CHAPTER TWO

GLOBALIZATION AS “PLUNDER”, “EXPLOITATION” AND “ECOVIOLENCE”: A CAUSAL ANALYSIS

Introduction

Neoliberalism is thus an aggregate of social, political, economic, legal and ideological practices, carried out by a variety of actors that respond to what we consider a formidable logic of plunder (Mattei and Nader 2008: 53).

The unapologetic quest for a new world order advocated and discussed in the previous chapter gains its motive and impetus from the overwhelming and globalized threat of neoliberalism. It is not simply this or that hazardous industrial operation, or this or that lifestyle practice of affluent citizens: it is an ongoing, systemic assault on basic human rights. The whole project of “development” understood as it is, led by industrialized Western market-based societies, needs the present instantiation of the state as its engine, through its understanding within the parameters of “dependency theory”:

This placed a spotlight on the state, its economic or class character, international orientation and so on—as the organized force of development policy direction (Westra, R. 2010: 20).

Richard Westra’s analysis is based on a Marxian understanding. Correct though it is, it is somewhat limited by the existence of Indigenous and local communities, which that perspective tends to view as collectives in transition to a more or less just future state. Bhupinder Chimni reinterprets “subaltern class” analysis to include “all oppressed and marginal groups in society”, whatever the grounds of such divisions (Marks 2008a: 19). We will examine Chimni’s opposition in the next section. But it seems that the Marxian enterprise itself tends to marginalize the most significant aspects of oppressed groups: such third world communities (not necessarily viewed as “developing countries” or national groups within such countries) represent the clearest and primary examples of resistance to neoliberal globalization. Their “backwardness” is not to be changed by revising their “forms of production”: instead it may well be a conscious position combining
distrust for Western technologies with a strong respect for the Earth and for the sacred within it.

In fact, it is their existence and their example that indicates the wrong-headedness of the current practices of neoliberalism and globalization. Indigenous traditional leaders march and demonstrate shoulder to shoulder with other disaffected groups. The last thing they need, in lieu of respect and support for who they are, is to be characterized as being prey to “ideologies” and “theologies” that somehow diminish their credibility as—if nothing else—moral leaders in a world Richard Falk characterizes as facing a “normative abyss” (Falk 1998).

A problem arises in that Marxian analysis would critique all forms of social consciousness that inform communities whose traditional religious and cultural beliefs are not amenable to an analysis based on capitalist/industrial Western societies, but are, like all Indigenous communities, based on a *sui generis* understanding of the appropriate lifestyle—that is, one that is egalitarian, communitarian, and (hence) relevant to such land-based traditional groups. International law, at least in principle, respects and defends such communities, although the application of appropriate regimes in defense of their lifestyle often leaves much to be desired in practice. But at least the recognition of their status and their existence as such is not demeaned.

Martti Koskenniemi argues that, for Marx, “the language of justice obstructed reliable analysis of social relations” (Koskenniemi 2008: 31). He adds that Marx’s view of the “proletariat” as a universal category is not accurate; I concur, with examples proposed above regarding Indigenous communities. Similarly, the very notion of “class” is far from universal: even in Marx’s time, and before it, “class” and wealth could even be contrasted. Further, land-based communities are for the most part classless, in the sense that their outlook is communitarian. Private property does not apply to their form of self-governance, and the elders (and the *sui generis* knowledge base they represent) guide, rather than ruling. Their specific forms of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) are based on their understanding of the land and of its cycles, and have been transmitted orally from generation to generation.

A case in point is that of Arctic peoples. Climate change not only threatens their individual lives and livelihood; it affects their social structures, as the TEK of the elders loses its relevance to their daily life, and their culture and existence as a people is increasingly at stake (Westra 2007; Ford and Wandel 2006). No change in their “mode of