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What Is Globalization?

JIM DATOR

“Globalization” and its twin sister “anti-globalization” rank high among the favorite and most contested concepts of the moment. The words appear with many different meanings and in many different contexts in newspapers, magazines, television commentary, and political-economic discourse everywhere. “Globalization” is itself globalized.

For us here, globalization means not only the worldwide capitalist system called “neoliberalism,” but also the full range of forces and factors that are sweeping across the globe totally unhindered, or barely hindered, by the boundaries and policies of the nation-state. Thus factors in globalization include jet planes, supertankers, and container ships; migratory labor; electronic and genetic communication technologies; anthropogenic global climate change; air, water, and ground pollution; new and revived diseases; religions; criminal and terrorist activities and their countervailing state-terrorist, police, and paramilitary forces; mass media; popular culture; and sports. Globalization also includes the spread of certain ideas, values, and practices, such as “democracy” and “human rights,” and “best practices” in all of the factors listed above. All of these are also forces of globalization that challenge conventional theories and methods of governance, driving some people to ecstasy and others to despair about the future.

Globalization is not new. It is as old as humanity, indeed, older. Joseph Nye says,

The oldest form of globalization is environmental: climate change has affected the ebb and flow of human populations for millions of years. Migration is a long-standing global phenomenon. The human species began to leave its place of origins, Africa, about 1.25 million years ago and reached the Americas sometime between 30,000 and 13,000 years ago. One of the most important [forms] of globalization is biological. The first smallpox epidemic is recorded in Egypt in 1350 B.C. It

reached China in 49 A.D., Europe after 700, the Americas in 1520, and Australia in 1789. The plague or Black Death originated in Asia, but spread [and] killed a quarter to a third of the population of Europe between 1346 and 1352. When Europeans journeyed to the New World in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries they carried pathogens that destroyed up to 95 percent of the indigenous population.¹

Historically, the speed and extent of globalization has increased with each change in modes of transportation and of communication. The initial spread of humans across the globe, whether “out of Africa” alone or by the coming together of independently evolved human communities, was no faster than a human could walk or a raft could drift. Then, from the domestication/invention and diffusion of the horse (and other beasts of burden) and the wheel, to oceangoing canoes, to sailing ships, to steamships, to railroads and automobiles, to propeller and then jet airplanes, the speed and ease of transportation has increased, and so the limitations of distance imposed by earlier technologies have decreased.

Similarly, the inventions of speech, writing, the printing press, the telegraph, the telephone, radio, motion pictures, television, satellites, computer networks, cell phones, and the World Wide Web each also increased the speed and scope of global communication, minimizing limitations of the earlier technologies and creating new social possibilities and problems.

But the fundamental processes underlying each of these technologies were not new. With each new level of technology, it may have seemed new to those experiencing it because of the transforming qualities of each change in mode of transportation and communication. So many of the current concerns about “globalization” are in fact very old when looked at historically, even though the people actually experiencing them now (not having been around five hundred or five thousand years ago) cannot be blamed for their feelings of fear or of exhilaration. Please see Walt Anderson’s *Further Thoughts*, “From the Local to the Global,” on page 17.

Later in this book we will look specifically at the way ideas of governance spread globally before and during the modern age in order to remind ourselves that the neoliberal ideas and policies in back of the New Public Management, for example, are simply the most recent of a long line of globalized governance “best practices” that might well be in the process of being superceded by new ideas about the domestic “security state” and the New American Empire spawned by fears of global terrorism.

Until September 11, 2001, and America’s response after March 19, 2003,² it was possible to imagine that there was something new about recent aspects of globalization associated primarily with the collapse of communism as a serious alternative to global capitalism. For a short period of time, it appeared that

humanity had arrived at the “End of History”³ where there was only one global economic ideology supported by one set of global political superpowers, facilitated by oligopolistically controlled global media all singing versions of the same global economic song.

The singing continues, but the song is now quite different from what it was only a few years earlier. Now, the United States seems bent on imposing its version of globalization on everyone whether they like it or not, while at the same time resisting many forms of globalization it once embraced, arguing that they thwart its narrowly defined national interests. In contrast, parts of Europe and Asia still hold high the flag of a more temperate form of economic globalization that the United States seems to reject.

This comment reminds us again that globalization is much, much more than a set of economic factors alone (more than the global flow of capital and goods) and more even than the transborder flow of labor, though that latter aspect of globalization is generally underappreciated. Globalization is also the flow of genes (of genetic information), the flow of popular culture and of new ideas, and the flow of environmental problems including diseases.

There is very little that is not touched by and part of the globalization process, including most of the anti-globalization forces who could not organize nearly as effectively against globalization were it not for all of the globalizing technologies and ideologies they use to fight it. This is the ultimate paradox: anti-globalization is a major part of globalization. “Terrorism” and state terrorism in response have made this even clearer.

Attitudes toward globalization thus are highly fickle. They are strongly influenced by current events. The year I was being recruited to join the University of Hawai‘i (1968) was the first year that the number of people arriving by airplane was greater than the number arriving by ship. Everyone in Hawai‘i then was accustomed to organizing their lives around boat days, when the great steamships arrived with new people and new goods and new information about the outside world. Our only direct and immediate contact then came via very expensive and cumbersome telephone connections and telegraph. Radio and TV were all local. Routine direct-satellite broadcast of live TV came a few years after I arrived. Then came direct-dial long-distance telephone. And then the fax.

I was the first civilian on the islands to use what came to be known as “e-mail” in the late 1970s. I had the good fortune to be invited to participate in an experiment conducted by Murray Turoff of the New Jersey Institute of Technology called EIES (Electronic Information Exchange System). Using a Texas Instruments workstation connected with an acoustic coupler as a phone modem to a computer in New Jersey and a printer (there was no electronic memory whatsoever) to “echo” the comments, I was able to participate in synchronous or asynchronous typed discussions with scholars spread across the globe.

As a consequence, I knew about developments well in advance of most of my colleagues in Hawai'i whose main source of information was printed material flown—and often floated—in well after the events. I thus participated in most aspects of the emergence of what is now the World Wide Web and learned very early on what a powerful, globalizing tool it could be. Without it, it would have been almost impossible for me to be as globally involved as I am while also living in Hawai'i, one of the most geographically remote spots on Earth.

Another important, but frequently overlooked, technology that facilitated my globalization was the credit card, which not only allowed me to spend money I did not have, and never would, but eventually to do so almost everywhere in the world.

I was not isolated at all. I was increasingly globalized and globally connected. My friends and neighbors were not simply those people physically around me, but increasingly spread all over the world. During the 1980s and 1990s, I became the secretary general and then the president of the World Futures Studies Federation. For two decades, because of advances in information and transportation technologies, I spent much more of my time, physically and emotionally, outside of Hawai'i and the rest of the United States than I spent in them.

So I now by no means feel myself to be primarily an American. I am an American by citizenship and by fundamental culture and language, to be sure. But I have spent far too much of my time deeply engaged in the lives of non-Americans to feel exclusive loyalty to any one country. I have, for better or worse, become profoundly globalized over my lifetime.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, globalization was viewed as inevitable and highly desirable by many leaders in Asia. It was mainly a question of how soon it might come and how they might be among the first to take advantage of it. There were critics of course, but they were a distinct minority. Almost everyone was singing the neoliberal song with full voice and chorus. But then the Asian economic crisis occurred in 1997–1998, and there was a vast outpouring of criticisms of globalization throughout Asia. While, of course, many people continued to support globalization without restraint, many more began urging caution and reconsideration, suggesting that Asian communities might want to find a different, an “Asian,” way.

The collapse of the fondest dreams of the so-called “dot-com” New Economy in 2000 led many more people (especially in North America) to reevaluate the desirability and inevitability (or at least the timing) of globalization. Shortly after assuming the presidency, George W. Bush began a series of actions that suggested his administration did not believe in “globalization” with quite the fervor one might expect of a Republican. He began by abrogating treaties, failing to sign international agreements, and enacting protectionist policies for domestic agri-

cultural and industrial protection that seemed to fly in the face of the neoliberal version of globalization.

Then, with the events of September 11, 2001, the concerns of what was originally termed a “strange alliance” of a few labor unions, environmentalists, students, and America First! patriots in the United States (who first made major headlines at the anti-WTO [World Trade Organization] demonstrations in Seattle in 1997) suddenly lurched forward in the consciousness of most Americans. Foreigners of all stripes found it increasingly difficult to get into the United States even to attend scientific conferences. Foreigners were also imprisoned without arraignment or trial. American citizens were stripped of long-held fundamental rights. “Security” was said to take precedence over “trade,” and intrusive inspections of imports began. French fries were renamed and Dom Perignon champagne poured down toilets.

Then, after a series of vain attempts to find and punish the apparent sponsors of 9/11, Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaida, the United States turned its vengeance on Iraq and, acting without significant global or even regional support, launched an unprovoked attack on a country that even the American president had to admit had nothing to do with the 9/11 events but would be punished anyway. So what is next? What events or trends might shape further views and actions for or against globalization by the time you read these words?

FURTHER THOUGHTS

From the Local to the Global

Walt Anderson

MANAGEMENT THEORISTS SAY that executives fall into one or another of three categories: some have an ability to survey the grand scheme of things. Others lack that kind of vision but are nevertheless proficient at understanding the nuts-and-bolts realities of how things work at the lowest levels of the organization. The best and most effective are those who have learned to “helicopter,” integrating a vision of the big picture with practical application. Today it has become necessary (not only for executives, but also for ordinary people) to cultivate the third ability.

There was a time, not so long ago, when local knowledge and traditional skills (in such areas as agriculture, hunting, and crafts) were all that most people needed. The new discoveries of explorers, scientists, and inventors did little to alter the conditions or the tempo of everyday village, pastoral, or tribal life. That is no longer the case. Increasingly, all people everywhere are being drawn into an interconnected global civilization, impacted by technological changes and global forces (economic, political, cultural, biological) that can touch their lives

in many ways: a farmer may find that global climate change requires him to change his practices. A woman in a tribal community may find that she has internationally recognized rights that give her the power to make decisions about her reproductive life.

People continue to be members of local communities, but they are also awakening (sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly) to the reality of being members of larger systems and networks of many kinds and learning how important the things that happen in those larger systems may be to them. In this world of open systems, local knowledge is not enough, certainly not enough to recognize the full potentialities of human life, and sometimes not even enough for survival.

Notes

1. Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Introduction," in *Governance in a Globalizing World*, ed. Joseph S. Nye and John D. Donahue (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 3.

2. On this date, the United States launched a "preemptive" war against Iraq.

3. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).