

Globalization

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The concepts of **the globe** as a spherical object and, metonymically, as the planet earth appeared together in the C16. The adjectival form (**global**) appeared in the C17 referring only to the former. In the late C19 "global" appeared in its more common contemporary sense, combining a geographical ("the whole world; world-wide; universal") and a mathematical or logical meaning ("the totality of a number of items, categories, etc.; comprehensive, all-inclusive, unified, total"). In the C20, the more active and historical form – **globalization** – appears, parallel to other comparable historical markers such as "modernization" and "industrialization" and related to the notions of postmodernity.

Does this mean that globalization began in the C20? Certainly there were earlier empires or translocal social systems which, if not covering the globe, extended their power and influence – economically, culturally, and politically – over large expanses of the globe. Marx suggested that capitalism was a globalizing enterprise:

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere... In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And in material, so in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. (*cit.* Waters, 1995: 6)

In fact, capitalism has always responded to crises of overaccumulation and overspeculation by expanding its territory.

In the mC20, two influential images of globalization circulated between the academy and broader public discourses. First, Marshall McLuhan's **global village** saw the world becoming a single interconnected society as a result of the new media of electronic communication. Second, Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory saw the emergence of a new configuration of global economic and social relations. While McLuhan's ideas, built on a kind of technological determinism, were largely associated with speculative, utopian, and counter-cultural visions, Wallerstein's more economic determinism was linked to a socialist left.

In the lC20, a number of developments made globalization a topic of government policy, public concern, and academic debate. In 1973, then US president Richard Nixon abrogated the post-war Bretton Woods agreement, which had established stable systems of monetary exchange and international trade regulation. Coupled with developments in computer technology and electronic communication, this opened up a hugely speculative international finance market, located in monetary and derivatives markets as well as traditional stock markets. The interests of this highly mobile finance capital were not always well served by the nationally organized systems of industrial capitalism. Newly

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empowered neo-liberal and neo-conservative regimes in the advanced capitalist world championed a new discourse of free trade, deregulation, marketization, and privatization. These governments, including that of Ronald Reagan in the US and Margaret Thatcher in the UK, pushed to (re)negotiate regional and global trade agreements (for example, the North American Free Trade Area, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and the European Economic Community), and gave new life and power to international regulatory agencies such as the World Trade Organization, and transnational economic institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

As a result, the 1980s witnessed the growing internationalization of corporate operations and the growing power of multinational corporations, which were no longer under the rigid control of national governments. One result of these developments was a radical shift in the labor market, with many manufacturing jobs moved to the cheaper and more easily exploited labor markets of the developing world, and replaced with less secure, often minimum-wage, service-sector jobs, partly hidden under an ideology that equated the service economy with the knowledge or information economy. Alongside these changes, the 1980s witnessed a major and significant transformation of the structures and size of international investments, by corporations, governments, and financial institutions, reinforcing the sense of a single world market for money and credit

Discussions of globalization as policy or in relation to particular governmental decisions generally focus entirely on such developments in the economic and technological infrastructure, not only as the driving forces of globalization but also as the very meaning of globalization. As a result, globalization appears as the new ideology of capitalism, with its predictable claim of inevitability: "Anyone who believes that globalization can be stopped has to tell us how he would envision stopping economic and technological progress; this is tantamount to trying to stop the rotation of the earth" (Renato Ruggiero, ex-director-general of the World Trade Organization, *cit.* ILRIC, 2000). Ironically, despite its supposed inevitability, globalization is being pushed strongly by various governments, corporations, interest groups, and transnational institutions.

Globalization, then, is the claim that there already exists or is necessarily coming an integrated **global economic market** encompassing all domains of social life. Local economic growth, the dominant definition of economic progress, depends on the reduction of all barriers to all international trade. Any nation's economic future depends upon its willingness to adopt policies committed to deregulation and free markets, and cutting government spending and taxes. Thus the state must undo its role as the provider of social services, as the protector of environments, markets, and populations.

Not surprisingly, the economic discourses of globalization are closely tied to assumptions of technological determinism, and to a powerful ideology of techno-utopianism, in which technological metaphors of networking are used to demonstrate the inherent democratizing possibilities of the new economy. These new technologies, it is claimed, have not only created the conditions for the possibility of exchange on a world-wide scale, but will also eventually

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democratize the distribution of knowledge, communication, and even wealth and power. Under the discipline of the discourses of globalization, there have been major transformations in the territorial organization of economic activity and political-economic power, resulting in a radical redistribution and reorganization – a new concentration – of economic wealth and power. Moreover, new economic institutions and organizations, new political and legal regimes, allow firms to operate across borders more easily, and force nations to negotiate with and find a place within these transnational processes. Finance capital has gained a new visibility in the everyday calculations of ordinary people, even as it has profoundly challenged the power of industrial capitalist regimes in the West. The result is a new geography of power. These processes have also exacerbated the uneven distribution of wealth across and within nations and regions, and the supposed commitment to free trade and competitive markets has actually reduced competition as a result of mergers, takeovers, stock deals, etc. And despite the claims of transnationalization, most large economies of the world are still overwhelmingly domestic, with little evidence that the levels of international trade are surpassing pre-World War I levels.

Some of the key questions surrounding globalization involve cultural practices, exchanges, and flows. Some of these concerns continue the fears of Americanization that preoccupied many nations following World Wars I and II, as first soldiers and then capitalism and the mass media brought the slick entertainment styles of US popular culture to the rest of the world. These issues were raised within the academy as ones of cultural imperialism – was American capitalist culture replacing and destroying all local and indigenous forms of cultural expression? – and in policy debates in discussions of the New World Information Order, a debate staged largely through the United Nations, about the rights of any nation to control the flow of communication across its borders.

New communication technologies and the new regimes of economic life have significantly intensified questions about the circulations of cultural products, including the increasing multinational corporate control of all media and public culture (hence a major issue in global trade policy involves bringing cultural goods into the regimes of free trade), the global tourist industry, and the growing visibility of Western consumer society as the taken-for-granted normative description of contemporary social life and experience. Of course, the question of the **globalization of culture** cannot be limited to concerns about the flows of popular commercial culture, for it involves as well questions about the effects of a rapidly growing **global tourism** industry and its consequences for indigenous populations and economies. More powerfully, however, than either of these domains, the globalization of culture has raised questions about the global normalization and acceptance of what is increasingly thought to be the essence of US if not all Western capitalist cultures: the extraordinarily rapid circulation of commodities of all sorts and, implicitly, the establishment of a consumer society. Sometimes described as McDonaldization or Nike-ification, discussions of globalization and culture then touch upon the question of the very nature of contemporary lived experience.

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Many critics argue that globalization cannot be understood as a simple process of homogenization in which everything becomes the same (whether that means Westernized or Americanized or, perhaps, Japan-ized). Instead, globalization has to be seen as more of a process of negotiation, hybridization, or **glocalization**. The forces and pressures of globalization, however they may be conceived, do not simply impose themselves everywhere in just the same ways, with local practices and identities simply succumbing passively to these new forms. Instead, local societies, cultures, economies, and political formations respond in active and distinct ways to the changes that confront them. The results are unique, composed out of the encounter between **the global** and the local. Even the centers of traditional Western culture and power have had to adjust to the demands and transformations of globalization, becoming hybridized in the process. Globalization also involves the voluntary and necessary migrations of people around the world, often former colonial populations moving to the centers of colonial power. These movements have radically changed the ethnic make-up of Western nations that had previously imagined themselves ethnically homogeneous, and have made questions of immigration and national identity some of the most volatile political issues of the IC20 and eC21. As a result, it has been suggested, globalization challenges the assumed normativity of Western culture and identities.

Finally, as a matter of lived experience, globalization is about the changing power of geography over people's lives. For example, some commentators have talked about the decreasing power of geography, pointing to those people for whom new communication technologies have meant the apparent collapse of distance into copresence. On the other hand, for many others, without access to the media, globalization has meant the growing power of unknowable, distant powers over their lives. Globalization signals the new form in which we experience the geography of social relations. It involves not only the sense of increasing interdependence, but also an intensification of people's consciousness of the world as a whole. This can suggest a McLuhanesque vision of a global society in which geography is no longer a primary determinant of social and cultural life and identity, in which there are no borders or boundaries – not only to the flows of money, commodities, people, and power, but also to the flows of sympathy and fellow-feeling. While the geography of influence and effect has significantly expanded during the past 30 years – as countries are rarely able to shield themselves from the impact of decisions and events in other countries – these new relations are no more symmetrical than previous transnational organizations. And while more people may have an awareness of the world and of other peoples, cultures, and places, there is little evidence that this is producing a more harmonious world-society or a more tolerant environment for differences. Whether one thinks of globalization as the shortening of time and shrinking of space (sometimes called time-space compression) or as the annihilation of space by time (Marx's description of capitalism), the questions remain: if globalization, or at least any particular form of globalization, is not inevitable, what are its possibilities?

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And since the last decade of the C20, there is some evidence that this question has been placed on the public's agenda with the appearance of organized and sustained dissent from, resistance to, and protest against the dominant discourses and practices of globalization, including the implications for the labor, environments, or national democratic autonomy of the new economic regimes, the spread of rationalized capitalist markets into all aspects of social life (McDonaldization and genetically modified food, for example), and the imposition of consumption as the proper measure of freedom and democracy. Such efforts, whether from the **anti-globalization movement**, indigenous peoples' movements, or human rights non-governmental organizations, are often based on transnational alliances "from below" which use the tools, the technologies, and even the discourses of globalization in order to construct more effective transnational resistances to the dominant discourses, organizations, and forces of knowledge/power/wealth.

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See: ***COLONIALISM, INFORMATION, MODERN, NETWORK, POSTMODERN, RESISTANCE, WEST.***