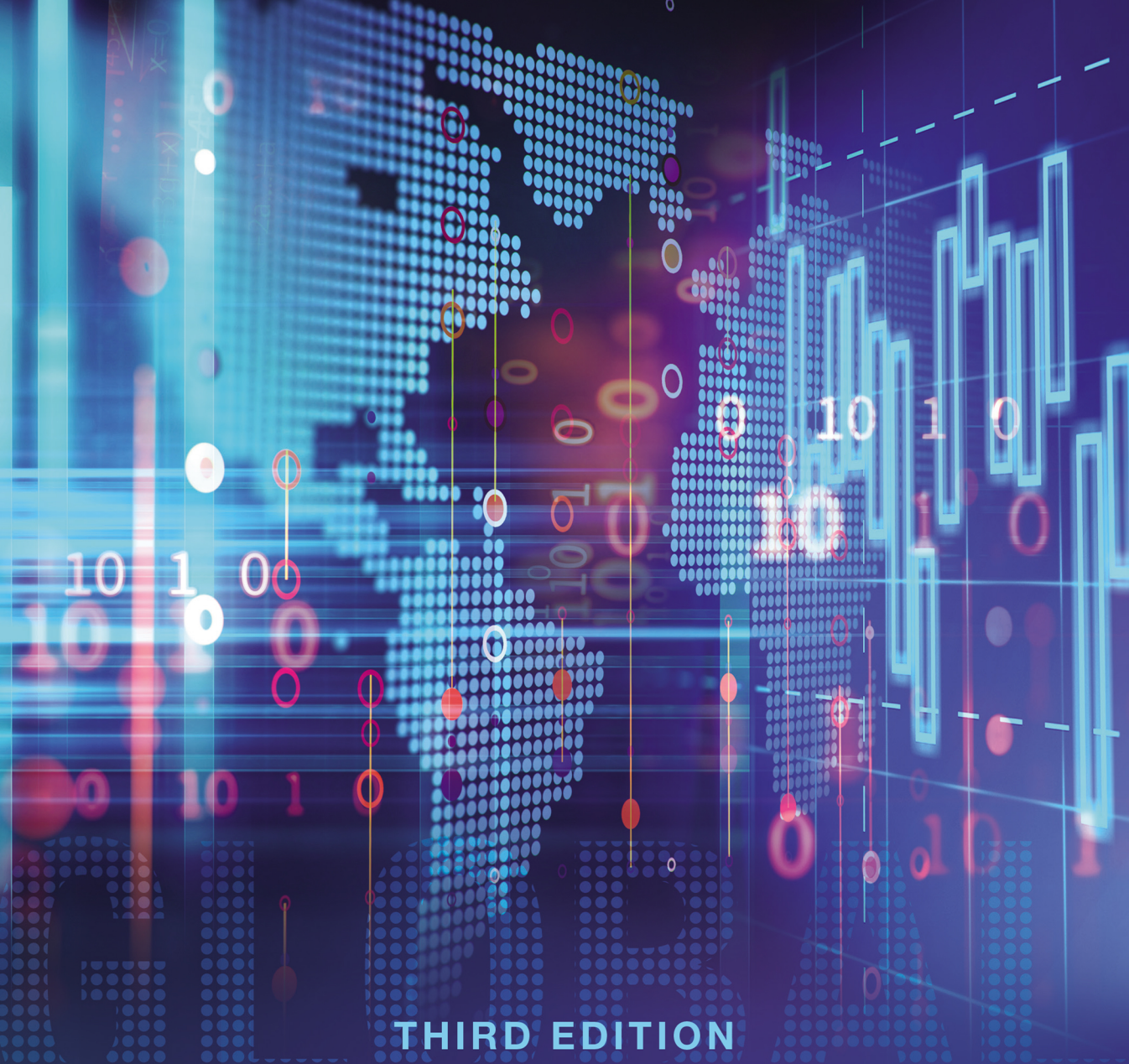

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GLOBALIZATION | A BASIC TEXT

GEORGE RITZER | PAUL DEAN

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GLOBALIZATION | A BASIC TEXT

GEORGE RITZER AND
PAUL DEAN

Third Edition

WILEY Blackv

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

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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 distanciation 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.

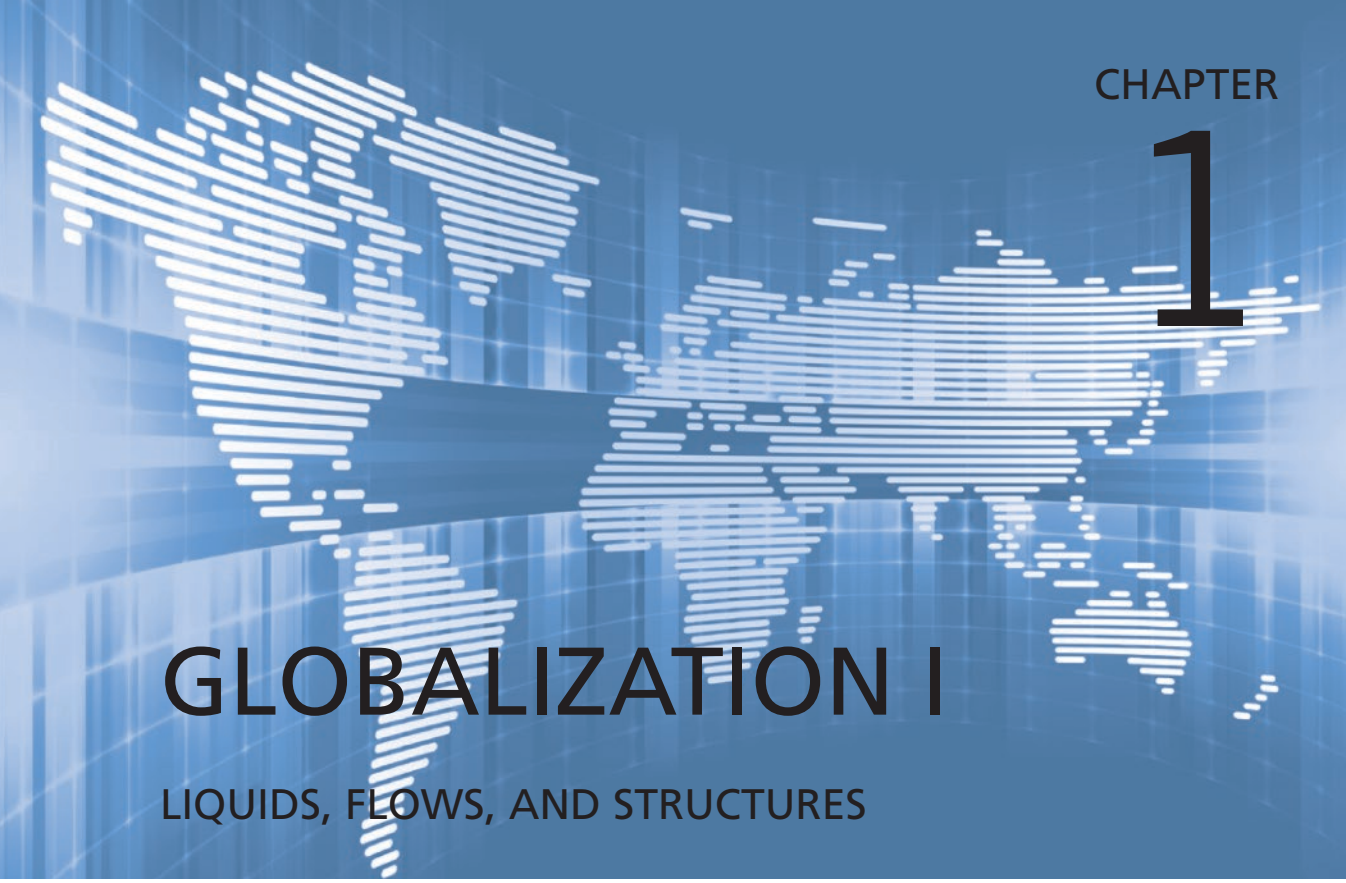
While this is a textbook on globalization, there are some key themes that run through the book. One relates, as mentioned above, to the increasing fluidity of the contemporary global age and the means through which powerful actors erect barriers to block, direct, and control such flows. Related to this 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

Globalization: A Basic Text, Third Edition. George Ritzer and Paul Dean.

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Globalization[1] 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 globalization[3] to be used in this book (note that all of the italicized terms will be discussed in this chapter):

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

> **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].)

Globality: Omnipresence of the process of globalization.

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.

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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.

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 immoveable, 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.

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

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 rigid and unable to adapt to changing conditions. 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, which was one factor that fueled the vote for Brexit. This has reached an extreme in the US with concern over undocumented Mexican (and other Latin American) immigrants leading to efforts to construct an enormous wall 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 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. For the right price, elites may even buy citizenship in some countries (Mavelli 2018). 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, smart phones]). 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.

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, books) 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 (as tourists or students studying abroad), 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 smart phones, messages from our global positioning systems letting us know the best route to our destination, or memes shared on social media.

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 capitalism 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, 2012; Bauman and Donskis 2016; Bauman and Leoncini 2018), is that it involves, above all else, increasing **liquidity** (Davis 2016) (and **gaseousness**). Several of Bauman's ideas on liquidity are highly relevant to the perspective on globalization employed here.

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.

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 2016), the globality of transactions and interactions (e.g. on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Weibo [Axford 2016]) 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, 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.

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 globalization[5] and it is the concept that will inform a good deal of the body of this book.

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. For example, foods of all sorts increasingly flow around the world, including sushi globalized from its roots in Japan (Edwards 2012), Chilean produce now ubiquitous in the US market (and elsewhere), Senegalese food in Paris (and other parts 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.

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 (Hogan and Haltinner 2015). 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. It is also flows of people that accounted for the spread of COVID-19 from Wuhan, China, to the rest of China and out into the rest of the world (Jia et al. 2020). Given the increasing flows of people within a rapidly developing China and a more interconnected world via air travel, the coronavirus spread around the world before health authorities could adequately contain it.

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 and social media. 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).

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 slower growth (World Bank 2019) which continues to be affected by COVID-19. The effect of the pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing trade tensions and tighter financial conditions, further slowing trade and investment in both developed and developing economies.

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, Internet, and social media 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 and have it delivered in 30 minutes or less by drones (Mims 2019). But an even more liquid form of delivery is the ability to download that book in seconds to a tablet or smart phone, and share on social media.

TYPES OF FLOWS

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

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, 2017). The sex industry requires the intersection of the flow of people who work or are trafficked in the industry (usually women and girls) 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). 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 2008).

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

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 assembled 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.

Conflicting flows: Planetary processes that conflict with one another (and with much else).

Still another layer of complexity is added when we recognize that planetary 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 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 and ISIS). 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 Iraq[6] 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.

There are also **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 and Stepnisky 2017). 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 – if you are reading it in print), difficult, because of its sheer weight and bulk, to transport. Fast forward to 2021 and a much lighter bound copy of the Bible could easily be purchased from Amazon and transported in hours or days virtually anywhere in the world. That Bible had also become weightless since it could be downloaded using a tablet or smart phone.

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 (on plots of land, farms, in 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 pocket-sized smart phone 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 2012; Knorr Cetina and Bruegger 2002) in these terms and, more recently, global terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda or ISIS. 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 social media such as Instagram or Twitter). It is with the Internet (and the devices by which we access it) that globalization reaches new heights in terms of the flow of things and of social relationships in large part because it, and much 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 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 their 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 hookup (e.g. Zoom) via the Internet. It is information, rather than things, that is increasingly important in the contemporary world and the post-industrial economy. 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. downloadable music, streamable movies, social media) 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. 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 (Jones and Johnson 2016; Wastl-Walter 2012) between nation-states and the fact that in recent years we have witnessed the strengthening (heightening, lengthening, etc.) of many of those borders. Similarly, several governments (e.g. China, Russia) have sought to restrict the access of its citizens to at least some aspects of the Internet that those governments feel are dangerous to their continued rule. In the case of China, the electronic barrier that the government has constructed is known as the "Great Firewall." (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 (Cruz-Jesus et al. 2018; Drori 2012), especially between developed and developing countries (or the North and South), is another example of a barrier. Developing countries have fewer computers and the supporting infrastructure (cellular and broadband connections) needed for a computerized world, which creates an enormous barrier relative to wealthier countries. 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. 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 structures[7] that impede or block those flows (see