

Framing Articles: What is Globalization?

Spiritual Perspectives on Globalization

Ira Rifkin

2003

Skylight Paths Publishers

What is globalization, and why do so many people—including many people of faith who see ultimate good, and even God's hand, in the process—share concerns about how it is unfolding, and, like the demonstrators, blame it for so much?

Abstract as it may be, globalization can be said to encompass certain elements.

5 In the economic sphere, globalization refers to the recent decades' unprecedented flow of capital and commerce across national borders, leading to the hegemony gained by international financial markets and multinational corporations, abetted by transnational agencies and organizations such as the WEF, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

10 On a cultural level, globalization refers to the spread of what has been pejoratively termed "McWorld"—shorthand for the Western-oriented (many say American) global mono-culture that is burying countless regional and even national cultural expressions in an avalanche of MTV, Disney, Michael Jordan endorsements, and, of course, McDonald's style fast food.

15 On an individual level, globalization is about the promotion of consumer values that feed on the perception that happiness is rooted in material progress, that choice equals the highest freedom, and that being well connected is more important than being deeply connected. All of this has been pushed at a dizzying pace by the extraordinary recent advances in information and travel technology that seem to mock time and space. The end result is the transformation of human society to a degree and in ways not yet truly understood but deeply disturbing nonetheless to many who worry about the growing divide between rich and poor nations, the commodification of life's basic resources, and consumerism's steady ascendancy.

20 In truth, though, the only things new about globalization are the phrase and the speed at which it is now occurring. Humans, in the parlance of the day, seem hardwired to seek the next valley and make it their own. We've been spreading around the globe and taking over since our ancient ancestors ventured out of Africa, perhaps as long as a hundred thousand years ago. Hunters and gatherers did it in their day. The early agriculturalists slashed and burned their way across the landscape, in some cases leaving it irrevocably changed. Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Chinese, Columbus, the conquistadors, and the Hudson Bay Company all pushed the globalization envelope, even if they did not always understand the globe's full breadth.

25 But globalization as we know it may be traced to a 1944 meeting in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, at which representatives from forty-five nations sketched out a plan for post-World War II economic recovery. In doing so, they created the IMF and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, better known as the World Bank—institutions that critics charge are responsible in good measure for the

economic, environmental, and cultural fiascos they cite as proof of globalization's systematic wrongs. International trade rules were liberalized and the flow of capital turned national borders into sieves. Soon, new media and new modes of transportation revolutionized the way we defined foreign and distant. A global village was upon us that more and more resembled an American buffet table—even if chilies, chutney, and kimchee were added to the mix.

World Publics Welcome Global Trade—But Not Immigration

Pew Global Attitudes Project

October 4, 2007

<http://pewglobal.org/>

The publics of the world broadly embrace key tenets of economic globalization but fear the disruptions and downsides of participating in the global economy. In rich countries as well as poor ones, most people endorse free trade, multinational corporations and free markets. However, the latest Pew Global Attitudes survey of more than 45,000 people finds they are concerned about inequality, threats to their culture, threats to the environment and threats posed by immigration. Together, these results reveal an evolving world view on globalization that is nuanced, ambivalent, and sometimes inherently contradictory.

There are signs that enthusiasm for economic globalization is waning in the West—Americans and Western Europeans are less supportive of international trade and multinational companies than they were five years ago. In contrast, there is near universal approval of global trade among the publics of rising Asian economic powers China and India.

The survey also finds that globalization is only one of several wide-ranging social and economic forces that are rapidly reshaping the world. Strong majorities in developing countries endorse core democratic values, but people are less likely to say their countries are ensuring free speech, delivering honest elections or providing fair trials to all. Conflicting views on the relationship between religion and morality sharply divide the world. But on gender issues, the survey finds that a global consensus has emerged on the importance of education for both girls and boys.

Costs and Benefits of Globalization

Overwhelmingly, the surveyed publics see the benefits of increasing global commerce and free market economies. In all 47 nations included in the survey, large majorities believe that international trade is benefiting their countries. For the most part, the multinational corporations that dominate global commerce receive favorable ratings. Nonetheless, since 2002 enthusiasm for trade has declined significantly in the United States, Italy, France and Britain, and views of multinationals are less positive in Western countries where economic growth has been relatively modest in recent years.

In most countries, majorities believe that people are better off under capitalism, even if it means that some may be rich and others poor. Support for free markets has increased notably over the past five years in Latin American and Eastern European nations, where increased satisfaction with income and perceptions of personal progress are linked to higher per capita incomes. But there are widely shared concerns about the free flow of people, ideas and resources that globalization

entails. In nearly every country surveyed, people worry about losing their traditional culture and national identities, and they feel their way of life needs protection against foreign influences. Importantly, the poll finds widespread concerns about immigration. Moreover, there is a strong link between immigration fears and concerns about threats to a country's culture and traditions. Those who worry the most about immigration also tend to see the greatest need for protecting traditional ways of life against foreign influences.

Immigration Fears

In both affluent countries in the West and in the developing world, people are concerned about immigration. Large majorities in nearly every country surveyed express the view that there should be greater restriction of immigration and tighter control of their country's borders. Although Western publics remain concerned about immigration, they generally are less likely to back tighter controls today than they were five years ago, despite heated controversies over this issue in both Europe and the United States over the last few years. In Italy, however, support for greater restrictions has increased—87% now support more controls on immigration, up seven points from 2002.

Concerns about immigration have increased in other countries as well, perhaps most notably in Jordan, where an influx of Iraqi refugees has raised the salience of this issue—70% of Jordanians back tighter immigration controls, up from 48% five years ago.

Religion and Social Issues

Global publics are sharply divided over the relationship between religion and morality. In much of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, there is a strong consensus that belief in God is necessary for morality and good values. Throughout much of Europe, however, majorities think morality is achievable without faith. Meanwhile, opinions are more mixed in the Americas, including in the United States, where 57% say that one must believe in God to have good values and be moral, while 41% disagree.

The survey finds a strong relationship between a country's religiosity and its economic status. In poorer nations, religion remains central to the lives of individuals, while secular perspectives are more common in richer nations. This relationship generally is consistent across regions and countries, although there are some exceptions, including most notably the United States, which is a much more religious country than its level of prosperity would indicate. Other nations deviate from the pattern as well, including the oil-rich, predominantly Muslim—and very religious—kingdom of Kuwait.

Globalization and Local Culture

no date

The Levin Institute, State University of New York

http://www.globalization101.org/issue_main/culture/

The globalization of the production and distribution of goods and services is a welcome development for many people in that it offers them access to products that they would not otherwise have. However, some are concerned that the changes brought about by globalization threaten the viability of locally made products and the people who produce them. For example, the new availability of foreign foods in a market—often at cheaper prices—can displace local farmers who have traditionally earned a living by working their small plots of family-owned land and selling their goods locally.

Globalization, of course, does more than simply increase the availability of foreign-made consumer products and disrupt traditional producers. It is also increasing international trade in cultural products and services, such as movies, music, and publications. The expansion of trade in cultural products is increasing the exposure of all societies to foreign cultures. And the exposure to foreign cultural goods frequently brings about changes in local cultures, values, and traditions. Although there is no consensus on the consequences of globalization on national cultures, many people believe that a people's exposure to foreign culture can undermine their own cultural identity.

One of the principal concerns about the new globalization of culture that is supposedly taking place is that it not only leads to a homogenization of world culture, but also that it largely represents the "Americanization" of world cultures. The spread of American corporations abroad has various consequences on local cultures, some very visible, and others less obvious. For example, the influence of American companies on other countries' cultural identity can be seen with regard to food, which matters on two levels. First, food itself is in many countries an integral aspect of the culture. Second, food restaurants can influence the mores and habits in societies where they operate. The French are proud of having a unique cuisine that reflects their culture, such as crepes and pastries. Because of their pride in their cuisine, some French people are concerned that U.S. restaurant chains crowd out their own products with fast food. Some French people would argue that fast food does not belong in French society and is of lower quality than their own.

Moreover, restaurant chains not only affect eating habits, but they also influence the traditions and mores in countries where they are located. Starbucks causes cultural concerns in Italy because of the association that Italians make between coffee and leisurely sidewalk cafes. Coffee in Italy is more than a drink; it is part of the way of life and Italian mores. While in the United States it is common for people to buy takeaway coffee for drinking in the street or office, in Italy people usually prefer to relax and chat with peers while drinking coffee. Coffee shops offer a personal, friendly atmosphere that many Italians believe a large chain could not provide. Similarly, many people would prefer to frequent coffee shops that are each unique, while Starbucks offers a standard formula.

Another example can be seen with the introduction of the McDonald's restaurant in China. In the past, it was not considered proper for Chinese children to buy food with their own money, as they were expected to eat what was put in front of them. Because of McDonald's marketing to children, however, kids developed an interest in choosing their own food when going to McDonald's. After some time, it became more of a common practice for children to buy their food with their own money. McDonald's also popularized birthday parties in China. In the past, festivities marking a child's birth date were not celebrated in China. McDonald's established a new tradition by successfully promoting American-style birthday parties as part of its marketing strategy. This example may appear trivial, but it shows that the spread of American companies in foreign countries can have unexpected consequences.

Fittingly enough, the sociologist George Ritzer coined the term *McDonaldization*. In his book *The McDonaldization of Society*, Ritzer states that "the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world." Statistics show that within the last fifty years, McDonalds has expanded to over 31,000 restaurants worldwide.

McDonaldization, Ritzer argues, is a result of globalization and, ultimately, leads to global uniformity, influencing local habits and traditions. Take, for example, the previously mentioned example of Starbucks coffee disrupting the traditional coffee culture in Italy. This sometimes leads to negative reactions, such as in the case of the Starbucks coffeehouse in the Forbidden City in central Beijing. This particular Starbucks branch, which opened in 2000, was shut down in 2007 due to heavy protests. Critics called it a stain on China's historical legacy.

Concerns that globalization leads to a dominance of US customs and values are also present with regard to films and the entertainment industry more broadly. This is the case with French films in France, for example. As will be discussed later in the brief, governments from countries like France have attempted to intervene in the functioning of the market to try to protect their local cultural industries by taking measures such as restricting the number of foreign films that can be shown. But if a government imposes domestic films, TV shows, or books onto its people, it limits their choice to consume what they prefer. In other words, the government is effectively saying that it does not trust its people to make the choices that are right for them.

Throughout history, cultures have changed and evolved. Globalization may accelerate cultural change. However, because change is driven by the choice of consumers, the elements of a particular culture will inevitably reflect consumer choice.

The Deadly Noodle

Michael Hastings, Stefan Thiel & Dana Thomas

January 20, 2003

Newsweek, Vol. 141, Issue 3

Greasy burgers and processed food may be the most insidious forms of American cultural imperialism. They're making the world fat.

Of all the ways France has resisted the cultural imperialism of the United States, it has arguably achieved its greatest success in the realm of food. Not only is French cuisine the envy of the world, but culinary tradition has allowed the French to consume their sauce velouté and crème brûlée without succumbing to the ills of over consumption that plague the land of burgers, fries and angioplasty. In recent years, however, statistics

have begun to reveal that France is vulnerable to America's junk-food influence after all. Although southern, rural France remains steadfastly healthy, its more urban neighbors to the north suffer more from eating-related problems, not least a rise in childhood obesity. "We can't point our finger at any one thing," says Mariette Gerber, a nutritional scientist at the National Institute for Medical Research and Health in Montpellier. "It's a modern way of life, very urban. And it has come from the United States."

France's growing fat problem underscores how inextricable the Americanization of food habits has become. The problem is even more acute in the developing world, where the taste for American fast-food products like McDonald's hamburgers and Coca-Cola has long been fashionable. Urbanization is leading to more sedentary lifestyles in many places. And more and more, even traditional foods are being prepared from processed flour and other ingredients that yield more calories and less healthy roughages. Nobody ever thought resisting the export of American diets would be easy. But the trend has turned out to be more insidious and more widespread than previously thought. "It's very easy to blame globalization, or the big brands like Coca-Cola or McDonald's," says Derek Yach, executive director of the World Health Organization's disease prevention, nutrition, diet and physical-fitness program. "But the problem goes much, much deeper."

Diet and exercise habits may be complex, but the basic recipe for health problems is simple: a rise in caloric intake and a decline in calorie-burning activities. The number of overweight people in the United States doubled in the past 20 years to 60 percent, and Europe and Asia are catching up. In some developing countries, obesity is increasing faster than in America—the rate is three times higher in Mexico and Egypt. Each year more new cases of diabetes arise in China and India than in all other countries combined.

Where are all the extra calories coming from? One surprising source is the raw grains and other ingredients used for cooking traditional—formerly healthy—dishes. When crops are grown in big farms and processed en masse, much of their nutrient value is taken out, and their "caloric density" rises. Even the noodle, a staple of many traditional diets, is no longer as healthy as it once was. In China, for instance, home-cooked noodles used to be made from whole-grains, ground by hand. Now, households use factory-made "refined" flour, from which the grain husks have been discarded along with nutrients like fiber and minerals. What remains are simple carbohydrates that the body more easily turns into fat.

Cooking oils have taken a similar turn for the worse. Back in the 1960s, Japanese and American researchers discovered an inexpensive way to extract oil from vegetables. Westerners and developing countries alike adopted vegetable oils as a cheaper alternative to butter, healthy if used in moderation. The problem is, the oil is so cheap that in places like India it's used to excess. It's not uncommon for Indian cooks to use vegetable oil for breakfast, lunch and supper, and to throw in an extra 10 or 20 grams to enhance a dish's flavor.

Sugar is another culprit. Diets in some developing countries contain on average about 300 more calories a day than they did 20 years ago, according to Barry Popkin, professor of nutrition at the University of North Carolina. Some of the extra sugar comes from soda, but a bigger factor is the growing adoption of Western manufacturing practices, which allow local companies to sweeten bread and other staples. Brazil now consumes more sugar per capita than even the United States.

55 No part of the world, no matter how remote, is immune from empty calories. Over the course of 30 years, the native population of Samoa has fallen victim to rampant weight gain—today more than half its residents are clinically obese. James Bindon, a biological anthropologist at Alabama University, traced one of the causes to a fondness for tins of corned beef imported from England. Similar trends have been observed
60 in Fiji. "Where in the past they produced their own fruits and vegetables, now they're swamped with canned soda and mutton fat imported from New Zealand," says Yach of WHO. "Call it the Coca-Colafication of the Pacific Islands."

People in both developed and developing countries are also doing less and less physical activity. It's the couch-potato syndrome. Rather than riding their bicycles
65 and working the fields, people sit on assembly lines, ride in cars and spend their free time watching television—95 percent of Chinese households now have a TV set. "We export our jobs, and our wage-labor patterns," says Bindon. "It's a culture-bound syndrome."

The syndrome is raising health-care costs—\$100 billion for obese children in the
70 United States, estimates the Centers for Disease Control. What about the 35 million overweight kids around the world, not to mention 300 million adults? "The cost of health care—to feed the hungry and pay for the medical bills of obesity—is staggering," says Weight Watchers International chief science officer Karen Miller-Kovach. Unfortunately, obesity and all the illnesses it entails hit the poor hardest of
75 all. High-caloric junk food is cheap enough to afford even on a low income. And the well-heeled and well-educated tend to be better about hitting the gym. In developing countries, those leisure activities aren't even an option yet. The popularity of Western-style food has thus led to an alarming trend: obese parents and undernourished children living under the same roof. "It's a very attractive lifestyle," says Popkin. But it's
80 killing people all the same.