

## IS GLOBALIZATION A PHENOMENON OF THE MODERN AGE?

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*Abstract: Globalization is a process that cannot be dealt with from a single perspective and within a single nation. It is a set of processes that needs to be understood with its economic, political, cultural and ideological traits. This article will bring into discussion the idea according to which globalization is not a mechanism characteristic to the last decades but one that has been occurring for a long time. Therefore, I will try to compare globalization to the conquering wars that have taken place hundreds of years prior to this moment and argue that globalization is not necessarily a phenomenon of the modern age. Apart from this, I will also discuss some aspects which I consider important in the evolution of globalization as we know it today. Ergo, mention should be made about the Industrial Revolution and the First World War. The overall attitude towards globalization will be neither supportive nor critical but rather objective. In my opinion, globalization should be accepted as an ongoing process that has both positive and negative aspects. However, I will not deny the existence of certain factors that encourage its existence and proliferation.*

*Keywords: globalization, industrialization, modernity, consumption, hegemony.*

*“There is nothing new except the history you haven’t read yet” (Harry S. Truman)*

Globalization is a multidimensional set of social processes that resist being confined to any single thematic framework and whose transformative powers affect the economic, political, cultural, technological and ecological dimensions. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the fact that globalization is not merely a process that has been unfolding throughout the last couple of decades, but whose roots go a lot longer in time. According to Manfred Steger, globalization is a set of social processes that are thought to transform our present social condition into one of globality. The question that arises from this statement has to do precisely to its temporal aspect and to the moment when these issues began to exist. The unfolding paper will not try to identify the emergence of globalization, but instead present it as a process that has been occurring forever. An interesting perspective on this matter comes from Karl Moore and David Charles Lewis in “The origins of globalization”; the scholars trace the roots of globalization to the Roman times when the fruits and experience of trade were primarily enjoyed by the wealthy classes (xiv). The two also mention that trading controls have been imposed since Emperor Tiberius (17-38 AD), underlining that some of the leading aspects of globalization have their roots a lot further in time than one would expect (xv). It is remarkable to understand the extent to which notion such as production, distribution, interregional taxation issues and other phenomena that we consider part of our every day globalized economy have existed for millennia (xvi). However, the purpose of this paper is not to discuss the ancient times in particular, but to observe that the process in discussion is at times broader than one would predict. As this paper unfolds, the intention is to highlight the opinion that globalization, as we know it today has come into being at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when people coming from different social backgrounds benefited from the same advantages and at times disadvantages that globalization brought along.

Apart from the multitude of definitions and articles surrounding the topic of globalization, the process could be described in briefer terms. Although the comparison may

strike as superficial, I consider that ultimately, globalization is about conquering the world; whether the conquest is economic, political, cultural or ideological, my opinion is that fundamentally, it relates to the power of some over the others. Going back to the ancient times that were previously mentioned, states and empires conquered territories for the resources that were to be found there or for the purpose of expanding borders and obtaining supremacy. Whether military or mercantile, acting outside one's borders is not a novelty of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; historical records are filled with information related to the Persian wars of conquest, the conquests of the Roman empire or those of the Ottoman one. On the other hand however, leaving wars aside, trade between countries of the Western world and the East have constituted the subject of interest to many. Karl Moore and David Charles Lewis mention the fact that the medieval traders linked Asia and Europe and created interdependency between the two different civilizations (xv). More recently however, powerful nations search for new territories where cheap labor can be exploited and where taxes are lower than in wealthier countries. By asserting this, I do not mean to undermine the positive aspects of the process nor the fact that in parts of the world the presence of such action has come as an opportunity to the peoples in discussion. However, I do wish to underline that one could see a trend in the way powerful states, and more recently giant corporations act.

From a political perspective, one could also draw a comparison between the ancient times and the modern ones; countries have always depended on one another and have created alliances and fought together in battles in order to become more powerful. The previous years witnessed agreements between states, whereas modern societies signed treaties and created leagues of nations and organizations that were meant to protect them. Given all these, it is my opinion that territories have always had a global perspective upon the world and were never limited to their surrounding areas. It is obvious that as the years passed the overall attitude has become broader, but ideologically speaking, it has always been the same.

By mentioning the conquering wars, I do not wish to imply that globalization is a war in itself; although if one were to take into consideration the anti globalization point of view and the opponents of westernization belonging to the Arabic world, the comparison may not necessarily strike as unjust. Metaphorically speaking, globalization could be seen as a war whose weapons are advertising, production and consumption and whose ultimate goal is supremacy and welfare. However, placing the powerful nations or corporation on the one side of the battlefield and the less developed states on the other is indeed superficial.

Discussing globalization can prove indeed problematic and the overall attitudes surrounding the mechanism seem to be either pro or against it. It is my opinion that maintaining an objective perspective towards the matter is important in the sense that it provides a broader mindset and capacity of understanding it. Since there has been mention of the positive and negative viewpoints neighboring globalization, I consider that a brief description of the two is required. Therefore, on the one hand, the pro globalization argument and the "optimistic hyperglobalizers" plead in favor of the process bringing into discussion all the positive aspects that came along (Steger 93). Their argument foregrounds the free trade and market economy, the democratization of countries that have witnessed totalitarian regimes as well as other political organizations and alliances designed to protect that world as a whole. When it comes to the cultural aspect of globalization, the aforementioned bring into discussion data that shows that the number of educational institutes has grown in the last

period even in countries less developed as well as the widespread of information and the possibilities that become available to people all over the world (Manicas 462-463). Manfred Steger in his “Very Short Introduction to Globalization” mentions scholars that argue in favor of the mechanism. Fukuyama, for instance, equates Americanization of the world with the expansion of democracy, whereas Robert Robertson contends that global cultural flows often reinvigorate local cultural niches (Steger 94).

On the other hand, the anti globalization argument and the “pessimistic hyperglobalizers” suggest we are not moving towards a cultural rainbow that reflects diversity but towards an increasingly homogenized popular culture written by the Western culture industry (Steger 90). The examples offered in this case are indeed interesting and they include people coming from different parts of the world belonging to different ethnicities or even tribes that are seen wearing brand shoes or sweatshirts (Steger 91). The same people discuss the global inequalities in income, education, healthcare and life in general and mention different negative responses to globalization such as the Jihad (Steger 156-157). However interesting and important a thorough study on the matter might be I will not go any further with this description since it does not represent the corpus of this article. Nevertheless, as MacGregor Wise describes it, globalization is a much more complex process than any simple binary can describe and should therefore be analyzed as such.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of globalization, at least in my perspective, is that it is an ongoing process that proves to be problematic when it comes to it being interpreted. Manfred Steger utters that globalization is happening and brings forward three different interpretations of the issue: is globalization leaving behind the condition of modernity, are we moving towards the new condition of postmodern globality or have we reached it yet? The question that the scholars address is whether globalization is extending modernity or whether it is a radical break from it (Steger 8). In my opinion, as mentioned previously, globalization as we know it today has emerged simultaneous with modernity and has evolved alongside it. More precisely, I reckon that in the period following the Industrial Revolution and the Great War economics and politics have encouraged the appearance of the mentioned mechanism. In order to sustain this statement some matters regarding the Industrial Revolution in America will be further mentioned. .

Industrialization transformed the values and life styles of the American people and left a monumental imprint on the environment. Moreover, it created the infrastructure for the richest and most influential material civilization in history. The introduction of the steam engine, followed by the vast usage of electricity and later on the development of corporations, whose direct interests have brought important adjustments to the American society, also gave birth to an organizational revolution that in its turn generated the giant corporations. They became the harbingers of what evolved into a corporate society characterized by its formalized, organized and integrated traits. The latter fostered a social credo that came ever more to regard material goods as the primary source of happiness. According to Maury Klein “from this, a second more potent phase of growth emerged- the consumer goods economy with its dependence on mass production, marketing, advertising and emphasis on defining status in terms of possessions” (Klein 3). An interesting aspect that I have come across upon reading “The Genesis of Industrial America” refers to the fact that electricity could not be stored and therefore had to be consumed. In this respect, consumers (street lighting,

household appliances, electricity inside the working place) had to exist or even better, be created. I consider thus that most home appliances would not have come into being without the availability of electricity. Moreover, electric companies had all the motifs to encourage an increased electricity consumption and perhaps even finance or encourage the development of new forms of consumption. According to Klein, the emphasis moved from increasing production to a gospel of mass consumption (102). By the end of the century, electricity advanced from a mere curiosity to the most vital source of energy in industrial society.

The coming of industrialization drastically remodeled the role of small business in America. Large firms that were capable of utilizing energy and of applying large-scale economies pushed smaller competitors aside and made it impossible for other rivals to enter. Traditional family firms increasingly gave way to large enterprises managed by professional managers who would eventually dominate the production and distribution and preside over various other activities as well. Tycoons outperformed their competitors who were in turn eliminated either by being forced out or by being assimilated.<sup>1</sup>

Department stores emerged during the 1860s and became the first institution to employ the technique of mass selling. The guideline principle of the latter was to outsell the city's specialty shop. An interesting description of this whole process is exemplified in Emile Zola's "The Ladies' Paradise". The main character, Denise Baudu, is a poor girl coming from a rural area of France who becomes fascinated by the grandeur of the department store and who is "assimilated" by it. The interesting part is that part of her family, her uncle and his family, to be more precise, own a small business near the Ladies' Paradise and end up losing their business to the giant corporation. Perhaps it may seem odd to mention such notions in relation to globalization, but I consider that matters of consumption are closely related to the process and should be perceived, at times, as globalization triggers. Another reason why I brought this into discussion is related to the global aspect of the big corporations and to how they turned into a leading power throughout the world.

Going back to industrialization in America, certain scholars consider that it also influenced the rise of banks, stock markets and investment plans (Klein 129). By the turn of the century, corporations that were created by individuals to serve their immediate needs became the most powerful institutions in the nation, creatures in their own right. These corporations managed to create a gap inside the population's stratum and to generate class distinction. Moreover, the companies fostered a social credo that came to regard material goods as the primary source of happiness. To operate profitable, companies had to find the most efficient means of carrying out every function from the broadest strategy to the smallest operating system, and soon the distinction between ends and means became blurry. As the industrial system matured, it became an end in itself and shifted the perspective from why something was created to how it should be created and sold to the public. Those who were in charge of the American makeover were inventors, industrialist scientists, engineers and system builders. However, the latter were all brought together by the entrepreneurs, the so-called "Captains of Industry", "Robber Barons" or "Industrial Statesmen" (Klein 20). The overall attitude that surrounded the aforementioned was a controversial one due to the dichotomy between what they did and how they did it. Even before Calvin Coolidge

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<sup>1</sup> [https://archive.org/stream/Globalization\\_#page/n0/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/Globalization_#page/n0/mode/2up)

publically admitted that the United States were prone to doing business, the government was encouraging the process by passing laws that would encourage it, by lowering the penalties for risk takers and by alleviating credits and leases.

Subsequent to the Industrial Revolution came the Great War whose effects remodeled the entire world; however, only certain aspects surrounding the matter will be brought into discussion. Since I have mentioned the effects of Industrialization in America, I will also discuss World War I's impact on the American society. To begin with, mention should be made about the economic interests behind the War. Apart from the repeated attacks coming from Germany, America had a number of reasons for entering the war; it had strong economic ties with several allied nations, Great Britain especially, and became a provider of weapons and other war materials. The benefits that the United States had from the war were huge. America mobilized for the conflict through a patriotic outburst; the government was practically selling the war to the people and the latter was enthusiastic in showing its support. The Commission of Public Information was created and it had the objective of boosting wartime morale, of encouraging people to support the conflict and even to buy war bonds. The commission became a propaganda machine that had a number of allies. The United States had to set up a program of food relief to Europe during the conflict since European farming regions were damaged. In this matter, the government initiated the "Wheatless Mondays", the "Porkless Saturdays", the "Gasless Sundays" and the list goes on (McNeese 39). Another supporter that had proved loyal to the Congress's initiative was Hollywood. The studios produced films that presented the American soldier as the hero and that vehemently opposed the enemy. "The Prussian Cur" or "To Hell With the Kaiser." are only some of the titles that attracted the public during the War (McNeese 39). Another method of propaganda for steering American thought and action during the war and perhaps the most frequently used was an artistic one that included posters. Artists produced hundreds of them throughout the war with the purpose of generating support. Some posters encouraged young men to enlist in the army while others sought support for service organizations and war stateside. Some illustrators and the posters they have created have remained famous until present day. The above mentioned information has been introduced because I find it interesting how the War had to be sold to be people and how the Government was trying to "trick" people into "consuming" it. It is thought-provoking to observe the powers of advertising campaigns onto the masses.

The Great War's impact on the world was a destructive one; however, it also had some positive repercussions. It became an ideal breeding ground for entrepreneurs, who turned a national tragedy to their advantage. Some earned fortunes from government contracts, while others exploited the wartime insecurities. The same period saw banks proliferating as New York replaced London as the center of world finance, and businessmen gained experience from operating in the frenetic, shifting arena of wartime. Consequently, the war bred tragedy as well as opportunity considering the fluctuation of the markets and the overall uncertainty. The war turned the United States from a debtor nation into a creditor one and it organized, standardized and centralized American life as never before.

So far, there has been mention of the ancient wars, of the evolution of western society, American to be more precise, and of the way in which these actions have influenced the world. Whether referred to as dominance, hegemony or supremacy, my opinion is that from

an ideological point of view they all represent the same aspect- a global perspective upon the surrounding world.

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