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Indiana Journal of Global Legal
Studies

Volume 7 | Issue 1

Article 2

Fall 1999

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Recommended Citation

Mazlish, Bruce (1999) "A Tour of Globalization," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*: Vol. 7: Iss. 1, Article 2.
Available at: <http://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ijgls/vol7/iss1/2>

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A Tour of Globalization

BRUCE MAZLISH*

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it was fashionable to take a Grand Tour of the world to round out one's education. In fact, such a Tour was generally restricted to Western Europe and perhaps North Africa and, as such, was decidedly eurocentric. Today, we travel widely across the globe, called by some a "global village." To understand the globalized space and time in which we live, I propose to undertake a "tour of globalization;" that is, to travel mentally in its realm. My aim is to "map" the topic as a project and as a research area.

Globalization can be defined as a process taking place today before our eyes. It is also a historical process, whose origins must be sought far back into the past. Yet, I wish to contend that globalization as we know it is new in its intensity and in its dimensions—so much so that we can usefully speak of our entering a new period of history, a global epoch.

Immediately, we are presented with a dating problem with regard to such an announcement: When did the global epoch begin?¹ Was it in the 1950s, with the launch into space and the advent of nuclear power? Or was it the 1970s, with the spread of the information revolution and the extraordinary compression of space-time facilitated by computers? Or do we have to wait until 1989 and the beginning of the dissolution of the Soviet Union that ended a bi-superpolar world and made possible a truly global society?

What distinguishes this new epoch is the synchronicity and synergy among the factors that make for globalization. It is in these terms that a dating decision will eventually be made. The factors include the following: humanity's step into space from which we have a new perspective on "spaceship earth;" the development of nuclear energy that gives us the potential to destroy ourselves, or at least our civilization, with one blow; the

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1. There are those who contend, for example, that globalization is not new, that it is to be found in the nineteenth century, at the time of the second industrial revolution, with proportionately larger amounts of capital moving around the world than at the present time.

launching of satellites that can link all parts of the globe in instantaneous time and space; the creation of an environmental threat, the global proportions of which can be known from satellite pictures; and the increasing spread of multinational corporations whose wealth and power have metastasized vigorously.

All these transnational factors interact with one another “globally.” Although these factors are treated here as causal agents, they can also be treated as effects, since the boundary between cause and effect is porous. I add to this list of factors another list of what can be called correlative phenomena. For example, human rights, world music, spreading migration, and global consumerism are obvious candidates for this list. Approaching the list from another angle, we can study the relation of globalization to such phenomena as the city, crime and terrorism, the legal system, culture in all its manifestations, the possible end of patriarchy, and the vicissitudes of democracy, to name a few. Again, what must be emphasized is the interplay among all factors and phenomena.²

It is not, as is a common view of globalization, a matter simply of economic expansion. All the factors just enumerated are inextricably intertwined with one another. The fact is that too many people pass judgment on the process of globalization without having much understanding of it. With little real research as basis, there has nevertheless been a rush to normative evaluation. In our tour of the problem, I will now take up a number of hasty judgments that are often made and, in turn, make a number of quick comments. The first assumption concerns homogenization versus heterogeneity. Globalization, it is said, is making the world all one, flattened out in a monotonous likeness. It is claimed that such globalization is a continuation of the modernization process, with all societies converging to a similar point.

I suggest that this is an ideological posture, not a position arrived at after an examination of the facts. Rather, the facts point to the view that some homogenization takes place, but it is modified constantly by forces of heterogeneity. Globalization is occurring today in a “postmodernist” context, where the Fordist economic model is giving way to flexible production and where cultural pluralism (i.e., multiculturalism) is marching alongside the multinationals.

2. In an effort to study globalization in exactly these terms, see, for example, *CONCEPTUALIZING GLOBAL HISTORY* (Bruce Mazlish & Ralph Buultjens eds., 1993; GLOBAL HISTORY SERIES).

Next, the homogenization charge often takes the form of claims that the world is being “Americanized.” Again, there are elements of truth in the assertion. U.S. culture is being spread by its satellites, but one must remember that U.S. culture has itself been “globalized.” Consider the number of Mexican and Japanese restaurants spreading in the United States to match McDonald’s. Much more worrisome is that, militarily, the United States is probably the only country whose naval and air power give it a truly global reach.

Another variant on the homogenization-heterogeneity issue is the interplay between the global and the local. It is this interplay that led sociologist Roland Robertson to coin the phrase “glocalization.”³ In terms of research, one must always examine how globalization takes local form and how the local shapes and reshapes the global forces. The fact is that globalization, while it may utilize virtual reality, does not take place in the clouds, but in actual places.

Another questionable judgment is the pronouncement that, in a global epoch, the nation-State is about to disappear. Instead of such hasty sloganizing, we need to inquire carefully into what functions of the nation-State are being eroded (for some are) and what functions may, in fact, be enhanced. Moreover, the fact that approximately 190 nation-States, many created after World War II, are represented in the United Nations (UN) must give us pause as we bury the form. In our consideration, we must also reexamine the form of internationalism—a product, surely, of nations—and ask what relation does internationalism, as well as nationalism, have to globalization.⁴

Is globalization an inevitable development, whatever its actual shape? Is it, in short, deterministic? Tocqueville, we may recall, believed that democracy—the equality of conditions—was providential and therefore unstoppable. Marx preached economic determinism and the inevitability of communism. In my view, Tocqueville may or may not be right, even if for the wrong reasons, but Marx was certainly wrong about communism. However, Marx says, “Men make their own history; but . . . not . . . under conditions of their own choosing,”⁵ thus offering us hints as to a more useful way of looking

3. ROLAND ROBERTSON, *GLOBALIZATION: SOCIAL THEORY AND GLOBAL CULTURE* 173-74 (1992).

4. See, e.g., Bruce Mazlish, *Internationalism in the Light of Globalization*, a paper delivered at the conference, “The Mechanics of Internationalism,” held at the German Historical Institute London, 12-15 December 1996 (forthcoming).

5. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in *THE MARX-ENGELS READER* 595 (Robert C. Tucker ed., 1978) (1852).

at events. His is a fecund notion. Our “conditions” are, indeed, those of globalization, but how we deal with them involves our intentions as well as the tendencies involved in the present globalization process. Contingency and choice shape our interplay with a non-deterministic set of global factors.

I have now spoken of some of the broad issues surrounding globalization: homogenization versus heterogeneity, “Americanization,” the global-local dichotomy, the nation-State and internationalism, and the question of determinism. As we consider these issues, we should keep two injunctions in mind: (1) each issue must necessarily be the subject of intense further empirical research and theoretical formulation; and (2) our judgments, when soundly based in further understanding, should not be in simple terms of good or bad but in some balanced weighing, seen from our value positions, of the positive and negative features of the process we are studying.

Let us now turn to another cluster of topics related to globalization. In 1992, some colleagues and I held a conference entitled “Global Civilization and Local Cultures.”⁶ Subsequently, we probed whether something we can call a global civilization may be emerging, displacing civilizations of the past that now are best viewed simply as “cultures.” To answer such a question, we need to look more closely at definitions of both “civilization” and “culture,” a task I will not undertake here, but will only signal.⁷ We need also to remind ourselves of the global-local topos, flagged earlier.

Some other scholars, of course, see things differently. Samuel Huntington, for example, speaks of the clash of civilizations.⁸ This, in my view, is errant nonsense. We are in an era of nation-States, existing now in a context of globalizing forces. It is the nation-State, not a civilization, that puts satellites into orbit and manufactures nuclear weapons that can potentially destroy all human civilization.

If there is any grain of truth in the clash of civilizations thesis, it is that we are witnessing the clash of competing globalisms. A result of the globalization process is a reaction in the form of fundamentalism of various

6. The conference took place in Darmstadt, Germany (July 15-17, 1992), under the direction of Wolf Schafer, who is now preparing the papers for publication in the GLOBAL HISTORY SERIES (*see supra* note 2).

7. For further reflections on civilization and culture, see, for example, JEAN STAROBINSKI, *The Word Civilization*, in BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE; OR, THE MORALITY OF EVIL, (Arthur Goldhammer trans., Harvard University Press, 1993) (1989); and PAUL RICOEUR, *Universal Civilization and National Cultures*, in HISTORY AND TRUTH (Charles A. Kelbley trans., 1965); *see also* NORBERT ELIAS, THE HISTORY OF MANNERS (Edmund Jephcott trans., Pantheon Press, 1978) (1939).

8. SAMUEL HUNTINGTON, THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS AND THE REMAKING OF WORLD ORDER (1996).

sorts.⁹ One such fundamentalism is Islam. Though Islam, like Catholicism, has always proclaimed itself a global, messianic religion, it is only with the means provided by the new conditions of globalization that it can try to articulate its message and sponsor its migratory adherents globally. Its globalism, therefore, can be said to compete and clash with the globalization process that we are discussing.

If, in fact, we are witnessing the emergence of a single global civilization with multi-faceted local variants, it may be well to relate it to the end of eurocentrism. One useful way of pursuing this theme is to tie it to the history of mapping. Until more or less the present day, the Mercator projection has dominated our visual world, exaggerating the size of the Western countries, as do medieval paintings in their distortion by importance rather than linearity. Buckminster Fuller's dymaxion map, and other such corrections, give us a more balanced portrait of the globe.

Such a portrait also calls into question the notion among some political scientists and historians of a center and periphery. In a global context, where Japan and Indonesia, China and the city-States of Singapore and Hong Kong, South Korea and Thailand, Brazil and even South Africa all play important roles along with the European and American powerhouses, it appears more useful to think in terms of a decentered world of capital and people flows. So, too, with the virtual space of the computer and the instantaneous communication of the Internet, the center can be conceived of as everywhere and nowhere.

In such a space, each person has the potential of being a cosmopolitan. In Greek times, when Diogenes spoke of being a citizen of the world, it was an idle aspiration in a world largely unknown. Vigorously revived in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, the new cosmopolitanism could at least claim a world that encompassed the new continent of America, as well as the older ones. But even here, the cosmopolitan claim was to an ideal, not a reality; Voltaire was hardly living, or even thinking, globally.¹⁰

Indeed, eighteenth and nineteenth century cosmopolitanism was effectively a screen for the imperialistic imposition of Western civilization. Thus, Lord Cromer could speak of how "[t]he real future of Egypt . . . lies not in the direction of a narrow nationalism, which will only embrace Egyptians

9. See 2 MANUEL CASTELLS, *THE POWER OF IDENTITY* (1997).

10. See, e.g., Bruce Mazlish, "Eighteenth-Century Cosmopolitanism in the Light of Twentieth-Century Globalism," a paper delivered at the Conference for the Study of Political Thought at the University of Wisconsin, Madison (Nov. 6-8, 1998).

... but rather in that of an enlarged cosmopolitanism.”¹¹ In short, “wogs” could seek to become imitation Englishmen. Only today can we see the narrowness of the earlier definition, and only today can the enlarged ideal be actually realized in everyday life. By redefining cosmopolitanism to include multiculturalism along with a belief in universal human nature, it now appears both accessible and realizable to large numbers of people whose local identity is becoming globalized.

All the points made in what I am calling a cluster of topics—civilization and cultures, competing globalism, the end of eurocentrism, the reconsideration of the center-periphery thesis, and the spread of a new cosmopolitanism—are, of course, debatable and subjects for further research and reflection. They are, necessarily, to be studied in holistic terms as relating one to another, and as part of the synergy I spoke of earlier.

In further seeking to understand globalization, especially from a historical perspective, we confront a number of problem areas. A major one concerns the actors to be studied. For the last few hundred years, the writing of history has circled around the activities of the nation-State—its wars, economic activities, nationalistic culture, and political leaders. Profound shifts are underway in this regard. Though, as I have argued, the nation-State will still be a major player in global history, its role must be reassessed in terms of the larger process unfolding around it.

At the same time, players other than the nation-State crowd the stage of history. Especially prominent are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and multinational corporations, both of whose recent increases in numbers have been phenomenal. In a fuller treatment, we would wish to consider their emergence in relation to the notion of civil society, for certainly they have grown in the soil first laid down in the Enlightenment’s cultivation of the public sphere and public opinion. Forsaking such a digression, I will focus first on two prominent forms of NGOs: those related to human rights and those related to the environment.

Human rights is a global assertion, rising above the national rights restricted to citizens by earlier democratic movements. Today, although this view is hotly contested in some quarters, one has rights not because one is a Frenchman or an American, but because one is a human being. As we all know, however, there are few if any institutionalized “global” courts to enforce these rights, though they are enshrined in the Universal Declaration

11. EDWARD W. SAID, *ORIENTALISM* 37 (1978).

of Human Rights. It is the court of public opinion that mainly gives whatever strength there is to the observation of these rights. Importantly, public opinion is shaped and given a voice by NGOs, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other such organizations. In other words, in our informational-computer age, human rights proponents, under the guise of NGOs, are the conscience of the globe.

Another proliferating form of NGO relates to the environment. In this area, private, not-for-profit groups mobilize on both a local and a global level to deal with threats to the environment. These groups prod national governments to take international action. Using the new informational technology, NGOs—such as the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, and innumerable others—mobilize forces around the world to combat what are clearly global, as well as local, crises.

Increasingly, these NGOs, along with multinational corporations and adapting nation-States, are the actors to be studied by the historian or social scientist. Of course, the UN must be placed alongside these forces. A cross between a forum for nations, with their pursuit of national aims by international means, and an institution seeking to transcend its members and their parochial concerns, the UN is still unsure of its mission. That mission, it dimly senses, is a global one, but how to complete it is clouded in ambiguity and dissent. Justice and force would seem to be the two key terms in this regard. How to adjudicate local power squabbles in global terms, that must include strategies for prevention, and how to enforce UN judgments militarily are the clear challenges. For the student of globalization, the evolution of UN military forces deserves much attention.

Turning now to multinationals as our other selected actor, they have been traced back two thousand years by classical scholars.¹² This is accurate in the sense that certain trading groups were transnational. It is anachronistic in that nation-States did not exist at the time, thus giving a different meaning to multinational. If we add the word “corporation,” we again must realize that it is a legal term given precise meaning only recently. In any case, modern multinational corporations can be discerned emerging in the seventeenth century and flourishing, for example, in the shape of the Dutch and British East India companies.

Eschewing a continuous history, let me turn to our global present. Today, according to the UN, of the 100 largest possessors of gross domestic product,

12. See, e.g., Karl Moore & David Lewis, *BIRTH OF THE MULTINATIONAL: 2000 YEARS OF ANCIENT BUSINESS HISTORY* (1999).

fifty-two are multinationals. This means that these multinationals are wealthier than about 120-130 nation-State members of the UN. Today, there are said to be over 37,000 multinationals. In the past quarter of a century, the list of the top 500 industrial multinationals has shifted from almost entirely American-European to almost two-fifths Japanese-Asian.

How are we to understand what is happening? As a preliminary matter, we must necessarily define what we mean by a multinational corporation. Then, we must describe and analyze the features that we think characterize it: Where is it headquartered? Where is its workforce? Where are its sales? Where do its capital flows go? Then we must look at these features dynamically, seeing them develop over time. Finally, we must compare companies with companies and countries with countries to arrive at a global picture.

In fact, an international conference took place in October 1999 to shoulder exactly these tasks. Called "Mapping the Multinational Corporations," the project seeks to give visual form to what is happening economically around the globe. To complement the atlases featuring nation-States and their boundaries, the conference attempted to compile an atlas depicting multinational corporations as they leap across such boundaries. We need to see, not only understand, the new globe aborning.¹³

I conclude this section by suggesting what might be involved in dealing more fully with two of the key factors or phenomena in globalization that await our further study. I single out "migrations" and "identities" as examples for a bit more elaboration.

Of course, peoples have migrated long before the global epoch, indeed, since the beginning of human time. What needs to be studied now is the way migrations are occurring as part of the process of globalization, and thus, shaping it in turn. Again, there have already been international conferences on this topic resulting in publications.¹⁴ Yet, their findings, going back incidentally to the earliest diasporas of over two thousand years ago, represent simply a beginning.

What needs emphasis is how today's migrations are, in part, caused by other globalizing forces and how, in turn, migrations use those same forces.

13. See Conference, *Mapping the Multinational Corporations*, administered by the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund at the Pocantico Hills Conference Center in New York (Sept. 30-Oct. 3, 1999), and followed by publications of various sorts, including maps and a volume in the GLOBAL HISTORY SERIES (*supra* note 2).

14. See Symposium, *Global Migration and the Future of the Nation-State*, 2 IND. J. GLOBAL LEGAL STUD. 1 (1994); see also GLOBAL HISTORY AND MIGRATIONS (Wang Gungwu ed., 1997).

The experience of moving, or being moved, coexists with the feeling of staying locally rooted because of continued connection to the homeland by means of radio, telephone, television, and computer. All these can instantly reconnect the migrant with those at home, for home is now where the monitor is. It must further be emphasized that the new migrants are changing the places to which they have traveled. Pakistanis in Britain and Turks in Germany are causing old colonial stories to be rewritten and, in the process, are creating bi- and tri-national entities. As Marx would put it, “[a]ll that is solid melts into air.”

Part of what is melting is one’s identity. Old identities are up for grabs. What does it mean now, in a global epoch, to be British or German? Again, we are faced with a particular research problem that forms part of the larger problem of identity in a global time. Without engaging in further detailed discussion, I simply note the aspect concerning a global identity. Is such an identity possible? How would it relate to the other identities—local, national, regional—that we might have? Is it an identity solely for emerging global elites, or is it a possibility for the masses?¹⁵

Behind all the topics we have touched upon is the fact that time and space have been compressed in an unprecedented fashion. The roots of this compression reach far into the past. The development of sea vessels, from sail to steam, cutting distance and duration, forms one thread in this account. The invention of the telegraph, the laying of cables, the introduction of the telephone, and then the development of radio communication represent another wave of enormous changes. Now, as we know, satellites, with the aid of computer linkages, allow simultaneous communication between any points on the globe. One billion people watched the first step on the moon on their television sets, and more than three billion people were said to have seen the Coca-Cola commercials that accompanied the last Olympic games via the same medium, as if the viewers were in the same place. Moreover, individuals themselves can travel from one end of the globe to the other in less than a day.

Another major thread to follow is mapping. Since the fifteenth century, Ptolemaic maps have guided the opening of a new world in which half of a previously unknown globe spun into perspective. Yet, forgotten in this burst of vision was the fact that large areas of the globe were still “dark.” Parts of Africa remained unmapped until the end of the nineteenth century, and the

15. For a further discussion on this topic, see CASTELLS, *supra* note 9. Also, for an initial attempt, see Bruce Mazlish, *Psychohistory and the Question of Global Identity*, 25 *PSYCHOHISTORY REV.* 165 (No. 2 Winter 1997).

poles were not adequately explored until recent expeditions. Only in our time has the globe come to be more or less fully known. We have even seen it from outside, as one of many spherical bodies in space.

In this all too brief updating of the mapping aspiration, we can look back and observe how the impulse, starting in the fifteenth century and taking shape in the Mercator projections, has taken on a new global form—the view from space. Such space is no longer a mere eurocentric phenomenon. It is shared, potentially, by all peoples. We all look up at the same sky (allowing for different vantage points), and the sky looks down on us as if we occupied the same globe, which we do.

Such a new spatial conception is matched by a new time sense. In fact, as we know, space and time are coordinates. As in the mapping of longitude, we only know where we are when we know what time it is. With globalization has come the adoption of a uniform calendar; thus, our days are more or less the same. Clearly, in our global epoch, the compression of space and time has accelerated, continuing a trend that reaches far back in time. It is a trend conditioned by both changes in consciousness and in technology, with one affecting and determining the other.

The history of time, and technical devices by which to measure it, is itself a long one. I touch here only on a few aspects. Early man had no timepieces, other than those provided to him by nature: the rising and setting of the sun. Time varied according to the period of the year and also according to location. In their wanderings across the globe, hunter-gatherers lived in a phenomenological time of this sort, and this was the condition of the human species for about ninety-nine percent of its existence.

With humanity's entrance into agricultural society and then civilization, much of the old reckoning by the sun persisted. Gradually, however, mechanical devices were introduced, such as sun dials and water clocks. Many fine scholarly books provide details for the mechanical clocks and watches that entered the scene in the modern period and began to shape a new, mathematical grasp of time.

The invention of the pendulum, with its regular swinging back and forth, gave a new precision to measurements: balls rolling down an inclined plane, or projectiles and their flight, for example. Such artisan activity, including further work on escarpments, prepared the way in practice for the clock-like universe of Newton. After the great English scientist, the earth was not only held in place by gravity, but was presumed to proceed in its voyage around the sun in precise mechanical-mathematical terms.

Skipping across time, if any years had to be singled out when modern time was ushered in, they would be 1883-1884. On November 18, 1883, the railroads in the United States imposed a uniform time, known as "standard time," in place of the eighty or so different railroad times in the country. It has been called the "day of two noons" because at midday, clocks had to be set back in the eastern part of each zone.

With this standardization, the victory of artificial time over the time of God and Nature was made ever more obvious. In the process, local time gave way to a national time. The next intermediate step was a move from the national to the international. This step was taken in 1884, when an international conference agreed on establishing the meridian, the time zones, and the beginning of the global day. Thus, there came into existence a unified system of standardized time zones.¹⁶

I could go on about the topic, but will refrain from doing so, except for one more observation. Again jumping selectively, I remind you of the simultaneous witnessing of the Scud missiles descending on Jerusalem during the Gulf War, both in that city and in Baghdad, from whence the missiles were being sent, as well as in New York, London, and Tokyo. In this scene, certainly, is a vivid illustration of what has been happening.

The fact is that we are now living in a synchronized time and a simultaneous space. This outcome has had a long build-up; its culmination is a qualitative shift occurring as we enter the global epoch. In the treatment of this development, I have gone into some specificity, both to show how detailed research might proceed and to make more convincing the assertion that ours is an epoch of synchronization and simultaneity never experienced by previous generations.

At this point, we may feel somewhat overwhelmed. There is such a plethora of problems to be found in the seemingly simple notion of globalization. Are we to take everything as our object of study? In one sense, the answer is "yes." Globalization, as I have stressed, must be seen holistically, for each feature is connected to every other. Realistically, however, we can ignore huge swathes of ordinary history and concentrate initially on the factors of globalization enumerated earlier. In doing so, our tasks become limited research projects. Only gradually do we seek to reassemble the pieces, in turn further illuminating our empirical research efforts.

16. Cf. STEPHEN KERN, *THE CULTURE OF TIME AND SPACE: 1880-1918* (1983).

Nevertheless, it is evident that globalization as a real phenomenon threatens to overwhelm us, as does the attempt to conceptualize it. Even the name is contested. Alternative terms for globalization include “globalism,” “glocalization,” as previously noted, and “globaloney.” Perhaps even more importantly, globalization must be recognized as coming before us not only as an idea, or as a concept related to a process, but as an ideology promoted by multinational corporations and by various media, and as an ideal, a new version of the brotherhood—and today we would add sisterhood—of humankind. In short, everything about the subject must be assumed to be problematic.

Fortunately, as noted, research into the process of globalization is interdisciplinary in nature; many hands are turning to the task. After and along with the research, of course, are the policy issues. We do research not only for the abstract joy of understanding what is happening around us, but also for survival purposes as we seek to play an informed role in the global process. But first, as I have tried to make obvious, should come the research and analysis.

By now it must be clear from our “Grand Tour” how complicated the subject of globalization is, and how an understanding of the process is so vital to our sense of where we are and how we have come to be there—wherever “there” is. In truth, globalization has redefined and reoriented, as I have argued, our coordinates of space and time. Here on Earth we now have a feeling of a “full earth,” in the sense not only of encountering other peoples, but in the sense that, as noted earlier, almost all the planet’s surface, and increasingly its depths, are becoming known to us. Such knowledge is being matched by our invasion of formerly empty outer space. But such outer space, in turn, is being increasingly drawn inward, as we reorder our sense of self on Earth in terms of the new knowledge we are acquiring.

Difficult as it is to pin down—and correlated as it is with profound scientific, technological, and economic developments—a revolutionary transformation in consciousness, in self-consciousness, and in historical consciousness is taking place. This, in fact, may be the most important consequence of the globalization process. In sum, we are not only transforming the globe, but ourselves as well. What could be a more challenging prospect than that?