

THIRD EDITION

GLOBALIZATION | A BASIC TEXT

GEORGE RITZER | PAUL DEAN



WILEY Blackwell

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GEORGE RITZER AND 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 all those who struggle to make the world a better place,
who never lose their idealism and continue fighting,
often against incredible odds, for peace,
justice, and democracy.

(PD)

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www.wiley.com/go/ritzer/globalbasictext

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- Student Study Guide
- Chapter Summaries
- Additional Readings
- Discussion Questions
- Glossary

For Instructors

- Teaching Notes (including Additional Questions with Answer Frames)
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Preface

As we revise this preface in January, 2021, we are struck by how much the events of the day both reflect, and are profoundly changing, the process of globalization. For example, all of our lives have been altered by the global pandemic of COVID-19. The deadly virus emerged in late 2019, and within a few short months, it had made its way around the entire globe. In a highly interconnected world, it was spread through cheap international air travel, cargo ships crossing the vast oceans, and domestic travelers carried it deeper into even remote regions. The pandemic brought the global economy to a grinding halt, plummeting international trade, and putting people out of work in virtually every country on the planet. The World Health Organization (WHO) coordinated a global response in an attempt to halt the virus but over a year into the pandemic, COVID-19 cases and deaths continue to mount. Fortunately, several promising vaccines have been developed and those too are making their way through global distribution networks in hopes of ending the deadly virus.

It has been particularly fascinating to watch global events unfold as we have continued writing the first, second, and third editions of this book. For instance, the first edition was published in the midst of the Great Recession. While writing the second edition, the global economy had stabilized but it had not yet rebounded to its prerecessionary levels for 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. But economic growth would resume (until COVID-19), and having emerged from the Great

Recession, it became clear that neoliberalism remains a strong force in both global politics and the global economy.

In contrast to earlier editions, there are now more significant threats to globalization. As of this writing, one major threat is the spread of nationalist populism. In the last few decades, the rise of populist leaders in executive offices has increased four-fold globally. Populist leaders fashion themselves as political outsiders who will fight for “the people” and against “the establishment,” foreign invaders, or political elites. While some populist leaders have ushered in programs that help people broadly, they are more likely to act in antidemocratic ways that enrich themselves and increase inequality. For example, we are writing this preface just days after outgoing US President Donald Trump, a populist politician, encouraged his supporters to storm the US Capitol and overthrow a democratic election that he clearly lost. Populist leaders in the US, UK, Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America have campaigned against globalization, often targeting immigrants as scapegoats and using people’s fears to build walls between countries, or withdraw from international organizations, as Britons did with Brexit.

Compared with past editions of this book, more articles have appeared in popular media pondering the “beginning of the end of globalization” and “globalization in retreat.” While these articles usually exaggerate the actual threats, the continuation of globalizing forces are not as certain as they once were, and indeed there are some signs of de-globalization. In addition to the rise of nationalist populism and backlash to immigration, COVID-19 has fueled these trends. The virus revealed how reliant most countries had become on importing personal protective equipment (PPE), foods, and other essentials – pitting countries against each other to acquire needed supplies. Some leaders have expressed interest in bringing back critical production

capacities to their own countries, but such motivation will likely diminish as the virus gets under control and the costs of domestic production for many countries are so much higher than imports.

The conflicts around globalization have been exacerbated by several recent trends – especially global climate change and increasing inequality. 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, thus creating new tensions around migration flows. Environmental problems themselves flow seamlessly across national borders and many of these problems, such as global warming and deforestation, have come to affect the entire planet – even those countries that have implemented environmentally sustainable policies.

Economic inequality is also increasing in virtually every country around the world. As neoliberal globalization has become dominant, the nature of available jobs has shifted and social safety nets have shrunk. The world's elites move their money around the globe in complicated financial transactions to hide it from taxation, starving nations from needed tax revenue. With more competition for jobs and less support from the government, people find themselves fearful about the future. Populist politicians harness these fears, but rather than addressing corporate influence on government or systems of taxation, they place the blame on immigrants and the generalized "Other."

The changes noted above illustrate some ways in which this third 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. Furthermore, other elements of globalization – such as the spread of various cultural forms (e.g. hip-hop or K-pop), social media, and the Internet – are persistent and will remain highly globalized. Any useful perspective on globalization must be able to help us better understand the global changes and continuities.

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 some that cover 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 four 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 and Suggested Readings sections at the end of each chapter provide students with important resources 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 also included the most recent statistics and 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](#), time-space compression and distancing in Chapter [9](#), modernization in Chapter [11](#), world systems theory and economic inequality in Chapter [13](#), and global apartheid and white supremacy in Chapter [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 the means through which powerful actors erect barriers to block, direct, and control such flows. 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 recent attempts by authoritarian governments to control the Internet by creating national Internet infrastructures). But these flows and barriers do not affect everyone equally, and we pay special attention to the winners and losers of

these global processes. 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 a highly unequal 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 Amazon? Of life-saving pharmaceuticals? Of illegal drugs? Of participation in, or the televising of, the World Cup? 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. 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 Liz Wingett, Merryl Le Roux, and especially Charlie Hamlyn, have been extraordinarily helpful. Charlie assisted us throughout the entire revision for the third 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.

CHAPTER 1

GLOBALIZATION I

LIQUIDS, FLOWS, AND STRUCTURES

Some of the Basics

From Solids to Liquids (to Gases)

- Solids
- Liquids and Gases

Flows

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Heavy, Light, Weightless

Heavy Structures that Expedite Flows

Heavy Structures as Barriers to Flows

The Winners and Losers of Global Flows

Thinking about Global Flows and Structures

Chapter Summary

Globalization¹ is increasingly omnipresent. We are living in *a* – or even *the* – “global age” (Albrow 1996; Deflem 2016; Kershaw 2019). Globalization is clearly a very important change; it can even be argued (Bauman 2003) that it is *the most important change in human history*. This is reflected in many domains, but particularly in social relationships and social structures,² 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 globalization³ to be used in this book (note that all of the italicized terms will be discussed in this chapter):

globalization is a planetary *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 ...⁴

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). For example, increasingly global flows recently led to the so-called Brexit, where British voters rejected greater integration with the European Union. The global spread of COVID-19 has led to some (perhaps temporary) barriers placed on the movement of people and goods between countries.

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 et al. 2015) – 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 [Kühnhardt and Mayer 2019].)

For example, this book is being written by two Americans; our editor, managing editor and copy-editor are in England; reviewers are from four continents; the book is typeset in India; the book is printed in the USA 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 download onto wireless devices of all kinds. This would make the book highly liquid since it would be possible for it to be accessed 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. 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.

FROM SOLIDS TO LIQUIDS (TO GASES)