

# 1 Knowledge: Articulation and Consequence in Global Transformations

The trouble with the contemporary condition of our modern civilization is that it stopped questioning itself. Not asking certain questions is pregnant with more dangers than failing to answer questions already on the agenda; while asking the wrong kind of questions all too often helps to avert eyes from the truly important issues. The price of silence is paid in the hard currency of human suffering. Asking the right question marks, after all, the difference between fate and destination, drifting and traveling. Questioning the ostensibly unquestionable premises of our way of life is arguably the most urgent of the services we owe our fellow humans and ourselves.

—Zygmunt Bauman, *“Globalization: The Human Consequences”*

Knowledge transforms social life, institutions on all scales, and the character of the world. But that axiom’s limitations, and potentials, are much too poorly understood, especially for how much we believe it to be true.<sup>1</sup>

## Knowledge and Change

Not all accounts of transformations attribute terrific significance to knowledge. Environmental shifts, demographic pressures, changes in the mode of production, and alterations in state capacities to wage war or collect resources are among the greater explanations of social transformation. But even in these instances, knowledge plays a typically critical role.

That critical role is most obvious in the commentary beginning this chapter. Zygmunt Bauman offers the characteristic nightmare problem of which not only intellectuals should be afraid. We can dedicate our lives, our institutions, and our worlds to refining our answers to the questions posed by our particular domains of expertise and particular interests or ideologies.

But what if those questions, those domains, those interests and ideologies, are misplaced in their emphasis, direction, or concern? What if we are asking the wrong questions? That's ultimately the most foundational knowledge question, but it cannot be the most consensual. After all, we are far more likely to agree on the importance of a question, or knowledge, when we can see its significance in an already constituted body of knowledge. That, ipso facto, makes any *disciplined* critical question rarely so heretical as Bauman's urgent service. We more typically, especially in this era, focus on technology.

When viewed on the grandest scale, as Gerhard Lenski has offered, this "information about how to use the material resources of the environment to satisfy human needs" (Lenski, Nolan, and Lenski 1995, 42) is the most transformative knowledge of social relations (Kennedy 2004a). From the development of horticulture and then the plow to the revolution in the means by which we communicate with each other electronically, innovations in technology are central to change. And with those transformations, technology becomes central to our ideologies of change.

Those who wish to minimize the energy crisis argue that new modes for extracting fossil fuels will enable us to continue relying on a carbon energy base. Some of those who put their hopes on new greener technologies for saving our planet from global warming put similar stock in the relationship between knowledge and global transformations. And in energy's example, the significance of technology's embeddedness in culture and social relations becomes apparent.

That embeddedness is long recognized. Karl Marx (Marx and Engels [1848] 2012) never argued that the enormous dynamism of capitalist innovation was the single motor of change. It mattered also because it was driven by conflicts within and across classes. Max Weber ([1905] 1930) proposed that what counted was not just matters of accounting; rather, a certain kind of knowledge about God initially moved capitalists to accumulate wealth vigorously. Much more recently, Manuel Castells (2009), Saskia Sassen (2008), and others take the microelectronics revolution seriously, but they explain global transformations by considering the technology's interactions with other social forces. Energy technology optimists don't assume that new and appropriate technologies will emerge by themselves. People who consider the question will argue that one might develop such economically and environmentally consequential technologies only under pressures of market demand or state intervention.

In this sense, the “knowledge” critical here is not just of the technology in question but the accompanying forms of knowledge embedded in the world and about the world that make any technology matter. Are these understandings of the world also knowledge?

Technological innovation typically claims the knowledge mantle with ease given that it reflects an unprecedented combination of information or its application to novel circumstances. But characterizations of markets and demands about adoption of green technology are often debated as if they are ideological rather than knowledgeable interventions into change. The climate warming debate illustrates this problem.

Although most scientists expert in the field debate within parameters assuming unprecedented human contributions to global warming,<sup>2</sup> a few scientists challenge those frameworks. Their interventions in turn lead some beyond the scientific community to charge ideological bias to the scientific majority’s discussion. That in turn moves similar charges against these accusers. This debate between minority and majority turns less on scientific terms and more on the ways in which science is shaped by social forces beyond the laboratory, on how knowledge is embedded in, or apart from, the world (Hoffman 2011; Keller 2009).

Categorical thinking about science—is it apart from or embedded in the world?—is all too common and naïve whatever its conclusion. Sociologists are more inclined to ask about degrees of autonomy for science, or forms of influence of the world on science making. But this is not just a sociological question, as the climate science debate illustrates. It is a profoundly important public issue and a place where sophisticated thinking helps. One might ask about the conditions of science’s autonomy, building on Robert Merton’s (1973) famous account of the ethos of science. One might also consider the ways in which specific scientific problems are tracked through networks and actors both human and nonhuman, as Bruno Latour (2005) and his colleagues would have it. Pithily put, one might argue that one must develop a social science to use science well in public policy (Prewitt, Schwandt, and Straf 2012). These approaches, and this general question about science in the world, are only particulars in a much larger problem.

## Globalizing Knowledge

I suspect relatively few of you in reading the preceding passages thought much about what I meant when I referred to the “world.” As in many discussions about the relationship between something and “the world,” the something is taken more seriously than what we mean when we refer to the world. The world is typically posed as background, everything beyond that something. That vision homogenizes and simplifies all beyond focus. The world is typically cast as if one’s own social and biophysical environments are the imagined community of that world, with more distant places and peoples dim reflections, in positive or negative terms, of a more familiar existence.

This kind of ethnocentrism, a familiar sociological condition (Hughes 1961), is becoming less viable with revolutions in information and communication technologies and the relative ease of travel. The physical conditions of the familiar have changed. Some believe that the world is developing a more cosmopolitan disposition as a consequence (Beck 2006), making the globalization of knowledge a matter of everyday life. That cosmopolitanism typically does not engage adequately the challenge of difference (Calhoun 1995), especially when globalization is its vehicle.

Globalization, as concept, had its early academic supporters (Robertson 1992), but especially in my discipline it seemed to have had more detractors (e.g., Arrighi and Silver 1999). It blended too many notions. It was insufficiently distinct from earlier world systems theory. It was too self-congratulatory. Regardless of its intellectual adequacy, the concept took off in the public sphere during the 1990s, aided and abetted by pundits like Tom Friedman (1999). He helped his readers appreciate the distinction of this system that appeared to reduce the importance of state and cultural differences because it focused on flows of both tangible and intangible goods across boundaries.

In this vision, it’s especially easy to see knowledge flowing seamlessly across boundaries and differences of all sorts, especially for Friedman’s readers. Exemplified by Friedman himself, cross-cultural competence was simple. His readers might trust that most of the world worth knowing already knew the English language. Those places still out of sync would have to put on the “golden straitjacket” (Friedman 1999, 105) Friedman’s globalization system demanded in order to be relevant.<sup>3</sup> Universities were very much a part of that system and, in some ways, remain so today.

Higher education is one of globalization's big businesses. The debate around its place in the World Trade Organization's General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) illustrated that importance in globalization's heyday (Verger 2009). The globalizing knowledge system was also evident in the alliances universities began striking across the world in the 1990s. The scripts were not too varied. Consider, for example, how the themes offered by the higher education alliance Universitas 21 highlighted their own distinctions in ways that have mirrored so many others:

providing a forum for university leaders; preparing students for life in a globalised society, inspiring a global perspective through international mobility, stimulating and challenging collaborative thinking, nurturing and developing careers, delivering joint teaching and degrees, promoting innovation in research-inspired teaching, sharing experience and best practices.<sup>4</sup>

I have participated in this world of globalizing knowledge over the last decades. In the beginning I took careful notes, not realizing that I would hear the same leitmotifs over and over again. In one of my first such gatherings at a conference entitled "The University Summit in Kyushu: 2000 International Symposium on Universities' Past and Present," I was especially taken with Sir Graeme Davies, principal and vice chancellor of the University of Glasgow in Scotland. He identified the "global imperative" facing higher education. Among others, he made the following points:

1. "Systematizing internationalization will become more central to the strategic plans and objectives of universities aspiring to the highest status. But international strategies and linkages tend to have second-order priority being pursued only as sources of income intended to augment and sustain the perceived core activities of the universities."
2. More systematic thinking is important, however, because universities "are likely to find themselves in more hostile political circumstances as competition for national and international resources becomes more fierce."
3. "Without careful planning, the most probable outcome in dealing with increasing economic and political pressures will be a set of piecemeal, disjointed, ad hoc responses strongly dominated by local pragmatism."

Even though his manifesto is more than a decade old at the time of this writing, it's remarkable just how little this kind of challenge, and response,

changes. However, sometimes one can push the envelope and ask leading questions.

One of my duties during my time as vice provost for international affairs at the University of Michigan (1999–2004) was to think a bit more deeply about what these kinds of international ambitions meant and what we ought to discuss as we proposed to globalize our work. Several Michigan colleagues responded to such questions about the meaning of globalizing knowledge (U-M Faculty 2001). Linda Lim (2001), a professor at one of the schools especially dedicated to globalization within the university, offered the most institutionally critical set of comments:

In this view, “globalization” of the American university may mean simply offering American programs and teaching American models to foreigners at home or abroad—as in “We have a campus in Singapore” or “We offer programs in London” or “International students are 30 percent of our class,” ergo, we are “global.” Or it may be taken to mean sending our own students or faculty abroad on “exchanges” for training, internship and research collaboration, many of which involve merely replicating or extending in “their” territory what we already do here, and conducted in our language, not theirs. . . . Importing non-U.S. faculty and students . . . may actually undermine the globalization of the American intellectual universe if it results in institutionalization of the belief that “The rest of the world comes to us, so we don’t have to learn about the rest of the world.” . . . It is not surprising, then, that so many around the world dismiss “globalization” as a smokescreen for “American domination,” and are beginning to resist the spread or at least question the superiority of the “American gospel” of free markets and even of democracy. . . . The hegemonic U.S. university’s ethnocentric and parochial misidentification of the intellectual challenge of globalization could actually *diminish* our capacity to understand, interact with, and enrich the “globalized” world in which we live. Only rarely does it acknowledge the importance of globalization in the *intellectual content* of what its members research, study, teach and learn—the language, culture, business or scientific practices of the “other.”

Lim’s views were not typical in her business school, but after the shock of September 11, 2001, the significance of recognizing difference, and hegemony, became much more apparent.

Understandably, the first and most important thing to do when facing catastrophe is to grieve and then offer compassion and solidarity to those who

have suffered most. I wrote this in my notes during the couple of months succeeding that consequential day:

The count of 2001's victims numbed our minds; their obituaries, steadily published for months afterward, made us grieve many times over. The variety of their life stories made the violence seem even more horrific, for these stories showed us that this was not only an attack on America. It was also an assault on humanity, leaving families and friends, communities, and nations around the world in extraordinary pain. There were no easy words to convey our collective distress, but there were many acts of individual solidarity that helped the victims, the heroes and their kin—the donations of blood, the flow of money, the benefit concerts, the memorial observances.<sup>5</sup>

Within the University of Michigan (UM), there were exceptional efforts undertaken to support grieving students, staff, and faculty. As on many college campuses, on September 12 an extraordinary candlelight vigil assembled more than fifteen thousand students, staff, faculty, and friends to grieve together. On September 14, a remarkable concert organized by the UM School of Music channeled some of that pain. At some point, however, we needed to consider the ways in which this attack should, or shouldn't, affect our global mission.

On September 18, I organized a symposium on globalization and terrorism that drew more than one thousand people to listen to President Lee Bollinger, the business school dean Bob Dolan, and experts in religion, security, violence, and global loss to begin to process this into analytical frameworks. Dolan's remarks, especially in light of Linda Lim's observations, were most illuminating:

A member of my visiting committee . . . said to me, "we were educated about global challenges but not educated about real-world perceptions, perceptions that we would not like to hear. Our students cannot and should not be sheltered from this." And so that, I think, is the change I would take from this—that we have to do the research and find ways to really communicate to the future leaders of businesses how they can understand the new global realities in order to create a situation where we can contribute to society along with our capabilities. (cited in Kennedy and Weiner 2003)

Of course, Dolan's observations were most compelling for those embedded in the globalization system and sympathetic to its promoters like Tom Friedman.

Those who recognized the challenge of difference—whether the difference between the victims of the attacks of 9/11 and those who might celebrate that assault, or between those who saw globalization as a variation on a well-worn practice of exploitation and ignorance by the world’s wealthiest classes and those who saw it as a qualitatively new system of opportunity—might just see in Dolan’s words a bit too little, too late. And certainly over the last decade, the last century’s globalization looks positively anachronistic.

Friedman’s thoughts, even when amended by his subsequent publications, show their age. The straitjacket doesn’t look so golden, and in fact, Brazil, China, and India, at the least, point to an alternative global order in which what some call “the Global South” leads, and does not adapt to change initiated elsewhere (e.g., Unger 2005, xvi). As a consequence, we have a new kind of knowledge flow, where differences are diminished across a new set of nations in the name of a common struggle against declining forms of knowledge and power. This is a difference increasingly obvious, but hardly the only one that deserves attention when the world is our reference. The problem, however, is how in the world we recognize critical differences.

If we begin with global climate change as our framework, we might focus on the implications of changing water levels for places of different altitudes. Those in island nations likely consider this an existential question even as it appears too remote from the concerns of those setting global priorities. If emerging markets are our focus, as earlier approaches to globalization would emphasize, China and India seem much more important. If security is our concern, one might better begin with the location from which one poses the question of security itself. Policy makers in Washington, Moscow, Jakarta, and Johannesburg have very different proposals for identifying critical differences in the world. And we know that these differences also change over time as the attack on 9/11 and the Arab Uprisings of 2011 make very clear. One might naturalize these differences as expressions of national interest or world epoch, but that misses the opportunity an inquiry into their sociological formation offers for globalizing knowledge.

This range of invocations about knowledge and the world—from the narrative of connectivity inspired by globalization’s framework, to the challenge of difference heightened for the powerful by concerns over security or felt everyday by those excluded from worldly privilege—illustrates the challenge. Intellectuals and knowledge institutions and networks can easily overlook that challenge by pursuing a narrow definition of knowledge in the world.



Especially for those intellectuals, institutions, and networks moved by Bauman's worry beginning this chapter, we need to better understand the dynamics of globalizing knowledge.<sup>6</sup> That's especially true if we believe it matters for the world's well-being.

Part of the problem is that the term, like globalization itself, smooths over critical differences in its agents, audiences, objects, networks, and power. This series of cascading differences suggests abandoning the notion of globalizing knowledge altogether. Consider, for example, how sociologists might understand the reference (Kennedy and Centeno 2007). Some of my fellow sociologists can speak of globalizing sociology when they use data from other countries. Others, more familiar with various nations' cultures, might suggest deeper encounters by drawing on those nations' historiographies to refine interpretations of data or produce more context-sensitive questions (e.g., Thornton 2004). Others may even suggest that cultural logics of distant civilizations could alter our sense of space and time in practicing our discipline (e.g., Wallerstein 1999). Those variations also shift as they travel across space. For instance, the Bourdieusian approach we know in France or the United States becomes something else entirely in Poland (Warczok and Zarycki 2014). Globalizing knowledge is, even within sociology, a terrible notion. Yet its reference is inescapable in these times.

I seek therefore to elaborate its broader articulation so globalizing knowledge becomes conceptually clearer. I also work to make that clarification useful in both profound and good ways. Especially then for those inspired by Max Weber's methodological example, let me begin with its ideal type.

Globalizing knowledge refers to the process by which distant regions' knowledgeabilities are implicated in the particular cultures fusing those understandings. The form of globalizing knowledge will vary given the different historical and institutional contexts that shape such learning. Globalizing knowledge is, therefore, relationally composed. The *sociology* of globalizing knowledge concerns the conditions, manners, and implications of that fusion. To develop its sociology, one must be hermeneutic (Kennedy 1987). I would advise we consider that hermeneutic at three moments, drawing on the two familiars involved in proper translation and a third moment of elaboration.

First, the sociology of globalizing knowledge demands that we explain how globalizers recognize learning offered by other times and/or places. Here, the challenge of difference is paramount. Second, sociologists should explain how globalizers fuse horizons, building on those distant recognitions. They

should explore how a new common sensibility across planes of difference is cultivated. Finally, as translation occurs across multiple dyads simultaneously, if unequally, synthetic elaborations develop. These articulations are often implicit, but they can become explicit and thus subject to more rational critical discussion. That third moment gives intellectuals and publics, not just the implicated experts, a greater chance to influence how knowledge articulates change. Recognition, translation, and articulation are the three critical moments in the sociology of globalizing knowledge.

My own approach to this sociology of globalizing knowledge is more agent focused than is much work on the sociology of knowledge, translation, and global transformations. This book is about how different kinds of knowledge actors—intellectuals and knowledge institutions and networks—shape, and are shaped by, the mediations of various global flows and contexts through their various professional and public engagements. I have that focus because while I enjoy theory, I am dedicated to its implications for practice, but even in that, theory matters.

I don't have the financial or legislative resources that enable transformational practice as some of the people in my study do. However, my associations with a number of different knowledge institutions and networks have taught me that the cultural schema organizing their work affects how intellectual responsibilities are met and their practices conducted. Thus, while material resources matter,<sup>7</sup> the frameworks through which we recognize them matter maybe even more, especially when knowledge is the coin of the realm.

### Understanding, Intellect, and Articulation

The sociology of knowledge has a rich history and an even more exciting present, especially evident with the elaboration of political epistemics. Andreas Glaeser (2011) challenges us to move away from the sociology of knowledge to the sociology of understanding with various modes—discursive, emotive, and kinesthetic—in tow. He emphasizes the importance of figuring how knowledge comes to be validated and how different validation processes can make that knowledge more and less legitimate. That recognition also should make clear to whose networks of authority particular forms of knowledge belong, an inescapable dimension of knowledge politics. Lewis Coser (1965) left no doubt about where he stood and establishes one end of a knowledge politics spectrum.