

# The many faces of globalisation

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## Abstract

Although 'globalisation' has become the catch word of our times, it is not a simple linear or uniform process. On the contrary, globalisation is associated with apparently contradictory processes that manifest themselves in different forms in various domains such as the economic, social, cultural and political domains. Furthermore, in all these domains, globalisation is not only characterised by universalisation, homogenisation and uniformity, but also by localisation, heterogeneity and an emphasis on uniqueness. These many faces of globalisation are discussed in this article.

## I INTRODUCTION

*Nothing will be done anymore, without the whole world meddling in it.*  
(Paul Valéry, quoted in Featherstone 1991:15)

The term 'globalisation' refers in general to the accelerating process that involves the formation of complex power and communication relations worldwide between societies, cultures, institutions and individuals. One of the most important features of this process is the transformation of time and space constraints, that is, the contraction of distance as a result of the dramatic reduction in time needed to cover distances – whether personal or in the form of a message, representation or replication. Globalisation thus implies that the world in reality has 'shrunk' and that people have been brought 'closer' to each other. This process has reached almost all corners of the earth. Time and labour-saving production techniques (such as robot technology) and technology to cover spatial distances (for example, modern transport and telecommunication technology) have further contributed to

the spread of modern ideas, technologies and organisations of the European and North American centres to virtually all corners of the earth (Mohammadi 1997:3, 128; Tomlinson 1997:170; Waters 1995:3).

The compression of time and space distances also induced the intensification of awareness of the world as a whole. Apart from the objective reality of globalisation, there is therefore also a subjective dimension that relates to the increase in awareness among people that they form part of the global set-up (Robertson 1992:8).

However, globalisation is an intricate and multiple process. In the first place two dimensions – a horizontal and a vertical dimension – can be distinguished. The horizontal dimension involves the progressive compression of time and space that culminates in the world becoming a unified place, a single system. The vertical dimension involves a twofold process. On the one hand there is a tendency to homogenise, synchronise, integrate, unify and universalise. On the other hand there is a tendency to localise, differentiate, diversify and particularise. Although various analysts acknowledge the existence of these apparently contradictory processes, little is known about their link with each other. Yet it is generally accepted that these processes are essentially interwoven and – as two sides of the same coin – actually represent two manifestations of a single process (Tehrani & Tehrani 1997:131). Braman and Van Staden (2000:3) therefore prefer to use the plural form ‘globalisations’ to indicate that globalisation is a multiple process that can be observed in more than one area, experienced differently in different areas and manifest in a variety of – even contradictory – ways. The multiple nature of globalisation can however be understood better if one takes a look at its realisation in various domains.

## 2 THE ECONOMIC DOMAIN

Economic globalisation can be defined as a process in which economic activity occurs progressively on an international level. Economic globalisation is characterised by an ever-stronger liberal approach to international trade in goods and services, as well as by the international flow of capital (Chen, Huic & Stocker in Chen 1998:2). This means that obstacles in the form of trade restrictions between countries are reduced, and in some cases totally removed.

As a result of economic globalisation an integrated and unlimited market develops for all commodities. An integrated market does not mean that

there is one world market only, but that economics and markets of countries become increasingly interdependent. No market or economy can operate in isolation any longer. As a result of the rapid development of information and communication technology, geographic borders and time differences cease being a limiting factor in international trade and finance and an unlimited or virtual market emerges. Commodities are anything that can be exchanged, borrowed, purchased or sold, and include money, physical products and services, and information. Hamelink (1994:110) describes economic globalisation as the emergence of global consumers who demand global services and products that are provided by global distributors.

## **2.1 Facets of economic globalisation**

Two distinct facets of economic globalisation can be distinguished:

### **2.1.1 An increase in international trade**

Waters (1995:66) regards trade as the foundation of globalisation as it has the potential to bring producers and consumers who are geographically removed from each other into contact. From the earliest times man engaged in trade, but international trade started expanding rapidly during the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century. Ruggiero (1997:16–17) describes three phases through which the world economy proceeded after the Second World War. The first phase – which Ruggiero named the *international economy* – took up the first three decades after the Second World War and was marked by an increase in trade between a group of national economies or nation states. The period 1970 to the late 1980s was marked by rapid technological advances and a systematic reduction in trade restrictions. This enabled businesses to establish different facets of their production in different parts of the world that, in turn, leads to the establishment of so-called transnational or multinational enterprises. World trade was consequently no longer restricted to transactions between nation states – a *global economy* has emerged. Currently, multinational enterprises are responsible for about two-thirds of world trade and are regarded as the locus of transnational economic activities.

A third phase, the unlimited economy, was introduced by the development of digital technologies and communication networks in the late 1990s. As geography, borders and time no longer formed significant barriers to international trade, an unlimited world economy was established. Information has become the most important commodity, and free and equal access

to it has the potential to bring more balance into the relations between countries.

### **2.1.2 The globalisation of financial markets**

In the unlimited economy in which we find ourselves currently, the flow of capital is no longer limited by geographic or time barriers. The circulation of money progressively occurs outside of the jurisdiction of national governments (Hamelink 1994:108). We can also refer in this regard to a virtual financial market. Rastogi (1997:48) identifies three driving forces behind the globalisation of financial markets. Firstly, the worldwide deregulation of trade and financial markets results in most countries raising various regulations that restrict the flow of commodities as well as capital to and from them. In other words, countries open their economies or make them more accessible. Advances in computer and communication technology have furthermore facilitated and accelerated the flow of information on which transactions in the financial markets are based. Financial transactions are nowadays virtually clinched in the space of milliseconds. Information on financial markets is available 24 hours per day, worldwide, and when changes occur, information is instantly updated accordingly. CNN-FN (Financial News) is an international television channel and Bloomberg Financial Markets provide financial information via computer networks, radio, television and the printed media (Howard 1998:48). Diverse developments such as the formation of free trade zones, the demise of communism, the switch-over to fluctuating exchange rates, the aging of the world population, the growth of the middle class in developing countries, and the reconfiguration of pension schemes also lead to an increasing supply of and demand for capital.

However, there are some obstacles that the unlimited economy still has to overcome, such as legal, accounting and tax differences between countries. Furthermore, not all countries are equally keen to deregulate their economies. According to Rastogi (1997:50, 53) these obstacles may delay, but will not prevent, the globalisation of financial markets.

## **2.2 The driving forces behind economic globalisation**

What induced economic globalisation and still accelerates it? Four important driving forces can be identified:

## **2.2.1 The economic theory of demand**

Hu and Griffith (1997:117) as well as McClements and Smallman (1998:5) regard the economic theory of demand as the foundation of globalisation. International trade (goods as well as financial transactions) started to increase supply in answer to the growing demand for goods, services, capital and information.

## **2.2.2 Economic integration**

Economic integration is supported by the formation of economic regions such as the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (Hu & Griffith 1997:118).

## **2.2.3 Technological development**

Technological development, especially communication technology, facilitated and accelerated economic globalisation. Developments in telecommunication and mass media have resulted in the exposure of consumers right across the world to new/different standards of living. This has resulted in the emergence of a global consumer market with similar needs (Hu & Griffith 1997:118). Technological progress also made possible/facilitated the globalisation of financial markets.

## **2.2.4 The decline in the influence of the nation state**

McClements and Smallman (1998:3) refer to a fourth factor that accelerates economic globalisation: the decline in the influence of the nation state. This aspect of globalisation is discussed in more detail in the section on the political domain (Section 5).

# **2.3 Threats and challenges associated with economic globalisation**

## **2.3.1 The ripple effect of crisis situations**

A major threat associated with the unlimited economy (where a group of countries conduct trade, lend and borrow money and engage in investments among themselves) is that when one country or region plunges into an economic crisis, the effect of the crisis can spread worldwide. A good example of this is the Asian economic crisis that began during 1997. This crisis was marked by dramatic falls in the values of monetary units and

economic growth rates in countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and Japan. The crisis was a major shock for Asia and the rest of the world because until shortly before Asia was regarded as the world's fastest growing region. It was even feared that the Asian crisis could result in a worldwide economic recession – that the 'Asian flu' could become a worldwide epidemic.

One of the causes of the Asian crisis was that many of the South Asian countries had under-developed local financial systems. In other words, the requisite financial infrastructure (e.g. a highly developed bank system) for complying with the demands of the increasing international trade did not exist. This not only led to instability in the Asian markets, but destabilised the world markets too. The impact of the crisis was felt by developing countries in South America and Eastern Europe as well as Russia (Aggarwal 1999:392–398). Peru, for instance, exports zinc, copper and tin to South Asian countries. As a result of the Asian crisis these exports fell considerably (Anonymous 1998). Even developed countries in North America and Western Europe were affected by the crisis.

Another example, closer to our own soil, is the recent economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe. It did not only impair Zimbabwe's economy, but also had a very negative effect on the South African economy. The Rand weakened considerably against the American Dollar and British Pound, and investor confidence in Southern Africa declined.

### **2.3.2 Over-production**

One of the challenges of the increase in international trade is the balancing of supply and demand (Smith 1998:125). A growing number of companies start to focus on production for the international market but overlook demand. This results in supply exceeding demand worldwide. An example of this is the motorcar industry: Grieder (in Howard 1998:50) points out that the total supply by motorcar manufacturers in the year 2000 will reach 79 million vehicles worldwide, although the worldwide demand will be for 57 million vehicles only.

### **2.3.3 Competition**

The greater openness of the unlimited economy stimulates competition from upcoming countries in Asia and South America, which competition increasingly threatens the economic dominance of the USA and Europe.

### 2.3.4 Labour

The idea behind multinational companies is, amongst others, to shift production to countries where labour is much cheaper. However, this is often accompanied by large-scale exploitation, so that multinational enterprises have increasingly been pressurised from various quarters to improve the working conditions of the labourers at their overseas plants.

### 2.3.5 Global leadership

The decline in the influence of the nation state has already been referred to in the discussion of the driving forces behind economic globalisation. Despite the fact that the world is dominated in the economic sphere by a few multinational giants, this domination does not occur within an ethical framework. Most of these enterprises operate in their own interest only.

## 2.4 Critique on theories of economic globalisation

Although the idea of economic globalisation is recognised worldwide, there are also people who are sceptical about it. The debate deals in particular with the real extent of economic globalisation. The results of a study by Kleinknecht and Ter Wengel (1998:637) draw attention to the tendency in international trade to occur to a great extent **within** trading blocks (e.g. EU, USA and Asia) and not **between** trading blocks. One can easily err in thinking that economic globalisation means that all countries of the world trade with all other countries. Economic globalisation means that markets worldwide have become more accessible, and this accessibility is still growing, but a totally integrated world economy is still a long way off.

## 3 THE SOCIAL DOMAIN

### 3.1 The so-called 'global village'

In the past, social relations and the concept 'community' primarily referred to face-to-face communication and interaction between people within the same geographic space. This communication mainly centred on matters of local interest and was facilitated by a local community culture. Examples of such interaction are getting together at coffee bars; interaction on the village square; and shaking hands, within view of all the parties involved, to confirm that a contract has been closed.

Today neither dialogue nor interaction nor the community is required to share the same geographic space. The compression of time and space that coincides with globalisation also results in a re-organisation of social relations. Nowadays social relations in fact extend across the globe. This means that communication relations are no longer limited to a particular place, but are globally/spatially extended. We have all in reality become a part of an unlimited community. The existence of this community, which is not constrained by distance, interstate borders or other physical obstacles, is made possible by modern communication technology that maintains communication relations – regardless of time or space.

Social globalisation implies that Marshall McLuhan's (1964) conceptualisation of the world as 'a global village' is in certain respects indeed materialising. Frederick (1993:119) does however point out that McLuhan was over-idealistic. He believed that the wonders of electronic communication would lead to the disappearance of all social, ethnic and racial divisions and eventually create a homogeneous global society. According to Frederick, communication in the global village differs from that in a local context. Communication via the electronic media is often impersonal, of short duration, anonymous and mostly indirect. On the other hand, communication within the local context is characterised by personal contact and interaction. It must further be noted that the daily life of most people, despite the fact that they are aware of their being part of the global set-up, is bound to their local geographic space. They incorporate elements of other societies and the global society into their personal life in their local space.

### **3.2 The fragmentation of identity**

An important effect of social globalisation is the fragmentation of individual as well as social identity (also called 'group identity'). People's identity is formed by fragments that originate at different levels. These levels range from the local to the global. Hence there does not exist in real life a pure global or a pure local identity. Rather, people's identity is a complex blend of global and local elements. Within the local space people's individual and social identities are also continuously formed and re-formed by the incorporation of elements originating from the different levels. The paradoxical phenomena of heterogeneity, differentiation and particularisation – and in particular the rise of ethnic solidarity – that are discussed in Section 5, lead scholars to doubt whether, at this stage, one can really talk of the establishment of a single human awareness or identity.



### **3.3 The global versus the local**

Social globalisation has furthermore resulted in local events being influenced by events that occur at places even thousands of miles away. The relations that dominate our everyday life consequently shift from the local to the global context, because the local context is interpreted against the broader global framework of time and space. The opposite is just as true. What occurs locally can exert an influence on locations that are literally on the other side of the globe (Frederick 1993:7; Tomlinson 1997:171). Giddens (1994) talks in this regard of 'action at a distance'. A good example of this phenomenon is the way in which negative perceptions of Africa in the rest of the world exert a negative influence on investments and economic development in South Africa. The perceptions and actions of people who live hundreds – and even thousands – of kilometres from where we live do consequently greatly affect our lives.

### **3.4 The formation of a global civil society**

Globalisation further led to the establishment of a global civil society. Civil society can be defined as those societal activities that fall outside of the economy and politics, but are significantly affected by economic and political realities. Before modern technology made communication relations across time and space borders possible, the civil societies of the world had difficulty to unite in broader alliances. The new technology promotes, however, co-operation between a variety of the world's non-governmental and non-profit organisations (the so-called NGOs) in a wide variety of spheres such as human rights, consumer issues, conflict management, women's rights, racial equality and environmental conservation. Global mobilisation around these issues rests on the assumption that we are all inhabitants of Planet Earth, that is, members of the global social community, and that transgressions in any of these spheres affect all of us deeply. This significant development in the history of human communication has already had a powerful impact worldwide on social and political movements (Frederick 1993:7; Waters 1997:101). The fuss that the 'Green' movement in Europe makes about the culling of elephants in the Kruger Park is but one example of global social mobilisation around nature conservation issues.

## 4 THE CULTURAL DOMAIN

### 4.1 Processes associated with cultural globalisation

The horizontal and vertical dimensions of globalisation can nowhere be observed better than in the cultural domain. The cultural situation of the world is intrinsically linked with the flow of information and knowledge that in themselves can be designated as cultural flow. However Appadurai (1990:2) distinguishes processes that have an impact on culture – global as well as local. These processes are the following: the flow of individuals (tourists, migrants, refugees, etc); the spread of technology; the spread of capital; the spread of information; as well as the spread of political values and ideas (for example, ideas on freedom, democracy and human rights). Waters (1995:126) adds to these the spread of religious values and ideas.

### 4.2 The emergence of an universal consumer culture

It was long believed that the increase in the flow of information – and in particular the introduction of the Internet – would lead to the establishment of a homogeneous world society and culture. It is indeed so that there is currently talk of the worldwide establishment and spread of a homogeneous American-Western consumer culture (Tehranian & Tehranian 1997:132; Waters 1995:140). Terms such as 'Americanisation', 'Western cultural imperialism' and the 'Coco-Colonisation' of the world are often used in this regard.

The spread of this consumer culture is promoted by the enormous growth in world trade and the concurrent spread of publicity for the mass market; the rapid development of communication technology and other technological innovations; the mass media (and people's tendency to imitate depictions and actors in the mass media); the worldwide spread of electronic entertainment presented by a few mega-conglomerates; the spread of commercially packed cultural products such as food (for example, Coca-Cola and McDonald's hamburgers), clothing (for example, Calvin Klein denims and Nike sport equipment), popular music and many more. The establishment of a uniform consumer lifestyle that is propagated aggressively worldwide by advertising is further facilitated by a liberal political climate. A further consequence of the consumer culture is the popularisation of so-called 'high' and 'elite' cultural products. A good example is the concert of the three tenors during the world soccer event in 1992 where opera music was linked to popular sport. The form of the concert was also

rather than that of a pageant (probably aimed at the mass media) than that of a classical music concert.

It is however important to note that the term 'consumer culture' implies more than the mere use or consumption of particular goods and services. The items and goods at issue do not only have material value, but also achieve symbolic meaning. The consumer culture originates from influential groups who in their capitalist drive encourage consumers to 'desire' things they may not really 'need'. Consumption therefore becomes a way in which the individual expresses him/herself and defines his/her identity. Both the need structure and the self-image of individuals are thus transformed, while consumption is directly associated with identity. Sources of social differentiation such as descent, class and political affiliation are also greatly replaced by concepts such as 'fashion', 'taste' and 'lifestyle'. One's place and esteem in society are therefore determined by the extent to which one reflects the latest fashion fads and lifestyle of the consumer culture. The saying 'fine feathers make fine birds' indeed assumes a new meaning in the global cultural set-up.

### **4.3 Cultural imperialism**

The term 'cultural imperialism' is often used to refer to the homogenising influence of the global consumer culture, that is, the equalisation and even extermination of local cultures as a consequence of the worldwide spread of the Western-American lifestyle and the values and consumer goods associated with it. According to the discourse of cultural imperialism, one of the most important implications of this cultural equalisation is the reduction of the space in which local communities can practise their own culture. (The ability of a local community to develop and maintain its own culture depends to a great degree on the local cultural space that that community controls.) Local initiative is however suppressed and the production of local cultural products is impaired. The local culture is indeed silenced. According to this view the process of cultural globalisation ultimately boils down to the predominance of Western modernisation and a particular national culture, namely the American culture. A dramatic pessimist scenario is furthermore pictured of the Third World, which scenario asserts that the cultures of these parts of the world are virtually being fully absorbed by the homogenised and commercialised global culture.

However, the discourse of cultural imperialism is currently widely criticised for various reasons. On the one hand this view represents a one-sided and

deterministic perspective on cultural processes according to which the local culture is totally determined from above by political and economic realities. Cultural processes are thus regarded as a one-way flow of power from the American and European cultural centres to other parts of the world. The elements of the popular world culture are also regarded as a type of drug that intoxicates the local population so that they become passive receivers of the 'foreign' cultural goods.

This is however not the full picture of what really occurs. Rather, there is a complex and continuous interplay between foreign and local cultural goods, that is, between the global and the local culture. Giddens (1991:181) refers to a 'global-local' dialectic in this regard. Braman (in Servaes, Lie & Terzis 1998:59) uses the term 'interpenetrating globalisation' to explain that the global culture can only exist in the local culture. In the interplay between the local and the global culture foreign goods can be taken over as they are, or can be translated or transformed in the local idiom (a process that is also termed 'localisation'), or can mutate (take on another form) or blend with local goods (also called 'hibridisation' or 'creolisation'). A good example of these processes is the complex mutations that can be observed in the popular music culture. For instance, the 'hip-hop' culture, which is regarded as an expression of the culture of poor urban Afro-Americans and currently forms part of a world youth culture, is in reality a complex blend of the Afro-American and Caribbean music cultures. In South Africa the soapie 'Egoli' is modeled on the American 'soap opera', but has obtained a local content and character. T-shirts (one of the symbols of the international consumer culture) with slogans that mirror local issues are another good example of the blending of the global and the local culture.

#### **4.4 Reverse cultural imperialism**

Tomlinson (1997:180) also points out that there is currently talk of reversed cultural imperialism. For instance, it is often assumed that television programmes originating from the USA hold a virtually untouchable position in external markets. This is however not always and everywhere the case. Products of countries on the periphery provide strong competition in certain circumstances. The products of companies such as TV Globo in Brazil and Televisa in Mexico dominate not only their local markets, but they also export their products to other Latin-American countries and even European countries such as Spain, Portugal and Italy. Even in the USA with its large Spanish-speaking community these programmes are very popular. Globalisation and more specifically the increase in international tourism also

creates in many centres a market for local cultural products (consider, for instance, the demand for traditional African art), and has directly contributed to an increase in the production and even export of such products.

Developments such as these indicate that one should rather talk of a pluralisation of cultural production in centres around the world and that geo-linguistic factors and the local culture remain factors to be taken cognisance of. The idea that a monolithic and homogeneous global culture is taking shape appears at this stage to be unfounded. The global culture should rather be described as 'meaning on the move', that is, a culture that occupies space next to and between other cultures, the essential nature of which is rather that of a hybrid or a blended culture.

#### **4.5 Intercultural communication**

What is however true is that globalisation has led to a change in the nature and problems associated with intercultural communication. The international flow of individuals increasingly enables people to come into contact with more than one culture, but also increases their first-hand experience of problems associated with intercultural communication. The globalisation of capital, world markets and the establishment of large multinational companies have, for instance, led to the birth of a new group of business people and other professional people who often travel the world in the execution of their duties. Their frequent traveling among cultures demands an adaptable lifestyle. Their adaptation to different cultures has been eased by the development of a so-called 'third culture', the cosmopolitan culture. According to Featherstone (1990:9) the response of individuals to foreign cultures varies on a continuum that runs from localism to cosmopolitanism. Some people never really desert their local culture even though they may find themselves in foreign countries. In addition, they have access to travel brochures that give directions on how to get to their local culture in a foreign country, such as a list of restaurants where Americans (and probably also South Africans!) can obtain steak in Japan. Tourists, too, usually prefer to have exotic as well as familiar experiences in a foreign country and tour guides usually protect their clients against potentially alarming intercultural experiences. Other people, such as transnational academics, are not only at home in foreign cultures but also consciously maintain an open and receptive attitude towards other cultures.

Increasing migration – mostly also as a result of economic, financial and technological globalisation – and numerous political refugees further

contributed to the liberation of many cultures from their containment in a particular state or geographic space, allowing them to spread across the borders of existing states and even across the world. This implies that it becomes more difficult for governments to manage and control cultures and subject them to the power of a particular state. (This problem is however discussed in more detail in the next section.) Another implication is that local cultures that were previously homogeneous, increasingly assume a heterogeneous character as a result of the flow of migrants. This stacking of cultures in previously homogeneous spaces has also resulted in a hybridisation, creolisation or blending of cultures (amongst others as a result of marriages across cultural borders). Scholars are therefore of the opinion that the term 'multicultural' should replace the term 'intercultural' in order to reflect the current cultural scenario.

The flow of individuals further led to the presence of 'the foreigner' in the local cultural space, that is, an individual or individuals who for shorter or longer periods reside in the local culture without becoming or aspiring to become part of the local culture. Also on these individuals the attempts of governments to control and integrate cultures have had little impact. Globalisation therefore results in cultural differentiation within previously homogeneous space.

## **4.6 Summary**

The conclusion can be drawn that cultural processes worldwide should be regarded as dialectic, which implies that there is a possibility of a continuous interaction, interplay as well as tension between local and global cultures. Globalisation in general, notably cultural globalisation, leads simultaneously to greater homogenisation and greater differentiation.

# **5 THE POLITICAL DOMAIN**

## **5.1 The traditional role of the nation state**

As early as the fifteenth century, when the church, religious leaders and feudal land holders gradually lost their influence and power in Europe, the so-called 'nation state' – a medium-sized, territorially bound, centralised and sovereign form of government – became the dominant form of political organisation in the world. National governments negotiated with each other, declared war and made peace. Through the conclusion of treaties and

agreements a certain measure of order was brought into international relations. The relations between states rested on the principle of sovereignty. According to this principle each state had the absolute right to decide on internal matters, and meddling in the affairs of another state was regarded as pathological. The economy, too, was virtually completely at the command of the nation state. The aim with economic activities was to expand the power and glory of the nation state and promote the position of the particular state in its competition with other states. In this competition the nation state could depend on the loyalty and patriotism of its citizens; indeed, the state was a significant component of their identity. In the nation state emotional connectedness usually combined with administrative effectiveness. It is therefore no wonder that the nation state became the central conceptual unit in sociology, political science and international relations (Tomlinson 1997:172; Valaskakis 1999:153; Waters 1995:96).

According to Waters (1995:27) this conceptualisation of internal politics and international relations can be compared with the balls on a snooker table. Each ball is a world on its own and has a different colour and weight. As these balls change in the course of time – or move across the table – they come into contact and interact with other balls on the table. Each ball has a certain measure of autonomy over its own movements as determined by the player – or his/her government. As a ball moves across the table, its movements or autonomy are however limited by the positions and movements of the other balls (or states). The white ball can be regarded as a super power that has a larger measure of autonomy over its own movements and exerts a greater influence on the movements of the other balls.

The term 'nation state' is however problematic. The term 'nation' is derived from the Greek word 'natio', which refers to a group of people who are all kin. This consequently points to a common descent or relationship, which in Europe in particular – where the nation state was born – can be associated with ethnicity and a common culture. The concept 'nation state' therefore implies cultural homogeneity, that is, one nation, one state, one culture, one ethnic identity that simultaneously also represents the national identity of the state.

The problem is, however, that the homogeneous nation state has always been the exception rather than the rule. Currently only about 10 % of states across the world can be regarded as ethnically homogeneous. In the majority of states there is thus a lack of convergence between the political (the state) and the cultural (the nation) – a problem that is further

complicated by the flow of migrants and refugees that has been referred to in the previous section. This state of affairs causes the governments of many heterogeneous states to follow a policy of nation building, so as to comply with the requirements of a true nation state. Nation building implies that various means at the disposal of the state (for example, political institutions, national symbols, the educational system and the media) are harnessed to actually form an overarching national identity and promote loyalty to the state. In many states, nation building unfortunately coincides with the equalisation and extermination of cultural diversity and the negation of the interests of ethnic minorities.

## **5.2 Changes in the position of the nation state**

Globalisation did however effect an incisive change in the role and position of the nation state and created problems in the conceptualisation of society, politics and international relations on the basis of the nation state. The form, legitimacy, sovereignty and power of the state are also increasingly threatened. A variety of factors led to these changes:

- The complex international links unique to globalisation ignore existing social and political borders. The globalisation of technology – and notably the Internet – has made it almost impossible for governments of nation states to control and limit the free flow of information. National governments are therefore no longer able to regulate or control the flow of ideas, information and economic items. The borders of the state – as well as internal policy and the institutions that enforce internal policy – are thus increasingly rendered ineffective.
- The growth of transnational processes in number and extent implies a further contraction of the power of the state. Certain transnational companies (for example, Microsoft) are currently larger and have much more influence and power than many governments.
- The transnational mobility of corporations, capital and technology enables the private sector to ignore and evade national legislation and regulations. If legislation and regulations in a particular state are not to their liking, they merely move their business elsewhere. They are also able to pit one government against the other and force them to bring down tax and labour costs to the minimum. States are progressively exposed to the effect of international market forces and lose their power to regulate or protect their internal economies. Hence a government can do virtually nothing when its monetary unit is forcibly weakened by other units in the foreign exchange markets. The fact that the South



African government can do little when the value of the Rand drops as a result of international market forces is but one of the examples of this trend.

- Many spheres that traditionally fell under the jurisdiction of the state (such as defence, communication, economic management) are currently co-ordinated internationally.
- In order to be able to compete effectively in the new economic and political climate, many states must abandon their sovereignty in favour of larger political units (such as the European Union) and international organisations (for example, the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund).
- The sovereignty of the state is also often negated on the multilateral level on the basis of the principle that all inhabitants of earth experience certain societal problems that are aggravated by the action of an individual nation state. The point of departure is therefore that global issues such as the conservation of nature and the protection of human rights should be addressed at the international level because they represent problems shared by the inhabitants of the earth.
- The fact that individuals and societies regard themselves as part of a global system, causes the nation state to be no longer the only or most important source of citizenship or identity. Globalisation thus undermines the emotive and normative values of connectedness to a particular nation state.

In re-applying the snooker table image, one may compare the new international scene with a finely woven cobweb that has been spun above the snooker balls and across the whole of the snooker table. The thin lines of the cobweb are the complex connections across political borders, which connections are based on factors such as trade, communication, technology, language, ethnicity, religious identification, ideology, strategic alliances and legal and communication agreements. When the balls move slowly (for example, in the exercise of diplomacy), movement is greatly determined by the lines of the cobweb. The autonomy of the balls therefore declines, as their movements are largely regulated by the multiple connections across borders. When the balls move fast (for example, during conflict and war) the lines are disrupted. According to Waters (1995:28) this situation demands that the concept 'distance' as a geographic concept be replaced with the concept 'effective distance'. The thicker the web above two locations or states, the 'closer' they are in effect to each other. When this web above the world is as thick as it usually is in a local context, globalisation would have taken its full course.

### 5.3 New role-players on the world scene

While the power and legitimacy of the nation state are declining, various new role-players have appeared on the international political scene. Diplomatic relations between states are greatly supplemented and even replaced by non-governmental agents such as the so-called non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private individuals and groups. The private sector has also started to take over services that were traditionally provided by the state, and state-controlled industries are progressively privatised.

### 5.4 The revival of ethnicity

One of the most important implications of the change in the position of the state is however the weakening in the relation between the state and ethnicity. In reality the links between ethnicity, the state and the economy have been severed. Ethnic minorities who used to be subjected or absorbed by the state have actually been liberated by globalisation. The result is a revival of ethnic and cultural loyalties and the mobilisation of ethnic groups across the borders of existing states. Globalisation has further led to the contention that all forms of ethnic identification are legitimate and that not only major ethnic groups who organised themselves in states since the nineteenth century have a right to be recognised. The fact that most political entities currently are multicultural entities causes most states of the world to be confronted with the demands of ethnic and cultural groups for recognition, cultural rights, self-determination and equal access to resources. Ethnic conflict in various parts of the world such as Ruanda, Burundi, Kosovo, Somalia, Turkey and Sri Lanka has thus become one of the most important characteristics of the international political scene since the termination of the Cold War.

According to Servaes, Lie and Terzis (1998:45), the articulation of ethnic and cultural identities at grassroots level can also be regarded as a form of localisation. Localisation implies in this regard that not only contact between nation states and large-scale processes have become important, but also that small-scale local communities and contact between them and other role-players are important. In addition, localisation is related to heterogeneity and differentiation and as such it counters the homogenising effect of globalisation. Whereas in the engagement with global issues such as nature and human rights scholars premise their arguments on the assertion that these issues affect each inhabitant of the earth (thus there does not exist an 'other'), ethnic and cultural movements emphasise differences rather than similarities, because cultures are always distinguishing themselves

from other cultures. Differences can also only exist if there is an 'other'; it is therefore impossible to create a global 'us'. The only perspective according to which ethnic cultural movements can be deemed 'global' is the way in which they use modern communication technology such as the Internet, faxes and image technology to communicate worldwide with each other. For instance, the international Muslim community uses above all the Internet to mobilise members worldwide and to keep them informed of the developments within their community. South African communities, too, such as the Afrikaners, keep in touch with their members who have emigrated by the placement of Afrikaans newspapers on the Internet and a web page such as LitNet. In their means of communication these ethnic groups are therefore global, although not in respect of their objectives.

## **5.5 A global political culture**

By contrast to differentiation, which coincides with the revival of ethnic and cultural identities, analysts point out that there is currently indeed talk of a global political culture. This culture rests in the first place on the idea of individual human rights, that is, the conception that each individual has the right to autonomy in certain spheres of thought and action (for example, freedom of religion and political thought); the right to own and sell property; the right to elect a government and participate in it, and the right to equal participation and influence. The latter implies that liberal democracy is accepted as the norm for governments and political systems in the global sphere. Commitment to liberal democracy also implies a commitment to capitalism and the protection of individual rights in the economic sphere.

## **5.6 The future of the nation state**

Many analysts believe that when globalisation has taken its full course the world will function as a single place in which the nation state will become redundant. They are further of the opinion that the world community is inevitably moving towards a global political community and one or other form of world government – a view that is supported by the fact that a common political culture is materialising worldwide. There are however other analysts who think that the governments of states as we know them today play an essential part in matters such as the establishment of local infrastructure and the maintenance of law and order. How ethnic and cultural groups will be accommodated in a global system of government is

also unclear. Hence only time can tell what the result of globalisation will be in the political domain.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion can be drawn that globalisation is by no means a simple, unitary or linear process. Globalisation and its effects differ for various domains, different regions of the world and not even individuals in the same region is affected in a similar way. Moreover, the globalising world is characterised by apparently contrasting processes such as globalisation and localisation; homogenisation and heterogeneity; cultural imperialism and reverse imperialism; the formation of larger political units and ethnic revival. Academics and analysts understand very little of the dynamics underlying these processes. However, the fact of the matter is that globalisation is transforming the world at an unprecedented pace. In the end no-one will be left untouched by its farreaching effects.

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