1

KEY CONCEPTS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER OUTLINE

In the beginning of creation, when God made heaven and earth, the earth was without form and void ... God said, ‘Let there be light’ ... and God saw that the light was good, and he separated light from darkness ... God made wild animals, cattle and all reptiles, each according to its kind, and he saw that it was good. Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image and likeness’ ... male and female he created them ... And said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it, rule over the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, and every living thing that moves upon the earth ... Thus heaven and earth were created with all their mighty throng (Gen. 1:2).

In the beginning, the earth was a bare plain. All was dark. There was no life, no death. The sun, the moon and the stars slept beneath the earth. All the eternal ancestors slept there, too, until at last they woke themselves out of their own
eternity and broke through to the surface. When the eternal ancestors arose, in the Dreamtime, they wandered the earth, sometimes in animal form—as kangaroos, or emus, or lizards—sometimes in human shape, sometimes part animal and human, sometimes as part human and plant. Two such beings, self-created out of nothing, were the Ungambikula. Wandering the world, they found half-made human beings. They were made of animals and plants, but were shapeless bundles, lying higgledy-piggledy, near where water holes and salt lakes could be created … With their great stone knives, the Ungambikula carved heads, bodies, legs and arms out of the bundles. They made the faces, and the hands and feet. At last the human beings were finished. Thus every man and woman was transformed from nature and owes allegiance to the totem of the animal or the plant that made the bundle they were created from … This work done, the ancestors went back to sleep. Some of them returned to underground homes, others became rocks and trees. The trails the ancestors walked in the Dreamtime are holy trails. Everywhere the ancestors went, they left sacred traces of their presence—a rock, a waterhole, a tree. For the Dreamtime does not merely lie in the distant past, the Dreamtime is the eternal Now. Between heartbeat and heartbeat, the Dreamtime can come again (Morgana’s Observatory, 2004).

… out of the simple compounds in the primordial ocean and atmosphere there appeared, with time, ever higher concentrations of the more complicated amino acids, as well as simple sugars, that amino acids combined to form peptides; that pureness, pyrimidines, sugar, and phosphate combined to form nucleotides; and that, gradually over the ages, proteins and nucleic acids were created. Then, eventually, must have come the key step—the formation, through chance combinations, of a nucleic acid molecule capable of inducing replication. That moment marked the beginning of life … As chloroplasts multiplied in the ancient seas, carbon dioxide was gradually consumed and molecular oxygen took its place. The present Atmosphere III was formed. Plant cells grew steadily more efficient, each one containing numerous chloroplasts. At the same time, elaborate cells without chlorophyll could not exist on the previous basis, for new food did not form in the ocean except within plant cells. However, cells without chlorophyll but with elaborate mitochondrial equipment that could handle complex molecules with great efficiency and store the energy of their breakdown, could live by ingesting the plant cells and stripping the molecules the latter had painstakingly built up. Thus originated the animal cell. Eventually, organisms grew complex enough to begin to leave the fossil record (plant and animal) that we have today … there is a profound sense in which we humans in the twentieth century, in an age of science, turning the next millennium, know for the first time who we are and where we are (Wilson 1996).

Every culture has its myth of origin, its story of creation, which tells of how the world came to be and of people’s place in that world. The first story, instantly recognisable to Muslims, Christians, and Jews, places God at the beginning, and humans as the rulers
of a God-created world. The second, more complex, story stresses the connection and interdependence between humans, plants, animals, and their shared environment, while the third and most recent story posits human beings as biological entities that emerged only as a consequence of a long chain of evolution. This chain has no connection to God, and appears to have no particular plan or purpose, other than to reproduce itself. Unlike the first two stories—which place a creative God or ancestors as architects of a world that is both good (God saw his creation was good) and moral (humans have a responsibility to plants and animals)—the third imagines no such master of ceremonies, nor any particular morality. The driving force of creation, according to the third story, is inherent in the very structure of life.

How might we evaluate these stories? The first story, because it is part of a text sacred to three major religions of the world, we identify as a religious story, and whether we believe it or not, it is therefore a matter of faith. Most of us will accept that while it is a truth for some, it is not a truth for all, not even for all adherents of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The second story, appealing in its inventiveness, we are likely to point to as evidence of enduring and deeply felt ties between the Indigenous peoples of Australia and their continent. It is special to these peoples, but not to all humans. The third story, perhaps the least readable of the three, we are likely to view as an attempt to explain the ‘real’ world. It is full of ‘facts’ and identifiable ‘things’, and whether we fully understand what is being referred to as ‘mitochondrial equipment’, we are likely to accept that it does exist. For most of us, science, the mode of explanation of the third story, is part of our cultural heritage. Frequently, this mode is associated with the Western world, but an emphasis on empirical demonstration, logic, replicability, and ‘science’ is by no means an invention of the West. Other societies have advanced earlier and further in some areas of science than has ‘the West’; for example, the Arabs’ early development of mathematics, the Indian study of astrology, Chinese physics, and even Balinese engineering, evidenced by complex irrigation schemes. In addition, the division of the contemporary world into ‘East’ and ‘West’—each with its own separate set of knowledge, customs and so on—makes less and less sense. Science, as a mode of explanation and as technology, is shared across societies, and has been for some time. For these reasons, more people are likely to take seriously the ideas of the third story, and to view God and the ancestors as matters of either fiction or faith.

The mode of explanation that underpins science also underpins social science. Social science is not simply a set of opinions or attitudes; it is a scientific study of society, complete, as we shall discover, with its own ‘facts’ and ‘things’. But, at the same time, it does bear some similarity to myth, and to religion. Like myth and religion, it has been concerned with the origins of humans and human society, and with explaining how humans think, act, and feel. To this end, it has developed a number of concepts—such as society, culture, gender, ethnicity, and social structure—that in their totality both construct the world (for example, as gendered or as structured) and act as the concepts by which we understand the world. If this sounds convoluted and difficult to understand, it is because
we are here approaching the very complex question of what, precisely, is knowledge? All knowledge, be it social scientific, religious, or mythical, does at least two things: firstly, it attempts to describe, name, label, and categorise; secondly, in so doing it creates that which it describes. Thus, once we have hit upon the word ‘culture’ to describe the customs, traditions, and belief systems of a people, it easily follows that the world is comprised of ‘cultures’. From that, the notion follows that there may be conflict between cultures—because they have different and perhaps contradictory customs, traditions, and beliefs—and that ‘culture conflict’ might explain at least partly why human beings seem to have such an inordinate fondness for war. In this way, apparently simple descriptions become concepts with explanatory power.

Such social scientific description and creation, however, does have a purpose, and it is a purpose that it shares with myth and religion. All three can be perceived as part of an ongoing human endeavour to understand the world and those who live in it. Myth, religion, and science are products of human curiosity and creativity, and are not specific to any single society or culture, but are shared by all. Therefore, the story of social science is, and must be, a global story.

The purpose of this book is to introduce the ‘facts and things’ of social science, or, more scientifically, the concepts and theories associated with the work of sociologists, anthropologists, and others who may be identified as social scientists. The aim is not to uncover ‘the truth’, but to figure out which ideas and theories help us to understand cultural and social life as we experience it now. At a time when globalisation (one of the concepts we will explore) has brought and continues to bring us into closer and more frequent communication with others throughout the world, those ideas and theories that help us understand global connections are particularly important. We begin here with a brief exploration of the foundational concepts (the ‘things’) of social science—society, structure, culture, and nation and state—before discussing the ‘new’ concept of globalisation. While it may seem that ‘globalisation’ can simply be added to the existing conceptual set as a way of linking one society to another, it will become apparent that globalisation provokes some rethinking and reworking of the foundational concepts.

**Society**

Society refers to ‘a system of interrelationships which connects individuals together’ (Giddens 1990: 22). Marvin Harris adds to this the idea of a ‘common habitat’ or environment within which members of a society depend on one another for survival and well-being (1983: 6). It is the links between individuals, groups, and institutions that the concept of ‘society’ stresses, to the extent that sociology, the study of modern society, may be characterised as not the study of human individuals, but of relations and relationships between humans. As Bryan Turner has put it, sociology is the study of friendship, which is the ‘ultimate social cement’ (1984: 11).
In everyday discussions, society is often spoken of as if it were something apart from human beings, a faceless thing that nevertheless influences and constrains our actions and thoughts. Hence we may say, 'society today forces women to forever strive to be thinner', or we may explain a fistfight between two young boys with the words, ‘but society allows, even expects, men to be physically active and rough, particularly with each other’. When we speak in this way we are reifying society; that is, we are turning the concept ‘society’ into a concrete thing, and by so doing blocking off any real attempt to understand what is going on when men fight and women diet. Simply, if healthy and attractive women think of themselves as fat and ugly, we may learn a great deal by inviting women and men to talk about what they consider to be the attributes of an attractive woman. We might also like to investigate whether any group gains in some way from this (mis)perception—for example, companies that produce ‘diet foods’. In this way we can work towards an understanding of what we might call the ‘social pressure’ to be thin, recognising as we do that this pressure emanates from interactions between people, and between people and their products, such as the body images used in advertising and films. To blame eating disorders on ‘society’, as if ‘society’ were a wilful being, is to make an object of an abstract concept, and to hinder any analysis.

In recent years, references to ‘world society’ have become more common, primarily as part of an attempt to grasp the ways in which individuals and groups are connected, knowingly or not, to other individuals and other groups in other parts of the world. More conventionally, however, societies are imagined as bounded and separate, and frequently the boundaries are assumed to be contiguous with the boundaries of a nation state: hence we may speak of French society, or Australian society. There are a number of problems associated with mapping ‘society’ onto ‘nation’, as will shortly see. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that the perennial problem with the concept of society has always been where to place a society’s borders. Some social scientists consider the ‘border issue’ to be so problematic that they suggest doing away with the concept of society altogether and replacing it with something like ‘polity’, which would include ‘societies’ that go beyond the borders of a state or nation—the European Union is one example (Walby 2003). In everyday social science language, however, ‘society’ is still the most common referent for a group of human beings who comprise a community that has distinct institutions and patterns of interrelatedness.

STRUCTURE

‘Structure’ has been used to refer to the basic ordering principles or deep structures of the human mind that organise and categorise human apprehension of the world, as well as to the pattern of social relations or social structure. The French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss (1963) is associated with the first notion of structure. His approach, known
as ‘structuralism’, holds that mental and cultural systems are built up on the basis of contrast, founded on elementary and binary oppositions. These oppositions include nature/culture, left/right, raw/cooked, centre/periphery, and man/woman. Each is defined by the other: hence, the definition of ‘raw’ is ‘uncooked’, while the definition of ‘right’ is ‘not left’. In structuralism, Lévi-Strauss provides us with a real insight into the structure of language and the means by which as human beings we all comprehend the world—do we not, on first encountering something new, attempt to comprehend what it is not, as well as what it is? But often structuralism seems to afford too great a determining role to ‘structure’ and too little to human agency or action. Thus we might all agree that our position in the social structure—as man or woman, of the elite or of the common people—does determine much in our lives, but we might also argue that the meaning of man or woman, or who constitutes the elite, also depends on people’s actions and is subject to change over time. The relative contribution of structure versus agency is perhaps the crucial debate of social science, and many answers have been offered, as shown in Chapter 2.

**CULTURE**

‘Culture is the learned, socially acquired traditions and lifestyles of the members of a society, including their patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling and acting’ (Harris 1983: 5). In a definition that has become famous, the US cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes culture as ‘an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life’ (1985 [1966]: 3). To the definition of culture as encompassing learnt traditions and lifestyles, as well as ways of comprehending and understanding that makes those traditions and lifestyles meaningful, can be added the notion of material culture; that is, the objects and artefacts produced within a culture. In practice, these different aspects are interwoven: hence, we might long to purchase a particular car (material culture) not just because we need it to get to work, or for supermarket shopping (work and shopping being part of our customs and traditions), but also because ownership of that particular make and model conveys a status and prestige (meaning system) upon the owner. Cars are material utilitarian objects, but they also have cultural meanings, as anyone who has driven a reliable but old, clapped-out rust bucket would be well aware.

Culture is not greatly invoked by sociologists during the so-called classic phase of sociology (late eighteenth to early twentieth centuries), although there are important exceptions. Max Weber’s sociology, for example, paid particular attention to meaning, and Geertz’s definition of culture is clearly indebted to that German sociologist. Instead, culture is frequently taken for granted, as reflecting something else in society
or as acting as a constraint on action. Roland Robertson (1992) discusses the ways in which ‘culture’ has resurfaced in sociology, in sociology’s concern with the global, and through its interactions with the field of cultural studies. Indeed, new students of social science may well associate a study of ‘culture’ with the field of cultural studies rather than with sociology, or with the discipline that historically has been much preoccupied with culture—anthropology.

Anthropology has a long tradition of field work; that is, of living in a community for a year or more and becoming to some extent part of that community, while gathering information about the community and finally writing an account of that community’s way of life, or culture. At least until relatively recently, this field work was conducted in foreign places. The ‘foreign’ place was more accurately foreign in thought, rather than in geographical location. Thus, Native Americans were ‘foreign’ and white Americans were not. Indigenous Australians also were ‘foreign’, whereas white Australians were not (Trouillot 1991). The task of the anthropologist was to discover, interpret, analyse, and write down the culture of the foreigner, or the Other, a task that entailed myriad activities: collecting genealogies (by making lists of who was married to whom and who was descended from whom); recording rules of land tenure; observing rituals; and talking, insofar as the anthropologist had fluency, with Others about ‘what in the world they thought they were doing’, to paraphrase Geertz (1983). What was uncovered in this process of talking, listening, observing, and recording—what anthropologists call ‘participant observation’—was ‘the learned, socially acquired traditions and lifestyles of the members of a society, including their patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling and acting’ (Harris 1983: 5); in other words, their culture.

Whether or not the idea that anthropologists were the culture experts, and that culture could be captured through participant observation, was ever really fixed in anthropologists’ minds, it is certain that a critical and self-questioning (or reflexive) turn in the social sciences from the mid-1970s permanently made such a notion delusional. Firstly feminist and then postmodern and other critical scholars questioned the ways in which culture had been represented, and demonstrated that writing about culture always entailed writing from a particular, and partial, point of view (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Abu-Lughod 1991, 1998). For example, attention to the ideas and practices of elite men in any society may lead to an account of culture as they see it, but this account is not likely to concur with culture as experienced by men who are not of the elite, or by women. Such a recognition prompts any number of questions, from ‘Whose culture are we discussing?’ to ‘Do outsiders have any right to claim knowledge of another culture?’ From these questions emerged the field of cultural studies, as well as new styles of anthropological inquiry. Sociology also rediscovered culture, particularly through explorations of popular or mass culture, youth culture, and ethnic cultures. Cultural analysis may now fairly be claimed as a central preoccupation of the social sciences in general.
NATION AND STATE

A state exists where there is a single form of internal governance that comprises a political apparatus (including courts, parliament, and a civil service) and that rules over a given territory, whose authority is backed by a legal system and by the capacity to use force to implement its policies. This sort of sovereign state, with its clearly demarcated borders and rule of law, is historically relatively recent. Even more recent is the combination of the state with the idea of the nation, to produce the concept of a nation state. Conventionally, modern societies are characterised as nation states (Walby 2003).

Essential to the notion of the nation state is nationalism, or a sense of ‘we the people’. Benedict Anderson (1983) has suggested that the nation is an ‘imagined community’, the members of which view themselves as connected to each other through the shared rights and responsibilities inherent in citizenship of the state, as well as through shared language, culture, and history. According to Anderson, the foundation for imagining national communities was the spread of technologies of print production, which created unified fields of communication and exchange. Distinct dialects merged to become single languages—Italian, for example, or English—through which emerged the idea of the ‘Italian nation’ or the ‘English people’. The ‘shared communion’ (Anderson 1983: 44) of the nation is imagined rather than actual, because while the citizens of a nation state might have a common experience of, for example, the state’s education or legal systems, and might all read the same national newspaper, they have personal knowledge of very few in their massive community. In actuality, they are more divided by ethnic background, by gender, and by their place in the social structure than they are united. Hence a definition of nation as ‘a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories’ (Anthony Smith 1991: 14) refers to few, if any, nation states. Rather, states are likely to include a number of ‘nations’; that is, groups of people who think of themselves as sharing a territory, culture, and history. A sense of a shared national community has become even more problematic with the rise of the internet, and of its virtual communities (Gruzd et al. 2011; Tiryakian 2011) which allow non-resident nationals to participate, albeit virtually, in their home nation. Conversely, many nations, modern or historical, have lacked any state affiliation. For example, the British state includes Scottish, Welsh, and English nations, while both the Jewish and the Palestinian nations have for longer or shorter periods been without a state.

One might conclude that the nation state is a fiction, or a myth. However, we must recall here that myths have effects in the real world, and that fiction may provoke action. One example of the power of such a fiction may be seen in the contemporary Olympic Games, where nation states vie with each other for a place on the winner’s podium, and the talk is of how well or how badly Greece, or China, or the USA is faring in the competition. Competitors compete for their nation state, not their nation, and are identified as, for example, ‘a world-class British sprinter’, not ‘a very fast Welsh runner’.
At home, the imagined community is hard at work, presenting the star competitors as belonging to us, to the nation. Thus Cathy Freeman, an Australian Olympic gold medallist, is called ‘our Cathy’ by the national media, and this is despite the fact that she is an Aboriginal Australian, a member of a group that until recent decades has not enjoyed the same human rights as other Australians, and has in effect been separated from the Australian nation. Given the right sorts of circumstances—and national prestige is one—the nation state claims those who reside within its borders as its own, as its people. As Jonathan Friedman has commented, the nation state may be viewed as an ‘assimilation machine’ (2002: 39), a ‘citizenry-based development project’ (2002: 38), busily manufacturing ‘the Australian’, or ‘the Indian’.

GLOBALISATION

While society, social structure, culture, state, and nation have been developed as concepts that refer to essentially static, bounded, and separate ‘things,’ ‘globalisation’ is not a thing but a process, and one that is seen to have effect on societies, cultures, and nations. Here, we will outline the main approaches to globalisation in some detail, as it is crucial to an understanding of both contemporary societies and cultures, and to the ways in which conventional notions of ‘society’ and ‘culture’ need to be refined if they are to remain useful to social science’s endeavour to understand the human world.

Globalisation may be defined as a process whereby hitherto bounded societies are experiencing increasing cross-border flows of people, goods, services, ideas, information, money, images, knowledge, and culture. This process includes technological innovation in the field of communication and information, advances in the field of transportation, and organisational innovation, particularly the organisation of production across countries (Ietto-Gillies 2003: 143). In this process, the activities of transnational corporations (referred to as TNCs) are crucial insofar as they plan, organise, and control business activities across countries. TNCs include the world’s major oil companies, as well as manufacturing giants such as Matsui, Mitsubishi, Nestlé, and British American Tobacco. Some TNCs have larger economies than many states.

The process of globalisation is not confined to the field of economics. Other scholars (for example Harvey 1989; Giddens 1990) have emphasised the ways in which globalisation upsets the former relationship between space and time, so that instead of thinking, for example, of a journey in terms of distance (it is 400 kilometres from Florence to Venice), we have come to think of it in terms of time (it is four hours by train) or through a combination, a space-time compression (it is four hours by fast train and six by a regular service). The experience of the processes of globalisation has also created, and continues to create, a new awareness among people; a sense of what Robertson (1992) has called ‘the world as a single place’. It should be emphasised, however, that the same forces that have contributed to globalism—a sense of the world
as a single place—have also prompted local diversities, disruptions and confrontations (de Sousa Santos 2006). Political conflict and ethno-nationalist movements have resulted in the creation of new nation states, and some hitherto robust political and economic unions—the European Union, for example—have in recent years struggled to maintain unity in the face of the weakening or collapse of their member nations’ financial systems, and consequently of the shared currency. In so far as the Global Financial Crisis, as this collapse was termed, was itself a product of a global banking network, it does demonstrate the inherent contradiction of globalisation: Shiva-like, it simultaneously creates and destroys, unites and drives apart.

We return to the contradictions of globalisation in Chapter 3. Much of the literature depicts globalisation as a new process, one that is transforming what had been a divided world. Although there is lively debate over the origins of globalisation—for example, as we will see in later chapters, it has been argued that the major world religions have had a global presence and have made claims to global authority long before the term ‘globalisation’ came into being—there is general agreement that the globalising forces of the last several decades represent something essentially new, and something that people directly experience every day. We might think of a young woman sitting at an Ikea-manufactured desk in her bedroom, using a Netbook (or a tablet, or even an old-fashioned PC), wearing a baseball cap with a Coca Cola label on it, and grinning into the web cam while eating instant noodles and, via Skype, Facebook and Twitter, communicating with friends from all over the world. This young woman could be Japanese, North American, Swedish, or Malaysian, and the friends with whom she communicates may be known to her only via their on-screen presence, or they may include mates who attend her school. This mixture of places, cultures, and spaces is not something our web-cam stars read about in a textbook: it is something they experience in their everyday life. For this young woman, the notion of the world as a single place is simple common sense.

However, the experience of globalisation, and the extent to which it incorporates, or invades, particular societies and cultures, is not equal and uniform. One argument insists that globalisation merely stands for the expansion of capitalism and its relations of production, with all the attendant miseries of exploitation and inequality. We might offer as evidence the fact that relatively few of the world’s youth have access to a reliable electricity supply, let alone a computer and a room of their own. More positive interpretations view globalisation as a liberating force, which frees markets and people alike. This view might argue that globalisation has already brought computers and rooms of one’s own to at least some hitherto poor farming societies, as well as education, food, and health care. While this is statistically verifiable—the World Bank’s annual World Development Report provides useful statistics on economic growth and quality of life—it is also true that globalisation has not yet significantly altered the wealthy/poor division in the world. Certainly some poorer states are economically far stronger
than was the case 20 years previously—China is but one example—but this growth has not been at the expense of the wealthier nations. Rather, the main beneficiaries of globalisation, at least as measured in economic terms, have been the already wealthy nations (Guillén 2001: 247).

Following Guillén (2001), de Sousa Santos (2006, 2010), Turner (2008), and Holton (2011), we can identify five key and ongoing debates concerning the process and significance of globalisation. The first debate centres on the existence or otherwise of globalisation itself. Early studies of globalisation—Hirst & Thompson (1996) are a good example—argued that the process had been exaggerated and that the economy was becoming more international, but not more global. Such a view readily agreed that the world’s nations and states were becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent, but contended that much of that interconnection was concentrated in Western Europe, North America, and Japan, and had yet to expand outside that triad (Guillén 2001: 243). However, in the early years of this century, the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) nations emerged as global centres of economic growth, in addition to and often in direct competition with, the old ‘triad.’ Other nations—Indonesia and South Africa, for example—have come to play more prominent global roles. That which de Sousa Santos terms ‘neo-liberal’ globalisation (2010), a mix of economic liberalisation, deregulation, and privatisation, is everywhere in evidence. In the economic sphere, then, globalisation is entrenched. In the social, cultural, and political fields, globalisation has more complex effects, as we will see.

The second debate focuses on convergence, or the tendency for societies to move towards a uniform pattern of economic, political, and cultural organisation. In this view, the integration of the world’s societies and cultures and the creation of multiple interdependencies means that those distinctions conventionally drawn by social scientists, between North and South, East and West, or core and periphery of the world system, have become less meaningful. Globalisation is creating a new form of society (see Connell 2007: 53). While there is clear evidence for this trend (membership of the European Union, for example, is dependent on a state being able to demonstrate its conformity to the economic and political organisation of existing EU member states), it is equally obvious that cultures have retained a distinctiveness, and that capitalism, while global, does not manifest in exactly the same guise in all parts of the world. The United Kingdom and Australia, for example, retain strong welfare-state tendencies, epitomised by systems of universal health care, but the USA has never had any such framework. At this point in time, the argument for convergence is inconclusive, but it is worth noting that convergence and distinctiveness or diversity are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed, much of the recent literature on globalisation points to just this: as de Sousa Santos remarks, ‘Strangely enough, globalization seems to combine universality and the elimination of national borders, on the one hand, with rising particularity, local diversity, ethnic identity and a return to communitarian values,
on the other’ (2006: 393). Globalisation may then be conceived as a linking of diverse localities (Robertson 1992) rather than a global branding exercise, wherein all states will become slightly different models of the same make.

There is still no definitive answer to the questions of whether societies are becoming more and more alike, and whether the world is becoming a single place. However, it does seem clear that static notions of society, culture, and nation state will not help us in thinking about and formulating responses to these debates. The foundational concepts are in need of an overhaul, particularly the notion of a bounded nation state. This is precisely the focus of the third key debate, which questions whether globalisation undermines the authority of nation states. The argument here is that the process of globalisation has outgrown the international system of states, by locating much economic and political activity outside the authority of any nation state. Hence, TNCs, which operate across nation states, are beholden to no particular state. Certainly the actions of states affect TNCs, but the globalisation of banking, finance, and production does allow a TNC to remove itself from a ‘hostile’ state and relocate in another, more inviting, host state. Thus if Brazil no longer wants Nike factories, then surely Indonesia or Bangladesh still might.

At the same time, within the political sphere, global institutions such as the United Nations (UN) may enact policies and make declarations that directly affect the internal organisation and politics of a state, whether or not that state is a member of the UN. For example, as shown in Chapter 9, UN conventions on racial discrimination were crucial to the recognition by the Australian state of the right of Indigenous Australians—at least in some cases—to native title over traditional lands. In recent years, the UN has repeatedly intervened in the domestic politics of many nations, including Afghanistan, Serbia, Croatia, East Timor, Indonesia, and Iraq. Whether one agrees with this interventionist action or not, it is the case that the UN does intervene, and this intervention is not always at the invitation of the nation in question. For these reasons, the concept of a bounded and sovereign nation state requires some refinement. At the very least, we need to recognise that there are significant polities in addition to nation states, which frequently cut across nation states. In her list of polities, Walby (2003) also includes organised religions, such as Catholicism and Islam, as well as regional groups such as the European Union. The point to recognise here is that these polities, like nation states, also command loyalty and exercise power in ways that may either strengthen or threaten the power and authority of the nation state.

The fourth debate is concerned with the relationship between globalisation and modernity. Modernity may be described as an outgrowth of a Western world view, one that values rationality, reason, and progress, and seeks to establish capitalist economies and rational government. The ‘modern world’ is the Western capitalist world: one approach argues that globalisation is nothing more than an intensification and expansion of the modernity ‘model’ to the rest of the world. In this view, then, there is nothing new
about the process of globalisation. However, the argument that globalisation represents a historically new process is more compelling. Globalisation differs from the modern expansion of the world economy in the nineteenth century in that it does not so much link markets and places, but fuses and in so doing transforms them (Korbin 1997; Held et al. 1999; de Sousa Santos 2010). Unlike modernity, which was dominated by a single world view, globalisation is multiple and hybrid.

The fifth and final debate, and the most controversial, concerns the rise of a global culture. We will consider this debate in more detail in Chapter 5. We note that as a concept of social science, culture has always been tied to place: hence, we speak of French culture or Italian culture. For a global culture to exist, culture must be divorced from place, and to some extent such a ‘disembedding’ or ‘deterritorialisation’ (Tomlinson 1999) of culture does appear to be in process. For example, Marc Auge (2008) has commented on the proliferation of what he terms ‘non-places’, which are similar to George Ritzer’s idea of ‘nothings’ (2003). Non-places and nothings are where face-to-face interaction, or simply talk, is replaced by mute signs. An airport is one example; automatic teller machines and supermarkets are another. It is possible to complete one’s business in these non-places without ever uttering a word, or without any understanding of the language of the place within which this non-place is situated. Because supermarkets and airports are each organised in an essentially similar fashion the world over, an English speaker finds it no more difficult to buy a bunch of grapes in Seattle than in Rome, and no more difficult to check in for a flight at Hong Kong than at Heathrow.

In this view, global culture is a culture of nothings and ‘no-wheres’. Another view identifies consumerism as global culture, noting that it serves to standardise tastes and desires: hence, everyone wants to be thin, and young, and eat fast food, and watch North American movies. In this view, global culture represents a creeping Americanisation of the world (Turner 2008). Finally, a third approach to global culture utilises the notion of ‘glocalisation’ (Robertson 1995; Turner 2008) to argue that cultures may pick and choose from the standard global menu, and in their selection may strengthen their distinctiveness, rather than lose it. To give a simple example, the McDonald’s menu is glocalised for each culture, so that in Indonesia you order your burger with a side of rice and chilli sauce; in Australia you may eat a McOz burger that includes slices of beetroot, and dip your fries in tomato sauce; while in Belgium and the Scandinavian countries your fries come with mayonnaise. Glocalisation, a term invented by Japanese business to denote a particular micromarketing strategy of refining the product to fit the consumer, suggests that globalisation is a process within which diversity can be protected, and even encouraged.

Finally, the sorts of developments in technology and communications that are part of the globalisation process—such as fast and affordable air travel, and high-speed, ‘always on’ internet connections—have aided in the ‘deterritorialisation’ of culture insofar as
they allow people to live in, and make homes within, more than one nation. This idea has been explored within the context of migration studies, and is considered in detail in Chapter 9.

**CONCLUSION**

The social sciences offer a way of thinking about human beings, their products, and their interactions that is both compelling and enlightening. Each individual has their own personal biography and each group their own history, but when we begin to think in terms of concepts like ‘culture’, ‘globalisation’, and ‘nation’, we can begin to sort out what may be unique to us as an individual person, and what links us to a particular place, a particular time, or a particular gender. Certainly we are all individuals, but we live in society and we collectively create culture. To recognise this is to exercise what the US sociologist C. Wright Mills (1970 [1959]) has famously called ‘the sociological imagination’.

**QUESTIONS TO THINK WITH**

1. How do anthropologists and sociologists learn about culture? You might like to consider Bronislaw Malinowski’s discussion of his field methods (1961 [1922]: 1–25), and Clifford Geertz’s essay on the nature of anthropological understanding (1983). Are these methods appropriate to the investigation of culture today?

2. List the characteristics of the mall and the supermarket that mark it as a non-place. Are you persuaded that this list has produced a satisfactory description of the human experience of the mall and the supermarket?

3. Is there more than one nation in the state where you now live? Why do you describe these other groups as ‘nations’? Are relations between the nations that comprise your state amicable and based on equality or do they have a different basis?

**FURTHER READING**

