

TOWARDS A CRITIQUE OF GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract

Globalization heralds a great epoch in human history. Yet, despite certain advantages of globalization, its disadvantages cannot be overlooked. It is necessary to ask certain questions. Is globalization a form of neocolonialism? What is its impact on the southern hemisphere? Is it necessarily linked to violence, militarism and eco-unfriendly technologies? And are these problems essentially moral rather than merely economic and ecological?

Globalization is a key word in contemporary discourse. Human-kind has entered a new epoch. At the dawn of a new millennium we find ourselves joining the conversation of humanity facilitated by stupendous communications network. This is a new beginning and could be a great leap forward for the global community.¹ Socially, globalization can promote the unity and oneness of the human race through cooperation, interdependence and sharing of knowledge, expertise, personnel and resources. Economically, the world has become one huge market. Technologically, globalization is accelerated by the use of machines so much so that man today is *homo technologicus*. Despite the advantages of globalization, some questions concerning it are very disturbing indeed. What is happening to the world in the name of globalization? Who benefits most from globalization? Does globalization make the world a better place to live in? Is globalization neo-colonialism?

The Colonial Legacy

Colonialism dates back to the discovery of the new lands by the maritime powers of Europe from the 15th century onwards. This was the beginning of the exploitation of the non-Europeans and it is apparently a nonstop process till today. What were the presuppositions for the justification of colonialism? The Europeans treated the new lands they had discovered as their property. What made them owners of the colonies? When the Europeans encountered the non-European cultures, the former considered the latter inferior. What were the reasons for this inferiority? Perhaps the Europeans suffered from the assumption that the non-European cultures were inferior to that of Europe. Is this assumption baseless since these cultures had their own antiquity? For example, the civilization of India is older than that of Europe. The British archaeologist Gordon Childe remarks that at the time of the Indus Valley Civilization known for its palatial buildings and highly developed urban culture, the people in England were in the Stone Age. Probably the possession of gunboats and technology boosted the European consciousness of superiority. Compared to the Europeans, the natives had hardly any developed technology; so the Europeans might have viewed the natives as inferior. This was an era of the combination of racism, invasion, oppression and exploitation in the colonies. Colonizing somebody else's land amounts to robbery, lawlessness and gross violation of the principles of justice. The colonial powers were Christian nations and one wonders whether or not Christianity was a failure in Europe. Ironically, there were both European mercenaries and missionaries in the colonies. The former plundered the people and the latter preached the Gospel.

It is hard to comprehend how both plundering and evangelizing could go together! Discovery of new lands, colonialism, industrialization, and capitalism have strengthened Eurocentrism. It would seem Europe was the centre of the world and the rest of the world existed for the sake of Europe. The economy of Europe was fortified by exploiting the colonies. The superior military technology of the Europeans silenced the natives of the colonies.

Westcentrism

The 20th century witnessed freedom movements in the colonies in Asia and Africa. The native people rose to affirm their right to self-determination. It appeared as if the days of colonization were over. On the contrary, Eurocentrism assumed greater proportions. The term West means not only Europe but also includes America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, which the Europeans grabbed from the natives. Professor Gary Dorrien rightly remarks, “The United States was founded on a genocidal conquest...”² Eurocentrism has evolved into what I call Westcentrism, which means the West is the centre of the world and the rest exists for the sake of the West. In my opinion, the West today has enormous power and resources due to science and technology, and exploitation of non-Western nations.

The Medieval Age in Europe, also known as the Age of Faith, gave way to the Renaissance and Enlightenment, the Age of Reason and later the Age of Science. With advancement in science and technology, the world was increasingly desacralized, the gods had fled and what is now left is stark matter. Even man is a kind of living matter. The West has tasted a comfortable life made possible largely by exploitation and the Western lifestyle has to be maintained at any cost, no matter what happens to the rest of the world. Ironically, Europe embraced the very beliefs of Marxism, which it attempted to repudiate. In a desacralized and secular world, man is primarily an economic being, a consumer. Religion as the opium of the people deserves elimination. Hence, the death of God and of Christianity. It is also time for the death of ethics. All we have is stark matter and naked power, derived from unlimited wealth.

Wittgenstein wrote in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: “The world is the totality of facts, not of things.”³ But today the world is a totality of marketable commodities. Planet earth itself as commodity is for sale. The world can be fragmented and sold on installments. The world is no longer the home of man but a huge bundle of resources for marketing. Everything in the world has a use-value for man and this use-value must be converted into money. The world is a generator of money. Money is deified and man reified. Money determines the power of individuals.

Samuel P. Huntington in his *Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of World Order* writes: “Western nations, as one author summarized it:

Own and operate the international banking system
Control all hard currencies
Are the world's principal customer
Provide the majority of the world's finished goods
Dominate international capital markets
Exert considerable moral leadership within many societies
Are capable of massive military intervention
Control the sea-lanes
Conduct most advanced technical research and development
Control leadership edge technical education
Dominate access to space
Dominate aerospace industry
Dominate international communications
Dominate the high-tech weapons industry."⁴

Irrespective of another theory that the power of the West is in the decline, it is obvious the West continues to wield enormous power.

Worldview of Globalization

I infer some presuppositions of globalization from the praxis of globalization. Globalization views the universe as a totality of material beings, which constitute nature and the environment. All of them just exist. There is no ultimate reason why they should exist. These beings depend on and use each other. In this sense they are relational. This relation is one of use and interdependence. Man is different from other beings in the sense he can have a greater use and enjoyment of these beings. All beings including man are resources. Think of the Human Resource Department of any organization which reduces man to one of the resources like electricity, water, timber and so on. All beings as resources are for consumption. The teleology of being is both proximate and remote. Consumption is the proximate teleology of beings. The possession of consumable goods and capital endows man with power. This power derived from wealth makes man feel good. The greater the power one has over others, the greater the sense of well-being. The remote teleology of beings is power

realized in man. One is reminded of Nietzsche's will to power. The philosophy of globalization originating from the West is materialistic and ego-centric (not ecocentric). It views the world solely in terms of exploitation and use. The world as container of resources is the object of insatiable greed and endless power, which inflate the ego.

The Impact of Globalization

In my opinion, the greatest threat to the world comes from the West. The rest of the world has been suffering since the days of colonialism, Industrial Revolution, capitalism, Communism and more so today due to neocolonialism or globalization. Colonialism had inflicted untold suffering on the natives of the colonies – it robbed them of their freedom, self-respect, resources and so on and left them with poverty, slavery, dehumanization and a host of other problems. The industries in the West sucked the raw materials out of the colonies. The West converted the colonies as market for the goods made out of the raw materials from the colonies themselves.

The insatiable appetite of Western capitalism devours people and nature. Man and nature are raw materials for manufacturing commodities. Man himself is a commodity selling his labour power in the labour market. Marx was one of the first thinkers to perceive the disastrous consequences of capitalism on man and nature. He ventured to suggest Communism as an alternative to capitalism. Communism as a product of the West meant to be emancipatory; unfortunately it ended up enslaving people. With the implementation of Communism the world was divided into two camps of the cold war era. Colonialism, capitalism, Communism and cold war have been the creation of the West.

Industrialization, science and technology ushered in the era of modernization. The rest of the world believed that modernization was the best thing that could happen. The rest of the world aped the Western model of modernization while mostly forsaking time-honoured, native wisdom. The consequence is a long list of woes: disappearance of native manufacture, exodus to the cities, desertion of the rural areas, cut-throat competition, greed, consumerism, destruction of nature, disintegration of the family,

artificial life-style, deforestation, junk food, pollution, poisoning of water, air, soil and food, arms race, terrorism, suicide bombs, fundamentalism and numerous conflicts ultimately leading to the possible decimation of both man and nature.

The problems of globalization are essentially moral rather than economic or ecological. Globalization is the product of the predatory Western civilization, which is spiritually and morally bankrupt. Globalization coming from the West is a threat to the Asia Pacific region. Asia has been home to great civilizations and religions from time immemorial. Today Asia faces the inevitable challenge of globalization as it did in the case of modernization. Our forests are disappearing and together with them varieties of fauna and flora and the displaced communities. The rivers, mountains, valleys and coasts plead for mercy. The globe is under attack in the name of globalization.

Globalization enhances the concentration of wealth in a few hands and the pauperization of the masses at an alarming rate. Not only will there be desertification of the land but also of the lives of millions of people in the poor nations. Globalization as it is today is unacceptable. John P. Hubert, Jr. writes, “. . .once Christian Western Culture has devolved into a virulent form of neo-pagan secularism. It is marked by moral relativism combined with utilitarianism, materialism including largely unregulated free-market capitalism, wild inequitable consumption of precious resources and the goods of production and a dangerous version of rabid personal “freedom” in which truth itself is sacrificed at the “altar” of the autonomous self, which pursues various “preferences” in the name of “human rights.”⁵ Globalization is part of this neo-pagan secularism. Since the days of colonialism, European civilization has come to stay as a predatory civilization. Therefore, is globalization, which is neocolonialism predatory?

Many Westerners seem to assume that they have more rights to a comfortable life than the non-Westerners. Their assumption is linked to their belief in racism and violence, which go along with globalization. For the Westerners, racial discrimination seems to be necessary so that the non-Westerners can be kept out of mainstream economic opportunities. Violence too is necessary since the days of colonialism to subjugate the non-Westerners. Violence continues to perpetuate itself through armament technology, arms race, military attacks and invasions. The trinity of racism,

militarism and materialism are built into globalization. For the U.S., globalization is part of its empire-building exercise. Hence, uneven trade agreements.

Alternatives to Globalization

Globalization as it is today is unacceptable for the following reasons:

1. It is unjust. The corporations exploit the world.
2. It is destructive. It destroys the natural resources all over the world, particularly in the developing nations.
3. It increases global poverty.
4. It threatens world peace.
5. It leads to dehumanization.

Therefore, it is imperative to seek alternatives to globalization. The good news is that “...millions of people ... are already hard at work constructing the building blocks of a post-corporate–post-capitalist civilization. They are demonstrating alternatives far more attractive and viable than socialism or the failed economic models of the former Soviet Union. The most promising alternatives center on applying the familiar principles of democratic governance and market economics to create societies that function in service to life and treat money as a facilitator, not the purpose, of our economic lives.

“The determined pioneers are creating new political parties and movements, strengthening their communities, deepening their spiritual practice, discovering the joyous liberation of voluntary simplicity, building networks of locally rooted businesses, certifying socially and environmentally responsible products, restoring forests and watersheds, promoting public transportation and defining urban growth boundaries, serving as peace-makers between hostile groups, advancing organic agriculture, practicing holistic health, directing their investments to socially responsible businesses, organizing recycling campaigns, and demanding that trade agreements protect the rights of people and the environment.

“They are present in every country. They come from every race, class, religion, and ethnic group. They include landless and illiterate peasants but also corporate executives; they include union members, shareholders, ranchers, teachers, housewives, small-business owners, farmers, local government officials, inner-city kids, loggers, wealthy intellectuals, and reformed gang leaders. The majority are women. Fed up with the failures of elitist leadership and distant bureaucracies, they are demonstrating the powerful potential of truly democratic forms of leadership in which people take direct responsibility for the health and well-being of themselves, their families, their communities, and the planet.”⁷⁶

Technology today is at the service of globalization and militarization. Globalization is not possible without technology and violence. The search for alternatives to globalization includes a humane perspective of technology and a nonviolent world order. I would like to draw inspiration from Heidegger with regard to technology. Heidegger views technology as a disclosure of Being. A close look at his treatment of technology reveals that he calls for an authentic understanding of man’s place in the world, especially of man’s relation to nature. For Heidegger, technological devices have arisen because our understanding of Being changes. He calls the essence of technology *das Gestell* i.e. the ‘disclosive framework’. This ‘disclosive framework’ or enframing lets the world be understood primarily in terms of how it can be arranged, transformed and utilized for realizing some human goal. Thus the Rhine River is no longer the home of the Rhine maidens, nor as something of intrinsic value, but as something to produce hydroelectric power. River, forests, landscapes and animals are destroyed and rearranged to suit some human project. Man sees the forest no longer as a display of the magic and beauty of life, but as raw material.

Heidegger cautions that if man treats nature as standing-reserve and goes on extracting from it as much as he wants as orderer of the standing-reserve, there is the danger he himself will become the standing-reserve. With the loss of transcendence, man himself may be treated as the most important raw material. One day we may have factories to produce human beings. The will to power is never satisfied and craves for more and more. As a result, the demand on the standing-reserve becomes unlimited. What Heidegger fears is not the deadly technological devices

like the nuclear weapons but the loss of being human. If man ceases to be man, what will happen to the world? On the one hand, we already face the consequences of man considering himself the lord of being. On the other, there is the possibility of an extreme situation wherein man becomes a standing-reserve, a very useful raw material. Is it possible for man to rediscover his relationship to nature? Should we give up technology and go back to the arcadian, idyllic simplicity of the past? We cannot eliminate technology. Overcoming technology requires collective, ethical action. Man is primordially *homo ethicus* before becoming *homo technologicus*. Man's relation to nature and human beings is ethical. Technological issues are basically moral issues which elicit an ethics of technology.⁷

A peaceful world order requires the renunciation of violence. What is needed is globalization of peace. Disarmament is an imperative not only for the survival of the planet, but also for peace and prosperity. Nonviolent solutions have to replace the military ones. As intelligent beings, men and women the world over are capable of ushering in an era of peace, liberty and prosperity to all. It is high time for the world community to reflect seriously on how to make disarmament a reality. Globalization of peace presupposes globalization of disarmament. The gods that had fled have to come back so that as Heidegger would put it, the fourfold of earth and sky, mortals and divinities can be gathered.

Instead of messing up the world any more and thrusting globalization on it, the West must apologize and repent for its colonial exploitation. Apology and repentance must be accompanied by restitution. The principle of restitution demands that the West provide the former colonies with internationally supervised economic aid. As Martin Luther King, Jr. put it, a great nation is a compassionate nation. When justice and compassion are combined, one can expect miracles to happen. The United Nations as a world body must be reformed, strengthened, and made more democratic; this would be part of genuine globalization. Member nations are bound to respect the decision of the U.N. Disregarding the decision of the U.N. would spell disaster to the world. A typical example is the invasion of Iraq by the U.S. So, whither globalization?

Endnotes

¹ Joseph I. Fernando. “Globalization with a Human Face” In John P. Hogan (ed.) *Cultural Identity, Pluralism and Globalization*, Washington D.C: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2005.

² <http://www.kzoo4peace.org/DorrienApr9.html>.

³ Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 1.1.

⁴ Samuel P. Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997, p.82.

⁵ <http://www.catholic.org/printerfriendly.php?id=2993§ion=featured+tod...20-02-2006>.

⁶ David C. Korten. *The Post-Corporate World*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. 1999, pp.2-3.

⁷ Joseph I. Fernando. “Heidegger and Technology”. *Prajna Vihara* (January – June 2003).