

CHAPTER FOUR: FRAMES OF GLOBALIZATION

Introduction

Now we come to the third strand in the triple helix. This is where we begin to explore the elements of humiliation in the experience of globalization. We began this book by saying that Westerners first 'discovered' globalization in the form of an overwhelming tsunami during the 1990s. In other words, they felt that economic, political and cultural forces 'above' and 'outside' their societies were reshaping their lives.

For rich Westerners this experience of being 'taken over' from outside or above was new. However, the British, parading on their ceremonial elephants through India in the nineteenth century, imposed exactly that experience on their colonial subjects, as did their European neighbours such as France, and Spain,

What is new to one is familiar to another. Non-Westerners got very used to being controlled from outside and above during the period of European colonialism. Now many Westerners are also discovering it is one thing to be sitting on top of an elephant and quite another when the elephant is sitting on top of you.

Globalization as empire, market and cosmopolis¹

Over the past four centuries there have been profound changes within the process of globalization. By 1550 European imperialism was well established and vigorously expanding. The Spanish and Portuguese empires were not 'mere' commercial enterprises. Imperial possessions were gorgeous trophies, visibly

demonstrating the might and honour of the monarchs in whose names they were carried out. They also glorified the generals who did the bloody work of seizing new territories and defending those already acquired, men who, if not already noble, were in search of nobility like Hernán Cortes, conqueror of Mexico.

The European empires soon stretched across Asia, America and Africa, as well as Europe itself. They were run on absolutist principles, just as the aristocracies managed their landed estates at home. The imperial masters asserted absolute control over the lands and resources, including the indigenous populations whom they regarded as absolutely inferior people, barely human. As the cliché has it, trade followed the flag. By the eighteenth century large businesses such as the East India Company had gained enormous influence.ⁱⁱ However, the market had to operate within the strict boundaries set by rigid social hierarchies and dictatorial political authority.

By 1950 several of the empires had already broken up and the others were on their last legs. One reason the empires died was they could not, in the end, contain conflicts between two opposing principles they tried to combine in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These were the absolutism of the landed ruling class, including the monarchy and military leadership, and the ideas of citizenship and people's rights. By the early twentieth century, the latter were becoming increasingly influential in the 'headquarter societies' of the empires: in France, Britain, Austria, Russia, Turkey and so on.

These 'modern' ideas made ordinary soldiers in the imperialist armies increasingly discontented with their own officers. Meanwhile, subject peoples began to organise to defend their own rights as 'imprisoned' or 'unborn' nations. They began to feel not just 'put down,' the common experience of losers in the battle for precedence under the old honour regime, but also wrongly 'excluded' from full membership of the human race. They wanted to be liberated and emancipated.

For these reasons, *imperialism was the first great global generator of humiliation.* The political fallout from the feelings of humiliation, deliberately heightened by 'consciousness-raising' political orators, leading to protests, revolts and boycotts, these things had the effect of weakening the internal coherence of the empires. It eventually left them weakened before the external pressures imposed by war.

As European imperialism diminished in strength during the mid and late twentieth century, the market values expressed in the World Trade Center were asserted more aggressively. This coincided with the global rise of the United States. *The global market place became the second great generator of humiliation.* Critics have targeted international big business and the 'Washington Consensus' as a cause of victimization and belittlement for national governments, workers and consumers throughout the world. The accusation is that the big multinational corporations dictate their own self-serving terms to local 'partners' in resource-rich but credit-poor countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Critics assert that business takes what it wants, accepts little

responsibility for the long-term social effects of its intrusion, and threatens to leave if there is any trouble.

Not everyone agrees with this assessment. International business and finance are defended strongly, as was imperialism in the days of the British Raj.

Advocates of an ever-expanding global market praise it as the primary agent of liberation. To parody the 'official' view: freedom and openness bring the market and the market brings yet more freedom and openness. Here, for example, is Mike Moore,ⁱⁱⁱ speaking as Director-General of the World Trade Organisation: 'Globalization isn't a new concept. It's been around since before Britain ruled the waves and waived the rules. What is new is the extent to which information flows have exploded. You all know this, because you now have to deal with the consequences for your businesses not just quarterly or annually, but daily, hourly and sometimes by the minute. The world is a much smaller, and vastly more transparent and democratic place, than when Tulip futures peaked in Amsterdam in the 17th century.'^{iv}

However, freedom is more complicated than that. It is not just a question of switching from colonial subjection to consumer sovereignty. This takes us to *the third global generator of humiliation: the human costs of living with the uncertainties and ambiguities imposed by the 'in between' cosmopolitan condition.*

By 'cosmopolitan,' I mean a situation in which many different cultures, religions, ethnicities or nationalities share the same social space without any settled

hierarchy or set of boundaries between them. None of them is clearly 'best' or rules the others.

Freedom from colonial subjection imposed a heavy emotional and psychological price upon those who were freed. In the 'old days' of imperial rule, when the indigenous population faced repression on a daily basis at the hands of uniformed officers representing the colonial powers, life had a refreshing clarity: the colonial subjects were oppressed and they demanded their freedom. Everybody knew who they were and what they wanted.

As more people were freed from imperialist oppression they came to experience with much greater intensity the tensions and difficulties of a 'liberated' cosmopolitan existence in which values and identities are often contradictory and ambiguous. More specifically, they found that in the course of the long struggle against their oppressor, 'modern' ideas and practices had infiltrated into the colonised society, challenging the old ways.

Once they had got rid of their imperialist oppressor, the liberators turned round to discover their old way of life had also gone. When people have lost both their oppressor and their old way of life it is very difficult for them to achieve a coherent sense of self or live in a morally satisfying way, enjoying the respect of others they respect in turn. This situation may be experienced as a humiliating displacement.^v

This particular story has an interesting twist. *Imperialism has made a comeback*, although its latest beneficiaries the Americans, only half believe in it. The United States has a strong anti-imperialist heritage. It played a major part in preventing Britain and France from re-establishing their empires after 1945. The leaders of the United States attacked and ridiculed the Suez invasion in 1956.

However, their successors in the White House and the Pentagon went on to use the military methods of the old imperialists in the same venues and against the same people: for example, in Vietnam, the old stamping ground of the French colonial masters, during the late 1960s and early 1970s and, more recently, twice, in Iraq, where the British flag used to fly.

The essence of imperialism is the systematic use of force to make others do what you want them to do. You end up treating those you push around as inferior, whatever your ideological excuses or moral motivations.

The US-Israel alliance and two wars in Iraq have been precious gifts to the more desperate elements among intellectually and morally tormented cosmopolitans, especially in the Middle East.^{vi} These examples of 'imperialism,' so conveniently appearing, allowed those attacking the West to activate hostilities cultivated since World War I and before. This return to tradition gave humiliated cosmopolitans a way of restoring their fractured sense of self. Extremist forms of fanatical religion provided ideological and emotional encouragement. This persuaded some to follow this road to a violent end.

Summary

In this chapter, we have: identified three frames of globalization which are the imperial impulse, the logic of the market and the cosmopolitan condition; and noticed that although the relegation of Europe in global politics seemed to be the end of empires, imperialism made a comeback during and after the Cold War, providing new political opportunities for victims of the cosmopolitan condition.

Conclusion

The next part of the book explores this chapter's themes in much greater depth. We are at a point of transition in the argument. So far we have travelled around the triple helix in one direction: *codes of modernity (honour/human rights) → modes of humiliation → frames of globalization*. During the rest of the book we repeat this journey but the other way round: *frames of globalization → modes of humiliation → codes of modernity (honour/human rights)*. We look at the intellectual landscape more closely, beginning with an investigation of the propensity of globalization to generate humiliating situations and experiences, focusing, initially, upon the imperial impulse.

ⁱ For interesting perspectives on globalization, including its political dimension, see, amongst many others, Held et 1999; Giddens 2000; Scholte 2000; Habermas 2001; Halliday 2001; Halliday 2002; Henderson 1999; Hobsbawm 2000; Monbiot 2003; Urry 1999; Urry 2002; Chandler and Mazlish 2005; Mazlish and Iriye 2005; Sassen 1996; Sassen 1997.

ⁱⁱ See, for example, Bowen *et al* 2004.

ⁱⁱⁱ Not to be mistaken for Michael Moore, author of *Dude, where's my country* (Moore 2004).

^{iv} Mike Moore was speaking to the US Chamber of Commerce in Florida, 25 February 2002,

http://www.wto.org/english/news_e/spmm_e/spmm77_e.htm (1 April 2005).

^v Cosmopolitan anxieties about personal values and cultural identity arise not just among freed post-colonial subjects but also in the ranks of the imperial power when the scent of decline is in the air. This is especially so if the servants of empire have doubts about the worthiness of their mission, and if the absolutist practices of imperial repression are in conflict with their own beliefs either in human rights and citizenship or, more vaguely, in the fundamental equality and dignity of all human beings. The career and writings of T E Lawrence (1888-1935), ‘Lawrence of Arabia,’ would make a relevant case study. Here is an extract from his letter to the *Sunday Times* on 20th August, 1920 complaining about the British occupation of Iraq (Mesopotamia): ‘We say we are in Mesopotamia to develop it for the benefit of the world...How long will we permit millions of pounds, thousands of Imperial troops, and tens of thousands of Arabs to be sacrificed on behalf of colonial administration that can benefit nobody but its administrators?’ Quoted at <http://www.antiwar.com/orig/lawrence.php> (August 15, 2005).

^{vi} On the *intafada* see, for example, Jamal 2005.