Chapter 2

What Is Globalization?

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The question we address in this chapter is both very general and very specific. It is general because it almost inevitably covers a number of disciplinary standpoints as well as worldviews to be found in different parts of the world. It is specific because we are concerned with the demarcation of the distinctive features of what has come to be called globalization. The general sense of the question 'What is globalization?' is continuously latent in what follows, whereas specification is much more explicit. Many different topics are included under the rubric of globalization, such as global governance, global citizenship, human rights, migration and the creation of diasporas, transnational connections of various kinds and so on. We are not concerned here with the matter of particular topics within the general frame of what we might loosely call the globalization paradigm.

Notwithstanding our attempt here to produce a definitely systematic way of analysing globalization, it should be strongly emphasized that in a major respect globalization is, in the frequently used phrase, an essentially contested concept. Many books and articles purporting to be talking about globalization indicate at the outset that there is no accepted definition of globalization but that the author or authors are about to provide one. To some degree this phenomenon is a manifestation of the relative newness of this topic on the academic agenda, not to speak of political discourse. (It is also in many cases a somewhat gratuitous effort to claim uniqueness, when such is completely unnecessary in view of the large number of similarities between many definitions of globalization.) Nonetheless, we attempt in what follows to supply as coherent a statement as is possible in full recognition of the disputed nature of the concept. Some of the disputes arise from differences in perspective across the world. Understandably, many people in developing countries are not exactly eager to accept definitions of globalization deriving from more privileged societal contexts. And there is much deviation with respect to ideas about globalization from one civilizational context to another. For these reasons a number of scholars speak of *globalizations* in the plural, as opposed to a single process of globalization.

Velho (1997) has spoken of globalization as an object, a perspective and a horizon. The object approach involves thinking of globalization as a single process, as if 'it' were being addressed from an Archimedean standpoint. This is not entirely possible, but nonetheless with sufficient reflexivity, one may continue to aim for a focus upon a particular object 'in an objective way', meaning that there is a wide degree of inter-subjectivity. As far as the perspectival position is concerned, Velho himself argues that, from within the 'community' of scholars and observers of global processes, the world takes on a different complexion when viewed in global terms. This, indeed, is one of the primary goals of the growing field of global education. Finally, in the Velho paradigm, globalization may be understood as the direction in which the world considered as a whole is moving. This brief synopsis of Velho's discussion indicates the range of presuppositions of which any contributor to the debate should be very conscious. It should be added that there are also different presuppositions resulting from disciplinary standpoints (Robertson and Khondker 1998). Indeed, the study of globalization is marked by the great mingling of disciplinary orientations, and the resultant debate has been and still is being conducted on a site of major disciplinary mutations, such that it may well be called a transdisciplinary development.

Globalization was discussed by that explicit name in sociology and anthropology, as well as in religious studies, as long ago as the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, as has become increasingly apparent in recent years, concern with globalization in effect began many centuries ago. To complicate matters a little, we have to recognize clearly that the idea of globalization did not fully enter academic, not to speak of wider political and intellectual, discourse until the late 1980s or early 1990s. In fact, the widespread use across the world of this term began only after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent, if only partial, collapse of communism. The cleavage – because that is what it is – between those who take a mainly economic position on globalization, in reference to the eventual end of capitalism, and those who have adopted a broader view, is a strong characteristic of the currency of the concept.

The necessity to recognize the two, initially very separate but now converging, uses of the term globalization can be recognized quite simply in the following example. During the late 1990s there arose what was popularly called the anti-globalization movement, situated mainly but certainly not exclusively in Western societies. As this movement grew, through often massive, sometimes violent, demonstrations at meetings of such organizations as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the G7/8 assemblies, largely through the increasingly instrumental use of the Internet in the facilitation of such global movements, so too did the development of a global consciousness about what were perceived to be the great inequalities produced by globalization, in its *mainly economic* sense. As the protest against capitalistic globalization grew rapidly, so too did the sense that the movement itself was a part of the globalization process. Hence, the distinction that emerged in the early 2000s between the notions of globalization from above (the 'enemy') and globalization from below (the 'good guys'). Meanwhile, ever since the early 1990s there has indeed developed a policy, promoted particularly by the more affluent nations, in favour of the desirability of open markets, free trade, deregulation and privatization. Accompanying the advocacy of

such a policy – one which has usually been labelled neoliberalism – has been the growing significance in the economic life of the world as a whole of transnational corporations (TNCs). Indeed, it is the latter which have often become the most iconic representatives of what many think of as the 'nasty' side of globalization.

In the concentration upon the capitalistic conception of globalization a number of crucial social scientific factors were greatly neglected. The kind of approach that had developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s to the phenomenon had been and still remains much more multidimensional. From the outset, those adopting a more multidimensional, as opposed to a unidimensional (economic), approach to the discussion and study of globalization drew upon a wider set of intellectual resources and were not, on the face of it, so obviously ideological as were those adopting the economic posture. This more general view of globalization had its roots in a different set of premises. In the background of the rise of globalization theory was the relatively simple observation that the world was increasingly becoming a 'single place'. This emphasis upon the world as becoming singular – as characterized by unicity (Robertson 1992) – was to have important ramifications in the development of various social sciences. In one way or another it has greatly affected the intellectual trajectory of the disciplines of sociology, political science and anthropology. For example, the idea of the world as a single place has brought into great question the sociological tendency to conceive of the basic and largest unit of sociology as being society (Mann 1986, 1993; Urry 2000; cf. Outhwaithe 2006). In political science and international relations, the rapid growth of interest in globalization has led to an increasing questioning of such heretofore central themes as sovereignty and territory. And in anthropology, attention has rather rapidly been turned from the study of societies, particularly of so-called primal societies, as if they were more or less completely isolated, towards a more inclusive view of the variety of different types of society and in particular, of the transcendence of societal boundaries by various globalizing processes, such as migration and hybridization.

The Parameters of the General Process of Globalization

It is very widely, if somewhat misleadingly, thought that the most important single defining feature of globalization – whether considered as a very long-term process or a rather short one – is that of increasing connectivity (sometimes called interconnectedness). Thus, for those who think of globalization as being pivoted upon this, little attention is given directly to what could, in general terms, be considered as a combination of both subjective and cultural factors. It is here maintained that increasing global consciousness runs in complex ways, hand in hand, so to speak, with increasing connectivity. Both connectivity and consciousness have to be unravelled, but the most essential point to grasp here is the significance of the relative neglect of the latter in favour of the former. Indeed, some disciplines have given much more attention to one or the other; in particular, while connectivity has been considered by political scientists, international relations specialists and economists as the defining feature of globalization, consciousness has been studied more by anthropologists, sociologists and cultural historians.

In his original journal article (1993), Samuel Huntington predicted that, with the assumed end of the Cold War, centred as it was upon the conflict between the United States and (former) USSR, the major world conflicts from there on would not be ideologically based, but rather focused more on civilizational issues. So when President Bush announced within a few hours of the tragedy of 9/11 that there had to be a *crusade* against mainly Muslim 'terrorism', we could say that, within the contexts of a narrow definition of globalization, there had suddenly appeared a recognition that indeed globalization involved much more. Bush's proclamation has to be seen against the background of Huntington's well-known (and controversial) thesis about the clash of civilizations (1993, 1996).

In Huntington's argument, civilizational conflicts would revolve above all upon profound differences in conceptions of the nature and purpose of human life. When all was said and done – and this became particularly evident when Huntington published a book based on the original article – the real and most salient civilizational conflict was between the 'Judeo-Christian' West and the Islamic Middle East plus the larger portion of Muslims in south and south-east Asia. Some have said that Huntington, in effect, wrote the script for the trauma of 9/11. It must, however, be emphasized that the growing perception of an Islamic threat to the West (in particular to the United States) had been evident since the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The drama of the conflict between the West and mainly Middle Eastern Islam lay relatively dormant between the Iranian Revolution, which brought into power an aggressive theocracy in Iran, and the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993. But it took nearly a decade for the full significance of the so-called clash to become fully evident. From the perspective of globalization theory, this seeming failure to acknowledge fully the cultural aspect of globalization can now clearly be seen as a very costly mistake. For much of the 1990s and indeed up to the present time, there has been considerable talk of the 'real' clash or conflict, having to do more with scarce resources, in particular oil, and more recently, water. It was in this way that it was possible for many to think of increasing connectivity as well as global consciousness as being either economic-materialistic or about policies and ideologies surrounding access to such resources. Few were able to see that the escalating conflicts around the world, with the Islamic/Judeo-Christian conflict at the core, were not at all helpfully described in terms of conflicts over material resources. To be sure, it would be extremely foolish to deny the significance of the material resource aspects of recent international conflicts or to neglect the great salience of military and strategic considerations.

The Dimensions of Globalization

Many books and articles on globalization, not least written by sociologists, stipulate that there are three major dimensions of such: the economic, the political and the cultural. The latter, the cultural, has come increasingly to the fore partly *because of* the concern with economic globalization. There has been much talk of what Ritzer has influentially called McDonaldization (2000). Even though Ritzer has not in an entirely explicit way spoken of McDonaldization as a form of cultural globalization or indeed as cultural imperialism, such ideas are at least latent in his important

contributions. Ritzer has been primarily concerned with the spread from America to much of the rest of the world of certain social and economic practices that have been spread not simply by the McDonald's Corporation, but by such others as Nike, Starbucks, the Gap, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and so on. Nevertheless, it has been found that in spite of attempts to spread the consumption of goods or services around the world in a relatively homogeneous way it is necessary to adapt brands to local circumstances. Moreover, the generalized mode of such adaptation can well constitute a form of homogeneity. In other words, even though adaptation to the local may promote heterogeneity, the way in which such projects of this kind are implemented is frequently very similar across much of the world. This has been evident, to take but one example, in the way in which McDonald's has had to alter the making of their burgers in the Indian context in which the eating of beef is taboo. (This issue is more adequately discussed under the concept of glocalization to which we will turn in due course.) The central thrust of this brief comment on the relationship between economic and cultural factors is that, somewhat paradoxically, the expansion of capitalism around the world has of seeming necessity involved the elevation of the cultural themes. This well illustrates the complexity of thinking in multidimensional terms yet at the same time brings sharply into focus the poverty of thinking in unidimensional terms.

Since much of thinking about globalization has been undertaken by sociologists, the neglect of the social dimension is rather glaring. In other words, many sociologists, speaking as prominent participants in (some would even say, the initiators of) the debate about globalization, have more often than not overlooked the very important social aspects of this general theme. One of the major exceptions to this generalization about the neglect of the social is Ritzer who does deal very directly with the globalization of social practices and relations in his influential work on McDonaldization. Others include scholars who have promoted the network approach to globalization, most distinctively Castells (1996, 1997, 1998) and Knorr Cetina (2001; Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2001). Notwithstanding the irony of this relative neglect of the social by sociologists in numerous books on globalization, suffice it to say that the spread, the diffusion of, styles of social interaction and communication around the world has surely been pivotal in the process of globalization. When all is said and done, it is impossible to conceive of connectivity without attending to social interaction, particularly but not only long-distance interaction (such as that via the Internet). One of the major sites of this kind of social interaction is to be seen in communications in previous decades – for example, by correspondence between migrants and those they have left behind, the classic case study being that of Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918–20).

In sum, it can here be stipulated that the major dimensions of globalization are indeed the cultural, the social, the political and the economic. It should be stressed that in referring to the social dimension, we are including the communicative. Furthermore, this listing is not to suggest that any one of these dimensions is more important than the other. Nor is it to maintain that such factors as environmental or ecological change are excluded. After all, it is human perception of the environment which is the crucial element; in other words, the concern with the environment is part of contemporary human culture.

The Form of Globalization

The issue of the form (or the pattern) of globalization was raised most sharply by Immanuel Wallerstein (1974, 1980, 1989), even though Wallerstein himself does not approve of the concept of globalization as such. Many scholars, nonetheless, have used aspects of his work in addressing this topic. Thus, Wallerstein raised an extremely important point in the early stages of his crucial work on the making of what he calls the modern world-system – the world capitalist system – when he spoke of the different ways in which the world could have become the singular 'system' that it has now more or less actually become. He cogently argued at that time that there were other ways in which the world could have become what we have here called a single place, a term which is certainly not meant to imply that we live in a world in which every nation or segment is totally integrated. We may say, following Wallerstein, that the world has not become a single place under the aegis, for example, of a particular religious institution, in spite of the attempts of the Vatican periodically having acted along such lines. The world could have become singular through the activities of an ideologically based, vanguard organization, such as the Soviet Communist Party, or through the expansion of German Fascism. It could, to take yet another example, have become a world-system along the lines planned by some Japanese politicians and intellectuals during the Second World War. Numerous other possibilities could be provided. The most important consideration at the present time is that, in the 1970s and subsequently, Wallerstein has ruled out the argument that the modern world could be systematized and coordinated along imperial lines. However, in the present circumstance it has to be said that there has recently been a great discussion of the new imperialism, a discussion which has brought into sharp focus the part played by ancient empires – most notably the Roman Empire. Here we should say in more than an *en passant* manner that this discussion of the role of imperial moves in the making of the modern world has brought into sharp relief the whole question of the ancient origins of the overall globalization process (Robertson and Inglis 2004; Inglis and Robertson 2004). The entire question as to the ancient origins of globalization – or, at least, protoglobalization – is currently being pursued by scholars from a number of disciplines, particularly sociological history.

However, leaving on one side the question of imperialism, the issue of the form of globalization can be addressed directly. From Wallerstein's point of view, the present world-system – or what some other writers have called world society, the global ecumene, global society and so on – has been produced primarily by the expansion of capitalism over the past five or six hundred years. This expansion Wallerstein regards as now being increasingly challenged by what he calls anti-systemic movements. He has not, however, regarded the latter in such an optimistic way as have some anti-globalization movements. In so far as we have rejected the unidimensional, economic approach to globalization (a term which we have already emphasized, but Wallerstein and his numerous followers have largely rejected or considered as only a particular phase of capitalistic expansion), we are constrained to think of the overall process of globalization in a more multifaceted way.

It is necessary to stress that in speaking of multidimensionality in the previous section, we have not exhausted the ways in which this methodological principle may be applied. Thus, in the immediate context of discussion of what we are calling the *form* of globalization we speak of there being different dimensions or facets of this form. In much of the present authors' work on globalization it has been proposed, not uninfluentially, that it is useful to think of the process of globalization as having conformed in a general way to the following pattern. First, and most obviously, there is what can, for simplicity's sake, be called the international-systemic aspect. Second, there is the aspect which covers the most general feature of global-human life, namely the concept of humanity. Third, there is another component which we have called (the totality of) individual selves. Finally, there is the principal 'container' of human beings for many centuries, namely the nation-state.

There are a number of important things to say about this proposal. In the first place, attention should quickly be drawn to the inclusion of the nation-state in the process of globalization. Many contributors to the debate have argued, from a variety of different disciplinary perspectives, that globalization is a process which has been challenged by nation-states. From the reverse angle, it has been argued that the nation-state as we know it, is being rapidly undermined, notably – but not only – by economic forces. Contrary to this perspective, we contend – not without some reservation – that the nation-state should actually be regarded as an *aspect* of globalization. We would almost certainly not be talking about globalization were it not for the existence of nation-states. For example, much of the discussion of increasing connectivity has been centred on the increasing intensity of and the organization of the relationships between nation-states; even though connectivity refers to all kinds of connections that involve bypassing nation-states. In any case, the preference in the work of the present authors has been not to think so much about the alleged decline of the nation-state, but rather about its *changing nature*. Here we think particularly of the rapidly growing concern with the problems of the so-called multicultural society. Widespread and extensive migration has contributed a great deal to these. At this time the debates in a number of societies about their identities is an excellent example of the centrality of the nation-state to any discussion of globalization. One might well say that the idea of national identity has itself been globalized with increasing but intermittent intensity since the early years of the twentieth century. The multiculturality or polyethnicity of most societies has become an issue of great political contention. It would seem that nativistic, right-wing movements notwithstanding, forms of multiculturality are becoming the global norm (McNeill 1986).

Next, the inclusion of selves within the general frame of global change has been motored by the conviction that it is not viable to exclude individuals – or, more generally, local life – from the scope of global change, more specifically globalization. This is why we consider it to be very misleading to think of globalization as being a solely macroscopic process, a process which excludes the individual, or indeed everyday life, from the realm of global change. Currently we may pinpoint considerable change with respect to the self – more especially, processes of individualization (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Admittedly these changes tend to apply most clearly to the West, although there are intimations of these occurring well

beyond the West. Individualization does, in one sense, isolate the individual and makes her or him more and more responsible for her/his actions. Increasingly, societies, including global society, depend on the inputs of individuals. It should be hastily emphasized that this societal reliance upon the individual is a phenomenon that can all too easily be transformed into a manipulation of the individual and her/his identity. In fact, the growth in the manipulation of individual identities by the state is all too apparent in much of the Western world. One notices this tendency particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States. At the same time, the identity of selves becomes increasingly differentiated in the sense that the self can and does assume a variety of forms and modes of representation, such as the 'racial', the national, the class, the religious, the gender and so on. This ability to manipulate one's own identity is greatly facilitated by the anonymity of Internet communications. Indeed self-identity is a crucial site of the complex relationship between homogeneity and heterogeneity, between sameness and difference. Here we find a paradoxical convergence of similarity and uniqueness. Specifically, individuals exhibit their uniqueness in terms of a common mode of presentation, most clearly manifested in fashion.

We move now to the international system – sometimes called the system of societies (Parsons 1966). Since the so-called end of the Cold War, we have witnessed an end to bipolarity. For much of the period since 1989 we have lived in a unipolar world dominated by the United States. However, in spite of the 'promise' of the European Union and the rise and rise of East Asia, the world now is to a large degree seen in terms of the West versus 'Terror'. Specifically, ever since the disaster of 9/11, in much of the world the major axis has been perceived as radical Islamists – sometimes called Jihadists. On the other hand, in spite of the seeming ability of the United States to act unilaterally, not merely has the Jihadist challenge rendered US domination less and less secure, consideration also has to be given to the rapidly expanding strength of China and, to a lesser degree, of Russia. In other words, the present international system is in a state of great and puzzling flux. Moreover, in this and in other respects, also including the life of individuals, we presently inhabit a world where millennialist views have great consequence. In particular reference to the international system we have a rapidly burgeoning discourse concerning the possible end of the world. Needless to say, environmental issues are much at stake, especially with reference to the international system.

Finally, we attend to the component of humanity. Here we find much increasing thematization and problematization. For example, the relationship between the human species and its natural and physical environment is clearly changing rapidly. Similarly the relationship between human and animal life is being thematized in a number of respects. For example, the globally expanding debate about the claims of creationists' and intelligent designists' conceptions of the origins and making of human life are in great confrontation with the inherited forms of Darwinian evolutionary theory. The very notion of human rights is also in a state of great flux, notably in the many rights which are being inserted into this realm. To the more conventional of human rights are being added a number of others, such as various categories of physical and psychological handicap, additional categories of gender and expanding rights for children and for the aged.

GLOCALIZATION

We turn now to an issue that has been intermittently invoked in the preceding pages. The concept of glocalization is one which has received considerable attention within the confines of business studies. Indeed, some claim that it is within that intellectual territory that the concept was first used. On the other hand, it has become with particular rapidity in recent years a relatively central concept in the discussion of globalization (Robertson 1992, 1995; Robertson and White 2003, 2004, 2005; Syngedouw 1989) in a much broader way. The problem that precipitated the introduction of the concept of glocalization was that concerning the relationship between the global and the local. Indeed, to this day it is not at all unusual to find the local being regarded as the opposite of the global. However, a few scholars began to see about 15 years ago that it was relatively fruitless to continue with this binary or antinomic line of thought. To put it very briefly, the alleged problem of the relationship between the local and the global could be overcome by a deceptively simple conceptual move. Rather than speaking of an inevitable tension between the local and the global it might be possible to think of the two as not being opposites but rather as being different sides of the same coin. We may illustrate this from the realm of business, although the same point could be made with reference to any other sphere of human activity. In order to produce goods for a market of diverse consumers, it is necessary for any producer, large or small, to adapt his/her product in some way to particular features of the envisaged set of consumers. Nevertheless, there is great variation in the degree to which such actions may straightforwardly be a form of adaptation or, on the other hand, more a matter of imposition. The latter important issue is addressed by Ritzer via his concept of grobalization (2004). The significant point here is that, far from seeing the local/global problem as one needing extensive academic discussion, real life producers as well as advertisers have simply *assumed* that coping 'globally' with 'local' circumstances is a necessary and an accomplishable project. Thus, the real sociological or anthropological question becomes that of examining the ways in which the relationship between the global and the local is *actually* undertaken.

Inherent in much of the discussion of globalization is the old sociological and anthropological concept of diffusion. Indeed, it could be argued that much of the literature on globalization involves a recasting of ideas from these two disciplines dating back, particularly in the case of diffusion, many years. In sociology, the concept of diffusion has involved concentration upon the ways in which ideas and practices spread (or do not spread) from one locale to another. (This approach was developed mainly in the field of rural sociology, notably in reference to the spread of agricultural innovations.) Broadly speaking, diffusion theory thus anticipated what we now call glocalization in very important respects. This is one of the reasons why some of the ideas produced in work on globalization are sometimes said to be exaggerated in their claims as to novelty.

There is a particularly significant set of ramifications of the concept of glocalization. This has to do with the ways in which one might sensibly answer the question: What happens after globalization? We have already indicated that globalization involves a strong shift in the direction of unicity, the world as one place.

Yet some people, very misleadingly, speak of 'a globalized world'. It should be clear, however, that there can be no criterion as to what a fully globalized world might look like. In this sense, a globalized world is an impossible world. Approaching this problem via the concept of glocalization, it can be seen that globalization is, in fact, inevitably and increasingly a *self-limiting* process. In other words, in so far as all ideas and practices have to adapt to contexts and niches, then in the sense of it being a homogenizing force, globalization really makes no sense. Globalization, when considered with due respect to the glocalizing aspects of diffusion, inherently limits itself. However, on the other hand, if we think more along the lines of Ritzer's grobalization, then globalization cannot be regarded as self-limiting since, as we see it, grobalization as a homogenizing force would be in theory a perpetually ongoing process until everything in the world has been enveloped by it.

Globalization and Global History

It is not surprising, given all that has been said about our now living in a global age (Albrow 1996), that the historical perspectives of our time are being greatly affected by this enhanced sense of globality (Robertson 1983). At any point in historical time, the matters which interest us about the past are very much framed by what are thought to be the main features and problems of the present. It is in this way that rather large number of historians and historically minded social scientists have become greatly concerned with the antecedents of this present globality – more specifically, a time of great connectivity and global consciousness. It is in this way that history as a discipline is being greatly affected by discussions within the framework of globalization analysis (Hopkins 2002). At the same time, there have been a number of developments among analysts of globalization leading to fairly widespread concern with the relationship between globalization and history or globalizations and histories, emphasizing that globalization is a narrower concept than that of 'mere' global change. Indeed, one of the most striking features of the highly compressed world in which we presently live is an often contentious rewriting of histories of ethnic groups, nation-states and regions in order that the members of such entities may have an 'authentic identity'. Clearly, the current almost worldwide concern on the part of not only intellectuals but also politicians and religious leaders with national identities is a very good example of this. Indeed, this interrelationship between globalization and concern with 'local identity' is a very good example of the apparently paradoxical relationship between the nation-state and processes of globalization, as was indicated earlier in this chapter.

There has been rather a lot of interest in mapping the different phases of globalization (e.g. Robertson 1992; Scholte 2005). This is indeed, transparently, a historical problem. Much more work needs to be, and to a considerable extent is being, done on this particular theme. This is ultimately leading, as has been indicated above, to new understandings of globalization, in spatial as well as temporal respects.

Conclusion

At the centre of our attempt to characterize globalization are the following. First, globalization consists primarily of two major directional tendencies, increasing global connectivity and increasing global consciousness. Consciousness does not imply consensus, merely a shared sense of the world as a whole. Second, globalization has a particular form, one which has been, to all intents and purposes, consummated by the founding of the United Nations organization. This means that, like the operations of the UN, globalization is focused upon four points of reference: nation-states; world politics; individuals; and humankind. Third, globalization is constituted by four major facets of human life – namely, the cultural, the social, the political and the economic. These dimensions are in reality heavily intertwined, one or two aspects being more prominent at any given time or place. For example, in the modern world the cultural and the economic are closely interpenetrative.

We have also highlighted the importance of not reifying globalization. Globalization is not a thing, not an 'it'. Recognition of its conceptual status, as opposed to its being an ontological matter, is of prime importance. This is vital in view of the global nature of the interest in, the discourse about and the analysis of globalization – a debate which brings ever sharper into focus what we have described as the inevitably contested nature of globalization talk. The very globality of this talk about globalization must surely lead to an appreciation of the impossibility of definitively answering, in an essentialistic way, the question, 'What is globalization?' This should *not*, however, be regarded as an open invitation for a proliferation of narratives of globalization as a matter of course. Rather the aim should be, with due regard for variation, both spatial and temporal, to aspire to the never-totally-attainable goal of locating an Archimedean fulcrum from which to view the world.

A particular concern here has been to push back the views of those who would prefer to swim in the seas of cultural relativism. Having said this, we do not deny in any way whatsoever that what have been called *critical* analyses of globalization are inappropriate. Far from it. The many injustices and forms of exploitation which are rampant in the world demand continuing attention. But we insist that the attainment of ever more sophisticated frameworks for the very discussion of globalization is required in order for effective and plausible critical analysis to take place. One of the dangers of undisciplined critique is that globalization simply becomes a negative buzzword, something to employ as a source of blame for each and every 'problem' on this planet – indeed, in the cosmos. In spite of much rigorous elaboration of globalization theory in recent years, we still unfortunately see a great deal of such indulgence around us.

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Chapter 3

The Cultural Construction of Neoliberal Globalization

Robert J. Antonio

> Honey, . . . I think the world is flat. (Friedman 2005a: 5)

Globalization is a multi-sided process, but the most intense debates over it have stressed its connections to a new global political economic regime with a distinct 'American template' – *neoliberalism* (e.g. Barber 1996; Gray 1998). Neoliberals champion free-market policy, deregulation and tax cuts. They seek to minimize health, education, welfare and other social spending, and they contend that limited government, free trade and global capitalism offer the only road to reduced poverty and increased prosperity. They hold that neoliberalism is the main engine of globalization *per se* and that the process's progress can be furthered only by fuller global implementation of their programme. Social Darwinism has been an important part of US political culture for more than a century; it has been reconstructed during major technological and financial bubbles. Neoliberals have revived it again (Foner 1998; Phillips 2002). They do not identify as social Darwinists, and their views usually lack the nineteenth-century version's racially tinted Malthusianism. They combine their highly optimistic claims about exceptional wealth creation, global opportunity and hybrid culture with emphases on the free market, unrestricted property rights, and self-reliance and opposition to welfare and redistribution. This chapter will explore the work of the highly influential globalization advocate, Thomas L. Friedman, with the aim of elaborating his tacit social theory, which maps and justifies neoliberal globalization.

New Age Globalization and the US-led New World Order

> . . . America was, and for now, still is, the world's greatest dream machine. (Friedman 2005a: 469)

By the late 1980s, the Thatcher–Reagan liberalization, new information-communication technologies, freer movement of goods, capital, images and people