

ALTER-GLOBALIZATION AS A RIOT OF THE (ALTER) EVERYDAY-MAN

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We may certainly point out the beginning of the current discourse of globalization (after World War II) while no one can precisely indicate when this multidimensional process actually began. In fact, there are several points of analysis on the globalization topic according to the different authors and different sciences which they represent. Thus, even after more than 50 years of reasoning and a rising number of investigations we have no clear vision of the phenomenon. The researchers concerned with the issue are not unanimous about the moment in history from which it should be investigated and what exactly should be in the focus of such an investigation. Nowadays globalization is something like U.F.O. – almost everybody has an idea what it is, an image formed by the media and the movies, but nobody has actually seen it. Unlike the aliens and their hypothetical spaceships, though, globalization is phenomenon typical of mankind which increasingly determines and directs the life of people all over the world. It happens in a certain but different degree in different parts of the globe, no matter if we talk about it, watch it on TV or just ignore it.

In the heaps of literature globalization has always been presented as something unavoidable, as something that originates from the common economic, sociological and historical sense, as “welfare” that will come for all in not fixed moment in the future. But is it not only figures in statistical and trade sheets, a political day-dream in somebody’s head or it is ahead of its time socio-culture theory? The most important question is not how this abstract idea has been communicated through the media and the political rhetoric but how it comes through the cultural and personal identity formation, job finding, the family life and the communication acts of everyday man, and naturally how he or she defines it for him/herself. Hence, the Anti (or more precisely “Alter”)-globalization movement starts when the little man of the periphery realizes that the global processes affect him/her personally and that it could even throw him or her aside. Currently globalization drives into a corner the democracy, the culture representation and the goods producing power of everyday man.

A curious moment in the literature on globalization is that “the great absent element” is namely the everyday man who is actually not an outside observer but the smallest unit bearing

and moving forward the process. Especially sociologists and economists (with few exceptions) who try to monopolize and dominate the discourse think and present globalization very broadly and generally or excessively narrowly. Such a way of speaking, however, is misleading because it transforms the word and the notion “globalization” into a denomination of some new kind of meta-science with its own almost incomprehensible meta-language while in the world real and concrete events happen. Namely with the purpose of preventing the process of being abstract and far from everyday man and local communities by the end of the 90’s and immediately in the beginning of the new century, a new dimension of this discourse increased. It appeared not only in the literature on the topic but directly in the streets. First, it was the demonstration against *World Trade Organization* in Seattle in 1999, next came Washington, Genoa, Prague, and Copenhagen in 2002 where the slogan of the protests was “Our world is not for sale – People before profit”. Some authors, such as Manfred Steger (2005), convincingly place the terrorist acts in New York on 11th of September 2001 as a demonstration against globalization with the weapons of globalization – migration, decentralization, asymmetrical military actions, international media network, easy access to the technologies, etc. And famous French philosopher and social commentator Jean Baudrillard emphasized that not only the choice of place of the implementation and of targets are symbolical tokens but the acts themselves are such a realistic invasion in our virtualized life that it is hard for us to apprehend them and to get them into our minds (in Znepolski 2007). Thus, on that day the terrorism was placed as a part of a globalization but not simply as a different paramilitary organization turned against the USA, and the evidence for that was the fact that the terrorists in New York were ordinary guys with legal status and normal jobs. In this case even the man in the street may be converted in highly deadly weapon of mass destruction.

This disagreement between the direction of globalization with the dominating role of the market and global finance interests was institutionalized in the regular *World Social Forum*, founded in Porto Alegre (Brazil) in 2001 and was supported by dozens of thousands activists from the left and the right, indifferently of the profession, class, age and place under the sun. The organization of the event itself was the sign that the underground movements and implicit and explicit protests of ordinary people will be a factor which the international units governing globalization in last 60 years should consider. It is an antipode of the Davos annual economic conference. What is more, in Mumbai (India) in 2004 the movement officially renamed itself from “anti-” to “alter-” globalization. It would be inaccurate if we consider it as an admission that globalization is an unstoppable process. Rather it is the realization that the discontented

groups and individuals use the same tools and infrastructure as the multinational corporations, the WTO and the World Bank do, but with the purpose to construct different path of development.

The contemporary “skeleton” of the globalization process – Internet as an almost unbounded and immense “network made from networks” has turned into a main tool for spreading and consolidation the alter-globalization idea. One man with a laptop and good connection to the Web could have more power to influence the ideas and the events worldwide than any other individual in human history. In the same context he or she is able to learn how to assemble a bomb, or to be instructed for using biological or chemical weapon, or to destroy informational system of banks and enterprises or security system of important state objects (*NIC*, 2007). Ironically, some groups, communities and individuals that feel themselves excluded from the globalization process are included in the transfer of information, ideas and money via the internet. Of course, even now there are too many “black holes” - as Manuel Castells (2004) calls them - in the network society based on new technologies, where people is disconnected and which will be a burden both to capitalistic globalization and to social alter-globalization. Probably the more important problem is not whether there is a network cable available for each individual on the planet but whether the individual in question has a connection with other people as a whole, with the groups and organizations which could defend his/her rights and interests, and ultimately with the system which allows him/her to be productive and efficient.

The main point here is that the existing dichotomy “global - local” reflects the current development of the world and is comfortably to be used in media and literature but at the same time it seems to be insufficient. With globalization progressing, it may be more appropriate to put a dichotomy such as “global - personal”. The reason is that while for the present there is no bigger thing than “global”, “the local” for its part could be divided into “personal”, because it is what is on the move, what works and produces and - more important - what connects or disconnects itself in preferred government, non-government or other organizations which could protect the individual and his/her everyday needs. Furthermore, “local” is a geographical notion which increasingly loses its meaning because of the intensive interconnection between human beings via Internet, high-speed transport and common-shared interests.

A good example of what was mentioned is the case of the Mexican activist who calls himself “Subcomandante Marcos”. This is a faceless, semi-mythical figure inspiring the guerrilla organization National Army for Liberation of Zapatists and the poor peasants of the Chiapas state in Mexico. Although the authorities and the people know who he is, Marcos (identified as

Rafael Sebastian Guillen - a middle-class student in graphics design) keeps on wearing his black skiing mask. Actually he intentionally converts himself into symbol of existence and resistance of everyday man because with his mask he demonstrates that he could be anybody and anybody could identify him/herself with ideals and goals of Marcos.

The list of persons who represent the growing influence of individuals provoking globalization or precisely the inequity resulting from free trade policy could be extended. As economic liberalization and invasion has its apologists like Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek, thus, alter-globalization movement has its own heroes. The great success of book “No logo” by Canadian journalist Naomi Klein and her explicit confrontation with Friedman’s economic philosophy in last few years contribute to her becoming one of the unofficial patrons of street activists. What really surprised politicians and especially economists was that the heavy kick against the paradigm of globalization as they tried to construct it came from the very heart of the process – the western countries. Nowadays there is no author in the realm of marketing and economy who affords to neglect what Klein was exposed in her first book and moreover, no one affords to neglect the after-effects of this book over the regular consumer. The Americans, for example, just were used to listening to the “anti-Americanism” of the famous linguist and political critic Noam Chomsky and Naomi Klein came on the stage with her intention to implant neo-Marxian and anti-consumerist ideas. To this list we could easily add even Mark Zuckerberg who with the speed of light became one of the richest young people in the world thanks to the simple idea of connecting people for sharing information about both personal things and whatever happens on the globe. Another interesting guy from the same kind is the founder of the scandalous site *Wikileaks* – Julian Assange, who broke the usual way of making journalism and is able to shock any government. No matter whether what he does is right or wrong, Assange and his organization have proved that nothing could be kept in secret and out of world’s sight for long time.

In conclusion I can only say that the statement of the traditional liberal economists that globalization will bring prosperity and equality “from above” sounds far-fetched because people who see “alter” path of globalization are individuals who are at a new stage – more connected and informed than ever. Just for juxtaposition – nowadays one individual with his/her computer uses more information than *NASA* did to send a man to the Moon. So, globalization “from above” is possible only with the cooperation “from below”.

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