

## Chapter 11.



# **YOUNG PEOPLE** in a **GLOBALIZING WORLD**

***The ambiguous relationship*** between globalization and youth is examined in this chapter. Globalization offers clear economic opportunities and benefits, but comes with substantial social costs that often appear to affect young people disproportionately, given their tenuous transitional status within an uncertain and rapidly evolving global context. The chapter explores the economic impact of globalization on young people, with specific examples provided in country-level and more localized case studies. The phenomenon of cultural globalization and its connection with the youth culture is then examined, with particular attention given to the role of ICT and media resources and the local-global synthesis that has occurred in identity formation. The final section returns to the ambiguities and contradictions that characterize this phenomenon, providing an assessment of its different implications for various groups, its contribution to local-global tensions, and its tendency to simultaneously promote linkages and divisions, inclusion and exclusion, and connectedness and isolation. The final conclusion is that young people's experience with globalization has been negative thus far; efforts are therefore needed to ensure that they become active and productive global citizens.

## INTRODUCTION

Young people are growing up in a world of globalization and inequality, taking part in a development process that is simultaneously bringing people closer together and widening the divisions between them. The assets of the 200 richest people on earth are greater than the combined incomes of more than 2 billion of the poorest, and the gap between the two groups continues to grow.<sup>1</sup> The World Bank reports that low-income developing countries, with a total population of approximately 3 billion, have shifted their export focus from primary commodities to manufactured goods and services;<sup>2</sup> between the mid-1970s and 1998, manufactured items increased from 25 to 80 per cent of the combined export total for this group. Per capita incomes in these countries rose by about 5 per cent annually in the 1990s, and the number of poor people declined by a not insignificant 125 million between 1990 and 1999.

Many commentators argue that globalization is primarily an economic process, but it is one that clearly has profound social implications. There is evidence suggesting that, at least in some cases, the higher wages and employment characteristics of globalizing countries such as China, India, Uganda and Viet Nam are closely linked to poverty reduction. Health and education provision has improved in many developing countries that have been more actively involved in the globalization process; in Brazil, Egypt and Malaysia, for example, infant mortality was reduced by an average of more than 30 per cent during the 1990s, compared with an average decline of 12 per cent for all developing countries. However, in the least-developed countries (with a combined population of 2 billion), overall economic growth has declined and poverty has been rising, which are critical considerations in the larger context of global development. Along with the loss of jobs and low incomes, such countries suffer from poor

health and education provision, both of which are crucial factors in the climb out of poverty.<sup>3</sup> World statistics reflect the fact that globalization is a double-edged sword; it offers substantial economic benefits, but those benefits, perhaps inevitably, are accompanied by social costs. This chapter is concerned with the extent to which young people are affected by both the positive and negative aspects of globalization.

What do the statistics really indicate about the globalization experience, and how is the process directly touching young people's lives? The relationship between youth and globalization is inherently ambiguous; in fact, the single word "globalization" and all it represents perhaps best sums up the uncertainty of what it means to be a young person at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Many sociologists specializing in youth affairs have portrayed young people as being at the forefront of social and even economic change.<sup>4</sup> Being at the forefront does not mean that they are in any position to control that change; nor should it be assumed that youth are necessarily controlled by it. Christine Griffin points out that youth are "treated as a key indicator of the state of the nation itself."<sup>5</sup> Young people might well be described as a barometer of social change, but this reveals little about the nature of their involvement in the process of society's evolution.

Globalization is a hotly debated issue within the social sciences. There is a broad consensus in the literature that some of the old certainties of the modern world have been undermined or invalidated, and that young people's life experiences are increasingly tenuous as a result.<sup>6</sup> This chapter will reinforce Kevin McDonald's assertion that young people's experience with globalization constitutes a delicately balanced struggle for independence and success that is as much about constraints and limitations as it is about freedom and opportunity.<sup>7</sup> It is important to understand that globalization has a direct and powerful influence on their lives insofar as it actively extends the kinds of social division to which young people are all too often subjected.<sup>8</sup>

It is generally agreed, notwithstanding the various differences in perspective, that globalization is having a tremendous impact on youth; the present chapter will seek to assess the nature of that impact.

## **ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF GLOBALIZATION ON YOUNG PEOPLE**

In its broadest sense, globalization refers to the extension of a whole range of economic, cultural and political activities across the world landscape. As Anthony Giddens suggests, "Globalization can be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa."<sup>9</sup> In this context, the increasing economic and cultural interdependence of societies on a world scale is of particular interest. Because it involves interaction in so many areas and at numerous levels, it is virtually impossible to conceive of globalization as a singular concept. John Allen and Doreen Massey argue that there are many "globalizations" occurring in various sectors and fields of activity, including telecommunications, finance and culture.<sup>10</sup> A key contributing factor in this regard has been the declining influence of the nation-state, which is in turn intimately linked to what David Harvey refers to as "time-space compression" — the way the world has in effect been de-territorialized by

the acceleration and wider dissemination of capitalist practices, simultaneously creating ever-higher levels of stress.<sup>11</sup>

Young people are in the process of establishing a sense of identity in what is essentially an insecure world, and this underlying instability may serve to magnify the tensions and lack of control they experience on a daily basis. As Zygmunt Bauman notes, what is interesting about globalization is that the uses of time and space are “sharply differentiated as well as differentiating”.<sup>12</sup> The danger is that globalization may produce all sorts of (unintended) local consequences. Most worrying is the following:

*“Being local in a globalized world is a sign of social deprivation and degradation. The discomforts of localized existence are compounded by the fact that with public spaces removed beyond the reaches of localized life, localities are losing their meaning-generating and meaning-negotiating capacity and are increasingly dependent on sense-giving and interpreting actions which they do not control.”<sup>13</sup>*

In this analysis globalization inevitably leads to exclusion. Globalization is characterized by spatial segregation, in that it actively increases the disparities that already exist between global elites and the localized majority. In the past, colonial powers exported raw materials from their colonies in order to strengthen their own power base while ignoring the broader implications for the industrial base of the areas whose resources they were exploiting.<sup>14</sup> What developed in this context was a multitude of core-periphery relationships at the international level; of equal concern, however, was the effect of economic disparities on class divisions domestically. As Christine McMurray and Roy Smith point out, geography is less important nowadays in the formation of core-periphery relationships. Differentials in access to resources, wealth and opportunities have the potential to produce far greater consequences in the global context than was ever the case in the past.

In effect, globalization can intensify social divisions, and as young people are struggling to establish themselves in a new social context—the sometimes intimidating adult world—they may be perceived as being particularly vulnerable to the threat of segregation or exclusion. However, in any analysis of young people’s relationship with globalization, two key points must be borne in mind. First, there is a tendency to assume that the effects of globalization are unstoppable, and that globalization is a process young people react to rather than actively negotiate. Stephen McBride and John Wiseman warn of the dangers associated with this position, criticizing the failure to move beyond theory to address the more practical aspects of globalization.<sup>15</sup> There is some concern that debates over globalization will remain at a conceptual rather than a grounded level, thereby leaving the political disparities associated with this phenomenon underexplored, as elaborated in the following:

*“Globalization involves a range of contradictory and contested processes which provide new possibilities as well as threats to communities concerned with promoting relationships of diversity, solidarity and sustainability. The central challenge is to recognize the connections between action at different levels of geographical space and political governance and to think and act at a range of levels without losing our grounding in the particularity of our own home place.”<sup>16</sup>*



Second, an analogous and equally significant point is that the experiences, meanings and concepts associated with youth are as complex and challenging as those associated with globalization. The inherent differences in young people, together with the wide range of interpretations regarding the significance of various aspects of the youth experience, make it difficult to produce an objective overall assessment of their current situation. One particular danger is that the problem-solving perspective of social science academics may actually serve to exaggerate and reinforce the marginalization and pathology of young people.<sup>17</sup> It is a gross oversimplification—and not entirely accurate—to suggest that youth are the passive recipients or vulnerable victims of the sorts of trends that will be examined below. Young people cannot control the speed or direction of social change, but they do have a say in the effect such change has on their lives. Facilitating their integration and involvement in the globalization process requires an understanding of their needs and priorities relative to those of adults in order to address the potential social divisions referred to above. In this context, the following may be instructive:

*“Research on youth tells us at least as much about the social, psychological and political concerns of adult society, in all their diversity, as it does about the lives of young people themselves, in all their diversity. Indeed, the two are fundamentally intertwined, and can never be completely disentangled.”<sup>18</sup>*

The rest of this chapter will concentrate not on disentangling this relationship but on constructing foundations upon which efforts might be undertaken to demystify the complexity of such a relationship and thereby gain a better understanding of what needs to be done to ensure that globalization represents a positive force in young people’s lives.

Steven Jackson and David Andrews caution against either overstating or understating the effects of globalization.<sup>19</sup> Every effort will therefore be made to present an accurate and objective assessment of developments within this context. That said, it might be useful at this stage to outline the broad economic impact of globalization and, more specifically, the economic implications of globalization for young people.

As Phillip Brown and Hugh Lauder point out, the emergence of a global economy reflects the decline of mid-century economic nationalism and increased international competition, the greatest beneficiaries of which have been the multinational corporations (MNCs).<sup>20</sup> In the World Investment Report 1993 UNCTAD estimated that 65 million people worldwide were directly employed and 130 million indirectly employed by multinationals.<sup>21</sup> More recently, David Held and others estimated that 53,000 MNCs with 450,000 foreign subsidiaries were operating worldwide in 1997, selling \$9.5 trillion worth of goods and services around the globe. According to some authors, transnational production now exceeds the level of global exports and has become the primary means of selling goods and services abroad;<sup>22</sup> they cite estimates indicating that multinational companies now account for about 20 per cent of world production and 70 per cent of world trade.

As a result of these developments, the economic boundaries between countries are weakening, a trend reflected both geographically and in terms of the legislation that underpins international trade. In this economic environment nation-states are losing their power to shape national economic competition, and international competition can create more problems than it solves—even for developed countries. As Brown points out in an assessment relating to the United Kingdom,

*“In an era of worldwide competition and low-cost global communications, no country like ours will be able to maintain its standard of living, let alone improve it, on the basis of cheap labour and low-tech products and services. There will be too many millions of workers and too many willing to do that kind of work fully as well as we or people in any other developed country could do it—and at a fraction of the cost.”<sup>23</sup>*

## Case study: Republic of Korea

Relating the experiences of specific countries provides a clearer picture of the effects of globalization. Kang Seoghoon addresses the relationship between globalization and income inequality in the Republic of Korea.<sup>24</sup> The economy of this country experienced massive growth in the second half of the twentieth century, with GDP (in terms of local currency) increasing 9,984-fold and per capita GDP 4,253-fold. During roughly the same period, the volume of exports rose 4,354-fold (from \$33 million in 1960 to \$143.7 billion in 1999). The composition of the country’s economic base changed dramatically over a period of several decades. For example, the share of agriculture, forestry and fisheries in GDP declined from 27.1 per cent in 1970 to 5 per cent in 1999, while the service industry share rose from 50.2 to 62.8 per cent. As the Government became increasingly committed to pursuing a global economic strategy, it moved away from a traditionally protective regime that was in danger of reducing competition and impeding technological progress.<sup>25</sup>

The move towards a global economy has had significant implications for employment in the Republic of Korea. Seoghoon relates that between 1980 and 1990 unemployment declined by 71 per cent among those without a high school education, 63.4 per cent among high school graduates, and 29 per cent among college graduates.<sup>26</sup> Broadly speaking, the inequalities associated with income distribution also decreased during this period, apparently as a result of the combined effects of rapid economic growth, low unemployment and an increased supply of highly educated labour. It is worth noting, however, that the country’s globalization experience is far from typical. The Government’s investment in education can be described as exceptional; the proportion of the State budget allocated to education rose from 16.2 per cent in 1965 to 23.3 per cent in 1998. Between 1980 and 2000 the number of four-year-college entrants increased by almost threefold.<sup>27</sup> With the tremendous improvement in its national income, the Republic of Korea has been able to offset a good portion of the added development expenditures; between 1970 and 2000 the country’s deficit-to-GDP ratio rose only slightly, from 5.2 to 5.8 per cent.

As tends to occur during the process of globalization, extraordinary economic successes have been accompanied by unexpected difficulties and hidden pitfalls. In particular, the Republic of Korea has had to deal with problems deriving from the

oversupply of college graduates in the labour market. Ironically, and arguably as a direct result of government policies aimed at easing the transition to a global economy, the wages of college graduates are actually increasing at a slower rate than are those of high-school graduates.<sup>28</sup> Many college-educated workers have been forced to settle for employment that, in relative terms, is poorly paid, requires a low level of skill, offers little in the way of security and benefits, and provides no real opportunity for professional development.

As mentioned, the Republic of Korea's globalization experience is in many ways atypical. It could be argued that the example is actually exceptional, insofar as income inequalities in the country appear to have improved overall with the move towards globalization, which is not the case in most developing countries. What it also illustrates, however, are the pitfalls inherent in the wholehearted adoption of global economics. In addition, it highlights the fact that young people are potentially the group most vulnerable to the uncertainties associated with the global economy and with policies developed by Governments seeking to adapt to rapid economic change. An important lesson learned from this particular experience is that a well-developed educational policy may improve income distribution, but it may ultimately exacerbate the inequalities between young people.

## Case study: China

China's experience, while different in many respects from that of the Republic of Korea, further illustrates the complex nature of globalization, its economic impact on young people's lives, its effect on economies more generally, and the potential pitfalls associated with the process. Although evidence suggests that the overall level of inequality has decreased, in practical terms inequality within China has actually increased inasmuch as the divisions between the provinces with urban agglomerations and those without are widening.<sup>29</sup> An estimated 70 million people have left their townships in search of non-agricultural jobs, reflecting the massive scale of social and geographical change occurring in China as well as the quintessentially urban character of globalization.

Large-scale movement from farms and villages to large cities has a serious economic and social impact on a country, as it involves the reconstruction of the urban situation while at the same time profoundly affecting rural development. Huang Ping has assessed the impact of rural-urban migration by young people within the context of globalization.<sup>30</sup> Having conducted research covering a total of 280 rural households in eight Chinese villages, Ping argues that young people are attracted to cities not only by job opportunities, but also by the distant appeal of urban lifestyles. In this sense, globalization operates on at least two levels; the process of urbanization associated with both Chinese economic reform and general world trends clearly has both economic and cultural underpinnings. Young people migrating from remote areas of China to southern coastal areas, in particular Guangdong, are drawn to city life even though most have had no exposure to the urban setting other than that provided through television.<sup>31</sup> The culture of consumerism is an especially powerful pull factor. It is important to remember, though—and this may apply to other countries as well—that however well-entrenched globalization may be, it must operate within the

constraints set by local institutional arrangements, as must young people themselves. Globalization by itself cannot liberate people. However involved in various aspects of globalization some countries might be, those young people willing to take advantage of the opportunities if offers are not always at liberty to do so.

## Other examples: Sudan and the United States

Summarizing country experiences can take the analysis of globalization's impact on the lives of young people only so far. Localized examples of globalization in action may provide a more detailed perspective. Cindi Katz assesses the impact of globalization on young people in New York and in Howa, Sudan.<sup>32</sup> One might assume that there would be a world of difference in the effects of globalization on these two areas, but definite similarities can be identified.

In her assessment, Katz indicates that one of the most important ways in which the economic logic of modern development and of globalization has been demonstrated is through agricultural projects. She explains how the Suki Agricultural Project transformed the subsistence economy of Howa, a Sudanese village, into one organized around exchange—a process that involved the complete restructuring of the area's economic and social systems of production. These developments had enormous implications for young people's lives, largely as a result of the practice of keeping women as secluded as possible. The move towards tenant farming imposed serious demands on the workforce and hence on young people. This sparked a series of changes leading to a situation in which many goods that had once been freely available became commodified, increasing the demand for cash and further intensifying the need for young people to work in order to earn that money. Ultimately, what on the surface appeared to be a positive "development" project actually created a situation in which young people's free time and their opportunity to attend school were diminished. Moreover, the fact that the new system incorporated a fixed number of tenancies meant that the same young people were unlikely to have ready access to productive land when they came of age. In short, although this project had clear economic benefits, children and young people were quite simply not acquiring the skills they would need in the long-term.<sup>33</sup> In other words, medium-term economic benefits came with long-term economic and cultural costs.

In analyzing the impact of globalization on young people in New York, Katz points out that the decline in manufacturing industries and in stable employment more generally has drastically reduced the availability of secure, meaningful work. Meanwhile, the emergence of a high-tech service economy has created a labour market of extremes in terms of pay, skills and stability. As a result of these developments, unemployment among 16- to 19-year-olds rose from 18 to 36 per cent between 1988 and 1993.<sup>34</sup>

As the examples presented thus far show, the economic benefits of globalization do not necessarily trickle down to all members of society. However, Katz warns against "dismalizing" young people. Globalization is not all-powerful, and to a certain extent it is possible to undertake measures to limit its more damaging effects at the local level. For instance, on a return trip to Howa two years after the initial

assessment, Katz found the village installing standpipes. This would clearly offer enormously positive labour-saving benefits and would also free up time for young people, many of whom could then take advantage of the village's next plan—the construction of a girls' school. According to Katz, this experience demonstrates how the politics of survival can emerge when necessitated by broad socio-economic change. Similarly, in New York, the local community worked together over a period of five years to ensure that two neighbourhood schoolyards were transformed into useable public spaces, thereby providing young people with a secure place to “hang out”. Katz argues that events in Sudan and the United States are connected in a sense, in that they represent local efforts to cope with the profound changes brought about by globalization, in particular those relating to the availability and organization of work.

## GLOBALIZATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S CULTURE

The attitudes of young people towards global economic change are worth considering. Vladimir Dubsky, citing the results of surveys conducted in the early to mid-1990s, notes that while 90 per cent of young Czechs supported the transition to a market economy, only 22 per cent advocated rapid change, compared with 71.8 per cent who stressed the need for prudence in order to avoid social unrest.<sup>35</sup> Young people, stereotypically considered impatient or impulsive, are not necessarily in favour of fast-paced global change; they recognize as readily as their elders that globalization, at its most fundamental level, should be more about cementing long-standing geographical and social divisions than about providing them with new opportunities.

The experience of global economic change in the former communist countries is further evidence of the unpredictability of globalization and its apparent tendency to provoke disorder not only within national economies, but also within young people's lives. As Ken Roberts states, “Young people's transitions into the labour market have been extended in the West and East, but in the East, for most young people, no destinations towards which they might head are yet visible because the outcomes of their societies' transformations are still unclear.”<sup>36</sup>

As mentioned, young people's experience with globalization appears to be fraught with uncertainty. However, the degree of that uncertainty varies according to cultural and social contexts. Much depends upon the extent to which individuals have the cultural and financial resources to offset the risks associated with strengthening patterns of inequality.<sup>37</sup>

Bearing in mind geographical and cultural variations, one might ask what active measures, if any, should be taken to offset the uncertainty and risk engendered in globalization. In relating the Australian experience, Peter Kelly asserts that the emergence of a vocational education and training (VET) agenda in post-compulsory secondary schools represents an attempt to regulate youth transitions.<sup>38</sup> This author underlines the declining influence of class, gender and family coordinates in young people's lives and the fact that youth are becoming more personally responsible for who they are and where they are going. The VET approach reflects an acknowledgment of this trend and seeks to manage youth transitions through the construction of networks or “pathways”, providing young people with information about labour markets,

arranging work placements and facilitating training in ways that are flexible enough to account for the uncertainties in young people's lives. VET programmes are particularly aimed at addressing the more problematic experiences of disadvantaged or socially excluded young people who inhabit what Kelly calls "wild zones", while also ensuring that they are "job ready".

An important point Kelly makes is that it is not enough to understand the precarious situation of "global youth". Experts construct conceptions of youth on the basis of multiple criteria, and it may be the case that such conceptions are far too rigid. A more realistic balance might be achieved with a better understanding of the cultural contexts that underpin young people's experience of globalization.

In presenting the contrast between the human connectedness of those engaged in traditional cooking practices in the Yucatán countryside and the personal isolation (but virtual connectedness) of young people lined up around the walls of a nearby shack to play computer games, Doreen Massey highlights the paradoxes inherent in the global youth culture.<sup>39</sup> She defines the local youth culture of the Yucatec Maya as a product of interaction—a culture that is not entirely closed, localized or global. Global culture, from this perspective, derives from a combination of self-focused efforts to carve up and claim some of it for one's own benefit and more interactive efforts that contribute to the immense interconnectedness of global space.<sup>40</sup>

Developments in education and employment are occurring in an environment characterized by broader cultural changes. Many developing countries steeped in tradition are having to reassess their relationships with the outside world, as "outside" is not as clearly defined as it once was. A clear trend towards the global circulation of cultural goods has been developing for decades, facilitated in great measure by the increased access to audio-visual communications media. Hugh Mackay notes that the number of television receivers per thousand inhabitants has increased everywhere over the past several decades; between 1975 and 1996, the number of sets jumped from 9,000 to 90,000 in Burkina Faso, from 1.2 million to 394 million in China, and from 121 million to 217 million in the United States.<sup>41</sup>

Globalization is as much about culture—and how economic and cultural change is culturally negotiated—as it is about economics. The two are inextricably linked, especially insofar as patterns of ownership of domestic communication devices exemplify the nature of global inequality and the intensification of what Mackay describes as the growing gulf between the "information rich" and the "information poor".

In this context, Jan Aart Scholte argues that much of global culture is youth culture,<sup>42</sup> as global consumerism has linked young people around the world to the extent that it has guided the construction of a dominant value system. Some argue that global audio-visual media have made many young people more familiar with Hollywood constructions of the United States than with certain aspects of their own countries. This point is developed in the European context by Dannie Kjeldgaard, who looks at how young people in Denmark and Greenland use global and local "consumptionscapes" in the continuous, day-to-day process of identity formation.<sup>43</sup> Kjeldgaard discounts the idea that young people are engaged with global culture in a uniform manner. In the developed world at least, youth are obliged to partake of the



consumer culture, but they also interact with and contribute to that culture, producing their own experiences and meanings based on their unique local circumstances. In presenting her analysis Kjeldgaard mentions the contribution of Karen Klitgaard, who found that for young people in Denmark the American television series *Beverly Hills 90210* represented a means of providing a social focus but also supplied a canvas upon which they could establish their own individual “style landscape”.<sup>44</sup> In other words, young people use global culture and consumption as a means of narrating their own life stories. Levels of engagement may vary, of course; for those young people living on the periphery, opportunities to become actively involved in the global culture are limited, and their participation remains essentially “virtual” and distant. Kjeldgaard argues—notwithstanding mitigating factors such as the personalizing influence of local cultural inputs and variations in levels of engagement—that the power and pervasiveness of global culture is such that young people in Greenland are, in a sense, a minority in their own homeland.

In many respects, as Kjeldgaard’s analysis illustrates, global influences outweigh traditional local influences and can even be said to constitute a burden. Western agencies produce and transmit 90 per cent of the world’s news,<sup>45</sup> and it is estimated that products of the American mass media account for 75 per cent of broadcast and cable television revenues worldwide and that American books make up 35 per cent of the world market.<sup>46</sup> Serge Latouche argues that the global media propagate a very American-centric vision of the world that fails to acknowledge the existence and importance of linguistic and cultural diversity and of the multitude of perspectives that exist worldwide.<sup>47</sup>

To further illustrate the cultural dominance of the West, which appears to be the source of most of the images seen by the world’s young people, Latouche describes a situation in which France provided Africa with 5,200 hours of free television programming per year as part of a support package in the early 1990s. Citing this as an example of the economic impact of cultural globalization, Latouche argues that this effectively undermined the African broadcasting industry. The power dimensions of cultural globalization are undeniable. John Street suggests that the rhetoric of global culture has been detached from the material and institutional conditions underlying the emergence of globalization.<sup>48</sup> In the final analysis, globalization does not represent the intermingling of a plurality of cultures or a harmonious synthesis of a single global culture, but rather a struggle for power. In this respect, globalization is clearly a political as well as a cultural phenomenon, and part of the political impact of globalization relates to the issue of homogenization.

## **Analysis of cultural globalization: a synthesis of local and global influences**

The paradoxical nature of cultural globalization is fascinating in that it both universalizes and individualizes culture.<sup>49</sup> The degree to which globalization actively promotes the consumption of diverse cultures continues to intrigue sociologists. Some theorists argue that globalization actually enhances differences between cultures. James Lull examines the manner in which global commodities and resources are “reused” by local consumers.<sup>50</sup> Media products, for example, are reappropriated

as young people interpret and internalize the messages in a way that gives them meaning in the local context of their own lives.<sup>51</sup>

One example of the personal application of global concepts is provided by Jonathan Friedman, who has

examined the specific ways in which young men in the Congo who belong to a low-status group known as the *sape* create high-status identities through the consumption of global goods.<sup>52</sup> They ostentatiously wear goods with designer names and proudly display cans of internationally known soft drinks in their cars. This process is about asserting a sense of power and undermining dominant power structures.<sup>53</sup>

The lesson here is that it is inappropriate to make assumptions about the impact of globalization when local identity is actually “constituted through face-to-face relationships that occur in social contexts where there is little territorial movement.”<sup>54</sup> An important point made by Rosamund Billington and others is that global consumers, particularly those in the developing world, are not simply “global villagers”. Local meanings are constructed according to environmental and personal circumstances—and within the framework of wider political, economic and social disparities—that inevitably play a role in determining the context within which those meanings can operate. It may therefore be argued that the impact of globalization cannot be accurately assessed unless it is first understood how globalization is experienced at a local level.

Global and local “forces are constantly felt in the lives of those trying to get from one day to the next”.<sup>55</sup> More to the point (in the context of the present chapter), global and local forces are playing a combined and increasingly fundamental role in determining how young people relate to their everyday lives. It is very important to maintain a balanced impression of how youth interact with global culture. Marwan Kraidy explores ways in which cultural identities are being reconstructed by a group of Lebanese youth seeking to adapt to new realities evolving from the global-local interchange.<sup>56</sup> The author contends that young Maronites in Lebanon are establishing their identities at the intersection of two competing forces constructed by the mass media, namely, modernity and tradition. While these spheres are generally considered contradictory, the young people concerned operate in both; however, they do not feel they belong exclusively to either. They occupy a “third space” within which they simultaneously accept and reject Arab and Western culture; this in itself provides a simulated culture that young people use creatively insofar as it allows them to create meaning in a de-territorialized world. Perhaps the best way of conceptualizing the complex ways in which young people engage with globalization is through the notion of hybridity: “Hybridity is ... construed not as an in-between zone where global/local power relations are neutralized in the fuzziness of the *mélange* but as a zone of symbolic ferment where power relations are surreptitiously re-inscribed.”<sup>57</sup>

In short, global culture provides a resource young people can use in navigating their identities through the ups and downs of everyday life. Andy Bennett uses hip hop as an example of a “global” practice that reflects how the youth culture can



be simultaneously homogenized and heterogenized.<sup>58</sup> More specifically, localized expressions of hip-hop music may not involve any major stylistic transformations, but tend to be characterized instead by subtle variations based on local affiliations with particular kinds of musical consumption.

Moving away from the more “individualizing” aspects, it could equally be argued that globalization universalizes culture because it is in the interests of commodification to do so. Globalization is underpinned by a desire to create uniform global markets that consumers can be persuaded to respond to individually. “Consumerism as a way of life” promises so much.<sup>59</sup> Whether a young person is living in the Hollywood Hills or in rural Lebanon, the global consumer culture appears to offer something special—and above all, the chance to feel a sense of belonging. Non-consumption, meanwhile, is experienced as a lack of control, a form of exclusion that perpetuates poverty and withdrawal. Globalization raises consumer expectations that often cannot be fulfilled, and the end result is alienation, frustration, relative deprivation and, potentially, crime and social strife.<sup>60</sup>

The problem, especially in developing countries, is that the images of consumerism are everywhere, but many have to be satisfied with the promise of what could be, as the advertised items and lifestyles are not always accessible, particularly to the poorer members of society.<sup>61</sup> The global culture has become a fundamental building block in many young people’s lives. However, their relationship with it is very fragile because youth, more than any other group, are exposed to and have come to rely on the global consumer culture but probably have the fewest resources and the most to lose should global culture not provide the satisfaction they demand of it.

On a cultural level the globalization process appears to reinforce existing divides (in contexts such as education, for example). Globalization constructs a more clearly wealth-differentiated world and, within that world, increasingly wealth-differentiated societies. In the developing countries such societies are founded on principles unfamiliar to the societies of old. In some of the booming economies of South-East Asia, for instance, young people have become preoccupied with personal advancement, since the onus is now on them to construct their own life courses and their own sense of identity, rather than assuming this is automatically going to be supplied for them by the family, the community or the State.<sup>62</sup>

The availability of resources is not as uniform as the commodity culture might have one believe. Advertising makes it seem that anything is possible in a global consumer culture. It is worth noting that Proctor and Gamble’s corporate advertising expenditure is \$5,754.6 million, or 10 times the entire education budget of Viet Nam (\$579 million), whose spending in this sector is actually relatively high in comparison with many other developing countries.<sup>63</sup> This is a world in which multinational corporations and advertising agencies are competing with family and school to become the most influential institutions in young people’s lives. The trouble, referred to repeatedly in this chapter, is that efforts to ensure the ideological dominance of consumerism also serve to reinforce social divisions.

There is considerable truth in the suggestion that mass media and new technologies have played a key role in constructing what Richard Tinning and Lindsay Fitzclarence describe as a postmodern youth culture.<sup>64</sup> The impact of the global media

on young people is perhaps a metaphor for the broader impact of globalization, insofar as apparently liberating technologies such as mobile phones and Internet computer games actually alienate young people by creating a world of individualistic hyperstimulation in which more mundane activities such as school simply cannot compete.<sup>65</sup> In this regard the effect of globalization on young people's lives is all about maintaining a balance.

The global media make it easier, in one sense, for young people to be the authors of their own biographies, as they can construct their identities, define their roles and model their attitudes and behaviour according to the menus provided for them by global capitalism. Global capitalism, in turn, targets young people as fledgling consumers with the production of the ephemeral. Young people want to be seduced, and global capitalism makes it easy for them. As consumers of the global culture young people are, by default, consumers of cultures. Their lifestyles provide an arena within which those cultures can be actively negotiated in a process of mutual and global affirmation.<sup>66</sup> What policy makers must concern themselves with, though, is that however comfortable young people may be with this situation, the dominant values to which young people ultimately acquiesce are the very values that promote global division and ensure that the majority of youth will remain on the poor side of the divide.

Young people's experience with regard to globalization is very much class-based. In the case of Kathmandu, for example, the opportunities provided by the global culture have allowed the new middle classes to build a position of localized class dominance, and this has actively worked against the interests of the working classes, who are being rendered increasingly powerless in both an economic and a cultural sense.<sup>67</sup> This point can be equally well made in the context of global music, as shown in the following example:

*"Dance or club cultures are taking root from Sao Paolo to Tel Aviv across a wide political and cultural spectrum. Yet the spread has done little to shift uneven power distribution; Western global cities continue to dominate along with the five major record companies which control distribution and abide by the stubborn distinctions of gender and class. We cannot help but ask, 'Is everybody equally welcome at this global party?'"<sup>68</sup>*

## CONCLUSIONS

It is perhaps impossible to make any valid generalizations about young people's experiences with globalization. The cultural impact of global economics will be very different in Western Europe, Eastern Europe and Africa, and indeed within individual countries. As Goran Therborn states, "Globalization takes place in different spatial-historical contexts, providing it with very different meaning and implications in different parts of the world."<sup>69</sup> The impact of globalization is still evolving and uncertain, as the transformations that many countries are undergoing remain incomplete. The only certainty is that globalization is characterized by increasing market power, and there is always the danger that such power will be abused. Overly hasty privatization, unaccountable



corporations and companies, a weakened public sector, and an imbalance between individual private interests and collective public interests are all symptoms of globalization that may have a direct or indirect impact on young people's lives.<sup>70</sup>

In this context, it is very important to recognize what Doreen Massey has described as the "power geometry" associated with globalization. What benefits one country may adversely affect another, and what addresses the needs of one social group may create problems for a different sector of the population.<sup>71</sup> The argument presented in this chapter is that although young people are not powerless, their economic position is such that they are more vulnerable than any other social group to the uncertainties and risks associated with economic and cultural globalization. In describing youth in Europe, K. Popple and R. Kirby point out that young people's globalization experience is paradoxical.<sup>72</sup> On the one hand, there is a group of young, educated, multilingual Europeans who are able to work and study in different countries and thus experience a diversity of cultures. On the other hand, the vast majority of young people simply do not have such opportunities, perhaps because they are not suitably skilled or lack the necessary qualifications or financial resources. Meanwhile, as the market model perpetuates a situation of global economic uncertainty, the pressures and disadvantages that many young people feel are intensified.

Young people are not fully integrated members of the global culture; in a multitude of ways, both economically and socially, they are excluded from it. At the same time, however, a good number of young people, especially those in the developed world, are absolutely dependent upon it. It is this that makes young people's relationship with globalization so fragile. Precisely because of the nature of the fragilities and delicate balances associated with globalization, it is absolutely imperative that it be perceived as both a structural and an experiential process. Judged on those terms, the process of understanding and addressing the impact of globalization is far from straightforward. In one sense, young people's experience with globalization is rhetorical; it is tempting to assume that youth are at the forefront of the sort of technological and cultural changes that might be associated with globalization, but if this chapter indicates one thing, it would be that this is not necessarily the case.

Many young people have adopted a world view in which the whole globe represents the key arena for social action.<sup>73</sup> Trans-world contacts have helped to create lasting bonds of global youth solidarity, a prime example being global protests (especially by anti-capitalist groups).<sup>74</sup> Young people are actively using the global media to express themselves,<sup>75</sup> and probably constitute the group that has contributed most to making globalization the political issue it is today. However, as Ien Ang argues, being active is not necessarily the same as being powerful, and this is particularly true in the context of globalization.<sup>76</sup> The rhetoric that might be associated with young people's citizenship in a global community generally does not match the reality. As noted in the context of examining the cultural manifestations of globalization in young people's lives, and as suggested in the work of David Harvey, global forces permeate young people's lives—or at least those living in the developed world.<sup>77</sup> Young people are in one sense citizens of a global culture but at the same time struggle for a sense of acceptance in the societies in which they live. For youth, this is the ultimate paradox of globalization.

According to J. Harvey, young people in both developed and developing countries are marginalized in terms of their lack of economic power, their judicial status, and their day-to-day experience of economic and social inequality.<sup>78</sup> Harvey indicates that discourses surrounding young people need to move away from the concentration on socialization and development and focus instead on young people as “social actors”, a blueprint for which is already provided in the form of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In short, policy makers and youth practitioners simply cannot perceive of young people as being moulded for the future. They are full-fledged members of society, here and now, and should be treated as such.<sup>79</sup> As Nikolai Lesko argues, the notion of citizenship is constantly being revised in the current era of globalization.<sup>80</sup> As the global economy expands and discards unproductive processes and people, young people are also being redefined. For Lesko, the outlook is bleak. The increasing emphasis on lifelong learning, in which everyone is in the process of “becoming”, is actually reducing the amount of attention given to young people’s needs. In many respects the power of globalization is such that young people’s global citizenship is unavoidably passive in nature.

To paraphrase Claire Wallace, the global promise of citizenship is always undermined by inequality.<sup>81</sup> Development activities are often imposed upon young people, who are virtually powerless to influence the process in any meaningful way. Intervention is needed to strengthen their participation and input in the processes determining their future. As stated in a report by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the global situation of youth, “Empowerment ... involves young people as active agents for change and development, instead of ... passive targets of externally initiated programmes.”<sup>82</sup>

Globalization is ultimately as complex as young people’s lives are multidimensional. The combination of the two inevitably creates an explosive and heady mix. Young people’s transitions are to varying degrees becoming increasingly open-ended, but that open-endedness is introducing an enormous assortment of complications that are making young people’s lives more difficult than ever. As World Bank President James D. Wolfensohn states, “We are convinced that globalization can and does contribute to development, but we cannot ignore those who are left out. Nor can we fail to recognize how much better development progress could be.”<sup>83</sup> Young people’s current experience of globalization is largely and inevitably negative. Globalization does offer opportunities, but one young person’s opportunity will inevitably be another’s loss. The key question is whether this represents a price worth paying. In the years to come the relative achievements of globalization will be judged, in part, by how far young people have been successfully assimilated into the global processes of social, economic and cultural change. ■

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