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Title: Solidarity forever

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Main disciplinary area: (e.g. education or psychology)

Globalisation

Keywords:

What can hold us together

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Abstract (add a descriptive paragraph of Output):

Globalisation

Solidarity forever

As an emerging nation in a unipolar world that is becoming increasingly militarised, we should be asking ourselves: what can hold us together?

BY PHILLIP DEXTER

As we mark the 10th anniversary of our hard-won freedom, South Africans are confronted with a challenge even more daunting than that presented by the apartheid regime.

Because globalisation affects us all, we dare not ignore it. Yet much of the debate and analysis of globalisation is simplistic, rhetorical and dogmatic.

However, we need to understand globalisation, whether we agree with it or not.

In 2002 a number of academics, activists, politicians and leaders participated in a Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) seminar to consider globalisation and its impact on SA society.

Representatives of Nedlac's four constituencies (government, labour, business and the community) interacted with academics and researchers.

The seminar addressed the issue of social cohesion and nation-building through the prism of globalisation.

Through this prism the interests of government, labour, business and the community are given a more nuanced interpretation, through which a richer perspective of globalisation emerges.

Without sacrificing the ideological and material interests of one's particular constituency, it is possible to recognise the incredible complexity of globalisation and the challenges it poses.

There are clear winners and losers under globalisation, but as important

are the nuances of who wins and loses what, when and how.

The framework of *What Holds us Together* (edited by David Chidester, Phillip Dexter and Wilmol James) identifies four broad themes in relation to globalisation: order or governance; production and exchange or the economy; connections or society; and resources, the networks of society. These themes may seem arbitrary, but they are significant.

In the first instance, globalisation has been articulated as a period during which the nation state has declined in significance and power.

Secondly, globalisation is understood as being primarily an economically driven phenomenon.

Thirdly, globalisation is said to have



They don't like it but they're part of it Protestors against the World Bank and IMF

a profound and usually negative effect on the structure of society such as families, identities or communities.

Lastly, it is essential to use reciprocity, informed by trust, if we are to deal with globalisation.

The issue of how to define globalisation is a vexed one, but simply put, globalisation is the tendency for economic activity to take place on the world stage, in terms of trade, investment, and movements of skills and culture, as opposed to the national or even local one.

So globalisation is the development of a global economic system or order and the social existence that accompanies this.

Extreme proponents or critics have insisted either that this phenomenon heralds the death of the nation state, national identity, culture, national companies and markets, or the dawning of a new era of competitiveness, efficiency, profitability and prosperity, of global identities in a global village. In short, both sides agree that it means the end of the world as we know it.

Yet these views confuse the objective phenomenon of economic globalisation with the ideologies or world views that accompany it.

The extreme proponents and opponents all miss the point that each period of development in society is accompanied by challenges and opportunities; by threats as well as by benefits.

Clearly, nation states have changed in their character and their role in many parts of the world. So too have companies, markets, culture, identities and any other aspect of human activity.

But in some respects nation states are stronger than they ever were, always watching, seeking to control the movement of people, particularly the poor. In fact, poorer nations are encouraged to be strong on security for private property and weak on regulation for business.

Culture, as it has developed global characteristics, has also brought certain aspects of local cultures to international prominence.

More people know more about each other across cultural divides than at any time in recorded history. Consider the exchanges of music, literature, film

and art.

But have things really changed that much? Each generation, each epoch grapples with great issues and challenges. What challenges has globalisation presented us with? The poor are still poor, indeed poorer in relative and perhaps even absolute terms. Xenophobia is still prominent in all societies. Sustainable development is still the desire of most of the world's population. Languages are still contested terrain, as are art, music and religion.

Does any of this seem new? Surely not. These are the perennial questions of human existence, played out in terms of our geography, our biology, our frailty and our naïveté.

Markets are global, and so are transnational companies. If anything is new, it is the size and role of the increasingly powerful private capital located in these companies.

But would Anglo American look much different to the peasants and workers of 19th century SA than it does to the rural and urban poor of today? Probably not. We need to spend more time studying exactly what globalisation is and what it has meant to all of us.

For South Africans, as an emerging nation in a unipolar world that is becoming increasingly militarised, we should be asking ourselves: what can hold us together?

We need to navigate capitalist globalisation to survive, prosper and develop as a nation. And we must not do this at the expense of others, but rather by developing our neighbouring countries as partners, as envisaged by the New Partnership for Africa's Development. Solidarity should be the guiding principle.

If we are to achieve this objective, then the ability of individuals or groups to advance their interests in a sustainable manner is what will hold us together.

We may define these interests in terms of our families, our religion, or our local, national or continental identity, but we will have to measure our progress by the means that seem significant to us.

For workers, this will be real income, for companies profits, for communities and interest groups by the

degree to which their particular interests are advanced.

Governments will have to be measured by the extent to which they ensure all of these diverse interests are balanced. Solidarity is surely what holds us together. ■

□ Dexter is a senior researcher at the HSRC and was formerly executive director of Nedlac.



All fired up Protest against the WTO

Marise Swardt

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