

Current Links between Globalization and Violence

Mark Lindley

Samskar Ashram Vidyalayam, Varni (Nizamabad Dist., A.P.) - 503 201, India.

lindley@boun.edu.tr

Abstract: Six ways in which globalization is tending to cause destructive violence (notwithstanding its benefits) are distinguishable: (1) a fast-expanding gap between rich and poor, (2) the public media making this gap widely evident, (3) a disturbingly fast rate of cultural interpenetrations, (4) worldwide availability of modern weapons; (5) lack of effective laws to control ruthless international concomitants of mass production/distribution, and (6) fear of macro-ecological catastrophes due to excessive increases in population and in per-capita consumption and waste. Some of these problems have to be addressed by strong democratic government. [The Journal of American Science. 2006;3(1):1-4].

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Students of human history know that it has included a lot of destructive violence even though mentally healthy people dislike such behavior. Political talk refers often to peace, but a stream of news reports suggest that violence may have increased in recent times and that the problem may get worse in the foreseeable future. I will describe six reasons for this likelihood and offer a few remarks as to some ways to address the problem.

1. The gap between rich and poor has become too wide, too fast. The very richest are richer than ever, while the poorest are still suffering starvation deaths; and meanwhile – perhaps more significant as a cause of violence – the gap between the richest one or two billion people and the poorest one or two billion is fast expanding. Most economists like to reduce such facts to one-dimensional, monetary reckonings; some respectable academic economists have concluded accordingly that whereas the ratio of wealth (taking account of market-exchange rates when the comparison is between people whose wealth is measured in terms of different currencies) between the richest and poorest 20% of the world’s population used to be, back in the 1960s, *ca.*25:1, it is now more than 70:1. (Milanovi, 2005).

Another way of comparing quantitatively the economic conditions of people in different countries is to estimate “purchasing-power parity” by taking the wealth ratio and dividing it by the ratio of estimated average costs of living in the countries concerned. But

this latter kind of comparison on a worldwide scale is of limited validity, because (*a*) it depends on the validity of the comparison of costs of living in the different countries – costs which are, to the extent that globalization has *not* taken place, for somewhat incomparably different ways of living (perhaps at quite different average levels of material consumption), and (*b*) it sets aside the fact that to the extent that modern globalization of commerce *has* effectively taken place between the countries concerned, the comparison of wealth based on market-exchange rates is valid. From estimates published by the World Bank in 2005, it can be reckoned that between the USA and China in 2004, the approximate ratio of wealth per capita was 32:1, and in terms of “purchasing-power parity” 7:1; between the USA and India, 67:1 and 12½:1; between the USA and Mauritania, 98½:1 and 19½:1.

2. Modern media enable many of the less well-off people to see the living conditions of the one or two billion who are far more *affluent*. If only a few people were extremely rich, some kind of ideological justification might seem feasible (“She’s the queen”, “He’s the high priest”, etc.), but no ideological mystique can make it seem fair that a billion people are anything like 70 times as rich as a billion others. It’s clearly outrageous.

(The same media that are now showing this to civic society are also bringing us constant news of violence in various parts of the world; so, it could theoretically be

the case that there is not really more violence today than at some time in the past, we just see and hear about it more than our ancestors did. But either way, when we see and hear about so much of it happening, of course we want the situation to be improved.)

Here I would like to recall the “strong-state/ weak-state” concept featured in Gunnar Myrdal’s famous book, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations* (1968). Myrdal was one of the economists – and his wife, Alva, one of the sociologists – who had helped the government of Sweden transform that country from a poverty-stricken land in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to a prosperous land in the latter half of the 20th century. They believed that government’s duties go far beyond policing to maintain a social order enabling private and corporate enterprise to engage in uninhibited accumulation. They helped design legislation whereby strong democratic government in Sweden collects ample taxes from the rich and uses the revenues to subsidize the housing of the poor and to ensure that all the nation’s children become well educated citizens, that even the least affluent parents need not have more children than they wish to have, and so on. These measures reduced saliently the noxious effects of the gap between rich and poor.

3. There is a remarkably fast rate of various kinds of cultural interpenetration due to the improved media and to economic migration (due in turn to improved means of travel). These cultural interpenetrations are causing big and little challenges to traditional, more or less local cultures, and some of the challenges are bewildering people and making them feel bullied and otherwise stressed. Moderate rates of cultural interpenetration and economic migration are beneficial, but in some places the one or the other is happening now at a psychologically indigestible rate. This is an important cause, when combined with some of the others described here, of the false consciousness of the religious fundamentalists.

4. The technical capacities for violence have been increasing. Just think of the guns, bombs, airplanes, etc., and of how modern media enable violent-minded people in one part of the world to learn techniques from and to collaborate with like-minded people elsewhere. Because of all this there probably *is* more human violence today than at most times in the past. Military people call some

of it “collateral” damage, but still it is violent. A land mine, for instance, is equally violent if it destroys a soldier’s foot within a week or an innocent child’s foot years later.

The duties of strong democratic government should include limiting people’s access to deadly weapons. The USA (my homeland) should have stronger gun-control laws than it does, and I think the current attempts by its government to promote an international order curtailing the worldwide availability of weapons of mass destruction are correct in principle (but should not in practice be accompanied by the precept of an era of American world hegemony).

5. Competitive mass-production manufacturing induces advanced countries to exploit the resources and markets of “underdeveloped” countries in ways that often entail violence. A Western-trained, anti-imperial economist who collaborated with Mahatma Gandhi in the 1930s, J. C. Kumarappa, saw this clearly at the time:

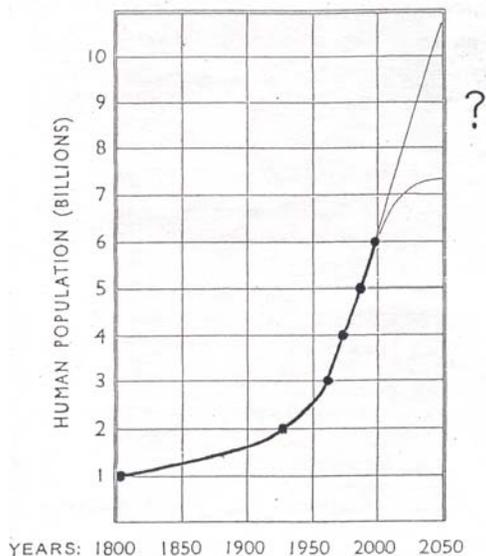
“While the plant that transforms raw materials into consumable articles is located in some one place, the ... raw materials are gathered from the places of their origin and brought together to feed the machinery ... at a speed demanded by the technical requirements ... for production at an ‘economic speed’. ...[And then] when the goods have been produced they have to be sold. Again the problems of routes, ports, steamships and political control of peoples have to be faced. Exchange, customs and other financial and political barriers have to be regulated to provide the necessary facilities. All this can be done only at the point of the bayonet.” (Cited in Lindley 2006, 34.)

The situation described at the end of this citation has been due in part to the lack of effective international law to prevent such use of “bayonets.” Perhaps in a happier future phase of globalization, institutions somewhat like the IMF may reduce the level of international violence due indirectly (and sometimes directly) to mass-production industries. It is important to pursue this hope notwithstanding the vested interests of the industrialized manufacturers of military equipment to sell their wares.

6. There is now an ominously mounting pressure upon the ecological capacities of the Earth to support the human population, because the population is too big and growing too fast in size (see the graph on this page) and in per-capita consumption and waste. Under the circum-

stances it would be rational to breed fewer children and to share and share alike (which would also mitigate the problem of unfairly extreme differences between rich and poor); but while many of the poor are *not* breeding fewer children, most of the rich are not yet thinking seriously in terms of sharing, because – I suspect – they are afraid that the “natural” premise that the Earth can supply enough for everyone’s need may be incorrect, and so there is a latent tendency to think less in terms of sharing in order to avoid massive violence than in terms of using violence to prioritize oneself, one’s family and other, more-or-less local groups that one identifies with.

In India in the 1970s, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi caused a lot of violence by setting targets (for numbers of men “voluntarily” sterilized) in a national program intended to curb the population explosion. This was an incorrect application of the strong-state concept. Some better ways for democratic government to address the problem are to provide high-quality universal primary and secondary schooling and to promote the social empowerment of women. The great majority of educated and socially empowered women would rather bear one, two or three children than a large brood.



Yet even if population-growth is curtailed, the Earth probably cannot go on for very long satisfying people’s greed the way it was made to do in the 20th century. There is available now a concept (introduced in 1996) enabling ecological economists to measure some of the ways in which affluent people are putting pressure on

the Earth’s capacity to support humankind and are thereby indirectly causing violence in human society – not by violent activities but just by their 20th-century-style affluence. The name of the concept is “ecological footprint.” Before explaining it let me distinguish between “closed-system” and “open-system” economic models. Closed-system models take account of all social economic exchanges, including those not paid for with money (for instance, most of the work done by most women) and therefore outside the market-economy, but are nonetheless “closed” in the sense of being limited to social exchanges and not including ecological facts. Open-system models take account of everything in closed-system models and also of the exchanges between humanity and the rest of the ecosphere. The aspects of open-system modeling that are not included in closed-system modeling are covered in ecological economics.

The ecological footprint of a given population is defined as the total area of ecologically productive land and water (cropland, pasture, forest, marsh, river, sea, etc.) that would with prevailing technologies be required in order to provide on a continuous basis the energy and materials consumed by that population, and to absorb its wastes. It is reckoned in terms of area (different kinds of area on the surface of the Earth) rather than of money. It summarizes several aspects of ecological economics in a way analogous to the ways in which “gross national product,” “cost of living” and other such indices summarize certain aspects of market economics. A clever aspect of the ecological-footprint index is that for each nation it can be estimated from data that have already been gathered for market economics. For instance, the pasture component of the nation’s ecological footprint can be reckoned from the totals of how much money is being spent annually there for dairy products and from estimating, for that complex of dairy products, how much pasture (not necessarily in the same country) is needed to produce those goods.

It is also possible to reckon how much ecologically productive surface (of various types) is available within each nation. The term for this in relation to national ecological footprint is “national available bio-capacity.” The ecological footprint minus the available bio-capacity is the “ecological surplus or deficit”; and, by dividing each of these three numbers by the number of people living in the nation, one gets corresponding per-

capita estimates. The table on this page (abridged from Wackernagel *et al.*, 1999) shows some of them in hectares as of the mid-1990s.

Because the reckonings are in terms of surface area, they are inapplicable to aspects of depletion (for instance, of fossil fuels) or pollution (for instance, of air) which call for reckoning in terms of volume. But in spite of that lack of comprehensiveness and in spite of the rough nature of the estimates (though no more rough than some of those, such as for cost of living, that are used in market economics), ecological footprint is a clear way of summarizing a lot of useful information in

	Available bio-capacity:	Ecological footprint:	Ecological surplus/deficit:
Australia	14.0	9.0	5.0
Canada	9.6	7.7	1.9
Sweden	7.0	5.9	1.1
Brazil	6.7	3.1	3.6
USA	6.7	10.3	-3.6
Germany	1.9	5.3	-3.4
Japan	0.9	4.3	-3.4
China	0.8	1.2	-0.4
India	0.5	0.8	-0.3
Earth	2.0	2.8	-0.8

ecological economics. It shows that the average person living the USA was, in the 1990s, contributing more than eight times as much as the average person in China was at that time to a related worldwide “ecological deficit” which is in turn a partial indication of the extent to which humankind was using up for current consumption the finite “natural capital” provided by the Earth.

Some people say that science will yield technological “magic bullets” rendering it unnecessary for the affluent to restrict their wants. But the problems of violence and of macro-ecological degradation may become so dire that humankind will need clever technology *and* voluntary simplicity in order to survive.

Concluding remarks. As new technologies continue to be developed, some partial remedies to these modern problems causing violence may be found in a context of more advanced forms of communication, production, distribution, organization etc. But still, strong democratic government will have to bear the main burdens in regard to lessening (a) the gap between rich and poor, (b) the availability of techniques of violence, (c) lawless international competitiveness due to mass-production manufacture, and (d) the ominous macro-ecological depletions and pollution. NGOs, schools and the public media can help develop a modicum of consensus on such political steps and can participate directly in (a) promoting modernized versions of small-is-beautiful production for local distribution, (b) persuading the affluent to cultivate voluntary simplicity, (c) mitigating the bewilderments due to large-scale cultural interpenetrations, and (d) addressing the older cultural and psychological causes of human violence that have not been discussed here.

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