

Conclusion

Sociology has a good record, at least in the past and in some countries, of taking a critical approach to what seem commonsense ideas. It looks at the theoretical coherence in what is said and empirical evidence to test what seems intuitively the case. It is an interdisciplinary subject which doesn't focus just on social relations in abstraction from economic and political divisions and power. It has a history of looking for power, inequalities and conflicting interests, from class, to gender and ethnicity, amongst other things. For a long time it has done so at an international level, from Marx and Wallerstein to the sociology of development, to take just some examples. As well as discussing traditionally sociological areas of globalization, such as culture and migration, I have also tried to bring these aspects of sociological approaches to understanding globalization.

Doing so shows limitations in some sociologies of globalization. These are sometimes focused on culture and migration and less so other areas such as economics and politics, often deliberately so in the name of anti-economic determinism and the alleged outmodedness of approaches which see nation-states as central. But leaving out the economy and the way economic motivations, economic power and inequality structure globalization gives an over-benign, harmonious and equalised picture of globalization. 'New' approaches which see globalization in this cosmopolitan way do not pay enough attention to some of the old approaches, which have enduring explanatory power, but are seen as out of touch with changing times. The consequence is that the way that globalization is based on and reproduces power, inequality and conflict gets left out. A world that has such characteristics gets validated by being defined in terms of the more benign category of globalization.

An objective of this book has been to test ideas of globalization. Some will see some of its conclusions as conservative and not looking for new ways of thinking in a rapidly changing world. My conclusions are mixed. They are doubtful about some aspects of globalism but not all and sceptical in some ways but not others. But the aim is not to come up with new ideas but the best ideas for understanding the world. If new ideas are needed then we should look for them but sometimes they are celebrated too much for their newness and imaginativeness and should be tested for their quality in understanding the world. The latter criteria can lead us to existing or old ideas. This is not conservatism or lack of imagination but finding the perspectives which are right. New theories can't just be advocated as theories. They need to be tested against empirical reality. Too often a benign cosmopolitan sociology of globalization gets its power from theoretical elegance, and disproportionately represents the experience of European elites, more than empirical evidence with a worldwide scope. We should not fetishise the new, and we should also not fetishise theory in abstract from the broadest empirical reality.

If you look at criteria for globalization some of these issues arise. It is important to define globalization and measure whether what it describes matches up to the definition. This is partly because globalization is a powerful discourse and idea that can give a picture of multiple inputs, equalisation, hybridity and convergence. When

the word is used it can reinforce the appearance of these features in the world. So it is important to set out criteria for globalization and test whether this is what it is really like. At the start of the book I argued that for something to be globalization it has to involve global extent, inputs from worldwide rather than just some parts of the world, interdependency, stability and regularity in global relations.

Historically globalization is a process. In the premodern past structures and relations in the world failed to meet such tough criteria. But it's fair to say that you can see globalising developments then, which came closer to realisation when capitalist incentives and industrial technology drove this forward with a qualitative leap. To some extent, more recent developments in globalization such as the end of the cold war divide and the internet build on the globalization established by capitalist industrialism rather than providing their own qualitative globalising leap.

At the same time studies which look for hard empirical evidence rather than pleasing theories show that on the criteria mentioned above arguments for globalization fall down. Global relations are not globally inclusive. Agency in and subjection to globalization is unequal and well short of convergence. The evidence for this can be found as much in pro-globalist theories as in those which are explicitly sceptical. It is important to define and test the theory of globalization because otherwise its power as an idea and discourse hides enduring and accentuating divisions of power, inequality and conflict. These give some in the world great advantages and subject large numbers at the opposite end to circumstances in which it is difficult to even stay alive, let alone achieve life chances beyond this.

There is potential in globalization to overcome such relations of power, inequality and conflict. Cultures, coming from around the world and fusing together in localities produce exciting and dynamic hybrids, new experiences and the possibility for greater commonality between divergent groups. New forms of identity emerge, made up of diverse global inputs from media and migration, and found in areas such as consumption, style and music. In the media the technology of the internet, websites and blogging allows individuals and groups to access information, and, more importantly, produce and disseminate content without corporate and political backing. At the same time the most popularly accessible and prominent media content is controlled by corporate power, increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few rich and powerful western interests, who have gained ownership across media sectors.

The freedom for people to move is also unequally distributed with those least in need, rich elites, the most free, and those most in need of mobility, the poor and those beyond the rich core, most restricted. The benefits of migration - for migrating people's life chances, their home countries through gains like remittances, and for receiving countries in labour and tax income to support public services and the ageing population, not to mention cultural diversity - are not realised as much as they could be because of restrictions on migration. Resistance to inward migration in rich countries cannot be due to lack of benefits because the gains are, on the whole, evident in empirical evidence. Prejudice and racism must play a role.

One area in which the opportunities of globalization remain unfulfilled or even actively countered is in economic globalization. It is important to have a pluralistic understanding of globalization which does not reduce explanations to economic or

other single factors. At the same time it is also important to see the links between different factors in globalization and look at the extent to which some have causal power over others, rather than just seeing all as equal, separate or unaffected by one another. The search for resources, trade, production or investment and the wealth that can be made from this has been a driving force in globalization, from premodern trade, to European imperialism, and global capitalism. One result has been global economic interdependency such that small occurrences like the 2007 US sub-prime crisis can have ramifications for economic, political and cultural life globally. Similarly things like culture and migration are not autonomous from economics, often being motivated, unequal or structured by power on economic bases. To dismiss economic explanations as too economic leads to such causes, power relations and inequalities being missed out.

Deregulation and technology have allowed for massive and fast financial flows. This, along with the globalization of production and trade, can bring investment, jobs and exporting possibilities to developing countries. Giants like China and India have seized such opportunities, although on the basis of insulation from globalization until they were strong enough to enter the global economy. At the same time economic globalization is not as globalised as it seems. The poorest have been locked out of such opportunities, with financial flows concentrated amongst the richest triad and world trade conducted on a basis in which they are hugely disadvantaged. Efforts to open up world trade are followed by rich countries when it benefits their industries and obstructed when it does not. Something like a fifth of the world's population live on what a dollar a day could buy in the USA and 40% on two dollars a day or less. For many in these groups hunger and early death is normal and there is a disproportionate likelihood of experiencing war and suffering the effects of climate change.

Such experiences are inextricably linked to the advantages that rich countries have. The growth that produced prosperity in rich countries produced the carbon emissions behind climate change. Climate change leads to the loss of fertile land and water and ensuing conflicts over these in developing countries. Rich countries profit from wars by selling arms, and wars are often rooted in conflicts or differences left behind by imperial powers – in Israel/Palestine for example. Poverty in developing countries is linked to the advantages that rich countries ensure for their own industries, despite their expectations of free trade on the part of the poor. The pleasing image of globalization as a cosmopolitan process which generalises human rights and provides equalisation, convergence and integration fails to match with empirical evidence about such issues. It reflects a view of elites which is mostly theoretical and focused on rich countries and culture.

Global politics which brings people together to forge agreed solutions to climate change, economic regulation, world poverty, war and human rights abuses is an ideal solution and should be pursued where possible. However power imbalances, inequalities and conflicting interests amongst actors in the world make this a difficult way to achieve success. For some the suggestion that corporate power and powerful nation-state interests undermine global political solutions shows an outmoded and discredited Marxist economic determinism and an unreconstructed view of nation-states. But the evidence from economic globalization, and from the global politics of world trade, international human rights, environmental protection, nuclear

proliferation and miserable attempts to help the world's poor suggests that nation-state interests and the material interests of the wealthy are blocks to globalization at this level.

One key nation-state, the USA, has asymmetrical power economically, politically, culturally and militarily. If the power of America in world affairs is on the decline, it could arrest this by the greater soft power or multilateralism favoured by President Obama. If not, it looks most likely to be replaced not by a multipolar order or global cosmopolitanism but by another state, such as China, or other powerful states. But if China were to take over from the USA as the leading power in economic and other spheres it is not clear whether this would change the structure of the world order to favour the poor. China may join or replace the core in globalization as much as end a core-periphery division. At the same time some mid-ranking and poorer countries have resources, a critique of the current world order and of imperialism, and things in common with each other. These could be built on in a politics aimed at equalising power and wealth.

Global social movements have exposed the lack of globalization in globalization and have put important world issues on the agenda and brought them to wider attention. They have an imagination and critical attitude which has enhanced understandings of globalization and the world of global politics, on issues such as labour, corporate power, neoliberalism, imperialism, development, inequality, democracy and rights. Yet they lack the political clout to achieve their goals. The agencies that do have clout are states with a critique of globalization and the resources, power and material interests to ally with one another. States operate at an international level pursuing their own interests. They can ally internationally with other nation-states, if below the level of fully global politics, and with others with shared interests or ideologies.

States have the resources and power to tackle problems within their own borders. The diversity of national policies and practices and varying records in tackling poverty suggests that governments have not lost the capacity to provide social democracy, welfare, redistribution and alternative policies to neoliberalism. This is evident from Scandinavian countries to leftist governments in Latin America. Such forms of politics come as much from states own resources, domestic traditions and alliances as from globalization. Beyond their borders, international state action by anti-globalization governments, from outside the rich core, in alliance with global justice movements, is where global politics to tackle world poverty, climate change, human rights, and war seems to have the most chance. Ideology, material interests and bilateral links provide a basis for this sort of global politics. This can put pressure on a Democrat President in the USA, open to such concerns, but also part of a core of rich states with their own interests and preferred type of globalization to pursue.