

Thinking About... Globalization

by
Ruben Nelson

Allow me to offer these thoughts... My bias for conceptual clarification will be evident (a part of my training I do not want to overcome!)

Seems to me there are at least 3 different senses of "Globalization" and that the differences among them matter.

First, there is the **phenomenon of globalization_p** in the sense that for good and for ill we are increasingly living in each others faces, with no place to hide. Seems to me this still-emerging reality is undeniable, unstoppable – far more profoundly so than is normally given credence. This is the sense of globalization which any other sense must face, understand and come to terms with. We are not going back to the ignorance of one another that marked earlier decades, let alone earlier centuries.

Consider that with every passing day more and more of us know that we share the planet with 6 billion others; that eventually we will all know it (of course, by then the number of us will be higher); and that in 1900 not .01% of folks on this planet would have any idea of how many others were on the planet with them. And, in 1900 this ignorance did not matter.

Consider that for the first time in history we now know where everyone is, i.e. we no longer expect to find folks about whose existence we do not now know. This puts an end to a human experience which is literally as old as human beings – “discovering” new people.

Consider also, the 1903 Encyclopaedia Britannica had no articles on Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam.

In sum, whatever "globalization" meant in 1900 it did NOT mean living with an undeniable awareness that we do share, will share, must share the planet with folks who are not us.

Finally, even the activity of the anti-globalization folks adds to globalization_p.

Second, there is the sense of globalization used in the last sentence – **globalization_c as a human project to make the world safe for 20th Century corporations and free trade.** It is this project of globalization that is resisted in the streets (while it is promoted in the meeting halls) because, at least as practised at present, it is so destructive of local ways of knowing and living. In this sense, globalization_c has been an implicit dream of a significant sub-set of Western Culture for several hundred years -- those with money and access to power.

Third, there is **globalization_h – the human project of co-creating a way of living that is prosperous, sustainable, inclusive, humane and global.** In my judgement this is the real work of the next 2 centuries. For the first time in history, we must come to terms with developing ways of living that are truly global.

A further thought, one of the reasons the anti-globalizers are, as yet, so ineffective, is that they have not yet come to terms with the reality of globalization_p and, therefore, the necessity of the human project of globalization_h. Accordingly, those who protest invest too much energy in trying to hold on to

local ways of living – as if that were possible, when it is not . Much energy goes into an moral stance of expressing indignation at the destructive character of globalization. But the empirical issue of how whole cultures change and evolve is never addressed. We know hardly anything about these matters, even less than we know about childhood "development" in 1900. In principle, this is an empirical issue, but we don't seem to be able to explore it as such. There is real work to do here.

My interest is in learning to think systematically and developmentally about whole cultures – since we now know they are socially constructed artefacts (in at least some sense of that word). The new human assignment from the universe is to develop our capacities – as persons, families, organizations, communities and whole societies – to intentionally, consciously and effectively co-create a future that works for all; a new world that is post-Tribal, post-Traditional and post-Industrial.

Is a project such as this a fools' game or the real work of our generation? To the best of my ability I live for the latter option and rejoice when I meet others who share this passion.

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