

Lecture 5

Defining globalisation

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You often hear G being described as:

- “Late modernity” or
- “A stage of capitalism” or
- “A new way of thinking” or
- “Modernisation of modernisation” or ...
- (no wonder the sceptics dismiss the emptiness of “globaloney” and “global babble”)

These descriptions show that

- G is at once an *end* and a *beginning*:
- It is a culmination of a long historical process &
- It is a start of many new historical processes, novelties

The issue of definition

- People often have radically different definitions of the term ‘globalisation’
- Confusion persists because even those more specific conceptions of G that do exist are highly diverse (even the ‘experts’ disagree)
- At least 5 broad definitions of G have been distinguished because of the differences in their emphasis and focus (even though they are in some ways related and sometimes even overlap):

5 definitions of G

(Scholte, 2000)

- Internationalisation
- Liberalisation
- Universalisation
- Westernisation or modernisation
- Deterritorialisation or supraterritorialisation

1. Internationalisation

- G = cross-border relations among countries
- G means growing international exchange and inter-dependency
- Emphasising the role of the states & cross-border relations between states (including the enlarged movements of people, messages, ideas between states)
- Proponents argue that the states are not losing importance and that the state borders are far from dissolving

2. Liberalisation

- Focus on eradicating the barriers between states in the sense of ‘free’ global economy & free trade
- Removing government imposed restrictions on trade, foreign-exchange, capital controls etc, between states (GATT => WTO), visas
- G means international economic integration

3. Universalisation

- When the verb ‘globalise’ was coined in 1940s, it meant ‘to universalise’ and expected a planetary synthesis of cultures in a global humanism
- ‘Global’ in this sense means ‘worldwide’
- G is process of spreading objects and experiences to people all over the world

Problems with these definitions

- What is new and distinctive about contemporary globalisation? Interconnections between countries have been intensive even before; what makes the last few decades so different?
- They forget about the uneven impact of G across different parts of the world
- They do not explain the extent to which this interdependence has captured people's imagination

4. Westernisation/modernisation

- Such a definition equates G especially with ‘Americanisation’
- G is sometimes described as imperialism of McDonald’s, CNN, Hollywood
- G = a dynamic whereby social structures of modernity (capitalism, rationalism, industrialism, bureaucratism etc.) are spread all over the world, usually destroying pre-existent cultures and local self-determination

Problems with this definition

- G is not a single all-conquering and homogenising force, driven by Western cultural imperialism and capitalism
- Cultural experiences have not been simply moving in the direction of cultural uniformity and standardisation
- Such a conception overlooks the impact of non-Western cultures; there is still room for reproduction of considerable social and cultural diversity within the interconnected global structure

5. De-territorialisation or supra-territorialisation

- Reconfiguration of geography, spread of supra-territoriality
- Social spaces transcend territorial places, territorial distances and territorial borders
- G = “a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions” (Held *et al.*, 1999)

De-territorialisation or supra-territorialisation

- This definition of G is the most radical
- It accounts for far-reaching changes that have occurred in the last few decades; “G refers in the first place to the advent and spread of what are alternately called ‘global’, ‘supraterritorial’, ‘transworld’ or ‘transborder’ social spaces” (Scholte, 2000)

Globality:

- is a *social condition* characterised by the existence of global economic, political, cultural, and environmental interconnections and flows that make many currently existing borders and boundaries irrelevant (Steger, 2003)

Globalisation

- is a set of *social processes* that transform our present social condition into one of globality (Steger, 2003)

Influential definitions of G

- “G can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.” (Anthony Giddens)

Influential definitions of G

- “G compresses the time and space aspects of social relations.” (James Mittelman)
- “G as a concept refers both to compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole.” (Roland Robertson)

Influential definitions of G

- “G may be thought of as a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions (...) generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power.” (David Held)

Influential definitions of G

- “The concept of G reflects the sense of an immense enlargement of world communication, as well as of the horizon of a world market, both of which seem far more tangible and immediate than in earlier stages of modernity.” (Fredric Jameson)

4 distinct qualities / characteristics of G:

- 1.) Creation of new & multiplication of existing social networks and activities that increasingly overcome traditional political, economic, cultural and geographical boundaries
- 2.) Expansion and stretching of social relations, activities and interdependencies
- 3.) Intensification and acceleration of social exchanges and activities (Internet, satellites...)
- 4.) Growing human consciousness about it all

Hence, a definition:

- “Globalization refers to a multidimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant.” (Steger, 2003)

Defining globalisation

- Emphasis on the diminishing significance of time and space as the world becomes more interconnected
- ‘time-space compression’
- Intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa

Comments to this definition

- More helpful than previous definitions
- Helps distinguish the contemporary phase of G from earlier phases
- Alerts to the pivotal role of the rise of a global consciousness:
- G = a social process in which constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding
- 'glocalisation' (local is an aspect of G, not counterpoint to the global)

Readings for Lecture 6:

- **The End of the Nation State** Kenichi Ohmae
- **The Declining Authority of States** Susan Strange
- Robert J. Holton **Globalization and the Nation-State**, 1998: Chapter 4 (pp. 80 – 107)
- “Quietly Sprouting: A European identity” article available @ the info system!