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Ghafele, Roya

Vienna University

2004

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MPRA Paper No. 37736, posted 29 Mar 2012 15:36 UTC

**The metaphors of Globalization and Trade:
An analysis of the language used in the WTO**

Roya Ghafele

ghafroia@yahoo.com

1, rue Faller

1203Genève

Tel: 0041/ 78 8415448

The Author's background

Roya Ghafele, Dr.Phil. was trained at Vienna University, Johns Hopkins University and the Sorbonne in international affairs. During the course of her studies she contributed to research in the field of language, law and politics at Johns Hopkins University. Her research on the discourse of the digital divide was awarded with the Theodor Körner Research Price. Currently she works as an International Civil Servant. Other than that she gained work experience in Management Consulting and Classical Ballet.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not in any way reflect those of the WTO or her current employer.

Abstract

This research project examined the metaphors of Globalization and trade in the context of current asymmetries prevailing between high- and low-income countries. As a theoretical underpinning we used historical discourse analysis which views language as a social activity through which humans conceive and understand the reality they live in. Metaphors in particular provide speakers with an inventory of comparisons and pictures. Metaphors offer the discourse its down-to-earth colorit and help in this way to secure one specific perspective on reality. How this is being done in the WTO system is demonstrated in the empirical part of the article. Metaphors on Globalization and trade were extracted from face-to-face interviews with WTO staff and trade diplomats of low-income African countries. These metaphors were analyzed with respect to their force in making trade “speakable” and by doing so providing

the one particular view on Globalization that hardly leaves any space for alternative considerations.

Introduction

“Globalization is both: a historical event and a political football.”¹

Globalization is a word that generates heated debates. Often used, rarely defined, it appears as a dominant metaphor in contemporary international discourse.

Is Globalization new or can it to some extent be traced back to early modern times? This question matters for reasons of legitimacy, rather than scientific evidence. She/he who can argue that Globalization is nothing new and has in fact been a prevailing feature throughout modern history gives more weight to her/his words than a speaker who refers to a rather recent phenomena.

Globalization defined as “the broadening and deepening of national economies into a worldwide market for goods, services and capital”² is in fact nothing new. Historical predecessors could be seen in the Hanseatic or Venetian trading activities. One could also look at the Indian spice trade and argue that it dramatically changed tastes and culture in Europe. Hirst/Thompson³ have clearly demonstrated that intensive trade and financial flows were established long before the word Globalization conquered its place in international discourse.

Still, can one insist that a theme is not novel, if it hardly occupied any linguistic space before the End of the Cold War?

The metaphor of Globalization emerges as a guiding principle at the end of the 1990s. It is a term that has no reference in any of the world’s well-known encyclopedias before the early 1990’s. Neither Larousse, nor Encyclopedia Britannica nor the Brockhaus offer any kind of definition of the term before then.⁴ Claiming that Globalization as the integration of the world

¹ Prakash Aseem/Hart Jeffrey A.(ed.): Coping with Globalization, London/New York 2000, Routledge, p. 9

² Ohiorhenuan John: The South in an Era of Globalization. In: Dennis Ben/Hell Kenneth. (ed.): Globalization: A Calculus of Inequality. Perspectives from the South, Jamaica 2000, Jan Randle Kingston, p.56

³ Hirst Paul/Thompson Graham: Globalization in Question, Oxford/Cambridge 1996, Polity Press

⁴ Brockhaus Enzyklopädie: Nr. 8, Mannheim 1994, Brockhaus, Brockhaus Enzyklopädie: Nr. 8, Mannheim 1989, Brockhaus, Brockhaus Enzyklopädie: Nr. 8, Mannheim 1964, Brockhaus, Encyclopädia Britannica: Nr. 5,

economy has existed throughout history is however an important dimension of its present metaphorical use.

With Clive we agree that Globalization is more than a mere fact based description of intensive flows of trade and capital. Globalization provides the metaphorical setting of the Post Cold War era. It is anything but a “natural” historical evolution. It is the result of human views, beliefs and politics. Globalization is a human artifact that is being positioned as a natural phenomenon.

“Globalization is a dominant economic theme that encapsulates both: a description and a prescription. The description is the widening and deepening of international flows of trade, finance and information in a single, integrated global market. The prescription is to liberalize national and global markets, the belief that free flows of trade, finance and information will produce the best outcome for economic growth and human welfare. All is presented with an air of inevitability and overwhelming conviction.”⁵

Globalization is a metaphor that fits a myth based on facts and figures. The metaphor of Globalization offers ONE particular perspective on the global trading and financial order and dismisses other perspectives by declaring them as unrealistic or infeasible. Barthes sees myths as facts that are chosen by a historical discourse. The myth is not a system of facts, but a relationship that a period of time has to facts. Facts are not being destroyed, but naturalized. Metaphors are an important toolkit to achieve this goal. Through metaphors certain aspects are viewed as normal – common knowledge - whereas others are forgotten.⁶ The mythic system to which the metaphor of Globalization belongs allows and sometimes forces the speaker to structure facts in one specific way, to tell one (coherent) story and declare other views as wrong, ridiculous or foolish.⁷

In this sense we do think that Globalization marks a new historical era. Not so much because it encompasses the integration of the global economy, but because it is the principle point of reference of the Post-Cold War era. A period of time where mainstream international politics

15.th ed. Chicago, London et al.1974, Mayers Enzyklopädisches Lexikon: Nr. 10, Mannheim 1974, Lexikonverlag

⁵ Clive Thomas: Globalization as Paradigm Shift. Responses from the South. In: Dennis Ben/Hell Kenneth. (ed.): Globalization: A Calculus of Inequality. Perspectives from the South, Jamaica 2000, Jan Randle Kingston, p.44

⁶ Barthes Roland: Mythen des Alltags, (Paris 1957) Frankfurt am Main 1964, Suhrkamp, p.88

are dominated by the metaphors of bits and bytes rather than Nuclear Arms. An era where globally known success countries believe to have developed adequate strategies to enhance sustainable growth and feel to be in the position to give advice to the economically less successful states of the world.

Globalization imposes to think in terms of winners and losers. In a surprising way the metaphor of Globalization refers to the domain of football. States compete against each other and aim to be at the top of international rankings. But what will happen to states that disqualify? Will they get a new coach? Will they have to replace their team/citizens? Who will want these non-performing teamplayer/citizens?

The metaphor of Globalization shows remarkable asymmetries:

Asymmetries of ownership and asymmetries of access. The word “Globalization” literally encompasses the entire world, but what kind of Globalization can we mean if we speak at the same time of marginalization and exclusion? What kind of understanding of the integration of the world does Globalization encompass if it can not do without the concept of insiders and outsiders?

The WTO

Liberalizing international trade is an important dimension of Globalization. The World Trade Organization (WTO) reflects the architecture of the international trading system and offers a legal and institutional framework for international trade negotiations. Through the WTO trade is formalized. Its aim is to promote a predictable, liberal environment for international trade.⁸ Only nation states can be a member to the WTO.⁹ The organization’s primary belief is that free trade is a vector for prosperity, economic growth and better living standards.¹⁰ At the core of the WTO are the Most Favored Nation (MFN) and the National Treatment (NT) clause. The principle of MFN binds member countries to the organization to treat goods and services of all other members in the same way.

⁷ Foucault Michel: *Wahnsinn und Gesellschaft*, (Paris 1969) Frankfurt am Main 1973, Suhrkamp

⁸ Chulsu Kim: *Fifty Years of the GATT/WTO System: Major Achievements and Future Challenges*. In: Sa Kong Il/Kwang Suk Kim (ed.): *The Fifty Years of the GATT/WTO: Past Performances and Future Challenges*, Korea/Seoul 1999, Institute of Global Economics, p.5

⁹ This does not, however, prevent the private sector from taking an indirect influence on the trade negotiations. Business associations are actively communicating their positions to the respective governments.

“A privilege granted by any contracting party to any product originating in or destined for any country shall be accorded immediately and unconditionally to the like product originating in or destined for the territories of all other contracting parties.”¹¹

The National Treatment clause obliges its members not to discriminate between foreign and domestic products.

“The products of the territory of any other contracting party shall not be subject, directly or indirectly to internal taxes... in excess to those applied... to like domestic products.”¹²

With regard to trade in services the principle of national treatment is not consistently applied. Countries can pick and chose to which extent they grant equal treatment to domestic and foreign services. Taking the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS) mode 4 (movement of natural persons) as an example most economically viable countries have chosen strict limitations. The free movement of natural persons is in many cases not considered to be consistent with the immigration policies pursued by these countries.

The World Trade Organization was founded in 1995 as a result of eight years of negotiations during the Uruguay Round (1986-1994). The WTO emerged out of the GATT, the General Agreement of Trade and Tariffs, a forum for trade liberalization founded in 1947 primarily with the purpose of reconstructing the war torn economies after World War II. The GATT can be best described as an informal setting which aimed to liberalize international trade and to bring down tariffs and quotas. It supplemented the work of the IMF and the World Bank, but never reached the status of an international trade organization.¹³ At the time of the GATT the agenda of low-income countries was not so much an issue, many of them had not even reached independence from their former colonizers. Its focus tended to be rather on the “Old World” (Europe, North America).

¹⁰ Hoekman Bernard M./Kostecki Michel M.: The Political Economy of the World Trading System. From GATT to WTO, (1995) Oxford 1997, Oxford University Press, p.12

¹¹ Article I, GATT 1947. In: WTO Guide to GATT Law Practice on CD-Rom. Analytical Index, Geneva 1997

¹² Article III, GATT 1947. In: WTO Guide to GATT Law Practice on CD-Rom. Analytical Index, Geneva 1997

¹³ Kenen Peter B.: Managing the World Economy: 50 Years after Bretton Woods, Washington D.C.1994, Institute of International Economics, p. 6-10

One has to keep this historical background in mind when looking at the WTO. Its main challenge, reflected in the Doha Development Agenda and the successive negotiating round in Cancun, remains its transformation from an “Old World’s club” to a “World”-trade organization.¹⁴

So far the WTO has also maintained the GATT’s mercantilist approach to free trade. The aim of its work has never been free trade, but free-r trade. The principle of reciprocity prevails (“quid pro quo basis”).¹⁵ In this sense the institution practically contradicts the liberal trade theories of David Ricardo and Adam Smith to which it theoretically adheres. Liberal trade theory is being reinterpreted in a mercantilist way. The WTO can therefore be seen as a system that promotes the mutual disarmament of barriers to trade.

The “agora” WTO is a member driven organization. Decisions are only reached by consensus; the organization takes the directions its members want it to take. However, in practice the organization is much more driven by some members than by others. A lot of low-income countries that are members to the WTO are physically not represented in Geneva. Those low-income countries that have a diplomatic representation in Geneva lack adequate human resources and technical infrastructure to have any real impact on the WTO agenda. Many economically weak countries have only 2-3 diplomats that have to cover all the UN agencies and activities in Geneva.¹⁶ On the contrary, most economically strong countries traditionally send an important number of trade experts to Geneva to deal exclusively with WTO issues. Due to these considerations the Dispute Settlement Mechanism has never been made use of by any sub-Saharan African country.

Additionally many low-income countries’ trading structures are characterized by low levels of sophistication. These countries trade only low value added goods and many times consider the former colonizer as main trading partner. Concessions in agriculture or textiles for example remain fairly restricted for the simple reason that countries largely trading in these sectors have often few cross-sector deals to offer in return. Within this context it is hardly surprising that the agenda of economically less viable countries has so far been inadequately addressed.

¹⁴ Stiglitz Joseph E.: Two Principles for the Next Round or: How to Bring Developing Countries in From the Cold. In: The World Economy Nr.23/4 2000, p.451

¹⁵ Hoekman Bernard M./Kostecki Michel M.: The Political Economy of the World Trading System, From GATT to WTO, [1995] Oxford 1997, Oxford University Press, p. 1

Theory of Metaphors

Metaphors have traditionally been associated with poetry and rhetoric. Mainly regarded from the aesthetic point of view their cognitive function has been of secondary concern. By consequence they have long passed unnoticed in international politics and their role in representing reality ignored. Metaphors help the human mind to gain a better understanding of the world that surrounds him/her. Their systematic use in everyday language, science or politics allows to gain access to knowledge domains and concepts. Quasi omnipresent in any sort of discourse metaphors provide similarities and offer comparisons and allow in this way to understand one phenomenon through another. Goatly defines metaphors as a relationship between two otherwise unrelated phenomena:

“A Metaphor occurs when a unit of discourse is used to refer unconventionally to an object, process or concept, or establishes in an unconventional way a syntactic relationship between two different words. This unconventional act of reference... is understood on the basis of similarity, matching or analogy involving the conventional referent of the unit and the actual unconventional referent.”¹⁷

Metaphors need not only be verbal, also drawings, cartoons or buildings can act as metaphors and express a specific worldview.¹⁸ Metaphorical speaking is an unusual way of speaking and tends to lead into an illogical world. Understanding one phenomenon through another can often be provocative.¹⁹ A comparison between two different areas can also appear as a shock. Yet, it is this shock that helps to legitimate the one specific view. The metaphor does not break with the discourse it belongs to. While metaphors can have different functions such a filling lexical gaps, providing explanations and models, reconceptualizing views, decorating a discourse, expressing an emotional attitude or providing a pathic element, their ultimate

¹⁶ Blackhurst Richard/Lyakuwa Bill/Oyejide Ademola: Options for Improving Africa's Participation in the WTO. In: The World Economy Nr. 23 2000, p.500-511

¹⁷ Goatly Andrew: The Language of Metaphors, London/New York 1997, Routledge, p.8

¹⁸ Lakoff has demonstrated how the attack on the Twin Towers was perceived by the US administration in a metaphorical way . He argues that buildings are often associated with faces. The airplane that was used as a missile was associated with a gun. The crash by consequence was a shot in the head of the country. Unsurprisingly the reaction of the US government was very harsh.

See: Lakoff George: Metaphors of Terror. The Power of Images. In: InTheseTimes.com, 29th Of October 2001, p.1-9

¹⁹ Eco Umberto: Die Grenzen der Interpretation, (Mailand 1990) München/Wien 1992, Carl Hanser, p.200

purpose is to provide one specific view on a subject.²⁰ While helping to understand a problem, metaphors help to understand it in the light of the connotation inherent to the analogy. Metaphors may therefore break with expected manners and codes of conduct or cultivate intimacy, but it is this break that assures in the end the continuity of the discourse.²¹

Metaphors provide the imagination with key elements. Their use does not destroy phenomena, but in a more subtle way deforms them according to how the speaker wants to portray them. The roses that a lover offers to the woman of his admiration can be understood as a metaphor for his feelings. The roses do not fulfill the man's desire to express his love because they are traded at world markets or because they are a plant that does not support the direct sun. Other characteristics of roses are referred to in order to express love: Their perfume, their look, and their beauty. The characteristics of the roses are transformed. While certain aspects are completely ignored, others are highlighted to the extent to symbolize features of a domain other than the one to which they belong. The relationship that is created between two unrelated phenomena "love" and "flowers" is discursive in character. The roses are transformed until they become the symbol of love and love is transformed to give it the impression of the beauty of the flowers. A myth is created and a specific view on reality established. Two at first sight neutral phenomena are transformed and a relationship is created. At the end of this process both domains have received a distinctive connotation and can hardly be dissociated from each other. From a cognitive point of view humans can't but perceive the one domain through the symbolized other one.

"Devant l'alternative de liquider ou de deguiser la metaphore trouve une alternative: elle naturalise."²²

Historical discourse analysis in the sense of Foucault helps to understand how metaphors shape social realities through their cognitive function. According to discourse analysis humans do not interact, behave and speak in a reality that is already pre-defined, but actively

²⁰ Goatly Andrew: *The Language of Metaphors*, London/New York 1997, Routledge, p.171

²¹ Cameron Jenny: *Feminizing the Economy: Metaphors, Strategies, Politics*, Draft Manuscript 2003, The Australian National University

²² Barthes Roland: *Mythen des Alltags*, [Paris 1957] Frankfurt am Main 1964, Suhrkamp, p.112
Translation: Having to choose between the alternative to liquidate or to disguise the metaphor finds an alternative: It naturalizes.

create the world they live in through their interaction, behavior, language and particularly the metaphors they use.²³

“On agit sur la réalité en agissant sur sa représentation.”²⁴

Social realities are under permanent construction and change throughout time. The metaphors humans use to grasp concepts and give shape to the world that surrounds them are more than the simple reflection of the “outside world”. They are the result of the collective work of a community, group or society.²⁵

“Der Diskurs ist kein Bewusstsein, das sein Vorhaben in der äusserlichen Form der Sprache unterbringt: ist nicht eine Sprache plus ein Subjekt, das die Sprache spricht. Es ist eine Praxis, die ihre eigenen Formen der Verkettung und der Abfolge besitzt.”²⁶

Foucault introduces the notion of representation to explain the mechanisms of the creation of social realities. Social realities are essentially linguistic realities. They do not exist independently from the world of objects they represent. Rather, by describing, analyzing, explaining, comparing and classifying objects and facts the metaphor creates a specific perspective on these facts and objects. It is the arrangement, the structure that the metaphor imposes on this “outside” world that creates **one** specific understanding of the object reality. Foucault considers a discourse as a system of relationships.²⁷ In this sense metaphors can be understood as an essential element of this system. By providing categories of cognitive

23 Foucault Michel: *The Archeology of Knowledge and Discourse on Language*, [Paris 1969] London/New York 1993, Barnes/Noble Books; Lenk Jürgen: *Interpretation und Realität, Vorlesungen über Realismus der Philosophie der Interpretationskonstrukte*, Frankfurt am Main 1995, Suhrkamp, Potter Jonathan: *Representing Reality, Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction*, London/Thousand Oaks/New Dehli 1996, Sage, Berger Peter L./Luckmann Thomas: *The social Construction of Reality, A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, London/Plymouth 1967, Penguin, Hall Stuart: *Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and Post-Structuralist Debates*, in: Curran James/Morley David/ Walkerdine Valerie (ed.): *Cultural Studies and Communication*, [1985] London 1996, Arnold, Bourdieu Pierre: *Ce que Parler Veut Dire, l'Économie des Échanges Linguistiques*, Paris 1982, Fayard

²⁴ Foucault Michel: *Les Mots et Les Choses, Une Archéologie des Sciences Humaines*, Paris 1966, Gallimard, p. 93

Translation: One acts upon reality by acting upon its representation.

²⁵ Lafont Robert: *Sprache als Arbeit*, [Paris 1978] Wien 1992, Braumüller, Petrilli Susan: *On the Materiality of Signs*, in: *Semiotica, Journal of the International Association for Semiotic Studies*, Nr. 62 ¾ p. 223-245

²⁶ Foucault Michel: *Die Archäologie des Wissens*, (Paris 1969) Frankfurt am Main 1973, Suhrkamp
Translation: Discourse is not a consciousness that realizes its intentions in an exterior form called language: is not language plus a subject that speaks the language. It is a practice that owns its own forms of chaining and sequencing.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.9

structures the metaphor provides humans with a repertoire of perceptions and representations in the world they live in.

The purpose of metaphors in international politics is to offer comparisons in order to make complex constellations more understandable. While these constellations do become more understandable, they are however understood in one particular way.²⁸ The metaphor acts as simplifier by using phenomena from one area and transfers them to another that is in no way related. This allows the speaker to give his/her words the colorit of general understanding and provokes a visualization of the one specific perspective.²⁹ The “logical” world receives its down-to-earth common sense underpinning. Metaphors express concepts and act as mechanisms of control. This is how different views succeed in being considered as facts rather than artifacts. The metaphor fulfills the human desire for coherence and simplicity.³⁰

Arranging the world of objects and facts in one specific way is a powerful tool. The elaboration of this one specific perspective allows to silence alternative views, dismiss them or make them ridiculous. The result of this work is the adaptation of alternative discourses into the mainstream discourse, which ultimately leads to their elimination.

“L'accès de la classe dirigeante à l'être a pour contrepartie la chute inevitable de la classe complementaire dans le néant.”³¹

As to international politics, prevailing power structures are apparent in the various metaphorical discourses of the world.³² Different communities view various situations very

²⁸ Rigotti Francesca: Die Macht und Ihre Metaphern: Über die Sprachlichen Bilder der Politik, Frankfurt am Main 1994, Campus

Münkler Herfried: Politische Bilder, Politik der Metaphern, Frankfurt am Main 1994, Campus

²⁹ Chilton Paul/Lakoff George: Foreign Policy by Metaphor, in: Schäffner Christina/ Wenden Anita L.(ed.): Language and Peace, Aldershot/Brookfield/Singapore/Sydney 1995, Dartmouth, p. 58; Lakoff George L./Johnson Mark: Metaphors we live by, [1980] Chicago 10th ed. 1994, University of Chicago Press

³⁰ Wesel Reinhard: Entwicklungspolitische Rhetorik: Kognitive Strukturen im Phänomenbereich „Dritte Welt“ und ihre symbolische Politisierung zwischen euphorischer Projektion und Bedrohungsängsten, p.70,71. In: Opp de Hipt Manfred/Latnial Erich (ed.): Sprache statt Politik?, Politikwissenschaftliche Semantik und Rhetorikforschung, Darmstadt/Opladen 1991, Westdeutscher Verlag

³¹ Bourdieu Michel: Ce que Parler Veut Dire. L'Économie des Échanges Linguistiques, Paris 1982, Fayard, p.134

Translation: The access of the ruling class to existence implies the inavoidable fall of the complementary class into inexistence.

³² Opp de Hipt Manfred/Latnial Erich (ed.): Sprache statt Politik?, Politikwissenschaftliche Semantik und Rhetorikforschung, Darmstadt/Opladen 1991, Westdeutscher Verlag,

Van Dijk Teun: Discourse Analysis as Ideology Analysis, in: Schäffner Christina/ Wenden Anita L.(ed.): Language and Peace, Aldershot/Brookfield/Singapore/Sydney 1995, Dartmouth

differently and accordingly use a different language. The WTO has a quasi-monopolistic position in the area of international trade. The metaphors of the institution are backed up by the authority it dispenses as an international organization. WTO employees are considered to be experts in the field of international trade. Their words are legitimized and authorized by the institution. The metaphors of trade negotiators representing economically weak countries have little weight to legitimize their position. One can not consider the metaphors of diplomats from low-income countries as another way of structuring facts and objects. There are few success stories to underpin the position. Those who lack credentials are by definition in a weaker position than those who represent the word of an internationally legitimized body. Their metaphors may criticize and denounce asymmetries and imbalances of the international trading system, but in doing so they remain within the dimension of the established discourse. To the contrary, the antagonistic metaphors that this group uses reinforces the dominant discourse; a discourse that functions in terms of winners and losers:

The discourse of Globalization.

The issue is however not to determine who has power and who does not, and to judge why this may be considered discriminatory. We are not in a position to make such ethical statements. Rather, we seek to create awareness that power is the guiding principle of discourse.

Analysis of the Metaphors of Globalization and Trade

The empirical part of this contribution seeks analyze some metaphors used in the Globalization discourse. The following illustrations were extracted from in-depth-interviews we conducted with 38 francophone African diplomats and WTO staff in Geneva in 2001. We will contrast the metaphors used by WTO staff with those of diplomatic representatives of francophone African LDCs (Least Developed Countries) which have taken to be representative for low-income countries.³³

³³ The following quotes are kept anonymous for reasons of commonly accepted diplomatic standards. We will refer only to the country of origin of the speaker, his/her gender and professional background. (either trade diplomats or WTO staff). In cases where speakers come from the same country we will number them to demonstrate that this is a different speaker.

Africa, the ill child

“La mondialisation pour l’Afrique c’est comme avec les médicaments: ça aide, mais ça a aussi des effets négatifs.”³⁴

The metaphor of Globalization as medicine refers to the medical vocabulary. It implies that the continent as a whole is ill.³⁵ Africa is being personalized and put in the position of the patient. In European types of medicine this is a passive situation where a doctor, who is educated to identify what the patient suffers from, is in the (superior) position to give advice to the unknowledgeable patient about the illness. As a consequence of the consultation the patient is usually given medicine which is supposed to heal the problem. In line with this thinking is the view that only medicine that has negative side effects has an impact on the illness. Alternative medicine is dismissed in advance.

Through this comparison Globalization has one particular connotation: It is healthy, helps and offers solutions to a seriously ill patient. It also establishes an asymmetric relationship between the patient (Africa) and the doctor (knowledgeable insider countries). Other aspects of Globalization do not enter the picture and have no space in the way that reality is created in this metaphor.

“Picture of a white man watering a bean in a flower pot.”³⁶

One can not speak of Globalization in an African context without talking at the same time of development. The picture used in WTO’s information folders is a white little man watering a bean. (See Annex)

The bean has already gained substantial height, but the white little man continues watering. The bean has no choice, but to grow since the man keeps flowering. It can not decide by itself when it has reached its ideal height. Also in this metaphor an asymmetric relationship can be observed. The man is in the active position and has the physical and material means to ensure that the bean will grow. The bean is stuck in the flowerpot and must undergo the treatment.

African diplomats do criticize this attitude in their metaphors, but it is important to note that their thinking adheres to the same framework.

³⁴ France/Male/WTO Staff

Translation: Globalization for Africa is like medication: It helps, but it also has negative side effects.

³⁵ Foucault Michel: *Psychologie und Geisteskrankheit*, [Paris 1954] Frankfurt am Main 1968, Suhrkamp

“Un enfant qui ne peut pas marcher à son rythme, mais qui doit courir tandis qu’il ne peut pas courir.”³⁷

Africa is being compared to a child that can hardly walk, but is supposed to run. The role the child has in his/her relationship to the parents becomes exchangeable to the role the bean has to the little white man who waters it or the ill patient who gets medicine prescribed by a medical doctor. Neither the child, nor the bean, nor the patient has self-determination, but depends on the education, activity or advice of somebody else.

Africa, the hopeless case

“Africa has to put its house in order.”³⁸

Once the connection between pathology and Africa has been established it is important to clarify responsibilities. Hygiene is an essential concept in medicine. It appears as an essential concept in explaining why these states do not succeed in international trade. States are being personalized. They live in chaotic houses. Is it surprising that there can not be a healing process if there is a lack of adequate sanitary circumstances?

This metaphor expresses the misfit between different structures of discourse. Clearly, the African discourse does not fit into mainstream discourse, structure and order. Edward Said would argue that this type of metaphor is typical for one culture perceiving another culture through its own structures and prevailing habits.³⁹ Instead of making the effort to understand the socio-economic system of other parts of the earth for what they are; namely the expression of a different way of leading a life in a community, this type of metaphor imposes an understanding of different worlds only through reference to one’s own world.⁴⁰

³⁶ WTO: The World Trade Organization in Brief, Geneva 2000, p.6

³⁷ Senegal/Male/Diplomat, Gabon/Female/Diplomat

Translation: A child that can not walk at his/her own rhythm, but has to run although she/he can not run.

³⁸ Malawi/Male/WTO Staff

³⁹ Said Edward: Orientalism. New York 1979, Vintage

⁴⁰ Chabal Patrick/Deloz Jean Pascal (ed.): Africa works: Disorder as Political Instrument, Oxford/Indianapolis 1999, Indiana University Press

“Avec l’Afrique c’est un peu le chat qui se mord dans le queue.”⁴¹

The black continent remains black. The association of an unchangeable vicious circle is created which puts into question development aid. This again creates space for the “trade not aid” discourse.

“With Africa it’s the chicken egg dilemma.”⁴²

The chicken/egg comparison suggests a linearity of development processes. However development progressions are evolutionary, one thing arises from another. By assuming spontaneous change and asking whether the chicken or the egg was first here, one perceives the issues in a framework that does not allow the possibility of multicausalities. This metaphor expresses hopelessness and questions equally the usefulness of development aid. It lacks belief in the possibility of indigenous force as a means of human development.

“Les 29 pays les moins avancés (PMA) qui sont en Afrique sont des photocopies les uns des autres.”⁴³

This type of language questions the individual character of each Least Developed Country (LDC). It presumes that all the poor are very much the same. The prevailing dominant feature of these countries is their poverty. So why should they be any different from each other?

The potential pitfall of this type of language is that it assumes that one size fits all. Ultimately it prevents custom tailored development aid. Also, it prevents us from seeking a deeper understanding of the driving elements of each individual country.

“Sans Globalisation ces pays n’ont rien.”⁴⁴”

⁴¹ France/Male/WTO Staff/2

Translation: With Africa the cat bites itself in its own tail.

⁴² Ghana/Male/Leading WTO Staff

⁴³ France/Male/WTO Staff/2

Translation: The 29 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) that are in Africa are photocopies of each other.

⁴⁴ Mali/Male/WTO Staff

Translation: Without Globalization these countries have nothing.

Without Globalization poor countries are empty. Balzac says in “Scènes de la vie de province”, “whereas Paris, the capital is everything, the countryside is nothing but itself.”⁴⁵

This view is consistent with Balzac’s conception of the periphery.

There is nothing in Africa, but perhaps the desert, some wild life and fauna and potentially a couple of tribes that live in huts. These words ultimately dismiss the idea of an indigenous culture, of indigenous structures that existed before Globalization was brought there. Globalization is considered as a means of bringing life to the desert, but is the desert not already alive?

Taking a look back into history one can trace this type of perception back to an undertaking that is by now largely dismissed: Colonialism.

“En Afrique les gens marchaient dans certains zones avec des feuilles. Maintenant ils marchent plus avec des feuilles, mais ils s’habillent normalement, comme ça. (speaker points to the black suit he is wearing) L’identité du 20e siècle c’est plus de marcher avec des feuilles.”⁴⁶

Globalization is being presented as the ultimate possibility to bring civilization, structure and order to the poor countries in Africa. Globalization is positioned as salvation. The indigenous culture on the contrary is being made ridiculous. Indigenous dress codes are considered as clearly inferior to European dress codes. The picture associates Africans with primates that live in trees and wear nothing but a leaf around their waist.

This type of metaphor is being used by African WTO staff. The postcolonialism movement would see these words as the victory of mainstream discourse.⁴⁷ Representatives of economically weak countries define themselves with regard to an economically stronger group. The understanding of the self, of what makes oneself can only be achieved by looking at the others. This understanding of oneself by looking at the other can by definition only lead to frustration and the questioning of oneself.

⁴⁵ Balzac Honoré de: Scènes de la Vie de Province: le lys dans la vallée, [1871-80] Paris 1946, La Nouvelle France

⁴⁶ Burkina Faso/Male/Leading WTO Staff

Translation: In Africa people used to walk around with leaves in certain areas. Now they do not wear leaves anymore, but dress in a normal way, like that. The identity of the 20th century is not anymore to walk around with leaves.

⁴⁷ Spivac Gayatri C.: In Other Worlds, Essays in Cultural Politics, New York 1987, Methuen; Chambers Jain/Curti Lidia (ed.) The post-colonial Question. Common Skies, Divided Horizons, (1996) London/New York 1998, Routledge

Africa has missed the train

Another frequently used metaphor is the comparison of Globalization with a train. In the interviews we conducted with WTO staff and African diplomats this metaphor was used equally often. Yet it was used to outline different views on Globalization.

“Africa risks to miss the train. Everybody is trying to jump on this train, a train that you can’t stop.”⁴⁸

Comparing Globalization to a train suggests the linearity of time and history. It implies that Globalization is irreversible and that there is no other way. The movement of a train depends on the railway. It can’t just take any direction. The patterns of the railway were constructed long before the train could actually start moving in this way it just follows a predefined way. There is room for flexibility according to where the train is supposed to go, but it will always remain bound to its predefined patterns. In this metaphor the train is moving fast and can’t be stopped. Yet everybody wants and has to travel with this train. The picture does not explain why this is so.

The following metaphor leaves no scope for other views of Globalization than the one that it is an unstoppable fast moving means of transportation.

“Le train est déjà parti et on peut plus l’arrêter. Mais il faut l’attraper.”⁴⁹

The metaphor does not tell where this train is supposed to take the world and why everybody has to take the journey. The threat lies in being left behind (behind what? What’s the aim?) and not being a passenger of the train with the unknown destination.

The velocity of the train is being criticized by some African diplomats, but their arguments do not leave the framework of the train metaphor either.

“On laisse beaucoup de pays au bord de la route. Ils peuvent pas suivre.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Malawi/Male/WTO Staff

⁴⁹ Burundi/Male/Diplomat

Translation: The train has already left and one can not stop it anymore. But one has to catch the train.

High-speed trains represent the progress of modern technology. What is illuminated in this metaphor is that this speed is simply too high. Those who do not have ownership of the technology can not follow and are left behind. Why and what they are supposed to follow appears less important. What matters is that the periphery catches up. A challenging undertaking since the train is moving so fast.

“Le train va les écraser.”⁵¹

Little hope is left in this picture. Globalization is a train that simply rolls over those who are not travelling with the train. Does this imply that those who are not on the train are against the train?

This image provides little scope for alternative solutions. There is no alternative but to join. This metaphor used by African trade negotiators themselves demonstrates that the words that might have the potential to elaborate alternative views are in fact nothing, but a reflection of the dominant view on Globalization and trade. What remains is resignation and ultimately acceptance. One knows about the potential threats of Globalization, but takes insufficient ownership of one’s own destiny.

Who directs WTO?

“C’est comme si vous êtes dans un bateau. Vous êtes embarqués dedans, mais la destination, le conditionnement, le fonctinement, vous en savez strictement rien et quand on vous tourne à gauche, vous êtes embarqués à gauche, et quand on vous tourne à droite vous êtes amenés à droite, mais vous n’avez aucune commande.”⁵²

Who drives the WTO, which is by its constitution a member driven organization?

African trade negotiators compare the WTO to a means of transportation that is commanded by others. There are few possibilities seen that empower. Self-determination and freedom can

⁵⁰ Côte d’Ivoire/Male/Diplomat

Translation: One leaves a lot of countries at the side of the street. They can not follow.

⁵¹ Republique Démocratique du Congo/Male/Diplomat

Translation: The train will smash them.

⁵² Republique Démocratique du Congo/Male/Diplomat/2

only be achieved at the price of jumping from the boat; which would imply committing suicide. In fact, the WTO is confronted with the absence of diplomats from low-income countries at informal discussions, meetings and decision-making bodies. However, as this metaphor suggests, many low-income countries have internalized the passive role and have made insufficient effort to break or modify traditional structures. Many administrations from low-income themselves do not see the necessity to become further engaged in the discussions taking place in WTO.

“L’OMC c’est comme un bal où vous êtes invités, mais vous pouvez seulement y aller si vous avez une robe de soirée, mais bien sûr vous n’en possédez pas puisque vous n’avez pas l’argent pour vous payer une telle robe.”⁵³

Comparing the WTO to a ball, which one is invited to, but does not have the dress needed to participate in the ball, refers to Africa’s inadequate trading structures. The WTO is a trade organization, but such an organization has little meaning for those who have little to trade. The WTO is therefore considered an expensive ball. Maintaining a diplomatic mission in Geneva is costly; attracting qualified trade diplomats is even more costly. Also, there is hardly a perceived need to take an active role in the WTO system.

“L’OMC [WTO] c’est comme un match de foot. Mais ce match n’est pas juste parce que la ligue des mineurs doit jouer contre les professionnelles.”⁵⁴

This metaphor used by African diplomacy compares WTO to a football match. In football there are winners and losers, there is competition and there are certain rules with which the players must comply. All these characteristics also apply to WTO, except that the rules are negotiated by the players themselves. In this metaphor the junior group, henceforth the less experienced, is playing against the senior professionals. This metaphor evokes an unequal game, which intrinsically leads to unequal results.

Translation: It is as if you were in a boat. You are in the boat, but you know absolutely nothing about the boat’s destination, conditions or functioning. When you are turned to the left, you go left and when you are turned to the right you go right, but you have no command at all.

⁵³ Senegal/Male/Diplomat

Translation: The WTO is like a ball where you are invited, but you can only go there if you have an evening dress, but of course you do not own such a dress because you do not have the money to buy such a dress.

⁵⁴ Senegal/Male/Diplomat/2

Translation: The WTO is like a football match. But this match is not fair because the youth club is playing against professionals.

“On tue les pays.”⁵⁵

The WTO is perceived to be dangerous to indigenous development. Asymmetries of ownership prevail within the organization. African trade diplomats do not see the WTO as THEIR organization. It is the club, where one does not belong. It is however a dangerous club, that many fear. This metaphor does not offer solutions. It does not show ways to take ownership of the organization. It only shows that trade diplomats from low-income countries don't see a way to turn the WTO's aim to liberalize trade into a win-win outcome. All that this group of professionals sees is that it has the potential to extinguish life.

Although the following two examples are not metaphors we think it is essential to quote them since they reveal much about current perceptions of Globalization.

“Globalization is not just something that the WTO does. It is a historical process.”⁵⁶

WTO staff clearly shifts the responsibility for any eventual negative consequences away from the WTO. Globalization is a historical process. History again is a natural evolution, rather than a human artifact. The WTO is not a driver of historical processes, but takes a passive role. In this way the WTO can not be held responsible for Globalization. History is not considered an active process that results from human behavior, but is constructed as an unchangeable natural process that is dissociated from human interaction.

In a way this type of language is contradictory to earlier statements from WTO staff that tend to consider Globalization as a positive event. Globalization is positioned as an opportunity for low-income countries. Why does this professional group then seek to assure that the organization they work for can not be held responsible?

“History is what it is. Currently I see some bold and authoritative African leaders...With Globalization people can make choices.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Côte d'Ivoire/Male/Diplomat/1

Translation: One kills the countries.

⁵⁶ New Zealand/Male/Leading WTO staff

⁵⁷ Ghana/Male/Leading WTO staff

These words underline once more the emphasis that WTO staff places on dissociating the organization from Globalization. History is what it is and it is clearly not affected by what the WTO does.

Conclusion

Globalization defined as the integration of global markets is nothing new. Globalization defined as a prevailing metaphor in international politics however is quite a recent phenomenon. As a metaphor Globalization fits a world that believes to have replaced myths by facts and figures. The metaphorical language of Globalization borrows its vocabulary from the domains of sports, business and medicine. Globalization is being conceived in terms of winners and losers, patients and doctors. The overarching aim is to maximize benefits, achieve sustainable growth rates and outperform competition. The metaphor of Globalization leaves hardly any space for indigenous growth in low-income countries.

International trade is an important element of Globalization. The metaphors of trade and Globalization appear interchangeable; the analogies are led by a similar Leitmotiv. One plays catch up at the international level. However, perceiving development in these categories must by definition lead to frustration. How can low-income countries catch up countries that themselves are constantly evolving, growing and developing?

The World Trade Organization (WTO) acts as a forum for international trade negotiations. It is a bargaining place where countries negotiate the liberalization of trade. Although the WTO would in theory clearly adhere to the ideal of free trade as developed by thinkers like Ricardo or Smith, in practice it reinterprets these trade theories in a mercantilist way. “Do ut des”, “I give so that you give” is the prevailing paradigm. The paradox of the mercantilist reinterpretation of free trade theorems does not act to the advantage of low-income countries. Most of these countries have a low level of diversification of their trading structures. In addition, this group of countries is inadequately represented at the WTO. Lacking financial resources, many of them have no diplomatic mission in Geneva, where the WTO is located. Those who are present in Geneva lack adequate skilled human resources to effectively participate in the discussions at the WTO. As a consequence sectors of interest to low income countries are not being promoted and addressed in the WTO. From a low-income country’s

perspective the historical evolution of the WTO does not act to its full advantage either, given that the WTO emerged from the GATT, which can be considered an “Old World’s” club.

“Language is a social phenomena by definition and not by election.”⁵⁸

Language represents the world and only as such does it become bearable and its sense seems controllable. Through metaphors humans gain ownership and control of the world they live in. Humans use metaphors to manage the meaning of the world that surrounds them. Foucault is interested in discourse because it creates a structure. For him the unifying element of discourse to which metaphors belong is the force to arrange facts in a specific way. This is how one specific way of perceiving the world is established. Discourse is a social process, a collective work. A community uses language to create a common understanding, a way of doing and speaking. For the individual speaker this means that she/he can not say anything at any time. Linguistic freedom is restricted by the dominant features that guide the discursive setting of a speaker’s words. This can be well demonstrated by the discourse of the institution. The WTO is an international body that is considered to have knowledge and competence about the subject. WTO employees are experts that are supposed to know what they say. However they can not openly criticize or question the institution they work for. Their words are bound by the guiding principles of the organization.

The function of metaphors is to give a certain discourse a down-to-earth and understandable colorit. Metaphors may disturb prevailing codes of politeness, but they do not disturb the specific perspectives created in a discourse. To the contrary, the provocation that is created by using a metaphor reinforces the line of argumentation of the speaker. One element is explained with the help of another. When relating Globalization to trains for example one only applies certain characteristics of trains to Globalization. What makes the train metaphor attractive is the fact that trains move fast in one predefined way. What matters less is that trains need electricity or are made of steal. The trains become the symbol for movement, which again helps the speaker to make her/his point in an easy and understandable way.

The analysis of the language used around the WTO system reveals paternalistic structures and leaves little self-determination for those affected. The infantilisation of Africa is a theme

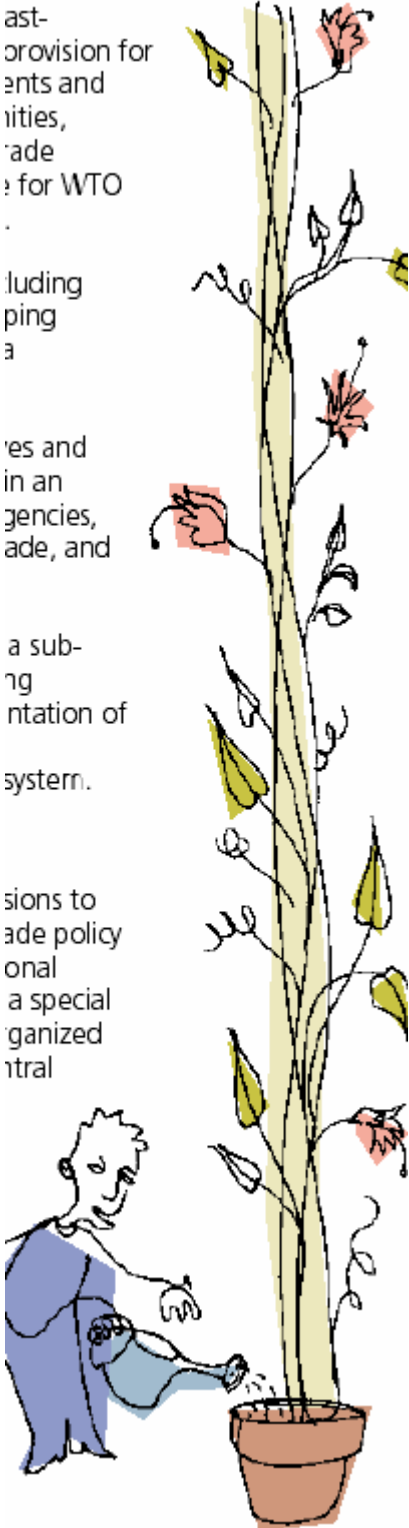
⁵⁸ Barthes Roland: *Le Degré Zéro de l’Ecriture*, Paris 1953, du Seuil, p. 10

throughout the metaphors. The same holds for the medicalisation of low-income countries. These countries are considered to be ill, immature and are recommended to change. Referring to the doctor/patient picture allows to put these countries in a receiving position, allows to question their levels of self-determination. Metaphors centering on the view that low income countries like those in Africa hardly have anything to offer, are in a way “empty” or at best chaotic give way to an understanding that Globalization can provide these places with richness. As to the WTO metaphors that compare the organization to an unequal football game are telling for current challenges that the organization faces in integrating low-income countries into the world trading system.

The contemporary metaphors on Globalization offer patterns that should be of concern to those caring about equity and equality. What is worrisome within this context is the fact that even the interviewed African diplomats themselves use the picture of the infant to describe themselves. Since their critique remains within the dominant paradigm they are not able to develop an alternative view on Globalization. Perhaps we are asking too much since the omnipresence of the language of the economically strong makes it virtually impossible for the “others“ to establish a legitimate position, which differs from mainstream speaking. Language usually goes unnoticed. We hope to have contributed to the sensibilisation of readers of the words that surround them. After all, it is a word’s world.

Annex:

Picture of a white man watering a bean in a flowerpot:



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