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GLOBALIZATION, CULTURE
AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION

The word "globalization" seems to be over-used today by economists as well as NGO's, politicians, business people and many others. A study on the frequency of the use of the word "globalization" in a German national newspaper showed already at the turn of the century that in 1993 it was used in that paper only 34 times but in 2001 it had multiplied to 1136 times. The word is new but the fact is probably much older. When did globalization start in human history and what does it really mean? Is it used as a promise and threat, as a challenge or culprit? There is no unified and precise definition agreed upon by all or even a majority.

In a broader sense, the word "globalization" seems to indicate an interrelated world where people from different places are related and possibly dependent on each other in some way. Globalization, thus, is the growing interdependence of people which began in European history at the latest already after the discovery of the Americas in 1492 when Emperor Charles V stated that "now the sun would not set any more" in his empire. There might be something of this feeling also today when carmakers or other producers tell us that their products are designed and made by teams in Tokyo, New York and Munich or any other place around the globe or when we participate through modern means of communication in happenings from all parts of the globe.

Different from this view, others date the beginning of globalization with the opening of the Suez Canal 1869 which made shipping beyond the Americas and Europe to the East easier. Others date the beginning of globalization with the Bretton-Woods System 1944 or the landing of the first man on the moon on July 20, 1969.

All these attempts try to show that nobody on this planet is isolated but rather all are interrelated and thus, also in one way or the other responsible for each other. The modern means of communication, reporting instant news from all corners of the world into the smallest village of the earth, are developing this experience further and the question arises if we are moving towards a world culture, where the local is endangered or lost (cf. Stierle, 2003).

Already in 1960, Marshall McLuhan coined the expression "global village." Are we condemned to that?

In a more restricted sense, we talk about globalization as an expression for new ways of interrelation between financial markets and business undertakings beyond nations and continents. Deregulation is one of the key words to lose national ties and push open the whole world as a market for business. Liberalization and privatization are strongly related other phenomena. If the cheapest places for production are in China or anywhere else in Asia it is no difficulty for European or American companies to shift their production to these places. The governing forces here are profit, money and power but not necessarily the concern either for people and the individual or for the well-being of society. We experience the "Death of Distance" (Cairncross, 1998) because everything is instantly available and possible anytime, anywhere. Time and space are no longer a hindrance for international business and economy to thrive and finances to flow.

All this is especially made possible through the modern technologies of communication. It is no longer a problem for newspapers with world-wide circulation like "International Herald Tribune" to be published and printed simultaneously at 26 and more different places in different continents of the world but edited centrally at the main editorial office in Paris. Almost all papers today have their online editions which are quicker and more easily distributed through the Net. Such globalized communication, however, was not born overnight. Already the Universal Postal Convention of 1874 prepared the ground with international postal services, overseas telegraph and telephone. Some people thus have defined globalization as a multidimensional and polycentric happening which cannot be reversed anymore.

Financial markets are in the center of the discussion in their limiting and/or determining social, economic and communication developments. If 75 percent of the world capital flows into no more than 12 countries of the world and only the rest into the remaining 140 other countries, there is an imbalance which calls for remedies and concern. Globalization in this understanding therefore does not promote balance but rather promotes greater imbalance. The same holds

true for the development of trade and commerce. It is mainly the rich countries which profit from free trade zones and liberalization (Stierle, 2003). In communication we talk about the "Digital Divide" to indicate the discrepancy between those who have and those who don't have the most modern devices for communicating.
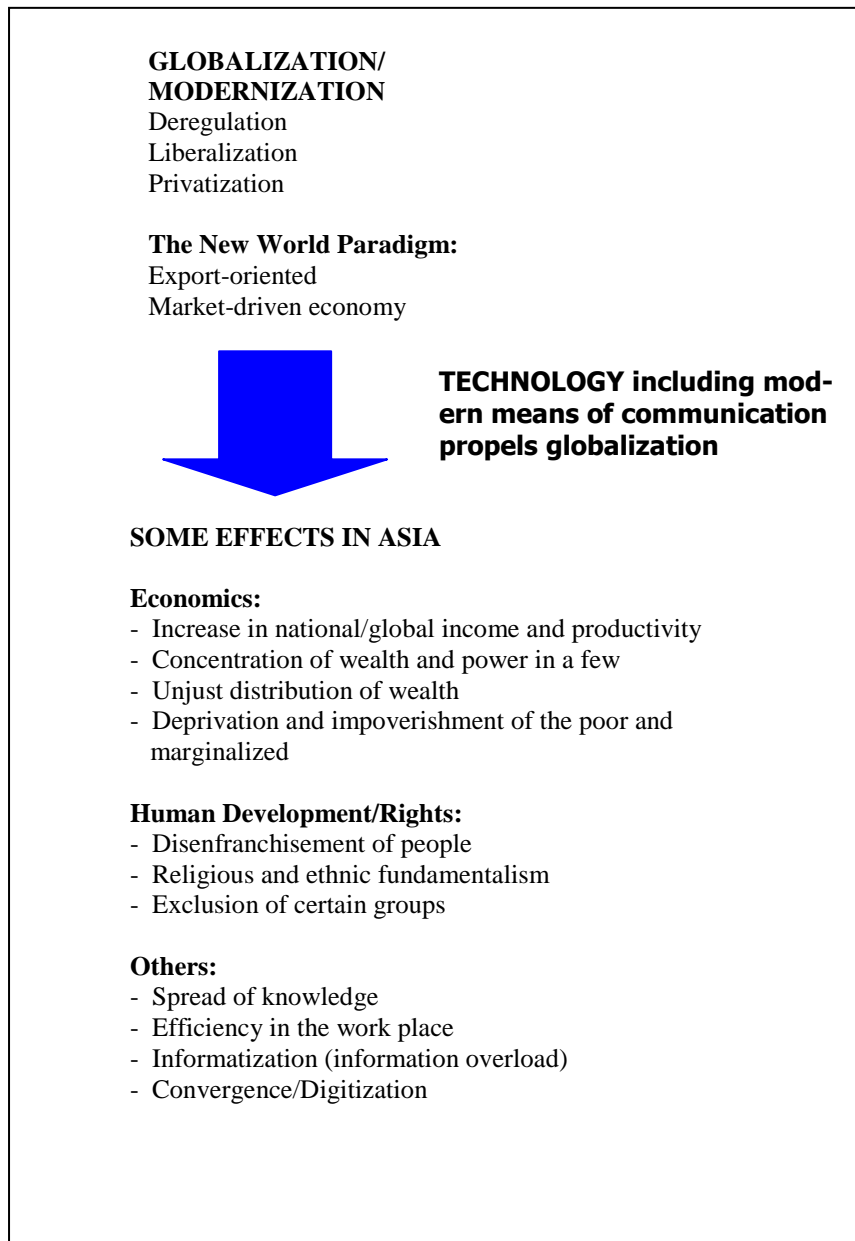
In this situation, human rights are easily violated and human development hindered. There are structural injustices leading to unrest, but also hostilities, armed conflicts and power struggles. Some Asian countries experience civil and/or political repression, disenfranchisement of individuals and groups with repressive national security acts and endemic graft and corruption. There is lack of religious freedom. And problems of religious and ethnic fundamentalism are on the rise. Job insecuritys and inhuman labor practices are another reality partly caused or promoted by globalization. Genuine human development is not realized, and groups of people are marginalized or excluded from public participation and a decent human life.

On the positive side, globalization has increased efficiency and production of goods and services. Access to new technologies makes possible more intensive and ongoing relations between people leading to deeper understanding and solidarity.

The modern means of social communication facilitate the exchange of knowledge and scientific developments, but in many ways also change the way people live. The use of cellular phones and computers, especially in urban centers but also increasingly in the countryside, makes instant information accessible to almost everybody. Through satellite and cable television as well as the increasing privatization of these means, change (if not threat) is becoming widespread among individuals as well as regional and local cultures. There is even a new word already when people talk about "the hybrid between globalization and localization" as "Glocalization" where "local cultures are blended with national and international ones" (Abercrombie/Longhurst 156). Here ordinary people might be confronted with lifestyles, values and worldviews that are completely divergent, even contrary, to their own traditions. How can we reconcile local cultures with the "new culture" characterized by new ways of communicating – "new languages, new technologies and a new psychology" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio,* 1990, 37c)?

Behind such a situation are mainly multinational corporations and, in some cases, political powers. Because such developments are mostly export-oriented and market-driven, local cultures are often sidelined. Instead of promoting people and their cultures, they are made objects of business.

An overview of these realities could look like this:

**GLOBALIZATION/
MODERNIZATION**
Deregulation
Liberalization
Privatization

The New World Paradigm:
Export-oriented
Market-driven economy

TECHNOLOGY including modern means of communication propels globalization

SOME EFFECTS IN ASIA

Economics:
- Increase in national/global income and productivity
- Concentration of wealth and power in a few
- Unjust distribution of wealth
- Deprivation and impoverishment of the poor and marginalized

Human Development/Rights:
- Disenfranchisement of people
- Religious and ethnic fundamentalism
- Exclusion of certain groups

Others:
- Spread of knowledge
- Efficiency in the work place
- Informatization (information overload)
- Convergence/Digitization

The new information and communication technologies and the resultant "Death of Distance" are decisive elements in our modern world. They might threaten local cultures and communities, but not everybody is convinced that this will really lead to a world culture

which substitutes the local. Wang, Servaes and Goonasekera e.g. argue "for the strength of the local cultures and even cultural industries that mitigate the threat of dominance and monoculture posed by global media" (cf. McAnany 2002, 10).

Some people see a "world culture" emerging which subsumes local cultures to lose their identity. Thus, with an emerging world culture for entertainment especially for young people, for example, traditional values and productions of art might be lost. It is difficult, however, to see this in a simple black and white, either-or manner. Globalization also challenges local cultures to become more aware of their values and treasure more their own philosophy and religion which have grown over centuries and are not lost automatically to modern superficiality. In fact in many cases, "there is a refusal to be uprooted from particular religious soil, precisely because without such concreteness, religion evaporates into thin air" (Wilfred, 2002, 3).

Acceptance of and/or resistance to modern globalization have also to be considered under the perspective of culture and cultural strength. Cultures change but they are deeply rooted in the lives of peoples and their communities. Dharm P. S. Bhawuk has studied "culture's influence on creativity" for India and comes to the conclusion that it is Indian spirituality which has shaped the country over 2,000 years. He presents a long list of spiritual masters over 2,500 years. "A closer examination of the list shows that these spiritual gurus came from all castes, and were not limited to the caste of Brahmin only, the caste that had the privilege of being a teacher or a guru. They also came from many religions, e. g. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, and Sufism. Also, they were not limited to any particular part of the country..." (2003, 5). After a more detailed presentation of three modern spiritual masters, he states "that India continues to innovate in the field of spirituality even today." He also sees Mother Teresa of Calcutta as a recent example. "Mother Teresa's Nobel Prize could be argued to recognize Indian spirituality, since she is the only Catholic 'saint' to receive this prize, albeit in the form that the sponsors of the prize can relate to... Spirituality can be seen to permeate the masses in India, and social life revolves around rituals that work as a symbolic reminder that people in this culture value spirituality..." (2003, 17).

In an overview on the foundations and directions of Asian discourse studies Shin-xu refers to Asian worldviews, values and ways of thinking as being "influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism, Shintoism, etc." (2009, 383) and states that "Asian wisdoms [are] influenced by these religions." Thus "Asian cultures share an ontological view of the Universe" and are based on a holistic

worldview to "achieve societal Harmony and Balance as their highest principle" (391).

All this indicates that spirituality and religion are important sources to counteract or balance negative developments of globalization and to save and even develop also local realities and independence.

Philosophy and religion of cultures and people are generally rooted deeply in peoples' lives and beliefs so that they change only slowly, over a long period of time. On the other hand, even cultures are not museum pieces and untouchable. They always have developed over time and tried to find answers to new and challenging situations. This refers also to religions and religious communication.

Already the very first known definition of Culture by Edward E. Tylor (1871) includes "beliefs, art, customs, and any other capabilities or habits acquired by man as a member of society" as essential parts of culture. Louis Luzbetak sees cultures as but different answers to the same basic human needs demanded by the physical, social and ideational environment. The ideational needs are reflected in the respective philosophy and religion of a group of people. There is no culture without this ideational dimension which means religion. This does not support attempts to relegate religion to the private sphere. Increasingly leading thinkers like e. g. Jürgen Habermas admit that human society cannot exist without religion. After all it is religion which gives the basis for values, ethics and the moral structure of society.

Religions

How should religions as essential parts of culture respond to the challenge and especially also the negative effects of globalization? The Indian philosopher and theologian Felix Wilfred (2002) sees three possible responses:

First, the thinking could go "in the direction of creating a planetary religion and ethos that presumably would match with the nature and demands of this process (globalization). In keeping with the process of homogenization, religions also could be metamorphosed into an ideally conceived 'religion' coupled with a well-packaged 'global ethics' which everyone all over the world would consume as standard spiritual and moral goods. Humankind, equipped thus with an ideally shared religion and ethics, could expect, as a matter of natural course, that the long-cherished ideal of unity and peace would come its way… In this model we could note that dialectics be-

tween the particular and universal is resolved in favor of the latter…"
The considerations and attempts of theologian Hans Küng for a
"Global Ethic" or "World Ethic" (1993, 1998, 2010) go in this direc-
tion.

The *second* possible response would be religious tribalism against
globalization. Similar to the latter, "religious tribalism too is a projec-
tion of a particular religious identity which claims to be the univer-
sal. Here religions vie with each other to catch the global religious
market and sell their spiritual goods as the best and even the only
one. What appears to be global outreach hides a power agenda which
is behind such aspirations as to see the whole world as Islamic,
Christian, Hindu etc. The process of globalization has added fuel and
supplied the instrumentalities for competing of religions, and indeed
for religious conflicts… What is worse is that religious tribalism does
not allow any room for self-critique… The threat religious tribalism
feels, coupled with the absence of self-critique, incapacitates it to
revise its own traditional image of the other groups… Much like the
process of globalization which 'progresses' by continuously excluding
more and more people, so too religious tribalism excludes all who do
not belong to it…" Here the study of Pradip Ninan Thomas on "Chris-
tian Fundamentalism and Communication in India" published under
the title "Strong Religion, Zealous Media" can serve as an example
(cf. also: Hoover/Kaneva 2009).

The *third* possible response would be religions in struggle for uni-
versal community which is not the same as "global" community. "Glo-
balization in its nature and trajectory is opposed to the project of
genuine universal community. The very fact that it creates deep divi-
sions in the contemporary world and causes a chasm between the rich
and poor offers no prospect for any universal communion… In a situ-
ation of inherent disintegration of community through globalization,
the religions could re-define their relationship to community in a new
way and in new terms. In the first place religions need to be aware of
the fact that the reality of community does not end with those belong-
ing to its fold. In other words, there is legitimate place for a confes-
sional community based on shared symbols, beliefs, rituals, etc. But
there is also the larger community which goes beyond the confession-
al boundaries. The crucial question is to what extent the various reli-
gious traditions are capable of supporting the coming together of
peoples, nations and cultures… The disintegration inherent in the
globalization process needs to be challenged by religious traditions,
by their role in the public sphere to help transcend the identities
based on language, ethnicity, culture and nation." Here in a special
way social communication comes in and should help to pay attention

to the grassroots and to bring people together in solidarity and in common concerns backed up by proper research and studies.

Religious Communication

Such developments challenge Religion as an essential part of cultures especially in their own teaching and formation for and in theology. In western Christian theology it is mainly the "ratio," the head which is essential to teaching and preaching but also to living religion. Modern communication technologies, however, in view of the audience are rather image and emotion oriented. They try to reach and "buy" the heart of people often in such a way that there seems to be no space any more for religion (Palakeel, 2003). But our Asian cultures are based to a considerable extent on spirituality and religion as essential elements (cf. Bhawuk, 2002).

Looking back in history, it is revealing to see that religious convictions and commitments are also the fruit of certain communication trends moving towards universality – or should one say "globalization"? Most world religions, especially Islam and Christianity, have been right from their beginning "global" in trying to grow all over the world. Even Buddhism spread all over Asia including India, though in different traditions, at a very early stage. There seems to be a parallel with modern globalization if one remembers that religions in the past were very often spread and promoted through business by itinerant merchants who brought their religious convictions to the places they visited or even created for their business undertakings. Already Marco Polo reported in 1292 that on his return from China he found at the northern tip of Sumatra Indian businessmen who converted the local people to Islam. The foundation of Malacca (now: Malaysia) goes back to the beginning of the 15th century. Since it was a main place for business, here too Islam found fertile ground from where it spread further to Java and Sumatra, thus being the beginning of Islamization of Indonesia (Stöhr/Zoetmulder 1965, 280ff).

Long before modern globalization all world religions aimed at extending and communicating their beliefs and practices beyond their place of origin. Buddha sent his monks out individually and Buddhism developed all over Asia in different forms (Waldenfels, 1987, 81ff).

Hamid Mowlana in writing about the "Foundation of Communication in Islamic Societies" refers to the Islamic term *tabligh* (propaganda) which is distinguished from the general modern use of the term "propaganda" (2003, 306ff). It "is dissemination and diffusion of

some principle, belief or practice. It is the increase or spread of a belief by natural reproduction; it is an extension in space and time." He sees in this expression used in a broader sense "a theory of communication ethics." Here, truthful propagation (*tabligh*) and group cohesion (*assabieh*) are considered "as two fundamental factors in the rise of world powers as states and large countries." It further emphasizes intrapersonal/interpersonal communication over impersonal types (308ff).

Jesus Christ sent out his apostles into the whole world to preach the "good news." He sent them "catholon" (all embracing), and this is the beginning of the "Catholic" Christian Church: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19ff). This "catholon" was reflected right at the beginning of the Church on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down on the disciples to preach about Jesus to representatives of the whole world who were present at that time in Jerusalem: the "Parthaians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome; Cretans and Arabs…" (Acts 2:9-11).

The birth of Christianity was thus a global happening right from the beginning even without modern technologies of communication, but in the power of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit also accompanied the first preachers and apostles in sharing their faith beyond the limited Jewish community of that time to the Hellenists and non-Jews. In fact this "globalization" was especially developed by the apostle Paul who continued his profession as a tentmaker. He was confirmed in this undertaking by the first council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), the very first council in the history of Christianity. The recipients of Christian communication were not only the Jews but all the peoples of the world.

This kind of "globalization" of religions is quite different from modern globalization where profit, influence and power are decisive. The sharing of religion is to uplift the "inner person," to support the dignity of humans and to bring meaning and fulfillment to their lives. This is true especially even today in Asia. It is revealing that Doug Underwood titles his recent book on the history of Journalism in the United States "From Yahweh to Yahoo!" looking at "the religious roots of the secular press." He shows that right from the beginning even of the secular press in the States there is a religious root which even today is reflected though not always in a conscious way (Underwood, 2002).

How should religious communication respond to the fact of modern globalization, which is based especially on new ways of developing and using communication technologies?

John Naisbitt has predicted eight "megatrends" for Asia which are partly promoted by globalization: 1. From Nations to Networks, 2. From Export to Consumer Cultures, 3. From Western to the Asian Way, 4. From Government-controlled to Market-driven, 5. From Villages to Super Cities, 6. From Labor Intensive to High Technology, 7. From Rich to Poor, and 8. From Men to Women. These megatrends were taken up by a group of Asian communication bishops in 1999 who analyzed their communication consequences. They added two further developments which should not be overlooked: "From Traditions to Options" and "From Belief to Fundamentalism" (Eilers 2008, 37-44).

The former poses a special challenge in the defense and strengthening of local cultures. Young people in the past grew up within traditions but today they have many options. How are they accompanied in this process of finding the proper balance? Cultural values and traditions should still accompany them and have to be integrated. The same is true for a wholesome integration of religion into life without going to extremes which are never a reflection of reality but rather of an ideology.

Modern religious communication should not be a matter of "trial and error" but should be based on solid research and reflection of reality. This was stated by a group of Asian communication scholars in a "Round Table" organized 1999 at the Assumption University in Bangkok, which led to the foundation of the "Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication" at St. John's University in Bangkok (cf. Eilers, 2002, 49-54; Kofski 2002, 129-134).

Such research should consider the actual usage but also the potentials of modern communication for religion and especially serving human rights, peace building, community development, and the provision of proper ethics which respects local und universal values to promote and consolidate a grounding of societies and people beyond consumerism and commercialization. The dignity of the human being must be central and is the concern of every religion.

Beyond this the effects of modern communication, especially television, on values and beliefs of people, particularly the young, should be of special concern. Not everything that is technically possible is also of value to human life and existence which again is at the center of every religion.

We also need to study the kind of people listening or viewing or even interacting with or within the communication media. Thus the recent discussion on social networks like Facebook, Twitter and others should be of special concern for educators and people concerned about the values and ethics of human life and society.

In modern communication the participants are not the somehow passive receivers of the past any more. They are now active participants: everybody becomes his/her own editor. Globalization and modern communication live on interactivity. What are the consequences of this for religious beliefs and practices and the development and preservation of culture and values in human society: the dignity of human life, of the human person and communities of people? This also leads to the often neglected field of communication ethics beyond mere legal considerations...

If religion is an essential part of culture and society it should have the potential for a proper grounding of values and mutual understanding of and within societies beyond individualism, power, consumerism. Communication is an activity in community and one essential part of this is also the experience of the "beyond" of a single person or group.

Like religion communication also has an interpretative function to bring meaning into life and society. How far does this determine our modern communication? Are we only concerned with business and profit making or is there something more, beyond the utilitarian view and concern?

Based on presentations at an international and inter-religious congress on Media, Religion and Culture in Edinburgh (1999) Jolyon Mitchell (2003, 337-350) sees seven areas of concern for religious communication which could be adjusted and developed into a proper research program in our Asian situation and globalization:

1. He sees a *participative turn* in seeing the audience not merely as passive objects but as active participants in any communication process "creating their own identities with the help of mediated narratives."

2. The *narration of identity* follows similar lines and helps to better understand "how viewers account for their uses of the media" (339).

3. The *multi-religious perspective* refers "to the emerging work on separate religious traditions and the media" (340) which is especially important in the view of globalization and local realities. Here Mitchell notes that "other rich, historic religious traditions have not to-date received such extensive

treatment as Islam and the media or Christianity and the media." He sees a real need for scholars to investigate the relation between the media and other religious traditions more deeply.

4. *The quest for communicative justice* is another field which has to be dealt with. Communicative inequalities in technology, in news and information flow, but also in distorted reporting characterize our world. Especially scholars on religion and media are challenged in their concern for ethics and the protection and development of values.

5. Developing the *historical perspective* means to put context and background on the information which brings also the religious dimension into the interaction of religion and social communication.

6. A *transformation of religious and theological reflection* goes beyond the instrumentality of the media as vehicles for religious communication into a deeper theological understanding of the communication process as a theological happening.

7. Finally, the *ethics of the audience* emerges especially in view of the new media. How far do users of media really take responsibility? Can a virtual community on the Internet really "care" for somebody? This indicates a move from producer-oriented ethics to an audience-centered approach.

Conclusion

Modern globalization is market-driven and export-oriented resulting in some marginalization and violation of human rights. It offends the dignity of persons and nations to some extent and this cannot be tolerated. On the other hand, it also introduces new communication technologies which can be used and harnessed to unite people, bring them closer together and raise them up from their isolation. Globalization must not necessarily destroy or substitute local cultures. They rather should be encouraged to develop strongly on their own, especially based on their spirituality and religious roots. Religious communication has to play a special role in this through interreligious dialogue, sharing of values and experiences in such a way that they promote human dignity and quality of life. Academic research in this area is especially needed. The "Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication" at St. John's University is a step in this direction.

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ABSTRACTS

Der Begriff *Globalisierung* scheint heute von Wirtschaftsexperten wie auch Nichtregierungsorganisationen, Politikern, Geschäftsleuten und vielen anderen überstrapaziert zu werden. Eine Untersuchung der Häufigkeit seines Gebrauchs in einer deutschen Zeitung zeigte bereits um die Jahrhundertwende, dass er in dieser Zeitung 1993 nur 34 Mal, 2001 aber bereits 1136 Mal benutzt worden war. Das Wort ist neu, die Tatsache selber aber wahrscheinlich viel älter. Wann begann die Globalisierung in der menschlichen Geschichte und was bedeutet sie wirklich? Wird sie als Verheißung oder Bedrohung gesehen, als Herausforderung oder Sündenbock? Es gibt keine gemeinsame und präzise Definition von Globalisierung, auf die sich alle oder eine Mehrheit bisher geeinigt hätten.

La palabra "globalización" parece ser sobre-utilizada hoy en día tanto por los economistas como por las ONGs, los políticos, los comerciantes y muchos otros. Un estudio de la frecuencia del uso de la palabra "globalización" en un periódico alemán de fines del siglo mostró que, en 1993, la palabra se usó en este periódico solo 34 veces, pero en 2001 se había multiplicado hasta 1136 ocurrencias. La palabra es nueva, pero el hecho es posiblemente mucho más antiguo. ¿Cuándo comenzó la globalización en la historia y qué significa realmente? ¿Es usado el concepto como promesa o amenaza, como desafío o culpable? No existe una definición unificada y aceptada por todos o siquiera por una mayoría.

Le mot « globalisation » semble être surexploité aujourd'hui par les économistes comme par les ONG, les politiques, les hommes d'affaires et bien d'autres. Une étude sur la fréquence d'utilisation du mot dans un journal national allemand a déjà montré au tournant du siècle qu'il était passé de 34 occurrences seulement, en 1993, à 1136, en 2001. Le mot est nouveau, mais la réalité est probablement bien plus ancienne. Quand la globalisation a-t-elle commencé dans l'histoire humaine et que signifie-t-elle réellement ? Est-elle utilisée comme une promesse ou une menace, comme un défi ou un coupable ? Il n'existe pas de définition qui soit universellement – ni même majoritairement – reconnue.