

How and why are new social movements resisting globalization? essay sample

[Economics](#), [Globalization](#)



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Previously a concept only taught to business students, the use of the word globalization has grown in line with the extraordinary boom in the use of the internet. Communities throughout the globe are now linked to an interconnecting web via computer. Academia is hot on the trail of globalisation, debates wrangle, as it emerges as a central topic of debate amongst social scientists.

This essay will seek to introduce the concept of New Social Movements (N. S. M's) in relation to globalisation. With the aid of the Internet and literature from Agnew, Knox, Giddens to name some of the many key writers in this field the essay shall be divided into two sections. Firstly it shall examine N. S. M's using the case studies of the Peoples' Global Action (P. G. A) against "free" trade and the World Trade Organization (W. T. O) and of the Zapatista rebels, Mexico, highlighting issues involved in the implementation of global opposition. The second section shall define globalisation, explaining why globalisation is protested against over issues such as racism or sexism for example. This section will then site examples of corporate greed and exploitation in China and the rise, to a lesser extent, of cultural homogenisation.

Integration, exploitation and homogenization characterise globalization, inspiring a fresh wave of anti global fervour, consequently the explosive growth of New Social Movements (N. S. M's) can be seen. Dellaporta and Diana (Social Movements 1999: 13) site the works of Melucci. Melucci states:

' New Social Movements oppose the intrusion of the state and the market into social life, reclaiming the individual's identity and the right to determine

his or her private and affective life against the omnipresent and comprehensive manipulation of the society’.

Critically N. S. M’s do not limit their activities to seeking material gain, but challenge the diffuse notions of politics and society themselves. Social movements do not invite state intervention; rather they endeavour to resist the expansion of political administration. (Social movements an introduction- Dellaporta and Diana, Blackwell 1999: 12)

February 1998 saw peoples’ movements from all corners of the globe meet in Geneva, launching a worldwide resistance against the global market. A new alliance, the Peoples’ Global Action (P. G. A) against “ free” trade and the W. T. O was born. The P. G. A promotes a clear rejection of the W. T. O, rebuffing it and other trade liberalising agreements that promote social and environmental destructive globalization. A confrontational yet non-violent approach is expected as lobbying frequently has no major impact upon such biased and undemocratic organisations where trans-national capital is the true policy maker. The P. G. A is an instrument of co-ordination, not an organisation; seeking the greatest numbers of participants and organisations to take part through non-violent civil disobedience and people orientated actions.

The P. G. A ranks alongside the largest social movements; however the actions of N. S. M’s can be viewed at a number of levels. The Zapatista rebels of Mexico are a perfect example. Chiapas, Mexico, is the most resource rich nation state in the country. It is home to a wealth of

agriculture, cocoa, coffee, timber and cattle ranching industries. Importantly, Chiapas has some of the richest oil reserves in Central America. Systematic brutalisation of indigenous communities and tight control of political machinery provided the environment from which the Zapatistas emerged. Taking up arms was the only way to be heard and part of a larger strategy for the expansion of the space for democratic struggle ([http://www. utexas. edu/students/nave/zaps](http://www.utexas.edu/students/nave/zaps)).

Just as N. A. F. T. A celebrated in the development zones along Northern border regions and among affluent districts of Mexico City, Zapatista rebels in southern states forcibly reminded their country that the national economy lacked the flexible political, social and economic framework to encourage the nation's entirety in the development process. Zapatistas countered their powerful enemies, challenging society to participate, producing a radical shift in culture and social relations. ([http://www. utexas. edu/students/nave/zaps](http://www.utexas.edu/students/nave/zaps)). In the original declaration of war and in subsequent communiqués, Zapatistas have explained that their struggle is for: work, land housing, food, health care, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice and peace. The Zapatista movement refuses a vanguard role, calling to different sectors of Mexican civil society.

‘ We think the revolutionary change in Mexico will not be a product of action in just one direction’

Put simply it will not be in the sense and armed revolution, or a peaceful revolution, it shall be a revolution that is the result of struggle on various

social fronts, with many methods, under many social forms, with varying degrees of commitment and participation. Zapatistas are an almost entirely indigenous organization without ties to other movements in Latin America. They follow a model of direct democracy that grants voice to and seeks consensus among all members of the community.

The situation in Mexico is further exacerbated by the involvement of the U. S in Mexican affairs, which includes increased military ' cooperation' by the state and donation of equipment designed for the ' drug war' but used to kill peasants and Indians. Yet the Zapatistas have countered their powerful enemies by challenging civil society to participate in the process of producing a radical shift in political culture and social relations.

So, why has the late 1990's seen a rise in the growth of these N. S. M's? University politics was previously about discrimination, identity, race, gender and sexuality, " the political correctness wars" now I see banners advertising anti-capitalist movements, World trade demonstrations and N. SM's. Simply put, anti corporatism is the brand of politics capturing the imagination of the next generation of troublemakers. We need only look to the student radicals of the 1960's and the I. D warriors of the eighties and nineties to see the transformative impact N. S. M's can have. (N. Klein, No Logo, Flamingo, 2000)

Globalisation is a phenomenon that has been in existence for centuries, from the development of the spice industry through until the present day. The emergence of the internet and the widespread use of telecommunications

and digital technology as well as the improvements in global transport infrastructure have combined, making the ease of developing a global network increasingly simpler. Axford sights the historical dimension, pointing to the impact colonialism and imperialism upon the development of a global market. Giddens, on the other hand, focuses upon locality and territory, arguing that globalisation is not about grand centre stage activities such as corporate mergers but increasingly about the autonomy of life worlds. What scholars share is the notion of social connection and interaction.

The global economy is a close-knit triad of geographic centres of North America, the European Union of Western Europe, and Japan. Most of the world's flow of goods, capital and information are within and between these three centres, with each centre having influence over its own enterprise area. Around this triangle of wealth, power, and technology, the rest of the world becomes organised in a hierarchical order with the wealthy at the top and the poor left lagging at the bottom. According to the United Nations Development program (U. N. D. P), the gap between the poorest 20% of the world's population and the wealthiest 20% increased threefold between 1960 and 1990.

The US has taken authority over the global economy, the establishment of the dollar as the world's principle reserve currency following the Bretton Woods conference in 1944 makes it easier for US companies to buy into foreign industries, enabling firms to penetrate previously untapped markets, spreading corporate tentacles originally into Latin America but now

throughout the world. (The geography of the world economy, Knox and Agnew, Arnold 1998 3rd edition)

The world economy increasingly operates as a united ' multi-lateral' system dominated by trans-national corporations, frequently with the ability to act independently of and dominate political arrangements. The adoption of this attitude has led the West to become cocooned in thinking that Westernisation are the guiding principles democratic nation states should seek to follow. Today, however, the world is a divided one. Divisions exist along a number of axes creating much opposition and anger to western affluence and success. We see opposition to cultural homogenisation and the so called Americanisation of society; secondly we see economic opposition to the money hungry capitalist west. It is bizarre to think that a process ' theoretically' bringing people together through time space convergence and time space compression has led to the polarisation of many. Spatial divisions of labour and development exist on truly vast scales. Economic exploitation of previously untapped markets and to a lesser extent cultural homogenization can be seen as the catalyst for opposition.

Global homogenization has an impact on cultures in different ways. It affects directly the production and use of consumer goods. People use the same kind of goods everywhere. Homogenization is superficial and limited to the material level of the consumer goods and consumer culture that is artificially promoted by the media. It does not radically affect how people relate to each other and how they find meaning and purpose in life. (<http://eapi.topcities.com/eapr99/mamal.htm>)

In 1960, less than 7% of all apparel purchased in the United States had been imported; by 1980, more than half was imported. Leisure wear – jeans, shorts, T-Shirts, polo shirts, and so are important components of the homogenized world in which we live. (The geography of the world economy, Knox and Agnew, Arnold 1998 3rd edition). These types of garments are worn worldwide, they are seen as a symbol of westernisation and prosperity by many, yet to some western clothing represents uniformity, lack of identity and a break from tradition. It is this possible erosion of culture from place and production that has led many to challenge globalisation.

The obvious exploitation of workers by multinational corporations brings the process of globalisation into disrepute. Periphery countries have no other option but to accept the offer of Foreign Direct Investment (F. D. I) as they have no established economic framework by which to develop. For this reason peripheral countries remain, unable to develop a competitive advantage, dynamic or technologically advanced economic infrastructure all too frequently lurching from economic setback to economic setback. Multinational companies would appear to be out to earn as ‘fast buck’ seeking to maximise profits wherever possible by hunting cheaper suppliers and cheaper labour with little or no regard to the welfare of workers.

Nike, the sports garment producer previously owned manufacturing plants in the US and UK. Now however 100% of its production capacity is subcontracted to Asia. Typically these countries include South Korea and Taiwan. At the moment partnerships are diminishing as wage levels “spiral” making production costs greater. New networks of contractors have been

sourced in Indonesia, Malaysia and China. The Nike Athletic shoe factory in Wellco, China, sees shocking working conditions with workers in shoe production paid approximately 87 US cents per hour if experienced, workers are expected to commit between 77-84 hours per week, 11-12 hour shifts per day, and 7 days a week. This is however not where the slaves labour ended. Workers are fined if they refused to work overtime; there is no enhanced pay rate for those who do overtime; the overwhelming majority have no legal work contract; corporal punishment for slow work was common place and there was the arbitrary fining of talking and of pregnant and older women (above 25 years). Most workers had never heard of Nike's code of conduct. (No Logo N. Klein, Flamingo 2000) yet it is these workers who make the millions of dollars for the company each year.

The lack of legislation for workers and indeed human rights in general, coupled with the cheap labour and material costs make the Far East the ideal choice of location for firms like Nike. However, people are becoming aware of how global agreements such as NAFTA are perpetuating sweatshop labour and how institutions such as the World Bank are not helping peripheral economies. Admittedly global companies do offer opportunity, but only in the short term, with jobs anyway amounting to little more than slave labour.

In conclusion it is possible to see that the rise and growth of the united global market has led to the rise and all conquering domination of the Trans national corporation. N. S. M's are the opposition to firms such as Nike and Gap seeking to open the eyes of the world to their plight. This essay has shown the intervention from organisations such as the W. T. O and NAFTA

has led to great opposition. These organisations are seen as invasive and non productive to economic development, whilst also promoting the homogenisation of cultures. The future of globalisation is by no means in doubt and I have no hesitation I saying that it will grow from strength to strength and N. S. M's will never manage to eradicate the Trans national corporation and the domination of wealth.