

How Can People Be Opposed To Globalization?

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OLIVER SIMON, MAY 21 2013

Globalization can be defined as: “the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of transcontinental flows and patterns of social interaction” (Held and McGrew, 2004a: 1), whereby: “national cultures, national economies and national borders are dissolving” (Hirst and Thompson, 1999: 1). Thus, it involves political, economic and cultural dimensions. In this new globalised world, the institution of the state and the doctrine of sovereignty are becoming less relevant, being superseded by market forces and global governance. Globalization is an extremely contentious issue, with two core debates revolving around it: firstly, between those who suggest it is a real phenomenon, the ‘globalizers’, and those who believe it is very much exaggerated, the ‘sceptics’; secondly, between those who are opposed to the effects of globalization, the ‘anti-globalization’ movement, and those who believe that globalization will bring benefits to the world, the ‘positive globalizers’. The analytical core of this essay will focus on the latter debate.

The following analysis contains five sections, four of which will each review one objection to globalization, before evaluating each point as a whole. The objections examined are: firstly, that globalization perpetuates inequalities in the world; secondly, that it leads to homogenisation of culture; thirdly, that political globalization is overly Western-dominated; and finally, that it creates new global problems. This essay will argue that all four of these objections are based on a single, basic opposition to the idea of a globalized realm superseding the position of the nation-state and the doctrine of sovereignty, and will go on to indicate that those opposed must be of a ‘realist’ disposition. The final section will argue against such a state-centric realist position and advocate instead a liberal cosmopolitan stance, ultimately concluding that if one can move beyond a state-centric realist viewpoint and adapt a more cosmopolitan stance, the concerns of those who are opposed to globalization can be effectively disputed.

The first opposition to globalization is that it increases inequality in the world. There are multiple cases where globalization has increased inequality within states; for example: when Russia integrated into the globalized markets, there was an increase of 21.8% of people living on or below two dollars per day, whilst a select minority became richer from the same integration (Stiglitz, 2002: 153). The inequality that globalization causes inside countries is theoretically explained by the fact that those without capital cannot gain from the economic integration inherent in globalization; thus those with capital grow richer and those without grow poorer (Kakowicz, 2007: 572). In the Russian case, although pre-globalization there was little inequality because of communism, those with slight advantages, including government contacts, could take advantage of globalization and became richer, whilst those who did not got poorer. This inequality is worsened, since the state can no longer maintain its welfare system, nor redistribute efficiently, in a globalized world, due to the competitiveness of global finance (Tanzi, 2001: 78-9). The anti-globalization movement claims that global absolute income inequality has also greatly increased due to globalization; for example, the gap between richest and poorest more than doubled between the 1960s and 1990s (UNDP, 1999: 3). This is explained by the fact that globalization involves competing in the international market, creating losers and winners, impoverished and wealthy (Held and McGrew, 2004a: 82-3). The competition inherent in globalization leads to a situation which from its very nature implies inequality. In simplified terms, according to the anti-globalizers, globalization causes an increase in inequality within nation states, because the poor lack capital and in a globalized world the states are unable to redistribute, thereby increasing inter-country inequality due to the inherent competition it implies.

Nevertheless, the premise that globalization increases inequality is contentious. In terms of globalization causing

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inequality within a country, it is certainly true that rapidly imposed globalization, as in Russia in the early 1990s, does increase inequality. However, naturally occurring globalization creates stability and private property rights, which allow the poor to benefit, at least on average the same as anyone else in society (Dollar and Kraay, 2002: 27). In terms of global income inequality, those such as Wolf (2005) contend that, contrary to the UN study cited above, absolute income inequality is less relevant than relative income inequality, since it ignores the advantages the West had from two hundred years of industrialisation-fuelled development. The relative measure shows, rather, a reduction of inequality by 10% between 1970 and 1995 (Wade and Wolf, 2002). In addition, this statistic relies on national accounts rather than household surveys, the former being more satisfactory because they have a self-checking mechanism built in, since they are composed of an independent figure for the output, the income and the expenditure of a country (Wolf, 2005: 153).

Furthermore, the economic integration part of globalization is not necessarily tied up with increasing inequality; perhaps this is more associated with ignoring "the role government can play in development" by protecting fledgling industries and regulating imports, as the Chinese and 'Asian Tiger' success stories prove (Stiglitz, 2002: 248). Indeed, the deepening of European economic interconnectedness in the European Union (EU), for example, has led to a convergence in living standards, contradicting the claims of those who are against globalization: for example, the Republic of Ireland, once one of the poorest European countries, is now towards the higher end of the wealth spectrum (Cohen, 2007: 135). The relationship between globalization and inequality is, therefore, rather more complex than the anti-globalizers make out. Indeed, as Dollar and Kraay argue, the efficiency of globalization will benefit the poor at least as much as the rich, so the inequality argument is insufficient: rather, the underlying fear is of the state no longer being in a position to control its own economy, which is instead controlled by more global forces.

Moving now to the objection to the cultural dimension of globalization, it has been argued by the anti-globalization movement that globalization entails cultural homogenisation or cultural imperialism. A form of 'McWorld' homogenisation is perceived to be caused by the expansionist nature of global capitalism and the interconnectedness of the world economy; this global culture is predominantly American, involving brands such as McDonald's, MTV and Hollywood, and it is argued by Barber (1996) that this culture now gives local cultures their expression, audience and aspirations. There are many examples of how this dynamic relationship functions throughout the world; the French cinema industry, for example, is continuously attacking Hollywood imports, even as it gives one of France's most prominent awards, 'Chevalier' of the 'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres' to American actor Sylvester Stallone. Similarly, despite Japan's increasing insistence on its own traditions, McDonald's was the most popular restaurant in Japan in 1992 (Barber, 1996: 17-9). This friction between national culture and the Americanised 'global' culture demonstrates how culture is converging; despite local objections it appears that the world cannot resist it. In addition, those opposed argue that in most cases cultural globalization involves patterns of stratification, involving hierarchy and unevenness. One example is television programming, where only select countries are involved in selling programmes on the international export market (Held et al, 2000: 358-60). So the anti-globalization movement argues that the global, American culture conflicts with national cultures.

Advocates of globalization, on the other hand, deny this homogenisation thesis. Global culture is certainly not a one-way relationship; there exist many examples of non-American culture becoming part of this global culture: yoga is replacing aerobics, children worldwide watch Japanese anime and Korean music gains huge success across the world (Lam, 2012). Furthermore, the plurality of language, religion, and by extension national identity, that exists in the world essentially assures cultural diversity regardless (Kant, 1991: 113-4). The only notion that is threatened by cultural globalization is that of an exclusive and self-sufficient, dominant culture, a notion that is unfeasible in advanced countries anyway. Countries that have pursued a self-sufficient culture or cultural fundamentalism are usually unsuccessful; North Korea has just reproduced the very worst parts of communism (Hirst and Thompson, 1999: 266-8). To further reinforce this point, take the example of the EU, which despite having become the most interconnected market in the world, has not led to a decrease in cultural diversity amongst its constituent peoples. Rather, diversity has increased; for example, both the Catalans and the Corsicans have been able to request more autonomy from their governments, with the knowledge that they are protected by the wider European economy. In the view of Cohen, "Europe sharpens these distinctions more than eliminates them" (Cohen, 2007: 136). In sum, global culture is not just of one background, rather it is a fusion of different cultures, unthreatening to national cultures, only threatening to national-dominated cultures, so the opposition to cultural globalization lies in opposition

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to a cosmopolitan world culture which exists alongside the national culture.

We must now consider how Western countries, especially America, are allegedly able to dominate the political dimension of globalization. The anti-globalization movement argues that global governance, which equates to political globalization, is merely “a political shell for the exercise of US global dominance” (Held and McGrew, 2004a: 62). Indeed, global governance has not been a permanent feature in international relations and the only reason it exists and continues to flourish is because it remains in the interests of the most powerful countries in the world (Held and McGrew, 2004a: 73). The fact that other countries have agreed to it does not indicate a voluntary and free choice, since less dominant countries have no option but to submit to the rules that the dominant countries have made (Grewal, 2008: 278).

American dominance within the organisations of political globalization can be seen through the powers of veto and weighted voting systems embedded into the organisations of global governance. An example of this dominance is the Mexican debt crisis of 1995: the USA ordered the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to bail out American bondholders, not even seeking the approval of Japan or the EU, which was in clear contradiction of the IMF charter (Gowan, 2001: 84-5). Similarly, we can point to the structural adjustment policies imposed by the IMF and the World Bank in return for lending, which have enforced the Washington consensus of privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation, usually benefiting American interests. This has led to the creation of the Bank of the South, which aims to wean South American countries off “Washington-dominated prescriptions”, delivering economic independence to those countries (Carroll, 2007). Other examples are the way that America continually blocks any changes to its agricultural subsidy programme, despite this being an essential part of the World Trade Organisation’s fundamental goals, and its encouraging the rest of the world towards greater trade liberalisation (Chorev and Babb, 2009: 473). Thus, it appears that America can dominate political globalization by way of controlling inter-governmental organisations.

Nevertheless, political globalization being dominated by America is contested and so the extent of the truth of this assumption needs to be examined and evaluated. Confusing globalization with American dominance is both analytically and empirically incorrect (Held and McGrew, 2004b: 53). First, if America came to be seen as a threat, or was not acting in the global interest, supporting states would withhold their support and thus America would lose its power. This is especially the case since there is significant competition within global governance from the EU, Japan and China (Nye, 2004: 113). Furthermore, dominance is not a problem of globalization itself; rather, it is a problem with the management of political globalization at present. Stiglitz argues that if we address the democratic deficit within international organisations, we could have a kind of globalization that would benefit all (Stiglitz, 2006: 280-4). Thus, by adopting his recommendations, it is likely that we could effectively remove the American dominance from political globalization. In effect, American dominance is often overstated, because there are in fact significant alternatives in terms of power. In addition, the problem of dominance is not a problem with globalization per se, rather with how it is managed at present. If we accept Stiglitz’s adaptations, this problem would be mitigated, and the opposition to political globalization would exist only as an objection to the globalized realm superseding the nation-state authority.

The final broad opposition that will be considered is that globalization creates new global problems. These include, but are not limited to: international organised crime, global terrorism and worldwide environmental problems. Even the defender of globalization, Bhagwati, acknowledges that globalization has led to a rise in international organised crime; he considers specifically the exploitation of women across the world, arguing that more open borders allow women to work away from home as domestic servants, where they are often subject to abuse, especially in places such as the Middle East. In addition, the proliferation of international tourism in places such as Thailand has led to growing prostitution. The trafficking of women has also become a problem in countries with economic issues, such as Russia or some Asian countries (Bhagwati, 2007: 89-90). Clearly, all these examples of female exploitation by organised criminals are a result of increasing interconnectedness, examples of which include more open borders, greater international tourism and faster, cheaper transportation methods. Global terrorism has also developed as a result of globalization; indeed, Islamic terrorism demonstrates a resistance to Western culture, which is seen as contradictory to Islamic religion and culture (Hoffman, 2004: 110). So, we can conceptualise terrorism as a response to perceived conflicts within cultural globalization. The worldwide environmental issues we face have been caused

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by, firstly, increasing technology supporting high pollution growth in developed countries; secondly, the rapid industrialisation of the developing world; and finally, an exponentially increasing world population. The first two are directly linked to globalization: in a world with global warming, carbon emitters across the world are increasingly responsible for the fate of the Pacific island nations (Held and McGrew, 2004a: 129). The objection is therefore raised that globalization has caused these new global problems.

Whilst it is certainly true that most of these problems are caused to an extent by globalization, this essay would argue that these are not inherent flaws with globalization but rather with how it is implemented. In fact, globalization can be used to solve these problems. In the first problem, the exploitation of women by organised criminals, the recent proliferation of international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as ECPAT and international conventions, which work to prevent trafficking, have been relatively successful. More progress could be made through further steps towards political globalization, allowing for easier enforcement (Bhagwati, 2007: 91). On the problems of global terrorism, clearly a multilateral coordinated approach is necessary, given the transnational borderless nature of modern terrorism. The United Nations (UN) recognises this and explains that to prevent terrorism one must: "intensify cooperation, as appropriate, in exchanging timely and accurate information" (UN, 2007). This method of prevention of terrorism is analogous to increasing globalization, intensifying the flows of information. In respect of worldwide environmental issues, the only way they will be solved is through cooperation; for example, the Montreal Protocol, which has been successful through international coordination in significantly reducing Chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) emissions, which damage the ozone layer (Bhagwati, 2007: 159). For all these problems, globalization leads to a situation where actions in one country can have effects on the rest of the world; this interdependence requires greater collective action to solve these problems. Those opposed to globalization are therefore fearful of the expanding significance of the global realm, reducing the significance of the nation-state.

Finally, we should consider why a liberal cosmopolitan stance is a favourable one, since it should be clear that all the opposition to globalization essentially resides in a fear of the global realm superseding the nation-state and the subsequent denial of the doctrine of sovereignty. Firstly, stemming the tide of globalization is just not possible, as flows across continents now form an essential part of political, social and economic life. It has been stated that to ask for "a stop to globalization is to demand that life as we know it should cease" (Chanda, 2001). If we accept this premise, we should by default accept the cosmopolitan stance, since it allows us to ameliorate the problems which globalization causes. As explained earlier, the global problems caused can be solved by the world coming together and cooperating; furthermore, the economy can provide gains for all by embracing this interconnectedness. Thus it is favourable to conceive of political and social life in a cosmopolitan sense. Indeed the nation state has not always been accepted as the sovereign and the ultimate source of power within its territory; previously there existed city-states, empires and principalities (Held et al, 2000: 35). Just as sovereignty was uncoupled from these authorities, it is entirely possible to imagine it becoming disentangled from the nation-state and moving into the global realm. Thus, it is entirely possible to envisage a world with sovereignty not tied to territoriality. It is both beneficial and feasible to adopt such a liberal and cosmopolitan stance on the world order.

In conclusion, people can be opposed to globalization under four main objections: that it increases inequality; that it leads to cultural homogenisation; that political globalization is American-dominated; and that it leads to a multiplication of global problems. All of these objections have been evaluated and it has been argued that each of these reveals a fundamental state-centric view of world politics on the part of the objector. Globalization is seen as a challenge to the realist model of international relations, in which the nation-state is the fundamental building block and the preservation of sovereignty predominates. For this reason, this essay has outlined why it is beneficial and feasible to adopt a liberal cosmopolitan view of world politics as opposed to a realist state-centric view: it empowers the world to solve problems, and it is possible because the nation-state has not always been the dominant block in international relations. By adopting a liberal cosmopolitan outlook, one perceives the objections to globalization as illogical.

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