

Are We Now Living in One World?

The concept of the world becoming ‘as one’, is a concept which has been widely been contested by many writers on subjects such as modernisation, globalisation, and equality to name a few. It is quite clear from our everyday lives in how some aspects of our lives are clearly influenced by other cultures, such as the availability of Indian takeaways on every high street.

Robertson (1992) suggests that the world began to become more integrated with the European voyages of discovery and colonisation in the 15th Century.¹ Turner (1994) has shown how there has been a global economy since the 17th Century.² Yet other theorists claim that it is a much more recent development. In this essay I intend to look at many of these theories and in particular look at theories of modernisation, and globalisation.

Modernisation replaced the older traditional forms of societies based on agriculture. Parsons (1966) has referred to the evolution of societies as a “process of modernisation”. This presumes all societies to be eventually heading towards the modern stage. This can be applied to the theory of globalisation in that he is saying that all societies will become similar and ‘modern’.³

Rostow (1971) used a similar model to explain human society, in his eyes it was both evolutionary and possessed an ‘inner logic’ which leads societies to ‘modernisation’.⁴

¹ Harris, N., (1986), “The End of the Third World: Newly Industrialising Countries and the Decline of an Ideology”, Harmondsworth, Penguin.

² Turner, B.S. (1994) “Orientalism, Postmodernism & Globalism”, London, Routledge.

³ Parsons, T., (1966) “Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives”, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall.

⁴ Rostow, W., (1971) “Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto”, Cambridge University Press.

In the opinion of Giddens (1990), globalisation originated from modernisation. It is a continuation of the trends from modernisation processes in 18th Century Europe.

Modernisation is based on processes of disembedding. It 'dis-embeds' feudal individuals from fixed identities in space and time. This is known as the 'time-space distanciation', which I shall examine in further detail shortly. It is used to explain the historic move from traditional to modern societies and the part played by globalisation in speeding up the modernisation process.⁵

Giddens (1991) suggests that the modernisation process entails four major sets of 'institutional complexes of modernity'. These are administrative power, military power, capitalism and industrialism.⁶

Administrative power refers to the growth and development of the secular nation state based on rational and bureaucratic forms of administration of its population and law and order. Capitalism and industrialism represent new forms of production based and centred on factory and industrial production. Militarism is based upon technology and professional armies in modern societies.⁷

In France, the word for globalisation is mondialisation. In Spain and Latin America, it is globalizacion. The Germans say globalisierung. This shows how far the term has spread and how widely used it is.

It is said by many writers such as Giddens (1999) and Beck (2001) that we are now living in a cosmopolitan society which is forming around us. It is emerging in an

⁵ Giddens, A., (1990), "The Consequences of Modernity", Cambridge, Polity.

⁶ Giddens, A., (1991), "Modernity & Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age", Cambridge, Polity.

⁷ *ibid.*

anarchic haphazard, fashion carried along by a mixture of economic, technological and cultural imperatives.⁸

Robertson (1996) defines globalisation as a concept,

“Which refers to both the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole...”⁹

Giddens (1991) takes the view that globalisation is an equalising process as it gives previously disempowered groups and nations the potential to realise their goals. He has spoken of globalisation generating “reverse colonialism” which means that non-western countries influence developments in the west. Examples of this are the Latinising of Los Angeles, the emergence of a globally orientated high tech sector in India and the selling of Brazilian TV programmes to Portugal.¹⁰

For Giddens (1994) globalisation is a social process which results in,

“... Larger and larger numbers of people living in circumstances in which disembedded institutions, linking local practises with globalised social relations, organise major aspects of day to day life.”¹¹

However, he sees it as a contradictory and uneven process. He claims that it ‘pulls away’ from local communities and uses the example of the weakening of the capacities and power from nation states in the hands of supra national political organisations. It is also said to ‘push down’ as it may present local communities with new possibilities and demands, such as the increase of nationalist movements, for example, in Scotland.¹²

⁸ Giddens A., (1999), “Runaway World”, Lecture 1: “Globalisation”, London, BBC Reith Lectures, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/events/reith_99/week1/week1.htm 20/11/01

⁹ Robertson, R., “Globalisation: Social Theory and Global Culture”, London, Sage.

¹⁰ Giddens, A., (1991), “Modernity & Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age”, Cambridge, Polity

¹¹ Giddens, A., (1994), “Beyond Left & Right: The Future of Radical Politics”, Cambridge, Polity

¹² Giddens, A., (1999), “Runaway World: How Globalisation Is Reshaping Our Lives”, Profile Books.

Globalisation is said to emanate from the 1960s as this is when aspects of the modernisation process received added impetus as a result of globalisation. In late modernity there is a world capitalist system which is dominated by Trans-National Corporations (TNCs) which operate independently of nation states. TNCs can be the dominant economic actor especially in ‘developing countries’.¹³

In industrialism Giddens (1994) claims there has been a development of the International Division of Labour in which local industries are incorporated. Previously separate and distinct industries are now involved in trading raw materials and components with each other. He also mentions how ‘industrialisation’ now includes the ‘service’ and ‘culture’ industries. These industries are now internationally based.¹⁴

The administrative powers of the nation state grow due to the increasing ‘internationalisation’ of state relations through the sharing and pooling of knowledges and hardware states can increase their powers of surveillance and control over populations.¹⁵

Military power has become globalised through the increasing alliances between states, which empowers members of each alliance.¹⁶ This can be seen today in the alliance between the UK and the US in fighting the war against terrorism in Afghanistan.

The concept of ethnocentrism can be seen as a criticism of globalisation as most of

¹³ Giddens, A., (1994), “Beyond Left & Right: The Future of Radical Politics”, Cambridge, Polity

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*

the developments benefit the richer Western countries rather than equalising wealth. Gilroy (1995) has illustrated this by saying that the West has used the 'rest' of the world, especially regarding the use of slavery by which to 'modernise'.¹⁷

Parsons saw the West as the sole source of modernisation, and globalisation is said to have come from modernisation.¹⁸

Giddens (1999) speaks of how all giant multinational companies come from rich countries, most being based in the US. It can also be seen that global poverty remains at scandalous levels and millions of people around the world have little, if any, democratic rights. The share of the world's population in global income has dropped from 2.3% to 1.4% from 1989 to 1999. The proportion taken by the richest fifth has risen from 70% to 85%. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 20 countries have lower incomes per head in real terms than they did twenty years ago. In many less developed countries, safety and environmental regulations are low or virtually non-existent. Some TNC's sell goods in these countries that are controlled or banned in developed countries, such as poor quality medical drugs, destructive pesticides and high tar and nicotine cigarettes.¹⁹ Tanzania's debt of £4.5 billion is 152% of its GNP. 85% of the Zambian population lives in absolute poverty.²⁰

The abandonment of the term 'third world' can be an indicator of the alleged convergence of the world. The term originates from the belief that the group of countries it stood for would develop to modernity by a third route that differed from that of the 'first world' or the 'second'. The 'first world' refers to the countries

¹⁷ Gilroy, P (1993), "The Black Atlantic: Modernity & Double Consciousness", London, Verso.

¹⁸ Fitzgerald, T., <http://www.sociologyonline.co.uk/GlobalParsons.htm> 20/11/01

¹⁹ Giddens A., (1999), "Runaway World", Lecture 1: "Globalisation", London, BBC Reith Lectures, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/events/reith_99/week1/week1.htm 20/11/01

²⁰ <http://www.sociologyonline.co.uk/GlobalWTO.htm> 20/11/01

involved in the industrial revolution and the capitalist route to modernity; and the 'second world' refers to the Soviet Block who took the socialist route to modernity. Harris (1986) claimed that the abandonment of the term was due to the increasing global integration and therefore the notion of distinct worlds were out of date.²¹ This theory is supported by the fact that some countries previously referred to as 'third world' are now economic rivals of the 'first world', such as Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore.²²

However, again the statistics on deprivation, as shown above, conflict with this view. Global inequality is clearly not decreasing in all areas.

²¹ Harris, N., (1986), "The End of the Third World: Newly Industrialising Countries and the Decline of an Ideology", Harmondsworth, Penguin.

²² Fulcher, J. and Scott, J. (1999), "Sociology", Oxford, Oxford University Press.

The historical movement from traditional societies to modern ones and the part played by globalisation in speeding up the movement begun by the modernisation process is referred to as 'Time-space distancing' by Giddens (1991) and 'Time-Space Compression' by David Harvey (1989). Traditional societies are said to be based upon social relations 'embedded' in time and space. For example, time for a peasant, would be based upon the cyclical nature of the seasons due to their reliance on agriculture as a means of subsistence. This also meant that time to different societies were different, as their neighbours would use different measurements of time.

The invention of the clock is significant to this as it allows one measure of time to be universalised and not narrow and locally defined. This can reduce the sense of social distance between communities. The sense of time is now global, as there is now only one concept of time in the world. Distances appear to have 'shrunk' as one community is using the same concept of time as one on the other side of the world.²³.

In this sense, it can be said that modernisation 'dis-embeds' the individual from their fixed identity in time and space.

The two mechanisms Giddens (1991) claims are processes of 'disembedding' are symbolic tokens and expert systems. Money is used as an example of symbolic tokens as it was not used in traditional times; economic exchange was based upon local and particularistic expressions of value. With modernisation comes money as a universal form of exchange. Money, as time, acts to make general and universal what once were particularistic and local exchanges. As the current main form of exchange, money can make the world seem as one as it allows individuals to move between

²³ Giddens, A., (1991), "Modernity & Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age", Cambridge, Polity

local contexts and can therefore establish social relations across time and space.²⁴

As modernisation created the notion of a national currency which diminished difference within national boundaries, then globalisation removes differences between national currencies, for example, with the birth of the credit card. The credit card is accepted around the world making it easier to spend money worldwide. The introduction of the Euro in many European countries in January 2002 is another example.²⁵

Expert Systems are the result of scientific discoveries and technical knowledge which claim to be universal. They are not context dependent and therefore can establish social relations across time and space. An example of this is the current model of health care which is based on universal claims of science and dominates across the globe. Other models are ridiculed or labelled 'alternative', such as holistic therapies.²⁶

A second 'shrinking' of the world occurred according to Harvey in 1847-8 with the economic collapse of credit. As a consequence of the collapse finance capitalists across Europe attempted to centralise capital and credit markets. Time was therefore further compressed as capital investments could move faster through the new rationalised system. The further conquest of space was made possible as investments are made in forms of transportation such as the railways and shipping.²⁷

This compression of space is given further impetus at the turn of the 20th century as investments are made in aviation and new media such as radio, photography and the cinema.²⁸

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Harvey, D. (1989) "The Condition of Postmodernity", Oxford, Basil Blackwell

²⁸ *ibid.*

According to Harvey the revolution in electronic technologies, such as computerisation and the Internet have meant that 'time' and 'space' has been conquered, as instantaneous communication is a reality.²⁹

There are many sceptics to who all talk of the word becoming as one is simply talk. Whatever the benefits, trials and tribulations, the global economy is not especially different from that which existed at previous periods. The world is the same as it has been for many years. They use the example of external trade, saying that for most countries only a small part of income originates in external trade. Most economic exchange is regional, such as the countries in the European Union mostly trade amongst themselves. The same is said to be true of the other main trading blocks such as the Asia Pacific and North America.³⁰

Sutcliffe (1995), for example, claims that global development is impossible since it would be economically unsustainable. He argues that development is going in the wrong direction, the underdeveloped countries would be better models for sustainable societies than the developed ones.³¹

Giddens (1999) criticises these views pointing out how globalisation sceptics are often on the old political left and they believe that globalisation is a notion proposed by those who wish to dismantle the welfare state and cut back on state spending. If the concept of globalisation is a myth then governments can still intervene in economic

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ Giddens A., (1999), "Runaway World", Lecture 1: "Globalisation", London, BBC Reith Lectures, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/events/reith_99/week1/week1.htm 20/11/01

³¹ Sutcliffe. B., (1995), "Development After Ecology", in Timmon Roberts, J., and Hite, A. (eds.) (2000), "From Modernisation to Globalisation: Perspectives on Development and Social Change", Oxford, Blackwell.

life and the welfare states can remain intact.³²

Giddens (1999) argues that the global marketplace is much more developed than even two or three decades ago and national borders are no longer of importance. He claims that,

“The era of the nation state is over”.³³

Nations are said to have lost most of the sovereignty and politicians have lost the power to influence events. However, Turner (1994) demonstrates how a high degree of ‘economic globalisation’ occurred during the 17th Century.³⁴ Other writers claim similar points saying that the world has reversed to how it was a century ago as in the late 19th Century there was a global open economy, with a great deal of trade occurring, including trade in currencies.³⁵

Giddens (1999) criticises this saying that the level of world trade today is greater than it ever has been and involves a much wider range of goods and services, but the most important is the level of finance and capital flows. He uses the example of electronic money, money that only exists on computers. Money can be transferred around the world at simply a click of a mouse. Over a trillion dollars is said to be turned over everyday in global currency, a massive increase from ten years ago. The money an individual has personally depends on the fluctuations in the global currency markets.³⁶

Max Weber wrote on the nation state and maintained that the power to declare war or peace was one of the essential features of a state. If it doesn’t have a monopoly over

³² Giddens A., (1999), “Runaway World”, Lecture 1: “Globalisation”, London, BBC Reith Lectures, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/events/reith_99/week1/week1.htm 20/11/01

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Turner, B.S. (1994) “Orientalism, Postmodernism & Globalism”, London, Routledge.

³⁵ Giddens A., (1999), “Runaway World”, Lecture 1: “Globalisation”, London, BBC Reith Lectures, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/events/reith_99/week1/week1.htm 20/11/01

³⁶ *ibid.*

was and peace, then it isn't a state.³⁷ Beck (2001) takes this up saying that the power to decide between war and peace is no longer a matter for an individual state acting autonomously and uses the example of the war against terrorism to demonstrate this.³⁸

Developments in technology and communications are a factor in the debate. In the mid 19th Century Samuel Morse transmitted the first message by electric telegraph initiating a new phase in world history. Morse code was discontinued as a means of communications at sea on 1st February 1999. Now we have communications satellites, which were first launched just over 30 years ago and now there are over 200 satellites creating instantaneous communications across earth. Also other types of electronic communications have accelerated over the past years. No dedicated transatlantic or transpacific cables existed until the late 1950's. These all play their part in making the world seem smaller and more accessible.³⁹

The reach of media technologies also is a factor in making the world more 'as one'. Celebrities may be more familiar to us than our next door neighbours. I could not tell you who my neighbours were; yet many people around the world would be able to say, for example, who Brad Pitt's wife is.

Giddens (1999) expresses how far the media has reached and how cultures have globalised by using an example of a friend of his who studied village life in central

³⁷ Weber, M., (1919), "Politics as a Vocation", in "From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology", ed. H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1948

³⁸ Beck, U. (5/11/01) "The Fight for a Cosmopolitan Future", The New Statesman Online <http://cgi.sociologyonline.force9.co.uk/cgi-bin/frame/FrameIft.cgi?Url=http://www.newstatesman.co.uk/200111050022.htm&Text=Back+to+Socio-News&Title=SociologyOnline+Link&FooterLocation=2&FooterFontFace=Verdana&FooterFontSize=3&ShowRemoveFrame=1&Link=http://cgi.sociologyonline.force9.co.uk/Files/socio-news/SocioNews.shtml&FooterBgcolor=2c448b&FooterTextColor=ffffff&AllowResize=0&FrameBorder=0>

³⁹ Giddens A., (1999), "Runaway World", Lecture 1: "Globalisation", London, BBC Reith Lectures, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/events/reith_99/week1/week1.htm 20/11/01

Africa. On her arrival in a remote area she was invited to a local home for an evening's entertainment and instead of finding out the traditional pastimes of the community, they watched Basic Instinct on video, which hadn't reached British cinemas at this point.⁴⁰

The changing roles of women around the world and the changing structure of the family are also due to globalisation and making the world more similar. For example, Cherie Blair has recently launched a campaign to help the women of Afghanistan, as by our standards they have no rights.

Ulrich Beck (1992) writes about 'reflexive modernisation' and in an article published online for the New Statesman he writes about how this is bringing the world together. 'Reflexive modernisation' is a description of contemporary society in which we become aware of the risks and dangers of industrial technological society and in which increased knowledge about how to deal with this creates more awareness of dangers and risks.⁴¹ He applies this to the recent terrorist attacks to show how, "... The warring camps and nations of the world united against the common foe of global terrorism."⁴²

Old rivalries of the US, such as with Moscow and Beijing are forgotten and a real cease-fire between Israel and the Palestinians is enforced.

He pontificates that humanities common fear is now making new bonds and dissolving the boundaries of national and international politics creating the globalisation of politics in which states are moulded into transnational co-operative networks. He also shows how foreign and domestic policy, national security and

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Beck, U. (1992), "Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity", London, Sage.

⁴² Beck, U. (5/11/01) "The Fight for a Cosmopolitan Future" in The New Statesman Online.

international co-operation are now interlocked. Since 11th September, ‘terrorist sleepers’ have been identified in Hamburg, Germany, and many other places. Therefore German domestic policy is now an important part of US domestic and foreign policy. So are the domestic foreign, security and defence policies of France Pakistan, Great Britain, Russia and so on.⁴³

There are very many arguments suggesting that the world is becoming as one. Other arguments I have not gone into are the growing awareness of the global environment and the ways people all over the world are trying to help, such as with the South American rainforest and the widespread starvation of Africa. Global tourism is also making us more aware of our world and the ease of travel to far away places makes the world seem as if it is smaller than when the first voyage of discovery crossed the Atlantic Ocean. The spread of the English language around the world and the films and television programmes seen by hundreds of millions of people in different countries also contribute.

The world is also better connected both economically and politically with global financial markets and the World Trade Organisation, also the creation of international political communities such as the European Union and the United Nations make the world more integrated.

However, we will not live in ‘one world’ until the problems of inequality between rich and poor are solved. Also until many aspects of difference are recognised and accepted, especially regarding religious difference as this is still a major cause of disagreement in the world today.

⁴³ *ibid.*

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