

CHRISTOPHER CHASE-DUNN

GLOBALIZATION: A WORLD-SYSTEMS
PERSPECTIVE REFLECTING
ON SOME NON-RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

The discourse on globalization has become a flood. What are the trends and processes that are alleged to constitute globalization? How do they correspond with actual recent and long-term changes in the world economy and the world polity? What are the interests of different groups in the political programs implied by the notions of globalization? And what should be the response of those peoples who are likely to be left out of the grand project of world economic deregulation and the free reign of global capital?

These questions are addressed from the world-systems perspective, an historically oriented analysis of cycles, trends and long-run structural features of the world-economy. The recent explosion of awareness of transnational, international and global processes is set in the historical perspective of the last 600 years of the emergence of a capitalist intersocietal system in Europe and its expansion to the whole globe.

International economic integration has been a long-term trend since the great chartered companies of the seventeenth century, but this trend also reveals a cycle in the rise and fall of the proportion of all economic exchange that crosses state boundaries. Political globalization also has a long history in the emergence of international organizations over the last 200 years. Most of the many versions of globalization discourse focus on a recent qualitative transformation and emphasize the unique qualities of the new stage, while the longer view sees recent changes as part of a much older process of capitalist development and expansion in which there are important continuities as well as changes.

The trends and cycles reveal important continuities and imply that future struggles for economic justice and democracy need to base themselves on an analysis of how earlier struggles changed the scale and nature of development in the world-system. While some populists have suggested that progressive movements should employ the tools of economic nationalism to counter world market forces (e.g. Moore 1995), it is here submitted that political globalization of popular movements will be required in order to create a democratic and collectively rational global system.

I THE WORLD-SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

Today the terms “world economy,” “world market,” and “globalization” are commonplace, appearing in the sound-bites of politicians, media commentators, and unemployed workers alike. But few know that the most important source for these phrases lies with work started by sociologists in the early Seventies. At a time when the mainstream assumption of accepted social, political, and economic science held that the “wealth of nations” reflected mainly on the cultural developments within those nations, a growing group of social scientists recognized that national “development” could be best understood as the complex outcome of local interactions with an aggressively expanding Europe-centered “world-system” (Wallerstein 1974; Frank 1978).¹ Not only did these scientists perceive the global nature of economic networks 20 years before they entered popular discourse, but they also saw that many of these networks extend back at least 600 years. Over this time, the peoples of the globe became linked into one integrated unit: the modern world-system.

Now, 20 years on, social scientists working in the area are trying to understand the history and evolution of the whole system, as well as how local, national and regional entities have been integrated into it. This current research has required broadening our perspective to include deeper temporal and larger spatial frameworks. For example, some recent research has compared the modern Europe-centered world-system of the last five hundred years with earlier, smaller intersocietal networks that have existed for millennia (Frank and Gills 1993; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997). Other work uses the knowledge of cycles and trends that has grown out of world-systems research to anticipate likely future events with a precision impossible before the advent of the theory. This is still a new field and much remains to be done, but enough has already been achieved to provide a valuable understanding of the phenomenon of globalization.

The discourse about globalization has emerged mainly in the last decade. The term means many different things, and there are many reasons for its emergence as a popular concept. The usage of this term generally implies that a recent change (within the last decade or two) has occurred in technology and in the size of the arena of economic competition. The general idea is that information technology has created a context in which the global market, rather than separate national markets, is the relevant arena for economic competition. It then follows that economic competitiveness needs to be assessed in the global context, rather than in a national or local context. These notions have been used to justify the adoption of new practices by firms and governments all over the world and these developments have altered the political balances among states, firms, unions and other interest groups.

The first task is to put this development into historical context. The world-systems perspective has shown that intersocietal geopolitics and geoeconomics has been the relevant arena of competition for national-states, firms and classes for hundreds of

years. The degree of international connectedness of economic and political/military networks was already important in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The first “transnational corporations” (TNCs) were the great chartered companies of the seventeenth century. They organized both production and exchange on an intercontinental scale. The rise and fall of hegemonic core powers, which continues today with the relative decline of the United States hegemony, was already in full operation in the seventeenth century rise and fall of Dutch hegemony (see Arrighi 1994; Modelski and Thompson 1996; Taylor 1996).

The capitalist world-economy has experienced cyclical processes and secular trends for hundreds of years (Chase-Dunn 1989:Chapter 2). The cyclical processes include the rise and fall of hegemons, the Kondratieff wave (a forty to sixty year business cycle)², a cycle of warfare among core states (Goldstein 1988), and cycles of colonization and decolonization (Bergesen and Schoenberg 1980). The world-system has also experienced several secular trends including a long-term proletarianization of the world work force, growing concentration of capital into larger and larger firms, increasing internationalization of capital investment and of trade, and accelerating internationalization of political structures.

In this perspective, globalization is a long-term upward trend of political and economic change that is affected by cyclical processes. The most recent technological changes, and the expansions of international trade and investment, are part of these long-run changes. One question is exactly how the most recent changes compare with the long-run trends? And what are the important continuities as well as the qualitative differences that accompany these changes? These are the questions that I propose to explore.

2 TYPES OF GLOBALIZATION

There are at least five different dimensions of globalization that need to be distinguished. There are also several misunderstandings and misinterpretations that need to be clarified. Let us evaluate five different meanings of globalization:

2.1 Common ecological constraints

This aspect of globalization involves global threats due to our fragile ecosystem and the globalization of ecological risks. Anthropogenic causes of ecological degradation have long operated, and these in turn have affected human social evolution. But ecological degradation has only recently begun to operate on a global scale. This fact creates a set of systemic constraints that require global collective action.

2.2. *Cultural globalization*

This aspect of globalization relates to the diffusion of two sets of cultural phenomena:

- (i) the proliferation of individualized values, originally of Western origin, to ever larger parts of the world population. These values are expressed in social constitutions that recognize individual rights and identities and trans-national and international efforts to protect "human rights".
- (ii) the adoption of originally Western institutional practices. Bureaucratic organization and rationality, belief in a law-like natural universe, the values of economic efficiency and political democracy have been spreading throughout the world since they were propagated in the European Enlightenment (Meyer 1996; Markoff 1996).

Whereas some of the discussions of the world polity assume that cultural components have been a central aspect of the modern world-system from the start (e.g. Meyer 1989; Mann 1986), I would emphasize the comparatively non-normative nature of the modern world-system (Chase-Dunn 1989: Chapter 5). But I would certainly acknowledge the growing salience of cultural consensus in the last 100 years. Whereas the modern world-system has always been, and is still, multicultural, the growing influence and acceptance of Western values of rationality, individualism, equality, and efficiency is an important trend of the twentieth century.

2.3 *Globalization of communication*

Another meaning of globalization is connected with the new era of telematics. What does "technological" globalization mean? For media of communication another aspect of globalization seems relevant, one on which Anthony Giddens (1996) insists. Social space comes to acquire new qualities with telematics, albeit only in the networked parts of the social world. In terms of accessibility, cost and velocity, the hitherto known political and geographic parameters that structured social relationships are much less relevant.

One may well argue that time-space compression (Harvey 1989) by new information technologies is simply an extension and acceleration of the very long-term trend toward technological development over the last ten millennia (Chase-Dunn 1994). Yet, the rapid decrease in the cost of communications may have qualitatively altered the relationship between states and consciousness. Global communication facilities have the power to move things visible and invisible from one part of the globe to another whether any nation-state likes it or not. This does not only apply to economically relevant exchange, but also to ideas, to gather support for issues worldwide and to form

lines of opposition. How, and to what extent, will this undermine the power of states to structure social relationships?

2.4 Economic globalization

Economic globalization means globe-spanning economic relationships. The interrelationships of markets – finance, goods and services – and the networks created by transnational corporations are the most important manifestations of this. Though the capitalist world-system has been international in essence for centuries, the extent and degree of trade and investment globalization has increased greatly in recent decades. Economic globalization has been accelerated by what telematics has done to the movement of money. It is commonly claimed that the market's ability to shift money from one part of the globe to another by a push of a button has changed the rules of policy-making, putting economic decisions much more at the mercy of market forces than before.

2.5 Political globalization

Political globalization consists of the institutionalization of international political structures. The Europe-centered world-system has been primarily constituted as an interstate system – a system of conflicting and allying states and empires. Earlier world-systems, in which accumulation was mainly accomplished by means of institutionalized coercive power, experienced an oscillation between multicentric interstate systems and core-wide world empires in which a single “universal” state conquered all or most of the core states in a region. The Europe-centered system has also experienced a cyclical alternation between political centralization and decentralization, but this has taken the form of the rise and fall of hegemonic core states that do not conquer the other core states. Hence the modern world-system has remained multicentric in the core, and this is due mainly to the shift toward a form of accumulation based more on the production and profitable sale of commodities–capitalism. The hegemons have been the most thoroughly capitalist states and they have preferred to follow a strategy of controlling trade and access to raw material imports from the periphery rather than conquering other core states to extract tribute or taxes.

Power competition in an interstate system does not require much in the way of cross-state cultural consensus to operate systemically. But since the early nineteenth century the European interstate system has been developing both an increasingly consensual international normative order and a set of international political structures that regulate all sorts of interaction. This phenomenon has been termed “global governance” by Craig Murphy (1994) and others. It refers to the growth of both specialized and general international organizations. The general organizations that have emerged

Borderlines in a Globalized World

New Perspectives in a Sociology of the World-System

Preyer, G.; Bös, M. (Eds.)

2002, XVIII, 241 p. 2 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4020-0515-2