Globalization: The Key Concepts

Second edition

Thomas Hylland Eriksen

London: Bloomsbury 2014

The first (2007) edition has its page here.

Contents

Preface

Introduction: A shrinking planet

1. Disembedding

2. Speed

3. Standardization

4. Connections

5. Mobility

6. Mixing

7. Risk

8. Identity politics

9. Alterglobalization

Afterword: An overheated world

Bibliography

Index

1. Disembedding

Disembedding is the most abstract of the key terms of globalization, and this stands to reason, since it in fact refers to the historical movement towards a more abstract world. When something is disembedded, it is moved from a concrete, tangible, local context to an abstract or virtual state. Money is disembedded value; clock time is disembedded time; writing is disembedded language. For globalization to integrate people all over the world into a shared system of communication, production and exchange, some disembedding common denominators are necessary.

In August, 1989, I visited San Juan, Puerto Rico. I was in the middle of anthropological fieldwork in Trinidad, and took a break in order to familiarize myself a little with the wider Caribbean region. At the airport, I was on my way to an exchange office when I came across an ATM with a VISA symbol up front. Tentatively sticking the card into the machine and typing my PIN code, I was uncertain as to what to expect, but after a few seconds, the machine duly presented the required greenbacks and – even more impressively – a receipt which told me my exact (meagre) bank balance. My money no longer had a physical form; it had been moved to cyberspace (a term coined five years earlier in William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer*, Gibson 1984). The money had been *disembedded*, removed from a tangible, physical context.

As a rule, anything that can be accessed anywhere is disembedded. It could be a clip on YouTube, an international agreement, a stock exchange rate or a soccer game (provided its main audience watches it on TV and not at the stadium). One main contemporary form of disembedding is *deterritorialization*, which takes place when something is 'lifted out of' its physical location. Before we delve more deeply into the concept and its implications for the real world, let us consider a famous example of deterritorialized warfare.

When, in September 2001, the then US President George W. Bush announced his 'war on terror', it may have been the first time in history that a war proper was proclaimed on a non-territorial entity. Unlike metaphorical 'wars on drugs' or 'wars on poverty', this was meant to be a war fought with real weapons and real soldiers. The only problem was that it initially appeared to be

uncertain where to deploy them, since terrorism was potentially anywhere. The ostensible goal of the war was not to conquer another country or to defend one's boundaries against a foreign invasion, but to eradicate terrorism, that is a non-territorial entity.

The cause of the declaration of war was the terrorist attack on the USA, where three civilian airplanes were hijacked by terrorists belonging to the militant Muslim al-Qaeda organization, and flown into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. A fourth plane, with an uncertain destination, crashed en route. Rather than seeing this as a large-scale crime, the US government defined the event as the beginning of a war. However, it was not to be a war between territorially defined units like nation-states. Several of the hijackers lived and studied in the USA. Most of them were of Saudi origins, but they were not acting on orders from the Saudi state. The organization on whose behalf they acted seemed to have its headquarters in Afghanistan, but the members were scattered, some living in North America, some in Europe, some in Pakistan and so on.

The nation-state has unambiguous boundaries, it is defined in Anderson's famous terms as being imagined as 'inherently limited and sovereign' (Anderson 1991 [1983]: 6). Wars are fought by the military, whose mission it is to protect the external borders of the country. A nation-state thus has a clearly defined inside and outside. The events of 11 September were a shocking reminder that the boundaries of a nation-state are far from absolute. Nations are effectively being deterritorialized in a number of ways through migration, economic investments and a number of other processes, and the 'war on terror' illustrates that this is now also the case with war. 'America's enemies' can in fact be anywhere in the world and operate from any site, since 'American interests' are global.

A few days after the 11 September events, a thought-provoking photo was reproduced in newspapers worldwide. It depicted military guards watching over the entrances to New York's Grand Central Station. The image was a reminder of two features of globalization: The boundary between police and military becomes blurred even in democracies where the military is not normally visible in the streets, and suggests a partial collapse of the boundary between inside and

outside. (This blurring of the inside/outside boundary is also evident in the military patrolling of EU borders along the North-West African coast and the military's role in typical transit areas such as the Canary Islands. The division of labour between police and military is negotiable and uncertain in these regions.) Secondly, this image is suggestive of vulnerability in a world society where everything travels more easily than before, including weapons and the people carrying them.

The 'war on terror' is instructive as a lesson in the form of disembedding characteristic of the global era, where the disembedding mechanisms of modernity, which create abstract common denominators and thus conditions for global communication and comparability, are used transnationally. A main form of disembedding is deterritorialization, that is processes whereby distance becomes irrelevant.

Globalization and distance

A minimal definition of globalization could delimit it simply as *all the contemporary processes that make distance irrelevant.* A major body of work in globalization studies is, accordingly, concerned with disembedding (Giddens 1990) and its effects on social life and the organization of society.

Disembedding entails the 'lifting out' of phenomena (things, people, ideas …) from their original context. Writing, it could thus be said, disembeds language just as an ATM disembeds money and the wristwatch disembeds time. This concept (and its close relatives) draws attention to the *relativization of space* engendered by development in communication technologies and the worldwide spread of capitalism. In the early 19th century, newspapers in North America reported from the Napoleonic wars in Europe weeks and sometimes months after the event. News had to be transported, erratically and unpredictably, by sailship. Travel, even in the relatively developed Western Europe, was slow, cumbersome and risky. Most goods were, for practical reasons, produced in physical proximity to the markets. With the development of global financial networks, transnational investment capital, consumption mediated by money in all or nearly all societies, and not least the fast and cheap means of transportation typified in the container ship, goods can travel, and

often do travel, far from their site of production. When it doesn't matter where something was made or done, it has been disembedded.

However, disembedding has a deeper and more comprehensive meaning; it does not merely, or even primarily, refer to the shrinking of the globe as a result of communication technology and global capitalism. Giddens defines disembedding as 'the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space' (1990: 21). Put in everyday language, it could be described as a gradual movement from the concrete and tangible to the abstract and virtual. Think of the global financial system as an example. Values registered on a stock exchange, or the value of a particular currency, are somehow related to tangible goods and services, but in an abstract and general way.

Disembedding processes are associated with modernity and are indeed a central feature of it. Some important disembedding processes evolved in pre-modern times, but the central argument of this chapter is that global modernity, or the globalization of modernity if one prefers, can be described as a series of disembedding processes with a transnational and potentially global reach.

Towards a more abstract world

The most important disembedding revolution of pre-modern times was arguably the invention of writing. Through writing, and especially phonetic writing (alphabets rather than pictographc systems such as hieroglyphs), utterances were separated from the utterer and could, for the first time in human history, travel independently of a given person. The utterance became a permanent, moveable thing. First developed in what is now Turkey and Mesopotamia, writing was invented independently in Mesoamerica and China.

Writing made it possible to develop knowledge in a cumulative way, in the sense that one had access to, and could draw directly on, what others had done. One was no longer dependent on face-to-face contact with one's teachers. They had left their thoughts and discoveries for posterity in a material, frozen form. The quantitative growth in the total knowledge of humanity presupposes the existence of writing. Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) could, working in a European monastery in the thirteenth century, spend a lifetime trying to reconcile two

important sets of texts – the Bible and Aristotle's philosophy – which were already then considered ancient. Explorers travelling in the Black Sea area in the sixth century AD could compare their observations with Herodotos' descriptions from the fifth century BC. Mathematicians and scientists could draw on Euclid's *Elements* and written works by Archimedes as points of departure when setting out to develop new insights. Writing makes it possible to stand firmly and rationally on the shoulders of deceased and remote ancesors (Goody 1977). This would also be the case in other parts of the world with writing systems; the mature versions of Chinese philosophy, Indian mathematics and Mayan astronomy were clearly the results of long, cumulative efforts presupposing a technology capable of *freezing thought*.

A non-literate society has an oral religion where several versions of the most important myths usually circulate, where the extent of the religion is limited by the reach of the spoken word, and where there is no fixed set of dogma that the faithful must adhere to. A literate society, on the contrary, usually has a written religion (often in the shape of sacred texts), with a theoretically unlimited geographic reach, with a clearly delineated set of dogma and principles, and with authorized, 'correct' versions of myths and narratives. Such a religion can in principle be identical in the Arab peninsula and in Morocco (although it is never this simple in practice; local circumstances impinge on it, and oral traditions never die completely). The three great religions of conversion from West Asia (the Abrahamic religions) have all these characteristics, which they do not share with a single traditional African religion. (In real life, nonetheless, oral and literate cultures mix in one and the same societies. The orally transmitted 'little traditions' live side by side with the fixed 'great traditions'; the former, often dismissed as superstitions or heresies, have proved remarkably resilient over the centuries even in societies dominated by powerful, literate traditions.)

A nonliterate society, further, has a judicial system based on custom and tradition, while a literate society has a legislative system based on written laws. Morality in the nonliterate society depends on interpersonal relations – it is embedded in tangible relationships between individuals – while morality in the literate society in theory is legalistic, that is embedded in the written legislation.

Even the relationship between parents and children is regulated by written law in our kind of society.

In a nonliterate society, knowledge is transmitted from mouth to ear, and the inhabitants are forced to train their memory. The total reservoir of knowledge which is available at any particular point in time is embodied in those members of society who happen to be alive. When an old person dies in a small, nonliterate society, the net loss of knowledge can be considerable.

Most nonliterate societies are organized on the basis of kinship, while literate societies tend to be state societies where an abstract ideology of community, such as nationalism, functions as a kind of metaphorical kinship. In certain non-state societies, the 'religions of the Book' have historically worked in a similar way, creating a 'disembedded' or abstract community encompassing persons who will never meet physically.

At a political level, the general tendency is that nonliterate societies either are decentralized and egalitarian, or chiefdoms where political office is inherited. Literate societies, on the other hand, are strongly centralized, and tend to have a professional administration where office is in principle accorded following a formal set of rules. In general, literate societies are much larger, both in geographic size and in population, than nonliterate ones. And while the inhabitants of nonliterate societies tell myths about who they are and where they come from, literate societies have *history* to fill the same functions, based on archives and other written sources (Lévi-Strauss 1966).

Writing, in this way, has been an essential tool in the transition from what we could call a *concrete society* based on intimate, personal relationships, memory, local religion and orally transmitted myths, to an *abstract society* based on formal legislation, archives, a book religion and written history. I shall mention four other innovations in communication technology which, together with writing, indicate the extent of disembedding in the social life of modern societies.

Abstract time and temperature

The mechanical clock was developed in the European medieval age, partly due to a perceived need to synchronize prayer times in the monasteries. (The calls of

the Muslim *muezzin* and the Christian church bells are contemporary reminders of this initial function of timing technology.) Calendars are older, and were developed independently in many more societies than writing. In general, however, calendars in non-modern societies were not a technical aid to help societies make five-year plans and individuals to keep track of their daily schedules and deadlines, but were rather linked with the seasons, ritual cycles, astronomy and the agricultural year. The clock is more accurate and more minute (literally) than the calendar. It measures time as well as cutting it into quantifiable segments. In spite of its initially religious function, the clock rapidly spread to co-ordinate other fields of activity as well. The Dutch thinker Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) formulated a moral maxim which illustrates this. Grotius is widely known for his contributions to political philosophy, but he is also sometimes mentioned as the first post-classic European to defend a moral principle completely divorced from religion: 'Punctuality is a virtue!' ('Time is money' is a later refinement of this principle, sometimes attributed to Benjamin Franklin.)

In the same way as writing externalizes language, clocks externalize time. Time becomes 'something' existing independently of human experience, something objective and measurable. This was definitely not the case in traditional societies, where inhabitants live within an event-driven time structure in their everyday existence. Events regulate the passage of time, not the other way around. If a traveller, or an ethnographer, to an African village wonders when a certain event will take place, the answer may be: 'When everything is ready.' Not, in other words, 'at a quarter to five'. But today, there are no clear-cut distinctions. Even in societies where clocks and time-tables have made their entry long ago, it may well be that they are not directly connected to people's everyday life. A colleague who carried out anthropological fieldwork in the Javanese countryside told me that one day, he needed to take a train to the nearest town. So he asked a man when the train was due. The man looked at him with the proverbial puzzled expression, and pointed to the tracks: 'The train comes from that direction, then it stops here, and after a little while it continues in the other direction.' End of account.

Clock time turns time into an autonomous entity, something that exists independently of events. 'An hour' may exist (in our minds) in an abstract way, it is an empty entity that can be filled with anything. Hence it is common to speak of clock time as 'empty, quantified time'. It is chopped up into in accurately measured 'pieces', like meters and deciliters. These entities are presupposed to be identical for everybody, anywhere and any time. Living in our kind of society somertimes gives the feeling that we were somehow obliged to sign a contract the moment we are born, committing us to lifelong faith in clock-and-calendar time.

Mechanical time measurement turns time into an exact, objective and abstract entity, a straitjacket for the flows and ebbs of experienced time perhaps – for this kind of time will always pass at varying speed; as everybody knows, five minutes can last anything from a moment to an eternity. The philosopher who has developed the most systematic assault on this quantitative time tyranny, is doubtless Henri Bergson (1859-1941). In his doctoral thesis from 1889, *Sur les données immédiates de la conscience* ('On the immediate givens of consciousness'), rendered in English as *Time and Free Will*, he severely criticizes the quantitative, 'empty' time that regulates us from the outside, instead of letting the tasks at hand fill the time from within.

The clock also has the potential to synchronize everybody who has been brought within its charmed circle. Everyone who reads this is in agreement regarding what it means when we say that it is, say, 8:15 p.m. Everybody knows when to turn on the television to watch a particular programme, and they do it simultaneously, independently of each other. If the programme has already begun when one turns it on, it is not because the TV channel fails to meet its commitments, but because something is wrong with the viewer's timepiece. Co-ordination of complex production in factories and office environments would also, naturally, have been unthinkable without the clock, as would anything from public transport to cinema shows.

The thermometer does the same to temperature as the clock does to time. Under thermometer driven regimes, it is not acceptable to state merely that it 'feels cold' when one can walk over to the thermometer and obtain the exact number of degrees. If it shows more than 20 degrees Celsius (68 degrees

Fahrenheit), it is not the air temperature, as it were, but oneself that is to blame.

Money as a means of communication

An even more consequential kind of technology than the thermometer is another invention which pulls adherents and victims in the same direction, namely money. In traditional societies, both language and time concepts exist, but not writing and clocks. Similarly, money-like instruments exist in many kinds of societies, but our kind of money, 'general-purpose money', is recent and historically culture-bound. It does roughly the same thing to payment, value measurements and exchange as clocks and writing do to time and language, respectively. They make the transaction abstract and impose a standardized grid onto a large area (ultimately the whole world). They place individual, mundane transactions under an invisible umbrella of abstraction.

Both shell money, gold coins and other compact valuables are known from a wide range of traditional societies. They may, perhaps, be used as *value standards* to make different goods comparable – a bag of grain equals half a gold coin; a goat equals half a gold coin; *ergo*, a sack of grain can be bartered with a goat. They may be used as *means of exchange*; I can buy two goats with a gold coin. They may even be used as *means of payment* – I have killed my neighbour, and I have to pay the widow and children three gold coins in compensation. However, modern money is a much more powerful technology than anything comparable that we know from traditional societies. Above all, it is *universal* in its field of applicability. It may be that Lennon and McCartney were correct in their view that love is not a marketable commodity ('Can't Buy Me Love' – although it is easy to find cynical sociologists who argue the contrary), but in general, one single kind of money functions as a universal means of payment and exchange, and as a value standard. West African cowries had no value outside a limited area, and even there, only certain commodities and services could be purchased with them. General-purpose money is legal tender in an entire state of millions of inhabitants, and if we belong to a country with a convertible currency, they are valid worldwide. Regarded as information technology, money has truly contributed to the creation of one world, albeit a world into which only people of

means are integrated. Money makes wages and purchasing-power all over the world comparable, makes it possible to exchange a tonne of taro from New Guinea with electronics from Taiwan, and it is a necessary medium for the world economy to be possible at all. Whereas transaction and trade in many societies depended on trust and personal relationships between seller and buyer, the abstract and universal money we are familiar with, imply an externalization of economic transactions. As long as there is agreement over the economic value of the coloured bits of paper, I need not know either my debtors or my creditors personally. With the recent move of money into cyberspace, which entails that the same plastic card can be used for economic transactions nearly anywhere in the world, it becomes even more abstract.

Abstract music

A final example is musical notation. All or nearly all societies we know possess some kind of music, but notation was only invented a couple of times, namely in Europe (ninth century AD) and China/Japan (tenth century AD). However, it was only in Europe that an expressed aim of notation from the very beginning was to create an entirely symbolic language for communicating musical content – the Chinese/Japanese system was based on pictographs proper to the written language. In the beginning, the rudimentary notes marked only ascent and descent of tone level. Eventually, they became more accurate, and in the eleventh century, Guido of Arezzo introduced the staff, which made it possible to mark specified intervals. In the same period, the notation system was standardized, and symbolic markers depicting tone duration were also introduced. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the system with which we are familiar was largely in place.

Several aspects of musical notation are relevant in the present context. First, written music do the same to music as script does to language; they liberate music from the performer, and make it possible to store music independently of people as well as, for individual players, to learn a piece without personal contact with another performer. Only those aspects of music that can be depicted in writing are copied with a high degree of fidelity across the generations. Just as there is an indefinite residue in speech that is not

transmitted through texts, the same could be said of music (feeling and, until quite recently, absolute tempo, are two such aspects). Secondly, notes freeze music, just as history freezes myths and clock time attempts to fix the variable flow of time. In several European countries, folk music that had evolved gradually for centuries, was suddenly transcribed and preserved in frozen form during national romanticism; as a result, it is played today note by note as it was played, say, in the mid-nineteenth century (Sinding-Larsen 1991). Thirdly, notation lays the conditions for another kind of complexity than what would otherwise have been possible. Tellingly, notation was developed in the same period as polyphony, a musical innovation which appeared only in Europe. Neither the mathematical regularity of Bach's fugues nor the very large number of voices in Beethoven's symphonies would have been possible without an accurate system of notation. The standard tone A440 (a pure A is a wave with the frequency 440) was finally defined in 1939, after having fluctuated for hundreds of years. It is the equivalent in music to the gold standard, Greenwich Mean Time and the metre rod in Paris (see box). A shared, abstract standard is assumed to be valid for all persons at all times.

Printing and factories

The transitions from kinship to national identity, from custom to legislation, from 'cowrie money' or similar to general-purpose money, from local religions to written religions of conversion, from person-dependent morality to universalistic morality, from memory to archives, from myths to history, and from event-driven time to clock time, all point in the same direction: from a small-scale society based on concrete social relations and practical knowledge to a large-scale society based on an abstract legislative system and abstract knowledge founded in logic and science.

Two further historical changes, with important implications for both thought and ways of life, need mentioning as conditions for widespread disembedding: printing and the industrial revolution.

Before the era of print – Johann Gutenberg lived from about 1400 to 1468 – literacy existed in many societies, but it was not particularly widespread. There were several causes for this; among other things, the fact that a book could be as

costly as a small farm. Both in Europe and Asia, books were written by hand, largely by monks, but also by professional copyists. Then Gutenberg invented his printing press with movable type, frequently seen as the single most important invention of the last two thousand years, and suddenly, books became relatively inexpensive. Ths happened from 1455 and onwards, to be exact; this was the year Gutenberg printed the famous 42-line Bible. That is to say, books did not become really cheap yet. Gutenberg's Bible cost thirty guilders, and the annual salary for a manual worker in his home area was ten guilders. During the following decades, the new technology spread rapidly to cover the central parts of Europe, and books became increasingly inexpensive. The first printing shop in England was founded by William Caxton already in 1476. Caxton was both printer, editor, book salesman and publisher (a common combination as late as the nineteenth century), and he contributed in no small degree to standardising English ortography and syntax. Printing entailed standardization in other countries as well, as well as facilitating access to books written in native languages, at the expense of Latin. The market was suddenly much larger than the small elite of Latin scholars. Printing was a decisive factor for the emergence of new science, philosophy and literature in early modern times. It was crucial for both mass education and the creation of civil society in European cities, and led to consequences Gutenberg could never have foreseen. His main ambitions seem to have been to print Bibles and pay his debts.

The features of printing that are most relevant here, are its contribution to the spectacular growth in information, and its standardising effects on language and thought. Cheap, printed books contributed to the standardization of both language and world-views. An identical message, clothed in identical linguistic garb, could now be broadcast to the entire middle class from Augsburg to Bremen. Thus a national public sphere could emerge for the first time, consisting of equals who were preoccupied with the same writers, the same political and theological questions, the same philosophical, geographic and scientific novelties. Printing was so important for the development of democracy and nationalism that Benedict Anderson gave the leading role to print capitalism in his historical drama about the rise of nationalism, *Imagined Communities* (Anderson 1991 [1983]). Without this formidable system of

production and distribution, it is difficult to see how a person in Marseilles could even dream of having a morally committing feeling of community with a person in Lille. Seen as a technological device for creating abstract communities, that is solidarity and empathy between people who will never meet in the flesh, print capitalism is king. An underlying question for us is, naturally: If print capitalism bequeathed nationalism and democracy, what lies in store for us after a period similarly dominated by the Internet and digital satellite television?

It took a long time for literacy to become truly widespread even after the rise of printing technology. In Shakespeare's time, perhaps ten per cent of the population in England and Wales were literate. No country has an illiteracy rate even approaching this today. Even women in conservative, patriarchal societies have a higher literacy rate than the male inhabitants of Shakespeare's England.

It was printing coupled with universal primary education and mass media like newspapers and magazines (including books published in monthly installments) that truly pulled the minds of ordinary men and women into the new, abstract society. This society consisted of an enormous number of persons who were all cogs in a giant machine, and eventually they could easily be replaced by others in the productive process. Their knowledge and skills were not unique, but standardized and therefore comparable to others' knowledge and skills. With the harnessing of fossil fuels and the subsequent industrial revolution from the late eighteenth century onwards, this possibility was turned into practice for the first time.

*** Boxed text on disembedded nations around here ***

Nationalism as a template for globalization
Nationalism, often seen as an obstacle to globalization, is a product of the same forces that are shaping the latter (see Sassen 2006). Historically, an important part played by nationalist ideologies in contemporary nation-states has consisted in integrating an ever larger number of people culturally, politically and economically. The French could not be meaningfully described as a 'people' before the French revolution, which brought the Ile-de-France (Parisian) language, notions of liberal political rights, uniform primary education and not

least, the self-consciousness of being French, to remote areas – first to the local bourgeoisies, later (in some cases *much later*) to the bulk of the population. Similar large-scale processes took place in all European countries during the 19th century, and the modern state, as well as nationalist ideology, is historically and logically linked with the spread of literacy (Goody 1986, Eriksen 2010), the quantification of time and the growth of industrial capitalism. The model of the nation-state as the supreme political unit has spread throughout the 20th century. Not least due to the increasing importance of international relations (trade, warfare, etc.), the nation-state has played an extremely important part in the making of the contemporary world. Social integration on a large scale through the imposition of a uniform system of education, the introduction of universal contractual wagework, standardization of language etc., is accordingly the explicit aim of nationalists in the parts of the world often spoken of as developing countries. It may be possible to achieve some of these aims by contrasting the nation with a different nation or a minority residing in the state, which is then depicted as inferior or threatening. This strategy for cohesion is extremely widespread and is not a peculiar characteristic of the nation-state as such: similar ideologies and practices are found in kinship-based societies and among urban minorities alike. Insofar as enemy projections are dealt with in the present context, they are regarded as means to achieve internal, national cohesion, since international conflicts are not considered.

Nationalism as a mode of social organization represents a qualitative leap from earlier forms of integration. Within a nation-state, all men and women are citizens, and they participate in a system of relationships where they depend upon, and contribute to, the existence of a vast number of individuals whom they will never know personally. The main social distinction appears as that between insiders and outsiders; between citizens and non-citizens. The total system appears abstract and impenetrable to the citizen, who must nevertheless trust that it serves his needs. The seeming contradiction between the individual's immediate concerns and the large-scale machinations of the nation-state is bridged through nationalist ideology proposing to accord each individual citizen particular value. The ideology simultaneously depicts the nation metaphorically as an enormous system of blood relatives or as a religious community, and as a

benefactor satisfying immediate needs (education, jobs, health, security, etc.). Through this kind of ideological techniques, nationalism can serve to open and close former boundaries of social systems. Some become brothers metaphorically; others, whose membership in the nation (and consequently, loyalty) is debatable, become outsiders. Unlike the situation in pre-modern societies, nationalism communicates mainly through abstract media (written laws, newspapers, mass meetings etc.) whereas kinship ideology is communicated in face-to-face interaction. The former presupposes the latter as a metaphoric model (Eriksen 2010, see also Smith 1991).

Nationalism is ideally based on abstract norms, not on personal loyalty. Viewed as a popular ideology, nationalism is inextricably intertwined with the destiny of the nation-state. Where the nation-state is ideologically successful, its inhabitants become nationalists; that is, their identities and ways of life gradually grow compatible with the demands of the nation-state and support its growth. Where nationalism fails to convince, the state may use violence or the threat of violence to prevent fission. The monopoly on the use of legitimate violence is, together with its monopoly of taxation, one of the most important characteristics of the modern state; however, violence is usually seen as a last resort. More common are political strategies aiming to integrate hitherto distinctive categories of people culturally. Since national boundaries change historically, and since nations can be seen as shifting collectivities of people conceiving of their culture and history as shared, this is an ongoing process. Ethnic groups can vanish through annihilation or more commonly, through assimilation. They may also continue to exist, and may pose a threat to the dominant nationalism in two main ways, either as agents of subversion (they do, after all, represent alternative cultural idioms and values – this was how the Jews of Nazi Germany were depicted) or as agents of fission (which was evidently the case with Baltic nationalists before 1991).

Nationalist strategies are truly successful only when the state simultaneously increases its sphere of influence, and responds credibly to popular demands, thereby stimulating national sentiment from below. It is tautologically true that if the nation-state and its agencies can satisfy perceived needs in ways acknowledged by the citizens, then its inhabitants become

nationalists. The main threats to national integration are therefore alternative social relationships which can also satisfy perceived needs. There are potential conflicts between the nation-state and non-state modes of organization, which may follow normative principles incompatible with those represented by the state. This kind of conflict is evident in every country in the world, and it can be studied as ideological conflict, provided ideology is not seen merely as a system of ideas, but as sets of practices guided by such ideas. Typical examples are African countries, where 'tribalism' or organization along ethnic lines is perceived as a threat (by the nation-state), or as an alternative (by the citizens), to the universalist rhetoric and practices of nationalism. From the citizen's point of view, nationalism may or may not be a viable alternative to kinship or ethnic ideology (or there may be two nationalisms to choose between, e.g. an Ethiopian and a Somali one, in eastern Ethiopia) – and she will choose the option best suited to satisfy her needs, be they of a metaphysical, economic or political nature. The success or failure of attempts at national integration must therefore be studied not only at the level of political strategies or systemic imperatives; it must equally be understood at the level of the everyday life-world. In a word, the ideological struggles and the intra-state conflicts, as well as the context-specific options for 'the good life', shape and are simultaneously rooted in the immediate experiences of its citizens, and the analysis must begin there.

Other disembedding mechanisms

In the realm of production, the *labour contract* of the capitalist enterprise is a disembedding instrument separating the labour power of the individual from the entire person. Under a labour contract, workers were and are, at least in principle, free to quit, and their obligations to the employer are limited to their working hours. Other examples could have been mentioned. The point is that modern societies are characterized by a particular kind of complexity, where the lives of individuals are 'compartmentalized' (Berger et al. 1973) into separate roles or functions, and thereby become replacable with each other in particular domains. This is not the only possible way of making a society work. Indian caste society and traditional Australian world-views are two spectacular examples of social and cultural complexity, respectively. Nonetheless, modernity is today in a

uniquely important position; it is hegemonic on the verge of becoming universal, and due to its disembedding and compartmentalizing functions, it lays the foundations for global networking. It synchronizes and standardizes an enormous number of persons, all of them little cogs in a great machinery. It draws on a shared mechanical time-structure, a global medium for economic transactions (money), technologies of production and destruction based on a shared theoretical science and easily transferrable knowledge. Modernity co-ordinates the movements and thoughts of an enormous number of people in ways which were both unknown and unthinkable in non-modern societies. It divorces its resources from particular individuals by externalising time, language, economy, memory, morality and knowledge. And it enables a nearly infinite social complexity in a world where boundaries are increasingly relative and negotiable.

Many react critically to particular aspects of disembedding, seeing it as dehumanizing or alienating, oppressive or inauthentic – or they are simply unable to reap its profits, e.g. by being excluded from the formal labour market. They are engaged in various forms of *re-embedding*, witnessed, for example, in the informal sector in the economy (based on trust and interpersonal relationships) or in local identity politics (emphasizing the virtues of that which is locally embedded).

So far, I have considered some of the main conditions of modernity, chiefly in its guise as the modern nation-state. However, with the replication and diffusion of technologies and modes of organization across boundaries, what emerged during the 20th century, and particularly in its second half, was a world-system of nation-states based on many of the same premises. Thus, given these emerging similarities across the globe, contemporary globalization became feasible. It would neither be economically profitable nor culturally possible to create enduring reciprocal ties between non-state, non-literate tribal groups and the economic machinery of the industrialized countries, but with the increasingly transnational disembedding of communication, trade and production, such ties have become both viable and widespread.

Giddens (1990) distinguishes between two kinds of disembedding mechanisms: the creation of *symbolic tokens*, and the establishment of *expert systems*. A typical symbolic token is money, which travels independently of persons and goods (and is increasingly located to the abstract realm of cyberspace); a typical expert system is economic science, assumed to be context-independent and valid everywhere.

As mentioned, the increasing dominance of disembedding mechanisms and their growing spatial range can fruitfully be seen as a movement from the concrete to the abstract, from the interpersonal to the institutional, and from the local to the global. The two next chapters, on acceleration and on standardization, present features of globalization which are closely related to disembedding.

Disembedded friendship

American colleges and universities have a long tradition of publishing an annual 'face book' including names and mugshots of all students. A kind of directory, the intention of these face books was to make it easier for sophomore students to get acquainted with others. During the 1990s, face books were increasingly turned into online catalogues, and in 2004, the Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg used material from Harvard face books, some of it acquired by hacking into the protected areas of 'houses' at Harvard, to create a more comprehensive catalogue including a comment field. In spite of legal difficulties with the Harvard administration, the site became an instant success. During the following year, the network was expanded to include other universities as well as high schools, the user interface was developed beyond that of commenting on photos, and in September 2006, Facebook as we know it today was opened to the general public. By autumn 2013 – less than seven years after its launch – Facebook had more than a billion users worldwide.

Modelled on face-to-face social relationships, but lifted out into the virtual world of cyberspace, Facebook can be described as an ongoing, deterritorialized conversation between people who sometimes know each other outside of Facebook, who are sometimes aware of each other outside of Facebook, and who sometimes know each other only through their online presence. The range of

subjects dealt with on Facebook parallels the breadth of social and cultural life itself. A typical newsfeed on my own account would include a few photos of cute animals and children celebrating their birthdays, a few political cartoons, news from environmental organizations and the gas industry in Australia (where I am doing research), comments on recent news in Norway and the European Union, a few links to YouTube clips and a handful of links to academic articles. I know less than half of my Facebook friends personally, but I know something about them (such as their occupation, musical tastes or authorship).

What is peculiar about Facebook in this context is not only the fact that it is totally disembedded and deterritorialized, but that it is chiefly being used for reimbedding by sharing personal experiences, spontaneous thoughts and judgements with friends, physical and virtual. Of course, 'Web 2.0' (where 'the social media' play an important part) encompasses far more than Facebook – Twitter (for microblogging), Instagram (for photo sharing) and LinkedIn (for professional networking) are interesting in their own right – but Facebook is the most powerful and widely used medium of this kind. The reason may be that it offers possibilities to share the whole range of human emotions with likeminded (or not) people anytime, anywhere; or it may be, as Daniel Miller says, 'the desire by nearly everyone on our planet to be on the same network as everyone else' (Miller 2011: 217).

Neoliberal economics and disembedding

The term neoliberalism is often used to describe a particular kind of disembedded economic ideology and practice characteristic of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. It is commonly agreed that it began in earnest with the policies of deregulation and privatization instigated in the USA and the UK around 1980, under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher's respective leaderships. The structural adjustment programmes implemented by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the so-called developing world in the 1980s and 1990s conformed to the same principles, cutting down public expenditure and encouraging the development of competitive markets wherever possible. This set of policies believed to lead to a healthy economic development are generally known as the Washington Consensus, as the were the outcome of

an agreement between the IMF, the World Bank and the US Treasury
Department. The influential geographer and social theorist David Harvey defines
neoliberalism like this:

> Neoliberalism is … a theory of political economic practices that proposes that
> human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual
> entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework
> characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.
> The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework
> appropriate to such practices. (Harvey 2005: 2)

Neoliberal policies have in the subsequent decades been pursued by
governments in most parts of the world, fully or partly privatizing formerly
public enterprises such as railways and postal services, and encouraging an
unhampered market economy (although restrictions are usually placed on
imports in the form of tariffs).

   The neoliberal view is that the removal of hindrances to competition (such
as import tariffs, strong trade unions, inefficient and bureaucratic state
institutions, unprofitable activities) will eventually lead to prosperity and
economic growth through the workings of the market principle. Such a view of
the economy is, for better or worse, a disembedding vision since it sees the
economy as 'lifted out of' social relations, following its own logic and its own
dynamic, driven by anonymous market forces.

   Neoliberalism has been criticized from many quarters. Some have simply
argued that it did not deliver the goods, and that deregulation and slimming of
the public sector sent countries like Argentina into a prolonged crisis. Others
have pointed out that neoliberalism did not so much lead to increased prosperity
as to increased inequality (Harvey 2005). Yet others see the economy as a
socially embedded kind of activity which cannot and should not be viewed as an
abstract and virtual thing (Hart et al. 2010). Yet others have warned against the
instability of a financially driven world economy, and the concept 'casino
capitalism', although coined by the international relationist Susan Strange
already in 1986, was frequently used during the financial crisis beginning in
2008. Finally, some critics of neoliberalism argue that a deregulated global

market cannot coexist with national democracies (Rodrik 2011). The reason is that national politicians would have minimal space for maneuvre and few effective tools for social planning in a deregulated world economy where the local fortunes depend on global processes.

In spite of these and other objections and criticisms of neoliberalist ideology and practice, privatization, deregulation and calls for marketization are still very widespread around the world. The disembedded market economy is a key feature of contemporary globalization, although – as will be made increasingly clear in later chapters – it encounters resistance, and alternatives to it are being developed.

*** Boxed text on gated communities around here ***

Critics of disembedding

An especially grim interpretation of disembedding processes sees them as resulting in fragmentation, alienation and anonymity, ultimately removing every trace of the local and particular. In an original essay on 'non-places', the anthropologist Marc Augé (1992) describes a condition he labels 'supermodernity' (*la surmodernité*) which continuously produces uprootedness and alienation because it obliterates and neglects historically rooted places imbued with particularity. Augé's non-places are frictionless and lack resistance. They communicate through a rudimentary pidgin language devoid of particular experiences. He writes that we live in a world where one is

> born in a clinic and dies in a hospital, where transitional points – luxurious or dehumanising – proliferate (hotel chains and temporary shacks, holiday resorts, refugee camps, slums soon to be demolished or which are in a condition of permanent decay), where a network develops which is tied together by means of transportation which are also dwellings, where the routine user of shopping centres, ATMs and credit cards carries out his transactions without a word, a world where everything encourages lonely individuality, the transition, the provisional and temporary. (Augé 1992: 100-101, my translation)

In the abstract, generalized world described by Augé, the local and peculiar is lost. Augé's countryman Paul Virilio (1996, 1999) goes even further, in seeing disembedding processes as heralding the death of civil society. In Virilio's view, a main cause of social fragmentation and alienation is contemporary communication technology. Whereas some of the disembedding communication technologies, notably the book and the newspaper, were important for the creation of civil societies by creating shared frames of reference for people who would never meet physically (Anderson 1991 [1983]), the contemporary, transnational and instantaneous communication technologies (such as the Internet) dissolve it in Virilio's view. He describes a world where people no longer need to – or even want to – meet their neighbours, where they are entertained and informed online, and where communication with others is also increasingly online, deterritorialized, disembedded and detached from ongoing social life. As a result, Virilio fears that the everyday conversation about society, the little compromises and conversions taking place in discussions about anything from sport to politics, fade away because the organization of society no longer creates conditions for such interactions.

There is in the social sciences a long tradition of criticizing modern societies, and not least the features we have described as disembedding processes, for alienating people and reducing the conditions for existential security, intimacy, self-reliance and autonomy. Most of the leading pioneers of social theory, including Marx, Durkheim and Tönnies, contrasted the abstract, large-scale, industrial societies of their own day with the concrete, small-scale, agricultural societies that had preceded them. Some of their arguments can be re-found in contemporary debates about globalization, which is in a certain sense just modernity writ large or, in the words of Appadurai (1996), simply *modernity at large*. However, the era of global modernity is in important ways different from the modernity defined and described by the sociological classics. Notably, the economy and communications have become increasingly globalized – or deterritorialized – without a similar development in politics. The 'democratic deficit' of globalization is a much debated topic (cf. Held et al. 2005), and in the view of the critics, the national public and political spheres are being marginalized. Some call for a strengthening of national power, while others

argue in favour of transnational governance through international organizations and regional entities like the European Union. Yet others have faith in the potential of 'grassroots' movements, that is organizations from below, as alternative ways of influencing both local and transnational politics.

Through presenting some of the disembedding mechanisms of modernity at some length, this chapter has shown how contemporary globalization is a development presupposing the implementation and dissemination of a series of disembedding processes, which have created abstract societies, now increasingly transnational in their ongoings.

Disembedded nations

Disembedding means the 'lifting out' of social relations from their local embeddedness. Thinking along these lines, and looking at identification and belonging, one may imagine the development of state-sponsored virtual nations on the Internet, ensuring the continued loyalty and identification of citizens or ex-citizens living abroad. In terms of economics and strategic interests, such an enlarging of the national interest, this makes perfect sense. The Chilean government discovered this potential in the early 2000s. During the military dictatorship (1973-1990), roughly a million Chileans left the country, and the majority did not return after the reintroduction of democracy. There are people registered as Chileans in 110 countries around the world, even if many lost their citizenship after fleeing from the Pinochet dictatorship. In the early 2000s, the government actively sought to reintegrate overseas Chileans and their descendants, not by encouraging their return, but by enhancing their sense of Chileanness, which might in turn benefit the state through investments and 'Chilean' activities scattered around the globe. Chile was officially made up of 13 regions, but increasingly, a 14th region, called the region of el exterior *or* el reencuentro *(the reunion) was mentioned in official and unofficial contexts. Initiatives were even taken to allow Chilean artists living abroad to apply for government funding.*

Another, more common way of using the Internet to enhance national identities which lack a territorial base, is by nations lacking a state or exiles in political opposition. On the Internet (and with a growing presence on Facebook),

various Tamil, Kurdish, Palestinian, Sikh and Iranian websites bring news and host discussion forums representing and aimed towards their scattered, deterritorialized constituencies, thereby encouraging and strengthening strong collective identities among people who would otherwise have been isolated from each other (Eriksen 2007b).

The use of the Internet by states in order to stimulate and kindle national loyalty among nationals living in diasporas is by now very widespread. Since most debates about immigration in the receiving countries deal with integration, this kind of measure is bound to be perceived as a fragmenting force in the host countries. Yet, what is interesting here is the fact that disembedding mechanisms have the potential of making political boundaries congruent with cultural ones, as Ernest Gellner puts it in Nations and Nationalism *(Gellner 1983) - even when both kinds of boundaries are thoroughly deterritorialized.*

The gated community as a form of disembedding

Segregation in cities has been studied widely by urban sociologists, anthropologists and not least geographers. The term gated community, often used in the literature, describes an urban area which is guarded, usually by a private security company, and closed off, usually physically, from the surrounding city. The people inhabiting the gated community are economically privileged, and have closed off their local area in order to control their interaction with the surroundings, seen as threatening and dangerous. Naturally, the gated community is a feature of cities which are strongly class-divided. Inhabitants of the gated community have their own infrastructure, wholly or partially, they send their children to private schools and buy imported goods in expensive shops. In an analysis of the development of a gated community, or fortified enclave, in Managua, Nicaragua, Rodgers (2004) describes them as 'disconnected worlds that are the antithesis of public space, in that they constitute a withdrawal from the fabric of the city, leading to its fragmentation' (2004: 123). The social form of the gated community leads to the exclusion of others from formerly shared spaces, and limits the interaction between the enclave's inhabitants and outsiders. It definitely contributes to a fragmentation of the city, and also has consequences for the political life in that the very notion of a shared public space is challenged. Inhabitants of gated communities consume

pretty much in the same way as middle- or upper-class citizens in rich countries; they watch cable television and communicate online from home. Their integration into the world economy is indisputable – many work in international agencies or transnational companies – but their level of participation in the domestic public sphere is debatable and often very insignificant. The spread of gated communities throughout the poorer countries – Rio de Janeiro, Nairobi, Johannesburg, Santiago de Chile, Guatemala City and so on – suggests not only a disembedding of an urban form from its physical location, but also the emergence of a global middle class, transnationally integrated through shared ideas, practices and lifestyles, but with a weakening tie towards the local and domestic.

This example suggests a development which is complementary to, and signifies the opposite of, the example of the 14th Chilean province: While the Internet and increased transnational interaction can serve to re-integrate diaspora Chileans into the imagined community of the nation, the growth of gated communities in third world cities signifies the detachment of groups, which are physically located to the nation-state, from it.

• Disembedding can be defined as 'the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space'.

• Disembedding refers to a main trajectory of globalization, namely the increasingly abstract character of communication and objects, whereby their origin becomes obscured and their currency more and more widespread.

• Writing (often in the form of printing), money, clock time and standardized measurements are some of the most important disembedding mechanisms in modern society.

• The disembedding mechanisms of contemporary global or transnational systems rely on electronic information and communication technology (ICT) for their efficacy.

• Critics of contemporary disembedding see the 'lifting out' of social relations as a recipe for alienation and fragmentation.

Questions

In which ways does disembedding occur as deterritorialisation? Give some examples and discuss the consequences.

Mention three main forms of deterritorialisation which are integral to modernity, and indicate how they are necessary conditions for contemporary globalization.

In what way does the author see musical notation as connected to globalization? Do you agree?

How can nationalism be said to be a product of the same forces that are shaping globalization?

What are some of the main differences between contemporary globalization and the modernity of the nation-state?

Further reading

Bauman, Zygmunt (1999) *Globalization - The Human Consequences*. New York: Columbia University Press. Written by the famous Polish-English social theorist known for his theoretical analyses of modernity and postmodernity, this book describes new forms of inequality, surveillance and risk resulting from tighter integration.

Gellner, Ernest (1990) *Plough, Sword, Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. There are many books trying to explain the transition from tribal to modern society, and this is among the very best. The author looks at familiar dimensions such as technological changes and population growth, but he also places great emphasis on writing and scientific thought.

Giddens, Anthony (2002) *Runaway World*. London: Routledge. This is a compact and informal book, based on a lecture series, highlighting some important aspects of disembedding and global modernity, but emphasizing the positive aspects of globalization such as human rights, the spread of feminism and cosmopolitan ideas.