

James H. Mittelman, *The Globalization Syndrome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Introduction

THE MAIN CONCERN of this book is the interplay between the powerful thrust of globalizing market forces, sometimes propelled by the state, and a counterthrust fueled by the needs of society. Above all, the challenge here is to discern globalization's contents—i.e., historical transformations in world order—and the resultant discontents. Then there are specific questions within these basic issues, posed in individual chapters.

In contrast to many of the previous interpretations of globalization, this book is an attempt to present a holistic and multilevel analysis, connecting the economic to the political and cultural, joining agents and multiple structures, and interrelating different local, regional, and global arenas. Given the broad scope of the topic, of course, no single study by itself could be fully integrative, but this volume is one step in that direction. Heretofore, globalization studies have come in different genres. As we shall see, there is a tendency toward economism (a one-sided emphasis on material factors to the extent of indifference to politics and culture, although political commitments and cultural values may be implicit in the analysis). Another is state-centric approaches, also evident in a good deal of cross-national research, which posit that public policies are driving the globalization dynamic. And some persevering forms of area studies insist on particularities and detailed descriptions about the transformations in a given locale without also grasping the linkages to evolving global structures. These three genres do not cover the entire gamut of globalization discourse, but they certainly dominate much of it.

Whereas most of the globalization literature is based on the experiences of the West, my findings are, in the main, drawn from the non-Western worlds. As distinct from other books on globalization, this volume considers, but in no way romanticizes, the voices of the subjects of globalization, including those who resist this trend. Without presuming to speak on their behalf, which would be a pretense of arrogance without license, I explore globalizing processes from the standpoint of those who are hurt by them: trade union movements, people on the fringes of society (in some cases, a bedrock for populist politicians), the unemployed and underemployed in various parts of the world, and the marginalized, especially women and children, in developing countries. Directly, or more often indirectly, they encounter the globalizers: internationally mobile capital and its allies in the state, exporters who balk at restrictive trade practices, local industrialists (to the extent that they are competitive with

overseas enterprises), and domestic finance positioned to gain from liberalization and increased access to foreign markets. These groups, in turn, vie with nationalist politicians, inward-oriented bureaucrats, and other prominent protectionists, some of whom are advocates for domestic business adversely affected by transnational flows. In this context, there are no villains or heroes, but constellations of actors with concrete and conflicting interests in the intrusive transformation under way at a global level, in some cases provoking resistance to it, albeit in very different forms.

The core argument of this book is that globalization is not a single, unified phenomenon, but a *syndrome* of processes and activities. As used here, the term "syndrome" designates a pattern of related characteristics of the human condition, or, more specifically, within the global political economy. Although some critics, on both the left and right, do indeed regard globalization as a pathology, in our context "syndrome" is not meant to convey the medical sense of symptoms of a disease, because globalization is by no means an abnormality. Rather, globalization has become normalized as a dominant set of ideas and a policy framework, while, as I will show, also being contested as a false universalism. Integral to the globalization syndrome are the interactions among the global division of labor and power (GDLP), the new regionalism, and resistance politics. Although these are not the only factors, of course, they stand out as central to the transformations in world order.

The GDLP is the anatomy of the global political economy. Its parts are a spatial reorganization of production among world regions, large-scale flows of migration among and within them, complex webs of networks that connect production processes and buyers and sellers, and the emergence of transnational cultural structures that mediate among these processes. Moreover, globalization proceeds through macroregionalism sponsored by states and economic forces seeking to open larger markets as a means toward greater competitiveness, subregional transborder arrangements, including Asia's "growth triangles" (a term coined by Singapore's Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in 1989) and "growth polygons," and microregional projects such as export processing zones (EPZs). The power component of the GDLP and in the new regionalism has a counterpoint, for it provokes resistance politics. More specifically, a specific configuration of power, which will be delimited, begets resistance movements as a response to globalization, albeit in nascent form. This configuration also precipitates a search for alternatives that could make the productive potential of globalization serve the goal of equity rather than subject society to the exigencies of hypercompetition with the widening gap between rich and poor and the deterioration of public social policy that neoliberalism (heightened integration in the global political economy) has brought about.

Hence the contradictory nature of globalization: It offers major benefits, including gains in productivity, technological advances, higher standards of living, more jobs, broader access to consumer products at lower cost, widespread dissemination of information and knowledge, reductions in poverty in some parts of the world, and a release from longstanding social hierarchies in many countries. Yet there is a price for integrating in this global framework and adopting its practices. Expressed or tacit acceptance of being encompassed in globalization entails a lessening, or in some cases a negating, of the quantum of political control exercised by the encompassed, especially in the least powerful and poorest zones of the global political economy. In addition, the penetration of world markets and increased polarization on a world level erode cultural traditions, giving rise to new hybrid forms.

THE CONCEPT OF GLOBALIZATION

Having foreshadowed the theme of this book, let me offer a concept of globalization, at least in a preliminary manner so that it can be built up in the chapters that follow. Although the literature provides many definitions of globalization, there are two main categories.¹ The first of these is to point to an increase in interconnections, or interdependence, a rise in transnational flows, and an intensification of processes such that the world is, in some respects, becoming a single place. Typical of this genre is the following: "Globalization refers to the process of reducing barriers between countries and encouraging closer economic, political, and social interaction" (Tabb 1999, 1). A more expansive, but basically similar, formulation is put forward by the president of the Ford Foundation:

The term [globalization] reflects a more comprehensive level of interaction than has occurred in the past, suggesting something different from the word 'international.' It implies a diminishing importance of national borders and the strengthening of identities that stretch beyond those rooted in a particular region or country. (Berrestford 1997, 1)

This definition is especially useful inasmuch as it captures key features of globalization—cross-border flows, identities, and social relations—but ambiguous about the nature of social relations and silent about hierarchies of power.

A second cut is more theoretical and emphasizes the compression of time and space. Three authors, in particular, have contributed impor-

¹ For a list of definitions, see Scholte (1997, 15). Other useful sources are Albrow (1996); Guillén (forthcoming); Held (1995); Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton (1999); Kofman and Youngs (1996); McGrew (1992); McMichael (1996b); Rosenau (1997, 78–98); and Waters (1995).

tantly to this conceptualization, although others could be named as well. Distinguishing between place and space, Anthony Giddens holds that the former is the idea of locale, or a geographical (understood in the sense of physical) setting of social activity, whereas with globalization, the latter is structured by social influences absent from the scene. Space is increasingly dislocated from place, and networked to other social contexts across the globe. And the old modes of time (say, seasons or sunup and sundown in agrarian societies) also become separated from space, opening to various possibilities of recombination (Giddens 1990, 18–19). “Globalisation can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens 1990, 64).

Along similar lines and noting that time horizons are shortened and that it is difficult to tell what space one occupies when it comes to determining causes and effects, David Harvey posits the “annihilation of space through time” (Harvey 1990, 299). Spaces from hitherto remote worlds form a collage, changing not only cultural representations, as in art exhibitions, but also the commodity mix in our daily lives. The marketplace for food, for instance, is very different from what it was decades ago, with local products being supplanted by national and then global goods, transforming consumption patterns and price structures, which are integrated into international trade. Proceeding along this same broad avenue of inquiry, Roland Robertson emphasizes cultural practices and, in matters linked to globalization, a high level of variation. For him, globalizing cultural processes are propelled by global consciousness, but less emphasis is accorded to technology than it is in Giddens’s scheme (Robertson 1992, 142–45, 183; Albrow 1996, 98). All three accounts pivot on the notion of time-space relations, and relate globalization to modernity—for Giddens, it is a consequence of modernity—and postmodernity. Giddens’s analysis of time-space compression is fundamentally tied to social technology; Harvey’s, to shifts in capital accumulation; and Robertson’s, to the cultural sphere.

While not rejecting this course altogether, but attempting to go further, I propose a somewhat different concept. *As experienced from below, the dominant form of globalization means a historical transformation: in the economy, of livelihoods and modes of existence; in politics, a loss in the degree of control exercised locally—for some, however little to begin with—such that the locus of power gradually shifts in varying proportions above and below the territorial state; and in culture, a devolution of a collectivity’s achievements or perceptions of them. This structure, in turn, may engender either accommodations or resistance. Most agents acquiesce, but others attempt to write a script that embraces macroeconomic growth processes and new technologies while linking them to so-*

cial equity and reform programs. In this scenario, the transformation commenced with market forces, yet political responses to it are of paramount importance. Whereas the market clearly continues to be a motor of globalization, there is an enormous difference between the interplay in initiating and maintaining or undermining this trend. Although politics and market relations have always been intimately related, globalization is emerging as *a political response to the expansion of market power*, both as a form of domination and an emancipatory possibility.

Furthermore, globalization is *a domain of knowledge*, not a fully fledged paradigm but a critical approach that helps to explain the intricacy and variability of the ways the world is structured and, by extension, to assess reflexively the categories used by social scientists to study this distinctive correlation of both integrating and disintegrating processes. A rubric for myriad phenomena, a globalization framework *interrelates multiple levels of analysis*—economics, politics, society, and culture. This frame thus elucidates *a coalescence of diverse transnational and domestic structures*, allowing the economy, polity, society, and culture of one locale to penetrate another.

In this connection, it is worth emphasizing that some champions of globalization and some of its detractors alike engage in economism. Ironically, the base-superstructure construct has resurfaced, this time by purveyors of globalization who bestow uncritical acclaim on neoliberal restructuring. Popularizers of the notion of global trends (e.g., Ohmae 1990; Naisbitt 1996) tend to posit one-way causality and believe that world aided by technological advances, marketization itself is transforming the world around us. Rather than overwork the concept of globalization by engaging in an economic analysis—or for that matter, political determinism, as do realists and neorealists who argue that states, not markets, are driving globalization—and obfuscate the linkages, one must identify specific interactions among its economic, political, and cultural dimensions. Indeed, globalization is a multilevel set of processes with built-in structures on its power and potential, for it produces resistance against itself. In other words, globalization creates discontents not merely as latent and undeclared resistance, but sometimes crystallized as open countermovements.²

APPROACH

Theoretically, a useful point of entry for exploring the underpinnings of globalization, and for holding together empirical data so that a complex

² While I was lecturing and writing on globalization’s “discontents,” unbeknownst to me at the time, two books also picked up on this theme, though quite differently from what is attempted here. See Burbach, Nunez, and Kagartitsky (1997) and Sassen (1998).

set of materials does not spin out of control, is Karl Polanyi's seminal work. One need not engage in a celebratory reading of his writings to note that they are suggestive of not only a holistic approach to global restructuring, but also the basis of a conceptual reformulation. Although I turn to other master writers, such as Fernand Braudel and Antonio Gramsci, and do not draw exclusively or even primarily on a Polyanian framework, it is pivotal for my probings—a touchstone for ordering concepts that I revisit, criticize, and attempt to extend at several junctures.

In *The Great Transformation* (1957, originally published in 1944), Polanyi explored the socially disruptive and polarizing tendencies in the world economy driven by what he called the self-regulating market, not a spontaneous occurrence but the result of coercive power in the service of a utopian idea. He traced the tendencies in the global political economy that generated the conjuncture of the 1930s and produced—out of a breakdown in liberal-economic structures—the phenomena of depression, fascism, unemployment, and resurgent nationalism, collectively a negation of economic globalization, leading to world war. His notion of “double movement” encapsulated unprecedented market expansion entailing massive social dislocation and a sharp political reaction in the form of society's demands on the state to counteract the deleterious effects of the market. Perhaps similar to the global economy of the 1930s, contemporary globalization appears to be approaching a conjuncture in which renewed liberal-economic structures will generate large-scale political, social, and economic disruptions, as well as sustained pressure for self-protection. The concrete processes analyzed in each of the chapters that follow are an integral part of this contradiction. To examine these processes, it is useful to reach beyond Polanyi's renowned 1944 book, cull his writings that are not as well known, and tease out the implications for the conjunction between the expansion of the market and specific issues centrally related to the GDLR, the new regionalism, and resistance politics.

To focus the analysis, there are compelling reasons why one must delimit the *ontology of globalization*. One can hardly proceed without first indicating the basic units that comprise an existing order. The balance of social forces on the ground is rapidly changing, and thus it becomes important to bring to light potential agents of transformation in diverse contexts. Although the term “ontology” is derived from philosophy and refers to the branch of metaphysics that studies the nature of existence or being, it has come to mean the specific objects of inquiry. These are the parts of world order that interact with one another, and the interactions will be discussed more fully under the rubric of evolving global structures in chapter 1. As the word “evolving” denotes, ontologies are not once and forever, but they are in historical motion. In this connection, it is

worth recalling that the French economic historian Braudel suggested that a number of “observation points” be identified for viewing history. Specifically, he posited that axes be established corresponding to “social orders,” hierarchy, time, and space. Along these axes, he proposed imagining divergent positions, such as those pertaining to different regions and spatial hierarchies (Braudel 1980, 55; Helleiner 1990, 74). Following Braudel, one may attempt to capture the advent of the ontology of globalization, without in any way fixing it as a static framework:

(1) The *global political economy* may be conceived in a Braudelian manner as a system of interactions on a world scale. Braudel did not make the world economy the exclusive dominant factor in his analysis, but emphasized the entities that interact with it and thus establish global structures. Although several political and economic entities spur globalization, it is especially the rise of the transnational corporation (TNC) that shapes globalizing processes, for the TNC coordinates production and controls operations in several countries, even if it is not the owner (Dicken 1998, 8). However, the large corporation is by no means the only force driving globalization. Notwithstanding their very different positions in the global political economy, states, too, have become agents of globalization, particularly through the neoliberal framework of deregulation, liberalization, and privatization.

(2) In Braudel's sense, *states* are mapped with dotted-line borders, partly permeable, able to regulate transborder flows—a template superimposed on the global economy. In an era of globalization, states—and more properly, the interstate system—are by no means epiphenomena, as sometimes argued, for policies—e.g., those on migration—do set conditions for exit and entry, however imperfectly enforced. Production is organized partly within borders and partly crossing borders in transnational flows. Similarly, migratory movements are partly within borders and partly across national frontiers.

(3) *Macroregions*—the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum—coordinate capital flows within a spatial unit but also provide access to the globalization process. The formation of macroregions involves a vast enlargement in the size of the market, a restructuring of extant political units, and a reorientation of the full meaning of citizenship. Embedded in the state, national citizenship is less meaningful because of the separation of citizenship and work. Laborers who live in their home country and work in another include border crossers (e.g., residents of France with jobs in Switzerland) and computer-based home workers linked to transnational production processes through electronic means. Macroregions may thus be regarded as loose geographical units larger than a state with some political and cultural bonds, however varied, tenuous, and sometimes contentious. Although globalization of production is a homogenizing force, local cultures