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A Critique of Globalization

Not Just a White Man's World

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I believe that the globalization debate is a gendered discussion about directions for the future rather than merely being an objective and impartial description of “how things are.” This is because globalization has been promoted with a particular future vision in mind. It has been assumed that certain actions in the present are necessary in order to adjust to an already given (globalized) future. This given future has been described in terms of economic and technological determinism; it is an image of an economically developed global society in which everybody benefits, eventually.

However, in the meantime it is commonly understood that a globalized future is following a particular trajectory: mostly in terms of the future becoming (even) more competitive, challenging, and basically insecure. In this future world there is little space for alternative ways of living and doing things, given the victory of economic globalization. Not only is globalization understood and described mostly in terms of this economic dimension, but the discourse on globalization also presents capitalism as an irresistible force. Implicit in this future is that globalization continues to be influenced mostly from “above,” by multinationals and states. Also, the world is populated by the global consumer within a social order that is profit oriented, focused on “wants” and the instant satisfaction of needs. To fulfill these wants there are ever-increasing material products and material choices.

With all the discussion about the need to acknowledge human, social, and cultural differences, there is no assumption that indigenous, other nonwestern, or women's ways of knowing and perspectives are recognized within this global future. Rather, a certain kind of intellectual development remains paramount, and only certain so-called “rational” aspects of knowledge are valued. As argued by Scholte, “Most knowledge that has circulated in global spaces to date has continued to exhibit the core rationalist attributes of secularism, anthropocentrism,

scientism and instrumentalism. To this extent, contemporary globalization has tended to spread and strengthen the position of modern rationality.”¹

This version of the future (the globalized world) has now become hegemonic, representing “the truth” about the future. It is rarely questioned; rather, it is used as a guiding image of inevitable trends that inform policies and actions in organizations and institutions across the board.

Another reason I argue that the debate on globalization is also a discussion about the direction of the future is because while the processes of globalization have a very long history, the “globalization hypothesis” is more recent. Most important, the globalization hypothesis has become distinctively different during the last few decades, coinciding with a period in western history that can be characterized by a void of visions of socioeconomic futures. As narratives on progress and development were weakened by postmodern, postcolonial, and feminist discourses, the space opened and the need arose for another guiding image of the future to appear. As the “Left” proclaimed the end of utopia, refusing to develop another master narrative, this new guiding image of the future (of a globalized world understood in a particular way) developed from within a neoliberal perspective. This can perhaps help explain why globalization is “not normally linked to” multiculturalism, or issues of global social sustainability²—or, indeed, given all the discussion about a global “knowledge economy” or a global “learning society,” why globalization is not normally linked to demands for *increased* funds for education.

While globalization processes themselves open up spaces for the assertion of a multitude of perspectives and positions, the globalization hypothesis and the previously described hegemonic/guiding image of a globalized world remain firmly locked within western and patriarchal intellectual history. The image of a globalized future as it is understood today has not emerged out of intercivilizational dialogues or from multiple temporal frameworks. Rather, it is associated with the expansionist drives of hegemonic powers that have imposed their own approach to time (globalized, linearly compressed) and the vision of the future to geographically, culturally, developmentally, and temporally different societies.

Geography of Globalization Hypothesis

Of course, as postmodernists remind us, every reality has an author.³ The same is true of futures visions. The current globalization hypothesis has not emerged from an epistemologically and politically neutral place. Rather, it has a history and geography.⁴ While debates abound about the history and the nature of globalization (mostly meaning discussions about various globalization processes), the globalization hypothesis can be more easily located both geographically and

historically. Geographically, the globalization hypothesis originated in western societies, the vast majority of its theorists being American or western European male academics. That is, globalization has been predominately theorized from the western spatial location as well as from the perspective of male embodiment. This means that, so far, globalization has itself “been analyzed from a very un-global perspective.”⁵ The absence of gender and nonwestern perspectives in the theories of globalization often means an inappropriate universalization of particular experiences. For example, globalization understood as the “shrinking of time and space” is possible only if one has access to financial, political, and technological resources that make some old boundaries disappear.

At the same time, mostly because of the environmental and social effects that result from economic “developmental” policies, a large number of the world’s women are forced to spend more time and cover larger territory (looking for food, fuel, or jobs) in order to satisfy basic household needs. It could be argued, then, that at least for these groups of people space has not shrunk but become more vast. Similarly, while there is a focus on the “unification” of our world in western theories of globalization, conflicts in the developing world violently diversify people (nationalize, reify ethnicity, religion, and tribe). As well, the “global networked society” is theorized in the world where access to the information superhighway is still a privilege denied to many. In a similar fashion, the “global post-scarcity” society is seen to be emerging while each year millions of people die of hunger and poverty-related illnesses.

History of Globalization Hypothesis

While globalization is seen as a new phase of development in the west, many disadvantaged social groups may, in fact, experience it as a continuation (and further enhancement at the global level) of processes such as colonization, imperialism, and patriarchy. One’s own positioning and worldview, therefore, determine how globalization is experienced and seen. It also partly determines whether “globalization” itself would be seen as an issue.

Historically, the globalization hypothesis has coincided with the coming of the Christian millennium, emerging in the 1980s and increasing in influence during the last decade of the twentieth century. It has helped name more concretely the vaguely described “New World Order.” It has also helped replace more problematic terms such as “monopoly capital” or “world capitalism,” conveniently neutralizing anti-capitalist rhetoric. The globalized future has therefore not come to represent the victory of “the Right” in the historical ideological battle with “the Left.” More conveniently, it has come to represent a whole new system with a whole new set of rules that can potentially benefit all humanity. While,

arguably, this may be the case, this globalized future can clearly be identified as a new phase within western and patriarchal understanding of time and social change. As Cvetkovich and Kellner write,

In many mainstream social theories, the discourse of the global is bound up with ideological discourses of modernization and modernity, and from Saint-Simon and Marx through Habermas and Parsons, globalization and modernization are interpreted in terms of progress, novelty and innovation, and a generally beneficial negation of the old, the traditional, and the obsolete. In this discourse of modernization, the global is presented as a progressive modernizing force; the local stands for backwardness, superstition, underdevelopment, and the oppressiveness of tradition.⁶

The “Global Age” has therefore come to represent a new, emerging order, in line with similar theorizing that puts an emphasis on slightly different phenomena (e.g., “postindustrial,” “postmodern,” “information,” or “knowledge society”). As previously discussed, this periodization arises from within the western timeline and a particular western understanding of time, progress, and development.

Globalized Utopia, Dystopia, and Eutopia

Various utopian, eutopian, and dystopian narratives underline many of the debates and discussions on globalization.⁷ This further illustrates my point that the discourse on globalization is in essence a debate on the trajectory of the future. According to the utopian and eutopian versions, globalization will lead to an “irreversible shift of power away from the developed countries to the rest of the world . . . delivering billions of people from poverty, creating opportunities for choice and personal development, and reinforcing democracy all round the world.”⁸ In sum, the liberal market economy, by its very nature being global, is also “the summit of human endeavour.”⁹

Other expected positive developments that are mentioned most often include the shift toward the understanding of human differences within a unified view of humanity; increased ecological consciousness; higher cultural interchange; more consumer and employment choices; and the opening up of the possibilities in travel, communication, and business.

The dystopian version, on the other hand, most commonly mentions the widening gap between the rich and poor globally and within nation states; further environmental degradation; and the continuation of cultural colonization. These and other perceived negative effects of globalization are nicely summarized in the following paragraph.

Among these [negative effects of globalization] are the obliteration of local cultures, the demise of nation-states, the erosion of cultural identity and tradition, the loss of sense of place and home, the technologizing of everyday life and concomitant compression of space and time and loss of “authentic” communications, a global sameness of desired and consumption patterns, and a dramatic blowout of social inequalities and unequal capital accumulations.¹⁰

Of course, because the processes of globalization are “deeply asymmetric,”¹¹ “dialectical,”¹² and “disjunctive,”¹³ it is impossible to determine whether consequences of globalization are mostly good or bad. There is even disagreement on whether the prevailing discourse on globalization is “rather optimistic”¹⁴ or mostly about “unmediated negative effects.”¹⁵ In addition, the same trends and visions are to be seen in both a positive and negative light, depending on one’s own positioning, embodiment, and/or worldview. However, the above-mentioned utopian, eutopian, and dystopian narratives are, in general, presented as universally agreed upon. This, too, is a part of “globalization,” the development of what is assumed to be a universally shared globalization discourse.

Moving Away from the Nation-State as the Default Unit of Analysis

Another universally shared discourse, connected to and preceding the globalization hypothesis, is that of the nation-state. And while the globalization hypothesis asserts that globalization is, in general, weakening the power and relevance of the nation-state (or alternatively creating the need to respond with reactive policies toward strengthening national boundaries), the nation-state remains a core unit of analysis that is used to “describe reality.” Of course, the nation-state is only one important level within a much broader system. As Henderson says in *Beyond Globalization*, other levels include the global (“human societies beyond the borders of nations and their planetary ecosystem effects”), the international, the corporate, the provincial and local, civil society, and the family individual.¹⁶

Thus if we are to move to a world that is significantly better than the old “world order,” then our units of analysis may need to change as well. The nation-state as the default unit of analysis made some sense before the introduction of such players as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the environment. Many studies have shown that the nation-state is simultaneously “too big and too small” to coordinate effective responses that address urgent social problems and issues.¹⁷ The sovereignty of nation-states needs to be balanced by subnational and supranational entities by both local communities and the world as a whole.

If we do this we might be able to reconcile diverse elements within the anti-globalization movement expressed by right-wing parties on the one hand and

environmentalists on the other. In the case of the latter, the environmental crisis can be addressed successfully only if we step away from “nation-state sovereignty” as the dominant worldview. From an ecological perspective, as opposed to the current anthropocentric and statist one, the sovereignty of Earth not only precedes but also supersedes all human sovereignties.¹⁸ This is but one example of why the nation-state cannot remain the default unit of analysis and consequently the main player when addressing numerous global problems and imbalances. See Sohail Inayatullah’s *Further Thoughts, “The Triple Bottom Line, Plus One: Economic Prosperity, Environmental Sustainability, and Social Justice for Future and Present Generations,”* on page 84.

Globalization scenarios: Globotech versus Ecarmony

While commenting on the meanings of “globalization” above, I suggested that globalization can be seen as a contest between two contrasting images of the future. These two scenarios can perhaps best be termed as Globotech, representing a hegemonic futures vision, and Ecarmony, representing the main emerging alternative. Of course, these two scenarios represent two “ideal models” or two main tendencies and political choices for the future and are, ultimately, deducted from the multifaceted reality with all its complexities, “hybridities,” and “heterogeneities.” The main characteristics of a Globotech scenario are as follows:

1. “Business as usual” continues.
2. The world is populated by the global consumer.
3. Social order is profit oriented, focused on “wants” and the instant satisfaction of needs and with ever-increasing material choices.
4. Free flow of capital is not accompanied by the free flow of people.
5. Welfare policies are implemented mostly to ward off political upheavals.
6. Poverty remains higher among women, racial and ethnic minorities, and other marginalized social groups.
7. The positive impacts of new technologies include flexibility of work, increase in communication across the world, increased human longevity, wiping out of certain genetically inherited diseases, and higher security in some areas (though provided by global monitoring and surveillance).
8. There is an increased interaction between humans, machines, and artificial intelligence.
9. The main growth industry is space exploration and excavation.
10. In general, global society is arranged hierarchically; the exploitation of the underprivileged is not direct but structural.
11. Globotech societies continue to admire individualism, competition, success, breaking the boundaries of the physical world, appearance, youth, abundance, and excess.

12. Multiculturalism is tokenistic (to satisfy demands for inclusion) and pragmatic (to stimulate penetration of foreign markets).
13. Gender and family relationships are slightly changed; the nuclear family is still seen as the most desirable family form because it is best at fostering individualism. But among the wealthy, parenting and other social functions that the family used to satisfy are increasingly being outsourced.
14. Among the elites and the wealthy, population is controlled in terms of “quality” (search for perfection), while among poor populations it is controlled in terms of “quantity.”
15. Ethical issues are discussed mostly within organized religions, but these discussions are rarely followed in the “real world,” where “anything goes.” Science and technology are given the privilege of being amoral and are still considered objective and value-free human endeavors.

As I previously argued, states and multinationals mostly pushed this scenario from above, and it remains firmly rooted in patriarchy. At the same time, various social groups, including numerous women’s movements, push globalization in a different direction, toward the Ecarmony model. The main characteristics of this model are as follows:

1. It requires global (cultural, epistemic) transformation.
2. The push comes from social movements in western post-scarcity societies and is mobilized around issues of purpose, identity, higher goals, and meanings. Another push comes from the “majority world” as well, but here it is facilitated out of necessity.
3. The eutopian “one world” is imagined as a guiding principle for human unity. The desire for belonging to one unified world is facilitated by huge demographic changes.
4. Ecarmony attempts to develop expansive multiculturalism, based on the need to learn so that persons or groups can prosper, as well as on the desire to push the boundaries of the known.
5. Economic development is seen as important but defined in broader terms. Indicators of economic progress are connected with long-term indicators of continuation/sustainability and horizontal indicators of stress/indicators for quality of life.
6. The main values in Ecarmony are justice, equity, fairness, peace, inner and outer transformation, security, long-term view. While the main principle leading societies was previously that of expansion, in Ecarmony conservation and sustainability are the new norm.
7. Education is given priority because of the view that without awareness of social and natural processes, interpersonal and group relationships, as well

as the psychological and physiological processes within the self, humanity cannot prosper. Vast resources are invested in conflict prevention and resolution, as peace is seen as the prerequisite for progress.

8. The main organizational principle is a network, which is facilitated with the development of new information and communication technologies.
9. The main weakness is potentially too much focus on the distribution of wealth, which can then jeopardize the creation of wealth that is to be distributed. Also, inner development and transformation and focus on emotional and spiritual aspects do not always sit well with issues such as efficiency, punctuality, completion of (if perceived to be boring and irrelevant) mundane tasks, and so on.

The drivers for both scenarios are currently present, both in the form of the push toward the future (demographics, environmental issues, new information and communication technologies) as well as in the form of the pull toward the future (desired image/vision). However, proponents of the Globotech scenario are better equipped in finances, time, and energy resources. In addition, this scenario is also better supported by historical social structures such as capitalism and patriarchy. However, visions from within numerous women's and feminist movements, expressed in both feminine ontologies and epistemologies (visions, ideas, theories) as well as in feminine political activities, clearly prefer the other model.

The negative effects of the current economic globalization on women

There are many women who do and will continue to benefit from changes attributed to globalization. Demands for women's rights might be secured at home by appealing successfully to global standards, for example. However, most studies that focus on gender and globalization show that women in both Second- and Third-World societies provide, and are expected to provide, services that buffer the negative aspects of economic restructuring caused by the extension of global capitalism.¹⁹ These studies also show that benefits that may result from national economic restructuring, such as more job opportunities and higher consumer choices, are usually reserved for younger and educated professional women. On the other hand, it is the most vulnerable women who suffer from existing inequalities and insecurities that are intensified by globalization.

Even when individual women do benefit from economic globalization, this happens in an environment that is increasingly hierarchical, unequal, and insecure. This is contradictory to certain visions developed from within feminist or other women's movements²⁰ or from visions developed by certain women fu-

tourists²¹ as well, from implicitly and explicitly desired visions/alternative worlds that exist in feminist utopian and science fiction.²²

Of course, globalization has many faces and is composed of many various processes. In addition to globalization governed from “above” predominately influenced by multinationals and states, there are also global forces that challenge this dominant futures vision and actively create alternatives. Here lies the potential for development of different visions and forms of globalization.

Currently there are two main scenarios for the future of globalization: one is a hegemonic vision of a competitive global society; the other is an alternative vision of a cooperative global society. Not surprisingly, perhaps because of certain individual and social capacities,²³ women play much more prominent roles in the development of alternative visions of a globalized world.

Unfortunately, the future has already been colonized with ideas and images that stem from the Globotech scenario, that is, being naturalized as “the truth” about the future. The Ecarmony model, on the other hand, is seen as optional, possibly naive and utopian (defined as unrealistic and unfeasible). As a group, women may be gaining ground through some spaces that are being opened by globalization (e.g., the increase in the influence of NGOs).

However, this process is still a long haul ahead. For the global world to be more “women friendly,” much more is required, nothing short of global transformation toward societies focused on life maintenance rather than life destruction. While globalization is currently understood and governed in terms of a neo-Darwinian paradigm (e.g., survival of the fittest, competition, expansion), globalization can also be understood and governed in terms of a Gaian paradigm (e.g., creation of a more socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable global society). Certainly, this latter vision would be closer to feminine “ways of knowing and politics of doing.”

Of course, reality is always more complex than what can be expressed, summarized, and categorized within even the wide range of scenarios, let alone only two. Still, despite all the claims and desires to the contrary (e.g., by postmodernists), our era is characterized by the emergence of two main meta-narratives or, alternatively, two main utopian visions that currently inform and express globalization discourse. Interestingly, both stem from western European history as two basic narratives about the relationship between “men” and “nature.”²⁴ One is the several-centuries-old myth of “The Land of Cockaygne,” the land of milk and honey, the “golden age” where nature provides abundant resources and the magic bowl of porridge never empties. This is the land of unlimited consumption, limitless choices, and ever-increasing growth and progress.

In European history, the Land of Cockaygne was especially popular during the Middle Ages amongst lower classes who sought to relieve the drudgery of their

everyday lives “through the pure satisfaction of sensual pleasure.”²⁵ The current version, of course, is consumer-based global capitalism where new wealth and products are constantly being created, both through technological and economic innovations as well as through the colonization of nature, lands, peoples, and space.

Another myth is that of Arcadia, where nature is bountiful but humans do not indulge themselves beyond their needs.²⁶ It is the idea and the image about the harmony between humanity and nature, rather than the image of domination and control of nature by humanity, to produce society and civilization. Arcadia originated in ancient Greece and was revived by Renaissance humanists who were “seeking to restrain the selfish tendencies of the rich and powerful classes.”²⁷ Its modern versions are today’s ecological, New Age, and anti-globalization movements.

Perhaps, as we move toward a “truly global society,” we may witness the emergence of different futures visions and meta-narratives, those based on different epistemologies and different civilizational and cultural frameworks. And it will be then, perhaps, that real spaces for imagining alternative futures, including those based on feminist/feminine epistemologies, will also emerge.

FURTHER THOUGHTS

The Triple Bottom Line, Plus One

Economic Prosperity, Environmental Sustainability,
and Social Justice for Future and Present Generations

Sohail Inayatullah

WHILE MANY BELIEVE that globalization must be totally transformed (seeking a post-capitalist vision of the future), others work for achieving fairness within the system. Among those imagining within-system change is the Triple Bottom Line movement. The term comes from a book by John Elkington, *Cannibals with Forks*. The “three bottom lines” of socially committed enterprises are economic prosperity, environmental quality, and social justice.

This is a vision of an alternative value system that can be counted in a world where counting matters (and where things that are not counted do not count!). Nations, states, and local communities can measure the second and third bottom lines just as they do the first. Royal Dutch Shell buys advertising space to say that its strategies are based on the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profits, while the United Nations calls for policies and practices that focus on people, planet, and prosperity.

Profits/prosperity have always been the first bottom line, and capitalism will