General Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century, globalization became an all-purpose catchword in public and scholarly debate. Government officials could attribute their country’s economic woes to the onslaught of globalization, business leaders justified downsizing of their companies as necessary to prepare for globalization, environmentalists lamented the destructive impact of unrestrained globalization, and advocates for indigenous peoples blamed the threatened disappearance of small cultures on relentless globalization. As different parties used the term in disparate ways and the concept itself turned into a global symbol, its meaning became inflated. Globalization risked becoming a global cliché. One purpose of this reader is to show that, worn though it may be, the concept still usefully captures significant worldwide changes that have continued into the twenty-first century. Underlying the various nuances of the term, as used strategically by many groups, is a shared awareness that the world itself has changed. We think that awareness is correct. We are witnessing the consolidation of a new global society. The selections compiled in this reader aim to describe and explain the course of globalization and the shape of its outcomes.

What does globalization involve? Globalization refers to the fact that more people across large distances become connected in more and different ways. They can become connected very simply by doing or experiencing the same sort of thing. For example, Japanese cuisine “globalizes” when more people on different continents enjoy the taste of sushi. Since the nineteenth century soccer has become globalized as players and fans in many countries took an interest in the game. Though many people lack access to good medicine, parents the world over routinely decide to immunize their children against major diseases. These are instances of diffusion: ways of thinking, acting, or feeling spread widely. Such diffusion increased greatly in recent decades as the infrastructure for communication and transportation improved dramatically, connecting groups, institutions, and countries in new ways. The spread of sushi involved not just a shared consumer experience; it also made many American fishermen dependent on a Japanese market as tuna caught off the US coast is sold and shipped overseas. In soccer, the professional prospects of great players from South America depend on the demand from European teams. The health of many children depends on breakthroughs
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in distant laboratorie and an intricate global system for dispensing medication. Such links make more people more interdependent. These links are molded into new organizational forms as regional institutions go global or new ones take shape on the world stage. For example, international law governs who can fish in coastal waters, and the World Trade Organization handles disputes between members, including the USA and Japan. FIFA is an international nongovernmental organization that sets the rules of soccer and organizes major tournaments such as the World Cup. The World Health Organization, as well as more informal networks of professionals and volunteers, organizes campaigns to address major health threats.

Such institutions, which have emerged in many areas of human activity, reflect increasingly common knowledge and awareness. Eating sushi, watching the World Cup, and getting a shot involve elements of world culture – the meaning of sushi, the application of the offside rule, or the reason for immunization are known to consumers, fans, and patients regardless of their location. Even if they do not know the larger structures, their everyday life is nevertheless embedded in a world culture that transcends their village, town, or country. As people become more intricately connected to many others across large distances – not all people to the same extent, of course – the world is becoming a “single place.” Globalization thus involves growing diffusion, expanding interdependence, more transnational institutions, and an emerging world culture and consciousness – all aspects of the connectedness at the heart of globalization, all elements of the world society globalization is creating.

Is globalization new? Many scholars point to sixteenth-century Europe as the original source of globalization. After all, the Europeans established worldwide trade connections on their own terms, brought their culture to different regions by settling vast areas, and defined the ways in which different peoples were to interact with each other. Economically and culturally, the modern world system already existed nearly five centuries ago. Others point to the late nineteenth century as a period of intense globalization, when millions migrated, trade greatly expanded, and new norms and organizations came to govern international conduct. At the beginning of the twentieth century, such scholars would stress, the movement of people, goods, and finance across national borders was at least as free and significant as it is today.

We agree that globalization has been happening for a long time. We also agree that specific features of world society have their roots in earlier periods. We add, however, that the second half of the twentieth century was a significant period of globalization in its own right. World War II gave globalization a new impetus. Obscured by Cold War divisions, the transformation of world society in the past six decades – in terms of linkages, institutions, and culture and consciousness – was nevertheless profound. This reader includes selections from scholars skeptical of this claim, but it also illustrates by many examples that globalization has entered a new phase.

Is globalization driven by the expanding market? The pursuit of economic opportunity has long sent merchants around the globe, and powerful states have supported their profit-seeking activities. Capitalism knows no bounds, as Marx noted more than a century ago. Marx expected the European economy to become a truly global system, and in many ways it has. In recent years, the integration of financial markets has added a new kind of interdependence. To us, this does not mean that globalization is first and foremost an economic project. While an economic system operating along capital-
ist lines now encompases most regions of the world, and economic motives always have been important in creating global linkages, globalization takes place in many spheres for many reasons. The economy may be a driving force in creating global change in some periods, but its effects depend on what happens outside of world markets. To understand the world economy, then, one also needs to understand world society. Accordingly, this reader presents a comprehensive picture of globalization, covering economic, political, cultural, and experiential dimensions.

*Does globalization make the world more homogeneous?* This question would seem to answer itself: If certain activities or institutions become global, they must displace existing, locally variable activities and institutions. If there are more global linkages, global institutions, and global values, presumably this means that more people will have more in common. To many critics of globalization, this seemingly neutral description is nefarious. Globalization is the work of the West, they argue. Markets set western rules for economic activity; one kind of western state has taken hold around the world; by controlling information flows, western media companies shape global consciousness; the popular culture of “McWorld” is of mostly western origin. Globalization thus entails cultural imperialism.

We agree that some things become more similar around the world as globalization proceeds. There is only one World Trade Organization and it enforces one set of trade rules; there is only one kind of bureaucratic state that societies can legitimately adopt. But we do not think this leads to a homogeneous world, for three reasons. First, general rules and models are interpreted in light of local circumstances. Thus, regions respond to similar economic constraints in different ways; countries still have great leeway in structuring their own policies; the same television program means different things to different audiences; McDonald’s adapts its menu and marketing to local tastes. Second, growing similarity provokes reactions. Advocates for many cultures seek to protect their heritage or assert their identity; witness the efforts of fundamentalists to reinstate what they consider orthodoxy, the actions of indigenous peoples to claim their right to cultural survival, and the attempt of Asian leaders to put forth a distinctive Asian model of human rights. Third, cultural and political differences have themselves become globally valid. The notion that people and countries are entitled to their particularity or distinctiveness is itself part of global culture. The tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity is integral to globalization, and this reader illustrates it in several ways.

*Does globalization determine local events?* In recent years, Afghan girls returned to school after the USA defeated the Taliban regime; a war crimes tribunal in the Hague handed down convictions for atrocities committed during the war in Bosnia; African countries struggled to achieve progress as parts of their educated classes succumbed to AIDS; and melting glaciers raised concern about the impact of global warming. Around the world, local events bear the imprint of global processes. It would be easy to infer that local autonomy and local tradition must fall by the wayside, but globalization is not a one-way street. To be sure, local and global events become more and more intertwined, as illustrated by the way a global “war on terror” enhances the educational opportunities of some Muslim women, by the role of global institutions in dealing with the aftermath of major regional conflicts, by the domestic reverberations of a global epidemic, and by the way global climate change alters the habitat of
specific groups. But the local feeds into the global as well. Both their own desires and
the Taliban’s failures helped to change the fortunes of Afghan women; the Bosnian
war provoked the innovative establishment of a war crimes tribunal to vindicate global
principles; domestic hesitations and constraints contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS
in many countries; global warming results from the release of greenhouse gases in
specific manufacturing centers and high-consumption countries. Yet, even if globali-
ization does not necessarily “determine” local events, there is no escaping it. As world
society integrates, individuals become conscious of being enveloped in global net-
works, subject to global forces, governed by global rules. Some of our selections con-
cretely illustrate this local–global connection.

Is globalization harmful? Implicit in the questions we have raised is a widespread
sense that globalization may be harmful to the well-being of individuals, countries,
and cultures. If the market is the driving force in globalization, many fear, it is bound
to exacerbate inequality by creating winners and losers. If globalization makes the
world more homogeneous, others fear, many cultures are in trouble. Loss of local
autonomy may mean that more people will be vulnerable to economic swings, envi-
ronmental degradation, and epidemics. For these and other reasons, globalization has
become an extremely contentious process. Indeed, the debate about the merits and
direction of globalization is itself an important component of global culture. As we
already indicated above, we are skeptical of the most sweeping critiques of globali-
zation. But our purpose in this reader is not to offer definitive judgments; the subject is
too complex for a clear-cut assessment in any case. Rather, we present a variety of
perspectives that convey the thrust of actual debates and ongoing research so that
readers can understand the varied consequences of globalization and make their own
informed judgments.

What does globalization mean? Activists use the term in denouncing global injustice.
Politicians invoke it to explain the problems they face. Academics employ it to describe
important trends. Even within these various groups, people disagree. As a result, glo-
balization has different meanings to different groups. Not surprisingly, this often
provokes complaints that the concept is too fuzzy. However, we detect two common
meanings. The simple definition we gave above captures one of these: globalization is
the set of processes by which more people become connected in more and different
ways across ever greater distances. A more academic version of this idea is to equate
globalization with “deterritorialization,” the process in which the constraints of physi-
cal space lose their hold on social relations. This is a generic definition since it captures
a wide variety of possible relations. When viewers in India enjoy reality TV shows that
originate in Europe, or when Americans buy baby products made in China, or when
Iran plays against Angola in the World Cup, these are all instances of generic globali-
zation. Used in this way, the concept is analytically clear and applicable in many contexts.
It does not favor a particular theory or call for a particular judgment.

A second kind of definition is more specific. It identifies globalization with the
process by which capitalism expands across the globe as powerful economic actors
seek profit in a global market and impose their rules everywhere. Though sometimes
invoked by defenders of globalization, it is a critical definition that usually serves to
challenge the process it tries to capture. Through this lens, generic globalization looks
a little different – the export of TV-show formats as cultural commodities is driven by
media producers in core markets, Chinese workers making baby products are exploited as nodes in a global commodity chain, and the World Cup has turned into a marketing event for multinational shoe companies and an audition for players seeking professional advancement. This lens filters out much of what the generic view includes but also sharpens the focus, in a way that especially suits contemporary critics of capitalist market society.

*The Globalization Reader* aims to convey the complexity, importance, and contentiousness of globalization. This is an exciting time in social science scholarship, as many creative minds try to discern the outlines of a new era. The reader includes some of their best work. But making sense of globalization is not just a task for scholars and students. It is a public concern. We hope this reader will assist a diverse audience in understanding the patterns and problems of globalization, which is likely to remain a dominant concern of the twenty-first century.

**Note on Selections**

Footnotes, citations, and sources of quoted passages have been excised. Omitted text is indicated by "[...]."