



## CONCEPTUALIZING GLOBALIZATION

### INTRODUCTION

Is globalization simply a euphemism for concepts such as Americanization or Westernization? Can there be an “Asian globalization”? What about the plausibility of “alter-globalization”, a term that was popularized in the World Social Forum? In discussing concepts in social science, it is obviously important to ask whether the concepts at hand add anything new or valuable to the understanding of social reality. Social scientists have used various concepts – such as modernization, modernity, late modernity, post-modernity, development, post-development, imperialism – to describe a range of related social transformations. Does globalization as such add value to our conceptual repertoire? This chapter argues that, although these diverse intersecting concepts provide varied frameworks to analyse the processes of social change, globalization provides a more inclusive and comprehensive intellectual framework than any of these alternative concepts. Globalization, for us, is a historical process or a set of intertwined processes with certain structural properties. At one level it is a macro-historical process, *a process of processes*; at another level, namely, the micro level, it deeply affects human beings directly, including their consciousness and everyday life.

In providing a brief conceptual history, we challenge two popular notions: that (1) globalization refers *only* to economic unification of the globe, integrating all the countries of the world under a single market grid; and (2) globalization is a euphemism for “Westernization”, that is, the discourse of globalization is a Western hegemonic imposition on the rest of the world in the mode of cultural imperialism. Rather than viewing globalization as a narrow, economic and exploitative process, we recognize globalization as a multidimensional process. We look at the various

dimensions of globalization in terms of various complexities and contradictions. We also challenge yet another popular myth that, as a megaprocess affecting all aspects of our life, globalization unleashes destructive consequences by erasing differences and creating a uniform and homogeneous world. We do not see the flattening of the world through common communication systems as an immediate outcome. We critically evaluate the popular understanding of globalization as “global pillage” and examine in some depth the notion of the “global village”, which Roland Robertson once remarked looks more like a “global town”. A caption in the *International Herald Tribune* (20 May 1999) summed up the popular understanding of globalization neatly. It said simply “Bhutan Joins the Global Village”. The newspaper covered the story of the legalization of television and the Internet in this mountainous, remote and devoutly Buddhist kingdom in South Asia. The coming of television to Bhutan connected this hitherto aloof society into the global system. Bhutan had resisted television for quite some time, while neighbouring Bangladesh and India had had television since the early 1960s. Being connected with satellite television and the Internet is indeed the popular conception of globalization and certainly this form of globalization raises the possibility of a transformation that has both far-reaching and complex implications. However, the popular understanding has to be complemented by a more penetrating sociological investigation. For example, one could argue that in neighbouring India television has been as much an instrument for preserving Indian tradition as it has been a harbinger of global modernity. Some writers tend to conceptualize globalization as world-wide modernization, often seeing it as posing a threat to local cultures and traditions, while others see globalization as a historical outcome made up of a variety of local traditions. In this perspective, locality becomes a site for a dynamic confluence of various cultures. It would, however, be too early to assess the impact of these exposures on Bhutan.

Considering the fact that nearly half the world population now lives in urban rather than rural areas, the global village metaphor is likely to become quickly anachronistic. The heterogeneous and multicultural features of the processes of globalization are more likely, following Robertson, to create a global city. Such an image opens up possibilities for further theoretical and empirical explorations.

The main task of this chapter is to present a brief history of the concept of globalization. By conceptual history, we mean simply the exploration of a concept over time. It is neither the history of an idea nor a narrative of the empirical processes. In recent years the term “globalization” has obviously become widely and promiscuously used in popular culture. Business leaders, politicians and lay public have used it so frequently that it has

lost much of its analytical rigour. There is more to it. In the global politico-ideological discourse, it has become a highly controversial term, so much so that now there are both *globophobics* and *globophiles*. The former group embraces a doomsday scenario of the consequences of globalization, while the latter group welcomes globalization with enthusiasm, seeing it as a universal panacea.

By tracing the history of the concept of globalization, we argue that globalization does not simply mean the creation of a world-embracing economic system paving the way for cultural homogenization on a worldwide basis, and it is not just a new variant of so-called cultural imperialism. Globalization is neither a menace nor a panacea. It is a complex process of social, cultural, economic and political connectedness that has to be approached at a high level of complexity and abstractness.

It is important to conceptualize globalization in relation to cognate concepts such as modernization and Westernization. Globalization is viewed by some as Westernization in general and Americanization in particular. In order to develop this discussion, it will be useful for the purpose of conceptual clarity analytically to separate the concept of globalization from such categories as internationalization, cultural diffusion, homogenization, and universalization. Although many of these concepts are overlapping, it can be stated rather forcefully that globalization is *not* internationalization, even though many social scientists use these two terms interchangeably. It is *not* Westernization in the sense that the world is becoming more homogeneous and the non-Western world looks increasingly like the West. Its relationship with cultural diffusion is also somewhat problematic. If one conceives of cultural diffusion as a process of mediation rather than a simple unidirectional overpowering of one culture by another, then diffusion can be seen to resemble the general process of globalization.

Globalization is sometimes equated with modernization. Modernization as a concept in sociology has had a chequered history. It has been criticized for its lack of historical awareness and sensitivity as well as for its lack of empirical validity. A revised view of modernization would have to take into account the fact that historically modernization does not mean the entire elimination of the deadweight of tradition, but on the contrary modernization can mean the incorporation of tradition into the actual constitution of modernity. The historical possibilities of multiple trajectories of modernization persuade us to look at globalization in a similarly multivalent manner. One failure of an early generation of writers on modernization was their inability to understand the actual tradition that modernity was supposed to replace. Tradition, rather than being dissolved, remains alive, so much so that it can set the agenda for modernization. The

notion of “multiple modernities” that was outlined by Goran Therborn (1995) made a seminal contribution in this regard. Some sociologists now argue that a second wave of modernity is marked by its reflexivity (Therborn, 2000a; Beck, 2000). In a similar vein, globalization as a process has been referred to as “reflexive cosmopolitanization” (Beck, 2000).

The multidimensionality of this concept and the heterogeneity of the phenomenon of globalization have led to a plurality of theories and discourses about globalization (Robertson and Khondker, 1998). In addition to a number of disciplinary approaches to globalization in the contemporary social and cultural sciences, there are also various regional and national debates on globalization from Asia, North America, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa. More to the point, these discussions do not share a common understanding of the meaning of globalization. Although in defining globalization the majority of authors tend to emphasize the economic interconnectedness of the world, globalization, we will argue, is a much more comprehensive and complex process. The three dimensions of globalization that need to be considered are techno-economic, socio-political and cultural/civilizational.

## **A PROBLEM OF DEFINITION**

Against the background of an optimistic if not triumphal mood with the presumed victory of capitalism and liberalism at the end of the Cold War, “globalization” as a concept made its original appearance to capture this changed social reality. A large number of writers began to view globalization as resurgence of capitalism where market, capital, investments, enterprise and technology would not encounter any national boundaries. Certainly economists, marketing and business strategists as well as the custodians of the international financial and development organizations applauded such a view. However, the response in many liberal and left quarters was exactly the opposite. They approached this situation with a sense of concern and apprehension. Concerns were (and continue to be) raised over the fate of the environment, local cultures and cultural differences when confronted with the march of globalization. Many of the recent critics, such as James Mittelman (1996, 2004) and James Petras (1993), and possibly some supporters of globalization ground their position on a simplistic and reductionist understanding of globalization, equating it simply with the irreversible march of capitalism. Peter Smith (1997: 174), for example, sees it as merely “a shift from the rubric of modernization

toward the geographical euphemism globalization". Smith (1997: 175) continues in the same critical mode to say that "Globalization is as much a script for U.S. corporate boardrooms as a strategy for national economies, simultaneously a diagnosis and prescription." For Ray Kiely (1998: 96), "the globalization thesis contends that we live in a world economy dominated by transnational corporations (TNCs) that invest wherever they like in a footloose manner". Empirically speaking, however, there is no denying the fact that there was a proliferation of transnational corporations by the late twentieth century and the extent of the reach of those corporations was matched by their enhanced political and economic clout. According to a UN Report, there were 60,000 TNCs which, together with their half a million affiliates, accounted for over 25 per cent of the global output and combined sales of over US\$11 trillion (*The Straits Times*, 28 September 1999, p. 57). Others tend to see globalization as a form of "cultural imperialism" that accompanies the march of transnational capitalism.

Globalization as a concept made its appearance in the sociological literature towards the end of the 1980s (Waters 1995). Although the genealogy of the globalization perspective can be traced back to the earlier works of Marshall McLuhan (1964), William Moore (1966), and Peter Nettl and Roland Robertson (1968), serious theoretical discussions began in the mid-1980s, especially in the United States. Sociologists who took the lead in this discussion were Roland Robertson and his students (Robertson and Chirico, 1985; Robertson and Lechner, 1985) at the University of Pittsburgh, Albert Bergesen (1980) at the University of Arizona who was responding to the somewhat economically deterministic view of Immanuel Wallerstein at that time, and John Meyer (1980, 1992) who, along with his students at Stanford, was examining the globalization of state and education in light of institutional isomorphism. The notion of isomorphism clearly points to structural similarities while the contents, that is, people with their culture, collective memory and history, are different. A common theme in those discussions was the abandonment of a simplistic convergence thesis which was an outgrowth of the earlier modernization theories that predicted a convergence and withering away of the differences. Robertson's (1992) conceptualization of globalization insisted on heterogeneity and variety which are the hallmarks of the increasingly globalized world.

The emergence of the discourse of globalization itself signalled the intensification of globalization as a social/economic/political/cultural process. Globalization refers "both to the compression of the world and to the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole" (Robertson, 1992: 8). This definition takes into account both the empirical aspect (that

is, the *compression* of the entire world into a single, global system) and conceptual ideas about the ways in which the world as a whole should be mapped in broadly sociological terms (Robertson, 1990). David Harvey (1989) argues that the process of time-space compression is rooted in the flexibility of the new forms of capitalism. Globalization, for Anthony Giddens, “is really about the transformation of space and time”. He defines it as “*action at distance*, and relate[s] its intensification over recent years to the emergence of the means of instantaneous global communication and mass transportation” (Giddens, 1994: 4). John Tomlinson (1999: 2) defines globalization as “complex connectivity”, because it “refers to the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern social life”. Globalization also means an increased awareness of the world. In the words of Malcolm Waters (1995: 3), it is a “social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding”.

One writer used the survival of Kuwait as a state after its physical takeover by Iraq in 1990–91 as an evidence for the “deterritorialization” thesis. As he commented:

The occupation and subsequent liberation of Kuwait has shown that in the age of globalism, physical space is not central to the state’s survival...When the territory is occupied, the state can become diffused in the financescape and the mediascape or transformed into what might be called, following Baudrillard, a “hyperreal state”, “hyperreal Kuwait” survived as a state in the global flow even when it was occupied physically. (Fandy, 1999: 125).

Such analysis was perhaps a little overdrawn. Geography continues to remain important since the project of state-making always hinges on a land mass of one’s own.

## **GEOGRAPHY AS PROBLEMATIC?**

During the heyday of the Cold War, many critics of capitalism around the world invoked both a non-Western and a Marxist intellectual position at the same time. The emergence of Marxist discourse on Western soil by no means makes it a “Western” theory, much less an apologia for the capitalist world system. The relative autonomy of these discourses should be accepted and should supplement the view of the embeddedness of social thought. From an epistemological point of view, a convenient starting

point for us would be the middle ground between the “strong program” and the radical non-foundational position, such as the epistemological position of the American pragmatist Richard Rorty. The post-modernist discourse (or anti-discourse), which has paradoxically turned to Rorty’s anti-foundationalism for its own foundation, has made an important contribution in terms of shaking any paradigm-centred, universal orthodoxy and thereby creating an open-ended quality for debate. Our approach to globalization hopefully incorporates some of that open-endedness, especially the notion of the non-linearity of development. This globalization approach has also moved away from a rigid progressivist view that continues to characterize many of the conventional social theories of modernization. Yet, it is important to recognize that a moral compass for measuring progress is still necessary and possible.

If we create a broader meaning for the term “discourse”, then we can say that in the post-Cold War world there now exists a world-wide discourse on the benefits and failures of the free market economy. Though initiated by the economists of the Bretton Woods Institutions (IMF, World Bank and so forth), this market discourse is no longer confined merely to the economists or to those governments that are dependent on the World Bank or IMF framework. Other social scientists, opposition politicians, leaders of NGOs, journalists and the “thinking public” are all participants of this discourse. Those who are opposed to or are less enamoured of these free-market ideas are also criticizing or are expressing their reservations in response to this neo-liberal doctrine, thus being implicated in this discourse. This point needs further elucidation. We are saying that in order to participate in a discourse one need not be simply a follower of it. One can affirm a discourse even by criticizing or rejecting it. In this sense, Immanuel Wallerstein’s view of the contributions of the criticism of the capitalist world system provides a close parallel. Commenting on the historical anti-Western tendencies among Russian intellectuals, one writer stated that “The more Russian thinkers distanced themselves from the West, the more they used it as a point of reference. While criticizing it, they observed it, if anything, even more closely than did the westernizers” (Laszlo, 1993: 103). Similarly, protagonists of so-called “Asian values” cannot help but use the West as a necessary foil. Following the disputed presidential election in Iran in June 2009 when several European and US officials criticized the Iranian government for suppressing public opinion, the Iranian government was quick to turn it into a “bully West” trying to impose its hegemony on the “East”, neglecting the fact that a large number of Iranians both within and outside the country were shocked at the derailment of democratic rights in their own country and many of them put their lives at risk at the altar of freedom.

The discourse of globalization incorporates those who affirm it, partially accept it, or even reject it. It is in the last sense that the whole movement towards indigenization – provided its point of reference is the global society – can be seen as the opposite side of the coin to globalization, thus becoming inevitably a part of the globalization discourse.

The idea of a world literature developed by the famous German literary figure Goethe provides another example of this process. As Homi Bhabha (1994: 11) points out, for Goethe, “the possibility of a world literature arises from the cultural confusion wrought by terrible wars and mutual conflicts”. “Nations could not return to their settled and independent life again without noticing that they had learned many foreign ideas and ways, which they had unconsciously adopted and came to feel here and there previously unrecognized spiritual and intellectual needs” (Bhabha, 1994: 11). In a similar vein, it can be said that in today’s world of so-called conflicting civilizational standards, multiculturalism, and the overall sense of chaos and political disorder, a new awareness of the globe and global culture is taking shape. Globalization is the shorthand name for these complex processes and the discourse of globalization is an intellectual response to these processes.

## THE PROBLEM OF HEGEMONY

Hierarchy, historically formed and culturally negotiated, is one of the central features of the complexities of the modern world. The problem of hegemony captures the varieties of dominating, exploitative and repressive hierarchical relationships that characterize the world. We maintain, however, that there is an important difference between the hegemony at the politico-economic level and the hegemony at the cultural and intellectual levels. It is in the latter sense that Antonio Gramsci, the influential Italian Marxist intellectual, used the word “hegemony”. The concept is important and relevant in helping us to understand the question of consent. There is, for example, an important difference between voluntary acceptance of certain procedures, often for pragmatic reasons, and involuntary subjugation.

Colonialism provides a good example of involuntary subjugation and of hegemonic globalization. Yet during the colonial period, we find examples of how social changes in one place had important unintended consequences elsewhere as a consequence of global connectivity. Let us take the example of indigo cultivation and its impact on the decolonization process. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Bengal

(present-day Bangladesh), following its colonial incorporation, was selected for indigo cultivation. As Bengal became a major exporter of low-cost, high-quality indigo for the European market, the earlier suppliers of indigo in South and Central America became less competitive, which came to have a disrupting influence on their economies. Unemployment eventually led to political unrest, thereby paving the way for anti-colonial movements. Most of the South American countries overthrew the colonial powers in the early nineteenth century; for example, Argentina in 1816, Venezuela 1821, Brazil in 1822, Uruguay in 1825, and Guatemala in 1839. In short, economic changes in Bengal had unintended political outcomes in South America.

Many of the Asian and African colonies became independent after the Second World War when the colonial powers were too weak to retain a political grip over their former colonies. The impact of the Second World War on national liberation movements in Asia and Africa provides another example of the role of unintended consequences in history. Political independence in Indonesia in 1945, India and Pakistan in 1947, Burma in 1948, Malaysia in 1963, Sudan in 1956, Nigeria in 1960 and Senegal in 1960 was in part the product of changes in the global position of the so-called Great Powers. The decline of British imperial power after the Second World War created a general global context in which African and Asian countries could successfully press for independence. These developments were recognized overtly in, for example, the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's famous "wind of change" speech in Africa in February 1960, in which he acknowledged the inevitable movement towards a post-colonial world.

At the military, political and economic levels, it is not difficult to demonstrate the existence of the hegemony of the United States or NATO or the G8 countries, including Japan. This hegemony is often made manifest in overt domination very much in the vein of earlier imperialism. But that form of hegemony does not mean that the theoretical approaches and the intellectual currents that are being produced in that milieu are mirror images, embodying the same hegemonic intent. Let us take the example of the globalization of knowledge in medical science. In a world dominated by large and powerful multinational pharmaceutical companies, one can argue that, although there are occasional examples of enforced implementation, much of the diffusion of medical knowledge now takes place in the context of open voluntary acceptance. We clearly recognize the importance of indigenous medicine and alternative healing techniques in the developing world. However, one can argue that in the event of a massive flood in Bangladesh, which often brings in its wake

epidemics such as cholera, both officials and critical intellectuals will unconditionally accept vaccines from Germany or the USA without debating the possible hegemonic quality of “Western” medical science. A less dramatic example is the popularity of certain “indigenous” types of Chinese medicine (Tiger balm, for example) in countries such as India and Bangladesh; these provide further evidence of the same pragmatic actions. When it comes to intercultural borrowing and the diffusion of knowledge, people often make choices that are based on pragmatic calculations; they are not simply cowed into ideological submissiveness by hegemonic medical regimes. An illustration of pragmatic borrowing from Western medical technology can be found in the case of Japan, a process that preceded both the Meiji Restoration and the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853, when Japan started to borrow Western (in this case Dutch) knowledge of medical science to combat an epidemic of cholera. At the same time, Japan was embracing Western military technology – mainly gunnery – as early as the 1840s (Najita, 1993: 26). An even earlier example of such borrowing of medical knowledge can be found in the popularity of the work of Ibn-Sina, or Avicenna as he was known in Europe. Born in present-day Uzbekistan, some of his important contributions included discerning meningitis as a distinct illness, the contagious nature of tuberculosis, the real cause of asthma, the significance of the optic nerve, and the discovery of various drugs through experimentation (Nasr, 2003). In 1980, UNESCO celebrated the one-thousandth anniversary of Ibn-Sina’s birth.

The view that social theories reflect certain politico-economic designs in a linear fashion is patently naïve. James Petras (1993: 145) asserts that “One of the great deceptions of our times is the notion of ‘internationalization’ of ideas, markets and movements. It has become fashionable to evoke terms like ‘globalization’, or ‘internationalization’ to justify attacks on any or all forms of solidarity, community, and/or social values.” Even if one overlooks the irony that Petras is arguing for the protection of “community” and “social values”, it is clearly evident that he is taking a simplistic and unproblematic slogan rather than the notion of globalization to task. The imperial role of the United States, which has become more glaringly obvious in the post-Cold War world, also has its apologists. We are not ruling out the official “diplomatically correct” points of view. But they are points of view that often embellish quasi-official publications in the United States. They are surely not objective theoretical statements. The disjuncture between the space where discourse takes place and the theoretical or, more generally, intellectual tendencies themselves is also a feature in the process of globalization. For example, Noam Chomsky’s critical works abundantly document the

imperialistic ventures of the US government and business in the so-called “new world order” (Chomsky, 1994). It is, however, at the same time worth stressing that such a critical discourse is possible in the United States (but not everywhere) and this ironic fact indicates a certain autonomy on the part of intellectual culture. Edward Said was also a vocal critic of the imperialistic designs of the United States and used his enormous intellectual force to expose the underlying assumptions of Orientalism. Now to hold Said’s location in the centre of world capitalism against him – as Ahmad (1992) does – would be a denial of the possibility of some distance between geographical space and the intellectual world. Homelessness and fluidity are the essence of contemporary – post-colonial – intellectual practices and praxes. The very mobility of modern intellectuals means that they do not invariably speak from or on behalf of a specific domain.

However, we are not saying that the possibility of intellectual hegemony does not exist. It does. But such ideas as “cultural imperialism”, “colonization of mind” and “enslaved imagination” are to be treated with more care than they have in the past. Leonard Binder (1988) makes a distinction between “good”, “bad” and “pragmatic orientalism” in Said’s “oriental discourse”. Clifford Geertz’s study of Islam might be taken as an example of “good Orientalism”. The problem is that a wholesale attack on Orientalism has led to the development of a “reverse orientalist discourse” which can sometimes manifest in what Abaza and Stauth (1990) call “going native”. The counter-discourse which we can refer to as Occidentalism is often a mirror image of the Orientalist discourse. In attacking the moral high-handedness of the metropolitan intellectual, it situates itself on an equally high moral ground.

An Orientalist from a metropolitan location or a nativist from the periphery can no longer be easily located within a specific geographical grid. A spatial definition of knowledge is predicated upon the creation of a “good us” versus “bad them” dichotomy which rules out the possibility of home-grown or indigenous fascists and other such odious reactionary tendencies. Yet those tendencies are too glaring to overlook. They include the Hindu fundamentalists in India such as Bajrang Dal, a party credited with a whole range of activities from moral policing to attacking Christians, or Shiva Sena, whose leader Balasaheb Thackeray publicly glorified Adolf Hitler. The negative and violent role of Talibans in Afghanistan and some parts of Pakistan is well known.

The attendant problem of cultural relativism, which such binary distinctions create, leads eventually to a more pernicious political and moral relativism. An escape from a binary framework to a more pluralistic understanding of the social, cultural milieu is a necessity even for political/moral

reasons. Relativism disarms us from criticizing each other, thereby foreclosing the possibility of learning from each other (Jarvie, 1983). Relativism might allow one to repudiate the Other – as both the colonial and now the reverse colonial discourses indicate. In the binary world-view *difference* is the root metaphor which entails competing rationalities. As S.P. Mohanty (1989: 13) argues:

But the issue of competing rationalities raises a nagging question: how do we negotiate between my history and yours? How would it be possible for us to recover our commonality, not the ambiguous imperial-humanist myth of our shared human attributes, which are supposed to distinguish us all from animals, but more significantly, the imbrications of our various pasts and presents, the ineluctable relationships of shared and contested meanings, values, material resources? It is necessary to assert our dense particularities, our lived and imagined differences; but could we afford to leave untheorized the question of how our differences are intertwined and, indeed, hierarchically organized? Could we, in other words, afford to have *entirely* different histories, to see ourselves as living – and having lived – in entirely heterogeneous and discrete spaces?

One prominent weakness of Orientalism has been its tendency towards conflation. Amartya Sen (1993) suggests that there are, at least, three modes of non-Indian discourses on India: the exoticist, the magisterial and the investigative. It is important to stress the varieties and nuances of the so-called “Western discourse” about non-Western societies so that the pernicious condescending and insulting (mis)representations can be separated from the more plausible and positive approaches.

The history of colonialism demonstrates various examples of cultural subjugation and violence, and yet one primary objection to the simplistic and unreflective acceptance of the notion of “cultural imperialism” is that it denies the role of agency. Moreover, notions of imperialism and domination entail intentionality, whereas globalization as a process is more unintentional and amorphous. In the words of John Tomlinson (1991:175):

Globalization may be distinguished from imperialism in that it is a far less coherent or culturally directed process. For all that, it has an ambiguous location between the economic and political senses; nevertheless the idea of imperialism at least contains the notion of a purposeful project, namely the intended spread of a social system from one centre of power across the globe.

The idea of globalization suggests the interconnection and interdependency of all global areas rather than their purposeful organization. It comes about as the result of economic and cultural practices which do not, of themselves, aim at global integration, but which nonetheless in some sense produce it. This is, however, not to suggest that the whole process is teleological – a history unfolding itself towards a predetermined endpoint such as a global and even homogeneous world.

It can be argued that a spatial or geographically specific hegemony has been supplanted by a disciplinary hegemony. The hegemonic rise of the discipline of economics over other social sciences has taken place concurrently with the definition of the world in primarily economic terms (Markoff and Montecinos 1993). The rise of economics as a discipline and of economic presuppositions in sociology illustrates the force of economic globalization. Rather than advancing a defence for the Western social sciences, we are simply trying to establish that a globalization approach is not a camouflaged attempt to establish the hegemony of “Western” social theory, culture or ideology. And this can be done by turning to the so-called “non-Western” part of the world. The use of the quotation marks suggests that we are using yet also underscoring the essentialist qualities of these categories. In the world today, we are all implicated by and in globalization.

## **THE PROBLEMATIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNIVERSALIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION**

Can the expansion of the global field be equated with the march of universalization in the traditional Enlightenment sense? The idea of the march of universalization in both spatial and cultural terms was one of the clarion calls of modernization theories, which unfortunately also turned out to be its theoretical Achilles’ heel. Many critics pointed out that what was billed as the “universal” was in reality the “particular” culture of the West. Universalization was, in that sense, the world-wide spread of Western particularistic culture. The idea of universalization was an accompaniment to the notion of progress that had been nurtured by the idea of Enlightenment. A critical evaluation of the Enlightenment project provided another opportunity to challenge universalistic ambitions. A simplistic, yet popular, view of globalization tends to conflate globalization with homogenization. For example, one writer claims that:

Cultural globalizing tendencies are most evident in the common core syllabuses that have spread across the globe. Schoolchildren,

whether they be in Islamic Iran, Croatia, or the Basque Country, learn to master the same basic mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology. As an orientation to the world, this common global socialization provides strong constitutive elements for a core commonality. (Goonatilake, 1995: 229)

This is a clear and empirically valid statement, but then to conclude from this that “[t]hese ongoing processes of cultural globalization are tending to wipe out local cultural identities” (1995: 229) is an unwarranted exaggeration.

There is no denying the fact that there are certain homogenizing tendencies at work at the global level, but one need not equate globalization theory with earlier homogenization theory, a theory that has its Marxist as well as liberal varieties. The duality and the conflictual relationship between *locality* and *globality* that a misreading of globalization theory yielded have been largely redressed by the introduction of the concept of *glocalization* by Robertson (1995). To what extent globalization theory embodies a universalist position is an issue that cannot be discussed here in any great detail. We share the minimalist theory of universality of (moral) values – “truth” and “justice” – proposed by Michael Walzer (1994) as a take-off point. In a more philosophical sense, Walzer, while retaining the duality of “particular” and “universal”, seeks to transcend it by advancing both the notion of minimal morality and the politics of difference at the same time. Drawing upon the difference between society and humanity, Walzer (1994: 8) writes:

Societies are necessarily particular because they have members and memories, members with memories not only of their own but also of their common life. Humanity, by contrast, has members but no memory, and so it has no history and no culture, no customary practices, no familiar life-ways, no festivals, no shared understanding of social goods. It is human to have such things, but there is no singular human way of having them. At the same time, the members of all the different societies, because they are human, can acknowledge each other's different ways, respond to each other's cries for help, learn from each other, and march (sometimes) in each other's parades.

Here obviously Walzer proposes a pluralistic world-view in consonance with the ideals of liberalism. Although we do not want to deviate too much from this pluralistic intent, we suggest that a number of the common concerns of humanity can be shown to have a “shared understanding”, if not some shared festivals or celebrations. Issues such as ecological degradation, epidemics such as AIDS, gender equality, cultural

rights, etc. have clearly become common concerns of humanity. Earth Day and United Nations Day are also celebrated world-wide. Global conferences on the environment (the Rio conference of 1992) or the World Conferences on Women in Nairobi in 1985 and in Beijing in 1995 illustrate these common underpinnings of a global consensus. The impact of globalization on local contexts cannot be seen to be simply an erasure of local traditions, nor can the local be recreated as an imaginary land. Even those who are concerned about the adverse effects of globalization on the local are quick to issue warnings against the fabrication of the local, because such an attempt might resurrect and legitimize primitive oppression and exploitation. The local can be the site of resistance and liberation, but also a predicament (Dirlik, 1997: 85). When ideas of resistance are invoked, it raises the need for a moral compass to separate a life worth living, and thus fighting for, from what is unacceptable and loathsome. The idea of measuring progress does not become entirely inappropriate or obsolete.

One problem with earlier modernization theory was its inability to conceptualize progress adequately, including its uncritical acceptance of a unilinear view of progress. In the face of endless theoretical onslaughts against the idea of progress, it is a challenging task to salvage it. In our opinion, Therborn's (1995) discussion of four routes towards modernization – the European, the New World's, self-imposed, and modernization by conquest – is helpful in its emphasis on the plurality of the concept. On the issue of progress, Sztompka's (1990) view of a progressive theory of progress based on the principles of self-evaluation and self-correction can be incorporated into a globalization approach. The problems concerning the universal versus the particular and rationality versus relativism can also be negotiated intellectually by adhering to the minimalist position that Walzer recommends or by arguing for a position of weak or flexible absolutism, or what may be called a reflexive universalism. A reflexive universalism must be based on an adherence to a minimum set of common ground rules which would allow for sensitivity to the local traditions, norms and institutions. A reflexive universalist position would allow for negotiation and rational discussion among competing claimants of rationality. Such debates and discussions are pivotal for ensuring some minimal conditions for social justice on a global basis. A reflexive universalist position takes the local context very seriously. Though sensitive to local context, it is not context-dependent rationality.

Let us take the example of recent discussions of women's rights in the so-called Islamic societies. Now to talk about "Islamic society" as a single category would be an error and empty of reflexivity. The

so-called Islamic societies are so varied in terms of both time and space, as are the conditions of the women who live in those societies, as to render any generalization almost meaningless. Women in Libya undergo military training, whereas their counterparts in Afghanistan are literally excluded from public life. Yet in such diverse conditions, one can find the presence of a global discourse of women's rights. Under the rule of the Taliban, Afghan women stand to lose their basic rights to education. In Saudi Arabia, Amnesty International is involved in helping Saudi women to gain basic rights. Saudi women remain socially and politically excluded, yet economically engaged. The negotiation process is complex and can only be done if a good deal of sensitivity is shown towards these local conditions. In Iran – which presents a very interesting case – while the Islamic guards prowl the streets to enforce a ban on lipstick (Milani, 1999), some of the high-level leaders write essays on women's emancipation. The debates around democracy and women's rights in Iran command particular attention because of their autonomous nature. Reformist leaders in Iran draw inspiration from their indigenous religious and cultural traditions. Milani (1999) makes the interestingly ironic statement that “In Iran, nothing is what it seems to be. There are layers upon layers of meaning attached to every word, to every gesture, to every action.” This observation is applicable to a wide range of societies, not only Muslim societies, under global conditions.

## CONCLUSION

Plurality and reflexivity are not only key attributes of the contemporary world that we inhabit, but also the hallmarks of the concept of globalization that we employ to make sense of that world. The availability of multiple discourses, controversies, debates and new intellectual battle-grounds on globalization points to a complex and non-linear reality. Recognition of and respect for disparate discourses of globalization demonstrate anything but its hegemonic intent. Globalization does not mean the removal or erasure of local culture. Local cultures under the conditions of globality have become as important as global culture itself. Local culture does not surrender itself unproblematically to forces from outside; rather it absorbs as it valorizes its own distinctiveness. At the turn of the twenty-first century, what is local and what is global are becoming increasingly uncertain. The near-erasure of the distinction between the local and the global as spatial categories has given way to a disjuncture between conceptual and spatial polarities.

How globalization as a process works out both institutionally and culturally depends to a large extent on local conditions. The reconstitution of locality takes place in due recognition to the fact that local culture, like any culture anywhere, is not a timeless structure; it changes, gathering strength by incorporating and indigenizing traditions from far and near in the truest spirit of cosmopolitanism.

To conceptualize globalization in a more meaningful, and thus useful way, we must transcend binary modes of thinking. It is no longer either tradition or modernity, but the fusion of the traditional and the modern. It is no longer either global or local, rather it is global and local simultaneously (or “glocal” in Robertson’s terminology). Cosmopolitanism, hybridity, pastiche, *mélange* and “multihistoricity” are the terms that come to mind in describing this process. A national citizen, whether of Singapore or South Korea, today has the potential to become a truly cosmopolitan citizen, to borrow a Kantian phrase. And that very possibility is courtesy of globalization. Robertson (1987b), in his original formulation, conceptualized the global circumstance as the global-human condition which includes individuals, societies, relations between societies and (in the generic sense) humankind as the major contemporary components or dimensions of that condition. This conceptualization very adequately captures the liberating potential of globalization without being naïve about its destructive qualities. In short, one must remain open-minded about the direction of the unfolding process of globalization.