others, place-based barriers of any kind, including the oceans, mountains, and especially the borders of nation-states. This was demonstrated once again in late 2008 in the spread of the American credit and financial crisis to Europe (and elsewhere): “In a global financial system, national borders are porous” (Landler 2008: C1).

Looking at a very different kind of flow, many people in many parts of the world believe that they are being swamped by migrants, especially poor illegal migrants (Moses 2006). Whether or not these are actually floods, they have come to be seen in that way by many people, often aided by politicians and media personalities in many countries who have established their reputations by portraying them in that way.

Undoubtedly because of their immateriality, ideas, images, and information, both legal (blogs) and illegal (e.g. child pornography), flow (virtually) everywhere through interpersonal contact and the media, especially now via the Internet.

Decisions of all sorts flow around the world, as well as over time: “The effect of the [economic] decisions flowed, and would continue to flow, through every possible conduit. Some decisions would be reflected in products rolling off assembly lines, others in prices of securities, and still others in personal interactions. Each decision would cascade around the world and then forward through time” (Altman 2007: 255).

Even places can be said to be flowing around the world as, for example, immigrants re-create the places from which they came in new locales (e.g. Indian and

Pakistani enclaves in London). Furthermore, places (e.g. airports, shopping malls) themselves have become increasingly like flows (for more on this and the transition from “spaces of places” to “spaces of flows” see Castells 1996).

Even with all of this increasing fluidity, much of what would have been considered the height of global liquidity only a few decades, or even years, ago now seems increasingly sludge-like. This is especially the case when we focus on the impact of the computer and the Internet on the global flow of all sorts of things. Thus, not long ago we might have been amazed by our ability to order a book from Amazon.com and receive it via an express package delivery system in as little as a day. That method, however, now seems to operate at a snail’s pace compared to the ability to download that book in minutes on Amazon’s Kindle system (a wireless reading device to which books and other reading matter can be downloaded).

“Heavy” and “Light”

There is another set of conceptual distinctions, or metaphors, that are useful in thinking about globalization. In addition to the change from solids to liquids, we can also think in terms of change that involves movement from that which is *heavy* to that which is *light* (this is another distinction traceable to the work of Zygmunt Bauman).

The original Gutenberg bible (in mid-fifteenth-century Germany) was usually published in two volumes, ran to close to 1,400 pages, and was printed on very heavy paper or vellum. It was in every sense of the term a heavy tome (almost like the one you are now reading), difficult, because of its sheer weight and bulk, to transport. Fast forward to 2006 and a much lighter bound copy of the bible could easily be purchased from Amazon.com and transported in days via express mail virtually anywhere in the world. By 2007 that bible had become weightless since it could be downloaded using the Kindle system.

More generally, it could be argued that both pre-industrial and industrial societies were quite “heavy,” that is, characterized by that which is difficult to move. This applies to those who labored in them (e.g. peasants, farmers, factory workers), where they labored (plots of land, farms, factories), and what they produced (crops, machines, books, automobiles). Because of their heaviness, workers tended to stay put, and what they produced (and what was not consumed locally) could be moved, especially great distances, only with great effort and at great expense. Later advances, especially in technology, made goods, people, and places “lighter,” easier to move. These included advances in both transportation and technology that made all sorts of industrial products smaller, lighter, and easier to transport (compare the netbook computer of today to the room-size computer of the mid-twentieth century).

Karin Knorr Cetina (2005: 215) has written about what she calls “complex global microstructures,” or “structures of connectivity and integration that are global in scope but microsociological in character.” She has described financial markets (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2002: 905–50) in these terms and, more recently, global

terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda. We will have more to say about these global microstructures (see Chapter 10), but the key point here is that while Knorr Cetina sees these global microstructures as having several characteristics, of primary importance is their “lightness” in comparison to “heavy” bureaucratic systems. Thus, unlike the armed forces of the United States, al-Qaeda is not a heavy bureaucratic structure, but rather a light “global microstructure.” It is al-Qaeda’s (as well as the Taliban’s in Afghanistan) lightness that gives it many advantages over the extremely cumbersome US military, and the huge bureaucracy of which it is part, and this helps account, at least so far, for the latter’s inability to suppress al-Qaeda or to catch Osama bin Laden.

It could be argued that we moved from the heavy to the light era in the past century or two. However, by about 1980, we can be said to have moved beyond both of those epochs. We are now in an era that is increasingly defined not just by lightness, but by something approaching weightlessness. That which is weightless, or nearly so, clearly moves far more easily (even globally) than that which is either heavy or light. The big changes here involved the arrival and expansion of cable and satellite television, satellite radio, cell phones, PDAs, and, most importantly, the personal computer and the advent of the Internet (and networking sites such as Twitter). It is with the personal computer and the Internet that globalization reaches new heights in terms of the flow of things and of social relationships, in large part because they, and everything else, have approached weightlessness.

An excellent example of this can be found in the world of music. Vinyl records were quite heavy and the shift to cassettes and later CDs did not make music much lighter. However, the creation of advanced technologies such as iPods and cell phones allows us to carry around thousands of once very heavy albums in our pockets. We can carry that music with us anywhere in the world and we can exchange music over the Internet with people around the globe.

Of course, there are still many heavy things in our increasingly weightless world. Factories, offices, buildings, large and cumbersome machines (including MRI machines), newspapers, hardback books, and even some people (made “heavy” by, for example, minority status, poverty, a lack of education) continue to exist. All, of course, are nevertheless being globalized to some degree in one way or another, but their weightiness makes that process more cumbersome and difficult for them. For example, the global parcel delivery systems (e.g. FedEx) have become very efficient, but they still need to transport a physical product over great distances. Clearly, that process is still quite weighty, in comparison to, say, the downloading of weightless movies from Netflix (a website that began by allowing members to receive heavier DVDs via snail-mail). In fact, of course, it is increasingly the case that that which is weightless (e.g. iTunes and downloadable music in general, downloadable movies, blogs) is destroying that which is comparatively heavy (e.g. the CD, the DVD, newspapers).

The ideas of increasing liquidity and weightlessness being employed here do not require that the world be “flat” or be considered as such (Friedman 2005). Fluids

can seep through all sorts of tall and wide structures and, in the case of a flood, those structures can even be washed away (as was the Berlin Wall, for example, and more metaphorically, the Iron Curtain), at least temporarily. Further, that which is weightless can waft over and between the tallest and widest structures. Thus, the world today is increasingly characterized by liquidity and weightlessness, but it is *not* necessarily any flatter than it ever was. Those tall, wide structures continue to be important, especially in impeding (or attempting to impede) the movement of that which is solid and heavy. It is less clear how successful these structures will be in impeding that which is liquid, light, or weightless.

The most obvious of such structures are the borders (Crack 2007: 341–54; Rumford 2007: 327–39) between nation-states and the fact that in recent years we have witnessed the strengthening (heightening, lengthening, etc.) of many of those borders. Similarly, the Chinese government has sought to restrict the access of its citizens to at least some aspects of the Internet that the government feels are dangerous to its continued rule. The electronic barrier that the government has constructed is known as the “Great Firewall” (French 2008: A1, A6). (A firewall is a barrier on the Internet; the idea of the “Great Firewall” plays off China’s Great Wall.)

The huge “digital divide” in the world today (Drori and Jang 2003: 144–61), especially between North and South, is another example of a barrier. The relative absence in the South of computers and the supporting infrastructure (telephone and broadband connections) needed for a computerized world creates an enormous barrier between the North and the South. In terms of computerization, the world may be increasingly flat (although certainly not totally flat) among and between the countries in the North, but it has many hills in the South and huge and seemingly insurmountable mountain ranges continue to separate the North from the South.

The history of the social world and social thought and research leads us to the conclusion that people, as well as their representatives in the areas in which they live, have always sought to erect structural barriers to protect and advance themselves, and to adversely affect others, and it seems highly likely that they will continue to do so. Thus, we may live in a more liquefied, more weightless, world, but we do *not* live in a flat world and are not likely to live in one any time soon, if ever. Even a successful capitalist, George Soros, acknowledges this, using yet another metaphor,

Economic globalization: Growing economic linkages at the global level.

in his analysis of **economic globalization** when he argues: “The global capitalist system has produced a very *uneven* playing field” (Soros 2000: xix, italics added).

“Heavy” Structures that Expedite “Flows”

The liquefaction of the social world, as well as its increasing weightlessness, is only part of the story of globalization. As pointed out already, another major part is the fact that many heavy, material, objective structures continue to exist and to be created in the globalized world. Some are holdovers from the pre-global world, but

others are actually produced, intentionally or unintentionally, by global forces. In studying globalization we must look at *both* all of that which flows (or “wafts”) with increasing ease, as well as all of the structures that impede or block those flows (see below for more on these) as well as serve to expedite and channel those flows. To put it another way, we must look at *both* that which is light and weightless *and* that which is solid and heavy and that greatly affects their flow in both a positive and a negative sense (Inda and Rosaldo 2008: 29).

For example, there are various “routes” or “paths” that can be seen as structures that serve both to expedite flows along their length, as well as to limit flows that occur outside their confines.

- Intercontinental airlines generally fly a limited number of well-defined routes (say between New Delhi and London) rather than flying whatever route the pilots wish and thereby greatly increasing the possibility of mid-air collisions.
- Illegal immigrants from Mexico have, at least until recently, generally followed a relatively small number of well-worn paths into the US. Indeed, they often need to pay smugglers large sums of money and the smugglers generally follow the routes that have worked for them (and others) in the past.
- Goods of all sorts are generally involved in rather well-defined “supply chains” (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of this concept) as they are exported from some countries and imported into others.
- Illegal products – e.g. counterfeit drugs – follow oft-trod paths en route from their point of manufacture (often China), through loosely controlled free-trade zones (e.g. in Dubai), through several intermediate countries, to their ultimate destination, often the US, where they are frequently obtained over the Internet (Bogdanich 2007: A1, A6).

Then there are an increasing number of formal and informal “bridges” (Anner and Evans 2004: 34–47) created throughout the globe that expedite the flow of all sorts of things. This idea applies perhaps best to the passage of people across borders legally through the process of migration (Sassen 2007: 788–95). It is clear that in the not-too-distant past there were many structural barriers to the flow of people. There are even a few places in the world today where this remains true – e.g. between the US and Cuba. However, with the end of the Cold War, there are now many bridges for people (and products) to cross openly not only between the countries of the old East and West, but also among and between virtually every country and region of the world. However, illegal migrants are likely to need to be more covert in their movements. All sorts of illegal products are also less likely to move openly across such “bridges” where they would be highly visible to the authorities. Thus, there are also more hidden structures that permit movement of illegal people and products.

It is also the case that an increasing number of people, perhaps nearly everyone, are involved in, and affected by, global relations and flows and personally participate in global networks (Singh Grewal 2008) of one kind or another (networks of communication and information technology, interpersonal networks involving

individuals and groups). While global networks span the globe (e.g. cables under the oceans that permit transoceanic communication [Yuan 2006: A1]), or at least much of it, there are other types of networks including transnational (those that pass through the boundaries of nation-states [Portes 2001: 181–93]), international (those that involve two or more nation-states), national (those that are bounded by the nation-state), and local (those that exist at the sub-national level) (Mann 2007: 472–96). Networks can expedite the flow of innumerable things, but they are perhaps best-suited to the flow of information (Connell and Crawford 2005: 5–26). People involved in networks can communicate all sorts of information to one another in various ways – telephone calls, snail-mail, e-mail, blogs, social networking websites, and so on. These networks have revolutionized and greatly expanded the global flow of information. As with all other structures, such networks can be blocked in various ways (e.g. the “Great Firewall”).

All sorts of networks have been made possible by the Internet. The Internet can be seen as being of enormous importance in allowing information of various sorts to flow in innumerable directions. One important example involves the formation of the networks that became and constitute the alter-globalization movement (see Chapter 12). This movement (as well as its various political actions, most notably the anti-WTO [World Trade Organization] protests in Seattle in 1999 [Smith 2001: 1–20]), like much else in the world today (e.g. Barack Obama’s successful 2008 presidential campaign), was made possible by the Internet (Juris 2008: 353–4).

Finally, it is not only individuals who are increasingly involved in networks. An increasing number of social structures (e.g. states, cities, law) and social institutions (the family, religion, sport) are interconnected on a global basis and these, too, enable and enhance global flows. For example, the international banking system has an infrastructure that facilitates the global movement of funds among a network of banks. Included in that infrastructure are IBANs (International Bank Account Numbers), rules, norms, and procedures on how such money transfers are to occur, and a highly sophisticated technical language that allows those in the business to communicate with one another wherever they are in the world. Another example involves global (Sassen 1991) and world cities (Marcuse and van Kempen 2000) that are increasingly interconnected with one another directly rather than through the nation-states in which they happen to exist (see Chapter 11). The financial markets of the global cities of New York, London, and Tokyo are tightly linked, with the result that all sorts of financial products flow among them and at lightning speed. More generally, in this context, we can talk in terms of the “global economy’s connectedness” (Altman 2007: 255).

“Heavy” Structures as Barriers to “Flows”

While there is no question that the world is increasingly characterized by greater liquidity and increased flows, as well as various structures that expedite those flows, we also need to recognize that there are limits and barriers to those flows. The world

is not just in process, there are also many material structures (trade agreements, regulatory agencies, borders, customs barriers, standards, and so on) in existence. As Inda and Rosaldo (2008: 31) argue: “Material infrastructures do not only promote mobility. ... They also hinder and block it.” Any thoroughgoing account of globalization needs to look at *both* flows and structures and, in terms of the latter, the ways in which they *both* produce and enhance flows as well as alter and even block them. In other words, there is interplay between flows and structures, especially between flows and the structures that are created in an attempt to inhibit or stop them. As Shamir (2005: 197–217) puts it, globalization is an epoch of increased openness *and* “simultaneously an era of growing restrictions on movement.” Borders, of course, are major points at which movement is blocked. There are many examples of this including the toughening of border controls in France (and elsewhere in Europe) because of growing hostility to refugees (Fassin 2008: 212–34).

There are challenges to the idea that all there is to globalization is flows and fluidity (Tsing 2000: 327–60). In examining global flows (some of which have been anticipated above), we also need to consider those agents who “carve” the channels through which things flow, those who alter those channels over time, national and regional units that create and battle over flows, and coalitions of claimants for control over channels.

A focus on the above kinds of agents and structures, rather than flows, promises a more critical orientation to globalization in terms of the structures themselves, as well as in terms of who creates the structures through which things flow and who does and does not control and profit from them.

The idea of flows is criticized for other reasons, as well. For example, there is a kind of timelessness to the idea of flows and, as a result, it implies that they are likely to continue well into the future and there is little or nothing that can be done to stop them. This implies that everyone – scientists and businesspeople who profit from flows, as well as those at the margins of those flows and perhaps even those hurt by them – is swept up in the same processes. The focus on flows tends to communicate a kind of enthusiasm for them and the erroneous idea that virtually everyone benefits from flows of all types.

Also important in this context is what has been called “awkward connections” (Inda and Rosaldo 2008: 31). While the idea of global flows and fluids communicates a sense of total and uniform connectedness, we know that this is simply not the case and that in many places in the world, especially those that are less developed, there are awkward connections (e.g. being restricted to slow and unreliable dial-up connections to the Internet), as well as no connections at all (no Internet service of any kind).

A similar idea is “frictions,” or the “awkward, unequal, unstable ... interconnection across difference” (Lowenhaupt Tsing 2005: 4). The key point is that the global flows that create interconnections do *not* move about smoothly; they do not move about without creating friction. Friction gets in the way of the smooth operation of global flows. However, friction not only slows flows down, it can also serve to

keep them moving and even speed them up. Highways can have this double-edged quality by both limiting where people and vehicles can go while at the same time making movement “easier and more efficient” (Lowenhaupt Tsing 2005: 6). More generally, “global connections [are] made, and muddied, in friction” (Lowenhaupt Tsing 2005: 272). The key point in this context is that flows themselves produce friction that can slow or even stop global flows: “without even trying friction gets in the way of the smooth operation of global power. Difference can disrupt, causing everyday malfunctions as well as unexpected cataclysms. Friction refuses the lie that global power operates as a well-oiled machine. Furthermore, difference sometimes inspires insurrection. Friction can be the fly in the elephant’s nose” (Lowenhaupt Tsing 2005: 6). A prime example of this today is the many frictions being produced in many parts of the world by large numbers of legal and illegal immigrants (e.g. the millions of migrants from Zimbabwe who have fled to South Africa eliciting violent reactions from South Africans who feel threatened by, and resent, them) (*Economist* 2008: May 22).

As has already been mentioned, the most important and most obvious barriers to global flows are those constructed by nation-states. There are borders, gates, guards, passport controls, customs agents, health inspectors, and so on, in most countries in the world. (The great exception is the countries that are part of the European Union [EU] where barriers to movement among and between member countries have been greatly reduced, if not eliminated. The EU is a kind of structure that allows people and products to move much more freely and much more quickly. At the same time, it serves to reduce the need to use hidden channels since there is far less need to conceal what is moving among and between EU countries.) Although many people (illegal immigrants) and things (contraband goods) do get through those barriers, some of them are successfully blocked or impeded by them. However, it is far more difficult to erect barriers against many newer phenomena, especially the non-material phenomena associated with cell phones and the Internet.

Specific examples of barriers created by the nation-state involve blocking economic transactions that it regards as not in the national interest. For example, in 2006 the US government blocked a deal in which a Dubai company was to purchase an American company involved in the business of running America’s ports (*Economist* 2006: March 10). The government felt that such ownership would be a threat to national security since foreign nationals, perhaps enemies, could acquire information that would allow terrorists easy entrée to the ports. In another example, in early 2008 the US government blocked an effort by a Chinese company to purchase (in conjunction with an American private equity firm) an American company (3Com) that, among other things, manufactured software that prevented hacking into military computers (Weisman 2008: C1–C4).

However, many of the barriers created by nation-states that we assume are, or can be, successful do not in fact deal with the flows they are supposed to stem. It remains to be seen whether the new fence between Mexico and the US can reduce the flow of illegal immigrants to the US. Similarly, it is not clear that the wall

between Israel and the West Bank will stop the flow of terrorists into Israel if (when?) hostilities in the Middle East flare up yet again.

There are many different kinds of organizations that, while they may expedite flows for some, create all sorts of barriers for others. Nation-states are, in fact, one such organization and they (generally) work to the advantage of their own citizens (and their flows as well as the flows of things important to them) in many different ways while creating many roadblocks for those from other countries. For example, nation-states create protectionist (Reuveny and Thompson 2001: 229–49) tariff systems that help their own farms, corporations, and so on to succeed by making the products of their foreign competitors more expensive. That is, the tariffs help the flow of products from a nation-state's own farms and manufacturers while inhibiting the flow into the country from its foreign competition.

Corporate organizations, say a multinational corporation like Toyota, are devoted to optimizing the flow of their automobiles to all possible markets throughout the world. They also seek to compete with and out-perform other multinational corporations in the automobile business. If they are successful, the flow of automobiles from those corporations is greatly reduced, further advantaging Toyota.

Labor unions are also organizations devoted to the flow of some things while working against the flow of others (Bronfenbrenner 2007). Unions often oppose, for example, the flow of illegal immigrants because they are likely to work for lower pay and fewer (if any) benefits (e.g. health insurance) than indigenous, unionized workers. Similarly, they oppose the flow of goods produced in non-union shops in other countries (and their own) since the success of the latter would adversely affect the shops that are unionized and that, in turn, would hurt the union and its members.

While organizations of many types, including nation-states, corporations, and labor unions, serve as structures that can operate against global flows, the fact is that there are signs that many organizations are changing and are themselves becoming more fluid and increasingly open.

One of the roots of this change is open-sourcing and the Internet. The best-known example of open-sourcing is Linux, a free computer-operating system. Anyone in the world with the needed skills can make changes in, and contributions to, it. (The best-known operating systems are produced by Microsoft [Windows and now Windows 7]. They cost a great deal and are closed in that only those who work for the company can, at least legally, work on and modify them.) In recent years a traditional closed organization – IBM – has not only embraced the Linux system, but opened up more and more of its own operations to outside inputs. The Internet has a number of open systems associated with what is known as Web 2.0 (Beer and Burrows 2007). One example is the free online encyclopedia Wikipedia (or wikis more generally) where again (virtually) anyone, anywhere in the world, can contribute to the definition of terms in it. The contrast here is the traditional (and costly) dictionary (e.g. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*) and encyclopedias written by selected experts (*Encyclopedia Britannica*) and closed to contributions from anyone else.

However, in spite of this new openness, most organizations and systems remain closed to various flows. This usually benefits (often economically) those in the system and disadvantages those outside the organization. Even with the new open systems, there are structural realities that help some and hinder others. For example, to contribute to Linux or Wikipedia one must have a computer, computer expertise, and access to the Internet (especially high-speed access). Clearly, those without economic advantages – in the lower classes in developed countries or who live in the less developed countries of the South (i.e. those on the other side of the “digital divide”) – do not have any, many, or all, of those things. As a result, they are unable to contribute to them or to gain from them to the same degree as those in more privileged positions or areas.

Subtler Structural Barriers

This brings us to a series of other structural barriers that also serve to contradict the idea of total global fluidity. These structures are less blatant, more subtle, than the kinds of structures discussed above, but in many ways more powerful and more important from a social point of view. Included here are a variety of structures that serve to differentiate and to subordinate on the basis of *social class*, *race*, *ethnicity*, *gender*, and *region of the world* (North–South). In fact, these phenomena tend to be interrelated. Thus in the disadvantaged South, one is more likely to find large numbers of poor people in the lower social classes, disadvantaged racial and ethnic minorities, and women who are discriminated against on the basis of gender (Moghadam 2007: 135–51). As a result, various efforts by the North to subordinate the South serve to further disadvantage people there in all of those categories. Furthermore, these categories overlap – a black female who is a member of the Ibo tribe in Africa is likely to be in a lower social class. (And there is a similar overlap among those who are advantaged – for example, white, upper-class, male Anglo-Saxons in Europe and North America.) Thus, the combination of these disadvantaged statuses (“intersectionality” [Hill Collins 2000]) has a disastrous effect on those with these disesteemed characteristics.

Those who occupy superordinate positions in these hierarchies tend to erect structures that halt or slow various flows. These restrictions are designed to work to their advantage and to the disadvantage of others. Good examples involve the operations of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO), and World Bank, which, for example, can serve to restrict flows of badly needed funds into Southern nations unless, for example, those nations engage in restructuring and austerity programs that are designed to slow down their economies (at least in the short run). Such programs often involve insistence that welfare programs be cut back or eliminated and the result is that the most disadvantaged members of Southern countries – racial and ethnic minorities, women, those in the lower classes – are hurt the most by these programs.

Those in superordinate positions also encourage certain kinds of flows that work to their advantage (and to the disadvantage of subordinates). For example, the so-

called “brain drain” (Landler 2007: A10) is a global phenomenon and it most often takes the form of highly trained people leaving the South and moving to the North. Those in the North actively seek out skilled people in the South and expedite their movement to the North. At the other end of the spectrum, also encouraged, although less these days, is the movement of unskilled workers to the North to occupy poorly paid menial positions – for example, as farm, or household, workers.

It is also the case that the prototypical Northern male upper-class white Anglo-Saxon Protestant has, in the contemporary world, acquired a great deal of fluidity and “lightness” in the form of mobility, and thus is able to move about the globe quite readily and easily. In contrast, the Southern female, lower-class, black, Ibo is far less fluid, much “heavier,” and therefore has far less capacity to move about the globe.

While the advantages of those in the North over those in the South remain, the South has been increasingly successful, at least in some instances, at gaining advantages by better controlling flows into and out of that part of the world. For example, Middle Eastern oil used to be largely controlled by Northern corporations (e.g. Shell) which kept the price low and made sure that the more developed North was adequately supplied with comparatively inexpensive oil. This adversely affected oil-producing countries, which did not get the price they deserved and furthermore a large proportion of the profits went to the Northern corporations and *not* the Middle Eastern countries from which the oil came. Now, of course, those countries (through OPEC) control the flow of oil and are profiting enormously from it.

In the end, then, globalization involves *flows* and a wide range of structures that not only expedite, but also impede, and even halt, those flows.

Having given a sense in this introductory discussion of the way globalization today – the global age – is conceptualized in this book, we turn now to some background on its origins and history.

ORIGINS AND HISTORY OF GLOBALIZATION

Telling the story of the origins and history of globalization is no easy matter since there are a number of different perspectives on these issues. In this section we will offer five different ways of thinking about what turn out to be very complex issues.

Hardwired

Nayan Chanda (2007: xiv) argues that “globalization stems, among other things, from a basic human urge to seek a better and more fulfilling life” (2007: xiii). This leads him to trace “the initial globalization of the human species, [to] when in the late Ice Age, a tiny group of our ancestors walked out of Africa in search of better food and security. In fifty thousand years of wandering along ocean coasts and chasing game across Central Asia, they finally settled on all the continents.”

Chanda focuses on four specific aspects of globalization that relate to a basic “urge” for a better life – trade (or commerce), missionary work (religion), adventures and conquest (politics and warfare). All of these are key aspects of globalization, all can be traced to early human history, and all, as well as much else, will be dealt with in this volume. However, Chanda’s view that globalization is hardwired into humans is not the one accepted here since we argue that we are now living in a distinctive global age.

Cycles

The second perspective is that globalization is a long-term cyclical process. It is not only difficult in this view to find a single point of origin, but the effort is largely irrelevant since there have long been cycles of globalization and it is those cycles that are of utmost importance, not any particular phase or point of origin (Scholte 2005). This view, like Chanda’s, tends to contradict the idea that we live today in a new “global age.” Rather, this suggests that there have been *other* global ages in the past and that what now appears to be a new global age, or the high point of such an age, is destined to contract and disappear in the future. Eventually, it, too, will be replaced by a new cycle in the globalization process.

Epochs

In an example of the third approach to the beginnings (and history) of globalization, Therborn (2000: 151–79) sees six great epochs, or “waves,” of globalization, that have occurred sequentially, each with its own point of origin:

1. The fourth to the seventh centuries which witnessed the globalization of religions (e.g. Christianity, Islam).
2. The late fifteenth century highlighted by European colonial conquests.
3. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries during which various intra-European wars led to globalization.
4. The mid-nineteenth century to 1918; the heyday of European imperialism.
5. The post-World War II period.
6. The post-Cold War period.

From this, Therborn concludes that globalization today is *not* unique. However, his historical or epochal view also rejects the cyclical view of globalization. Past epochs are not returning, at least in their earlier form, at some point in the future.

Events

A fourth view is that instead of cycles or great epochs, one can point to much more specific events that can be seen as the origin of globalization and give us a good

sense of its history. In fact, there are *many* such possible points of origin of globalization, some of which are:

- The Romans and their far-ranging conquests in the centuries before Christ (Gibbon 1998).
- The rise and spread of Christianity in the centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire.
- The spread of Islam in the seventh century and beyond.
- The travels of the Vikings from Europe to Iceland, Greenland, and briefly to North America in the ninth through the eleventh centuries as examples of, and landmarks in, globalization.
- Trade in the Middle Ages throughout the Mediterranean.
- The activities of the banks of the twelfth-century Italian city-states.
- The rampage of the armies of Ghengis Khan into Eastern Europe in the thirteenth century (*Economist* 2006: January 12).
- European traders like Marco Polo and his travels later in the thirteenth century along the Silk Road to China. (Interestingly, there is now discussion of the development of an “iron silk road” involving a linked railroad network through a variety of Asian countries that at least evokes the image of the lure of Marco Polo’s Silk Road.)
- The “discovery of America” by Christopher Columbus in 1492. Other important voyages of discovery during this time involved Vasco Da Gama rounding the Cape of Good Hope in 1498 and the circumnavigation of the globe completed in 1522 by one of Ferdinand Magellan’s ships (Rosenthal 2007: 1237–41).
- European colonialism, especially in the nineteenth century.
- The early twentieth-century global Spanish flu pandemic.
- The two World Wars in the first half of the twentieth century.

It is also possible to get even more specific about the origins of globalization, especially in recent years. A few rather eclectic recent examples include:

- 1956 – The first transatlantic telephone cable.
- 1958 – While it was possible to fly across the Atlantic in the 1930s on seaplanes that made several stops along the way, the big revolution in this area was the arrival of transatlantic passenger jet travel, with the first flight being Pan Am’s flight from New York to London (with a stopover for refueling required in Newfoundland).
- 1962 – The launch of the satellite Telstar and soon thereafter the first transatlantic television broadcasts.
- 1966 – The transmission from a satellite of the picture of the earth as a single location, not only leading to a greater sense of the world as one place (increased global consciousness [Robertson and Inglis 2004: 38–49]), but also of great importance to the development of the global environmental movement.

- 1970 – The creation of the Clearing House Interbank Payment System (CHIPS), making global electronic (wire) transfers of funds (now \$2 trillion a day) possible among financial institutions.
- 1977 – The Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT) came into being, making more global transfers of funds possible by individuals.
- 1988 – The founding of the modern Internet based on Arpanet (which was created in 1969). While it took the Internet several years to take off, this was a turning point in global interconnection for billions of people.
- 2001 – The terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York and on the Pentagon in Washington, as well as later terrorist attacks on trains in Madrid (March 11, 2004) and London (July 7, 2005), among others. The following is a specific example in support of the idea that 9/11 can be taken as a point of origin for globalization (at least of higher education): “Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, internationalization has moved high on the agenda at most universities, to prepare students for a globalized world, and to help faculty members stay up-to-date in their disciplines” (Lewin 2008: 8).

This, of course, brings us very close to the present day and it is possible that other specific events (especially the Great Recession which began in late 2007) will almost certainly come to be associated by future observers with the birth, or further development, of globalization.

Broader, More Recent Changes

The fifth view focuses on broader, but still recent, changes. There is a sense in this view that a sea change occurred in the last half of the twentieth century. Three of these momentous changes have been identified by scholars as the point of origin of globalization as it exists today:

- The emergence of the United States as *the* global power in the years following WW II.

The US not only projected its military power throughout the world (Korea in the early 1950s; disastrously in Vietnam in the 1960s and early 1970s), it extended its reach in the economic realm as it became the dominant industrial power when WW II decimated most of its competitors militarily (Germany, Japan) and/or economically (the Axis powers as well as Allies such as France and Great Britain). Many other aspects of America’s global reach either accompanied these changes or soon followed. Among them were the diplomatic clout of the US government, the reach of the US media, the power of Hollywood, and so on. Such a view closely aligns globalization with the idea of Americanization (see Chapter 2).

- The emergence of multinational corporations (MNCs).

While the world’s great corporations can be traced back to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in, for example, Germany, Great Britain, and the United

States, they were initially largely associated with their nations of origin and did the vast majority of their business within those countries. However, over time, those corporations did more and more business internationally. In so doing, they were following Marx and Engels' (1848/2000: 248–9) dictum that because of stagnant or declining profits capitalism had to expand into international markets or die.

For example, the once great American automobile companies – Ford and General Motors – not only originated in the US, but focused, at least initially, on selling into the American market and most, if not all, of the component parts were produced by them or sub-contractors in the US. Of course, they did import raw materials of various kinds (and they did sell their automobiles overseas, especially in Europe), but in the main, the bulk of their business was done in the US. Furthermore, the vast majority of top executives, employees, and investors was American. However, that began to change over the course of the twentieth century as these corporations exported more of their automobiles to other parts of the world, opened factories in other countries to sell cars under their brand names (or others), targeted their products to the distinctive needs (e.g. for smaller, more fuel-efficient cars) of those countries, and more recently began to move more of their automobile production aimed at the US market to other countries, either in factories of their own or in the factories of sub-contractors in those countries.

In these and other ways, Ford and General Motors have become multinational corporations and MNCs are, because of their very nature, inherently part of globalization. Indeed, MNCs are not only involved in globalization but this process is internalized into the organization as all sorts of global flows (parts, people, money) occur *within* the corporation.

The case of the other of the one-time “Big Three” American automobile companies – Chrysler – is even more striking in this regard. Initially, Chrysler followed the same course as Ford and GM and became increasingly multi-national. However, Chrysler has long been the most marginal of the Big Three and, famously, had to be bailed out in 1979 by a controversial loan from the US government. However, that was only of short-term help and in 1998 Chrysler was taken over by the German manufacturer of Mercedes-Benz automobiles which changed Chrysler's name to DaimlerChrysler AG. This clearly represented the formation of an MNC, although Daimler-Benz itself (as well as Chrysler) was a multinational corporation before that, since, among other things, it actively sold its automobiles in the US as well as in many other parts of the world. However, this marriage was short-lived and Daimler sold off its interest in Chrysler in 2007. In order to survive, Chrysler has been forced into a multinational merger with Fiat, the Italian automobile manufacturer.

Of course, American and German automobile companies are no longer the world leaders in that industry. Rather, the leaders are Japanese companies, especially Toyota (although it has been diminished by recent problems with quality, resulting, at times, in fatal accidents), Nissan, and Honda (with Korean companies [e.g. Hyundai-Kia] showing global strength, as well). However, these companies are today themselves MNCs as they not only sell cars in the US (and in many other

nations), but also produce in factories built in various parts of North America. The case of today's automobile manufacturers is just one example of national corporations that have become MNCs and therefore much more clearly and importantly integral parts of globalization.

- The demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

It could be argued that globalization is even more recent and did not truly begin until the fall of the “Iron Curtain” and the Soviet Union in 1991. With those events, the division of the world into mainly “capitalist” and “communist” spheres rapidly eroded as did all sorts of barriers that existed between them. Major parts of the world were opened for the first time since the early twentieth century to all sorts of global flows – immigration, tourism, media, diplomacy, and especially the capitalistic economic transactions of MNCs and other businesses. The global processes that had spread throughout most of the “free” world before 1991 flooded into the now independent states of the old Soviet Union, especially Russia, and most of its allies.

Vestiges of communism exist as of this writing, especially in Cuba, North Korea, and, at least nominally, in China. Cuba remains, in the main, outside of global capitalism, largely because of the US embargo against trading with Cuba, in force since 1962 and expanded and codified several times since then. However, the embargo itself is a manifestation of globalization – the US setting up barriers in order to limit or halt the flow of trade with Cuba and to inhibit or prevent other nations from around the world from trading with Cuba. China, of course, is becoming a, if not soon *the*, major force in global capitalism even though the government remains communist, at least in name (Fishman 2006). In any case, China is actively involved in globalization not only economically, but in many other realms as well (the 2008 Olympics in Beijing is a good example).

The perspective adopted in this book on the current global age is most in accord with this focus on broader changes that began in the last half of the twentieth century. While all of the other perspectives deal with global processes, they were far more limited in geographic scope and far less extensive and intensive than the global processes that took off in the late twentieth century. Thus the perspective adopted here is that globalization is a relatively recent development with its major points of origin occurring after the close of WW II.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Globalization is a transplanetary process or set of processes involving increasing liquidity and the growing multi-directional flows of people, objects, places, and information, as well as the structures they encounter and create that are barriers to, or expedite, those flows.

The sheer magnitude, diversity, and complexity of the process of globalization today leads to the conceptualization of the current era as the “global age.”

Globalization can be analyzed through conceptual metaphors such as solids, liquids, flows, structures, heavy, light, and weightless.

Prior to the “global age,” people, things, information, places, and objects tended to harden over time. Thus their common attribute was “solidity,” the characteristic of being limited to one place. Solidity also refers to the persistence of barriers that prevented free movement of people, information, and objects in that era. Although solidity persists, it is “fluidity” that is more characteristic of the “global age.”

Over the last few decades, that which once seemed solid has tended to “melt” and become increasingly mobile or “liquid.” A range of technological developments in transportation and communication have enabled far greater global movement of what was previously solid.

A closely related concept is the idea of “flows.” Globalization is increasingly characterized by flows of liquid phenomena including people, objects, decisions, information, and places.

In spite of greater liquidity and ever-more flows of various types, the world is still characterized by great inequality. While globalization flows more easily through the developed world, it bypasses many locales in the less developed world.

Globalization can also be analyzed through metaphors of heavy, light, and weightless. Historically, there has been movement from that which is heavy to that which is light and most recently to that which approaches weightlessness. Pre-industrial and industrial societies were “heavy,” characterized by that which is difficult to move. Advances in transportation and technology made goods, people, and places lighter. We are currently in an era defined not only by lightness but also increasingly by weightlessness.

Some structures (e.g. borders) continue to be important in impeding the movement of that which is liquid, light, or weightless. Other heavy structures (“routes” or “paths”) expedite flows.

There also exist subtler structural barriers which are in many ways more powerful than the material structures such as national borders. These structures serve to differentiate and subordinate on the basis of social class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and region of the world. These phenomena often tend to be interrelated. Those who occupy superordinate positions in these hierarchies tend to erect structures in order to impede flows that are not beneficial to them. They also encourage flows that work to their advantage.

The origin and history of globalization can be analyzed through five perspectives. First, globalization can be seen as being hardwired into humans, in the form of a basic urge for a better life. This instinct results in the spread of globalization through commerce, religion, politics, and warfare. Second, globalization may be perceived as a long-term cyclical process. In this view, there have been other global ages prior to the present one, and each age is destined to contract and disappear, after attaining a peak. Third, globalization can be viewed as a series of historical epochs or waves, each with its own point of origin. A fourth perspective argues that the multiple points of origin of globalization are located in seminal historical events. A fifth view focuses on broader, more recent changes in the twentieth century. It argues that the

global processes in motion prior to WW II were more limited in geographic scope and less intensive than the global processes of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Examine the dual role of structures as barriers to, and facilitators of, global flows. Are subtler structural barriers more effective than material barriers?
2. What is the significance of networks in the current age of globalization? Is it possible for networks to act as deterrents or barriers to flows?
3. Do liquids dissolve structures blocking their path, or do they merely circumnavigate them?
4. Discuss the impact of increased liquidity on hierarchical social structures.
5. Compare the current "global age" to previous periods which have been said to be associated with globalization.

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