



Développement et Civilisations
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Editorial

The other side of the picture

Albert Longchamp asserts straight away that saying “The world is ill” would be too simplistic. Really too simplistic. When in fact our statement in “Development and Civilisation”, is the exact opposite. Our indignation, our refusal to follow the current ultra-liberalism want to be well justified, respectful of the social, cultural and religious realities of the great geographical areas covered by the Centre Lebret-Irfed network.

Therefore, the aim is – as our former managing-editor says – to formulate alternatives. To relate why the other side of the globalisation picture justifies the refusal to submit oneself to a monolithic thinking of development and growth. With no perspectives nor a concession of an omnipresent reality, what is this reality worth?

The globalisation’s strength lies in the fact that, whether we like it or not, it represents a horizon for billions of individuals. Rapid enrichment, successful brands’ seductiveness, financial intoxication provoked by the manna of direct investment in relocations... many live this as a positive change. We have to understand and admit it to fight it effectively.

To hit the target, our shot must be well directed. And this is the merit of Albert Longchamp’s text, for whom “changing life” also comes with “changing our ways of life”. This need for individual responsibility is essential. The fact that nations withdraw themselves “like medieval citadels” is the dual consequence of a widespread fear and the declining will to resist. Here, we are proposing directions for active resistance.

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Changing globalisation

By Albert Longchamp*

Globalisation has not solved any of the development problems. On the contrary, the gap between rich countries and poor countries has only grown larger.

We shall not tell you that: « The world is ill ». It would be... too simplistic. And unfair. But, affirming that the golden age of Globalisation is finished seems close to the reality. We had strongly

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counted on hopes stirred by the advent of the “Global Village”. Even here, in a Faith and Development¹ article, I asked, un-ironically: “Globalisation, the New Name for Development?”. The question mark is here a necessity. There is no more need to ask the question. Globalisation has not at all solved the problems of development. This is why I’m borrowing from Chico Whitaker’s last work, a title that I’ve slightly modified. Instead of “Changing the World (new) Directions²”, I propose some reflections around “Changing Globalisation”.

I am not, by far, the only one to have come back from great illusions. It had seemed to me that a better connected world would become more unified, therefore relatively peaceful. We are far from that. Take the case of a giant in international negotiations, the World Trade Organization (WTO). After five years of discussions which were as trying as they were vain, the famous Doha round has been suspended sine die. Whose fault? Of course, the U.S. does not facilitate things. But the other tenors of the group, the European Union, Brazil, Japan, India and Australia are not doing any better. All are binded to elections or to local interests. This makes Pascal Lamy, WTO general manager, say that the crisis is political, while the NGOs and sometimes even members of governments, like Shri Kamal Nath, Indian Minister of Commerce and Industry, insist that the WTO crisis reveals the failure of the whole system. For Mr. Nath, the Doha round is caught between “Intensive Care and the Crematorium”. A charming picture!

An ideology for all seasons

Multilateral governance has not lived up to people’s expectations. Globalisation, caught in the frenzy of consumption, has been waylaid by a mercantilism which is sometimes sordid. This is not new. The phenomenon became manifest after 1950; as early as 1975, I happened to be in China, where we heard people promise that their country would equal the American standard of living “in thirty years, at the latest”. They kept their promise. We reckon that 300 to 400 million Chinese have gained access to the consumer society. And it is not the other globalisation giant, the G20, who will complain about this and deliver ready-made “new directions” for changing the world and its course.

Globalisation has become an ideology for all seasons; it does not regulate any truly human approach. In a recent issue of the Global³ review Michel Egger signed a severe article which denounces a “global model which impoverishes the poorest with blows of liberalization, which destroys agriculture and industrialization efforts, reduces the democratic control over public services, devastates the environment and above all, benefits the multinationals.” Did you say development?

And, to avoid getting things mixed up, the author does not even mention the senseless disasters caused by the Middle East conflicts, or Africa being subjected to pillaging, or even Europe which is somehow oblivious of the trauma undergone by civil populations during the dismemberment of Yugoslavia⁴.

I know that nobody knows the magic formula nor holds the magic wand which will transform the ruthless battle of world strategies into a child’s game. In fact, even children do not spare themselves and are now playing with real firearms (several cases of fatal confrontations, the last months in the U.S.). Life has no more value, except for the price of a good.

In the destabilization we are going through, commerce is not to be blamed alone, nor the weight of armament. The ethnic, cultural, religious issues maintain a permanent pocket of uncertainty, of

¹ *Foi et développement (Faith and Development)* no. 267, October 1998.

² *Changer le monde (nouveau) mode d’emploi [Changing the world (new) directions]* by Chico Whitaker, prefaced by Patrick Viveret, éd. De l’Atelier, Paris, août 2006.

³ *Global*, éd. Alliance Sud, CP 6735, CH-3001 Berne, no.21, autumn 2006, www.alliancesud.ch/politique. Quotations of Pascal Lamy and Shri Kamal Nath are extracts from the same article.

⁴ Concerning Latin America, that we must also cite, our readers will benefit from re-reading the article of Christian Rudel: “Bolivia, from colonialism to indianism” in *Development and Civilization*, no. 346, September 2006.

insecurity, of hostility. The Iraqi Muslims bury themselves in ruthless communal conflicts, whereas they could have joined each other to create a presentable image for their country. On their side, the Arab countries as a whole have never found the means to promote coherent politics, to try to pull the Israeli-Palestinian conflict out of the quagmire.

Once more, nations protect themselves like medieval citadels. They erect walls on the hills of Jerusalem or in the Mexican desert. Americans have become a population of cowards. A few days ago, at the Montreal airport, the security service politely and firmly asked me to leave a 7dl bottle of Coca-cola on the inspection table: "Too dangerous!" The Great powers are trembling with fear. Sure enough, it is possible to replace an innocent drink with liquid explosive, but this sole image shows that the label "War against terrorism" is shattering all the optimistic reference points provided by technical globalisation. Since Sept.11, 2001 the world is certainly less safe than during the cold war era and the thousands of nuclear warheads buried in ultra secret reservoirs, in Siberia or Texas. The world is literally disordered. It is in the same time split up and placed under the supervision of a group of companies or hegemonic powers. We sing to the glory of democracy and yet accept that our electronic mails fall under the permanent control of the United States. The police system is globalised. Would this be the only fruit of a broken dream?

We must admit it; the situation does not lead to optimism. But systematic pessimism would also poison the air. The new directions for globalisation are found between an enlightened trust, the spotting of intangible human and spiritual values, the will of a scientific community always searching for new solutions, and last but not least, a political class which is, at last, conscious of its responsibilities. Good ideas abound, but they often end up in oblivion due to the negligence of uneducated, mediocre or corrupt politicians (defects that can easily be combined). Not one country is an exception.

Globalisation rhymes with marginalisation

The capitalist and egoistic globalisation, just like the past communist domination, has had, for some time now, its detractors. And it's a good thing that Porto Alegre came to counterbalance Davos. But, the industrial dependence and technological subservience of so-called Southern countries as well as their lack of financial capital, diminishes a great part of their influence. One can always deliver great speeches, but Lithuania, Benin or Nicaragua, no matter how democratic they may be, will never stand a chance before the U.S., India or China who are, in reality, the great Globalisation champions.

At a conference organized under the aegis of the International Labour Organization (ILO) three years ago, a Senegalese participant talked about the "Re-colonization of our countries". Another participant, also African, invited his listeners to "develop a culture of resistance" to globalisation. The European Union can pride on having a piece of the cake; but try boasting about your profits to those who have been laid-off, and laid-off by French or British companies that have relocated to Singapore or into the suburbs of Shanghai. The market does not have a soul. It has stock holders. Work is being devalued.

For many, Globalisation rhymes with Marginalisation. Restoring the link between work and revenue is an emergency. So is the ending of systematic recourse to state subsidies, to unfair protectionism. Countries producers of raw materials (cotton or coffee, for instance) are held hostage by stock market values, exchange rates and customs fees. In 2003-2004, Tanzania experienced the lowest rates of raw coffee. But, in New York or Paris, the price of a cup of coffee never went down!

The truth is that, Globalisation is failing because we have developed bad habits. We are abandoning people's development for the blind forces of the market. But, wealth redistribution is not an optional matter. It is linked to a good part of the solution against "terrorist threat". The American-style secured State is, on the contrary, tempted to neglect social imperatives, whereas it should; through its social security channels, allow each citizen to benefit from the fruits of the global national wealth. What would happen to a Philippine or Bolivian worker's motivation if globalisation were to cut down the price of a pair of shoes in half for its buyer, but cost him his job?

Globalisation is having problems because, contrary to all expectations, it is « poor » in terms of good reputation. Zaki Laïdi's remarkable write-up which appeared in the 28th of January, 2004 issue of *Libération*⁵ explains some causes of the worrying character of globalisation. A particularly enlightening remark: "These last years, (globalisation) has paradoxically not produced any spectacular effect, economically and socially speaking: social mobility of nations is still very low, the dynamics of growth continues to be cyclical and the formidable increase in global wealth remains hypothetical due to the absence of world redistribution machineries".

Another difficulty originates from the fact that economic and technological globalisation cannot impose any constraint on sovereign States. The fierce resistance of the US to the Kyoto Protocol is an example. But, many other countries are not easily made to submit themselves to world programmes of governance, or else they exclude essential aspects like social norms or environmental protection. The end of the said article finally gives us something to meditate on: "Alter-globalisation is nothing else but the expression of political despair". This would probably explain the crisis of ATTAC, instigating organisation of the Porto Alegre Social forums, now lost in internal disputes.

This is how a certain force, faced with the evolution of globalisation, can lose its indignation and mobilization energy. Indignation is an exhausting act, and counterfeits are legion. Around 1930, in the midst of the economic...global crisis which he called the "established disorder", Emmanuel Mounier already wrote: "We have no illusion as to the character of the forces which are now fighting communism. Take away the fear, the vulgarity, the pecuniary interest, the class hatred, thousands of little forms of nonchalance, the felony and tranquillity out of the individual who bristles and weigh what is left of pure indignation"⁶. In fact, pure indignation does not either solve all problems. There is need for imagination, creativity and tenacity.

Concern for the local space

In an effort to find a way out of the present disenchantment which can explode into forms of social violence, interesting reflections on the social dimension of globalisation are published in a substantial World Commission study. Entitled "A Fair Globalisation – Creating Opportunities for All"⁷, it is based on around 2000 interviews from the whole world and tackles questions on globalisation as viewed from sometimes neglected angles. The Commission had the special task of focusing concern on the local space. There is no doubt that globalisation disturbs cultures and traditional values; it puts to test the village, clan and family structures of solidarity.

Therefore, choosing ways of integration which respect the social environment could help avoid shocks which destabilize peoples drowned by the globalised "great wave of uniformisation". The entry of big mining, forestry, agricultural companies, as well as the introduction of a certain type of tourism would not damage the local way of life – for instance, in markets wherein little producers come to do their purchases or sell their ware. Micro-credit programmes can also avoid the over-indebtedness which pushes men out on the road, with false hopes of finding better chances of survival in urban centres.

⁵ Article of Zaki Laïdi entitled " Du mou dans la mondialisation", chronique *Rebonds*, p.35. The author speaks after the meeting in Davos (les mondialistes) and especially in Bombay, where, that year, the alter-globalists were assembled. He writes as subheading that "*Bombay and Davos suffered from ideological routinization and disenchantment*". Note that alter-globalisation has suffered from the "good behaviour" of Lula. The Brazilian president does not forsake his commitments but tries to get Brazil into the "Big" league, even if he has to employ a certain neoliberal rhetoric. Political scientist Zaki Laïdi also published: *La Grande Perturbation*, Flammarion, 2004. But the author had already published in 1997 a short premonitory work, *Malaise dans la mondialisation*, éd. Textuel Collection "Conversation pour demain", 136 pages.

⁶ Quoted by Salvador Lozada during the Colloque « Emmanuel Mounier », UNESCO (Paris), the 5 and 6 October, 2000. See Actes du Colloque Mounier, Vol. 2, Editions *Parole et Silence*, Paris, 2006, p.451.

⁷ Publication of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Geneva, 190pp. See also: www.ilo.org/wcsdg.

A new initiative to re-think our relationship with consumption, and consequently with globalisation, starts to have a name in the midst of alter-globalisation: the trend or the movement known as Voluntary Simplicity (VS). VS has gone through discrete beginnings, in the form of a little book published in 1985, in Quebec, by Serge Mongeau. A total failure, then. But, the author wouldn't be discouraged. He tried again, in 1998, with "Voluntary Simplicity... more than ever". Great success this time! The work became an immediate best-seller and has not ceased to be reprinted. VS became part of Social Forums in Porto Alegre. The movement placed itself clearly under the slogan "Another world is possible"⁸.

What is Voluntary Simplicity? As Dominique Boisvert defines it briefly, it is a behaviour which allows a person "to concretely experience the possibility of living better with: less money, less material possessions, less work, less dependence and...no debt at all!"⁹. In essence, it's all a question of mental hygiene. Therefore, how about going after dependence on publicity, for instance. How? Develop one's critical sense ; and this does not cost a cent. On the contrary, one can gain much from it. Why choose brand names when the same un-branded product can be found five to ten times cheaper in this or that boutique? Or is it really necessary to spend so many more hours in a week shopping, the way Americans do, than playing with your children? "The VS, a way of life which is simple and which makes you intelligent", promises our friends from Quebec, with their legendary humour.

On a different sphere and in a more ethical context, many men and women, especially executives, are volunteering to adhere to specific moral provisions. M. Toni Föllmi explains this in a work which has even more competence from the fact that its author was manager of the Swiss National Bank¹⁰. Quite a reference! The author presents three questions which concern the economic decision: What ethical measure do we want for ourselves? What price are we ready to pay for ethics? What latitude is left to national decisions in matters of ethics, in the context of world competition? These questions aim to promote the attainable "human maximum".

In conclusion, let us quote this couple of company managers who had to realize 300 lay-offs over 3000 jobs in a little city in the Jura. It was a take-it-or-leave-it proposition, decision of the Board of Directors. The couple, practising Catholics, forced themselves to study all the files, one by one, in order to arrive at a decision which would be the most ethically just. Such respect of humanity merits homage. Not all employers are delinquents. I insist on believing in globalisation with "human maximum".

Albert Longchamp

Counter-point

The Necessary Political Combat

Criticising globalisation for not having kept its promises is an exercise which many engage in. Albert Longchamp does it, blending regret, indignation and humour, which gives force to his words. He emphasises on the aggravation of inequalities and the absence of international regulation and redistribution mechanisms likely to counterbalance this unavoidable effect of the sole free market competition. He avoids the dangers of refusing globalisation which would lead to rejecting the techniques that allowed it and the hopes it engendered.

Globalisation is a reality; how do we make it to serve all men? This is the question to which the article's title promises an answer. The great merit of Albert Longchamp's reply is in making us

⁸ For more details on VS, see <http://www.sosplanete.net/mongeau-frame.htm>

⁹ See *L'ABC de la simplicité volontaire*, by Dominique Boisvert, éd. Ecosociété, Montréal, 2005.

¹⁰ See *L'argent et le pouvoir face aux décisions éthiques*, Ed. Foi & Economie, CP 245, CH-1701 Fribourg. See www.foi-économie.ch

conscious of the fact that we are not locked up in a machine which crushes us and that everyone can do something by changing his/her way of life, by working on the local level, to strengthen solidarities.

But, the article stops there. In fact, globalisation cannot become equitable by the sole juxtaposition of individual actions respectful of the common good and the diversity of cultures; it needs institutions and rules. If the WTO fails, if the World Bank and the IMF commit errors and if the UNO is impotent, we will have to lead the political battle to change that. And, there again, individuals can act through their vote and participation in civil society organizations which are efficiently engaged right there, where the rules are made.

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