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Globalization Scripts: Dissension Among Global Actors

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Abstract. This article identifies conflictual cognitions about a globalizing economy that generate conflictual behaviors about this economy.

Although something called the globalizing economy may be a consensual and inevitable social perception of the moment, there is nothing consensual and inevitable about supporters and opponents of the perception who have clashed in Seattle, Bangkok, and other venues throughout the world. Their conflictual behaviors--from peaceful demonstrations to cybersabotage and assault and battery--are generated from equally conflictual cognitions. There seem to be four main groupings of these cognitions--viz., that the globalizing economy is essentially undesired, desired, desirable with qualifications, or a stalking horse for other political Issues.

Why is the globalizing economy essentially undesired? As interdependence among economic actors and the speed with which they can interact and influence increases, any one actor can rightly bemoan an increasing loss of self-efficacy and sovereignty. It becomes more difficult to plan for events that can be so much more easily affected by the self and by others beyond the purview of one's planning. If one attempts to narrow or expand the purview of those allowed to be part of the planning process, again self-efficacy and sovereignty are threatened. Another cognitive script related to the globalizing economy being undesired notes that economy's dependence on new technologies--e.g., as infrastructure, services, and products. Anxiety and anger about the New closely mimics a Luddite perspective that seeks to reify the Old and demonize the New.

Why is the globalizing economy essentially desired? One cognitive script emphasizes the efficiency of a global environment as tariffs, duties, and de facto impediments to something called "free trade" are minimized and disestablished. Something called the "free market" as it is more and more unencumbered inevitably must lead to the Good. Much more controversial is what the nature of that Good should be--viz., of what kind and for what kind and number of people. Another cognitive script emphasizes modernity as the cardinal virtue of the globalizing economy.

Why is the globalizing economy desirable with qualifications? Its putative efficiency, free trade, free market, and modern aspects must be tempered with humanity. This tempering usually refers to the developing and enforcing of environmental, labor, and humanitarian standards of what hopefully would become a global work force. Although this tempering often is broached in the context of human welfare, it is perceived as against such welfare by a number of social perceivers. These perceivers include those who disagree as to the type of standards that are appropriate, ascribe all attempts at standards as purposeful impediments against their own economic progress, and view global standards as purposeful attacks against their own cultures.

Why is the globalizing economy but a stalking horse for other political Issues? This sort of conflictual cognition is always the case for some political actors towards any social perception and is a feature of any political context.

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There are three main political approaches to deconflicting the four main groupings of conflictual cognitions. First, one can conceptualize a winner-take-all approach based on raw political power. Second, one can attempt to persuade and cognitively modify. Third, one can effect compromise.

To conclude, there are two conflicts--of substance and of means of resolution. In the globalizing political world, plus ca change. (See Krugman, P. (February 16, 2000). An American pie. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>.; O' Connor, R.E., Bord, R.J., & Fisher, A. (1998). Rating threat mitigators: Faith in experts, governments and individuals themselves to create a safer world. *Risk Analysis*, 18, 547-556; Warwick, P.V. (1998). Disputed cause, disputed effect: The postmaterialist thesis re-examined. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 62, 583-609; Wheeler, D.L. (1998). Global culture or culture clash: New information technologies in the Islamic world--A view from Kuwait. *Communication Research*, 25, 359-376.)
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