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Chapter 4

The political dimension of globalization

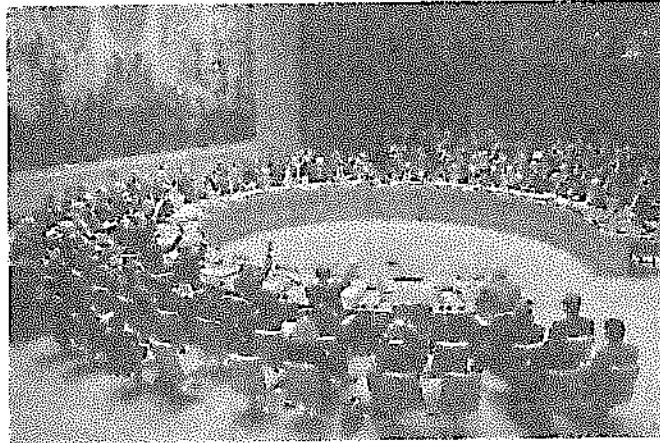
Political globalization refers to the intensification and expansion of political interrelations across the globe. These processes raise an important set of political issues pertaining to the principle of state sovereignty, the growing impact of intergovernmental organizations, the future prospects for regional and global governance, and global migration flows. Obviously, these themes respond to the evolution of political arrangements beyond the framework of the nation-state, thus breaking new conceptual and institutional ground.

For the last two centuries, humans have organized their political differences along territorial lines that generated a sense of 'belonging' to a particular nation-state. Based on 17th-century European principles of sovereignty and territoriality, the modern nation-state system found its mature expression at the end of the First World War in US President Woodrow Wilson's famous *Fourteen Points* of national self-determination. But Wilson's assumption that all forms of national identity should be given their territorial expression in a sovereign nation-state proved to be extremely difficult to enforce in practice. Moreover, by enshrining the nation-state as the ethical and legal pinnacle of his proposed interstate system, he unwittingly lent some legitimacy to those radical ethnonationalist forces that pushed the world into the Second World War.

This artificial division of planetary social space into 'domestic' and 'foreign' spheres corresponds to people's national imaginary that engenders collective identities based on the creation of a common 'us' versus an unfamiliar 'them'. Thus, the modern nation-state system has rested on psychological foundations and cultural assumptions that convey a sense of existential security and historic continuity of the national, while at the same time demanding from its citizens that they put their patriotic loyalties to the ultimate test. Nurtured by demonizing images of 'outsiders' and 'foreigners', people's belief in the superiority of their own nation has supplied the psychological energy required for large-scale warfare—just as the enormous productive capacities of the modern state have provided the material means necessary to fight the costly *total wars* of the last century.

President Wilson's other main idea of a *League of Nations* that would give international cooperation an institutional expression was belatedly realized with the founding of the *United Nations* in 1945 (see Figure 8). While deeply rooted in a political order based on the modern nation-state system, the UN and other fledgling intergovernmental organizations also served as catalysts for the gradual extension of political activities across national boundaries, thus simultaneously affirming and undermining the principle of national sovereignty.

As globalization tendencies grew stronger during the 1970s and 1980s, the international order of separate nation-states encountered a worldwide web of political interdependencies that challenged conventional forms of national sovereignty. Noticing these tendencies, many globalization experts have suggested that the period since the 1990s has been marked by a radical deterritorialization of politics, rule-making, and governance. In fact, early *hyperglobalist* best-sellers on the subject—for example, Japanese management consultant Kenichi Ohmae's *The End of the Nation State* (1995) or *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman's *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (1999)—left their readers



8. The Security Council of the United Nations in session.

Globalization

with the image of globalization as an irreversible juggernaut flattening the nation-state. Considering such pronouncements premature at best and erroneous at worst, *globalization sceptics* have not only affirmed the continued dominance of the nation-state as the political container of modern social life but also pointed to the emergence of regional blocs as evidence for new forms of subglobal territorialization. Some of these critics have gone so far as to suggest that globalization is actually accentuating people's attachment to the principle of nationality. Each of these two perspectives—hyperglobalist and sceptical—offers different assessments of the fate of the modern nation-state based on diverging views on the relative importance of political factors.

Out of these disagreements there have emerged three fundamental questions that probe the extent of political globalization. First, is it really true that the power of the nation-state has been curtailed by massive flows of capital, people, and technology across territorial boundaries? Second, are the primary causes of these flows to be found in politics or in economics? Third, are we witnessing the

emergence of new global governance structures? This chapter will consider them in turn.

The demise of the nation-state?

Hyperglobalizers like Ohmae and Friedman respond to this question affirmatively. After all, they consider political globalization a mere secondary phenomenon driven by more fundamental economic and technological forces. Hyperglobalizers argue that politics has been rendered almost powerless by an unstoppable techno-economic juggernaut that will crush all governmental attempts to reintroduce restrictive policies and regulations. Endowing economics with an inner logic apart from, and superior to, politics, these commentators look forward to a new phase in world history in which the main role of government will be to serve as a superconductor for global capitalism.

Pronouncing the rise of a 'borderless world', hyperglobalizers seek to convince the public that globalization inevitably involves the decline of bounded territory as a meaningful concept for understanding political and social change. Consequently, they suggest that political power is located in global social formations and expressed through global networks rather than through territorially based states. In fact, they argue that nation-states have already lost their dominant role in the global economy. As territorial divisions are becoming increasingly irrelevant, states are even less capable of determining the direction of social life within their borders. For example, since the workings of genuinely global capital markets dwarf their ability to control exchange rates or protect their currency, nation-states have become vulnerable to the discipline imposed by economic choices made on a supranational level.

Globalization sceptics like Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson disagree, highlighting instead the central role of politics in

unleashing the forces of globalization, especially through the successful mobilization of political power. In their view, the rapid expansion of global economic activity can be reduced neither to a natural law of the market nor to the development of computer technology. Rather, it originates with political decisions made by neoliberal national governments from the late 1970s to the 1990s to lift international restrictions on capital. Once those decisions were implemented, worldwide markets and new technologies came into their own. The clear implication of this perspective is that national territory still matters. Hence, sceptics insist on the continued relevance of conventional political units that operate in the form of either modern nation-states or world cities linked to national units.

Globalization

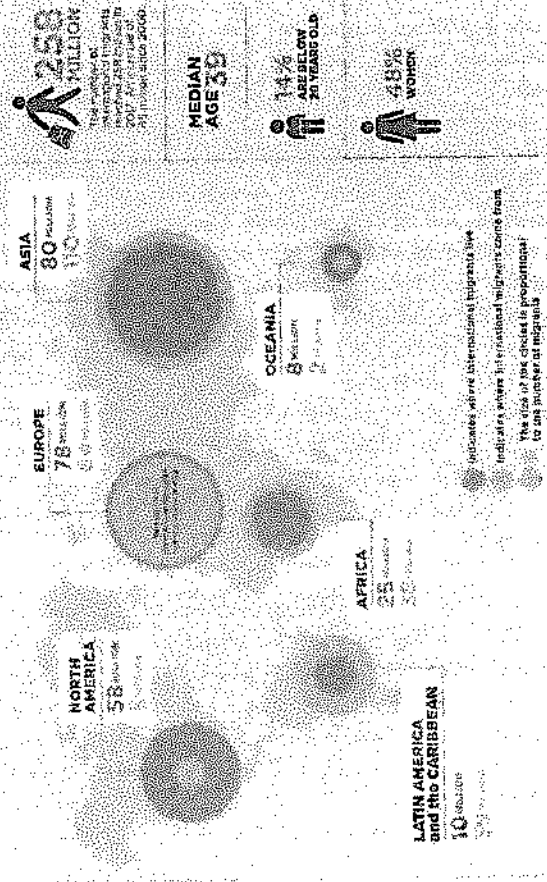
The arguments of both hyperglobalizers and sceptics remain entangled in a particularly vexing version of the chicken-and-the-egg problem. After all, economic forms of interdependence are set in motion by political decisions, but these decisions are nonetheless made in particular economic contexts. As we noted, the economic and political aspects of globalization are profoundly interconnected. For example, it has become much easier for capital to escape taxation schemes and other national policy restrictions. In 2016, the *Panama Papers*—a leaked set of nearly 12 million confidential documents—revealed how wealthy individuals, including government officials, managed to evade national income taxes by hiding their assets in Panamanian offshore companies. Moreover, global markets frequently undermine the capacity of governments to set independent national policy objectives and impose their own domestic standards. While it seems obvious to acknowledge the decline of the nation-state as a sovereign entity and the ensuing devolution of state power to both local governments and supranational institutions, the current surge of national populist political forces discussed in Chapter 7 suggests that political globalization is not an irreversible process.

Political globalization and migration

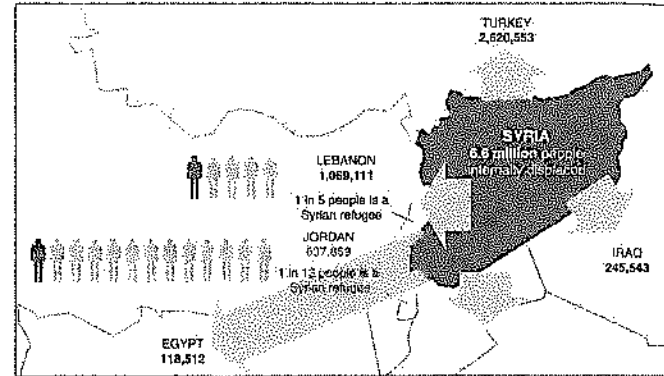
Again, the relative decline of the nation-state over the last three decades does not necessarily mean that governments have become impotent bystanders to the workings of global forces. States can still take significant measures to make their economies more or less attractive to global investors. In addition, they have continued to retain control over education, infrastructure, and foreign policy. Still, the intensifying population movements linked to the form of embodied globalization have challenged some of the most crucial powers of nation-states: immigration control, population registration, and security protocols. The number of international migrants reached 258 million in 2017, with an increase of 85 million since 2000 (see Figure C). With about 3.4 per cent of the world's population living outside their country of origin, immigration control has become a central issue in most advanced nations. Many governments seek to restrict population flows, particularly those originating in the poor countries of the global South. Even in the United States, significant annual inflows of about 1.2 million legal permanent immigrants during the 2010s are less than the levels recorded during the first two decades of the 20th century.

In order to illustrate the growing problems of nation-states to cope with increasing trans-border migration flows, let us consider a recent example: the *Syrian refugee crisis*. It started in the early 2010s when the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, backed by Russian President Vladimir Putin, embarked on a confrontational course with pro-democracy 'Arab Spring' demonstrators whom he vilified as 'rebel forces'. The country quickly descended into an all-out civil war that would kill more than 250,000 people over the next five years. The relentless fighting triggered a humanitarian crisis of truly epic proportions. By 2016, nearly 6 million Syrians—out of a total population of 23 million—had been internally displaced. Close to 5 million people had fled

Number of International Migrants in 2017



C. Number of international migrants, 2017. (Unknown residuals were redistributed proportionally to the size of groups for which data on international migrants were available by origin.)



Map 5. The Syrian Refugee Crisis.

the country in search of both personal safety and economic opportunity (see Map 5). The majority of Syrian refugees ended up in camps in the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey. But more than a million people attempted the dangerous trip across the Mediterranean from Turkey to Greece, hoping to find a better future in the prosperous states of the European Union.

Germany, in particular, emerged as their preferred place of refuge. The conservative German government under Chancellor Angela Merkel showed tremendous courage and compassion by welcoming over 1 million political refugees in 2015 alone—half of whom hailed from Syria. In order to reach their destination, Syrian migrants had to embark on a long route that led them from Greece across Macedonia, Serbia or Croatia, Hungary or Slovenia, and Austria, until they finally arrived in Bavaria, hoping for a swift approval of their residence applications. Even though some EU countries like Hungary resorted to rather inhumane policies and drastic measures to keep refugees out of their territory, their hastily erected border fences stretching over many miles ultimately proved to be ineffective in stopping such gigantic population movements.

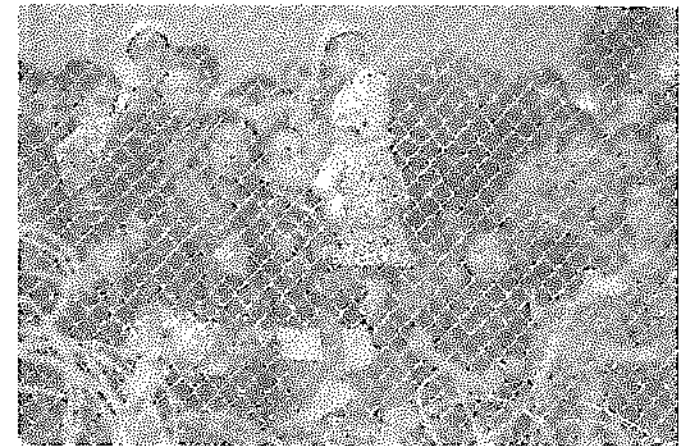
In fact, the Syrian refugee crisis revealed the inadequacy of the EU's current institutional immigration arrangements based on national preferences. The so-called *Schengen Agreement* that provided for open borders among EU core countries lacked the robustness and comprehensiveness necessary for coping with this crisis situation. As policy differences among various national governments became more pronounced, some member countries temporarily withdrew from the agreement and reinstated stricter border controls. Others placed arbitrary limits on the number of refugees they were willing to process and refused to consider a more coordinated approach. Unable to deal with the huge influx of migrants, the EU faced a predicament that laid bare deep political divisions over regional migration policy among member states.

Moreover, the Syrian refugee crisis also made visible existing cultural fissures and religious biases. For example, a number of official government ministers in EU member states like Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary openly expressed their opposition to the 'Islamization of Europe' and stated their preference for a small number of Christian refugees. Countries like Germany and Austria, on the other hand, experienced a polarization of public sentiments with roughly even numbers of citizens supporting or opposing more liberal political asylum measures. There is also much evidence that the pro-Brexit forces in the UK used the Syrian refugee crisis in their 2016 referendum campaign to convince the British people that the only way to stop mass immigration was to leave the EU.

But the Syrian refugee crisis represents only one case among many similar migration dynamics. According to the latest UN figures, a record 71 million refugees were displaced worldwide in 2018. Examples include the forced expulsion of an estimated 700,000 Rohingya people—an Islamic minority in Myanmar excluded from citizenship—as well as hundreds of thousands of Central American refugees who have sought political asylum in the USA.

The latter case, in particular, has drawn much attention because it involves one of the world's most liberal immigration countries applying a so-called *zero-tolerance approach* designed to deter illegal migration by legitimate political refugees seeking to escape the deadly violence in their home countries. In fact, the Trump administration has gone so far as to separate thousands of children from their families. Kept under egregious conditions in migrant detention facilities that have been compared to 'concentration camps' by some critics, many of these children were even transferred into foster care placement across the USA—without their parents' permission and no adequate tracking mechanisms that would allow for a safe reunion with their families (see Figure 9).

Finally, the intensifying global migration dynamics also play into crucial issues of *national security*. For example, the heinous attacks of global terrorist networks affiliated with jihadist Islamist groups like ISIL or al-Shabaab—such as the 2017 Manchester



9. Central American migrants, including children, behind the fence of a makeshift US detention centre in El Paso, Texas, 29 March 2019.

Arena bombing, the 2018 suicide bombings in the Nigerian city of Mubi, or the deadly 2019 Sri Lanka Easter bombings—have revealed the inadequacy of conventional national security routines and protocols. As a result, the globalization of terrorist and crime networks has forced national governments to engage in new forms of international cooperation. Thus, we can observe the seemingly paradoxical effect of political globalization: while states still matter, they are increasingly forced into new transnational practices that undermine their old claims to sovereignty and non-interference (see Box 8).

In summary, then, we ought to reject premature pronouncements of the impending demise of the nation-state, while also acknowledging its increasing difficulties in performing many of its traditional functions. Contemporary globalization has weakened some of the conventional boundaries between domestic and foreign policies while fostering the growth of supraterritorial social spaces and institutions that, in turn, unsettle both familiar political arrangements and cultural traditions. As the 21st century wears on, people around the world will become more conscious of the fact that they live in a transitional era in which the modern nation-state system will be increasingly challenged by global problems that require strengthening the dynamics of global governance structures.

Political globalization and global governance

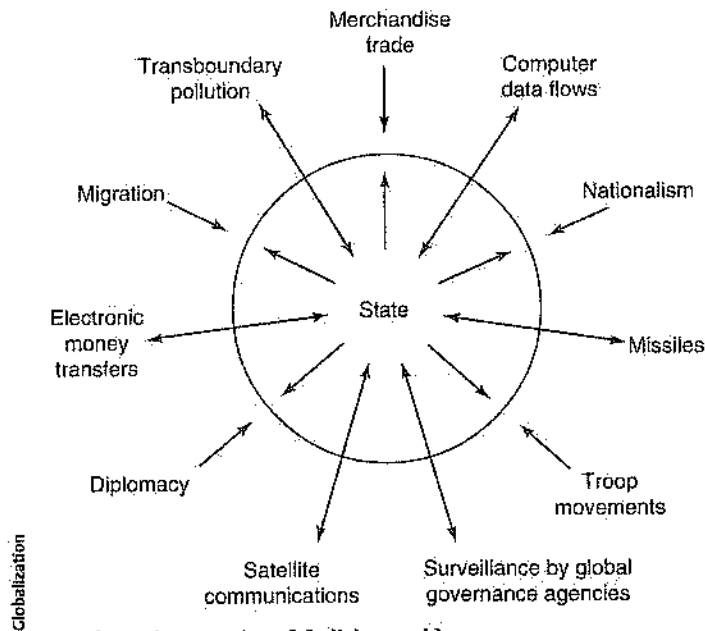
Political globalization is perhaps most visible in the rise of supraterritorial institutions and associations like the International Criminal Court or the International Law Commission held together by common norms and interests (see Figure D). In this early phase of *global governance*, these structures resemble an eclectic network of interrelated power centres such as municipal and provincial authorities, regional blocs, international organizations, and national and international private-sector associations.

Box 8. Losing national control? Russia's interference in the 2016 US Presidential election

The Russian government's systematic and sweeping attempts to influence the 2016 US presidential election in favour of Donald Trump represents another instructive case of how nation-states are struggling to maintain control over even their most basic functions such as the organization and management of open and fair national elections. Consider the following short excerpt from the official 2019 report issued by Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller III:

Evidence of Russian government operations began to surface in mid-2015. In June, the Democratic National Committee and its cyber response team publicly announced that Russian hackers had compromised its computer network. Releases of hacked materials that public reporting soon attributed to the Russian government began that same month. Additional releases followed in July through the organization WikiLeaks, with further releases in October and November. . . . As set forth in detail in this report, the Special Counsel's investigation established that Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential election principally through two operations. First, a Russian entity carried out a social media campaign that favored presidential candidate Donald J. Trump and disparaged presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. Second, a Russian intelligence service conducted computer intrusion operations against entities, employees, and volunteers working on the Clinton Campaign and then released stolen documents.

On the municipal and provincial level, there has been a remarkable growth in the number of policy initiatives and transborder links between various substate authorities. For example, Chinese provinces and US federal states have established permanent missions and points of contact, some of which operate relatively autonomously with little oversight from their respective



Globalization

D. The nation-state in a globalizing world.

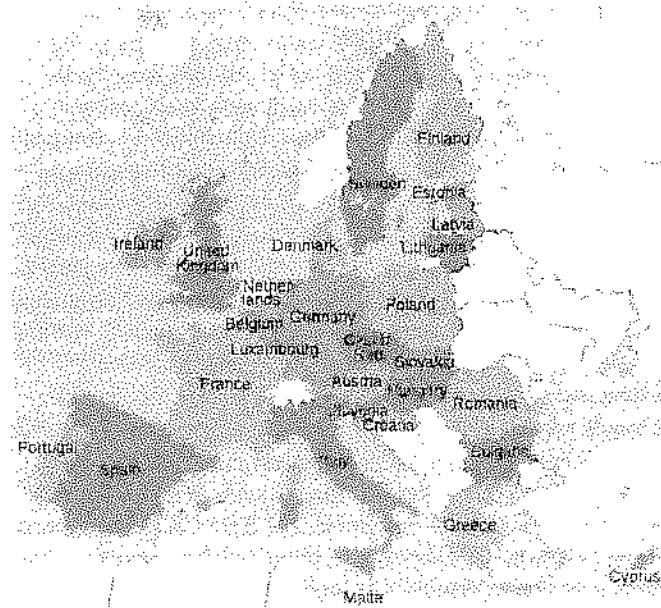
national governments. Various provinces and federal states in Canada, India, and Brazil are developing their own trade agendas and financial strategies to obtain loans. An example of international cooperation on the municipal level is the rise of powerful city networks such as the World Association of Major Metropolises that develop cooperative ventures to deal with common local issues across national borders. So-called *global cities*—Hong Kong, London, New York, Shanghai, Singapore, Sydney, Tokyo, and many others—are in some respects more closely connected to each other than they are to their national governments.

On the regional level, there has been an extraordinary proliferation of multilateral organizations and agreements. Regional clubs and transnational agencies such as APEC or ASEAN have sprung up

across the world, leading some observers to speculate that regional networks will eventually replace nation-states as the basic unit of governance. Starting out as attempts to integrate regional economies, these blocs have, in some cases, already evolved into loose political federations with common institutions of governance. For example, the European common market began in 1950 with French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman's modest plan to create a supranational institution charged with regulating French and German coal and steel production. Seven decades on, the twenty-eight member states of the EU form a close community with some shared political institutions that create common public policies and design binding security arrangements. In the first decade of the 21st century, several formerly communist countries joined the EU, which now extends as far to the east as Latvia, Romania, and Cyprus (see Map 6). But, as we discuss further in Chapter 8, such an expansionist dynamic is by no means inexorable. The 2016 UK referendum in favour of Brexit—and the ensuing bitter and drawn-out political battle over the conditions of its implementation—is a clear illustration that even a decade-long process of regionalization can be halted and possibly reversed.

On a global level, governments have formed a number of international organizations, including the UN, NATO, WTO, and OECD. Full legal membership in these organizations is open to states only, and the decision-making authority lies with representatives from national governments. The proliferation of these transnational bodies has shown that nation-states find it increasingly difficult to manage sprawling networks of social interdependence.

Finally, the emerging structure of global governance has been shaped by *global civil society*—a shared social realm populated by thousands of voluntary, non-governmental associations of worldwide reach. International NGOs such as Doctors Without Borders or Greenpeace represent millions of ordinary citizens who



Map 6. The European Union, 2019.

are prepared to challenge political and economic decisions made by nation-states and intergovernmental organizations.

One concrete example of the growing significance of INGOs in managing increasing global interconnectivity was the role of *Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders* (MSF/DWB) during the dramatic outbreak of the Ebola virus disease in West Africa from December 2013 to early 2016. Made up mainly of doctors and health sector workers from around the world who volunteer their services at any location on earth, MSF/DWB provides assistance to populations in distress such as victims of natural and man-made disasters, and armed conflict. It observes neutrality and impartiality in the name of its universal medical

code of ethics and also maintains complete independence from all political, economic, and religious powers.

When Ebola—one of the world's most deadly diseases that can kill up to 90 per cent of those stricken—hit in the West African countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia in late 2013, MSF/DWB was among the first responders on the ground, much earlier than many of the aid initiatives organized by the UN or individual nation-states. At its peak, MSF/DWB employed nearly 4,000 national staff and 325 expat staff in West Africa to combat a disease that threatened to turn into a global pandemic, especially when isolated cases of virus transmission were reported in North America and Europe. By the time the WHO declared an official end to the Ebola epidemic in January 2016, MSF/DWB had treated more than 10,000 patients in dozens of their management centres in the region. Given the lack of political will by national and local governments to rapidly deploy assistance to help affected communities in West Africa, the activities of NGOs like MSF/DWB proved to be decisive in preventing what could have easily turned into an unprecedented catastrophe of global proportions.

The Ebola crisis in West Africa demonstrated that more coordinated international steps have to be taken to better prepare the world for a future disease outbreak. Unfortunately, these measures were not implemented as a result of a major shortfall in the WHO's global contingency fund. Promptly, the Ebola virus struck Africa again in 2019—this time in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country plagued by persistent violent conflicts and neglected for decades by the international community. More than 1,500 people died in the first half of 2019, and thousands more have been infected (see Figure 10). As the outbreak is poised to spread into neighbouring Uganda and possibly South Sudan, an unstable country dotted with refugee camps, it threatens to escape containment and turn into a major calamity for the region. Once again, it appears

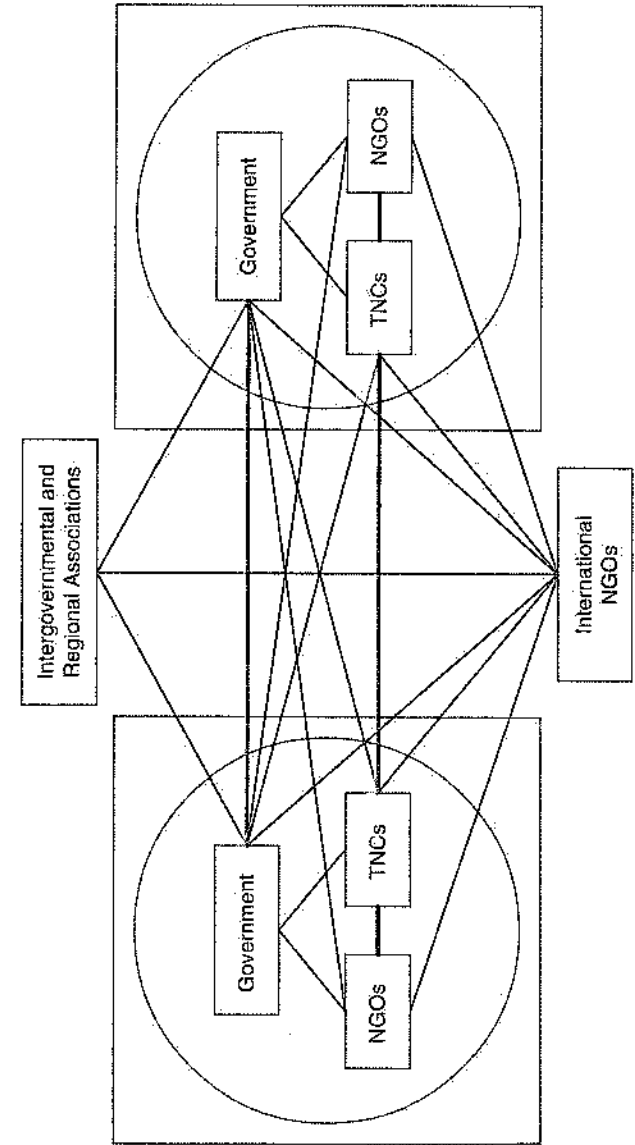


10. Health workers in the Democratic Republic of Congo burying a victim of the Ebola virus, June 2019.

Globalization

that INGOs like MSF/DWE will have to play a major role in preventing the worst.

As a result of the tough lessons learned in the struggle against pandemics and other global problems, some Global Studies experts believe that political globalization might facilitate the strengthening of democratic transnational social forces anchored in this thriving sphere of global civil society. Predicting that democratic rights will ultimately become detached from their narrow relationship to discrete territorial units, these optimistic voices anticipate the creation of a democratic global governance structure based on Western cosmopolitan ideals, international legal arrangements, and a web of expanding linkages between various governmental and non-governmental organizations. If such a promising prospect indeed comes to pass, then the final outcome of political globalization might well be the emergence of a *cosmopolitan democracy* that would constitute the basis for a plurality of identities flourishing within a structure of mutual toleration and accountability (see Figure E).



E. Incipient global governance: a network of interrelated power centres.

According to David Held, one of the chief academic proponents of this view, such a cosmopolitan democracy of the future would contain the following features:

1. A global parliament connected to regions, states, and localities;
2. A new charter of rights and duties locked into different domains of political, social, and economic power;
3. The formal separation of political and economic interests;
4. An interconnected global legal system with mechanisms of enforcement from the local to the global.

A number of less optimistic commentators have challenged Held's idea that political globalization is moving in the direction of cosmopolitan democracy, especially in light of the current populist backlash against globalization. Most criticisms of Held's benign world vision boil down to the charge that it represents an abstract idealism that fails to engage enduring political tensions on the national level of public policy such as the clashing immigration perspectives within the EU. Global governance sceptics have also expressed the suspicion that the proponents of cosmopolitan democracy have not considered in sufficient detail its cultural feasibility. In other words, the worldwide intensification of cultural interactions makes the possibility of political resistance and opposition just as real as the benign vision of mutual accommodation and tolerance of differences. To follow up on this cultural dimension of globalization, let us turn to Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

The cultural dimension of globalization

As this book's opening discussion of Matt Stopera's lost iPhone demonstrates, even a *very short* introduction to globalization would be woefully inadequate without an examination of its cultural dimension. *Cultural globalization* refers to the intensification and expansion of cultural flows across the globe. Obviously, *culture* is a very broad concept. Referring to patterns of meaning and ways of life, it is frequently used to describe the whole of human experience. In order to avoid the ensuing danger of overgeneralization, it is important to make analytical distinctions between various aspects of social life. For example, we associate the adjective 'economic' with the production, exchange, and consumption of commodities. If we are discussing the 'political', we mean practices related to the generation and distribution of power in societies. If we are talking about the 'cultural', we are concerned with the symbolic construction, articulation, and dissemination of meaning. Given that language, music, and images constitute the major forms of symbolic expression, they assume special significance for the dynamics of cultural interactions.

The exploding network of cultural interconnections in the last decades has led some commentators to suggest that such practices lie at the very heart of contemporary globalization. Yet, cultural globalization did not start with the worldwide dissemination of



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