

Essay

# Post-modernization and Globalization: New Approaches to Imperialism in the 21st Century

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## *Introduction*

According to historians, every few hundred years there occurs a sharp transformation among civilizations. According to postmodernists, within a few decades from now society will rearrange itself—its worldview, its basic values, its social and political structure, its arts, its key institutions. They claim that we are currently living through just such a transformation. Modernization theory advocates and some linear futurists claim that just as there is only one world history and one world civilization, they believe that the earlier transformation of the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, the shift from First-Wave agricultural society to Second-Wave industrial and now to the Information Age is part of a long and linear process of history. They also believe that we are clearly still in the middle of this transformation; that indeed, if history is any guide, it will not be completed until 2010 or 2020. These claims may be based on too Western a perspective; but what has been evident for some time now is that the political, social, moral, and economic landscape of the world has undergone major changes through globalization.

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*A Postmodern Future from the West*

Globalization is no longer utopia. Regionalism and block trading is already a reality. Regionalism does not create a superstate whose government replaces national government. Rather, it creates regional governing agencies that sideline national governments in important areas making it increasingly irrelevant. The trend toward regionalism was triggered by the European Community (EC), but it will not be confined to it. The EC started as the European Economic Community, that is, as a purely economic organization. Since then, it has assumed more and more political functions and has created a European central bank and a common currency. But it has also taken jurisdiction over access to trades and professions; over merger, acquisitions, and cartels; over social legislation; over everything that can be construed as "non-tariff" barriers to the free movement of goods, services, and people. This has triggered the establishment of NAFTA and AFTA, regional trade blocs as well as smaller aggregations such as Sub-regional Economic Zones (SEZs), or Growth Triangles, and Polygons, attempts which are purely economic in goal. But it can hardly remain so in the long run.

According to this postmodern future, in the emerging borderless world, it is harder every day to see where traditional national interests lie. The real battle will lie between regions, not countries. As the borderless and interlinked economy develops, regional and city-level interests come more and more into play. In fact, informal pairing of cities have taken on greater importance. The linkages vary but the pattern is clear: The global economy follows its own logic and develops its own webs of interest, which rarely duplicate the historical borders between nations. As a result, economic interest to a political reality, will supposedly lose much of its meaning. Part of this scenario states that people will make their own choices based on economic rather than nationalistic reasons alone.

*The downside*

The challenge of this postmodernist scenario will, however, be the oppression of the have-nots such as will be found in developing countries by the first world. Service workers from developing countries, as a rule, lack the necessary education to be knowledge workers. And in every country, even in the most highly advanced one, they will constitute a majority. The post-capitalist society will be divided by a new dichotomy. The dichotomy will be based on "Two Cultures"- literary and scien-

tific—of which the English novelist, scientist, and government administrator C.P. Snow wrote in his *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, dichotomy between the “knows” and the “know-nots”, the former concerned with words and ideas, the latter with people and work.

### *The On-going Struggle between Elitism and Pluralism in the Philippines*

As we approach the new millennium we find ourselves in a make or break struggle between forces that want to dominate the world and to put all people under one economic culture that they can control and forces for natural and cultural diversity. But the Filipino people’s struggle for pluralism and participative democracy is not new. It began early in the 20th century.

The movement for reform in the Philippines can be traced all the way back to the campaign for reform and independence from Spain at the turn of the century, the Huk Rebellion of the 1950’s and the 1st quarter storms of the 70’s. During these times, populist forces in Filipino society protested against the social burdens brought about by feudalism in rural areas, and exploitation in urban areas. Populist protest against a government that thrived on social illnesses reached new heights in the Philippines during the 1986 EDSA revolution. Since then, NGOs and POs have played increasingly important roles in the on-going reform movement. In 1992, the Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs was set up to provide policy advise . It soon published a paper entitled “People’s Agenda for Development and Democracy” which called for economic reform and placed emphasis on the role of people empowerment and mass participation in policy and decision making as foundations for a truly democratic Filipino society.

Meanwhile, in the rest of the world, state communism in Europe collapsed early in the 1990’s. Meanwhile, the Rio Summit of 1993 produced five important documents which became the blue print for a civil society that is based on the development strategy of diversity and sustainability. These are: 1. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development; 2. A Statement of Principles to Guide Sustainable Management of Forests; 3. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; 4. The Convention on Biological Diversity; and 5. Agenda 21. While there is no single clear definition of “Sustainable Development”, it is now a popular phrase or a cliché used by many dif-

ferent people for different and conflicting reasons. According to Agenda 21, however: the concept of sustainable development must encompass at least three areas namely: the Environment, the Economy and the Community. In other words, when development is sustainable, it empowers the people of the community, maintains or improves the economy, and treats the environment responsibly.

Today an increasing number of Filipinos believe that development should not degrade the basic, physical necessities for human life, such as clean air and water. These should be made available indefinitely, meaning the basic needs of future generations should be considered as well. The non-renewable resources of the world, such as minerals, and fossil fuel, should be extracted at a rate that does not deplete them before technology and industry can shift to another resource, and renewable resources should be managed so that they are neither depleted nor degraded. In order to realize these goals, the people of the whole world must work together, share information and technologies, and significantly reduce consumption of global natural resources. For these reasons, the thrust for a "true globalization" emerged and evolved. Unfortunately, the big players of the world see globalization as just a way of doing business as usual.

### *Inconsistencies within the Post-modern Development Framework*

The following inconsistencies can be found within the postmodernism globalization framework:

1. That globalization and the global free market are one and the same. Globalization and global free market systems are incompatible because the former focuses on societies, communities, and cultures and is therefore guided by good will, compassion, harmony, and humanitarian concerns while the latter focuses only on self-interest and profit.

2. That "global-free-marketization" is necessarily the next step to the evolution of civilization. Postmodernism and "global-free-marketization" are incompatible concepts because the former is supposed to be critical of, and tries to reform, modernization while the latter is simply an extension of modernization.

Postmodernism, as an umbrella for various social movements, began as a rebellion against structuralism in literature and the arts. It was also brought about by the popular desire to reform the evils brought about by modernization and industrialization. But people who do not really

understand the theoretical implications, potentials, and limitations of both these concepts now use postmodernism as globalization. Postmodernism is supposed to be all about reforming the dominant paradigm: a direct result of modernization. On the other hand modernization calls for the transformation of traditional societies into that which utilizes and supports the industries, the culture, and technologies of the West. Modernization and "global-free-marketization" are oppressive ideologies that are founded on the idea that Western culture is better than all other cultures and that the latter should therefore imitate the former for it to be considered "modern". Ideal postmodernism should support the idea of diversity not just in nature but also in cultures. It is, therefore, supposed to be critical of modernization theory. But in many books and articles from the West, postmodernism is often mixed with the various and dangerous notions on "global-free-marketization". The kind of globalization that is being promoted by the West today is nothing new. It is global capitalism which is the logical extension of industrialization, the free market systems, and liberalization. Today, when business people and economists speak of globalization and the borderless world, what they really mean is inter-dependent economies, zero tariffs, and economic mergers and conquests. Moreover, they claim that this kind of globalization is part of the postmodern movement towards knowledge based societies and the information era. People empowerment through information dissemination and education is not connected to globalization through economic rationalization. The only kind of globalization which compliments postmodernism is that of environmentalism and conservation.

### *A Global Menace*

Globalization through economic rationalization calls for the re-examination of local and international policies for the uncritical acceptance of free market reforms. It is part of the modernization thrust of the West who claim that economic rationalization is the only way for poverty to be eradicated. But despite the assurances given by the World Bank, the IMF, and even the United States government, developing countries who have jumped into applying the economic reforms mandated by globalization have (nearly) collapsed and these countries include Russia, Brazil, Mexico, Korea, and South East Asian countries. These countries were among the fastest growing economies in the world before they

were hit by speculators. The Philippines is still experiencing economic difficulties after almost undergoing the kind of collapse that Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia went through as recently as three years ago. G8 and pro-globalization players blame these near collapses to the lack of sound economic basics but this is a weak argument due to the fact that the above mentioned countries were doing extremely well before currency speculation caused their near down fall. Also, the major proponents of economic liberalization through globalization, the United States and Japan, are highly protectionists themselves when it comes to their own economies but they demand total and immediate liberalization from the other countries, especially those who need loans and financing from them.

The problem has to do with the "rogue" capitalism which is currently practiced by the big players of high finance. Capitalism, as it was intended by Adam Smith and company, was based on the accumulation of wealth from ownership of land, the use of capital, and production of concrete goods and services. In its original concept value was based mainly on production and in this way the economy was based on something tangible and quantitative as well as qualitative. Quantitative because the goods and services are measurable as in tons or man-hours. Qualitative because free competition dictates that produce will not sell in the open market if quality is poor or sub-standard. But in today's world of high finance value is now based on non-productive enterprises such as the stock market, the transfer of property through real estate development, and currency trading. What is the stock market after all but some form of gambling on things which only exist in the conceptual realm? Stocks are man-made concepts and yet they can make or break the economy of a country. In real estate development, productive agricultural lands are transformed to subdivisions, golf courses, and cemeteries. The later do not produce anything yet wealth is generated from such activities. Currency trading is the main culprit behind the economic problems which has caused misery for a great number of Filipino people. Through present electronic communications and information technology, currency speculators can flood a local economy with dollars and/or take away billions of dollars from the same in a matter of seconds leading to economic collapse and the devaluation of the local currency. This means that a life time's worth of savings can lose its value in a matter of seconds, businesses can go bankrupt, investments can get lost in seconds at the whim of speculators who can do as much damage to a country as in exploding a nuclear device through their manipulations and greed.

As for globalization through economic integration, the question remains, "Globalization for whom?" In other words, who will benefit the most from globalization? In Negros for example, the sugar industry is no match for that from other countries for the simple reason that the latter are industrialized while ours is still semi-feudal. Surely if tariffs from sugar imports are taken away today or in two to three years time the industry will collapse. Sugar leaders have less than two years to make the industry competitive but instead of using available money to improve planting, harvesting, and milling technologies, instead of using the same to create the technology and infrastructures for the production and trading of value added sugar products, they are using the money to lobby for the impossible, which is to get government assurances that the tariff on imports will not be taken away. In other parts of the country, already we see that small and medium scale businesses owned by Filipinos have, and will surely, fold/ed in the light of unfair competition from outside. Even the large Filipino companies like PAL, PLDT, SMC, are not safe from the onslaught of foreign competition. These big companies are no longer Filipino owned. Globalization, once fully in place, may reduce the Philippines into a nation of employees working for companies and businesses owned by foreigners and consumers of produce from the big trans-national corporations of the world.

Using a more long term analysis of emerging economic trends, economic globalization may be just the first step towards an attempt by some global players to create a new world order under their control with one mass media network, one global energy grid, one communications and information network, one global economic system, one language, one culture. This can be just a first step into a mono-worldwide culture of secularization, consumerism, and a materialism than borders on hedonism. Their motive of course would be profit and economic dominance. Imagine a world that is composed of centers and peripheries. The North would be the center and the rest of the world will be reduced to just sources of human and natural resources and serve as a vast market for the value added goods of the West. In this scenario, the Philippines will be reduced into one big shopping mall controlled and owned by foreigners and a source of raw materials and labor ranging from valuable metals and minerals to domestic helpers, entertainers, and commercial sex workers of the world. The new world order may have this vast army of employees and consumers accessed and controlled through electronic chips implanted on their forehead or at the back of their right hand. Like in the scenario presented in the Book of Revelations, no one may

trade or buy goods without this mark of servitude. This analogy has prompted this writers to ask; “ Is this not the mark of the beast”?

### *Alternative Development Initiatives:*

Fortunately, modernization theory has been exposed by critical scholars as an oppressive ideology. Also, elements within the postmodern movement have now placed traditional (quantitative) economics in question and are advocating new economic theories which are normative or in E.F. Schumacher’s words “economics as if people mattered”. Globalization through economic integration is now also being replaced by a growing concern for cultural and biological diversity. In the field of politics and governance we have the civil society movement replacing the strong state theory in terms of popular acceptance and we have advocates like Dr. Anthony Giddens (Director of the London School of Economics and chief economic adviser to PM Tony Blair) pushing for a synthesis (compromise?) between liberal capitalism and free market socialism which he calls the “Third Way”. Because of these re-developments, many of the progressive thinkers and leaders of the world are now calling for a re-thinking in the way our governments and business leaders do their thing.

### *How do These Changes Affect our Notions of Development?*

Johan Galtung, one of the world’s leading socio-anthropologists has radically re-defined development. In his controversial article “ Twenty Five Theses for Sustainable Development”, Galtung argues that development should focus on people and cultures rather than just the economy. Because there are many cultures, Galtung also argues that development should always be presented in its plural form - “developments” and that we should understand the same as “self-developments” as only we can develop ourselves and our society. No one can develop the Philippines other than the Filipinos themselves.

### *How should Filipinos Go about with Development Work?*

The dominant or modernist paradigm focuses only on economic development and profit and for this reason Galtung argues that it takes a considerable amount of oppression and inconsiderateness for this kind



of development to succeed. Developing the economy rather than people and local communities is like taking care of the bird cage without caring for the birds inside the cage. GNP may be on the rise but unless our policies will enable GNP growth to trickle down to the people and unless we protect our natural and social environments from questionable projects it will all come to naught. Galtung describes real development as “non-hurting” and favorable to the most vulnerable sectors of society. In thesis number two (of the same article “Twenty Theses for Sustainable Development”), Galtung argues that development should favor human and non-human kind, meaning, we have to care for the environment as well. Without a safe and nourishing environment, we will never be happy as a people and happiness is the absolute end of development after all.

### *Competing for the Future*

Changes, both beneficial and harmful, will take place even if we do not do anything about them. More accurately, harmful changes will take place especially if we don't do anything about present conditions because we will lose by default to those who are making things happen for themselves. The alternative futures theory states that we create the future with the things that we do or don't do today. In a sense every community, every institution has a stake in the future and is competing with each other so that the future that they prefer will come true. Despite the works and advocacy of people like Johan Galtung, Amitai Etzioni, etc., we will suffer from the negative effects of thoughtless and irresponsible plans and actions of the “big players of the world” if we will not unite and organize ourselves into a global network of caring and self-sufficient local communities who think globally but act locally. Globalization is not an evil *per se*. But globalization will only work out if we can transform our economics from that which is value free and focused only on the laws of the market to an economic system that is pregnant with values and founded on the laws of morality and spirituality. Globalization will also have to support the call for sustainable development, for bio-diversity, and for cultural diversity. Participative development practices will only bear good fruit if the people will be given good education and given good values. Democracy will only be beneficial if people know how to vote.

The bottom line is that good will only come about if there is a strong

sense of responsibility from our people. We create the future by the things we do or do not do and this makes us co-creators with God. When we do our work for creating futures we have to ask ourselves all the time if whether the work or the things we do today will benefit our children and the children of our children. We have to take responsibility for our actions for the good of future generations still to come.

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