

# Lecture 4

## Theories of globalisation

15 March 2006

# the “g-word”

- *Globe* (from L. *globus*) 1551 "sphere," "round mass, sphere"
- Sense of "planet earth," or a three-dimensional map of it first used in 1553
- *Globalization* first used in 1959
- 1962: the noun appears in the Oxford English dictionary
- But three decades passed before G was developed in social sciences as a paradigm

# Hyperinflation in the use of the term

- G is applied to almost everything
- “the most abused word of the 21st century”  
(*The Economist*)
- G is both a discursive and a descriptive concept – how we understand G has much to do with our political views and theoretical standing
- G is a terrain of conflicting discourses

# How to explain G?

- Because G has many layers and dimensions, a good theory must explain its complexity
- A theory needs to be adaptable in defining G because the world is changing: “a new world society” is still being formed:
- The “global age” needs a new theory

# Theories of G

(Lechner & Boli, 2005)

- 1. World system theory
- 2. Neorealism/neoliberal institutionalism
- 3. World polity theory
- 4. World culture theory

# 1. World System Theory

- Reflected in readings from Immanuel Wallerstein, Leslie Sklair
- In the 1950s, the dominant theory was modernisation theory; its problem was that some countries were not developing/modernising as predicted – evidence did not fit theory → hence...

# 1. World System Theory

- WST developed out of attempt to explain the failure of certain states to develop
- Looking at Latin America, their economies could not compete, global capitalism forced certain countries into under-development
- Trade is asymmetrical
- Poor countries are dependent on rich states

# 1. World System Theory

- Key concepts:
- CORE: rich & developed states
- PERIPHERY: poor & dependent states
- SEMI-PERIPHERY: the ‘in-between’ tampon zone; semi-industrialised states
- Semiperiphery keeps the system stable



# 1. World System Theory

- Trade & investment concentration
- The core dictates the terms of trade
- Dependency makes the situation of peripheral states even worse (they may even lose their political autonomy)
- The world system perpetuates dominance by the core & dependency of the periphery
- G perpetuates inequality – global economic system is inherently unfair

# 1. World System Theory

- International organisations do not influence the fundamental position of core and periphery *because* most NGOs and IGOs are created by core countries
- The idea that governments and international institutions can make the system ‘fair’ is an illusion (because they always reflect interests of capitalists)

## 2. Neorealism

- Realism and Neorealism dominant in IR theory for several decades
- Realism's central claim: states are dominant actors in world politics; driven by desire to survive and become more powerful (war, military competition)
- Critique of R: states no longer in constant struggle for survival; economic and social issues matter; R better suited to explain 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> c. situation

## 2. Neoliberal institutionalism

- Reflected in Robert Keohane & Joseph Nye:  
**complex interdependence**
- Critical response to realism:
- G produces a more complex system of interdependent states; societies are interconnected in many ways; power and security are not the only thing that matters – states interact over many different kinds of issues

## 2. Neoliberal institutionalism

- Military force is no longer seen as being central to inter-state relations; international organisations are the centre of global politics
- To understand global politics, we have to study what goes on in international organisations (e.g. WTO)

## 2. Neoliberal institutionalism

- World society contains many centres of power; there is no one, single power hierarchy
- Transnational rules and organisations now have much more influence
- States are still important but the system is one of interdependence - other organisations also influence world politics in critical ways
- The use of force is less effective; no hierarchy of issues exists that would be the same for all states

### 3. World polity theory

- Developed in response to modernisation theory, WST and R
- Reflected in John W. Meyer *et.al.*
- Polity = activities and associations of the public, political sphere
- World polity = political structures, associations and culture in the international sphere

### 3. World polity theory

- Contrary to observations of other theories, WPT is focused on the fact that societies have been becoming more similar in terms of their government and state policies
- Isomorphism:
- “trying to account for a world whose societies ... are structurally similar in many unexpected dimensions and change in unexpectedly similar ways”



# 3. World polity theory

- States govern on the basis of cognitive models (which come from the culture and society) – associations, IGOs and NGOs and other states transmit models of how to govern
- Worldwide models are constructed and reproduced through global cultural and associational processes – “models embedded in an overarching world culture”
- States modify their ‘traditions’ in the direction of “world-cultural forms/prescriptions/principles”
- WPT is based on a totally different theory of action: it emphasises the influence of norms and culture – not power

## 4. World culture theory

- A response to world polity theory
- Reflected in Roland Robertson, Arjun Appadurai, Ulf Hannerz
- World culture is new and important BUT it is not as homogeneous as WPT claims

## 4. World culture theory

- World society is a complex set of relations among many different units in the “global field”
- People are becoming aware of the new global reality – the problem of how to live together in one global system
- G compresses the world into a single entity; the emphasis is on cultural compression – all cultures are becoming subcultures within a larger entity = “global ecumene”
- This does not mean homogenisation but “organisation of diversity”
- We will come back to creolisation, glocalisation...

# Readings for Lecture 5:

- **Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy** Arjun Appadurai
- **The Global Ecumene** Ulf Hannerz
- If you want:
- Roland Robertson “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity” in *Global Modernities*