

# The Idea of Globalization

## What's in a name?

Globalization is the 'name' that is often used to designate the power relations, practices and technologies that characterize, and have helped bring into being, the contemporary world. What it in fact means, though, is less than precise. Armand Mattelart refers to globalization as:

one of those tricky words, one of those instrumental notions that, under the effect of market logics and without citizens being aware of it, have been naturalized to the point of becoming indispensable for establishing communication between people of different cultures. (2000: 97)

He argues in the same place that globalization has a **hegemonic** role in organizing and decoding the meaning of the world. In a similar vein, John Benyon and David Dunkerly, in their general introduction to *Globalization: the Reader*, make the claim that 'globalization, in one form or another, is impacting on the lives of everyone on the planet . . . globalization might justifiably be claimed to be the defining feature of human society at the start of the twenty-first century' (2000: 3).

Certainly, struggles over its meanings, its effects and its origins are played out in a variety of ways and sites, from academe and the media, through governments and corporations,

to the streets of Seattle, Melbourne and Genoa. For some, globalization means freedom, while others see it as a prison. For some it means prosperity, while for others it guarantees the poverty of the developing world. And though the word itself has been in use only since the early 1960s, some writers see it as dating from the empires of the ancient world, while for others globalization is coterminous with the modern era and the processes of **modernization**, or even of postmodernization. It seems everyone has a stake in its meaning, and is affected by its **discourses** and practices, though there is no straightforward or widely accepted definition of the term, either in general use or in academic writings.

### Globalization and the politics of naming

The intensity of debates over its meanings and applications can be understood if we take into account the importance of naming in the establishment of 'reality'. Mattelart points to this in his *Networking the World*, where he opens a chapter devoted to a critique of the politics of globalization by quoting the French philosopher Albert Camus's comment that 'Naming things badly adds to the misfortune of the world' (Mattelart, 2000: 97). At the time we commenced writing this book there was clearly a considerable amount of misfortune to be found globally. Wars were being waged in Palestine, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Algeria, Sri Lanka, Angola, the Sudan and in other places long forgotten, or never covered, by CNN. The number of people in the world living in poverty – which the World Bank defines as US\$1 a day or less – was over 1.19 billion in 1998 (PREM, 2000), and increasing or at best remaining the same in Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America and Central Asia (Nye and Donohue, 2000: 184). Crime and the management of crime contribute to this generalized misfortune: Pierre Bourdieu points out that 'California, one of the richest states of the US' spends more on its prison budgets than on the budget of all the universities combined, and that 'blacks in the Chicago ghetto only know the state through the police officer, the judge, the

prison warder and the parole officer' (Bourdieu, 1998a: 32). Unemployment too continues to impact on people's lives across the globe: in the week following the 11 September attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, over 100,000 airline employees in the United States, and many more around the world, were made redundant, with little prospect of regaining their jobs in the short to medium term. Clearly these are, in Camus's terms, 'bad things', which increase the level of misery for many people. But how their status is weighed and valued in the public imagination and in the eyes of power brokers varies tremendously according to how they are named, and to the contexts of their reportage.

We saw an extreme expression of this **politics of naming** in the media responses to the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, the destruction of New York's Twin Towers, the assault on the Pentagon, and the loss of thousands of lives. In the United States, but also in the United Kingdom, Europe, Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, the media networks ran virtually non-stop coverage of the event, with other programming effectively suspended. All other news (about politics, economics, entertainment, or sport) was virtually ignored, or treated peripherally, rating a serious mention only if it could somehow be connected with the attacks. International politics, for instance, was represented by stories of British Prime Minister Tony Blair pledging to support the United States; finance news dealt with the market collapse, seeing it as a consequence of the political uncertainty surrounding American President George W. Bush's response to the attacks. Entertainment was covered in stories about musicians like Celine Dion 'singing for the victims and their relatives'; and sports news was reduced to depictions of baseball teams 'playing for' America and/or New York).

The Western media were clearly of the opinion that something groundbreaking had taken place; as CNN put it, this was 'a day of unfathomable death, destruction and heartbreak' (CNN, 12 September 2001). Comparisons were made with historical events such as the bombing of Pearl Harbor, though most media commentators followed President George W. Bush in

characterizing the attacks as the first twenty-first-century war. Newspaper articles employed apocalyptic headings ('One with the world at last'; 'Our charmed life has gone forever') and lamented that 'On September 11, the world changed' (Goodman, 2001: 31). This change supposedly involved the loss, for Americans, of their innocence and security; although as Slavoj Žižek observed, 'when a New Yorker commented on how, after the bombings, one can no longer walk safely on the city's streets, the irony of it was that, well before the bombings, the streets of New York were well-known for the dangers of being attacked or, at least, mugged' (Žižek, 2001).

The significance of the event and the media's response for the wider story of globalization is that it worked as a profound instance of the politics of naming. What was, effectively, an appalling but localized disaster became international news – for a time, almost the only international news. And the language used in the reportage, and in statements by politicians and other world leaders, signals the efficacy of naming in bringing things into social reality, and in foreclosing, or shutting out, other 'realities'. Shocking as these events were, the 11 September attacks did not involve particularly high fatalities compared with many contemporary wars and acts of violence. The attacks on New York and the Pentagon resulted in the loss of what was initially reported as 6,500 lives (later reduced to around 3,000). By contrast, tens of thousands of people died in Russia's two invasions of Chechnya; some 19,000 Eritrean soldiers were reported as killed in the two-year war with Ethiopia (*Afrol News*, 2001); CNN reported that war-related deaths in east Congo were estimated to have reached 2 million by June 2001; and many hundreds of thousands have lost their lives in conflicts in Cambodia, the Balkans, East Timor, Iraq/Iran, Somalia and Ethiopia/Eritrea. But the reportage of these events came nowhere near the treatment of 11 September, possibly the most widely publicized event since World War II.

The response to the 11 September attacks, and the ideas and actions mobilized by the responses, are exemplified by Jean-Marie Colombani's article 'After this act of terrorism we are all Americans' in the *Guardian Weekly* of 20 September 2001

(initially published in *Le Monde*). Colombani's article, which more or less encapsulates the reactions of the Western media, required that 'we' (the CNN audience, the readers of Western newspapers) repress any doubt both as to who we are, and to what the attacks meant:

At a moment like this, when words fail so lamentably to express one's feeling of shock, the first thought that comes to mind is that we are all Americans, all New Yorkers . . . As during the darkest hours of French history, there is absolutely no question of not showing solidarity with the United States and its people, who are so close to us, and to whom we owe our freedom. (2001: 33)

This necessarily denies the possibility that his readers might identify with anyone but the United States, and collapses multiple forms of marking and identification into a tub of Americana. Colombani continues:

The US, isolated because of its unrivalled power and the absence of any counterweight, has ceased to be a pole of attraction. Or, to be more accurate, it seems to attract nothing but hatred in some parts of the world. . . . In today's monopolistic world a new and apparently uncontrollable form of barbarity seems poised to set itself up as a pole of opposition. (2001: 33)

There are a number of things happening here, the most obvious of which is the editing out of other contexts for the 11 September attacks. Colombani also fails to identify other contemporary misfortunes, such as the slaughter of Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica, as having comparable weight or significance; he would not and could not have declared, then or now, that 'after this we are all Bosnian Muslims'. But perhaps most significantly, he sets up a dichotomy, with 'us' opposed to them – the uncontrollably barbarous. The reason behind this is what Bourdieu (1998a: 19) refers to as the 'false universalism of the West', which he describes as a claim to **universalism** which is 'no more than a nationalism which invokes the universal (human rights, etc.) in

order to impose itself'. The attacks and deaths in the USA can move Colombani to call for Europeans to identify with Americans not just because of shared historical links, but more importantly because American society and its way of life are understood as standing in for 'universal' qualities or characteristics – humanity, reason, freedom, human rights, democracy and the 'good of mankind' – as opposed to the monstrosity, barbarity, madness and intolerance of its enemies.

This editing out of one broad spectrum of social issues, perspectives and values, and editing in of another as the only valid reality, is associated with the principle of **foreclosure**. Foreclosure is usually associated with psychoanalytical theory: Freud uses it with regard to the Oedipus complex, whereby a male child is required to repress desire for his mother and foreclose that aspect of his identity and desire as a requirement of his entry into 'normal' (patriarchal) society. Judith Butler refers to it in her discussions of the way in which 'normative heterosexuality' is understood as the basis and condition of subjectivity, and other possibilities of sexuality/subjectivity are foreclosed. So foreclosure can be understood as a process whereby certain feelings, desires, ideas and positions are both unthinkable with regard to, and simultaneously constitutive of, an identity. Foreclosure is also at the basis of the politics of naming, as we can see from Colombani's article ('After this act of terrorism we are all Americans'), because the process of foreclosure requires that 'we' (the CNN audience, the readers of Western newspapers) repress any doubt both as to who we are and as to what these attacks meant. The politics of naming thus simultaneously creates one reality, and forecloses another.

How is it possible to name one set of values as universal and foreclose another set while still holding to the notion of a globalized world predicated on such principles as freedom and democracy? Cultural theorists such as Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe and Claude Lefort have written, apropos of democracy, that it functions, theoretically, as an 'empty set' which allows no single group (a class, an ethnicity, a gender, a religion) to 'fill it up' or inflect it with their particularities. What Colombani's article points to is the process whereby the universal, supposedly

a non-inflected set just like democracy, is already filled with content – in this case, Western and/or American values, institutions and politics. And it is this inflection that allows Colombani to give the attacks on the USA a universal weight or meaning while denying a similar weight or meaning to the experiences of Bosnian Muslims or Afghani refugees.

### The name of globalization

Much the same can be said, of course, about the ‘empty set’ that is globalization. Despite the obvious difficulties in understanding what is meant by ‘globalization’, we can identify a number of positions that seek to explain and describe it. The many definitions in the literature range from the purely economic (interest rates, exchange rates, mobility of finance) and the rate of human movement (refugees, migrants, mobile professionals) to the effects of power (the collapse of nation-states, technological surveillance, ‘action at a distance’). But the many ways of thinking and writing about globalization can be collapsed into a small number of categories, which we will outline in a very broad brushstroke approach here.

The writers David Held and Anthony McGrew identify two main groups or ‘sides’ in the debate, whom they name the ‘**globalists**’ and the ‘**sceptics**’. Globalists, they argue, are believers, in the sense that for them ‘globalization is a real and significant historical development’ (2000: 2) – the effect of real structural changes in the past few centuries. The sceptics, on the other hand, consider that what we are experiencing at present is simply a continuation of trends that developed in the period of European colonial expansion, peaked during the period 1870-1914, and were interrupted by the two great wars and the ‘cold war’ of the twentieth century; so, for them, globalization is principally ideological, present more in the discourse than in reality.

Both sides in the debate, however, keep the market economy central to how globalization is viewed, and how it proceeds. Andreas Busch offers a very similar classification, identifying

writers on globalization as either 'liberals' – who start from the premise that globalization is unquestionably real, and move on to insist that it brings only benefits to all – or 'sceptics' – for whom global tendencies necessarily have negative political and economic outcomes (Busch, 2000: 30–1). He adds a third category, though: the 'moderately optimistic'. This group breaks with the other two (and, therefore, with Held and McGrew's globalist/sceptic division) by imputing considerably less importance to the economic sphere. At the same time, the 'moderately optimistic' category straddles the views of the other two groups by generally agreeing that there are globalizing tendencies which can be identified and measured, but that they are not as all-encompassing as the literature might imply; and nor are they operating without resistance, and without exceptions (Busch, 2000: 33).

In the chapters that follow, we will outline these ideas about what globalization means and for whom it takes on its meanings, and offer a critique of the central ideas and practices associated with it. In the process we will develop our own explanation for globalization, and trace its trends, patterns and movements across a number of domains, including history, technology, nationality, identity, media, the public sphere and economics. We start by considering the **Marxist** approaches of Immanuel Wallerstein, and Hardt and Negri, and draw on their ideas to discuss the relationship between history, ideology and globalization. Then we depart a little from this established category by examining a second strand of thought which comes from theorists we could designate '**Neomarxist**' such as Mattelart, Castells, Baudrillard, Virilio and Appadurai. Their examination of the processes of globalization centres around the extent to which technological developments have brought about a change in the way societies, states, cultures and individuals function and understand themselves. The third perspective which informs our discussion of globalization is exemplified by the work of writers such as Pierre Bourdieu and Zygmunt Bauman. These writers work in the tradition of Neomarxism, and give more emphasis to the cultural than to the economic aspects and effects of globalization. While they share the notion

that globalization has a history, and that technological developments have dramatically affected everyday life, they stress that these changes are explicable in cultural terms, specifically in terms of the politics of naming. That is, they argue that the changes are located within, and can be evaluated in terms of, powerful discourses that shape everyday life; discourses which simultaneously name, and thus help 'bring into being', what they are supposedly designating or describing.

### **'The global' and its meanings**

Most analysts accept the importance of the technological, economic, cultural and political changes associated with the term 'globalization', but very few agree as to what these changes mean or if, taken together, they add up to something that 'really exists' for everyone – as access to technology, as a world view, or simply as an instrumental name and set of discourses. In order to address the question, we first have to qualify it with two additional questions: for whom is globalization 'real', and in what ways? For the S11 (anti-globalization) demonstrators who protested in Seattle, Melbourne and Genoa, there was no doubt that globalization existed and was responsible for most of the misfortunes of the world, from environmental degradation and vandalism to the worldwide exploitation of workers. For them it was a reality which had changed the world, with negative consequences for their lives.

But to what extent are these consequences a result of globalization, or of the set of processes, values, technologies and politics associated with it? The protesters might well define it in terms of the power and influence of global capitalism, embodied in the practices of transnational corporations, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF); or characterize it as the various political, economic and cultural ways in which American hegemony has imposed itself upon the world; or point to the ways in which the IMF and the World Bank, operating as de facto arms of American free-trade policies, have effectively undermined the sovereignty of developing nations.

But the politicians who were the targets of the demonstrations would have had a very different understanding of the word 'globalization', an understanding shared, by and large, with spokespersons of the media, bureaucracies and business. When George W. Bush, Tony Blair and Silvio Berlusconi dismissed the protesters in Genoa as selfish malcontents who didn't understand the benefits globalization was bringing, particularly to the poorest and most underprivileged of the world's peoples, they were effectively repeating a discourse that was constitutive of Bill Gates's dream of 'frictionless capitalism', or Ted Turner's prophecy that the spread of CNN would eliminate war from the world: 'With CNN,' he announced, 'information circulates throughout the world, and no one wants to look like an idiot. So they make peace, because that's smart' (Mattelart, 2000: 95). Globalization may or may not be 'the defining feature of human society at the start of the twenty-first century', but importantly a large number of powerful people (from business, bureaucracies, government and the media) consistently assert that, contrary to what the protesters believe, it is the answer to, rather than the embodiment of, 'the misfortunes of the world'.

Still, before we could accept any of these explanations as evidence of the existence of something new called 'globalization', we would need to convince ourselves that the activities of capitalist institutions and/or American hegemony, and the technology associated with them, have changed and proliferated sufficiently over the last thirty or so years to justify talking about them, as do Beynon and Dunkerley, as 'impacting on the lives of everyone on the planet'. There are arguments both for and against the claims made by the protesters. Beynon and Dunkerley, for instance, argue that although globalization is not a new phenomenon, it takes a number of forms in the contemporary world which mark it off, quantitatively and qualitatively, from its antecedents. These forms include the usual suspects such as the technological compression of time and space; the spread of human rights, democracy and intercultural understanding; a 'new and voracious phase of Western capitalism'; the 'imposition of Americanized culture'; electronic imperialism; disparities with regard to the ownership and

production of and access to information; and the 'concentration of ownership of global media production and transmission in the hands of a small number of (mostly American) corporations' (Beynon and Dunkerley, 2000: 2).

As evidence for globalization, this characterization is unsatisfactory for two main reasons. First, there is nothing to suggest that these social, political and cultural forms, taken together or considered separately, are either constitutive of or inform any kind of universalization. There are many groups of people throughout the world, especially in Africa, South America and parts of Asia, for whom time and space are still experienced much as they were by their cultures a century ago. And to speak of democracy as a universal is not just to ignore obvious exceptions such as China, but also to conflate radically different versions of democracy (as practised, for example, in Zimbabwe, the USA and Fiji). As for the homogenizing effects of Western and particularly American culture, this ignores the argument, put forward by some cultural theorists, that local cultures have been particularly adept at transforming hegemonic cultural forms for their own purposes. Michel de Certeau, for instance, describes the way in which the indigenous people of South America may have appeared to the Spanish conquerors to have submitted to the Christianity they had imposed upon them, but in fact those conquered and converted were using Christian rituals and practices in ways that were very far from the Spaniards' intent (1984: xiii).

The second objection is that, as Armand Mattelart has demonstrated in a number of books (such as *The Invention of Communication*, *Mapping World Communication* and, most particularly, *Networking the World*), many of the forms identified by Beynon and Dunkerley were already discernible in the imbrication of the development of communication technologies and imperialist policies and practices in the late nineteenth century. We see them, for instance, in the choice (or imposition) of Greenwich time, in 1884, as the standard for the calculation of world time; or in the dividing up of the world, in 1870, into spheres of influence between British, French and German (and later American) news agencies. Mattelart argues that the

cultural, social and political forms of contemporary life are not new; rather they have been intensified and quickened by what he calls the 'originating' aspect of globalization, which involves the use of communication technology to bring about the integration of world financial markets:

Globalization originated in the sphere of financial transactions, where it has shattered the boundaries of national systems. Formerly regulated and partitioned, financial markets are now integrated into a totally fluid global market through generalized connections in real time. The financial sphere has imparted its dynamics to an economy dominated by speculative movements of capital in a context of constant overheating. With the expansion of the speculative bubble, the financial function has gained autonomy from the so-called real economy and supplanted industrial production and investment. (2000: 76)

Mattelart's position is interesting: he is sceptical with regard to both the emancipatory claims made for globalization – the idea that it improves human rights, or promotes democracy – and the notion that the **ideology** and cultural politics behind it are new. To exemplify this, he points to a number of striking parallels between the discourses and practices of nineteenth-century imperialism and those of the American hegemony. But at the same time he subscribes to the 'reality' of globalization in the sense that he accepts that there is a form of global activity – understood as the imbrication of communication technology, financial markets and flows, the media and other forms of information transmission, and a 'corporate management' ethos – which has accomplished the 'unification of the economic field and, by extrapolation . . . account[s] for the general state of the world' (2000: 75).

How does this take place? A prominent example of this phenomenon in action was the so-called 'Asian economic crisis' of 1997–98. World financial markets had been flowing into Asian stocks, realty and currencies because of the perception (fuelled by the successes of the 'tiger economies' of Singapore,

South Korea and Taiwan) that quick and even spectacular short-term profits could be made. There was no more logic to this activity than there was to the South Pacific 'bubble' in the eighteenth century or the rush for African colonies in the nineteenth. In each case, the economies in question were overheated and running large current account deficits. Once a number of businesses in the region defaulted on loan payments, there was a mass withdrawal of capital which caused local corporations to go under, workers to be laid off and currencies to fall dramatically in value. As Mattelart suggests, the keys to what happened were the speed, mass and reach of both the transmission of information and the circulation of capital. The resultant social and political consequences were drastic: in Indonesia, for instance, the government's attempt to implement IMF-sponsored economic reforms (which included cutbacks in public spending), coupled with the weakness of the Indonesian rupiah (which made it harder for people to buy food), led to riots directed against ethnic Chinese, who constituted a significant part of the local business community. Erratic and dramatic capital flows not only brought about the deaths of thousands of Chinese, they also created political instability throughout the South-east Asian region: only the stronger economies (Singapore, for instance) escaped without some form of sociopolitical disruption.

Mattelart's argument is that, in the contemporary world, social, cultural and political issues, including the sovereignty of states, are predicated – if not entirely dependent – upon this new phenomenon of capital flows, and the technology which makes it possible. Advances in communication technology, **informationalism**, the hegemony of American and Western culture, and the proliferation of institutions concerned with, or involved in, global governance have meant that states, groups and individuals are becoming 'increasingly enmeshed in worldwide systems and networks of interaction' and 'relations and networks of power', so that 'distant occurrences and developments can come to have serious domestic impacts while local happenings can engender significant global repercussions' (Held and McGrew, 2000: 3). But this is a long way from

accepting the position held by some theories of globalization, which is that flows of capital, culture, media, images and ideas have severed the connection between territoriality and identity, eroded the functions and power of the state, homogenized societies and cultures, and recontextualized lives and events in terms of global, rather than local, meanings and agendas.

If we look, for instance, at the reactions to the 11 September attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, there was certainly a great deal of rhetorical commitment to the notion of a 'global response to terrorism'. The leaders of states such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Pakistan, Japan and Russia, for instance, all offered the USA both discursive and material support. And newspaper editors, television reporters and politicians in the West were quick to embrace the Manichaean distinction between the 'allies' and the 'forces of barbarism and terror'. But this distinction soon became symptomatic of a general splintering of the facade of global unity into local interests, values and conflicts. Sometimes this occurred inadvertently, as when George W. Bush invited all nations (presumably including Islamic ones) to join him in a 'crusade' (a term from which he hastily resiled). The 'allies' and their 'global war on terrorism' took on an even more Western/anti-Islamic inflection a few days later when Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi told reporters that the situation was all about the superiority of 'our' (Western) civilization, and the inferiority of Islam. India followed up by trying to include Pakistan's support for Kashmiri Muslim separatists in the terrorist category; Russia invited the West to join its own crusade in Chechnya; Israel used the moment to justify its refusal to consider Palestinian statehood; and Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia took advantage of the occasion to round up and imprison Islamic opponents.

This strong anti-Islam rhetoric, fuelled by the media, was gradually directed more specifically at the Taliban. The front page of *The Weekly Telegraph* (3–9 October 2001), for instance, showed a photograph of 'The haunted face' of a former Taliban secret policeman above the caption 'I was a Taliban torturer – I crucified people'. But within a week of the attacks six people, including a Sikh, had been murdered in the USA – supposedly

because they were of 'Arabic appearance' – and mosques were attacked in the United Kingdom and Australia. In Pakistan, that country's official support for the war against terrorism was undermined by scenes of large demonstrations, violently repressed, against America. And in Australia the inflection reached particularly farcical proportions when the governing Liberal Party, determined to win an upcoming election at any cost, countenanced and contributed to the characterizing of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as barbaric and an enemy of civilization, while simultaneously demonizing a boatload of Afghans who sailed into Australian waters to claim refugee status. Prime Minister John Howard campaigned for his re-election on the twin platforms of promoting and contributing to the communality of global interests, while steadfastly protecting Australian territorial sovereignty against intrusions from the unwanted masses emanating from across that same globe.

### **Local or global?**

We posed the question earlier as to whether or not there was a reality behind the claim that lives and activities in the contemporary world could be understood in terms of, or were informed by, the processes associated with globalization. The question perhaps needs to be rephrased to address what Held and McGrew refer to as the 'puzzle' of 'the disjuncture between the widespread discourse of globalization and the realities of a world in which, for the most part, the routines of everyday life are dominated by national and local circumstances' (2000: 5). This disjuncture is played out most obviously in the different agendas, explanations and understandings that are brought to the meetings of organizations such as G-8 and the World Trade Organization, as we saw above in our discussion of the views taken by protesters compared with that of the politicians. The kind of discourse and politics offered by politicians and corporations are often read, not just by protesters, but also by theorists of globalization, as symptomatic of, and shorthand for, what we call 'neocolonialism' or 'neoimperialism'; a position

## Understanding Globalization

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David Held and Anthony McGrew (2000: 5), in their description of different versions of 'global scepticism', characterize as **Marxist** in orientation. They write that, for Marxists:

The history of the modern world order is the history of Western capitalist powers dividing and redividing the world up into exclusive economic zones. Today, it is argued, imperialism has acquired a new form as formal empires have been replaced by new mechanisms of multilateral control and surveillance, such as the G7 and World Bank. As such, the present epoch is described by many Marxists not in terms of globalization, but instead as a new mode of Western imperialism dominated by the needs and requirements of finance capital within the world's major capitalist states. (2000: 5)

The most obvious objection to this position is, of course, the one directed at Marxism in general; that is, it assumes that social, cultural and political activity is explicable in terms of the overdetermining order of the economy. But if we consider the work of a number of important cultural theorists – Jean Baudrillard, who writes about the current era in terms of its tendency to **hyperreality**; Paul Virilio, who analyses the social, cultural, political, environmental and military implications of contemporary changes to time/space; Michel Foucault, who traces the workings of power; Manuel Castells, whose concern is informationalism; or Arjun Appadurai, who addresses the relationship between technology, media, culture and identity – it is apparent that important changes are happening in the contemporary world which are not reducible to explanations about the transformation of capitalism, even though they may be linked with or informed by it.

The 'disjuncture' between the global and the local is also evident in a number of the more identifiable features of globalization – the proliferation of non-government organizations (NGOs), the use of computers and the internet to pursue political and social agendas, the increase in fundamentalist religious groups (including in the USA); and what we might

term the **'turn to the local'** in politics and culture, which can be seen in the emergence of the Zapatistas in Mexico, ethnic conflicts in Eastern and Central Europe, and anti-EU sentiment in the United Kingdom. These do not seem readily explicable through reference to conventional theories of a globalized world, with universal values, but rather in terms of the post-modern notion that power, rather than being concentrated in the hands of a small number of transnational corporations (TNCs), or a state such as the USA, has 'gone elsewhere'.

The relative diffusion of power, and the extent to which states, groups and individuals are becoming (in Held and McGrew's terms) 'increasingly enmeshed in worldwide systems and networks of interaction', was evident in the ways in which the USA and its allies, and President George W. Bush in particular, responded to the 11 September attacks. In his initial statements Bush was reasonably subdued, talking about the USA finding out which 'folks' had done this – a response which didn't go down well with many commentators in the media, or with many US citizens, who had clearly expected the President to 'talk tough', declare 'war on terrorism' and show the world the consequences of attacking the USA. Bush and his advisers quickly read and acted upon this sentiment, which resulted in the 'wanted, dead or alive' comment, the promises to strike against terrorism, and policies such as placing armed guards on commercial aircraft, and giving the military the option of shooting down planes they considered to be a threat to national security. But this gave rise to another unexpected response: Americans, already hesitant about flying, were suddenly faced with the prospect of shoot-outs inside aircraft, and being blown out of the sky by their own air force. The aviation and tourism industries, already in the process of shedding staff, were horrified; and this further exacerbated the free-fall of US and world markets.

And there were other local issues that overrode the global imperative. Just as Bush's attempt to build a coalition against global terrorism effectively 'ran away' from him, and was appropriated to further the interests of specific nations, so too in the American domestic sphere the rush on the part of journalists,

sportspersons, entertainment celebrities and ordinary Americans to participate in the 'God bless America' phenomenon did not remain a purely patriotic gesture. Instead, there were related developments, both seemingly antithetical to everything America stood for. The first was a crisis in the 'core business' of America, evidenced in the market collapse, the failure of corporations, and the decline in the dollar; the second was an increase in the power of the military, the CIA and the FBI at the expense of civil liberties.

In the months following the 11 September attacks Western nations increasingly backed away from their initial strong support for US retaliatory action, some US citizens began complaining about the restrictions on their freedom, the media (eventually) took an arguably more measured view of American military action, and Western leaders (including the Former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright) strongly criticized Bush's 'axis of evil' speech, and his plans to continue action against nations he designated as 'the enemy' (BBC News, 2 February 2002). Increasingly, Bush's actions seemed to be explicable in terms of their being a series of carefully staged performances of power and control which functioned to conceal the reality that no one person, state, alliance or sphere (not even Bush, capitalism, the 'free world, the West or America) was able to control or direct what was taking place.

We are in a sense back to Held and McGrew's 'puzzle' over the disjuncture between the discourses of globalization and the realities of localization, a disjuncture that is played out in the literature on globalization, and evidenced in the failure of authorized truths fully to silence alternative perspectives and actions. What we can identify in this disjuncture is that there is no clear chain of command operating within the globalized world. Despite imbalances of military and economic weight, power continually shifts from one site to another, and the world's regions, nations and organizations coexist more in an uneasy dynamic tension than in a vertical set of relations: in a grid rather than along a chain.

Just as there is no evidence that power is held in one site, unproblematically, so too no unproblematic, final or definitive

statement can be made about globalization. Rather, what it means, and what effects it has, are determined and identified variously, depending on the perspective of those making such determinations and identifications. The politics thus associated with the use of the term 'globalization', and the problems this poses for researchers into the field, are of the same order as the problems and politics that John Frow has identified in his work on the term **postmodernism**. Because of the multiple and often contradictory positions held on postmodernism, he writes, 'It begins to look as though the very engagement with the term represents a trap: as though your words, whatever their content, have nothing to do but to roll through the clown's mouth into the groove waiting to receive them' (1997: 22). Frow goes on to write that, given the difficulty of engaging with such an established term, it might be better 'to practice a strategy of avoidance: to dismiss the concept as a non-concept, imprecise, incoherent, contradictory, lacking any real historical significance' (1997: 22). But he rejects the temptation to avoid the concept because:

the very persistence of the word, however irritating this may be, seems to indicate that something is at stake, something that cannot be brushed aside as a theoretical fashion . . . It may be that the term is the index of a real epochal shift . . . or it may be that it indicates something less well defined, more obscure and more heterogeneous but nevertheless of genuine theoretical and practical interest. (1997: 23)

Though he is referring only to postmodernism, the same could be said of globalization: if a term is being used so often, in so many theatres, and with such profound effects, it is worth paying attention to it. In this book we attempt to do just this: to pay attention to the term and to the politics of its deployment and its effects. But rather than attempting to craft a unitary and definitive statement about globalization, we will suggest, following Hardt and Negri's description in their book *Empire* (which we discuss in the next chapter) that it should be understood as a kind of grid of power, one which incorporates

globalists and sceptics, liberals and Marxists, libertarians and fundamentalists, First and Third World nations and their economies, and so on, all within a dynamic and often agonistic relationship.

### Conclusion

In this chapter we have focused on the politics of naming as it applies to globalization, and discussed the extent to which naming not only brings the thing named into social existence, but forecloses other possibilities. We have also outlined the multiplicity of perspectives held on globalization, and the various definitions deployed in making sense of the term, and of the politics and practices associated with it. But while theorists from a range of disciplines – including international relations, politics, media studies, economics, cultural studies, sociology, developmental studies, communication, geography and history – have offered different explanations and evaluations of the processes associated with globalization, there is still general agreement that any discussion of the term needs to take into account the following issues: technology and changes in the way people experience and understand time/space; the ways in which such changes have influenced capitalism; globalization as ideology; globalization as a form of colonialism; the relationship between global forces and the sovereignty of the state; global '(in)security' and the actualities and possibilities of global governance; the media and the idea of a global 'public sphere'; and the emergence, throughout the world, of a coalition of forces opposed to different aspects of globalization.

We will consider all these theories and issues, in detail, in the chapters that follow, and attempt to devise a way of analysing the logic of the 'grid' that is the concept of globalization. In the next chapter we will contextualize the agonistics over the meaning of globalization by making comparisons between relevant historical precedents, most particularly with the period 1870–1914, and the technological, economic, social, political and cultural changes of the last thirty years.