

Conclusion

Europe took control of the world in half a millennium. Standing on the shoulders of the great Eurasian civilizations, it destroyed pre-Colombian civilizations before enslaving the Chinese, Indian, and Muslim civilizations, from whom it previously appropriated major inventions. In 1913, Europe and its new settlements reigned over the world. Only Japan escaped this hegemony.

It is tempting to interpret today's globalization as the continuation by other means of the ongoing Westernization of the world. Whether the emphasis is placed on economic domination or on cultural domination, the West seems to be finishing the work it began 500 years ago. This reading of history equally drives the interpretation that rejects globalization.

Portraying globalization as a "clash of civilizations" or as a "world class struggle" has the merit of historical simplicity, but it confuses myth and reality. The principal problem with globalization today is not that it sharpens

religious conflicts or class struggles; it is that *globalization does not keep its promises*. Globalization creates a strange world that nourishes the feeling of exploitation while in fact exploiting only a bit or not at all. It creates an image of new closeness between nations that is only virtual, not real.

Development, as analyzed by Amartya Sen, consists of giving peoples and societies the means to build destinies worthy of their expectations. The problem of globalization up to now is it has altered people's expectations more than it has increased their ability to act. Even in the *a priori* most favorable cases, the situation remains overwhelming. If China's eastern seaboard becomes the world's new factory, 800 million poor peasants will hope to obtain the right to go and live there. More than half of India's population still does not know how to read or write. Before the poor countries can become prosperous in their own right, considerable tasks remain for them. Half of the world's people live on less than \$2 a day. Everything that will allow them to become fully vested participants in globalization remains to be done. The poor countries must build roads, educate their children, and master technologies that are constantly evolving. Access to the Internet requires telephone lines. In order to prescribe medicines, doctors are needed. For the majority of the poor inhabitants of our planet, globalization remains an inaccessible idea.

For a long time it was thought that global commerce was responsible for enlarging the gap between the rich and the poor during the nineteenth century, foreign trade having accelerated England's industrialization and curbed India's. This interpretation should be rather good news for poor countries, since today the opposite is occurring. However, India suffered from a much heavier handicap—one that also hindered many other poor countries after they gained independence. Indian development was imprisoned by a sometimes colonialist conception of capitalism more than by capitalism as such. Today it is believed that capitalism is not capable of producing the "spirit" that it needs to prosper. Max Weber imputed this impetus to Protestantism. Many others have seen it as a Western characteristic. But the spectacular economic divergence of Taiwan and mainland China after World War II illustrates the fragility of the latter thesis. That demographic and sociological similarities between an Islamic nation and a neighboring non-Islamic country are much stronger than those between two spatially separated Islamic countries leads to a similar conclusion: that role models are drawn from larger pools than nations or religions.

Samuel Huntington's observation that the Middle Eastern youths who hijack an American airliner may wear jeans and drink Coca-Cola can be read with another meaning: Though they hijack the American plane, they privately seek the American way of life. Iranians can burn

an American flag before the television cameras and still adopt in private the behavior they denounce in public. Whoever saw the film *Ten* by the Iranian Abbas Kiarostami can no longer doubt that women in Iran ask the same questions as their Western counterparts.

However, wealthy countries, by the sole fact of their existence more than because they economically exploit or culturally stunt other peoples, pose an existential problem for other countries. That today they create technologies for the entire planet's use is at once immensely useful (they pay the cost of experimentation) and an expression of tyranny. Everything happens as if they uniformly prohibited the discovery of other possibilities. The existence of the telephone or television makes it impossible to think what could happen had they not been invented. Technology is much more than simple instruments. The paleontologist André Leroy-Gouran explained that, thanks to the use of tools, *Homo sapiens* progressed in a cumulative manner, rather than through the direct transmission of thoughts or ideas from one generation to another.

For countries in the South, and to a certain degree for European countries with respect to the United States, to be dispossessed from creating new knowledge and new technology is equated with exclusion from History. A person is not happy simply because he consumes a certain vegetable. The process that drives him to make one choice rather than another is just as heady as the

choice itself. Poor countries want sewers and medicines. These wants do not conflict with a desire to participate in writing a global history that does not amount to mechanically imitating the most advanced countries.

Understanding globalization requires holding at equal distance the universalism of those for whom the stages of economical growth are fixed in advance and the relativism of those championing the clash of civilizations. Because the human species is indivisible, each people is challenged by the technical or moral discoveries made by others. But the world will never be “just” as long as people do not have the conviction that they all contribute to discovering and molding a shared human destiny.