

FLC 301/Fall 2001

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**Briefing of 9/12/2001
on Explaining Globalization
by
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“No single universally agreed definition of globalization exists.” (The Great Globalization Debate: An Introduction, *Held and McGrew, 2000*) So what is globalization? What does it mean?

I believe in order to begin to understand globalization, one must have some knowledge of history, economics, global sociology and an open mind as to where things can or should lead; in essence, the ability to see “the Big Picture.” Human needs and human wants are the decisive factors in which way the future takes us.

Knowing the world’s history is pertinent to analyzing the globalization movement. If one looks at what the world was like only 650 (!) years ago, one would see that the centers of civilization were in places like Africa, Central/South America, and China. In contrast, “European Society was seemingly more primitive” (Introduction to the Modern World, *Kelleher and Klein, 1999*).

I assume that the great majority of people in these times had no notion of other far off and distant cultures as we have today. For most of them the “world” entailed their immediate local surroundings.

However, the fifteenth century was a new beginning for Europe. With the rise of navigation and exploration, Europe began 5 centuries of expansion and colonization. “The Industrial Revolution provided both the means and the cause for increased expansion [therefore] industrializing Europeans needed raw materials and new markets” (*Kelleher and Klein, 1999*). Europe was now colonizing much of Africa, the Americas, Australia, India and many other parts of the world, without asking those affected in these lands. In almost all cases, little consideration was given to native peoples and their wishes to maintain their cultures, societies, and economies. Culturally, Christianity was spreading everywhere the Europeans landed (and in some cases where they weren’t). Europe was gaining control of the world.

Parallel to these developments, capitalism and with it international trade expanded immensely (e.g., trade doubled between 1720 and 1780). If we jump to the period between 1840 and 1875, in “thirty-five years, the value of the exchanges between the most industrialized economy and the most remote or backward regions of the world had increased six-fold” (The World Unified, *Hobsbawm, 2000*).

This kind of multiplication in time can be found in other areas too. Communications, electronics and population, all seem to have had some sort of doubling effect over time. Almost 150 years ago, we had the development of the telegraph and the postal union. Now we have the emergence of the World Wide Web, international stock markets, and

frequent flyer miles. As our communications increase, so increases our general worldwide interconnectedness. As a result, “this shift requires us to reorient and reorganize our lives and actions, our organizations and institutions, along a ‘local-global axis’”(What is Globalization? Beck, 2000).

The Europeans also introduced the modern state and the division of people into nations and ethnoracial groups.. “Europeans used their version of the state, law, "justice" and "freedom" to achieve worldwide dominance.” [...]. Example: The first colonists in America had little or no respect for the indigenous "Indian" population, their forms of self-governance and use of territory. They perceived them as "primitive," ignored their claims, conquered their territory, and enslaved, oppressed, killed, or imprisoned them in reservations.

“Four primary characteristics define a modern state: *territory, government, a loyal population and the recognition of other states*” (Kelleher and Klein, 1999).

1. Bounded Territory –controlling a population and resources
2. Government – monopoly of force and laws, effective if viewed as legitimate by its citizens
3. Loyal Population – patriotism in combination with cultural, ethnic, religious etc. symbols creating nationalist feelings.
4. Recognition by Other States – significant when a government changes hands by way of revolution or war.

Modern states have been and still remain (next to new supranational, regional, local, and non-governmental actors) the most powerful decision makers affecting international events.

Market capitalism, new (communication) technologies, and the idea of "democracy" seem to be most important factors that drive current processes of "globalization." Some skeptics believe that the ideology of "globalization" is only an excuse for Western capitalist societies (in particularly the United States as the only superpower), to continue its domination of the world. They believe that “to maintain profits, capital constantly has to exploit new markets. To survive, national capitalisms must continuously expand the geographical reach of capitalist social relations”(Held and McGrew, 2000) and eventually include non- or pre-capitalist and lesser economically developed societies. This is what happened after China's leaders embraced the market economy and after 1989 when the Soviet Union collapsed. At the same time “the gulf between rich and poor is growing even wider. [...] A globally disorganized capitalism is continually spreading out”(Beck, 2000). Globalization means the existence of a world society without a world state and world government.

But the question persists. How can globalization benefit the entire world and not only a few countries and elites? What international institutions and laws are necessary to control the excesses of global capitalism? Is "welfare capitalism" or state intervention promoting "justice and equality" a solution to prevent or reduce the growth of exploitation, poverty, and greed on a global scale?

I believe the most important aspect concerning the globalization process is responsibility. All “these developments require new modes of thinking about politics, economics and cultural change. They also require imaginative responses from politicians and policy makers about the future possibilities and forms of effective political regulation and democratic accountability”(Held and McGrew, 2000). Beck also believes that along with reconfiguring world economics, we must address other global issues such as environmental destruction, basic human rights, and world poverty. With the emergence of worldwide communications, governments, together with non-governmental organizations (such as the United Nations, the International Red Cross, private corporations etc.) need to continue their global dialogue. Together, economists, politicians, sociologists, scientists, engineers, and historians need to say to themselves, “how will what we do today, affect the children of tomorrow?” How can we unite the world, yet still retain our cultures and identities?

It seems that while some feel that the notion of globalization is a dramatic new threat to one’s culture and values, others dismiss its significance. I don’t feel we are moving toward one universal culture, nor are we expecting to create one happy, perfect world. I feel the people and the nation-states of the world will remain separate, but we will also recognize the need to carry out things in a universal manner. Globalization means learning about, respecting, and understanding each other’s cultures, languages, economies, and needs; so we can help and benefit from one another. “Globalization, then, also means *no* world state, - or, to be more precise, world society *without a world state*, and *without a world government*” (Beck, 2000).

Questions pertaining my briefing about **Explaining Globalization**

1. How can we make Western capitalism more responsive to lift lesser-developed economies out of misery, poverty, and the cycle of underdevelopment?
2. Do you agree with my assessment about the most important issues concerning globalization today?
3. What are the chances that one day the world will be "one nation" with "one world government"? Why or why not?
4. The whole world is now divided into “nation-states.” Can you think of a other or better ways to govern people? Do we already see signs of another future?
5. How can one incorporate more "responsibility" and democratic control into the globalization process considering the speed and universality of changes?