

Program 1: As Old as History

If the flow of people around the world is one element of globalisation then it is not a recent phenomenon. It can be argued that globalisation has its origins in the 'out of Africa' migrations, commencing some 200,000 years ago.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries war and colonisation have been powerful globalising agents. The era of colonialism, in many ways, created the first globally multi-racial and multi-cultural societies. The post Cold War period has seen the United States become the dominant economic and cultural power and a driving force of globalisation.

Rena Sarumpaet

Hello and welcome to our six part series, 'GLOBALLY SPEAKING' - The Politics of Globalisation.

I'm Rena Sarumpaet.

Montage

"Name any gathering of the economically powerful of the world, the 'new Brahmins' I would call them, and you find people saying no that's not the world we want."

"Unfortunately we have to be very very loud and sometimes when trying to be heard people see it negatively."

Rena Sarumpaet

From human rights to the nation state, from democracy to the economy, nothing seems untouched by the processes of globalisation.

It's become a buzzword these days.

Montage

"I understand globalisation is the acceleration of the movements of people, ideas, goods, services and capital."

"I like the word, just the word globalisation I feel good with it, and it means good to me because it means oneness, it means that people are closer to one another. You're just another, just a neighbour across town you know that you want to do business."

"If we see globalisation at its broadest, I don't believe that you can say stop, because basically that would be like saying stop the world I want to get off."

Rena Sarumpaet

Although it means different things to different people it's most commonly used to refer to those forces creating an ever more integrated international economy.

But is globalisation a new phenomenon?

Our first program in the series - 'As Old As History'.

If we think of the migration of peoples throughout history, then globalisation's always been with us. Take Australia for example, preeminent historian Professor Henry Reynolds believes that the movement of people from Asia into Australia began at least 60,000 years ago.

Professor Henry Reynolds

We are a long long way from unravelling the complex movement of peoples over the last quarter of a million years. Archeological work in Australia is only 30 or 40 years old but at the present stage it looks as though the first entry of human beings into the continent was about 60-thousand years ago. This took place almost certainly at a time when sea levels were much lower than they are now during the Ice Age, and people entered Australia either from the north down the land bridge of Cape York, or across the Timor Gap.

However it does seem that there were subsequent migrations, certainly within the last ten-thousand years there appear to have been further migrations from Asia. We have a general picture but it's by no means a complete one.

Rena Sarumpaet

If the flow of people around the world is one element of globalisation, Islamic scholar Chandra Muzaffar, from Malaysia reminds us that it also involves the flow of ideas and trade ... not only from the west ... but also from the east.

Extended interview
Chandra Muzaffar

Chandra Muzaffar

One can argue that a thousand years ago, 1000AD, the Silk Route and the Mediterranean where different cultures and civilisations interacted with one another and there was this flow of not just goods across borders, but also the flow of ideas and borders were far less entrenched compared to the borders that we have today, because nation state didn't exist at that time, and at that time Islam was a very powerful force.

So there was Islam which was part of globalisation a thousand years ago and it has happened in different forms at different levels and different degrees right through history. So we should not see globalisation as a new phenomenon, it's not.

Rena Sarumpaet

Oxford historian, Felipe Fernandez-Armesto is author of 'Millennium: A History of the Last Thousand Years'. He believes that if we only define globalisation in economic terms, it's a very new development, a mere 'blip on the screen' as he puts it. Once we define it more broadly we can think of it as being as old as history itself.

Extended interview
Felipe Fernandez-Armesto

Felipe Fernandez-Armesto

If one means by globalisation what I think one ought to mean, that's to say an ever more interconnected world, an ever more interdependent world, and a world in which culture gets spread by long range contacts, then yes it is as old as human history. You could say that the first globalisation was the peopling of the planet. I mean one of the few things that science and the Book of Genesis at least until recently have tended to agree about is that homo sapiens started somewhere in the world, perhaps in Africa, and spread out from there. That was probably the last time we had a genuinely homogeneous culture worldwide, a global culture, and that was the last time the human race experienced transfers of culture as pervasive and as far reaching as those that we see unfolding today.

So in those senses sure, globalisation is as old as history itself. It's not a very old phenomenon if by globalisation you mean something purely economic, or if you mean westernisation. In those respects it's a very recent phenomenon, and I would say just a blip on the screen because in the sense of westernisation, globalisation hasn't lasted very far for so long.

Rena Sarumpaet

Over the past five or six centuries, European expansion through imperialism and colonisation has clearly been a globalising force. It also served to integrate economically many parts of the colonised world into economic empires based in Europe. Henry Reynolds again.

Professor Henry Reynolds

Europe had the capacity from the 15th-16th century onwards to extend its influence and it did so most spectacularly of course in Latin America and North America, also in places like Australia and New Zealand. This took place in two ways - there was one, the vast empires that were based on a small European governing elite governing over pre-existing societies which continued although changed. The other pattern was where the Europeans came in large numbers and soon demographically and militarily overwhelmed the indigenous people and this is so in countries like Australia and New Zealand and that's a quite different pattern. That is the cool temperate or the temperate grasslands that were occupied by usually hunters and gatherers who were overwhelmed basically in the 19th century by Europeans. And that is another pattern of globalisation.

Felipe Fernandez-Armesto

It's certainly not true that imperialism is a kind of white vice from which other peoples are exempt.

Rena Sarumpaet

Felipe Fernandez-Armesto.

Felipe Fernandez-Armesto

China and Japan are both profoundly imperialistic societies with very long standing imperial vocations. The Chinese have made a very good job of imperialism by assimilating their subject peoples and turning them into Chinese and that they've managed to perform that trick with most of the peoples who've been incorporated into the Chinese Empire in the course of history. And Japan is also you know a very imperial society. So you know Japan is an empire within its own islands and at intervals in the course of Japanese history really whenever the Japanese had the technical capability to reach beyond their home islands and conquer and colonise other places, they've tended to do so.

Rena Sarumpaet

In the 20th century, war has been a powerful globalising agent: it alters boundaries, transforms economies and shapes the way people think about themselves and their place in the world.

Dr. Phillip Deery, from Victoria University explains how the two world wars accelerated the processes of globalisation.

Dr. Phillip Deery

War in the 20th century unlocked very strong globalising forces. Because of the sheer numbers needed to fill armies and to fill factories, propaganda was used on an unprecedented scale, and it was used to both mobilise public opinion and enlist mass support. Now this capacity to mould or to transform or even shape cultural values I'd suggest is an important element of globalisation.

Now World War 1 or the Great War of 1914-18 was I think a very powerful locomotive for technological developments, and here I'm talking about the radio and the aeroplane, and these developments served much later admittedly to break down national barriers and to break down isolation. So these World War 1 developments that especially in communications and in transport and in technology, did help pave the way for a far more global society.

Now the Second World War with its two huge theatres of war in both Asia and in Europe and in North Africa was obviously far more a world war, far more a global conflict. So it was perhaps more decisive in triggering globalising forces. Now I'll just give one example - the American army was stationed around the world, now whether it was in Brisbane or in Bristol, or immediately after the war in Berlin and in Tokyo, and it left behind and this is where I think it's a globalising influence, it left behind an enormous cultural and sometimes economic baggage.

World War 2 also I think laid the basis for the consolidation of the political and economic strength of the two countries that were soon to be the superpowers of the future, and here of course I'm referring to Russia and America.

Rena Sarumpaet

These superpowers confronted each other in the Cold War for the next 45 years, and attempted to extend their ideological as well as military influence, globally.

What triggered the Cold War was the escalation of mutual distrust and suspicion between these global superpowers.

Winston Churchill speech

From the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an Iron Curtain has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of central and eastern Europe - Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia.....

Rena Sarumpaet

A defining moment of the Cold War was the inaugural conference of these Iron Curtain countries in late 1947 - the Cominform Conference. It was sponsored by Russia, held in Poland, and barely noticed in the West, but the Cominform Conference would soon have profound significance for the West and for global conflict. Phillip Deery again.

Dr. Phillip Deery

It declared that the world was indeed divided into two camps - the peace-loving progressive camp led by the Soviet Union, and the war mongering or imperialist camp led by the United States. Then going back to the United States point of view, the western point of view, the free world point of view, was the Marshall Plan in 1948. That was a mixture of perhaps altruism and economic imperialism linked as it was to the so-called Dollar Gap Crisis and the need to expand markets for American goods.

Rena Sarumpaet

Each superpower had its own world view, its own brand of 'truth' if you like, which either seduced or inspired millions of followers and which transcended national boundaries. Prominent Asian scholar, Professor Wang Gungwu, nevertheless believes that these competing ideologies both sprang from the same western philosophical traditions.

Professor Wang Gungwu

Essentially during the period of the Cold War when political ideologies were in terms of capitalism versus communism and so on were so dominant most people were quite prepared to look at both capitalism and communism offering secular universal ideas that could be acceptable to the whole world, and the contest between the two was merely a question of a contest among ideas which were rooted in the same set of beliefs in the West.

But with the failure of communism, with the end of the Cold War and the triumphant statements that the West had won and capitalism had won and therefore capitalism should now be accepted by everybody, well there was a new aggressive voice coming from the West as the victorious set of values that now everybody must accept because clearly there was no other force that could stand up against it with the failure of the Soviet Union and its allies.

Rena Sarumpaet

With the end of the Cold War then, and with the collapse of communism, America achieved a position of global hegemony. America now had no ideological rival. Phillip Deery.

Dr. Phillip Deery

The United States doesn't have that philosophical check, that ideological balance that the Soviet Union traditionally provided. And so in a sense America's global supremacy means that globalisation, you know whether it's through market forces, through communications industries, that it occurs in a much more untrammelled way. So in other words, rather than America having a kind of a philosophical bulwark in Russia, corrupt and flawed as Russia was and would still be, communism provided that sort of bulwark I think against the uninhibited, the untrammelled dominance of one superpower.

Rena Sarumpaet

On Radio Australia and Radio National you're listening to GLOBALLY SPEAKING, The Politics of Globalisation.

Some commentators, including Thomas Friedman, positively celebrate the virtue of America striding alone on the world stage. In his book on globalisation, 'The Lexus and the Olive Tree', he sees the post Cold war period as an opportunity for America to make the world safe for free trade.

Thomas Friedman

I make a very simple argument. It is American products, American technology, American culture for better and for worse, American ideas, that are at this moment most being globalised. Therefore surely if we have one overriding interest today it's to sustain that. Therefore if there is a common denominator, or should be a common denominator in American foreign policy it should be sustainable globalisation. How do we sustain this system? Well there's two ways you sustain it - one is by sustaining it militarily, someone has to keep the sea lanes open, someone has to keep the air lanes open - that is the job of the US army, navy, airforce and marine corps. I see this not in some imperialist sense or some arrogant, I say this as a sense of responsibility I feel we have to keep the infrastructure out there, the military infrastructure by which globalisation, integration and trade can happen, and it requires a benign superpower to do that. I believe that is America's role - without America on duty there would be no America online.

But it isn't just enough to keep the roads open, it seems to me that we also have a responsibility to democratise globalisation, to enable more people in more places on more days to enter the winners circle from globalisation.

Rena Sarumpaet

Richard Falk, Professor of International Law at Princeton University in his book 'Predatory Globalisation', warns of the dangers of western triumphalism. Global American culture carries with it the potential for resistance - it can produce a backlash from non-Western societies.

Richard Falk

Perhaps the first and most dramatic of these was the Iranian Revolution and the whole resurgence of a militant form of Islam that was in part a reclaiming of a tradition of resistance to the westernising tendencies that were embedded in how globalisation was being perceived. And part of that perception is the linkage between consumerism and globalisation as a kind of materialistic form of life associated with the United States is promoted by a global media. All of these create this impression of a single secular global civilisation that is threatening the values and the world view of non-Western, non-American forms of cultural identity.

Rena Sarumpaet

Of course within the West there are also instances of resistance to the encroachment of American cultural values and economic domination.

In 1997, Harvard academic, Samuel Huntington, in his book, 'The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order' saw as inevitable, a confrontation between western civilisation and the religio-cultural civilisations associated with the East - notably - Islam.

Richard Falk again.

Richard Falk

His notion of the West against the rest seems to be very alarmist and not very connected with the way in which peoples from different civilisations are increasingly intermingling as a result of inter-civilisational migration and other very important integrated forces in the world. Where I think Huntington's perspective is insightful and part of the reason that it attracted so much attention is that it does reflect the idea that we're living in a time when the nation state can no longer provide the sole or even in many cases the dominant form of political identity, that civilisational identities are important and that the unexpected rise of religion as a global force is also a very important challenge to this secular rationalism that we associate with the scientific civilisation of the West.

Rena Sarumpaet

While Richard Falk identified religion as a globalising force, it can also be a force for national disintegration as we've seen in the former Yugoslavia and we're witnessing in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, Thomas Friedman argues that economic integration will ensure peace and stability. His 'Golden Arches' theory maintains that the more countries become a part of the global economy the less likely they are to go to war.

Thomas Friedman

The 'Golden Arches' theory refers to an observation I made five years ago that no two countries that both had MacDonalds had ever fought a war against each other since they each got their MacDonalds, and I call that the 'Golden Arches' theory of conflict prevention, and it basically states that countries that become a MacDonalds country their people don't want to fight wars anymore, they want to wait in line for burgers.

Rena Sarumpaet

On the other hand, Felipe Fernandez-Armesto maintains that the presence of Corporate giants, like MacDonalds, outside the US, does not necessarily imply the dominance of American culture.

Felipe Fernandez-Armesto

Westernisation in as much as it happens at all tends to be a very superficial thing. People talk about coca cola culture and Mickey Mouse culture and MacDonalds culture - these are terribly superficial things. People in the West say that's globalisation when they see the MacDonalds arches in Beijing. People in Beijing don't say that's globalisation, they say that's westernisation and they tend to reject it, it causes a reaction against itself.

Rena Sarumpaet

But while the West is seen to be the dominant global force now, Felipe Fernandez-Armesto sounds a note of caution.

Felipe Fernandez-Armesto

The myth of the rise of the West has become so deeply ingrained in our historiography and in the way we see the world that we forget that it's been a very recent, very short-lived, very uncharacteristic phenomenon of human history. That the normal state of affairs in the world is for the world to be dominated for all the great initiatives and thought and inventiveness to come from the eastern end of the Eurasian land mass, not the western end. And we can already see that the rise of the West is over, and that the normal state of history is reasserting itself as China in particular begins to get its act together and is beginning to look as though it's at some point in the probably not too distant future going to resume its traditional place as the most powerful, most influential, most dominant as society, country and civilisation in the world.

So in that respect one could talk about a relative decline of the West. But I on the other hand don't want to talk about a decline of the West in the absolute sense, because I think in some respects we're not doing a bad job. And you know in our parts of the world I think we're doing a pretty good job of living together in peace, celebrating pluralism, promoting multiculturalism, working hard to free up trade and although I'm not at all satisfied with the progress we've made in asserting human rights at

least we've begun at the level of rhetoric to do something for the world in at least asserting the universality and equality of human dignity.

Rena Sarumpaet

And Richard Falk reminds us that human rights have been championed across cultures - it's not the preserve of the West. In fact he argues that the issue of human rights offers considerable potential for finding common ground between and within Eastern and Western countries.

Richard Falk

The human rights tradition does provide at least a starting point for finding common normative ground that the great civilisations of the world to a substantial degree share. The difficulty with the human rights tradition is less the substantive disagreement than it's seen itself as something that has been developed in the West by westerners, and it's very important that non-western leaders, spiritual leaders and political leaders and grassroots representatives have the feeling of participating in the creation of the rules and norms that we embrace as a common foundation for living together in a global village so to speak.

Rena Sarumpaet

Princeton University's Richard Falk.

George Mathew

I'm not against globalisation because what I like in the correct sense is a global village, humanity living together. But then I would ask for a level playing ground. If it is uneven and you're not getting equal opportunity, then what is this whole game about?

Rena Sarumpaet

Indian commentator, George Mathew, and in our next program, 'The Business of Globalisation' we consider today's global economic order.

'GLOBALLY SPEAKING - The Politics of Globalisation' is a joint project of Radio Australia and Melbourne's Victoria University. The program was produced by Sue Slamen and Barry Clarke - technical production Darren McKenzie. Academic advisor, Dr. Phillip Deery.

I'm Rena Sarumpaet.

Bye for now.