

**Briefing of 10/03/2001
on Debating Globalization
by**

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1. Anarchy in West Africa

Robert D. Kaplan discusses the future status of the world in his article *The Coming Anarchy*. In the region of West Africa nations are dissolving and becoming unrecognizable. Rebel groups have overthrown legitimate governments in unstable and conflict-ridden societies. Since rebels are not capable of governing, the end result is chaos. Kaplan's experience on this matter stems from his visits and personal contacts. He cites many anecdotes of violence, disorder, and vigilantism and claims that they give "an eerie taste of what American cities might be like in the future" (Kaplan, p. 35).

2. Premonitions of the Future

In the words of Kaplan "West Africa is becoming *the* symbol of worldwide demographic, environmental, and societal stress, in which criminal anarchy emerges as the real "strategic" danger. Disease, overpopulation, unprovoked crime, scarcity of resources, refugee migration, the increasing erosion of nation states and international borders, and the empowerment of private armies, security firms and international drug are now most tellingly demonstrated through a West African prism" (Kaplan, p.36).

Africa is in his view a premonition of the global future because the region contains--like in a nutshell--examples of current conflicts and past historic grievances. It was formerly divided, exploited, and controlled by European Imperial powers. De-colonization failed to transform the newly formed sovereign states into stable societies under an independent and legitimate leadership. Africa's current condition resembles the status of the Balkans one hundred years ago--a hotbed that ignited WW I. Similarly, Kaplan's picture of the future of Africa is bleak and suggestive about coming conflicts and wars.

3. The Environment as a Conflict Source

According to Kaplan "ethnic and religious conflict" is only part of a worldwide problem (p.42). The environment is also a stress factor given increased scarcity of natural resources and rising pollution and disease. For example, the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Southwestern U.S. will soon experience a lessening water supply which could lead to wars and distribution conflicts. But whereas technologically more advanced societies are more likely to master environmental problems, less civilized cultures societies are unable to adapt to changing conditions and erupt in conflict.

4. A New Kind of War

Earlier wars had drawn out battle lines and a recognizable enemy. In contrast, future wars will take on a whole new form. Private security firms will grow stronger, while larger national armies will dwindle away. Smaller acts of terrorist violence will become the new forms of battle where governments will be unable to protect their citizens. Often the wars of the future "will be those of communal survival.....caused by

environmental scarcity” (Kaplan, p.56). In fact, most of what Kaplan discusses in his article has quickly come to pass with recent 9/11 events. His premonition of the future and how events could unfold seem to become more evident every day. Kaplan’s article is an eye opener since it is news we hardly hear of in America. And his pessimism is disturbing, since he recognizes the factors and causes that lead to a new global anarchy but does not provide solutions.

5. Jihad versus McWorld

Benjamin Barber is somewhat more optimistic in his article about the struggle between *McWorld* vs. *Jihad*. He claims that the world is currently caught between retribalization and globalization. He goes on to describe the characteristics of these two worlds and how they operate. And he has a silver lining: "McDonaldization" will probably win in the end although perhaps at cost of true democracy and freedom.

Barber distinguishes four components of "McWorld:"

1. the market imperative--free markets expand worldwide at cost of national identity, producing a standardized consumer culture and behavior where religion and local cultures play a minor role. National borders will be redrawn for the sake of corporate profits.
2. the resource imperative--although many nations want to be independent, they are in fact relying on natural resources and man-made products and services of other countries. What country A cannot produce, country B can.
3. the information technology imperative--exponential growth of technology opens the doors of "closed" societies, borders are being crossed and redrawn to allow for access to a wealth of information.
4. the ecological imperative--now that Western countries have begun to see they have exhausted their natural resources, they are ironically telling lesser developed countries not to follow in their footsteps too quickly.

"Jihad" is characterized as follows: the world is a struggle for domination and freedom of one against another. Nationalism, once a forceful idea to unite people, has now become a serious threat to peaceful global integration under the banner of "McWorld." With small groups within societies resisting the pull toward capitalist standardization and uniform modernity, mini-wars are breaking out between super-nationalists and the rest of the population. Retribalization appears as a process rife with conflict, because of its exclusionary tendency.

In other words, Barber's way of thinking mirrors the fears and prejudices of the Western world. Globalization is an irreversible, Western dominated historic trend toward universalism that should not be sacrificed to anti-cultural particularism and the revival of ascriptive ethnic and religious identities.

6. The Myth of Ethnic Conflict

Bowen's article rivals Barber in its thinking and presentation. Whereas Barber is sympathetic to the Western world, Bowen examines the plight of the non-Western world. Bowen believes that modern day ethnic and religious conflicts are not the result

of old and traditional hatreds, but are instead conflicts over resources and power. He criticizes assumptions about ethnic conflicts. In his view:

- ethnic identities are NOT ancient and unchanging
- ethnic identities do NOT per se motivate people to persecute and kill
- ethnic diversity itself does NOT necessarily lead to violence.

Bowen dismantles Western ideological stereotypes which legitimize our ignorance or inaction. According to him, ethnic identities aren't ancient and unchanging because ethnicity is the product of fairly recent developments. People didn't always look at each other only as carriers of collective group characteristics. And ethnic identities are not the prime reason why people kill each other. Rather, conflicts are the work of individuals in power and the result of deliberate policy choices by people.

To support his arguments, Bowen provides examples from the conflict in former Yugoslavia (Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia) and its leadership (Milosevic, Karadzic and Tjudman). He also argues that the Rwanda genocide had origins in former colonialist rule and present corrupt leadership. Colonialists drew borders irrespective of their inhabitants and pitted one group against the another, i.e. Hutus versus Tutsis. After decolonization, ethnic power struggles continued using corrupt government offices and appointments. Government changed several times as a result of military-led rebellions. None of these changes were effective in solving problems although they were able to stir up hatreds that led to genocidal actions. In contrast to Kaplan and Barber, Bowen offers some hope by pointing out political solutions: elites and people need to make political choices to overcome ethnic tensions by, for example, promoting federalist policies based on multiethnic coalitions.

7. A Global Ethic as a Foundation of Global Society?

Like Bowen, Kueng, a German Catholic theology professor, tries to understand global conflict through non-Western eyes. Kueng argues for a religious-based global ethic of tolerance as a door to world peace in spite of all our differences. Global ethic means a basic consensus on binding values, irrevocable criteria, and basic personal attitudes that inform politics, law, and leadership. Kueng's global ethic has two main principles: every human being must be treated humanely and what you wish done to yourself, do to others. There are also four directives that all religions should agree on: have respect for life, deal honestly and fairly, speak and act truthfully, and respect and love one another. The UN Declaration of Human Rights is such a model of common rights and shared responsibilities. Kueng maintains that we all can keep our separate cultural, religious, and ethnic identities if we can find a way to follow universally valid principles based on axioms of world religions, i.e., values of tolerance, respect, participation, empathy, and non-violence.

8. Conclusion

- All articles of our reading point at a central global antagonism: economic, social, political, and cultural inequalities between our wealthy countries ("the West and North") vs. poorer and non-Western countries ("the East and South").
- Causes of global inequalities and resulting resentment/retribution are: economic exploitation, technological dominance, differences in religion, political corruption, the

failure of elites, environmental degradation, long-term effects of Western colonialism/imperialism, racism, and Western bias and arrogance in dealing with non-Western cultures.

- New global phenomena are emerging with long-term outcomes not yet fully understood: permanent civil wars and local conflicts, asymmetric warfare ("terrorism"), the breakdown of nations and states, global environmental disasters and resource scarcity, extreme polarization of power and wealth/
- Not many practical and pragmatic alternatives are offered by the authors of our reading. There seems to be not much light at the end of the tunnel. Anarchy is seen almost as an unavoidable characteristic of our 21st century world.

9. Questions for Class Discussion

- 1) Why does Kaplan suggest no remedies to the world's worsening condition? Is he ignoring positive signs, such as the peaceful breakdown of the Soviet Union and the successful settlements in Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor, Haiti?
- 2) What role could popular democratic participation play under the poor social conditions in West Africa?
- 3) Why do we read Kaplan's article differently after the events of September 11?
- 4) Are there no agreements and interactions possible between "Jihad" and "McWorld"?
But isn't Kueng's dialogue among religions a first beginning?
- 5) Is the world divided into the two antagonist camps of "Jihad vs. McWorld"? Don't we also have extremists/national chauvinists in our U.S. "McWorld"?
- 6) Does the U.S. census promote ethnic revival and community segregation by using designated racial and ethnic categories? Is there any rational reason for doing so?
- 7) Do our politicians and the U.S. media enough to stop racial/ethnic stereotyping on both a local and global scale? What should they do? What can we do?
- 8) How realistic and useful is Kueng's global ethic in helping to solve the problems of the 21st century? Is a change of attitudes as important as are tangible actions of elites and ordinary citizens?