Developing Global Consciousness

The Historical and Social Context of Globalization

This book is an exploration of the nature of globalization. It takes as its starting point the idea that globalization is not a post-Second World War phenomenon, still less a process of change that followed the collapse of the Cold War. Yet, undeniably, globalization is everyone's favourite catchphrase today. It never enjoyed this currency in the mid-twentieth century or before. Indeed, it has become the bête noire of analysts angered at the contemporary power and influence of transnational entities, monsters that they believe are rapidly homogenizing the world, destroying its diversity, and marginalizing its peoples' hard-won democratic rights. For others, transnationals and the new forms of global integration they represent are harbingers of a new order that will enable humans to co-operate more meaningfully with each other. Nations that embrace globalization, we are regularly informed, do not go to war with one another. Instead they compete on the global economic playing field and prosper.

But globalization is more than just McWorld or Westernization. It is about human interconnections that have assumed global proportions and transformed themselves. If we focus on globalization simply as a modern strategy for power, we will miss its historical and social depths. Indeed the origins of globalization lie in interconnections that have slowly enveloped humans since the earliest times, as they globalized themselves. In this sense, globalization as a human dynamic has always been with us, even if we have been unaware of its embrace until recently. Instead we have viewed the world more narrowly through the spectacles of religion, civilization, nation or race. Today these old constructs continue to frustrate the development of a global consciousness of human interconnections and their dynamism. Even analytic tools at our disposal are often infected; sometimes they are products of these perceptions.

More commonly however, as knowledge has expanded, academic lines of inquiry have become increasingly distinct disciplines, dedicated to the detailed
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studies such knowledge now enables and requires. Unfortunately such special-
ization tends to separate knowledge from ordinary people. It makes their task
of understanding life more difficult. It also ill equips us for the study of a
subject that is diverse, not only in all its various social, geographical, biological,
political, historical, cultural and intellectual components, but also in the out-
comes of their interconnections. Far from being static or one-dimensional,
globalization is the manifestation of extremely diverse dynamic synergies.
This book seeks to provide a historical basis for exploring those synergies.

Its focus is on the past five hundred years, when humans experienced three
distinct global waves of interconnectedness. The first, after 1500, centred on
the globalization of regional trade; the second, after 1800, gained impetus
from industrialization; the third derived from the architecture of a new world
order after 1945. Each wave began with an event – sometimes a war – which
gave space for its burgeoning as a global force for change. Each wave produced
new interconnections and generated new synergies that in time led to its own
transformation. No wave has ever been the creature of one country alone,
although at times hegemons and would-be hegemons have attempted to
monopolize them for their own advantage. No wave has ever been the product
of one 'civilization' or one culture alone. Waves encompass many cultures;
they enable them to interact, although not necessarily as equals. They enable
cross-fertilization. Exclusivity, on the other hand, denies mutual benefit and is
difficult to sustain. It frustrates globalization. It creates instability and makes
war and conquest attractive alternatives. The first wave faltered in the
eighteenth century for this reason; similarly the second wave foundered in the
early twentieth century. It is too early to make a final judgement about the
third wave.

Like earlier waves, the third wave is dynamic but it possesses characteristics
that also make it qualitatively different. Its difference can be summed up in
one word that suggests the emergence of something greater than the accident
of interconnections. That word is globalism, meaning a conscious process of
globalization or a set of policies designed specifically to effect greater global
rather than international interactions. Thus, it has been possible since 1944 to
speak of American globalism. No such globalism existed under British hege-
mony in the nineteenth century. Britain rode the forces driving globalization
but never pursued strategies designed to engender global relations. Its goals
were always nationally or imperially focused. The same might be said of the
United States, but its globalism set in place institutions capable, in theory if
not in practice, of independently developing global policies. The difference
lay in part in the US desire not to repeat the mistakes of the second wave, but
it lay also in the fact that American hegemony coincided with a remarkable
process of democratization that radically transformed societies and enabled
the emergence of dynamic structures for global co-operation.
To understand globalization then, we need to understand its historical dimension. But we need also to understand its equally important, though usually indirect, social dimension. As interconnections increasingly assumed global proportions, trade prospered and the power and influence of trading classes increased accordingly. Sometimes the nurturing and accommodation of such agents of profitable activity established precedence for social and political reform. Thus human interconnectedness extended opportunities for human empowerment, although not without contestation and struggle. It promoted social transformation, but without the autonomy that empowerment requires, the result of social transformation became inequality.

Social transformation and interconnectedness were also influenced by human environments, population sizes and movements, technologies and economies, and cultures. Differences between these factors have always ensured that no one society became identical to another. Consequently, many analysts have sought to explain social inequalities by reference to these differences.

But they have also focused on the strategies adopted by different communities and on the quality of leadership. As social animals, humans have always pursued a range of collective strategies to ensure their survival and well-being: they have migrated, conquered, traded, and technologically innovated. As societies grew larger and more interconnected, the range of strategies adopted tended to broaden. Yet for many societies until a thousand years ago, conquest remained the dominant strategy, and, like most strategies, was ultimately premised on an unsustainable zero-sum understanding about the generation of wealth. In the end, conquering societies always ran out of loot to plunder or societies worth subjugating. Sometimes their exploitation destroyed the very environments they coveted.

Trading societies were not always different in this regard. Their desire to monopolize trade and satisfy the lust for instant fortune frequently destroyed the potential for future market growth. It also attracted the attention of unwelcome predators. This was still a world dominated by elites who regarded any sign of economic success as an invitation for conquest. In time these rapacious classes would be swept aside or incorporated, and conquest subjugated – at least in principle – to the promotion of commerce and industry. Thus merchants and industrialists remained comfortable with slaves and colonial subjects during the first two waves of globalization. As initial beneficiaries of the autonomy and empowerment that the wider global environment increasingly gave space for, traders and industrialists wanted to monopolize their potential. But like conquerors before them, they failed. Democratization, long before it emerged as a global strategy for security and well-being, consistently frustrated all forms of exclusivity. First the struggle of traders, then industrialists, middle and working classes, and more recently of empowered civil societies bear testimony to this constancy.
Some writers give greater weight to the role of technology in stimulating change. They argue that the scope for human action altered dramatically with two paradigm shifts, the first heralding an agricultural revolution over ten thousand years ago, the second an industrial revolution beginning some two hundred years ago. Technological changes altered the way humans produced and transformed the nature of human societies. But what gave these revolutions significance was human interconnectiveness. Agricultural technology, like writing, evolved in only a small number of places. Yet its consequences were profound because it spread. The same is true of industrialization, except that ten thousand years later, greater human interconnectiveness gave it global resonance within a much shorter period of time.

Human interconnectiveness, then, has long been an important feature of human survival and well-being. Indeed, its historical strength has been such that human strategies have changed over time because of human interconnectiveness, especially after the fifteenth century, when it assumed global proportions and developed three very distinct consecutive forms. Globalization changed the nature of human communities accordingly. It also magnified tremendously the forms and scope of exclusionary strategies, thereby generating new dangers and challenges.

But the forms and scope of human co-operation and empowerment have similarly magnified, enabling a nascent global consciousness of the social import of globalization. From the macro level of the global community to the micro level of the family, the same imperative exists. Democratization empowers and enriches people. It transforms them. It fashions space for creativity, new specialisms, and new strategies. It creates scope for positively transforming the human condition. But managing such transformations is a difficult process; indeed globalization has twice faltered because elites sought to frustrate democratization and reorient globalization towards more exclusive ends.

The same prospect may well face our own third wave of globalization if we ignore the social and historical lessons that globalization presents to us. We should not allow globalization to be privatized, to become the privileged agenda of national and transnational entities. People need to reclaim ownership of globalization and democratize the process. The alternative has confronted humans before. Actions that seek to marginalize human agency and creativity, and undermine democratic gains, will not only make societies more vulnerable to economic and political shocks, but will also deny humans the mass global dynamism they now need to address problems that exist in global proportions. Every child that starves is a child denied the ability to contribute to society to the best of his or her ability. Every child refused education represents a loss in social and human potential. In one way or another, all peoples and their societies pay the penalty for such neglect.
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Our Exploration

To understand these relationships, we have to develop global consciousness and abandon the narrow perspectives that have imprisoned us in the past. We need to embrace knowledge that helps us in this task. In fact humans have been struggling towards this goal ever since they became conscious of themselves, and in Chapter 2 we explore some of the consequences that struggles for survival and well-being have had in the creation of global consciousness. In particular we focus on the importance of understanding our place in the universe, the nature of that universe, and the evolution of humans as a species. These are all prerequisites for understanding the human condition.

Unfortunately we often put on masks and veils in order to deny our genetically determined desires and our materialism. We claim that intelligence drives human history, rather than our ability to utilize resources and to imitate successful behaviour. We do not want to believe that we are governed by desires no more complicated than that of survival and well-being.

Nonetheless, we are also socially dynamic. We control our desires. We cooperate. We specialize. We have to because we do not live in a vacuum. We are affected by our environments, by our abilities to access and utilize resources, and by the size of our populations. Increasingly also, we are affected by human interconnectedness.

Our examination of early global transformations in Chapter 3 focuses on the interconnections that the human dynamic first generated. Many of these interconnections shared characteristics that are remarkably similar to those of globalization today: lost diversity, new forms of difference, environmental degradation, expanding social, political and economic units and, above all, the gradual development of synergies that had interregional impacts. Behind all these changes lay basic human drives for security and well-being as humans migrated, conquered, traded and innovated. We may regard interconnectedness as a feature of contemporary globalization, but the records of the past demonstrate its ancient centrality as a motor for human change.

Power based on increased unequal relations became the basis for governance in most agricultural societies. The different weight they gave to strategies for security and well-being produced very different outcomes. Yet none of them could isolate themselves from the consequences of increasing linkages between communities. By a thousand years ago, these linkages had begun to assume continental proportions. But they remained fragile. Indeed, war and a very biological consequence of human interconnectedness swept large parts of the Afro-Eurasian continent and delayed its global emergence until the sixteenth century.

Thus the first wave of globalization, the subject of Chapter 4, assumed a very different form than a reading of human history one thousand years ago
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might have presumed. Weakened by plague and distracted by the activities of Eurasian warlords, China never fulfilled its early promise. Into the vacuum stepped a number of European states whose fractious competitiveness provided motivation and whose accidental discovery of the Americas and its wealth provided the means to insert themselves into the lucrative intra-Asian trade. During the course of our examination of their fragile commercial imperatives, we will consider how this three-century-long transformation of global relations has been interpreted in the past, and whether Europe's growing pre-eminence suggested a degree of European exceptionalism.

However, at the heart of the matter lay an old human drive, the lust for riches. What drove Europe out of recession and produced the basis for successful commercialism was the sudden wealth that Atlantic and Asian trade networks generated. But while its multiplier impact created new opportunities for growth, it did not guarantee particular outcomes for its participants. The ruling classes of the first wave's protagonists tried to convert their newfound wealth into the basis for hegemony within Europe; in the end power flowed instead to societies that gave space to those who directly or indirectly generated wealth.

Commerce deepened the democratic imperative and made old forms of exclusion less viable. Indeed, the first wave – although less all-embracing than subsequent waves – transformed global dynamics. For the first time some humans operated globally. They transformed intersecting regional markets into global networks and enabled new interconnections, which accelerated the global distribution of plants and animals, spawned rapid population growth, and altered environments. These changes all had far-reaching political, social and economic outcomes. For all countries, the first wave of globalization was highly destabilizing.

As a goal, the attainment of wealth was uncontroversial, but in leading commercial nations it was accompanied by changes in class relations and property laws. Such nascent democratization sometimes threatened the interests of old elites. Commercial classes increased in size and influence. Urbanization expanded. Rural communities similarly changed as commercial activities increased. How those changes were managed not only dictated the success or otherwise of commercial activities but also determined the future character of their societies. During the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many European societies sought sustainability through exclusions of class, religion, race, empire or commercial monopoly. But their passage was never easy, and frequently countries resorted to war and conquest. France did both at the end of the eighteenth century, and brought the first wave to an end.

Despite the instability generated by the nascent democratic imperative, the synergies produced by the first wave enabled a remarkable technological
transformation. The Industrial Revolution, globalization's industrial child, is examined in Chapter 5. We have not always viewed it thus. Often we have been conscious of industrialization as a late-eighteenth-century process emanating only from Europe, or from Britain alone, rather than as a product of the first wave's interconnections and synergies. But there can be no doubting its impact. Industrialization enabled environments to carry larger populations, which in turn generated new social and political dynamics. More than ever before, technology now had the capacity to generate huge profits. It also increased interconnectiveness, enabling its own more rapid diffusion.

But it also generated disadvantage. The societies that initially benefited most from industrialization were those that had been transformed by the first wave of globalization. The Industrial Revolution was the pay-off for empowering more of their citizens and for enabling the creation and integration of diverse and dynamic economic activities. That democratizing process continued during the nineteenth century and heralded a new age of the masses.

Former powerhouses such as China never experienced the same dynamic surge through their economies capable of raising demand as trade had in Europe. Consequently no democratic impulse existed to generate demand also. In that difference lay disadvantage. So too the loss of autonomy. Societies unable to refashion themselves as industrial nations increasingly became imprisoned as colonies or semi-colonies in the industrial futures of other nations.

But even countries that did manage to retain their autonomy discovered no equality in their advantage. Inequalities between industrializing countries, together with the internal tensions that industrialization generated, tempted their leaders to boost security and well-being by exclusionary alternatives. Pressure mounted in the late nineteenth century as more countries industrialized and as a second generation of industrial technology emerged that depended on social transformation and democratization for its success. State systems needed to be more coherent and responsive; they had to become less hierarchical. States had to make huge investments in communications infrastructure and human capital. Industry and finance responded by restructuring, but this simply raised the stakes further. It did not produce mass prosperity, on which industrialization now increasingly depended. Not unnaturally many industrializing countries sought to distract disaffected subjects from their shortfalls by producing colonial successes. Japan turned to empire to offset the impact of unequal development at home and competition abroad. The United States sought empire to symbolize its great-power status, gain access to new wealth abroad, and demonstrate the universal benefits that Social Darwinism created. Russia expanded eastward across Eurasia.

There were many other reasons for colonies: they sustained national confidence, they possessed strategic value, they restored competitive advantage, and they demonstrated global reach. But they brought no lasting stability.
Certainly they brought little stability to the peoples they engulfed. Indeed, the nature of colonial transformation often made future autonomous development both tortuous and difficult. The various holocausts and economic reconstructions that accompanied incorporation into global processes of colonial production generated racism and victim mentalities that reduced the ability of their peoples to develop autonomously. In the long run these empires of disadvantage, the subject of Chapter 6, were unsustainable. They created new forms of difference and inequality that denied the key imperatives for successful transformation, autonomy and empowerment. Colonies involved zero-sum strategies. They destabilized communities. They denied inclusion. They suppressed demand. These contradictions never had time to become apparent to most industrializing colonizers; by the early twentieth century they were overwhelmed instead by pressures from their own communities for democratization and by competition among themselves.

The implosion of the second wave (Chapter 7) demonstrated the danger that this scale of globalization now presented. Instead of globalism and the development of mechanisms for co-operation and mutual development, the second wave promoted nationalism and the creation of empires that sought to become worlds unto themselves. Both responses demonstrated a belief that societies now possessed the necessary means to control the multiple transformations and class conflicts rippling through them. Fearing that they might lose out in competition increasingly drawn in Darwinian terms, the leaders of industrializing nations were prepared to go to the brink of war and over in order to preserve their democratically challenged social structures and gain hegemonic status at home and abroad. The First World War cost the fighting nations tremendously, and not only in lives. It cost them the confidence that had at one time energized the second wave.

In a sense nothing changed immediately after 1918; the deck chairs were simply rearranged. Consequently, a brutal depression – born of state indecision and timidity, and symbolic of the second wave’s collapse – provoked a second round of bloodletting during the 1930s and 1940s. Inward-looking economic policies simply reinforced the drive to empire and conquest. But the avenging fascist conquerors, who believed that national solutions could only come from baptisms of fire and empire, served only to demonstrate the futility of fostering zero-sum perceptions and denying the democratic synergies that globalization gave space to.

In Chapter 8, we begin an examination of the third wave of globalization, which followed the second wave’s implosion. War bestowed on the United States unprecedented opportunity to establish the first global world order. Indeed, American globalism did create a qualitatively different wave. It laid the basis both for domestic political stability in industrialized nations and for international co-operation. Through state planning and social engineering, it
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facilitated the return to prosperity of its former industrial rivals. It also created new multilateral institutions to manage international trade liberalization and prevent the return of ruinous national economic competition. Both projects incorporated US desires to maintain its hegemony, but in a more globalized world such desires were not always possible to fulfil.

American globalism also created an international environment in which the second wave's empires of disadvantage could be dissolved. Thus decolonization, too, was a child of globalization and its struggles, although not the uncontested Western gift that it is still sometimes presented as. Nor did decolonization guarantee future meaningful participation in the globalized economy for members of the emergent Third World. Nonetheless, it did represent a break with the traditions of the past and held the promise of autonomy for societies that decolonized. Achieving it proved more difficult.

Colonialism left most independent countries poorly equipped to survive in a more globalized world. In addition, residues of the past lingered in the modernization policies that more powerful industrial nations imposed as a condition for development assistance. They lingered also in the perceptions people held of globalization at a time when the term was barely recognized. Neither the policies nor the perceptions gave weight to the democratic imperative. Instead they encouraged the segregation of economic sectors, denied social reform, and reinforced dependence on export production. Consequently the promise of decolonization was not always realized. Dictatorships emerged. Development faltered. Neocolonialism prospered. A global divide emerged that still holds the potential to destabilize the third wave.

Residues of the past also lingered in the war of globalisms that erupted between the two victors of the Second World War, the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Instead of peace and global harmony, the third wave began with a new global ideological division, an unprecedented arms race, and a destructive Soviet–American rivalry that spilled over into East European occupations and Third World wars. It was not an auspicious start. In the end both globalisms died, one more dramatically than the other.

The victor was transnationalism. Large corporations and their allies exploited popular fears when post-war prosperity ended in the 1970s. They deregulated domestic economies and transformed global regulatory systems to their advantage. As transnational capital became more active, it harnessed a third generation of technological change to fashion new global production networks. These networks often exploited Third World vulnerabilities, but their primary purpose was to promote corporate survival and find new avenues for profit. By the close of the twentieth century, the corporate vision of globalism held centre stage.

But transnationalism threatened many of the achievements of democratiza-
tion, the subject of Chapter 9: Globalizing Democracies. Industrialized societies sometimes like to claim ownership of certain features of globalization, such as democracy. This too is a form of exclusion. Democratization is the process of social empowerment that makes modernity attainable. It too is challenging and destabilizing, not least to existing elites and powerholders who have a vested interest in declaring democracy 'a foreign flower'. Not surprisingly, the process of democratization has historically been exceedingly slow, at least until the third wave.

Recognition of the symbiotic relationship between economic growth and democratization has been similarly slow in emerging. Nonetheless, economic health demands a balance of power that better favours previously subordinate classes. Such a situation was never achieved until the third wave. In many respects the Great Depression and the Second World War were wake-up calls. Only a strong civil society could generate the social harmony and confidence necessary to breed dynamism.

The decades that followed sent shock waves of unprecedented empowerment rippling through the industrialized world. They reached deep into societies to transform working and domestic lives, as well as family and social relationships. As democracy deepened, it also radically transformed gender and race relations. These latter transformations, although incomplete, demonstrated the possibilities inherent in democratization and indicated the dynamic character of the third wave, in particular its ability to generate among people new ways of thinking and new forms of action quite independent of the more hegemonic tendencies exhibited in American, Soviet and transnational globalisms.

These new synergies demand from us new globalizing perspectives, the subject of our concluding chapter. The dynamics of globalization have changed, but the dangers they now present are not dissimilar to those of the late eighteenth century or the early twentieth century. The third wave could falter; it could collapse. Three challenges stand out; first, the challenge of extending and deepening democratization globally and enhancing the centrality of civil society. The attempted privatization of the third wave has strengthened short-term profit-maximizing strategies and forms of monopoly control at the expense of investment in human capital and infrastructure. The resulting increase in inequalities, exacerbated by war and debt, has cost the third wave much of its former popular legitimacy. It has also increased the scope for corruption and for new policies of exclusion at a time when human expectations for empowerment have never been higher. Like the empires of old, the First World, the industrialized world, cannot survive as a world unto itself. Human interconnectivity makes that impossible.

Second, there exists the environmental challenge of addressing issues of sustainability globally. Just as democracy cannot survive in a sea of poverty, it
cannot survive in an environmentally damaged and disease-ridden world. Transnational corporations are not always helpful in this regard. Their drive for short-term profit contributes to many environmental and health disasters. So too the quest by many states for big-power status or industrial might. Of course many problems are both cumulative and global, and can be addressed only by co-operatively developing global strategies that employ technology in environmentally sensitive ways. The machinery for developing and implementing such strategies barely exists.

The third challenge is the multicultural one that human diversity now globally presents to all societies that once defined themselves exclusively as homogeneous nations. In an age in which global strategies for security and well-being still include human migration, albeit on a scale that is both greater and more rapid than at any time in the past, national exclusions are unsustainable and generate instability.

All three challenges represent divides that have the potential to cripple the third wave and its human dynamic. In the short term, however, it is the refusal of many societies to accommodate diversity, one of the most important consequences of globalization, that may immediately prove most destabilizing. The creation of effective strategies to handle the reality of human diversity is one of humanity's most pressing challenges, as recent wars, ethnic cleansings, genocides and the restless tide of refugees and displaced persons demonstrate. But the first task is not an ideological one. Rather, steps need to be taken to relieve tensions by generating social equity.

Institutions already exist that can help to transform the third wave to meet these challenges. New ones can be created. War and depression should no longer be the only circuit-breakers. But for transformation to occur, we need to enhance our global consciousness in order to develop the necessary framework for future growth and change. Faith in a future technological revolution to resolve all our environmental, economic and social problems is not enough. Revolutions do not guarantee equality and harmony.

The key lies instead in continued democratization, and relentless individual and collective empowerment. Empowerment transforms class structures. It reduces barriers and broadens the scope for wealth generation. It encourages equity and the devolution of authority. It creates skills to manage complex societies, and makes possible diverse solutions and new ways of understanding ourselves. But empowerment also involves consciousness of our global history, and understanding that our very basic human drives require equally basic material solutions. Accordingly, our nascent global consciousness needs to be harnessed in material and institutional ways in order to manage the human condition more positively and to effect global solutions based on an inclusive rather than exclusive reading of human history. It is to that end that this book seeks to make a contribution.