

Discuss the impact of globalisation on the modern world.

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Globalisation is a blanket term referring to the increasing modern interconnectedness of nations, markets and people. A convergence made possible, and perhaps inevitable, by advances in transportation and communications technology (leading to the development of global communications networks); by the necessity of increasing intergovernmental cooperation, and the growth of influential non governmental organisations; by the development of enormously profitable transnational corporations, the commodification of culture into 'intellectual property', and the birth of the brand; but perhaps most importantly, facilitated by and accelerating these changes, the development of a global market place for goods and services. Perhaps the best brief definition of Globalisation was given by Philip McMichael in *Development and Social Change* (1996), as 'Integration on the basis of a project pursuing "market rule on a global scale"' (quoted by Lechner, 2001).

Three major camps exist in the ongoing globalisation debate amongst sociologists. Sceptics, who view globalisation as merely an extension of the colonial development of international trade routes and imperialist cultural expansionism; which does little to bridge the fundamental ideological and cultural gaps between traditional Middle Eastern Islam, Western capitalistic democracy and Asian authoritarianism; and believe that an inherent conflict exists between internationalisation and globalisation, "since international trade is strengthened by the existence of nation states whose policies actively regulate and promote it" (Cambridge, 2000).

Hyperglobalisers, such as Naomi Klein, who see globalisation as the formation of a new global order in which markets, transnational corporations, and inter-governmental organisations possess more influence on the direction of economic and foreign policy than individual nations. Creating "a new epoch in human history, in which all types of relationships are becoming integrated at the global level, transcending the nation-state and making it increasingly irrelevant" (Castles, 2000). Lastly transformationalists such as Giddens, see the process of globalisation as a decentralized empowering internationalisation of democracy, encouraging nations to exchange and enrich their cultural heritage, and forcing governments to act and develop multilaterally in response to the dynamic demands of a global economy and "the complex conditions of globalization" (Giddens, 2001).

Sceptics have argued that the spectre of globalisation has served as a justification and impetus for neo-liberal market ideologies, leading to the roll-back of the welfare state in Britain and the United States (Dean, 1998).

That rather than an open international market, free from trade barriers, what has been created by the deregulation of trade, are blocks such as the EU, NAFTA and the proposed South East Asian AFTA, who trade more with themselves than with each other. However this analysis ignores the enormous changes engendered by the collapse of European communism, and the simultaneous development of a truly global financial commodity market and an international market for cultural intellectual property. The demand of

populations raised on western entertainment to participate in the shared international culture of consumption, combined with pressure from organisations such as the WTO to conform to a liberalised development agenda, limit the ability of any nation (particularly so called 'underdeveloped countries') to maintain an independent economic policy, and to restrict cultural imports and labour exploitation.

Similar pressures reduce the extent to which the traditional manufacturing economies of Western Europe and the US have been able to ameliorate the decline of industries faced with competition initially from Asian tiger economies, and more recently China, with low employment costs and little enforcement of regulations protecting the rights of workers. Put simply "capital seeks to produce at minimum cost, and is thus attracted to low-wage, repressive countries that give it freedom from workplace safety, child labour, environmental and other regulations" (Kliman, 1997).

In 'No Logo', the book that has become a bible of the antiglobalisation movement, Naomi Klein writes passionately about the transformative effects of the increased liquidity of capital and labour, the consolidation of the media and the spread of western consumerism. Klein accuses western businesses of having reinvented themselves as brands, focused not on the development of innovative products, but on the homogenisation and promotion of intellectual properties. Divesting themselves of the baggage of manufacturing, by exploitatively outsourcing the production process to Free Trade Zones in the South; untaxed areas of intensive low cost production, minimal labour rights and safety, and wage bills a fraction of those in unionised western democracies. For the workers in these zones, globalisation has not brought the expected invigoration of local industries, nor the gradual increase in wages and living standards experienced in the 1970's and 80's by the 'Asian Tiger' economies. Fierce competition, created by the willingness of Western purchasers to switch contracts to the cheapest producer, keeps wages low and factories un-unionised. Worker descent is ruthlessly crushed and contracts are quickly lost by any factory which increases wages (and hence costs). An example is the Chentex factory, a part of Las Mercedes Free Trade Zone, Nicaragua, where a one hour strike by factory workers to increase their \$ 60 a month wage to better reflect the estimated \$ 200 a month cost of living led to the firing of union leaders, the setup of surveillance cameras, the filing of lawsuits against any workers in the union and the introduction of hired thugs and armed police to keep the workers in line (Ratner, 2000).

In the west the inflow of wealth created through the exploitation of developing world labour and natural resources such as oil and biological intellectual property, combined with hyper competitive job markets (the result of the exodus of blue-collar manufacturing jobs, and the huge growth of un-unionised part time labour relative to full time, well paid jobs) have greatly increased the gap between rich and poor; creating a fortress mentality both within countries, with the suburban rich frequently opting to live in segregated gated communities, and between nations and groups of nations, with the development of fortress America/Europe, as nations which formerly accepted immigration as a positive economic and cultural benefit, now shut their doors. Ironically, while money and products are now free to move between nations, the same

cannot be said of disadvantaged people. This xenophobic isolationism provides an odd counterpoint to the one world rhetoric of the WTO.

Globalisation is increasingly resulting in a ghettoisation of poverty, as developing nations are forced to transform their economies into what Andrew Kliman terms 'debt repayment machines' in order to qualify for aid from the WTO. While in the Europe and the US, neo-liberal reductions in company taxation and taxes on the highest earners, have forced the poor to bear an unfair tax burden in the form of indirect taxation, as governments have little effective power or incentive to increase or maintain income taxation.

In the US in particular, pressure is growing from right wing pressure groups to regress income tax to a flat level, or worse, to abolish it all together; to be replaced by increases in value added taxation. A move which would increase the disparity between the wealth and incomes of rich and poor, already at record levels (Editorial, St. Petersburg Times).

The advance of global communications technology has provided new avenues for creativity and new possibilities for repression. The internet allows human rights groups to communicate with one another and highlight the conditions they face under repressive regimes; creating a market for technology to enable governments to control and monitor their citizens access to the web, a market Western corporations have been eager to tap in China and 20 other countries world wide (de Villa, 2002), (Gutmann, 2003).

Conversely hacktivists, such as the 'Hacktivismo' group, an international collective of hackers, artists, and human rights workers, have begun to produce applications capable of circumventing these barriers to communication (Ruffin, 2002).

Nowhere is the new global interconnectedness of geographically heterogeneous individuals more apparent than in the growth of file trading and the mp3 phenomenon, set off by the cult like popularity of Shawn Fanning's Napster program, which has enabled music enthusiasts world wide to share and promote their favourite bands and artists. Developed and spread by fans rather than the music industry, peer to peer mp3 trading fought back against the commodification which had transformed the folk revival of the 1960's into a multi-billion dollar industry, and the homogenisation of music available through the managed output of MTV and centrally owned and scheduled radio networks like Clear Channel, which has gained control of 60% of US popular music stations since deregulation of ownership restrictions in the US radio industry in 1981 (Stone, 2001), (Bricklin, 2002). Initially music trading caused a surge in CD purchases (King, 2000), but ultimately legal action by the music industry (resulting in the shutdown of Napster and several other popular services), combined with increases in spending on leisure substitutes, such as DVD's and mobile phones, and the continually increasing price of CD albums, negated the positive effects of music sharing and lead to a downturn in CD sales (Bricklin, 2002).

The rationale behind the response of the music industry was the logic of intellectual property. Originally designed to allow inventors to profit from the development of their ideas, intellectual property has been transformed into a commodity to be bought and sold, and with the

remorseless logic of economics any commodity not exploited to its maximum potential becomes a liability. This is a massive change in the legal relationship of citizens to their culture (embodied in the establishment of the WTO, incorporating the Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, who enforce the hugely controversial TRIPS agreement), involving the development of new copyright laws such as the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (which effectively outlaws reverse engineering by "...prohibit(ing) the act of circumventing technological measures that control access to a copyrighted work in all but a narrow set of circumstances." (Gross, 1998)). A change opposed by organisations like the Electronic Frontier Foundation who (amongst other activities) provide legal representation to those charged under the restrictive auspices of the DMCA (EFF, 1999).

The EFF represents the digital vanguard of the antiglobalisation movement, a growing opposition to the forced internationalisation of Western culture, morality, laws and production, and the perceived exploitation of transnational capitalism. Antiglobalisation serves as a rallying point for the disparate forces of post socialist anti-capitalism, but is a movement as vague in ambition as globalisation is conceptually ambiguous (Henwood,1996).

A broad church with unclear ambitions, the antiglobalisation movement none the less represents a sincere rejection of the predominate neo liberal deregulating agenda, a rejection of what Noam Chomsky has called "the highly undemocratic thrust of the international economic arrangements that are being foisted on the world". Anti globalisation is thus not a rejection of the global sharing of ideas and the development of transnational democratic institutions (the appealing, advertised aspects of globalisation), but of the contraction of democracy and the free flow of information, represented by public private partnerships, the neo liberal ethos behind the destruction of the welfare state, and the increasing legal controls over our ability to communicate using the language of our shared culture.

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