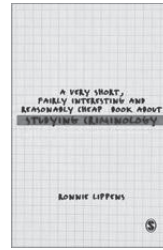
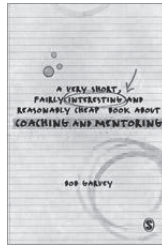
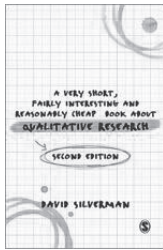
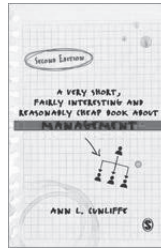
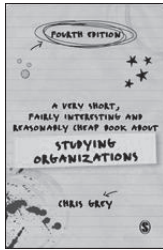
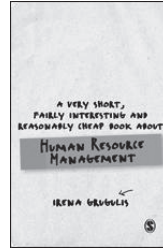
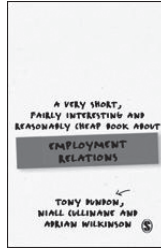
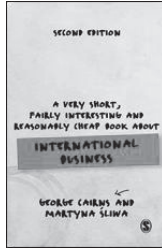
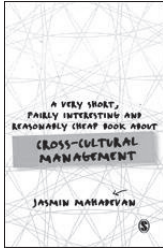


A VERY SHORT,
FAIRLY INTERESTING AND
REASONABLY CHEAP BOOK ABOUT

GLOBALIZATION



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Globalization as Myth and Hype: Exploring the Globalization Sceptics

Globalization exists as a process, but it is less complete than many people think and of a different nature than is commonly assumed.

(Veseth, 1998: 188)

Try to imagine the worst place in the world. Where would it be? A hospital ward short of staff and supplies in a war-torn middle-eastern city? A collective farm in North Korea? An urban ghetto ravaged by drugs, gang crime and deindustrialization? Travel writer and *Sunday Times* journalist A.A. Gill once reserved the title ‘worst place in the world’ for an entire geographic region: the ‘autonomous republic’ of Karakalpakstan (Gill, 2005: 106). It sounds like the name of a made-up country in a Hollywood action movie full of extremists who hate our freedoms. But, no, it is actually real. It is a large territory in western Uzbekistan, an area struggling mightily with the disastrous legacy of the Soviet system and suffering a protracted nightmare of post-communist economic stagnation and political repression. I’d not heard of the place until I read Daniel Metcalfe’s *Out of Steppe*, an entertaining book about the ‘lost peoples’ of Central Asia. In Nukus, the capital of Karakalpakstan, life seemed stripped of all motion and action. It’s like someone’s pressed ‘pause’ on the whole city and then wandered off with the remote control. He writes that ‘in Nukus people didn’t really walk. Old men lounged on shaded steps, child cigarette-sellers sat listlessly by their cartons’ (Metcalfe, 2009: 25). The countryside appears even worse: ‘The only landmarks were telephone poles and undulating wires. [...] This was a dirty beige nothingness, where sky met land in an underwhelming blur. Occasionally we drove past a bleak town – breeze-block constructions and concrete reinforced with rusted webs of iron’ (2009: 35). Metcalfe skilfully constructs a torrid dystopia – a land of melancholy that globalization forgot. There is something awful about its sense of disconnection from the world, a disconnection that makes fashionable theories about globalization, digital networks and a

knowledge economy seem like the excited ramblings of a privileged Western mind. How can we talk of 'globalization' when the world still features places like this, cut off and doomed to a fate of terminal decline and utter obscurity?

Amid the torrent of globalization writings it is easy to miss a significant literature that is sceptical about the whole notion of growing planetary connections and digital interconnectivity. This chapter will explore a large and diverse literature produced by a range of writers often grouped together as 'global sceptics'. They argue in various ways that globalization is mythological, inaccurate, worthless, hugely exaggerated or otherwise simply false as a concept. Global sceptics range from those who question the usefulness and accuracy of the term to those who come close to being globalization deniers. In various ways they attack the viewpoints of the globalization writers or the 'hyperglobalists' introduced in Chapter 1.

Debates about the newness, extent and impact of globalization are often shaped by differences of viewpoint across academic disciplines. For example, those trained to focus on the micro formations and meanings of local life (such as anthropologists, social historians, regional specialists and linguists) might be expected to be sceptical of a so-called 'globalization' that is ushering in total change and flux to all societies. Taking a microscopic rather than a helicopter focus, writers working in the traditions of ethnography or anthropology enter their communities and subcultures of interest and note down all kinds of behaviours and worldviews of these communities. Often using nothing more sophisticated than a pen and notepad, they go about recording the minutiae of behaviour, rituals and settings. From such a viewpoint, notions of global connections or a global society often seem remote, almost ludicrous. And yet, many ethnographers and anthropologists have made connections between the everyday and the global (Burawoy et al., 2000; see also Thompson, 2014: 7). There is a very interesting stream of highly detailed ethnographic literature on global industries, such as investment banking (Ho, 2009), arms trading (Nordstrom, 2004), or domestic cleaning services employing migrant women from less-developed countries (Parreñas, 2001). Such writings highlight the complex interplay of immediate and local forces with broader, perhaps less obviously visible, global forces that operate at a distance but affect local everyday life. Again, this shows the schizoid, unclear and to an extent contradictory nature of globalization writings.

At first glance, global scepticism appears absurd. How, when daily surrounded by evidence of increasingly intense global forces, structures, networks and risks, can anyone seriously suggest that globalization is a

myth? This chapter will show, however, that the sceptical literature actually makes a lot of important points, and will argue that it is essential to consult and discuss it if we want to gain a rounded understanding of the contested processes and outcomes of globalization. The chapter is arranged in the following way. Firstly we will explore the arguments of those who regard the notion of ‘globalization’ as an historically naïve, faddish and rather superficial concept. We then go on to look at those who question the actual empirical existence of globalization, arguing that the excited claims of the globalization literature are exaggerated and that local features of social life remain much more significant than any putative global ones. We then explore the view that globalization is a weak, vague and contradictory idea that just cannot function properly as a theory or concept at all.

Before we begin it is important to note that the globalization *sceptics* are largely different from the globalization *critics* (although there are some points of connection). The critics *do* believe that globalization exists and that terminologies of global ‘ages’ and global ‘networks’ are sensible. They are critical of globalization’s effects, whereas the global sceptics doubt or deny the validity of globalization either as a really-existing phenomenon itself or as a meaningful theoretical concept that can describe and explain the empirical world in its enormous complexity.

A very useful and detailed paper that unpacks the positions of the supporters, sceptics and critics of globalization was written by Mauro Guillén. He asks whether globalization is ‘civilizing, destructive, or feeble’ (Guillén, 2001). ‘Feeble’ would be a good word for the sceptics to use when they describe the veracity, value and relevance of globalization as a concept and a body of literature. It captures the sceptics’ disdain for an idea they regard as intellectually unsound. There is much value in their position, but the chapter will not accept the sceptical view uncritically. Instead it will question the meaning and value of a sceptical position. To go back to that sorry city of Nukus for a moment, one might suggest that even here we see international connections of various kinds. Metcalfe’s book often mentions young people desperate to leave the place, such as a law student who dreams of studying in America (Metcalfe, 2009: 33). Although most readers won’t have heard of Karakalpakstan, they may well be aware of one of the reasons why the place is so economically depressed and the main reason Metcalfe (and Gill) visited. It is the site of the drastically shrunken Aral Sea, once a huge thriving inland sea that Soviet economic planners reduced to a parched and toxic wasteland in their efforts to irrigate nearby regions for export cotton production. The region is struggling so badly because of a mishandled attempt to forcibly integrate a part of this region’s

economy into the global economy in a narrow and reckless fashion. Global connections often exist in the strangest of places and can take on peculiar, non-linear forms. So it might be wrong to point to a depressed region and say: ‘Where’s your so-called “globalization” now?’ To some extent, economic isolation can actually be related in certain ways to the very processes of globalization that the sceptics tend to deny or downplay. As this chapter will show, the sceptical literature struggles with its own limits and contradictions, just like the pro-globalist literature it attacks.

Various versions of global scepticism exist (Scholte, 2005: 18; Steger, 2005: 23). We begin our discussion by exploring the ideas of a range of authors who argue that globalization processes are nothing new. According to them globalization theory can’t be taken seriously because it is ahistorical and exaggerated.

Historical scepticism: Globalization as nothing new

In *American Colonies*, the historian Alan Taylor provides a wonderfully detailed account of the complexities and controversies of successive waves of European colonization of the ‘New World’, the American continent:

The first European explorers were stunned by the distinctive flora, fauna, and human cultures found in the Americas. [...] But the differences began to diminish as soon as they were recognized. The invasion by European colonists, microbes, plants, and livestock eroded the biological and cultural distinctions formerly enforced by the Atlantic Ocean. Newly connected, the two ‘worlds’, old and new, became more alike in their natures, in their combinations of plants and animals. (Taylor, 2001: 24–5)

The above passage reads very much like a piece of ‘globalization’ writing; connections are taking place, cultures are clashing and merging, difference and distance are being destroyed. Yet Taylor is describing events that took place in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Others have described the British East India Company (established in 1600) as the world’s first multinational corporation (Robins, 2006). We are led to believe that globalization is a dramatic new development that emerged in the 1990s and remade the world anew. But the processes of European colonization and expansion date back over five hundred years. Does the notion of globalization make any sense in this context? Can it really be considered anything new?

Colonization of the Americas is just one very famous historical example of a long-term process involving human movement, exploration, technological development, trade and conquest. The so-called Silk Road is another. The term 'Silk Road' is something of a misnomer; the 'Road' was actually a web of trading routes across land, sea and river that stretched from Japan and Korea, through central and southern Asia, China, India, on to Samarkand in present-day Uzbekistan, Iran, through to Egypt, Byzantium and the fringes of Europe. Of course, a great many more commodities than silk were traded; paper travelled from China through the Islamic world and into parts of Europe in the eighth century, for example (Hansen, 2012). The heyday of the Silk Road was around 200 BCE to 1500 CE (Metcalf, 2009: 4).

Long-distance trade, exploration, settlement and military conquest are consistent events in human history. Raw materials were imported into Early Mesopotamia in the third millennium BCE, and Babylonian and Indian societies had established trade routes from around 800 BCE (Held et al., 1999: 152). Could this mean that globalization is far from new but is rather a constant feature of human life since antiquity? When did globalization start? The settlement of North America by Europeans in the sixteenth century? What about Nordic settlements in Newfoundland in the tenth century? Or the 'native Americans', who were originally not indigenous to North America but rather travelled over centuries (45,000–12,000 BCE) across a land-bridge from what is now Siberia? Some claim that the world is 'one interacting whole and always has been' (McNeil, 2015: 148). Why, ask sceptics, did we start to use the word 'globalization' in the 1980s and 1990s when human movements, connections and empires were well-established many centuries earlier (Ferguson and Mansbach, 2012: 40–74; King, 2017: 1–7)?

This is a core argument of the global sceptics. Globalization is a buzzword or fad that naively fixates on present-day or very recent developments and mistakenly believes that the present is radically different from the past. Its main authors and proponents have become convinced by seductive but vacuous claims of radical breakages with history. The focus on the enabling power of new technologies and on the rapid growth in the power of multinational corporations distorts the historical reality of prior developments and the near-constant movements of people, technology, culture and wealth in history (and pre-history). How much has really changed since the 'global' era? Gender studies scholars have also objected to notions of radically new global eras or forces that transcend or escape the enduring importance of gendered social constructs such as family, marriage and domesticity (Acker, 2004; Gottfried, 2004).

One of the most famous sceptical pieces is Hirst and Thompson's (later Hirst, Thompson and Bromley's) *Globalization in Question*, a book that has run to three editions since the first was published in 1996. It is arguably the most detailed and advanced statement of the sceptical position and has been widely debated and cited. They don't go back especially far into human history to make their point that a globalizing or highly internationalized economy is nothing new. Their work includes no discursions through Mesopotamia or ancient China. Their discussion begins in the early nineteenth century and focuses in particular from the 1860s onwards, when processes of industrialization and the establishment of modern, urban societies started to really take root in Europe, North America and Japan. They claim that the internationalization of capitalism is nothing new (it has been ongoing on a very substantial basis since around the 1850s), and that in some ways previous eras in history actually exhibit stronger evidence of interconnectedness than today.

They note that international trade made up a larger percentage of many nations' GDP in 1913 than it did in 1995 (Hirst et al., 2009: 24–67). Hirst and colleagues particularly emphasize that nation states remain very significant actors whose power has not been eroded or destroyed by globalization. In fact, in certain ways national governments in the most advanced economies become even more central in their roles of setting the terms under which the global economy operates. Globalization is far from inevitable and unstoppable. Hirst et al.'s explanation of how the world economy has expanded and contracted at various times (the establishment and subsequent collapse of the Gold Standard, the 1929 Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression in the 1930s, the collapse of the Bretton Woods system of currency exchange in the early 1970s) dovetails with discussion about changes in policy discourses. Clearly national governments, political parties, bureaucrats and regulators were deeply involved in attempts to understand and influence the global economy at national and even international levels. Their efforts weren't irrelevant to the processes of globalization, suggesting that globalization is not some free-floating, unmanageable and irreversible new phenomenon, but is actually contributed to, encouraged by and sometimes restricted by government policy.

These are all important claims that add much-needed historical context, detail and realism to the often-excited globalization literature. Others have countered by suggesting that comparisons of the 2000s with the era of classical liberalism are spurious in that they ignore the quantum leaps in technology that have created a world economy qualitatively different from the industrial system of the nineteenth or early

twentieth centuries. '[T]he biggest difference is in the level of finance and capital flows. Geared as it is to electronic money – money that exists only as digits in computers – the current world economy has no parallels in earlier times' (Giddens, 1999: 9).

I suppose it all depends on what one means by 'parallels'. If we are talking about international trade, technological change, migration and interconnectivity, then clearly there are meaningful historical parallels to be made between the present day and prior eras of industrial capitalism. Hirst et al., and other historically informed globalization scholars (Held et al., 1999; Osterhammel and Petersson, 2005), make a credible case that globalization as we know it today was forged in the white heat of the industrial revolution. Going further back into history and pre-history to show that humans have always migrated and traded over distance perhaps does not really help the global sceptical argument because the volume of world trade before the advent of modern industrial society was peripheral – only 1–2% of world economic activity (Held et al., 1999: 154). While humans have always migrated and in many cases shown ingenuity in developing the technological capacity to do so, the processes of interaction and movement were glacially slow in comparison to the explosion of activity since the industrial revolution that swept Europe and North America in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Estimates of world GDP over time suggest general economic growth in much of the world's regions between the years 1 and 1870, then explosively rapid growth ever since. One estimate shows, for example, that the GDP of the region now known as Germany grew from \$1,225 million in year 1 to \$13,650 million in year 1700, then from \$72,149 million in 1870 to \$237,332 million in 1913 (Maddison, 2007: 379). That latter period of around 50 years saw revolutionary change in relation to the very slow development of the prior 15 to 20 centuries. Rutger Bregman, in *Utopia for Realists* argues that the last two centuries have seen 'stupendous' progress and that even 'those who we still call poor will enjoy an abundance unprecedented in world history' (Bregman, 2016: 13).

The industrial revolution provided the platform for the take-off phase of what later came to be called globalization. Twenty-five countries agreed in 1844 to set up three time zones and a concept of global time based on the Greenwich meridian, a system adopted almost everywhere by 1913 (Osterhammel and Petersson, 2005: 82–3). Electrical communication was pioneered around 1850 (McNeil, 2015: 144) and spread rapidly. Management and organizational ideas were also widely proliferated and adopted, especially towards the beginning of the First World War (Brecht et al., 2010).

If steam power, electricity, shipping, railroads and heavy engineering were the hardware of international business, then cost accounting and statistical quality control were its software. The cultural circuits of consumer capitalism started to really establish themselves in the early twentieth century: department stores, advertising, merchandising, branding (Leach, 1993). A strong case can be made that ‘globalization’ starts with industrialism in the latter half of the nineteenth century; essentially the position that Hirst and colleagues advance. In doing so, it is vital to note that globalization was directed by elites and by governments – industrialization went hand in hand with colonization, empire-building, military force and the Atlantic slave trade (Cooke, 2003; Robins, 2006). It also made significant use of import tariffs and other forms of government support to national industry in ways that today would be considered grave and costly violations of free-market economic policies (Chang, 2003). Processes of globalization are contingent and to a significant extent planned and enforced, not something inevitable and uncontrollable or an outgrowth of ‘natural’ laws of markets and efficiency.

Like many fashionable ideas, the theory of a free-floating, inevitable, market and technology-driven globalization has taken on a life of its own, regardless of evidence to the contrary. Some of the sceptics’ points are useful in providing a more historically informed and sober account of our supposedly radically new global economy. These authors are probably right to suggest that globalization is not a new phenomenon but can sensibly be traced back around 150 years. As the next section shows, other sceptics go beyond this and argue that globalization’s contemporary extent is also highly contentious.

Empirical scepticism: Globalization as exaggeration

For the mainstream promoters of economic globalization we already live in a global age in which international markets, fuelled by digital and financial innovation, continue to connect humanity in ways that promote technological advancement, transnational cooperation and economic growth. For its (mostly) left-wing critics, the forces of globalization are also perceived to be extensive and growing. Supporters and critics both claim that a global economy and a global consciousness have developed rapidly in the last 50 years or so and they expect them to continue spreading to all corners of the globe. For supporters and critics, the real-world existence of globalization is axiomatic. Where they disagree is the social and moral value of these developments.

Sceptics argue, however, that globalization is by no means as advanced as its proponents and detractors claim. Is a global economy really a self-evident truth? According to sceptical analysis about the reality of international economy, the widely held view of an already intensely integrated global economy is ‘simply wrong’ (Ghemawat, 2011: 11). One of the most powerful sceptical arguments focuses on how a very large proportion of the world’s population is cut off from so-called ‘globalization’. The world economy – far from being truly global – is actually structured and defined by regional blocs. The vast majority of trade and investment takes place in and between essentially three regions: a ‘triad’ of Western Europe, North America and East and Southeast Asia (Dicken, 2007: 38–9; Pauly and Reich, 1997: 1–2). These are the core parts of the so-called ‘global’ economy, to which the rest of the world is, to varying degrees, peripheral (Dicken, 2007; Ghemawat 2009, 2011; Hirst et al., 2009: 73–6). The majority of *Fortune* magazine’s annual Global 500 list of multinational corporations is headquartered in the USA, Japan, China, or Western Europe. Sheppard (2016: 17) cites research on international internet bandwidth that shows a mostly triangular pattern of USA/Canada–Europe–East Asia, with smaller branches to Latin America and (much less broadly) Africa.

Sutcliffe and Glyn (1999), in an article on measures of globalization in 1999, find all kinds of methodological problems in the ways in which globalization is accounted for. They claim to be ‘still underwhelmed’ by evidence that purports to show a dramatic new hyper-interactive global economy. A multivariate ‘Global Index’ developed by Raab et al. (2008) suggests a steady but very incomplete spread of political, economic, cultural and socio-technical globalization. Globalization processes have accelerated everywhere since the 1990s but there remains very distinct differences between regions categorized as ‘global players’ (Europe, Oceania and North America) and ‘catching-up regions’ (emerging economies in Asia, Latin America or the Caribbean). While still globalizing in absolute terms Africa seems to be doing so at a slower rate in relation to the others and might be falling further behind. African nations appear to be ‘globalization laggards’ (Raab et al., 2008). Ghemawat (2011) coins the term ‘semiglobalization’ to account for the partiality of these international connections.

It’s probably safe to say that globalization is far from universal. It is actually a very uneven and contingent process. The internationalization of capitalism, technology or culture is always partial and incomplete, and so-called globalization actually depends on critical local features. Several authors have identified the importance of so-called ‘global

cities', such as Tokyo, London, or New York where vital financial organizations are located (Sassen, 2006; Golding, 2002). There are also several key industry clusters such as Silicon Valley in California (Barley and Kunda, 2004) or the 'industrial districts' of Northern Italy which are hotspots of cutting-edge small engineering and design companies (Rabellotti and Schmitz, 1999). Italian wines are certainly a global product but the information and expertise upon which its production depends is shared only between vital local points (Morrison and Rabellotti, 2009). Less glamorous examples can also be used in this line of argument, such as the indispensable role played by airport freight depots or shipping container ports in facilitating international trade and inward investment (Dicken, 2007: 430–1). Science parks, improved transit systems, new office space and hotels and free-trade zones are developed by local and national authorities in high-profile plays to attract global investment, such as the Skolkovo technology park in Moscow. Cities and regional authorities compete vigorously with each other to attract world freight through their hubs, global financial investments through their banks and elite white-collar expert workers to their top corporations and professions.

Even when business is genuinely transnational the practices and norms of business remain far from simple or harmonized. There have been many efforts to develop a more seamlessly integrated, globalized and standardized world society. But the outcomes of these efforts are mixed. A famous example is the language of Esperanto, originally created by Ludovic Zamenhov in the late nineteenth century in a remarkable attempt to develop a global, logically organized language free of cultural bias that could be spoken by all peoples of the world. It never really took off (Patterson and Huff, 1999). Product markets are often regionally diverse. Major automobile groups have failed several times in their attempts to develop a simple, cost-effective global car model that will sell in all regions of the world, yet car markets remain geographically distinct. Manufacturers often distinguish their product strategies by continent (Maxton and Wormald, 2004).

International industry standards differ widely. The medical world has, for example, laboured for decades to establish practical international standards for the collection and sharing of clinical information. There have been some successes, but the overall trend seems to be toward a cacophony of competing systems (Patterson and Huff, 1999). Even medical knowledge itself is contested and internationally differentiated, having its own cultural and historical path-dependence and reflecting different norms around what qualifies as knowledge or fact. In Japan, for example, depression has traditionally been thought of as

primarily a physical rather than a mental ailment, implying no real Japanese market for antidepressant drugs developed by Western pharmaceutical companies (Harding, 2016). Various parts of the world have different industry standards for electrical voltage or weights and measurement and use variously shaped power sockets, railway gauges and systems of road traffic management. These differences can be overcome and worked around, of course. Huge efforts are expended on standardization and harmonization, as exemplified by the International Organization for Standards (ISO), a non-profit organization based in Switzerland to which over 160 national standards bodies are affiliated. It has developed tens of thousands of international standards such as the ISO 9000 series of quality standards. But the overall sceptical point holds. Standardization can be very hard to realize and the unintended consequences of its pursuit can be more harmful than the problem itself. How much would it cost to get rid of pint glasses or road signs marked in miles? In any case there wouldn't be any point; we can cope well enough without such standards and a so-called global economy functions reasonably adequately with wide variations in standards and practices.

A substantial academic literature discusses the huge range of customs and institutions that exists in the world economy. Yes, there is increasing internationalization in world business, and perhaps it is correct to call this 'globalization', but none of this means an increasing convergence in business practice. Germany, the United States, Japan, Russia, or China, for example, have all developed their own 'varieties of capitalism' or 'national business systems' that differ in many ways and to a large extent endure despite globalization (Dore, 2000; McCann, 2014a). International joint ventures and foreign direct investment projects often break down amid international rows about strategy, taxation or repatriation of profits, or founder on the rocks of cultural misunderstandings or clashing legal rulings. Working overseas is difficult. A large literature in the field of international management discusses the enduring problem of 'expatriation failure rates' where business executives find it impossible to work effectively in unfamiliar overseas surroundings.

Just like the different shapes and sizes of power sockets or railway gauges, idiosyncratic national institutions and 'ways of doing business' persist and survive. The world economy seems to tolerate these differences and the parallel ways in which national business systems operate. Perhaps the global economy doesn't need to converge, and the assumptions about the inevitability of convergence or adoption of global 'standards' reflect a Western arrogance about the superiority of their systems. For all the global talk, economics is

dominated by local activity. Ghemawat (2009: 56) estimates that around 90% of phone calls, web traffic and investment is local rather than transnational.

Much globalization theory speculates about the decline of nation states and the rise of a borderless world. But, related closely to arguments above about the importance and persistence of national institutions, global sceptics argue that nation states that have been powerful since the industrial revolution remain highly influential in structuring the world economic order (Hirst et al., 2009; Weiss, 1998). These nations' interests are most heavily represented in transnational political organizations such as the UN or the World Bank. Moreover, when it suits them, the most powerful nation states can skirt around or ignore these bodies (Martell, 2007: 175). China and Russia have recently re-emerged as major world powers exerting their political, geo-strategic and economic interests, backed by their increasingly globally prominent state media broadcasters such as Russia Today or CCTV. With long histories of communism and political authoritarianism neither is shy about exerting state control over some parts of their economies such as banking, telecommunications, heavy industry and military applications. Many claim that the Chinese state continues to play a vital role in the growth of its economy (Naughton, 2007). Major Chinese investments into Africa are increasingly notable and none of this takes place without the direct involvement of Chinese government officials (Carmody, 2011).

In relation to state power, there is arguably no real threat in sight to the principle whereby nations (broadly) respect the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of others. This dates back to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. National governments are elected only by national citizens and their daily reliance on bureaucracy, legal systems and established procedures shows how power, authority and governance are embedded deeply into local structures that usually date back generations. For all the talk of international connections, a global village or a global culture, significant power still resides at local levels (Thompson, 2014). This power is made manifest when a person enters a court room, is pulled over by a police officer or applies for a visa. Centuries of laws and regulations are enacted in the special powers possessed by those in official positions and represented in the badges or robes of office of police officers or judges. The judiciary is often the final arbiter of disputes and claims at many levels of society. The power of government is further demonstrated every day in professional routines and bureaucratic forms and procedures. This idea is Foucauldian in some sense, but also Marxian and Weberian; ultimately government power is based on its license to use force and/or its threat. Max Weber famously wrote in

1919 of the state's monopoly over the use of violence. Lenin repeatedly mentions 'special bodies of armed men' in *The State and Revolution* (1917). The genealogy of this thinking can be seen in classical works of political philosophy and law such as Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) or Bodin's *Les Six Livres de la République* (1576). It would take a truly dramatic change for 'globalization' to somehow overturn the ways in which sovereign power is manifested and legitimized over centuries of human existence.

Of course, globalization is associated with the growth of transnational legal frameworks such as European law, or the regulations and structures of transnational treaties such as CETA. But, contrary to populist views about excessive EU bureaucracy or conspiratorial rants about 'world government', these structures have not replaced national sovereignty. Rather they sit alongside them in complex relationships. Centuries of legal structures, precedents and judgements at the national level remain by far the most important influence on juridical authority (Lindahl, 2013).

Pro-globalists will suggest that globalization involves efforts to get around national restrictions or to find ways to harmonize them at international or 'supraterritorial' levels (Scholte, 2005). But, ironically, efforts to do this sometimes mean the amplification of local influences. For example, the US government's use of military detention centres at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base for the holding and interrogating of 'enemy combatants' was clearly related to a desire to avoid the Geneva Conventions that apply to the treatment of prisoners of war. This evasive and abusive behaviour created international outrage and brought the hidden 'non-place' of Guantanamo to the world's attention. A similar dynamic means that tiny and otherwise obscure territories such as the Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands or Turks and Caicos have become notorious as secretive tax havens which enable 'aggressive tax planning' (Fichtner, 2014). Physical location remains centrally important in a globalized world even when the operations of a globalizing party aim to be placeless and traceless.

This relates to another important sceptical argument surrounding the nature of the world economy – its physical, corporeal nature. Globalization literature tends to imagine the world economy as weightless, fluid and digitized – a world economy of ideas, finance, information, culture and knowledge that moves effortlessly through fibre-optic cables and across Wi-Fi networks (Bauman, 2000; Castells, 2000). Yet the global, digital, offshored economy has to materialize at certain physical points (Rainnie et al., 2008). Sceptics will argue that the 'knowledge economy' is exaggerated and that mundane and 'heavy' items are absolutely crucial elements of international business, such as

fossil fuels, container ships, electricity generation, electronic cabling or steel manufacturing. Oil and oil-derived products remain central to the functioning of the world economy. Yes, there is a global economy of sorts, but it rests on vital local architectures that enable, regulate and police international transactions. These range from physical and technological artefacts, to geographic and regulatory loopholes, to the ‘fixers’ who informally regulate legal, semi-legal and illegal trades (Nordstrom, 2007). Without access to trusted local knowledge and connections, many forms of international trade – major or small-scale – cannot happen. Hidden and questionable practices are abundant at many levels of global and local economic activity, ranging from outright bribery and racketeering to other forms of corrupt and semi-corrupt practices, such as corporate lobbying and the use of middlemen (Feldman, 2013; Granter, 2017).

Multinational corporations market themselves as genuinely global corporations with no enduring ties to any one nation. They often downplay their historical roots by rebranding the company to remove specific country references. But sceptical literature on multinationals has tended to emphasize the widely overlooked importance of locality. Rather than being genuinely global, multinationals would be more accurately understood as domestic firms with overseas units that are managed quite tightly from the centre. The HQ is a corporation’s centre of gravity. Boards of directors of large MNCs are usually dominated by home-country nationals (Doremus et al., 1999; Pauly and Reich, 1997). They are likely to think and act in similar ways, to promote executives with similar personal backgrounds up the corporate hierarchy, to put the interests of domestic stakeholders first, and to repatriate significant profits back to the country of origin. They frequently set up, benefit from and maintain distinctly locally bound structures such as industrial cartels. Their top executives are densely networked into national governments and agencies.

Globalization writings have a difficult time unravelling the relationships of ‘global’ to ‘local’. The language of globalization strains and contorts as authors try to reconcile these positions, resulting in the development of strange portmanteau terms such as ‘glocalization’. This term, often associated with the work of Roland Robertson (Ritzer, 2010: 255), seems to be a translation of a Japanese word *dochakuka* meaning ‘global localization’ (Robertson, 1992: 173–4; 1994). The idea appears to have been promoted by the Sony Corporation in describing its product strategy (Dicken, 2007: 138–9). But it’s difficult to get a real handle on what it means in practice. An interesting paper on South Korea’s globalization (Park et al., 2007) suggests the existence of both strong ‘localness’ and strong ‘globalness’.

Korea retains powerful social norms of nationalism yet also is highly globally dependent and in some ways subservient to Western-led transnational organizations as shown in the IMF bailout following the 1997 Asian financial crash. While it seems plausible for local and global to be thought of as simultaneously powerful forces, we introduce a real lack of clarity into our analysis if terms such as ‘global’ and ‘local’ are conveniently merged. Globalization literature wanders between different levels of abstraction and often cannot plausibly explain the underlying dynamics. ‘Glocalization’ would be a particular manifestation of this problem. Personally, I’ve always disliked this ugly term as I think it sums up the meaninglessness and circularity of so much of the globalization literature. I can see what it refers to: the awkward and complex coexistence of local and global features. But ‘-ization’ suggests a process, action or result of some kind. What are these movements or transformations? Where and how do they take place? By what means can something be glocalized? Can a person, product or a place be glocalized? And by whom? Can something be de-glocalized? This is starting to sound like gibberish.

Globalization is ‘a word that overuse has made so elastic, it has almost lost definition’ (Perry, 2008: 18). The turn towards ‘globalizations’ in the plural reflects this deep struggle for meaning. Sceptics believe the term is so imprecise that it is basically unworkable as any kind of serious academic theory. It is perhaps more sensible to speak of globalization as an area of study or an umbrella term under which all manner of further concepts and processes take place. Globalization as plural; globalizations with an ‘s’. But if that’s the best we can do to rescue the concept then what is the point? A third area of global sceptical literature argues that globalization is a junk concept, dumbed-down and worthless, or is perhaps part of a broader corporate ideology that should be rejected. We will now explore these particular ideas in more depth as we bring this chapter towards its conclusion.

Conceptual scepticism: Globalization as an unworkable theory

A final sceptical view regards globalization theory as simplistic and naïve. From this viewpoint, globalization is a corporate, academic and journalistic hype product. Susan Strange once complained that the notion is used to refer to ‘anything from the internet to a hamburger’ (Strange, 1996: xii–xiii; see also Steger, 2005: 23–7). Globalization as a concept is so vague, contradictory and all-encompassing that it cannot

rightly be considered a theory at all, certainly not in the sense of classic social science ideas as ‘rationalization’, ‘alienation’ or ‘industrialization’. Instead, globalization is an indistinct buzzword that refers only to a much more general series of uneven processes. At best, it just about works as an umbrella term for a broad field of study in which many other ideas reside.

In his books *Selling Globalization* and *Globaloney 2.0*, Michael Veseth argues that globalization is simply a powerfully told and regularly repeated story circulated by international elites. He argues that it ‘hardly matters whether the story is true or false. What matters is that people accept the story and use it to justify a set of actions and to further a set of interests’ (Veseth, 2010: 32). We’ve certainly seen this many times in the rhetoric of politicians, such as blaming poverty and joblessness on ‘the forces of globalization’ thus conveniently shifting blame away from governments’ own national policies. Veseth argues that globalization is a trope rather than a workable theory, and his texts include all manner of examples of globalization as an exaggerated and mythological idea that constrains the imagination of other possibilities. The title of the latter book is a reference to US Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce of Connecticut describing Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace’s proposed ‘free skies’ programme in 1944 as ‘globaloney’ (Veseth, 2010: 27). Here is an early example of right-wing opposition to globalization, in which Luce proposes putting American interests before any purported ‘global’ ones (see also Scholte, 2005: 15). Veseth suggests that the political Right and Left both exaggerate the benefits and dangers of globalization by making it mean almost anything with their excited rhetoric. ‘Globalization can apparently destroy democracy, create it, and be used by political entrepreneurs to manipulate democracy. This globalization must be a terrible, wonderful thing’ (Veseth, 1998: 12).

In describing globalization as hype, Veseth is not actually denying the existence of globalization in certain ways. Many other sceptics also agree that the current world economy is indeed highly internationalized (Hirst et al., 2009: 3). Thompson notes that his scepticism is ‘milder’ today compared to his writings with Hirst in the 1990s (2014: 4). Sceptics such as Thompson, Hirst and Veseth do not actually deny globalization. Rather, they argue that the statements, imagery and language of globalization run some way ahead of the reality, creating unhelpful rhetorical distortions that have been widely accepted uncritically. Mainstream notions of unstoppable globalization are inaccurate because people believe the myth that nothing can be done to influence it. Veseth points to a number of

prominent alter-globalization or anti-globalization movements such as the ‘Slow Food’ movement that emerged in Italy, or the hostility of much of French society to US-led globalization. While Veseth argues that global talk is often baloney, he also says globalization does exist and should be reformed to make it more humane and less oppressive. But in making this move Veseth’s supposedly sceptical position becomes very similar to ‘justice globalizers’ such as Held and others who promote ‘global civil society’ and are often positioned in the hyperglobalist camp (Thompson, 2014: 9–10). Like a lot of the globalization literature that he criticizes, Veseth’s own work is often contradictory, rhetorical and highly journalistic. We have returned to the idea that globalization is so large a field as to be inescapable; the sceptics use similar rhetorical tactics to those of the hyperglobalists in order to try to convince us that globalization is mythological. Ultimately the sceptics are unable to escape the circularity, superficiality and self-referential tropes of the globalization literature that they themselves criticize. As regards the Slow Food movement: ‘[t]he revolution began in Rome ... at a McDonald’s’ (Veseth, 2010: 141).

Veseth’s books are playful and ironic and he is too canny a writer to subscribe to some kind of ‘all-out’ globalization rejectionism. But the result is a half-scepticism to go with Ghemawat’s ‘semiglobalization’. In both the globalist and the sceptical literature we see endless provisos and qualifications. Very little is clear or unproblematic. To be fair to the globalization literature many other concepts in social science and humanities are also contentious and hard to define, such as art, culture, family, gender, power or history. It would not be fair to dismiss the concept of globalization as faddish and useless purely on the basis that the term itself is slippery and difficult to define.

Another sceptical position is to regard globalization theory as the ideology of corporate capitalism. This view suggests globalization is simply a new word for imperialism, Westernization, or Americanization, arguing that the internationalization of trade, investment, and product markets works in the favour of the core richest nations, exploiting the periphery of low-income countries that cannot fight back or put forward their own interests (Freeman and Kagarlitsky, 2004; Hardt and Negri, 2000). This is not so much global scepticism; rather it is re-characterizing globalization as imperialism. Anthropologist David Vine in *Base Nation* (2015) describes the US military’s version of globalization whereby the world is divided into giant regional Commands such as USAFRICACOM, USCENTCOM, USSTRATCOM. Large chunks of the world are overseen by a career military officer known as a Unified Combatant Commander who almost acts as a

regional plenipotentiary aiming to project American power (Johnson, 2006). The ideology of free-floating, networked, supraterritorial globalization diverts attention from much less palatable imaginations of what globalization can mean.

The arguments of global sceptics and global critics can start to merge when both draw attention to globalization as ideology that masks an uglier reality. A common device in the globalization literature is to talk of ‘waves’ of writings, starting with a first wave of hyperglobalist writings (see Chapter 1), moving to a second wave of sceptics and then on to some kind of third-wave synthesis in what is often called the ‘transformationalist’ position (see for example Hay and Marsh, 2000; Held et al., 1999). Third-wave globalization writers essentially reaffirm the existence of globalization but do so in a more detailed and less hysterical fashion than the early hyperglobalist literature. But in an interesting critique of the notion of ‘waves’ of globalization writings, sociologist Luke Martell (2007) suggests that there isn’t much to choose between the sceptical and transformationalist position. Instead, the transformationalists actually sound a lot like the sceptics in describing a contingent and partial international arena in which certain nation states remain very powerful players. None of the sceptics are actually globalization deniers. They don’t say that nothing has changed. It is more that they are uncomfortable with the talk of a globalized era that they see as exaggerated and unrealistic (Martell, 2007: 182). Sceptics or second wavers are less optimistic about the effectiveness of the kinds of global social movements that transformationalists are keen to emphasize. Instead, sceptics (like the critics we will encounter in Chapter 3) tend to see globalization as a power game in which the major players are likely to continue to hold on to their dominant positions. Martell writes:

If transformationalists are basing normative globalist proposals on an analysis that shares common ground with that of the skeptics – that is, a world with unevenness in integration, stratification, reconstituted but active nation-states, re-territorialization, and regional blocs – then the pursuit of a cosmopolitan global democracy that they argue for becomes unlikely. (Martell, 2007: 194)

Sceptics tend to reinforce more traditional ways of understanding the world; not in terms of global networks and flows, cosmopolitan civil society, or supraterritoriality, but in terms of long-established corporate and political structures that retain enormous influence, such as the World Trade Organization, Royal Dutch Shell, the Chinese Communist Party, the IMF, or the US military.

Whether we or not approve of the word ‘globalization’, it has become an important idea that deserves discussion. It can capture the imagination and it does refer to something recognizable. Scholars such as Hay and Marsh (2000), Held et al. (1999), Hirst et al. (2009), Jessop (2000), Sheppard (2016), and Weiss (1998) have all produced very reasonable and scholarly accounts of globalization as an outcome or a set of processes, showing that globalization writings do not have to be simplistic or dumbed-down. Globalization can be described in detailed ways and its extent and limits can be carefully accounted for.

But, such is its looseness and lack of precision, globalization fares much less well if conceptualized as a distinct process or theory with explanatory power of its own. Some of the heavyweights of global studies (Giddens, Scholte and others) have been subjected to fierce criticism for what some see as imprecision and sophistry in their writings (the most angry example probably being Rosenberg, 2000). There is a danger of the concept trying to explain everything: globalization creates wealth and poverty, democracy and authoritarianism, convergence and divergence, war and peace, inclusion and exclusion (Thompson, 2014: 2). If globalization means everything then it effectively means nothing. That is probably a good enough reason in itself to be sceptical about the notion of globalization, or of globalization writings where the complexities of the world are reduced to some abstract process called ‘globalization’ with explanatory effects. Such a reductionist view is not very convincing and does a disservice to the multiple complexities and contingencies of international economic, political and cultural connections that have already been very well described and explained by a range of more traditional concepts. Rosenberg (2000: 165) claims that globalization theory is ‘[h]amstrung at a deeper, definitional level, [...] unable even to rise to a coherent propositional statement without incurring the charge of a category error.’

The sceptics generally make a convincing case to abandon globalization as a distinct academic theory with explanatory power. But in terms of something like ‘globalization’ actually existing, as understood in terms of steadily growing international connections enabled by technological, cultural, organizational and political changes (even if far from uniform in extent and reversible at times), then, yes, this thing called globalization does exist. Given the apparent acceleration and proliferation of these processes and outcomes since the 1970s, it also seems likely that globalization will continue to grow in influence.

The globalization sceptics usefully inform us that globalization has very uneven geographic impacts and is not radically new; its existence can be traced back to the industrial revolution. The sceptical literature

has performed a valuable role in questioning the excesses of hyperglobalist arguments that can be naïve, distorting and disempowering. Globalization is often presented as inevitable, irreversible and largely unmanageable. But the sceptics – in showing that globalization is not especially new, is less extensive than is often thought, and not inevitable or unstoppable – suggest that there are alternatives to globalism and neoliberalism. It is around this area of thinking where global scepticism merges to some degree with the sensibilities of the globalization critics. We explore the arguments of the globalization critics in the following chapter.