



GEORGE RITZER and
PAUL DEAN

GLOBALIZATION | A BASIC TEXT

Second Edition

WILEY Blackwell

GLOBALIZATION

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PAUL DEAN**

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To Bodhi Axel Ritzer, With Much Love and Great Hope
for a Better World in Your Future
(GR)

To Tia Shields Dean, My Wonderful and Caring Wife who has Helped to Make
this Book and so Much More Possible
(PD)



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ABOUT THE WEBSITE

The *Globalization: A Basic Text, Second Edition*, companion website includes a number of resources created by the author that you will find helpful.

www.wiley.com/go/ritzer/globalization



FOR STUDENTS

- Student Study Guide
- Chapter Summaries
- Additional Readings
- Website Links
- Discussion Questions
- Additional Questions



FOR INSTRUCTORS

- Teaching Notes
- Discussion Question Answer Frames
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- PowerPoint Teaching Slides



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PREFACE

As we revise this preface in July, 2014, we are struck by how much the events of the day both reflect, and are profoundly changing, the process of globalization. For example, we write this only hours before watching Lionel Messi and Argentina take on the Netherlands in the World Cup – the most famous *global* sporting event. Football (or soccer, as it is known in the United States) is the most played and most watched sport around the world. Football fandom also reflects a global culture and, with FIFA as its governing body, it has a global organizational structure.

It has been particularly fascinating to watch global events unfold as we were writing the second edition of this book. For instance, the first edition was published in the midst of the Great Recession. The ways in which economic processes (e.g. mortgage failures, credit freezes, the failure of legendary financial firms and banks), largely originating in the US, flowed around the world in relatively short order was breathtaking. As the crisis deepened and widened, political unrest grew, and the future of the global economy was uncertain. As of this writing, the global economy has stabilized but it has not yet rebounded to its pre-recessionary levels for many Americans and for many others in most parts of the world. A great number of scholars and activists argued that it was neoliberal policy (see Chapter 4) that led to the Great Recession, and as the economic turmoil wore on, some predicted its demise. Now, having emerged from the Great Recession, it is clear that neoliberalism remains a strong force in both global politics and the global economy.

Numerous recent events have also profoundly changed the process of globalization. For example, global climate change is dramatically affecting economic processes and flows of people. Tens of thousands of people are losing their homes to rising sea levels, and are being displaced to other countries, and creating new conflicts. Environmental problems flow seamlessly across national borders and many of these problems, such as global warming and deforestation, have come to affect the entire planet. Many previous skeptics are finally acknowledging human-caused global warming, even though governments around the world continue dragging their feet on combatting the problem (current scientific evidence is even more definitive than it was when the first edition was published).

Another area that is experiencing rapid developments, and is dramatically shaping globalization, is the various global high-tech flows (see Chapter 9). This encompasses much more than the explosive growth of social networking sites (e.g. Facebook) and other social media (e.g. Twitter), but the ways in which technological flows are monitored, governed, and used to promote other types of change. Through the efforts of Edward Snowden and Wikileaks, we now know more about how governments and corporations are spying on their citizens and customers. Our understanding of this surveillance has also facilitated changes in how the Internet is governed, marking a shift from a US-dominated framework to a more global (and potentially fragmented) governance system. Such high-tech flows have also been used by activists promoting political change, as was seen in the so-called “Twitter Revolution” in much of the Arab world.

The changes noted above illustrate some ways in which this second edition has been revised, and suggest that such topics will continue to be further revisited as other global processes become more apparent. Nonetheless, the basic foci, perspectives, concepts, and theories offered here apply to whatever changes are occurring in, and are in store for, globalization. Change is nothing new to globalization, indeed it could be argued that change, including cataclysmic events and changes (the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1919, the Great Depression, WW II), is an integral part of it. More recently, we have seen a variety of economic crises in, for example, Asia, Russia, and Argentina, that are also part of the process of globalization. Any useful perspective on globalization must be able to help us better understand such occurrences.

Writing a general overview of globalization has been, to put it mildly, a daunting task. It is almost literally about everything – every place, every thing, everybody, and virtually every field of study. It also requires a sense of a wide expanse of history and of what it is about the present “global age” that differentiates it from epochs that came before it. We have been involved in textbooks before, including one that covers all of classical and contemporary sociological theory, but none has been more challenging than this one. Beyond the sheer magnitude of what needs to be covered, there is the fact that globalization, at least in its present form, is quite new, with the term itself entering the lexicon only three decades ago. As a relatively new phenomenon, it is constantly changing, as are conceptions of it. With few precedents to rely on, we have had to “invent” an approach to globalization (based on major theoretical sources), as well as create a structure for the book that encompasses most of the major topics and issues in globalization today. This is difficult enough, but it is made far more difficult by the fact that global changes (e.g. the price of that all-important commodity, oil; the landscape of global protests and conflict) occur constantly.

This is related to the issue of sources for this book, which include popular books (e.g. those of Thomas Friedman, although we are highly critical of his work), newspapers, magazines, and websites. These are atypical sources for a textbook designed to offer an overview of what we know about a field from a scholarly point of view. However, globalization occurs in the real world and continues apace in that world. Such occurrences either do not find their way into academic works or do not do so for years after they have happened. Thus, in order to be up to date – and it is important that a text on globalization be current – this book relies, in part, on a variety of popular sources. Popular sources also serve the function of providing down-to-earth, real-world examples and case studies of globalization. They serve to make globalization less abstract.

However, because it is an academic text, this book relies far more on scholarly work, especially journal articles and academic monographs of various types. It is heavily referenced and the many entries in the References section at the end of the book (as well as suggested readings at the end of each chapter) provide students with an important resource should they wish to learn more about the many topics covered in this book.

Another challenge has been to bring together these popular and academic sources in a coherent overview of globalization and what we know about it. A related challenge is the need to write a book that is not only accessible, useful, and of interest to undergraduates (the main audience for this book), but also of use to beginning graduate students and even scholars looking for a book that gives them an overview of the field, its major topics, and key works in the area. We have tried to deal with a good portion of the increasingly voluminous scholarly work on globalization, but in a student-friendly way. We have also sought to use many examples to make the discussion both more interesting and more relevant to the student reader.

We have sought to put together a coherent overview of globalization based on a theoretical orientation (increasing liquidity as the core of today's global world) and a conceptual apparatus ("flows," "barriers," etc.) developed in the first chapter. The rest of the book looks at globalization through the lens of that perspective and those concepts. Great emphasis has been placed throughout on key concepts and "thick" descriptions of important aspects of globalization. We have tried not to get bogged down in the text itself with data and statistics on globalization (which are highly fluid and often open to question), but we have included a number of maps designed to summarize, in a highly visual way, important aspects of the data related to globalization.

The focus here, as suggested above, is on the flows among and between areas of the world (as well as barriers to them). That means that the focus is not on the areas themselves – the global North and South, the nation-states of the world, regions, etc. – but rather that which flows among and between them. Nevertheless, all of those areas come up often in these pages, if for no other reason than that they are often the beginning or end-point of various flows. We have tried to cover many areas of the world and nation-states in these pages, but the US looms large in this discussion for several reasons. First, it is the world leader in being both the source of many global flows and the recipient these days of many more, and much heavier, flows (of goods from China, etc.). Second, we are led by both its historical dominance and contemporary importance to a focus on the role of the US in globalization (although recent significant declines lead to the notion that we are now entering the "post-American" age). Third, the predispositions, and the resources at the disposal, of two American authors lead to a focus on the US, albeit one that is at many points highly critical of it and its role in globalization. Although there is a great deal of attention on the US, the reader's focus should be on the flows and barriers which are found throughout the world and are of general importance globally.

Theory plays a prominent role in this analysis, not only in the framework developed in Chapter 1 and used throughout the book, but also in a number of specific chapters. These include theories of imperialism, colonialism, development, Americanization (and anti-Americanism) in Chapter 3, neoliberalism in Chapter 4, theories of cultural differentialism, convergence, and hybridization in Chapter 8, and global inequality in Chapters 13 and 14. We have worked hard to make these theories accessible and to relate them to more down-to-earth examples.

While this is a textbook on globalization, there are some key themes that run through the book. One relates, as mentioned above, to the increasing fluidity of the contemporary global age and how much more fluid it is than previous epochs. Related to this is the similarly metaphorical idea that virtually everything in the contemporary world (things, people, ideas, etc.) is "lighter" than it has ever been. In the past, all of those things were quite "heavy" and difficult to move, especially globally, but that is increasingly less the case. Because things are lighter, more fluid, they can move about the globe more easily and much more quickly. However, it is also the case that many past structural barriers remain in place and many others are being created all the time to stem various global flows (e.g. the wall between Israel and the West Bank and the more recently constructed border fence between Greece and Turkey). Thus, one of the perspectives we would like the reader to come away with after reading this book is of the ongoing relationship between flows and barriers in the global world.

Another key theme is that globalization does *not* equal economic globalization. All too often there is a tendency to reduce globalization to economic globalization. While economic

globalization is important, perhaps even the most important aspect of globalization, there is much more to the latter than its economic aspects. While we devote two chapters (6 and 7) to economic globalization, attention is devoted to many other aspects of globalization (e.g. political, cultural, technological, demographic, environmental, criminal, inequalities, and so on) throughout the book. In their totality, these other topics receive far more attention than economics (although, to be fair, all of the other topics have economic aspects, causes, and consequences).

One of the reasons that the multidimensionality of globalization is accorded so much emphasis here is frustration over the near-exclusive focus on economic globalization by both scholars and laypeople. Another is our concern when we hear people say that globalization is not good for “us” and we need to stop, or at least contain, it. We always ask them *which* globalization they want to stop or contain. Do they want to limit or stop the flow of inexpensive imports from China and on offer at Wal-Mart? Of life-saving pharmaceuticals? Of illegal drugs? Of participation in, or the televising of, the Olympics? Of global prohibitions against the use of landmines? Of oil and water? Of online social networking? Of terrorists? Of tourism? Of pollutants? The point is that one might be opposed to some of these (and other) forms of globalization, but no one is, or could be, opposed to all the myriad forms of globalization.

A number of important concepts are introduced throughout this book. Definitions of those concepts in bold typeface are found not only in the text, but also in the glossary at the end of the book, as well as often more briefly in boxes in the margins of the text.

There are a number of people to thank for their help in the years of work involved in writing this book. First, we would like to thank a number of graduate assistants including Nathan Jurgenson, Jillet Sam, and Michelle Smirnova, who assisted on the first edition of the book. Michelle was especially helpful in the early stages of the writing of this book, while Nathan and Jillet were of great help in the later stages in assisting the first author in getting the manuscript to the publisher. Nathan ably handled the inclusion of the many maps and Jillet was invaluable in hunting down missing sources and information. We would also like to thank the graduate students in various seminars on globalization, especially those in the fall 2008 seminar who read a draft of the first edition and offered numerous ideas on improving it. Then there are the three anonymous reviewers who offered very useful comments on revising this book for its second edition. The people associated with Wiley-Blackwell, including Louise Spencely, developmental editor Claire Cameron, and especially Ben Thatcher, have been extraordinarily helpful. Ben assisted us throughout the entire revision for the second edition, including in the arduous process of securing copyrights. Finally, we would like to thank our long-time editor at Wiley-Blackwell, Justin Vaughan, who has been deeply involved in this project, as well as many others already published or in the works. We owe him much gratitude, including for taking the first author “punting” in Oxford – a truly global and unforgettable experience.

GLOBALIZATION I

LIQUIDS, FLOWS, AND STRUCTURES

.....

Some of the Basics

From Solids to Liquids (to Gases)

- Solids
- Liquids and gases

Flows

- Types of flows

Heavy, Light, Weightless

Heavy Structures That Expedite Flows

Heavy Structures as Barriers to Flows

Subtler Structural Barriers

On the Increasing Ubiquity of Global Flows and Structures

Thinking About Global Flows and Structures

Chapter Summary

.....

Globalization¹ is increasingly omnipresent. We are living in *a* – or even *the* – “global age” (Albrow 1996). Globalization is clearly a very important change; it can even be argued (Bauman 2003) that it is *the most important change in human history*.² This is reflected in many domains, but particularly in social relationships and social structures,³ especially those that are widely dispersed geographically. “In the era of globalization. . . shared humanity face[s] *the most fateful* of the many fateful steps” it has made in its long history (Bauman 2003: 156, italics added).

The following is the definition of globalization⁴ to be used in this book (note that all of the italicized terms will be discussed in this chapter):

Globalization:
Transplanetary
process(es)
involving
increasing
liquidity and
growing
multidirectional
flows as well as
the structures
they encounter
and create.

globalization is a transplanetary *process* or set of *processes* involving increasing *liquidity* and the growing multidirectional *flows* of people, objects, places and information as well as the *structures* they encounter and create that are *barriers* to, or *expedite*, those flows . . .⁵

In contrast to many other definitions of globalization, this one does *not* assume that greater integration is an inevitable component of globalization. That is, globalization can bring with it greater integration (especially when things flow easily), but it can also serve to reduce the level of integration (when structures are erected that successfully block flows).



SOME OF THE BASICS

In spite of the focus in this book on globalization, there are many scholars who do not accept the idea that we live in a global age (see Chapter 2). Nevertheless, this book embraces, and operates from, a “globalist” perspective (Hirst and Thompson 1999) – globalization is a reality. In fact, globalization is of such great importance that the era in which we live should be labeled the “global age.”

Debates about globalization are one of the reasons that there is undoubtedly no topic today more difficult to get one’s head around, let alone to master, than globalization. However, of far greater importance are the sheer magnitude, diversity, and complexity of the process of globalization which involves almost everyone, everything, and every place and each in innumerable ways. (The concept of **globality** refers to the condition [in this case omnipresence] resulting from the process of globalization [Scholte 2004].)

For example, this book is being written by two Americans; our editor and copy-editor are in England; the development editor was in Canada; reviewers are from four continents; the book is printed in Singapore and distributed by the publisher throughout much of the world; and you might be reading it today on a plane en route from Vladivostok to Shanghai. Further, if it follows the pattern of many of our other books, it may well be translated into Russian, Chinese, and many other languages. This book is also available for Amazon’s wireless portable reading device, Kindle. This would make the book highly liquid since it would be possible for it to be downloaded anywhere in the world at any time.

Before proceeding to the next section, a note is needed on the use of **metaphors** (Brown 1989), which will occupy a prominent place in the ensuing discussion. A metaphor involves the use of one term to better help us understand another term. Thus in the next section, we will use the metaphor of a “solid” to describe epochs before the era of globalization.⁶ Similarly, the global world will be described as being “liquid.” The use of such metaphors is designed to give the reader a better and a more vivid sense of the global age and how it differs from prior epochs.

Globality:
Omnipresence
of the process
of globalization.

Metaphors:
Use of one
term to help
us better
understand
another.



FROM SOLIDS TO LIQUIDS (TO GASES)

SOLIDS

Prior to the current epoch of globalization (and as we will see, to most observers there *was* a previous global epoch [see Chapter 2], if not many previous epochs, of globalization), it could be argued that one of the things that characterized people, things, information, places, and much else was their greater **solidity**. That is, all of them tended to be hard or to harden (metaphorically, figuratively, not literally, of course) over time and therefore, among other things, to remain largely in place. As a result, people either did not go anywhere or they did not venture very far from where they were born and raised; their social relationships were restricted to those who were nearby. Much the same could be said of most objects (tools, food, and so on) which tended to be used where they were produced. The solidity of most material manifestations of information – stone tablets, newspapers, magazines, books, and so on – also made them at least somewhat difficult to move very far. Furthermore, since people didn't move very far, neither did information. Places were not only quite solid and immovable, but they tended to confront solid natural (mountains, rivers, oceans) and humanly constructed (walls, gates) barriers that made it difficult for people and things to exit or to enter.

Above all, solidity describes a world in which barriers exist and are erected to prevent the free movement of all sorts of things. It was the nation-state that was most likely to create these “solid” barriers (for example, walls [e.g. the Great Wall of China; the wall between Israel and the West Bank], border gates, and guards), and the state itself grew increasingly solid as it resisted change. For much of the twentieth century this was epitomized by the Soviet Union and its satellite states which sought to erect any number of barriers in order to keep all sorts of things out *and* in (especially a disaffected population). With the passage of time, the Soviet Union grew increasingly sclerotic. The best example of this solidity was the erection (beginning in 1961), and maintenance, of the Berlin Wall in order to keep East Berliners in and Western influences out. There was a more fluid relationship between East and West Berlin prior to the erection of the wall, but that fluidity was seen in the East as being disadvantageous, even dangerous. Once the Wall was erected, relations between West and East Berlin were virtually frozen in place – they solidified – and there was comparatively little movement of anything between them.

The Wall, to say nothing of East Germany and the Soviet Union, are long gone and with them many of the most extreme forms of solidity brought into existence by the Cold War. Nonetheless, solid structures remain – e.g. the nation-state and its border and customs controls – and there are ever-present calls for the creation of new, and new types, of solid structures. Thus, in many parts of Europe there are demands for more barriers to authorized and unauthorized immigration. This has reached an extreme in the US with concern over undocumented Mexican (and other Latin American) immigrants leading to the erection of an enormous fence between the two countries. Thus, solidity is far from dead in the contemporary world. It is very often the case that demands for new forms of solidity are the result of increased fluidity. However, a strong case can, and will, be made that it is fluidity that is more characteristic of today's world, especially in terms of globalization.

Of course, people were *never* so solid that they were totally immobile or stuck completely in a given place (a few people were able to escape East Berlin in spite of the Wall and many

Solidity: People, things, information, and places “harden” over time and therefore have limited mobility.

would still be able to enter the US without documentation even if a fence on the Mexican border were to be completed), and this was especially true of the elite members of any society. Elites were (and are) better able to move about and that ability increased with advances in transportation technology. Commodities, especially those created for elites, also could almost always be moved and they, too, grew more moveable as technologies advanced. Information (because it was not solid, although it could be solidified in the form of, for example, a book) could always travel more easily than goods or people (it could be spread by word of mouth over great distances even if the originator of the information could not move very far; it moved even faster as more advanced communication technologies emerged [telegraph, telephone, the Internet]). And as other technologies developed (ships, automobiles, airplanes), people, especially those with the resources, were better able to leave places and get to others. They could even literally move places (or at least parts of them) as, for example, when in the early 1800s Lord Elgin dismantled parts of the Parthenon in Greece and transported them to London, where to this day they can be found in the British Museum.⁷

LIQUIDS AND GASES

However, at an increasing rate over the last few centuries, and especially in the last several decades, that which once seemed so solid has tended to “melt” and become increasingly *liquid*. Instead of thinking of people, objects, information, and places as being like solid blocks of ice, they need to be seen as tending, in recent years, to melt and as becoming increasingly liquid. It is, needless to say, far more difficult to move blocks of ice than the water that is produced when those blocks melt. Of course, to extend the metaphor, blocks of ice, even glaciers, continue to exist (although, even these are now literally melting), in the contemporary world that have not melted, at least completely. Solid material realities (people, cargo, newspapers) continue to exist, but because of a wide range of technological developments (in transportation, communication, the Internet, and so on) they can move across the globe far more readily.

Everywhere we turn, more things, including ourselves, are becoming increasingly liquefied. Furthermore, as the process continues, those liquids, as is the case in the natural world (e.g. ice to water to water vapor), tend to turn into *gases* of various types. Gases are lighter than liquids and therefore they move even more easily than liquids. This is most easily seen literally in the case of the global flow of natural gas through lengthy pipelines. More metaphorically, much of the information now available virtually instantly around the world wafts through the air in the form of signals beamed off satellites. Such signals become news bulletins on our television screens, messages from our global positioning systems letting us know the best route to our destination, or conversations on our smart phones.

It should be noted, once again, that all of the terms used above – solids, liquids, gases – are metaphors – little of the global world is literally a solid, a liquid, or a gas. They are metaphors designed to communicate a sense of fundamental changes taking place as the process of globalization proceeds.

Karl Marx opened the door to this kind of analysis (and to the use of such metaphors) when he famously argued that because of the nature of capitalism⁸ as an economic system “everything solid melts into air.” That is, many of the solid, material realities that preceded capitalism (e.g. the structures of feudalism) were “melted” by it and were transformed into liquids. To continue the imagery farther than Marx took it, they were ultimately transformed into gases that diffused in the atmosphere. However, while Marx was describing a largely

destructive process, the point here is that the new liquids and gases that are being created are inherent parts of the new world and are radically transforming it. In the process, they are having *both* constructive and destructive effects (Schumpeter 1976).

Marx's insight of over a century-and-a-half ago was not only highly prescient, but is far truer today than in Marx's day. In fact, it is far truer than he could have ever imagined. Furthermore, that melting, much like one of the great problems in the global world today – the melting of the ice on and near the North and South poles as a result of global warming (see Chapter 11) – is not only likely to continue in the coming years, but to increase at an exponential rate. Indeed, the melting of the polar icecaps can be seen as another metaphor for the increasing fluidity associated with globalization, especially its problematic aspects. And, make no mistake, the increasing fluidity associated with globalization presents *both* great opportunities *and* great dangers.

Thus, the perspective on globalization presented here, following the work of Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2011), is that it involves, above all else, increasing **liquidity** (Lakoff 2008) (and **gaseousness**).⁹ Several of Bauman's ideas on liquidity are highly relevant to the perspective on globalization employed here.

For example, liquid phenomena do not easily, or for long, hold their shape. Thus, the myriad liquid phenomena associated with globalization are hard-pressed to maintain any particular form and, even if they acquire a form, it is likely to change quite quickly.

Liquid phenomena fix neither space nor time. That which is liquid is, by definition, opposed to any kind of fixity, be it spatial or temporal. This means that the spatial and temporal aspects of globalization are in continuous flux. That which is liquid is forever ready to change whatever shape (space) it might take on momentarily. Time (however short) in a liquid world is more important than space. Perhaps the best example of this is global finance where little or nothing (dollars, gold) actually changes its place (at least immediately), but time is of the essence in that the symbolic representations of money move instantaneously and great profits can be made or lost in split-second decisions on financial transactions.

Liquid phenomena not only move easily, but once they are on the move they are difficult to stop. This is exemplified in many areas such as foreign trade, investment, and global financial transactions (Knorr Cetina 2012; Polillo and Guillen 2005), the globality of transactions and interactions (e.g. on Facebook, Twitter [Birdsall 2012]) on the Internet, and the difficulty in halting the global flow of drugs, pornography, the activities of organized crime, and undocumented immigrants (Ryoko 2012).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, that which is liquid tends to melt whatever (especially solids) stands in its path. This is clearest in the case of the much discussed death, or at least decline,¹⁰ of the nation-state and its borders in the era of increasing global flows (see Chapter 5). According to Cartier (2001: 269), the “forces of globalization have rendered many political boundaries more porous to flows of people, money, and things.”

It is clear that if one wanted to use a single term to think about globalization today, liquidity would be at or near the top of the list. That is not to say that there are no solid structures in the world – after all, we still live in a modern world, even if it is late modernity, and modernity has long been associated with solidity. And it does not mean that there is not a constant interplay between liquidity and solidity with increases in that which is liquid (e.g. terrorist attacks launched against Israel from the West Bank during the Intifada) leading to counter-reactions involving the erection of new solid forms (e.g. that fence between Israel and the West Bank), but at the moment and for the foreseeable future, the momentum lies with increasing and proliferating global liquidity.

Liquidity:
Increasing ease of movement of people, things, information, and places in the global age.

Gaseousness:
Hyper-mobility of people, things, information, and places in the global age.


FLOWS

Flows:
Movement of
people, things,
information,
and places
due, in part, to
the increasing
porosity of
global
barriers.

Closely related to the idea of liquidity, and integral to it, is another key concept in thinking about globalization, the idea of **flows** (Appadurai 1996); after all liquids flow easily, far more easily than solids. In fact, it is the concept of flows that is widely used in the literature on globalization¹¹ and it is the concept that will inform a good deal of the body of this book.¹²

Because so much of the world has “melted” or is in the process of “melting” and has become liquefied, globalization is increasingly characterized by great *flows* of increasingly liquid phenomena of all types, including people, objects, information, decisions, places, and so on.¹³ For example, foods of all sorts increasingly flow around the world, including sushi globalized from its roots in Japan (Bestor 2005; Edwards 2012), Chilean produce now ubiquitous in the US market (and elsewhere), Indian food in San Francisco (and throughout much of the world), and so on. In many cases, the flows have become raging floods that are increasingly less likely to be impeded by, among others, place-based barriers of any kind, including the oceans, mountains, and especially the borders of nation-states. This was demonstrated once again in 2008 in the spread of the American credit and financial crisis to Europe (and elsewhere), which continues to be felt today: “In a global financial system, national borders are porous” (Landler 2008: C1).

Looking at a very different kind of flow, many people in many parts of the world believe that they are being swamped by migrants, especially poor undocumented migrants (Moses 2006; Wang 2012). Whether or not these are actually floods, they have come to be seen in that way by many people, often aided by media personalities and politicians in many countries who have established their reputations by portraying them as “illegal” immigrants flooding their country. For example, conservative pundit Ann Coulter is known for her inflammatory attacks on immigrants, such as “assimilating immigrants into our culture isn’t really working. No, they’re assimilating us into their culture” (Blumenfeld 2013). A well-known government official is Arizona’s Joe Arpaio, sheriff of Maricopa County, who spoke out against undocumented immigration and illegally targeted Latinos during traffic stops and raids; Arpaio was later found guilty of violating Latinos’ constitutional rights (Santos 2013). Undoubtedly because of their immateriality, ideas, images, and information, both legal (blogs) and illegal (e.g. child pornography), flow (virtually) everywhere through interpersonal contact and the media, especially now via the Internet.¹⁴ To take a specific example within the global circulation of ideas, “confidentiality” in the treatment of AIDS patients flowed to India (and elsewhere) because of the efforts of experts and their professional networks. The arrival of this idea in India made it possible to better manage and treat AIDS patients who were more likely to seek out treatment because of assurances of confidentiality. Confidentiality was very important in this context because of the reticence of many Indians to discuss publicly such matters as sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS (Misra 2008: 433–67).

Decisions of all sorts flow around the world, as well as over time: “The effect of the [economic] decisions flowed, and would continue to flow, through every possible conduit. Some decisions would be reflected in products rolling off assembly lines, others in prices of securities, and still others in personal interactions. Each decision would cascade around the world and then forward through time” (Altman 2007: 255). At the moment, much of the world is experiencing slow growth (United Nations 2013a) and continues to be adversely

affected by the 2007–2008 financial crisis, including a wide array of bad economic decisions made in the previous decade or more, especially in the United States.

Even places can be said to be flowing around the world as, for example, immigrants re-create the places from which they came in new locales (e.g. Indian and Pakistani enclaves in London). Furthermore, places (e.g. airports, shopping malls) themselves have become increasingly like flows (for more on this and the transition from “spaces of places” to “spaces of flows,” see Castells 1996).

Even with all of this increasing fluidity, much of what would have been considered the height of global liquidity only a few decades, or even years, ago now seems increasingly sludge-like. This is especially the case when we focus on the impact of the computer and the Internet on the global flow of all sorts of things. Thus, not long ago we might have been amazed by our ability to order a book from Amazon.com and receive it via an express package delivery system in as little as 30 minutes through the use of drones (*CBS News* 2013). But an even more liquid form of delivery is the ability to download that book in seconds on Amazon’s Kindle system (a wireless reading device to which books and other reading matter can be downloaded).

TYPES OF FLOWS

It is worth differentiating among several different types of flows. One is **interconnected flows**. The fact is that global flows do not occur in isolation from one another; many different flows interconnect at various points and times. Take the example of the global sex industry (Farr 2005, 2013). The sex industry requires the intersection of the flow of people who work or are trafficked in the industry (usually women) with the flow of customers (e.g. sex tourists). Other flows that interconnect with the global sex industry involve money and drugs. Then there are the sexually transmitted diseases that are carried by the participants in that industry and from them branch off into many other disease flows throughout the world.

A very different example of interconnected flows is in the global fish industry. That industry is now dominated by the flows of huge industrial ships and the massive amount of frozen fish that they produce and which is distributed throughout the world. In addition, these huge industrial ships are putting many small fishers out of business and some are using their boats for other kinds of flows (e.g. transporting undocumented immigrants from Africa to Europe) (LaFraniere 2008: A1, A10). Over-fishing by industrial ships has emptied the waters of fish and this has served to drive up their price. This has made the industry attractive to criminals and the result is an increase in the global flow of illegal fish (Rosenthal 2008a: A1–A6).

Then there are **multidirectional flows**. Globalization is not a one-way process as concepts like Westernization and Americanization (see Chapter 3) seem to imply (Marling 2006; Singer 2013). While all sorts of things do flow out of the West and the United States to every part of the world, many more flow into the West and the US from everywhere (e.g. Japanese automobiles, Chinese T-shirts, iPhones manufactured in China, Russian sex workers, and so on). Furthermore, all sorts of things flow in every conceivable direction among all other points in the world.

Still another layer of complexity is added when we recognize that transplanetary processes not only can complement one another (e.g. the meeting of flows of sex tourists and sex workers), but often also conflict with one another (and with much else). In fact, it is

Interconnected flows: Global flows that interconnect at various points and times.

Multi-directional flows: All sorts of things flowing in every conceivable direction among many points in the world.

Conflicting flows:

Transplanetary processes that conflict with one another (and with much else).

usually these **conflicting flows** that attract the greatest attention. This is most obvious in the case of the ongoing “war” on terror between the United States and Islamist militants and jihadists (e.g. al-Qaeda). On the one hand, al-Qaeda and other Islamist militants are clearly trying to maintain, or to increase, their global influence and, undoubtedly, to find other ways of engaging in a range of terrorist activities. For its part, the US is involved in a wide variety of global processes designed to counter that threat, stymie al-Qaeda’s ambitions, and ultimately and ideally to contain, if not destroy, it. This encompassed first the US invasions of Iraq¹⁵ and Afghanistan, and now the ongoing involvement in global flows of military personnel and equipment to other locales (e.g. Pakistan, Syria, and, increasingly, African countries); and counter-terrorism activities (e.g. drone strikes) designed to find and kill its leaders, and ongoing contact with intelligence agencies of other nations in order to share information on Islamist militants, and so on.

Reverse flows:

Processes which, while flowing in one direction, act back on their source.

Then there are **reverse flows**. In some cases, processes flowing in one direction act back on their source (and much else). This is what Ulrich Beck (1992) has called the *boomerang effect*. In Beck’s work the boomerang effect takes the form of, for example, pollution that is “exported” to other parts of the world but then returns to affect the point of origin. So, for example, countries may insist that their factories be built with extremely high smokestacks so that the pollution reaches greater heights in the atmosphere and is thereby blown by prevailing winds into other countries and perhaps even around the globe (Ritzer 2008b: 342). While this seems to reduce pollution in the home country, the boomerang effect is manifest when prevailing winds change direction and the pollution is blown back to its source. In addition, nations that are the recipients of another nation’s air pollution may find ways of returning the favor by building their own smokestacks even higher than their neighbors.



HEAVY, LIGHT, WEIGHTLESS

There is another set of conceptual distinctions, or metaphors, that are useful in thinking about globalization. In addition to the change from solids to liquids (and then gases), we can also think in terms of change that involves movement from that which is *heavy* to that which is *light* (this is another distinction traceable to the work of Zygmunt Bauman) and most recently to that which is lighter than light, that which approaches being *weightless* (the gases mentioned above).

The original Gutenberg Bible (mid-fifteenth-century Germany) was usually published in two volumes, ran to close to 1,400 pages, and was printed on very heavy paper or vellum. It was in every sense of the term a heavy tome (almost like the one you are now reading), difficult, because of its sheer weight and bulk, to transport. Fast forward to 2015 and a much lighter bound copy of the Bible could easily be purchased from Amazon.com and transported in days via express mail virtually anywhere in the world. That Bible had also become weightless since it could be downloaded using the Kindle system or another e-reader.

More generally, it could be argued that both pre-industrial and industrial societies were quite “heavy,” that is, characterized by that which is difficult to move. This applies both to those who labored in them (e.g. peasants, farmers, factory workers), where they labored (plots of land, farms, factories), and what they produced (crops, machines, books, automobiles). Because of their heaviness, workers tended to stay put and what they produced (and what was not consumed locally) could be moved, especially great distances, only with great

effort and at great expense. Later advances, especially in technology, made goods, people, and places “lighter,” easier to move. These included advances in both transportation and technology that made all sorts of industrial products smaller, lighter, and easier to transport (compare the mini-laptop computer of today to the room-size computer of the mid-twentieth century).

Karin Knorr Cetina (2005: 215) has written about what she calls “complex global microstructures,” or “structures of connectivity and integration that are global in scope but microsociological in character.” She has described financial markets (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2002; Knorr Cetina 2012) in these terms and, more recently, global terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda. We will have more to say about these global microstructures (see Chapter 12), but the key point here is that while Knorr Cetina sees these global microstructures as having several characteristics, of primary importance is their “lightness” in comparison to “heavy” bureaucratic systems. Thus, unlike the armed forces of the United States, Islamist militants (e.g. al-Qaeda) are not heavy bureaucratic structures, but rather light “global microstructures.” It is their lightness that gives them many advantages over the extremely cumbersome US military, and the huge bureaucracy of which it is a part.

It could be argued that we moved from the heavy to the light era in the past century or two. However, by about 1980, we can be said to have moved beyond both of those epochs. We are now in an era that is increasingly defined not just by lightness, but by something approaching weightlessness. That which is weightless, or nearly so, clearly moves far more easily (even globally) than that which is either heavy or light. The big changes here involved the arrival and expansion of cable and satellite television, satellite radio, cell phones, personal computers, tablets, and, most importantly, smart phones and the advent of the Internet (and networking sites such as Twitter). It is with the personal computer and the Internet that globalization reaches new heights in terms of the flow of things and of social relationships in large part because they, and everything else, have approached weightlessness.

An excellent example of this can be found in the world of music. Vinyl records were quite heavy and the shift to cassettes and later CDs did not make music much lighter. However, the creation of advanced technologies such as iPods and smart phones allows us to carry around thousands of once very heavy albums in our pockets, or we can play it from the cloud. We can carry that music with us anywhere in the world and we can exchange music over the Internet with people around the globe.

To take another example, in the past, if we needed to consult with a medical specialist in Switzerland, we would have had to fly there and take our x-rays and MRI images with us, or else had them snail-mailed. Now, both can be digitized and sent via the Internet; x-ray and MRI results have become weightless. Our Swiss physician can view them on her computer screen. We do not even need to go to Switzerland at all (in a sense we have become weightless, as well). We (or our local physician) can confer with our Swiss physician by phone, e-mail, or a video hook-up (e.g. Skype) via the Internet. It is information, rather than things, that is increasingly important in the contemporary world. Information, especially when it is translated into digital, computerized codes (that’s what happens to our x-rays and MRI images), is weightless and can be sent around the globe instantly.

Of course, there are still many heavy things in our increasingly weightless world. Factories, offices, buildings, large and cumbersome machines (including MRI machines), newspapers, hardback books, and even some people (made “heavy” by, for example,

minority status, poverty, a lack of education) continue to exist. All, of course, are nevertheless being globalized to some degree in one way or another, but their weightiness makes that process more cumbersome and difficult for them. For example, the global parcel delivery systems (e.g. FedEx, DHL) have become very efficient, but they still need to transport a physical product over great distances. Clearly, that process is still quite weighty, in comparison to, say, the downloading of weightless movies from Netflix (a website that began by allowing members to receive heavier DVDs via snail-mail) or viewing them on-demand. In fact, of course, it is increasingly the case that that which is weightless (e.g. iTunes and downloadable music in general, downloadable movies, blogs) is destroying that which is comparatively heavy (e.g. the CD, the DVD, newspapers).

The ideas of increasing liquidity and weightlessness being employed here do not require that the world be “flat” or be considered as such (see Chapter 4) (Friedman 2007, 2012). Fluids can seep through all sorts of tall and wide structures and, in the case of a flood, those structures can even be washed away (as was the Berlin Wall, for example, and more metaphorically, the Iron Curtain), at least temporarily. Further, that which is weightless can waft over and between the tallest and widest structures. Thus, the world today is increasingly characterized by liquidity and weightlessness, but it is *not* necessarily any flatter than it ever was.¹⁶ Those tall, wide structures continue to be important, especially in impeding (or attempting to), the movement of that which is solid and heavy. It is less clear how successful these structures will be in impeding that which is liquid, light, or weightless.

The most obvious of such structures are the borders (Crack 2007; Rumford 2007a) between nation-states and the fact that in recent years we have witnessed the strengthening (heightening, lengthening, etc.) of many of those borders. Similarly, the Chinese government has sought to restrict the access of its citizens to at least some aspects of the Internet that the government feels is dangerous to its continued rule. The electronic barrier that the government has constructed is known as the “Great Firewall” (French 2008: A1, A6). (A firewall is a barrier on the Internet; the idea of the “Great Firewall” plays off China’s Great Wall.)

The huge “digital divide” in the world today (Ayanso et al. 2014), especially between developed and developing countries (or the North and South), is another example of a barrier. The relative absence in developing countries of computers and the supporting infrastructure (telephone and broadband connections) needed for a computerized world creates an enormous barrier between these groups. In terms of computerization, the world may be increasingly flat (although certainly not totally flat) among and between developed countries in the North, but it has many hills in the developing countries and huge and seemingly insurmountable mountain ranges continue to separate the North from the South.

The history of the social world and social thought and research leads us to the conclusion that people, as well as their representatives in the areas in which they live, have always sought to erect structural barriers to protect and advance themselves, and to adversely affect others, and it seems highly likely that they will continue to do so. Thus, we may live in a more liquefied, more weightless, world, but we do *not* live in a flat world and are not likely to live in one any time soon, if ever. Even a successful capitalist, George Soros, acknowledges this, using yet another metaphor, in his analysis of **economic globalization** when he argues: “The global capitalist system has produced a very *uneven* playing field” (Soros 2000: xix, italics added).

Economic globalization:
Growing economic linkages at the global level.



HEAVY STRUCTURES THAT EXPEDITE FLOWS

The liquefaction of the social world, as well as its increasing weightlessness, is only part of the story of globalization. As pointed out already, another major part is the fact that many heavy, material, objective structures continue to exist and to be created in the globalized world.¹⁷ Some are holdovers from the pre-global world, but others are actually produced, intentionally or unintentionally, by global forces. In studying globalization we must look at *both* all of that which flows (or “wafts”) with increasing ease, as well as all of the structures¹⁸ that impede or block those flows (see below for more on these), as well as that serve to expedite and channel those flows. To put it another way, we must look at *both* that which is light and weightless as well as that which is solid and heavy and that greatly affects their flow in both a positive and a negative sense. This is in line with the view of Inda and Rosaldo (2008a: 29):

we will examine the materiality of the global. This refers to the material practices – infrastructure, institutions, regulatory mechanisms, governmental strategies, and so forth – that both produce and preclude movement. The objective here is to suggest that global flows are patently structured and regulated, such that while certain objects and subjects are permitted to travel, others are not. Immobility and exclusion are thus as much a part of globalization as movement.

For example, there are various “routes” or “paths” that can be seen as structures that serve to both expedite flows along their length (see Figure 1.1 for major global transportation routes), as well as to limit flows that occur outside their confines.

- Intercontinental airlines generally fly a limited number of well-defined routes¹⁹ (say between New Delhi and London) rather than flying whatever route the pilots wish and thereby greatly increasing the possibility of mid-air collisions (see Figure 1.2 for some of the major global airline routes).
- Undocumented immigrants from Mexico have, at least until recently, generally followed a relatively small number of well-worn paths into the US. Indeed, they often need to pay smugglers large sums of money and the smugglers generally follow the routes that have worked for them (and others) in the past.
- Goods of all sorts are generally involved in rather well-defined “global value chains” (see Chapter 7 for a discussion of this concept) as they are exported from some countries and imported into others.
- Illegal products – e.g. counterfeit drugs – follow oft-trod paths en route from their point of manufacture (often China), through loosely controlled free-trade zones (e.g. in Dubai), through several intermediate countries, to their ultimate destination, often the US, where they are frequently obtained over the Internet (Bogdanich 2007: A1, A6).

Then there are an increasing number of formal and informal “bridges” (Anner and Evans 2004) which have been created throughout the globe that expedite the flow of all sorts of things. This idea applies perhaps best to the passage of documented people across borders through the process of migration (Sassen 2007a). It is clear that in the not-too-distant past there were many structural barriers to the flow of people. There are even a few places in the world today where this remains true – e.g. between the US and Cuba. However, with the

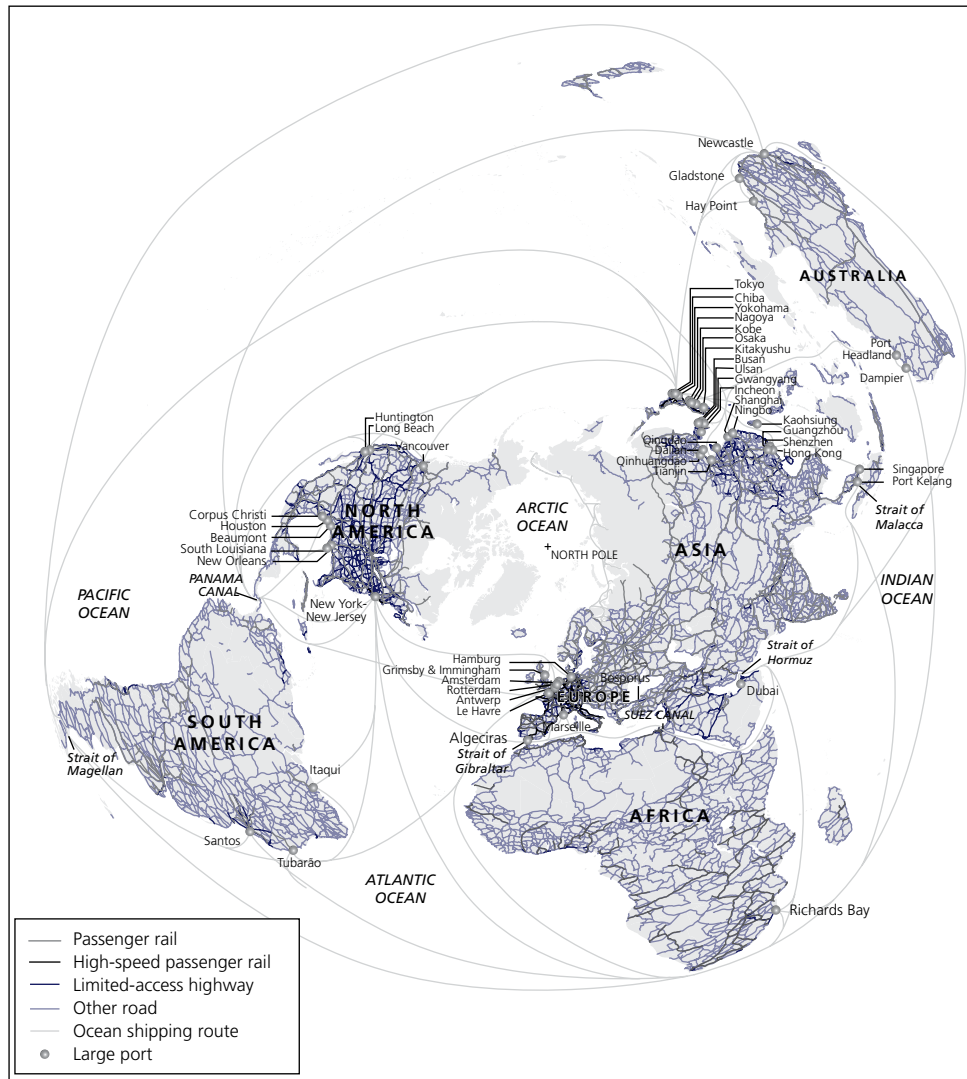


Figure 1.1 Transportation routes. Nearly all of the world's freight headed for international destinations is transported via ships in standardized containers. These sealed metal containers have dramatically altered the face of international freight transport. They are designed to be easily transferred from one mode of transport to another, for instance, from a ship to a train, thereby increasing efficiency and reducing cost. As with passenger airline traffic, maritime freight traffic is concentrated. The largest ten ports, led by Singapore, Rotterdam, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and South Louisiana, handle more than 50% of global freight traffic. Source: de Blij, Harm J., and Roger Downs. 2007. *College Atlas of the World*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, p. 59.