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Meaning of the Twenty-First Century: From Internationalism to Globalism

Ronald Glossop

In the *The Meaning of the Twentieth Century*[1] economist Kenneth Boulding makes the point that the 20th century is significant because it marks the time when the industrial revolution, what he calls the second great transition in the life-style of humans, had spread beyond the “developed countries” to almost all the nations of the world. He notes how much more rapid this transition has been than that of the agricultural revolution, the first great transition in the way that humans live. It started about 10,000 years ago and still has not reached a few remote places in the world.

The industrial revolution greatly changed not only the way that goods are produced but also the kinds of goods that get produced. New means of transportation (bicycles, trains, airplanes, automobiles, and jet planes) changed the distances people could and would travel. New means of communication (telegrams, telephones, radios, films, television, the internet, and cell phones) changed the ways people communicate with each other. As is often said, “Modern technological developments in transportation and communication are making the world smaller every day.”

These changes brought about by the new products of industrialization are in turn producing changes in ourselves and in our society as we move from the internationalism of the 20th century to the globalism of the 21st century.[2] I want to call attention to the cultural shifts taking place in three areas: (1) how we think of ourselves, (2) how we communicate with each other, and (3) what kind of political commitments we make, that is, where our political loyalties lie.

The Transition from Nationalism to Internationalism

Just as the transition from an agrarian society to an industrialized society didn’t occur everywhere at the same time, so the transition from nationalism to internationalism hasn’t taken place everywhere at the same time. Internationalism came to Europe much earlier than to the United States. The first international governmental organization was the Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine, created by the Europeans in 1815; and the second was the European Commission of the Danube created in 1856. The first worldwide international organization was the International Telegraphic Union. It was established in 1865 and incorporated into the International Telecommunication Union in 1932. Its work and that of other international functional organizations created about the same time was much more important in Europe than in other parts of the world.

The formation of the European Union in the last part of the 20th century is moving Europeans toward internationalism, but there is still much nationalistic restraint on that effort toward integration. The nationalism in Europe is being overcome to a large extent by the feeling that European integration is necessary to compete with the United States,

Japan, and China, but the use of many different national languages is a major obstacle to unification.

The United States, separated by oceans from both Europe and Asia, tended to view internationalism as a matter of U.S. domination of Latin America as proclaimed in the *Monroe Doctrine* of 1823. The intent of the Monroe Doctrine as originally expressed was to warn the Council of Europe powers not to support Spain in any effort to reconquer their Latin American colonies. It is the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine (1904) that represented a certain degree of US domination of Latin America. One indication of the extent to which nationalism has remained the prevailing outlook in the United States is the fact that it is one of only three countries in the world (the others are Burma and Liberia) which still does not use the International System of Units (the metric system of measurement), despite the fact that Congress adopted a law in 1866 saying that no contract using the metric system can be invalidated by a court plus the fact that other more recent laws declare it to be the preferred system of weights and measures in the United State.[3]

Despite some movement toward internationalism, nationalism is still a very powerful force in Europe as well as elsewhere. Nations continue to compete with each other economically and for status in all areas (science, entertainment, sports, art, literature). The two world wars were motivated by struggles for status between Germany and Britain, between Japan and China, and between Russia and Germany while the Cold War was a struggle for status between the Soviet Union and the United States. Similar struggles for status are now developing between nations such as the United States and China as well as between India and China. Nationalism is hardly a spent force.

The Transition from Internationalism to Globalism

Now let us look at the transition from internationalism to globalism. The difference between these two outlooks is one of viewing the world as made up of a collection of nation-states as contrasted with viewing it as a single planet where national boundaries are relatively insignificant. The appropriate image for internationalism is a map of the world or a traditional globe where the different countries appear in different colors, each one bordered by a solid black line. The appropriate image for globalism is the photo of Earth from space where there are no national boundaries and the unity and solitariness of the planet in space are most evident.

The word “internationalism” comes from Latin and means “between” or “among” nations. In this framework people do not relate directly to each other as individuals but usually interact with each other as citizens of different nations and in formal settings by means of national representatives. Crossing a national boundary usually means getting inspected, being subject to different laws, using a different language, and using different money.

Although it is not possible to point to some single moment when the transition from internationalism to globalism begins, it seems that a significant event relevant to this transition

was the photographing of the Earth from space which was done in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

We are living in the age of globalization. That term “globalization” is usually taken as applying to the domination of the global economy by transnational corporations, and that shift certainly is a major factor in the way that the global society is changing. It is these corporations more than any other institutions that are operating in a world where national borders are more and more irrelevant.

But we are also witnessing globalization, that is, the progressive diminution of the importance of national borders, in all facets of human life: disease (avian flu, HIV/AIDS), the internet, music, science, education, athletics, tourism, crime (drug trafficking, smuggling people and weapons across national boundaries, pirating patents and copyrighted material), and so on. Consider how a growing proportion of people are even marrying across national borders. Is there anyone who doesn't know at least one such couple?

Another indication of globalism is the growing concern for preservation of the environment of the whole Earth. When we think of problems such as global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, the growing disparity in the average standard of living in different countries, and unrestrained consumption of non-renewable resources, it is obvious that national governments focused on limited geographical areas and acting separately in terms of national interest are not likely to deal successfully with these problems which are global in scope.

Identity, Language, and Loyalty in the Global Community

Let me focus now on how the three areas of identity, language, and loyalty change as we shift from internationalism to globalism.

The first area of personal identity refers to how people identify themselves. In the age of internationalism people regard themselves as definitely members of one country, but have come to be aware that their country exists in a world where there are other countries with which cooperation is possible in many circumstances. In the age of globalism people think of themselves primarily as members of humanity on the planet Earth, and only secondarily as citizens of this or that country. One does not cease to be a citizen of a particular nation, but it is even more important to be an Earthling. Consider how most residents of the U.S.A. think of themselves first as Americans and only secondarily as citizens of a particular state such as Missouri or Illinois. Think of that and go up one more geographical level to where people think of themselves first as citizens of the whole Earth and only secondarily as citizens of a particular country. One recent book focused on this new view of personal identity is Joseph Rotblat's *World Citizenship: Allegiance to Humanity*.^[4]

The second area to be noted as we shift from internationalism to globalism is language use. With internationalism one accepts the situation that different nations and different nationalities often use different languages and that communication may require interpreters and translators, possibly assisted now by various kinds of modern technology. This internationalism will also function better when individual persons learn to use several different national languages. But in the case of globalism there must be one common language for all Earthlings, [5] not only to facilitate communication but also to promote global solidarity. We cannot ignore the connection between identity and language use. When people do not use the same language, it is difficult for them to view themselves as belonging to the same community. Consider the difficulties that occur when there is no single language for the whole society such as with Quebecois in Canada, the Basques in Spain, and the Hungarians in Romania. Consider also the present problems with regard to language use as efforts are made to create a European Union.

When we begin to think of one language for the whole Earth, the natural question to ask is, which language should it be? At the moment, it seems that English is on its way to becoming the single language for the whole world, but the proportion of the world's population which uses English as its first language is declining, from about 10 percent in 1950 to about only 5 percent now. There are two and three quarters times as many people who use Mandarin Chinese as their first language (and the economic influence of China in the world is increasing rapidly), and the native speakers of Spanish now outnumber the native speakers of English.[6] Furthermore the influence of Spanish within and outside the United States is growing.

There is a justice problem with using any existing national language. The speakers of that national language are a minority of the world's population, but they are given a huge advantage in international communication. This injustice arouses resentment, as is now occurring in much of the world against the use of English on the internet and in international contexts. And why not? After all, there are 23 languages in the world with at least 60 million native speakers.[7]

The logical and morally appropriate solution to this world language problem is to use a created language which is no one's native language but which has been designed to be easy to learn and to use.[8] That was the aim of Polish physician L. L. Zamenhof when he created Esperanto and gave it to the world in 1878, just two years after the invention of the automobile with an internal combustion engine. Unfortunately, Esperanto has not received nearly as much attention as cars, but neither has it been completely forgotten. The use of Esperanto has spawned a movement of idealists committed to the welfare of a global community based on a common language which at the same time will help to preserve the use of national languages within the national communities. Esperanto is used in addition to the national languages, not instead of them. The development of the internet has made Esperanto even more useful.

The third area influenced by the shift from internationalism to globalism is the locus of people's political loyalty. In internationalism the primary loyalty of individuals is still to the national governments. International policy-making organizations such as the League of Nations, the United Nations, UNESCO, the World Health Organization, the Universal Postal Union, and the International Atomic Energy Agency may be created to deal with international problems, but these organizations aim to assist cooperation among the national governments, not individuals. In globalism the primary loyalty of individuals would be to a global government, some kind of democratic world federation which is over the national governments, similar to the way that the U.S. national government is over state governments.

Patriotism (loyalty to the nation-state) is not eliminated, but it is subordinated to humatriotism (loyalty to all of humanity). Even now some individuals may have a greater commitment to the welfare of the global community as a whole than to their own national government, but until the political institutions are changed, such global citizens are likely to face many obstacles as they try to act in accord with that commitment. They can try to work through various non-governmental organizations, but they often find it difficult to get around the restraints placed on them by the national governments. National governments typically require primary loyalty to themselves, and they will be reluctant to relinquish that requirement until they decide to become part of a larger political unit, as occurred in the United States when the U.S. Constitution replaced the Articles of Confederation and as is now occurring in Europe as the various countries there agree to become part of the European Union. Globalism will be fully implemented only when the idea of unrestricted national sovereignty is abandoned[9] and the various national governments of the whole world are integrated into a democratic world federation, just as the U.S. state governments have been integrated into the United States of America.

Conclusion

Kenneth Boulding noted that the significance of the 20th century is that it was when the new products of industrialization spread from the industrialized West or "developed countries" to the whole world. The significance of the 21st century is that that is when the new products of industrialization have produced the unprecedented transformation in human society from internationalism to globalism, a change that is reflected in the way people identify themselves (as citizens of the world rather than a particular country), in the way language is used in the global community (a common global language in addition to a large number of national languages), and in the shift in political loyalty (from the nation-state to a democratic world federation).

Our educational systems should be enlightening our students (and our mass media should be raising the awareness of our adults) about this transition from internationalism to globalism currently taking place. We should be preparing our children (and our adults too!) both intellectually and emotionally for life in this emerging 21st century world community. Consider what life is going to be like in a democratically governed global community where

all people (children and adults) everywhere think of themselves as citizens of planet Earth and where all are able to communicate with each other via the internet using a common neutral global language familiar to everyone.

Endnotes

[1] Kenneth E. Boulding, *The Meaning of the 20th Century: The Great Transition*. New York: Harper & Row, 1964.

[2] Many but not all the changes related to this transition from internationalism to globalism are discussed at length by Peter Singer in *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002; 2nd ed., 2004. Singer presents his thesis in these words on page 9: “Rawls’s model is that of an inter-national order, not a global order. This assumption needs reconsidering.”

[3] *The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2008*. New York: World Almanac Books, 2008, p. 344.

[4] Joseph Rotblat (ed.), *World Citizenship: Allegiance to Humanity*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997.

[5] The case for a common global language is presented by Amitai Etzioni in “A Global, Community Building Language?” *The Federalist Debate*, XXI, No. 2 (July 2008), pp. 16-20, and he argues that it is going to be English.

[6] *The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2015*, p. 716.

[7] *The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2015*, p. 716. French is now fourteenth in the world in number of native speakers. Four of these 23 languages are mainly in India.

[8] Ronald Glossop, “Language Policy and a Just World Order,” *Alternatives*, XIII (1988), 395-409. Unfortunately, even those globally minded thinkers such as Peter Singer who address the problem of cultural imperialism (see pp. 139-144 of *One World*) generally completely overlook the issue of linguistic imperialism.

[9] Peter Singer, *One World*, pp. 4-5, 8, and 144-149. As Singer says (on page 148), “A global ethic should not stop at, or give great significance to, national boundaries.” Other books arguing for the need to move beyond unrestricted national sovereignty to a world federation include, James A. Yunker, *Political Globalization: A New Vision of Federal World Government* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007) and Strobe Talbott, *The Great Experiment: The Story of Ancient Empires, Modern States, and the Quest for a Global Nation* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008. For him a “Global Nation” means having a government for the whole world just as we have national governments for nations.