



Understanding Social Change

Globalisation - what is it?

Sound of aircraft

Tony Blair:

“Globalisation is changing the whole nature of the nation’s state as power becomes more diffuse, and borders more porous. Technological change is reducing the power and capacity of government to control its domestic economy free from external influence.”

Sound of telephones ringing

Bill Clinton:

“Today I’m pleased to report that the world’s leading economies have linked arms to contain the financial turmoil with bread and growth, not only in emerging markets but in all markets of the world.”

Sound of internet connection and aircraft

Bob Kelly

We’ve just heard some of the views of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton on the potential significance of globalisation, together with a series of background sounds, modern transport, communication systems, etcetera, that are associated with bridging and shrinking the world. Globalisation is certainly a key topic of the present day. The media constantly use the term, corporations clamour to benefit from the process, and protestors demonstrate against it at every opportunity. My name is Bob Kelly. I have with me in the studio Grahame Thompson who’s written widely on the subject from a generally critical perspective. Also with me is Raia Prokhovnik. We have four main aims for this audio. Firstly, we hope to clarify what is meant by the globalisation debates; secondly, we aim to identify key features of the conflicting positions; thirdly, we want to discuss possible winners and losers from what is happening; and finally, want to begin to identify possible strengths and weaknesses in the competing arguments. But first let’s listen to a number of people views on what globalisation is all about.

Man

Globalisation to me means something to do with the way money, information and technology is being spread throughout the world.

Man

The world is becoming a smaller place and there’s no real differentiation between different cultures any longer.

Man

Globalisation to me means world domination, basically.

Woman

Unification, everything being the same.

Woman

The world’s getting smaller and it doesn’t matter where you go in the world you will end up finding the same things, cultures are inter-mixing, the world’s shrinking, and we’ll all end up doing the same thing eventually one day, and maybe even look alike.

Man

Globalisation means a total worldwide spread of information, of all technology, of all sorts of things. It means an international totally worldwide situation. The internet, for instance, is a total global thing where people are now logging onto it all over the world, so dissemination of information all over the world.

Bob Kelly

So from those extracts we can hear that people think immediately of the transfer of money and information, of the world becoming a smaller place, of cultures mingling, ideas of world domination, the idea of us all beginning to act and even look alike, and then finally that the idea of the internet links us with information and ideas. So, Graham, what would you identify as the key central phenomena that have been associated with globalisation?

Grahame Thompson

Well I think those extracts and your summary of them are pretty kind of accurate about how globalisation is thought about, I mean one of the fascinating features of it from my point of view is its capacity to inflate and to include more and more and more things, I mean I think it started off really in, with respect, a kind of economic activity, economic relationships internationally, I mean more trade interdependency and more investment integration. Investment integration means that you're kind of linked-up production networks across international boundaries in a network underneath a sort of an idea of a large trans-national corporation going about its business. So I think it started out very much with respect to economic relationships, reducing trade barriers, and increasing trade, and increasing FDI, Foreign Direct Investment. I think added to that of becoming increasing technological diffusion, that is internationalised quickly and with greater impact, then we have growth of kind of cultural relationships, cultural homogenisation, I mean things that weren't mentioned by those clips are things like environmental degradation is now increasingly thought to be internationalised, we've just been hearing recently about sort of epidemics and diseases being included in under the globalisation umbrella. I mean this is the danger in my view, I'll come back to this perhaps later, but what globalisation has done is has this capacity to inflate and expand. Perhaps finally, and perhaps most importantly, in a sense it's kind of undermined to the nation state, or it's thought to, as a kind of viable political entity.

Bob Kelly

Right. Would you like to add anything to that, Ray?

Raia Prokhovnic

Thanks Bob. The phenomena covered by the term globalisation in cultural, political and economic globalisation need to be viewed as interdependent and influencing each other so, you know, the evidence isn't simply neatly divided between these areas of study. Politics is obviously affected by economic developments. Economics is affected by political regulation and legal frameworks, and cultures are influenced by and affect both politics and economics. Furthermore, another point, we need to remember that these phenomena represent a challenge for social scientists. The question facing them is how we can best understand what's happening and the changes in patterns of culture, politics and economics that have been occurring. Now this is an ongoing debate between social scientists that tend to cluster around three different attitudes or approaches, coming out of different academic traditions and disciplines. One group regarding these changes of evidence of a systematic shift called globalisation, another group considering that states still play a major role and that greater interconnectedness tends to revolve around developed countries in particular regions; and a third group considering that nothing fundamental has changed in the way international politics and interactions between economies work. Finally, these phenomena have differential impacts on different groups so, for instance, gender inequalities are a distinctive feature of the phenomena associated with the idea of globalisation.

Bob Kelly

Right, so what we have is really a very complex and multi-fascinated phenomenon that's going on out there with a range of different interpretations.