

Global Economy, Global Dialog

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We are constantly reminded that we live in a world that is now connected by a global economy, one that transcends the earlier understanding of an international economy. In the latter case, major corporations situated in a core country—either the US, Japan, or those that comprise Western Europe—and projected their economic power as the post-colonial representatives of that country. For much of the second half of the 20th Century these corporations looked to the military force of their nation to safeguard investments and protect property abroad, in many cases to the point of overthrowing legitimate governments that posed a threat. And during that period there was no confusion which were the client states, and which countries commanded. Ideological differences that made up what was commonly known as the Cold War created a language that lingers to this day—the First World were the “modern” western capitalist democracies, the Second World described those socialist countries under “communist” anti-capitalist rule, and the remaining countries comprised the Third World.

This label became synonymous with underdevelopment, poverty, corruption, vast urban slums, and countries under this heading were never viewed as anything more than sites of cheap labor and raw materials. Slowly, the corporations became known as multi-national corporations (or MNCs) and gradually they became extra-legal operations, beyond the reach in many cases from national laws because they operated in many countries. For the past two decades we have witnessed a transformation as economic activity became divorced from political jurisdictions and the global economy took hold. National laws became increasingly unimportant in enforcing rules of behavior, and the corporations acted with impunity (Westra, 2013) in the vacuum created by the absence of an international system of enforcement. The consequences are bleak. Oxfam recently released a study pointing out that the 85 richest individuals in the world have as much wealth as the lowest 3.5 billion people combined (Oxfam, 2014). The global economy meant that corporations and countries would feel economic shocks anywhere in this global system: currency crises in Greece or Spain reverberated in the financial markets in the US; high unemployment rates in Spain threatened European growth. Capitalism spread globally, and with it came the class structure of capitalism. But instead of a robust middle class that consumes the output of industrial production, the global middle class are economically weak. An International Labour Organization (ILO) report pointed to what it calls the developing middle class, but stated that these people earn between \$4 and \$13 per day (Mason, 2014). Surely, we must start to rethink how we understand the development of these economies and the social formations that follow more broadly—traditional lenses and orientations may not apply.

We analyze these trends from our Western perspectives, and take for granted a scholarship that is Euro-centric. But what happens when we consider the world with a different lens? *Critical Sociology* encouraged other voices to reflect on how we understand our world, beginning with

scholars and activists from Latin American (see the symposium Critical Analyses from Latin America, in this journal, 38:2 March 2012). The result was a critical reinterpretation of what Neoliberalism meant, and how it could be opposed. It opened up a dialog that reframed issues of national security and questioned the nature of US domination in the region. In short, it engaged Western readers and scholars to revisit their assumptions and broaden their analysis of the world around them.

In the same way, this issue represents our foray into yet another perspective. Seeking voices from Africa that are not informed by European notions of knowledge and assumptions about the organization of society, the articles in this issue offer a non-Orientalist approach, an effort at espousing an Africana Sociology. Future efforts will encourage yet other perspectives (see the call in the pages of this issue for a special issue focusing on analyses of North Africa and the Middle East by scholars from that region) to broaden the dialog, enable the emergence of new voices, and expand our critical understanding of the emerging global society that we are becoming.

References

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