

# GLOBALIZATION: CHALLENGES FOR TRANSFORMATION<sup>1</sup>

by Cynthia Ca Abdon-Tellez<sup>2</sup>

*Presented at the **Indigenous Women's Leadership for Transformation (IWALT)** Training on Feminist Reading of the Bible and Theologizing  
17-27 April 2006, Crystal Spring Guest House, Chiang Mai, Thailand*

## I. Globalization

A. I will start with how the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) perceives and comprehends the phenomenon of globalization. In its statement in relation with the last World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Hong Kong, the participants of a conference CCA organized articulated the prevailing guiding attitude towards globalization:<sup>3</sup>

1. The Church Leaders believe that "self determination of peoples, the integrity of cultural and biological diversity, the respect of human rights and the concerns of development need to have supremacy over the process" They further believe that "the spirit of love and care of God's children for each other and for the creation may take leadership in globalization."

2. This is not the case with the WTO, now a leading instrument in the process. "Church representatives state that forced liberalization through the WTO threatens to drag people and their economies into the global commodity chains and to deepen the international commercialization of all aspects."

They think that "many aspects of the draft texts [of the WTO Hong Kong Statement] are a continuation of an old model of colonization, subjecting the poor, the resources and development of the world under unfettered profit motive, vested interests of developed countries and their companies." This is why, the church leaders believe that the "WTO in its present character is an inappropriate platform for turning God's promise of a better earth into reality"

They further "reject the tendency of the WTO to regard everything of God's creation as tradable commodity, like certain basic services of communities (GATS), people's wisdom (TRIPS) or all aspects of food and agriculture (AOA)"

---

<sup>1</sup> Presented at the **Indigenous Women's Leadership for Transformation (IWALT)** Training on Feminist Reading of the Bible and Theologizing; 17-27 April 2006, Crystal Spring Guest House, Chiang Mai, Thailand  
(Sponsored by the Christian Conference of Asia – Ecumenical Formation, Gender Justice and Youth Empowerment)

<sup>2</sup> Director of The Mission For Migrant Workers (HK) Society, St. John's Cathedral, Hong Kong

<sup>3</sup> Churches and Church Organizations on Trade Justice *at the Occasion of the WTO Ministerial Meeting*

3. The WTO regime describes the manner in which superpowers relate with the rest of the world: controlling; and the attempt to “complete this control” is culminated at this point in history, with the establishment of the WTO.

That is why church leaders “denounce the attempts of the superpowers of world trade to impose world market integration on the developing countries while at the same time they refuse to remove their own trade barriers in areas where they might be losers.”

The scattered governing bodies (of the different countries) are pulled together to make easier control of the world. This control of the superpowers breeds monopoly of power. *Surely, if you are able to control the world, then you can monopolize the world's resources - natural and human resources and what easier way to do it if not with the already-existing structures[of governments] gathered in the guise of good-sounding works like “free trade”, “global”, etc.*

**B. This leads us to the inner core of globalization.**

When control and ownership of certain business and trade is monopolized by one or a handful of entities, and yet it pretends that the movement and operation of trading is free (such as in the current jargon called “free trade”) and that decision-making is claimed by many underdeveloped countries to be democratic (despite the conditions imposed on them by institutions like the IMF and World Bank and recently, the WTO), it will have to adopt certain policies and procedures on how to maintain the disguise.

In actuality, these forces wish to hide the most prominent features of globalization which are,

1. One, the privatization of government-owned enterprises. Many underdeveloped countries project a rising gross domestic products (GDP = revenues it gets from local sources) not as a result of business and trading but of selling government-owned and controlled corporations to private local and foreign business.
2. Two, the abolition of laws that control the prices of basic commodities like oil, electricity, water, especially when they are already controlled by private corporations. This is deregulation.
3. Three, liberalization: the total opening of the country's economy for investment, control, intervention and foreign ownership. It is the removal of taxes and tariffs for foreign investors that bring in products like rice, carrots, etc. Because of this, it is cheaper to buy imported products than local ones. It pushes down the livelihood of peasants and small businesses.

These are principles that are being peddled by the WTO in their meetings and agreements.

Mr. Percy Barnevik<sup>4</sup>, states that: “Globalization as far as I am concerned is the freedom to: (a.) Invest wherever I want; (b.) Invest whenever I want; (c.) Produce anything I want; (d.) Buy and sell anywhere I want; (e.) Support those with least control from laws and policies that has something to do with job and people.” This is a very individualistic and selfish position notwithstanding the lives that will be distraught by the actions. [e.g. *The Philippines’ Mining Act of 1995: This Act provides that areas that can be explored could go beyond what was originally agreed upon, if sources of mines are discovered to be beyond the specified limits in the contract, with no responsibility of compensating those whose livelihood and dwellings will be ravaged in the process.*]

Mr. Pascal Lamy<sup>5</sup> says it very simply: “WTO is for profit... not for people.” This is a very straight-forward description of the operation and goals of the WTO, and therefore, of globalization. While it looks purely economic, it very much affects the decision-making of a government once it is within the structure of WTO. It undermines the lives of the people whose labor they will exploit and whose livelihood they will destroy – all for those who already have more than they need to live decently.

This brings us to the “empire” that they wish to build.

**C. The building of empire:** Empire is a political power that regulates global exchanges. It is a sovereign power that wants to govern the world. In the process of governance, it patronises leaders who would support their interest, leaders who would ensure that laws and policies favour the empire; one that could go to the extent of meeting dissent among the people with listing organizations and individuals critical of its policies as “enemies of the state”.

The empire claims to want to develop a world with no boundaries, but the manner in which it operates, the “no-boundaries” imposition are applied only to underdeveloped countries – free entry, free impositions, free invasions. The well-developed ones could maintain their boundary restrictions from goods imported elsewhere to people entering their territory. If a developing country refuses, *the invasion of Iraq, threats to dissenting national leaders, the war on terror*, are matters to be considered as a result. To quote the statement of Peace for Life:

---

<sup>4</sup> President of ABB Industrial Group, a TNC that operates in 100 countries

<sup>5</sup> Head of the WTO - in his response to questions asked during a press conference when he visited Hong Kong in preparation for their 6<sup>th</sup> Ministerial meeting

*“Within the gleaming walls of the heavily fortified Hong Kong Convention Centre, government ministers and leaders of international organizations and trade decide the fate of the livelihood of millions worldwide. There, the representatives from the industrial North and those from the global South compromise to make a fair deal and thresh out differences for the furtherance of free trade. But we see the problem with WTO not merely as an issue of “fair deal.” The problem with WTO is that it is there at all, an exclusive club controlled by the world’s business colossi, clearing the way for finance capital, subjecting all available resources wherever to the logic of capital accumulation, opening them for exploitation by multinational corporations, and convincing state governments that free trade along with free movement of capital—human and environmental costs notwithstanding—is the only way to prosperity.”<sup>6</sup>*

*The statement further says: In our grossly unequal world, the total liberalisation of the world economy and trade will result in even greater tragedy. Policies and measures imposed by the IMF, World Bank and WTO towards this end have crippled economies and weakened the social fabric: exacerbating venality within state bureaucracies, existing inequalities in various aspects of power relations, and mass poverty. For the majority of the world’s people, women and children especially, the liberalisation agenda means suffering the violence of depredation — loss of jobs, destruction of farms, demise of emergent national industries, compromised food security, erosion of social services, growing insecurity, environmental degradation.<sup>7</sup>*

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) came out with a study and defines *“Economic Globalization” as a historical process, the result of human innovation and technological progress. It refers to the increasing integration of economies around the world, particularly through trade and financial flows. The term sometimes also refers to the movement of people (labor) and knowledge (technology) across international borders.*<sup>8</sup> It says *“Markets promote efficiency through competition and the division of labor – the specialization that allows people and economies to focus on what they do best.”* But even they could not deny the fact that precisely because of this so-called ‘specialization,’ *“markets do not necessarily ensure that the benefits of increased efficiency are shared by all.”*<sup>9</sup>

An example of this is when the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation or APEC was established. The Philippines for one could not present a better workshop of a Philippine product with international significance, but the exchange of labor. Thus, it had workshop on ISHR-Internationally Shared Human Resources. This meant millions of domestic helpers, manual laborers and caregivers, not to mention the

---

<sup>6</sup> Roundtable Statement “Call to People of Faith to Resist Capitalist Globalisation and Work Together for Life-enhancing Alternatives” Peace for Life Continuation Committee, December 17, 2005

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 4, p.2, para3

<sup>8</sup> Excerpts from Globalization: Threat or Opportunity? IMF staff April 12,2000 (Corrected January 2002)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 6, Intro, II. p.2

undocumented and uprooted people that would have to be exported (“shared”) to the rest of the world.

The devastation and impoverishment in the countryside as consequences especially among indigenous women has pushed them to take on these jobs overseas as well: approximately 20% of women domestic helpers in HK are indigenous women. C

ssssssssssssssssssssssss **B r e a k** sssssssssssssssssssssssss

## II. Impacts of Globalization in the lives of IWs

To focus our understanding of the impacts of globalization, let us again look at the different Agreements clinched in the ministerial meetings of the WTO. Why the WTO? It is because the WTO is the crystal-clear manifestation of the structural response of the rich countries that are building their empire for the full enforcement of globalization.

How do these agreements intrude into the lives of Indigenous Peoples? While the so-called majority in a developing country is terribly affected by the major impositions in the economic and political policies of a nation, the Indigenous People are affected twice over and their women counterpart more.

### **A. WTO Agreements:**

*(Following are agreements that directly affect Indigenous peoples especially the women)*

1. The removal of taxes or tariffs to foreign investments as the main component of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) has made, for example, countries in Sub-Sahara in Africa lost \$272 billion in their earnings because of more than 20 years of trade liberalization that destroyed their livelihood.

Then comes the entry of companies that establish cash crops undermining the basic products produced by the land and by the people.

2. The removal of agricultural subsidy required in the Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) frees and hastens the entry of imported agricultural products that are

cheaper. These will naturally compete with that of the local farmers'. This has created tremendous losses among indigenous peoples.

3. Trade Related Property Rights or TRIPS- Buys and monopolizes the patents of technology, medicines and plants so they cannot be used by poor countries.

The use of herbal medicines, for example, and the simple and inexpensive processing of these, the guaranteed effectiveness, affordability and their being readily available to the community are a hallmark of indigenous women's life-promoting trade.

On a similar tone, you may want to note that in 2002, 39 multinational pharmaceutical companies sued the South African government after the latter passed a law to buy cheaper drugs to combat AIDS. According to these MNCs, these are not in accordance with patent laws under the WTO.

More than 4.2 million have HIV/AIDS. The suit was withdrawn only after massive protests in South Africa and the world against the MNCs' actions.

4. Non-Agricultural Market Access (NAMA) also remove taxes to non-agricultural products. Mining multi-national corporations (MNCs) can freely exploit our mountains and seas when governments remove non-tariff barriers that protect our environment as well as indigenous peoples' communities.

The NAMA of the WTO doesn't worry about mal-development or of the destruction of the environment. It is the indigenous peoples who are directly devastated if not totally uprooted.

When governments take away laws that protect their sovereignty and patrimony, the destruction of the environment by MNCs will definitely worsen.

## **B. What in particular do these Agreements do to the Indigenous People?**

### **1. Loss of ancestral domain, erosion of livelihood**

Local agricultural products lose in their competition with the presence of imported goods in the local markets. Division of land areas is aggressively done inconsiderate of ancestral tradition.

This can best be illustrated in the zoning of IP's ancestral land according to legal / constitutional provisions, declaring a portion to be government land and a portion their ancestral land. Ancestral land, according to them cannot be measured in terms of meters, hectares and square kilometers.

## 2. Loss and commercialization of indigenous culture and ways of life, a violation of indigenous people's rights; a violation of women's rights

The use of backyard herbs and plants that are proven medicinal in the indigenous tradition is now being controlled (TRIPS);

The genes of indigenous men and women especially those who live a longer span of life and could survive certain illnesses or are immune to certain diseases is being explored by those who have the resources and capacity to experiment on them. However, these experiments give them the passes to patent these genes, not only the findings, in their name. They can not anymore be owned by the community where the indigenous women belong. Why the women? One off-hand answer is the most significant: It is because they are the ones who have the capacity to procreate, produce similar genes. Thus, such is a blatant violation to the core of the whole being, indeed!

## 3. Loss of lives

In highly militarized areas, sometimes labeled as "No Man's Land" by the military, the parameters are established and the declaration is duly endorsed by the national government. Any living objects on "no man's land" are shot. Indiscriminate shooting, regular bombings occur in such areas (as in Bugnay, Kalinga, in the Igorot land of the Cordilleras in the late 1980s).

In the guise of anti-terrorism, some indigenous people's communities are bombed to make way for military to guard and cordon the place and prevent residents to return to their dwellings, even when actual dissidents are hundreds of miles away. Communities in oil-rich areas like this meet such fates. When the notorious Abu Sayyaf terrorists were kidnapping tourists in Jolo, Sulu, it was the camp of another liberation movement called MILF, 600 kilometers away from the incident that the military bombed and took over the place. It was learned later that the marsh in that area is suspected to be a natural source of oil.

## **C. Development Aggression – Political and Military; War, Militarization, Human Rights Violations**

Development projects are crowding in indigenous people's communities: dams, mega dams, geothermal plants, mining operations, hydro power plants run by multinational companies. Moreover, special treatment is given by the WTO to countries that manufacture war armaments. The WTO can provide subsidy – thru state budget – to companies that manufacture such war armaments. It tolerates laws and policies that will ensure repression and violence. Military and local police personnel are used by private corporations to protect their operation against the people. They lose their function, that is, for the people's defense.

Indigenous people, especially the women, who protest the presence of such “development projects” have had stories of abuse, rape and killings to tell. But they learn lessons from such horrible experiences. They have not given up. They continue through generations defending their life.

### III. Responses & Reactions

*Jer.6: [14] They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.*

In a written interview with Mother Petra Macli-ing (75) in October 2005:<sup>10</sup> *Hapit* quoted her as saying that: “Our forefathers have said it before, and I will also say it now: Of what use and good would gold be to us when it means destroying our rice fields? What good will it be to us to have glittering gold to adorn our bodies if there is no food and our stomachs will be eternally famished?”

The development projects promised jobs in exchange of destroying the land.

“Mining will not bring development to our peoples here. In fact, the gold-buyers are the foreigners. Our resources are plundered and we don’t even benefit from our gold. The communities affected by these mining projects should organize themselves. They have nothing to rely on but their own strength and unity.”

She can say this because Mother Petra was among the women who managed to stop the attempt to make the government-sponsored Chico Dam Project operational in the 70s in the Philippines that would have affected farmlands and rivers of about six villages. When a group of military men and civilians took turns in protecting the bulldozers ready to destroy their farmland to give way to the dam project, one of the actions that the women in the community did was to hold a demonstration of women in the affected communities to confront them. They wore their traditional dresses: the colourful skirt or “*tapis*” and that was all. The military men and other government agents with them went scampering, away from the site and never returned.

### IV. Process of Transformation

“They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” They left the Chico River to continue flowing but they continued to protect the mining companies, the hydroelectric powers, they continued to suppress those who protest in the Cordilleras.

---

<sup>10</sup> (Hapit Vol. XIII No. 4 October – December 2005)

Mother Petra has this to say: "If not for our efforts to organize ourselves in the 1970s and act on our issues, I tell you, we would be dead by now, dead without our lands and our resources. That is why communities should persevere to organize and stay perpetually organized – always learning and continuously building strength, so that we can protect our lands – our lives – our gift from God."<sup>11</sup>

### **The obstacles for transformation**

Since towards the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the development of nations was towards the widening of the gap between the few rich nations and the majority poor nations. The empire, arrogating unto itself the ruler of the world made possible these uneven developments. It will be for its own benefit that many countries remain poor and dependent on the empire so that it can continually impose its own will on the ruled and unobstructed in exploiting the human and natural resources.

It is a vicious opponent that whatever gets in their way will get the empire's ire. The same way that whichever way it could get into a country for whatever reasons whenever it wants, however it wants - as clearly seen in the war in Afghanistan, the brutal invasion of Iraq, the threat received by Iran and the sending of troops to different countries - it would consistently be for possible oil sources, mineral/natural resources and human resources. Profit is the primary motive and threats to economic embargo and (if not actual) war as means to keep their target nations subjugated.

The international and big media outfits that the empire owns play very crucial role in propagating the empire's desire to control the world. War armaments are major merchandise. New models of air craft carriers, war planes and the likes are promoted on television, newspapers and even in war movies. They show how powerful the empire is. But at the same time they advertise it for governments to purchase.

But this global situation will not happen without the collusion of the elite classes of the third world countries which usually are also the ones in control of their governments. Treaties, laws and policies are promulgated according to the wish of the empire. The neo-liberal policy of the empire is being implemented to the hilt. They are also expected to quell all kinds of protest that would derail the plan of the empire.

### **The road to transformation and the concomitant challenges**

God works through his people. *Vox populi vox Dei*. The voice of the people is the voice of God.

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 8, p. 47 para 5

The people are the ones directly experiencing the hardships done to them by the present unjust order. In different ways and means, in various forms and in varying degrees of intensity, the people express their protest against the exploitative order created by the empire.

The anti-WTO activities especially during its ministerial meetings are one of those that demonstrate major progressive actions that contribute to the delay in its intentions to fast track the empire's plans.

The action of the South African government in 2002 to defy the WTO system of responding to the medical needs of its people suffering from HIV and AIDS supported by peoples of other nations is a glaring example of how things can be possible when people come together and stand their ground. Even the most powerful back tracks when the people act as one.

The decisions and positions taken by the government of Cuba and Venezuela must be emulated by other governments that uphold sovereignty, real progress and democracy.

The people are talking. We must listen. The people are taking actions, we likewise have to act accordingly.

### **The role of the church in tilting the balance in favor of transformation**

The church is in the middle of these contending forces. It is because these two contending forces are also their parishioners. If the church tends to reconcile two fundamentally opposing interests, it will fail in its mission if indeed it is the mission of the church.

The other side wants justice, equal distribution of the abundant blessings of God, eradicating exploitation in order to live decently and with dignity. The other one is to acquire, as much as possible all the wealth in this world and that is at the expense of the majority poor people of God.

This is the very situation that must be transformed.

This very effort of the CCA providing a channel, a venue, an arena for indigenous women to reread the bible from the exploited and oppressed women's eyes, should push us further to draw plans for concrete actions - a step towards transformation. But, honestly, it is so tiny a step compared to what CCA can still do. This program should be consistent and multiplied to ensure genuine transformative actions that will help initiate, as well as further support already-existing, efforts of indigenous women and the rest of humanity to liberate them from oppressions. This initiative to gather together indigenous women leaders in the church hearing from each other

and seeing hope should be a channel for strengthening our faith, overcome our differences and return to our communities renewed, reaffirmed, rejuvenated and ready for a protracted process of change.

There can never be genuine peace without justice. It is expected that we do not leave it here. Reading the Bible in a woman's eye should be a liberating process. We need to build the strongest unity and continuous action against the empire that peddles globalization. We need to create a platform for turning God's promise of a better earth into reality. #