

## Are inequalities, injustice and inequities associated with globalization?

The New York Times columnist, Tom Friedman, in his book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* gives his final verdict on the significance of world events in the last years. It is neither the "End of History" announced by Francis Fukuyama, nor the "Clash of Civilizations" predicted by Samuel Huntington. It is the return of "Globalization"; the process of globalization had already started in the second half of the nineteenth century, as a result of the revolution in transport. The new "Global Age" being the product of the revolution in communication is much more significant in its scope than the first. To use Tom Friedman's formula, the world a century ago, like a T-shirt, had moved from the large size to the medium size. Today, it has moved from the medium size to the small size.



This process of interdependency creates a world that is at the same time more complex, more fragile and in which the concepts of sovereignty, responsibility, the meaning of territory, the nature of international actors are all deeply challenged. It is only natural that such a "revolutionary process" should create multiple frustrations and sources of discontent.

Frustration with globalization stems from two contradictory or complementary fears: the fear of being absorbed in an artificially homogeneous culture, on the one hand, and the fear of being left out in an increasingly unequal world on the other hand. The fear of being absorbed leads either to an equation between globalization and Americanisation or simply to a desperate identity quest, which results in a process of fragmentation. My "marginal difference" becomes my source of identity in a world that appears to be too homogenized.

By contrast, discontent with globalization could also be equated with a new North-South divide or rich versus poor of the world. The contradiction between cultural and socio-economic fears may be more apparent than real. In fact, these two forms of discontent with globalization are largely complementary.

Globalization reinforces all sorts of inequalities: inequalities of power in the traditional sense of the term in favor of the United States; inequalities of wealth in favor of a few individuals who are richer than many states, even than an entire continent like Africa; cultural inequalities in favor of the Western world. In principle, all individuals can have access to the Internet, and create their own web-sites. Yet globalization gives a new legitimacy to Orwell's celebrated formula, all men "are equal, but some are more equal than others". Globalization is rightly perceived as leading to greater inequalities. Conscious of the growing strength of their critics, those who claim that the world is a global village are introducing the themes of "responsible globalization", "moralized globalization", "globalization and ethics", etc.

Yesterday, inequality in the world was best conveyed by the image of various classes of passengers in a train. You could travel in first, second or third class, but you reached your destination. Today instead, with globalization, only a minority, approximately one fifth of the world population, is actually on board of the train which has already left the station. These inequalities are of course above all of a socio-

economic nature, translating the increasing differences between the very rich and the very poor, but also the growing cultural, political discrepancies between an enlarged West and a demographically exploding East and South.

Are the benefits of globalization endangered by the fact that they are less than ever equally distributed, thereby increasing the risks of social disintegration? An excess of inequality, and an excess of arrogance could easily lead to destabilizing socio-economic and or cultural revolt. Globalization has to be managed and mastered: a difficult challenge for a process whose complexity and fragility is not fully grasped.

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