

# GLOBALISING PUBLIC ETHICS AND INTERESTS: POLICY ALTERNATIVES FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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## ABSTRACT

Since the end of World War II, trillions of dollars have been poured into development schemes by multinational development banks, bilateral aid agencies, and private enterprises. Revolutionary new technologies have transformed the agriculture industry and service sectors alike. Tariffs have been drastically reduced and vast transnational corporations have systematically replaced national corporations that catered for the domestic economy. Similarly, the nation states have largely replaced small companies that catered for the domestic economy and governments seem to have been ignored. If conventional wisdom held true, then the world should have been transformed into a veritable paradise. Poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, homelessness, disease and environmental disruption should be but vague memories of an underdeveloped past. But, to the contrary, these problems have become more serious and more widespread. The service delivery and social welfare ideals of the traditional nation states seem to be far from being realised.

This article explores reasons why the signing of the Uruguay Round of General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) by governments has further stalled the envisaged accelerated global economic growth and development through the globalisation process, by removing all constraints on trade, regardless of social, ecological and moral implications. Instead of accepting the incontrovertible empirical evidence that economic globalisation will only increase many of the problems that face the world today, governments under pressure from transnational corporations insist on pursuing it further. To solve these problems, society will have to follow almost the very opposite path. Instead of seeking to create a single global economy controlled by vast and ever less controllable transnational corporations, it should seek to create a diversity of loosely linked, community-based economies managed by much smaller companies and catering above all (though not exclusively) for local or regional markets. It is not economic globalisation that society should aim for but the reverse, economic localisation to counter-balance today's substantially unfettered globalisation.

## INTRODUCTION

At a time when the world is seen as a global village, with neo-liberal capitalism as the only acceptable economic system, ethics has to be situated within relatedness and interrelatedness. Exploring the ethics of relationships reveals what kinds of relationships are being fostered in the world today. In neo-liberal capitalism, relationships are motivated by self-interest and profit. The free market is seen as an appropriate mechanism to guarantee the well-being of society. At the same time, with the globalisation of capital, the traditional concept of the state as a sovereign entity is being eroded, largely due to transnational corporations becoming dominant influences in the market to the extent that they are able to evade political and social accountability. Some economists see the current global market as a historical epoch that will bring about freedom for the individual from institutional relationships (Davidson and Mogg 1997:42).

Neo-liberal policy analysts are advocating market ideology as the only source of economic growth for African states. What needs to be considered is that Africa and other poor countries could well be victimised by this relationship, which is characterised by fierce and vicious competition. The success of powerful countries is

often based on their ability to prey on the economic and political weaknesses of poor countries. It is their own prosperity that they are mostly concerned with, rather than that of the poor countries. To ensure their own progress, for instance, European countries have mobilised their capital to form a union. The USA has responded by initiating selective trade agreements with other Third World countries. These initiatives point to the evolution of survival in public governance. Politically, the ideal in neo-liberal theory is that the primary function of government is to remove whatever shields protect weak and ill-adapted industries. Global politics has been caught up in a fatalistic *laissez-faire* philosophy. The fatalism inherent in a *laissez-faire* philosophy advocates that any interference in the market will have harmful effects (Gaddis 1992:79). The argument is that the world must let the market work according to its own principles and all will be well in the end.

This philosophy encourages one to think only in the short term, for, as Keynes noted in Singer, "In the long run we will all be dead. Karl Marx, in turn, in Singer notes the element of Greek tragedy embedded in the *laissez-faire* market economy. Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world which he has conjured through his spells" (Singer 1995:33).

The assumption is that the market is a given tragedy of human kind's existence. Ethics can be seen in the globalisation process as a tool to cushion the ugly effects of selfishness among people, businesses and governments. The implication is that the market system is an inevitable tragedy of existence. The conviction that has emerged among neo-liberal public policy analysts is that, since the market is a phenomenon of tragedy, it also follows that the welfare of society can only be achieved through self-interest. It may be necessary that self-interest and altruism need to be held in balance, with self-interest being the dominant value. This implies that if altruism is given too prominent a role, the likelihood is a political backlash that endangers the very operation of altruism within public welfare.

The tragedy is that self-interest is incompatible with altruism. This contradiction becomes an unresolved moral conflict in the sense that one who sacrifices his or her interests for the good of others will end up being seen as acting primarily for his or her own self-interest. To caricature this kind of reasoning, one can argue that people should be grateful to the selfish and greedy individuals of society. It is their selfishness that sustains altruism. This is clearly a mockery of moral sentiment and reveals that the doctrine of self-interest is actually built on seriously fallacious grounds. For good governance to be secured, the interest of the people should be given the first priority in a democratic state in the globalisation process. Graham (1997:26-30) argues that the economic policies of a particular country are not concerned with the well-being of another country but with its economic self-interest. This implies that a politician who goes about promoting the interests of another country will be abusing power in the sense that he/she is not bound to promote these interests. Thus national interest in economic relations is morally neutral – it has nothing to do with ethical considerations.

In this form of argument, it becomes difficult to argue for common interest at the global level in the sense that the present reality of globalisation seems to go against an ethical theory, which espouses the idea that national interest is neutral. Africa and other Third World countries as having a negative impact on global relationships have experienced the pursuit of national self-interest by the economically advanced countries. If one sees globalisation as implying that humankind is related and interrelated, it becomes nonsensical to talk of national interest apart from the global implications of this interest. Taking into consideration the fact that the world has become a giant market, responsible governments have to realise that their national interests are intertwined. Instead of talking of national interest, one should perhaps refer to global interest so that global ethics could be developed.



## GLOBAL VERSUS NATIONAL PUBLIC ETHICS

Global ethics have to arise from a conscious realisation of the fact that human existence depends on the well-being of the whole. In such a global consciousness there is an ethical attempt to transcend national self-interest and patriotism. Most ethicists tend to see patriotism as the same as altruism, but perhaps the two are best distinguished. Patriotism tends to identify with a group and see its fortunes to some degree as fortunes. Socially, patriotism becomes an expression of the group's self-interest against the interest(s) of those who are classified as not belonging. Patriotism thus implies seeing one's country or race as possessing some superiority over any other race (Singer 1987:51). The ethical implication is that one feels less obliged to help people of other countries than one's own fellow citizens. The bias in ethics in respect of loyalty to the group as a whole shows itself in the high praise accorded to patriotism. Selfish behaviour is disappearing; group selfishness is encouraged when it is called patriotism. In contrast, ancient thinkers such as the Stoic philosophers saw their loyalty as belonging to the world community instead of the state they were born into. To foster a global ethic on the paradigm of relatedness and interrelatedness, there is a need to go beyond patriotism. One needs to see oneself as belonging to a larger reality beyond that which is contextual. One needs to learn to think of those people who stay in countries far away as relatives regardless of language, colour and culture. This can only be possible when globalisation is essentially action at a distance (Beck et al 1997:96). This notion of action at a distance is contradicted by scholars who postulate the survival of one's culture as the goal of all living. In this form of reasoning one's culture is being seen as in a state of competition with other cultures. Its survival is premised on its ability to outsmart other cultures. This is the impression one gets from Skinner's (1988:181) argument that culture has produced the science and technology it needs to save itself. The salient feature of Skinner's argument is that of cultural competitiveness as important for national survival. Instead of seeing globalisation in terms of cultural competitiveness, attempts should be made to see globalisation in terms of multi-culturalism based on the ethos of dialogic engagement. In this dialogic engagement, an outlook should be cultivated based on the idea that no culture has the monopoly on truth but that each culture is nourished and invigorated by constant dialogue with other cultures.

## PUBLIC MORALITY AND SELF-INTEREST

Various post-modernists argue that those countries that are economically successful have a strong moral basis and operate within a strong moral public administrative framework. Their notion of a strong morality is actually based on the Darwinian concept of survival of the fittest. Neo-liberalists see self-interest as a mechanism of natural selection. They see the origin of species. What this means is that those individuals who control the rules of the global economy, its language and logic, its resource allocation, its markets, will survive in the long run. It logically follows that poor countries are an endangered species. Indeed it is their perishing which gives progress to the rich countries. Darwin insinuated the undesirability of the existence of the poor when he said that: With savages, the weak in body may soon be eliminated; and those that survive commonly exhibit a vigorous state of health (Lux 1990:12). According to Darwin as cited in Lux (1990:12) the humanitarian efforts to build a compassionate and sympathetic society are the very causes for the propagation of endless misery. The ideal would be that poor people should be left for nature to take its course.

When bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank advise governments to cut spending on social welfare they may be motivated by a lack of morality, i.e. the Darwinian theory of natural selection, or instead by a morality of a common belonging. If reality is that everything is related and interrelated to everything else, it would follow that the present dualistic economic and political system should be substituted with another, more holistic model. From denying relationships among people, neo-liberal theory, modeled on the Darwinian paradigm, denies relatedness between people and the environment. The present global socio-economic and political structure encourages externalising and objectifying of human

beings and the environment. It accentuates the competitive element and equates self-interest with the common good. This juxtaposition also distorts the capacity of objective thinking so that even much of what passes for science is tainted by ideology.

Self-interest gave rise to parliamentary politics. The political participation of citizens in policy formulation is motivated by the need to safeguard and advance one's own self-interest. The role of government becomes that of protecting the individual's self-interest. Those who consider government as existing only to promulgate laws of its own, are misguided in the sense that they simply do not understand this basic feature of human nature. Moreover, any attempt by government to come up with rules to organise society is actually illusory. Smith (1969:381) implies that the wealth of nations is not based on governmental planning but on the freedom of individuals to exchange, specialise and extend their markets. While engaging in the pursuit of their self-interest, individuals or nations end up promoting the common good. This moral paradigm was that of participants in a system that moralised self-interest within a free market system without government intervention.

In view of the foregoing it may be deduced that the global market is an expression of relationships in which individuals make political and economic decisions that produce economic and political consequences. For example, when the USA was considering the African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA) aimed at creating investment funds and developing a free trade agreement with Africa, President Clinton expressed the spirit of the legislation as paying more attention to those who are making the right political and economic reforms. Thus the USA wants to help the magnets of change. Sub-Saharan Africa is still a largely untapped market of about 800 million people. This example shows that economically powerful countries do give shape to the political and economic design of poor countries – be it good or bad. Therefore, developing countries should begin to initiate positive local economic initiatives for good governance in the face of this globalisation process.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that two mechanisms exist, which are used by economically powerful countries to bring about effective change, namely, aid and investment. With these two mechanisms, powerful countries pronounce damnation or blessings on poor countries. Their intention may not be to promote the well-being of poor countries, but to persuade them to embrace the liberal market system. The market, being driven by self-interest, cannot accommodate the interests of the majority of people who have no access to a basic livelihood. In fact the market depends on a society's readiness to sacrifice its citizens. This has been a crucial issue in IMF and World Bank lending policies. At the micro-economic level, these financial institutions insist that African governments should cut welfare spending and not interfere with the market. At the macro-economic level; governments should allow the mobility of capital. It is only upon the fulfillment of these policies that loans are given, depending on the economic performance of the country in question. The aim of lending policies is to advance the liberalisation of the economy and the mobility of capital – the lending policies are basically modeled on the needs of the liberal economies of the North. The economic dominance of the developed countries thus did not come about as a result of a spontaneous order but through an extensive exploitation of natural resources, guided by the assumption that these resources would never be depleted. However, resources are finite, which implies that scarcity of resources will eventually lead to the collapse of the global free market system. An economic system based on self-interest, for this reason, cannot bring about the global common good. Such an economic system will in the long run ultimately militate against itself.

An alternative ethical paradigm that is able to address the concerns of globalisation has to emerge from a world-view based on relatedness and interrelatedness. Africa's economic and political well-being in its quest for effective good public leadership and governance do not lie in subsuming the neo-liberal economic system within the ambit of globalisation, rather the government needs to encourage local economic initiatives as an approach to safeguard the general economic interests of all citizens.



## POLICY GUIDANCE ON GLOBALISATION ETHICS AND CULTURE: AN APPRAISAL

What makes globalisation worthy of discussion, despite the vagueness of the term, is its cultural magic. After a long history of extraordinary destruction, societies could become one single society. This contribution raises an important question: where does the discourse of globalisation derive its objectives from? The world will quickly discover the close link between the modernisation project and the globalisation project. The underlying perception so far has shown that the expected dividends from the globalisation process may be more beneficial to developed economies than their developing counterparts. The main conclusion is that globalisation may neither produce useful results nor help to advance the cause of mankind unless human beings begin to look inwards for local self-sustainable empowerment. But as custodians of people, culture and policies that drive every societal change, governments may need to re-think their policy conceptions and formulation aimed at protecting its citizens. The role of governments at all levels in this era of global change cannot be undermined.

The modernisation project has failed to westernise the culture of the world. The discourse of modernisation – laden with ideological distortions, instrumental policies and strange concepts – has been powerless to assist. In addition, development has been a minefield of corruption embracing those who do not mind losing their intellectual probity. The discourse of globalisation takes its inspiration from such ruins and some professionals believe that the end of history has arrived with the inception of the globalisation process.

Criticising scholarly Western relations with the rest of the world is unlikely to please contemporary conservative thinkers for a number of reasons (Robertson, 1992:38):

- firstly, on account of its currency in academic institutions;
- secondly, an analysis is made credible by its balanced tone and unstated creed of the superior West; and
- thirdly, certain values and principles espoused by Robertson as shared, invite further inquiry into values.

The concept of globalisation could not be revived if many ideological patterns exist. Some see the world systems in which the world is conceived as a consequence of the capitalist system of exchange. Similarly, globalisation should be centered on such a conception that involves the attempts to take the notion of globality very seriously. Much of the thrust of this thinking centres on attempts to depict the main general contour of the world as a whole. But if one employs the concept of culture more fluidly and adventurously, culture indicates a particular way of sociological specifics and not vice versa. Therefore, in this globalisation era, culture should be seen as a social representation of the global field that stresses and processes diversity, which has implications for socialisation in the contemporary world. From this standpoint every culture will be seen as equal and only to blend with that of others in the globalisation process. If societies do not think in terms of divergence, globalisation becomes a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding.

Globalisation as a process may be conceived to be the fruit of modernity. But there must be something after modernity. Therefore, globalisation cannot be comprehensively considered simply as an aspect of the outcome of the Western project of modernity. It may also be argued that globalisation is intimately related to modernity as well as post-modernity and post-modernisation. Globalisation concepts have had so many critics in wider perspectives, as did the previous world's concepts such as modernity, anti-modernity and post-modernity and its impact on the world. The public sector may be seen as agents of the globalisation process. Leaders and governments create legal and environmentally friendly environments in which big businesses thrive. Therefore, further world integration within the globalisation process either for profit or for social change cannot succeed without government inputs. Globalisation may represent the final stage of the world's societal integration. However, in order to simplify complex arguments Westernisation may present a minimal model of globalisation. Therefore, countries should endeavour to assume a moderate

stance towards globalisation by moving towards self-reliance and local economic initiatives. Otherwise, Westernisation, imperialism and capitalism will be repeated in the globalisation process.

Globalisation involves the possible integration of the economy, polity and culture of one sphere into another. If this is so, the human endeavour to influence or dominate has been evidenced throughout the ages. Therefore, the globalisation process should be embraced with a holistic approach in which there is more concern to create a socio-cultural system in which culture; polity and economy play dominant roles in the world system. Economy and polity are not excluded from the world system, but help to energise it negatively or positively.

In a world system, individuals, societies, and humankind are to be treated in terms of one coherent analytical framework; hence there is a need for better leadership and governance to administer these changes. In so far as culture is unified it will be extremely abstract, expressing tolerance for diversity and individual choice. More importantly, territoriality will disappear as an organising principle for social and cultural life, it will be a society without borders and spatial boundaries, and, if care is not taken, without policies that will be relevant to the needs of the people. It is therefore worthwhile for governments all over the world to be more protective of their local culture rather than making it more vulnerable to others in the name of global integration.

There must be well-articulated models for effective good governance that will show how economy, polity and culture work together in the new world system and particularly diffuse the idea that culture is superior to everything else. The emphasis should be that, in all political systems of the world, good leadership and governance aimed at local people-centred development, is the only hope for global economic survival. This implies that culture will inevitably dovetail with economics and governance because culture has always been politicised, for example, in Japan-US relations where the US culture is seen to be superior to that of Japan even in their trade agreements. Therefore, if economic aspects and profits only drive the globalisation process, the world is proceeding without cultural guidance and economies and politics have not been strong enough to globalise existing reality.

## CONCLUSION AND REMARKS ON POLICY ALTERNATIVES

The views expressed above give a picture of globalisation from both a political and ethical point of view. Each view tends towards cultural cloning of the entire world in the name of change and modernisation. For example, if Islamic ideas and values should press Muslims to attack the world system, more than a single set of policy alternatives is needed to prevent the world system from being undermined; an alternative, which would please major actors. That is so because it is difficult to agree that Islamic ideas and values are the best for all or vice versa. Therefore, societies must go further in dynamising a societal order in relation to a global order, which almost automatically means that political-ideological and religious movements arise in deference to the issue of defining societies in relationship to the rest of the world and global circumstances as a whole.

To be in the business of globalisation is to be in the business of culture and vice versa. For example, in terms of culture the process implies that Arabs and Jews must discuss their differences and adopt some policy alternatives that bring them closer to a single global order. Islam, Confucianism and Western liberal democracy contest with one another for dominance at the contemporary world socio-political scene. In terms of polity and economy, the process also involves international organisations and transnational movements whose aim it is to have the upper hand rather than the advancement of humankind. Consequently, under the Western umbrella where organisations and multinationals play a dominant role, globalisation will be no more than the disorganisation of non-Western cultures and structures.

It is evidenced in this article that globalisation originated from Western thought in the same way as the discourse on modernisation has, and this can be better termed global cultural cloning. Western intellectuals

still see themselves as the best in the field despite the West's diminished capacity for spinning intellectual stories about non-Western places. Indeed, it shows that the North is more conscious about the globe than the South. This raises the question of whose influence will shape the present and future welfare of the earth's inhabitants. Freedom and equal justice should be an overriding factor.

The new version of change is also about competition, in which the rich alone will be rewarded and esteemed, provided it is done with openness and clear developmental intentions. Therefore, if globalisation is not a form of cultural dominance by the West then every nation in the developing world should be left to dictate the pace and limits of its own involvement. However, globalisation is not a self-operating machine, but requires a great deal of co-operation from those involved, especially when the problem relates to cultural identity. Therefore, the contemporary world demands a hegemonic organisation capable of diffusing, enforcing and protecting the harmonious interaction of economic, political and cultural processes. The problem is that good hegemonic power (whose goal is co-operation and liberation rather than colonisation and domination) is hard to define in the modern world, given that international public administration can be easily abused and subverted for national interests.

Similarly, as national governments and their leaders have the traditional role of serving the interest of their people, it will not be out of place for them to protect the same interests in matters of global concern and at the same time have good global relations with other sovereign states. However, the existing international public policy prescriptions are not universal in application and even if they were, leadership and governance scenarios are not the same all over the world and this poses a serious administrative threat in the present globalisation era. Thus, the concept of powerful global actors must be organisational; for example, the body of the United Nations (UN) and its agencies are in a position to make sure that every global decision must be in the interest of the people and not for a few economically privileged countries or/and individuals. It is important to note that policies and programmes of developing nations need to be focused on public service delivery in aspects that pose serious threats to the society such as primary health-care in dealing with deadly diseases such as Acquired Immuned Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), tuberculosis (TB) and malaria; education, which gives a boost to people's empowerment, training and development; and poverty alleviation programmes.

These challenges and many others may not be priorities for developed countries at this stage, but they are serious realities that impede several developmental efforts in developing countries. Unless these issues are viewed in the proper perspective, the chances of survival of developing countries may be slim in the present globalisation era.

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