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Theory Culture Society 2000 17: 129

DOI: 10.1177/02632760022051059

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Globalization North and South

Representations of Uneven Development and the Interaction of Modernities

Jan Nederveen Pieterse

A MAJOR FEATURE of the global condition is the wide and glaring hiatus between wealth and poverty. One would like to say it's a feature of global experience, but for how many of us is it a matter of experience? Worlds of experience are segmented and representations across the fence are coded. Global poverty is routinized – 'the poor will always be with you'. Aid fatigue is periodically interrupted by emergencies that prompt selective media attention and out of the sky relief campaigns. Refugees are objects of charity, asylum seekers objects of scrutiny, illegal immigrants are criminalized along with drug traffickers and crime syndicates. Wealth and poverty are both relative and contextual, and according to the soap stories that make up the comfort zones of capitalism 'the rich also suffer'. Indeed they probably suffer a lot more than the poor do because their mishaps are being continuously aired. The steady succession of development fixes and failures is papered over by global economic management; poverty alleviation and development are being outmanoeuvred by the management of global growth, in the vague expectation that a rising tide will lift all boats.

While the buzzword is globalization, uneven development trails globalization like its shadow. Globalization is uneven among countries and regions, among regions within countries and among categories within regions. While globalization is often characterized as 'truncated globalization' or 'Triadization', concentrated in the triad of Western Europe, North America and Japan, its reach extends further. While the development gap between the advanced economies and newly industrialized economies has narrowed, the gap between these and most developing countries is

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- *Theory, Culture & Society* 2000 (SAGE, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi), Vol. 17(1): 129–137 [0263-2764(200002)17:1;129–137;011543]

widening. This reflects a partial reversal of an earlier trend of gradual integration of developing countries in the international division of labour. With regard to trade, international capital flows and foreign direct investment, there has been a marked downturn in participation in the world economy by developing countries since the beginning of the 1980s. In this context what is at issue are differences at multiple levels: material differences and technology gaps, measured in the familiar statistics of GNP per capita and human development; transnational economic regimes; power differentials relating to geopolitics, security and prestige; and differences in perceptions and images.

One of the features of collective reflection in media and social science today is the profound discrepancy between perspectives North and South.¹ On either side, representations are schematic and together they make up a stylized exchange of stereotypes and off-the-shelf knowledge. Since global inequality is a major part of the contemporary collective condition it would loom large in collective reflection, but does it? The buzzword is globalization but we inhabit a divided world, a cardboard world of stereotypes and caricatures. In media and social science there is a wide discrepancy between the worlds of experience of the world's majority who are poor and the world's privileged minority in the North. In the North, social science is taken or takes itself to be at the forefront of collective understanding, while mostly it's too self-engrossed to take into account the experiences and perspectives of the world majority. Whether it concerns modernity, post-modernity or globalization, the social sciences tend to represent a narrow western or northern view. In the South, the engagement with northern perspectives is often out of context, out of touch with their historical context and with cultural variations. In the North, New Age scientists are foraging among mystical traditions in Asia and elsewhere on the basis of schemas and stereotypes, without much understanding of the actual variations in philosophy and practice. In the South, scholars seeking to negotiate modernity, scrutinize the European Enlightenment – Kant, Hegel, Habermas – without adequate understanding that rationalism was a programme, not a reality; that the Enlightenment also had a dark side; and that the Romantics were also part of the Enlightenment (Herder, Carlyle, Nietzsche). Lack of depth, lack of nuance, lack of experience and understanding on either side: the North–South hiatus in experience and reflection still creates the impression of our living in a cardboard world, making gestures to cut-outs rather than real figures. In a word, schematic understandings North and South, of the Enlightenment, modernity, capitalism, poverty, cultures. No wonder that the émigrés from the South in the North have been so influential in literature and social science, for they and not many others bridge the different worlds of experience.

North–South inequality runs very deep, *n'en déplaie* globalization and the 'de-territorialization of poverty' (i.e. the rich in the South and the poor in the North). It relates profoundly to world images and perceptions of globalization that are held also among the middle class in the South (e.g. Gopal,

1998). Of course, the South is in the North and the North is in the South, and privilege and poverty are no longer neatly geographically divided. Yet the overall distinction between North and South, crude as it is, still makes sense. In demographic terms they are the minority world and the majority world. They are *worlds* because they make up complete life-worlds. The division does not simply run between middle class and underclass – as if globally these share similar consumption patterns, lifestyles and values. In some respects, they do, but obviously class and status are not the only variables. Thus the middle class in the South shares many of the majority's economic, political and geopolitical frustrations and to some extent identifies with the nation, the region. The poor majority and the middle class in the South suffer domestic political incompetence and corruption, western double standards, superpower geopolitics and geo-economics, and share national and regional destinies.

In this reflection the focus is on differences in analysing and representing global conditions between North and South, on different conditions (different modernities, different capitalisms) and on the articulations across different conditions. Existing analytics – such as dependency, imperialism, exclusion and conspiracy theories – are not adequate for dealing with these new relations. Thus, the economics of dependency overlooks reverse dependency, i.e. the dependency of de-industrializing regions in the North (Wales, Scotland, Brittany) on investors from Asia (South Korea, Taiwan). The analytic of boomerang effects – such as the debt boomerang (indebtedness in the South curtailing demand for products from the North) – is too blunt to monitor and capture the multiple links and their ramifications. Risk analysis and the globalization of risk can be a relevant instrument but needs greater fine-tuning to be effective.

Another account of contemporary globalization adopts the novel terminology of exclusion and refers to the *exclusion* of the majority of humanity – the majority in large parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America, who are excluded from life in the fast lane, from the 'interlinked economies' of the 'Triad zone'. But exclusion is too crude a term to describe the actual situation.

The middle class in developing countries participates in the global circuits of advertising, brand-name consumerism and high-tech services, which, at another end of the circuitry, increasingly exclude the underclass in advanced economies. . . . The term exclusion ignores the many ways in which developing countries are *included* in global processes: they are subject to global financial discipline (as in structural adjustment and interest payments, resulting in net capital outflows) and part of global markets (resource flows, distribution networks, diaspora and niche markets), global ecology, international politics, global communications, science and technology, international development cooperation, transnational civil society, international migration, travel, and crime networks. For instance, the public health sector in many African countries is increasingly being internationalised. Thus, it would be more accurate to speak of *asymmetrical inclusion* or hierarchical

integration. A classic term for this situation used to be ‘combined and uneven development’, but now one of the differences is that the units are no longer nations. (Nederveen Pieterse, 1997: 80)

In the South if one is not participating in global market production or consumption one still partakes of ads, media and movies, developmental regimes (such as structural adjustment), economic, financial and political instability. Exclusion is too blunt a terminology if what is at issue is to examine the new uneven links that are developing in the framework of accelerated globalization.

Thus, people in the South are *within* the reach of global mass communications and advertising, within the reach of the message but not necessarily the action. This is how an Albanian émigré describes the impact of Italian TV on Albanians during the old days of seclusion:

Step by step the entire advertising message is extracted from its (pragmatic) context. . . . The ultimate result is that ads are viewed as windows to an upper reality. This is the reality where people, and things, and behaviors, and actions are light, colorful, beautiful. People are almost always good looking, clean, and well dressed; they all smile and enjoy everything they do, and get extremely happy, even when confronted with a new toothbrush. . . . The repeated contact with mirages of a reality *beyond* the wall, not only created a diffuse desire, but also kept it alive for a sufficiently long time, so that desire could lose its initial property of being a[n] . . . impulse for action, and become a *state of mind*, similar to profuse, disinterested love. (Vebhiu, 1999)

In Western Europe, at the other end of the TV set, viewers experience ‘long-distance suffering’ and engage in schizophrenic behaviour – making limited or vague gestures of solidarity, while finding shelter in the ‘chauvinism of prosperity’ that is being sustained by institutions and media. Electoral politics in many advanced countries excludes ‘terrorists’ and marginalizes welfare recipients and now this often extends to asylum seekers, refugees and ‘illegal migrants’.

Globalization evokes much anger and anxiety in the South and tends to be experienced as yet another round of northern hegemony, another round of concentration of power and wealth. The common metaphor for globalization in the South, in the slipstream of 200 years of weary experience, is imperialism or neocolonialism revisited. Analytically this is mistaken: imperialism was territorial, state driven, centrally orchestrated and marked by a clear division between colonizer and colonized; and none of these features apply to contemporary globalization. Contemporary accelerated globalization is multidimensional, non-territorial, polycentric, and the lines of inclusion/exclusion are blurred and run between the middle classes and the poor North and South. Imperialism was multidimensional but ultimately driven by a single-minded intentionality. Unlike imperialism, globalization involves multiple intentionalities and criss-crossing projects on the part of many agents.

Table 1 Differences between Imperialism and Accelerated Globalization

Imperialism	Accelerated globalization
State-centric, balance of power	Multiple actors and fields (technology, corporations, states, international institutions, civic organizations)
Primarily political	Multidimensional
Territorial	Non-territorial
Directed by metropolises	No central powerhouse; absence of a global hegemonic power
Clear division colonizer–colonized	Blurred division between inclusion/exclusion from ‘interlinked economies’

While the metaphor of imperialism does not apply and generates misleading analytics and politics, nevertheless the feeling itself that this is another round of hegemony is a political reality. What is common to both imperialism and globalization is the sense of powerlessness and frustration; only this time the dynamics of deprivation are different.

So are the current geopolitical circumstances. The world of the 1970s is no more. Then the momentum of decolonization was still in motion, the Nonaligned Movement was strong; the Eastern bloc provided a counter-balance and global alternative scenarios such as the New International Economic Order seemed to make sense. In the 1990s none of these conditions prevail. During the last 20 years globalization has coincided with a new period of hegemony of finance capital, in the wake of the recycling of petro-dollars and the ensuing debt crisis, resembling in some respects the turn-of-the-century epoch of Hilferding’s finance capital. Open space is shrinking. De-linking as an option was overtaken by the new international division of labour in the 1970s and localism or building alternative enclaves has little future in the 1990s. This is why the ‘new protectionism’ is a loser strategy. Countervailing power now is located in the diffuse realm of ‘global civil society’, of civic organizations and NGOs, local and international.

Frustration fosters paranoia and conspiracy theories are a convenient shortcut. Lashing out against ‘Jewish financiers’, as Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed did, is not of much use. Much of the Middle East lives by a conspiracy theory centred on Zionism in league with the United States on account of the Jewish American lobby (Pipes, 1996). In parts of Africa, the Caribbean and among African Americans, the lead conspiracy is white racism and its machinations. This is not to mention regional anxieties, such as India’s worries about regional rivals in league with foreign powers (Pakistan and China supported by the US, and the Tamil Tigers supported by foreign elements) and Southeast Asian concerns about the decomposition of Indonesia.

These perspectives in the South are mirrored by conspiracy theories in

the West – Jihad against McWorld, the clash of civilizations, or an Islamic-Confucian combine against ‘the West’, the Islamic bomb. Saudi Arabia supports a girdle of conservative Islamic states (Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan) and movements. The ‘Afghanis’ (trained by the CIA in the war in Afghanistan) are a destabilizing force in states in the Arab world. Smugglers of humans, illegal immigrants, criminal organizations, drug traders, terrorists threaten to erode and undermine the citadels of civilization. Conflicts in the South are trivialized as minor skirmishes in the periphery, or yield doomsday perspectives – either the end of history (Fukuyama) or the end of the world (Kaplan, 1996). The issue is not that these phenomena do not exist – where there’s smoke there’s fire. The issue is that of labelling, relative magnitudes and explanatory force.

The Interplay of Modernities and Capitalisms

An alternative explanatory framework may run as follows. Ours is not a world of simple modernity or simple capitalism that exists in varieties of more or less, further or earlier, differentiated along a single-track path. That was the old panorama of evolutionism, progress, developmentalism, modernization, Westernization. Part of the problem is that the language of social science and politics invites the use of the singular – modernity rather than modernities, capitalism rather than capitalisms, industrialization rather than different types of industrialization. This generalizing language is in use across the political spectrum, right to left, and is inhospitable to nuanced political thinking.

It is tempting to conceive of modernity as a single historical sphere, to which there may be different roads but which is ultimately a singular experience. What matters in that case is only a before and after: pre- and post-modernity. Of course, within modernity differences run between early and advanced, high, radical, neo-modernity and at the edges of modernity there are variations as well – peripheral, failed, truncated and hybrid modernities, but these all refer back to more or less of a single modernity. On the other hand, from here it would be a small step to spatio-temporal variations – such as European, American, Japanese, Asian modernities, and variations within each of them (such as Northwest, Southern, Eastern, Central European variants). Another argument is to distinguish among different *sequences* in modernization processes, as is common in Asian analyses. Gradually the argument of different modernities is being accepted (e.g. Nederveen Pieterse, 1998).

A similar case can be made with respect to different capitalisms. There is recognition of multiple ‘cultures of capitalism’ even among advanced industrialized countries (Hampdon-Turner and Trompenaars, 1993). There are different modes of regulation among different forms of national capitalism varying according to historical antecedents and cultures of capitalism – statist on the European continent, Manchester liberalism in Britain, free enterprise in pioneer America, statist in Japan. Concerning industrialization, distinctions run not merely between first- and late-comers

but also between late late-comers and very late-comers to industrialization, or different generations of industrialization along with different stages of industrialization. East Asia belongs then to the fourth generation industrialization. ‘There are many rooms in capitalism’s house’ (Okita, 1993: 273).

Thus multiple modernities and capitalisms are each conditioned and articulated by historic and geographical circumstances and each take on a different character on account of different modes of fusion and articulation. Acknowledging the geographical and historical differentiations of modernity, capitalism, industrialism is one concern, analysing their relations is another. What is the relationship between difference and sameness, between the variations and the theme? This is not a world of different realms that are neatly separated – modern and pre-modern, North and South, etc. Besides the different modernities in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, the Americas and Europe, there is the *interaction* of modernities and capitalisms. Understanding this interplay is a major key to contemporary dynamics. ‘We live in a world in which competition is not only a feature of inter-firm relations, but of the relations between different capitalist economic systems’ (Applebaum and Henderson, 1995: 3).

Post-Fordism, for example, brings together discussions on capitalism and industrialization, but is usually discussed as if it concerns dynamics in the advanced economies of the North only. But the actual options available and directions taken are likely to be more influenced by the *interactions* among different modes of capitalism than is indicated by merely examining varieties in the North, as if these represent the front end of capitalism (which is not tenable in view of the rise of Pacific Asia) and as if the front end would not be affected by the rear. Thus, ‘national variants of Fordism’ include peripheral Fordism (Mexico, Brazil), hybrid Fordism (Japan) and ‘primitive Taylorization’ (Southeast Asia) (Peck and Tickell, 1994: 286–7), and the question is, how are they related?

While post-Fordism and postmodernity are important analytics for understanding dynamics in the North, for a complete understanding we should consider the relations *between* post-Fordist economies, newly emerging markets and developing countries. The ramifications of the ‘East Asian Miracle’ economies are a case in point. First, East Asian economies have been new investors in de-industrializing regions of the North and Eastern Europe, thus impacting on regional uneven development in the North. Second, labour standards in newly emerging markets (lower wages, longer working hours, less unionization) are affecting labour standards in multinational corporations in their operations North and South. Third, the rhetoric or perception of less government intervention in the newly emerging markets (while in several ways bogus) is being used to reinforce structural reform globally and government rollback in the North. Fourth, the financial crises in the newly emerging markets – the Tequila crisis, the Asian crisis, the Latin American crisis – have reverberated on markets North and South, and have led to serious consideration of the architecture of the international financial system from Wall Street and the US Treasury to the IMF. They

have generated the notion of *contagion* as a successor to the Cold War domino theory. In other words, links *between* economies in the North and the newly emerging markets are affecting developments North and South. This is unfolding at the level of material exchanges and economic and financial regulation and simultaneously at the level of rhetoric, discourse and imaging.

These diverse spaces are not simply stray parts and add-ons in a random arrangement but part of a structured, dynamic and self-reflexive configuration. Thus, according to Petrella (1996), the relevant distinction now does not run between 'good' capitalism (social market, Rhineland) and 'bad' capitalism (wild, casino), but between national and global capitalism. The articulation of different capitalisms and modernities is being processed and channelled through the nodes of global capitalism and global hegemony.

Imperial continuities – the British Empire succeeded by US hegemony – have shaped the global career of capitalism. Nesting in the interstices of empire and hegemony and carried on its waves, Anglo-American capitalism – that is, the least state regulated of all forms of capitalism – has become the leading and dominant form of global capitalism. Its economics, neo-classical economics, has become the norm of economic thought. By this logic, Keynesianism was an interlude that was only partially implemented. The Bretton Woods institutions have become *de facto* global spearpoints of Anglo-American capitalism. The Washington consensus, or what is left of it, still rules if only because of the absence of a coherent alternative. Because of the size and complexity of the United States as a large multinational state it is difficult for significant changes to pass through Congress. On issues of global significance – trade policy, financial regulation, environmental and labour standards – there is a stalemate so that by and large the conservative common denominator prevails. The structural stalemate in United States politics is being reproduced in global affairs, transmitted via the decomposing (post) Washington consensus and international institutions.

As part of global hegemony differences are acknowledged but are being erased in the terms in which they are being acknowledged – as more or less of the same, early and late along the same course. Globalization has overtaken development or, more precisely, developmental globalism has become the successor to developmentalism; structural adjustment has become the successor to modernization – both refer to alignment in the global ranks, the subsumption of differences under a single standard set by the centre. Since the 1980s development policy has increasingly come to mean world market integration, through improvements of infrastructure, human resource development, structural adjustment, deregulation, good governance and transparency. If development was traditionally premised on the principle of a special status and treatment of developing countries, globalization means the end of development.

The buzzword is globalization and the key issue is uneven development. Contemporary accelerated globalization refers to a new distribution of

power and comes in a new package together with informalization, informatization and flexibilization. The ramifications of North-South articulation range from security, migration, media representation to regional conflict, labour unrest and social movements. This is the backdrop to contemporary social unrest as well as to the growing need for global reform (Nederveen Pieterse, 2000, forthcoming).

Note

1. This reflection is inspired by many talks on globalization I have given in countries in the South – including Egypt, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Tunisia – and listening to reactions they evoked.

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