

significantly brought about by the overkill of IMF policies. In Thailand, the authoritarian Thaksin government was able to get much popular support from its economic policies to invigorate domestic capital and a domestic-oriented economy. This was obviously a result of the public's strong reaction against the IMF policies. In the end, all three countries advanced their debt payments to the IMF just to get away from it as soon and as far as possible.—**JOSEPH ANTHONY Y. LIM**, PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS, SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, ATENEO DE MANILA UNIVERSITY.

## NOTES

1. The authors incorrectly call the corporate reforms as neoliberal.
2. This was not discussed in Hundt's chapter.

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**Ronaldo Munck. 2005. *Globalization and Social Exclusion: A Transformationalist Perspective*. Connecticut: Kumarian Press Inc. 190 pp.**

Amid the vast array of manifestos, scholarly essays, anthologies, and books that have been made available since the late '90s, Ronaldo Munck's *Globalization and Social Exclusion: A Transformationalist Perspective* no doubt marks itself as a useful cognitive map of these "interesting times." Published in 2005, the book seems to be a belated introductory volume, given its broad strokes. A closer look into the chapters, however, shows how Munck—a distinguished sociologist who has "always tried to make sociology relevant to society and engaged on behalf of the disempowered"—has benefited from his own hindsight and from the lessons of recent history.

The book's eight chapters tackle the different dimensions of globalization seen through the lens of social exclusion. All throughout, Munck endeavors to tackle historical couples that structure global capitalism: poverty and development; global integration and social disintegration; the local and the global. Postmodernists and postructuralists would be quick to dismiss these historical couples as an insistence upon crude western binarism. Munck's handling, on the other hand, convincingly demonstrates how globalization is precisely structured by a binary logic. The reproduction of binarisms in

contemporary theory are, in fact, the result of globalization's polarizing dynamics. And the lesson? What is pervasive in material reality cannot be wished away by a mere discursive poststructuralist gesture.

Consistently mindful of the polarizing dynamics of globalization, Munck provides an engaging discussion of the most compelling contemporary issues, which includes governance, structural adjustment, the feminization of labor and poverty, global sex trade, and global apartheid. He observes, and rightly so, that globalization "dominates economic policy-making, social welfare policies and even the ways people contest the inequalities and oppressions that proliferate in the world around us" (ix). His main argument is "that social exclusion is the necessary social counterpart to globalization" (ix). Munck persuades his readers that the relationship between globalization and social exclusion should be "set ... within ... a transformationalist perspective" (ix).

Munck's conceptualization of the transformationalist thesis is also a tribute to the intellectual debt he owes the following intellectual giants: to David Held's advocacy of an "open-ended conception of globalization" (x) that breaks with both the "optimistic globalizers" and the "traditionalist skeptics" (x); to Roberto Mangabeira Unger's "transformative politics," which aims to "overcome the debilitating opposition between reform and revolution" by ultimately going for "radical reform" (x); to Karl Polanyi's theory of double movement, which provides a framework in which we may understand the "great transformation" engendered by globalization "as well as the countermovement it generates" (xi); and to Hardt and Negri who, in confronting the problematique of transformation, have adopted a mixture of epistemologies, which for Munck is instructive so as to avoid conceiving the concept of transformation in a "unitary or prescriptive manner" (xi).

Quite reflective of his intellectual debt, Munck argues that the transformationalist task is "to democratize globalization and build sustainable structures and networks for good, that is to say, democratic governance" (20). The democratization of globalization is justified by Munck's sharp critique of the latter. The era of the free market has produced serious "threats to human security" and "increasing inequality." Munck provides a succinct description of the contradiction that shapes neoliberal globalization when he argues that the "liberalization of trade may create dynamism but privatization measures ensure its benefits are socially restricted" (20). Even the much celebrated notions of labor

flexibility and competition are not spared from Munck's criticism. He avers that "what flexibility in practice means for the world's workers is insecurity and precarious working environments. For companies, flexibility means to hire and fire at will, or to lower wages in pursuit of competitiveness. Flexibility is advocated as a counter to bureaucracy but what it actually operates against is social cohesion and exclusion" (147). As for competitiveness promoted by globalization, Munck maintains that "competitiveness at a national level can operate as a spurious excuse to ignore human needs and human rights. Competition can be healthy, certainly, but it can also lead to economic wars, not to mention the loss of jobs and the reduction of living standards that it invariably creates" (147).

What, then, constitutes democratic governance? Munck takes precautions with his endorsement of this potential mode of intervention. He recognizes the fact that global governance is a "force for democratization" as much as it is "an agent of social control" (151). He elaborates on the three types of formation that shape contemporary governance. These are the "neo-liberal iron triangle" made up of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization; the "social" organizations made up of the United Nations (UN) family—UN, United Nations Development Program and the World Health Organization; and lastly, the "Third World organizations committed to alternative development" (155). He cites "the limits of social engagement with the bodies in charge of economic management" (155) and properly argues that "social engagement with the bodies in charge of the global economic management has certainly been uneven" (155) since Third World organizations that profer alternative development programs "will simply not be "heard" (155). He sums up the conduct of these formations by providing a conceptual tool by which they may be analyzed within the "global governance debate" (154): the policy-oriented formations (neoliberal iron triangle, UN family) and their politically oriented counterparts (Third World alternative organizations).

Furthermore, Munck invites his readers to go beyond this "skeptical view of global governance" by pursuing a "more nuanced and optimistic approach" (154). He asserts that "bringing back politics into governance debates could make it a fruitful terrain of struggle" (154). This position taking is derived from Munck's appreciation and appropriation of the Foucaultian conceptualization of power, which, when applied to the

analysis of globalization, allows for arguing the potency of the following insight:

Power and knowledge are bound up in the production of discourse of globalization. It is a contested discursive terrain where different social groups and political positions vie for discursive hegemony. The irony of the critical position of, for example, parts of the anti-globalization movements is that it grants to globalization an all-encompassing power. From a Foucaultian perspective we can take a more open-ended, less “necessitarian” conception of globalization. (157)

In privileging micropolitics, Munck joins the bandwagon of “radical” academics who, for all their tirades against social exclusion, are wont to limiting our imagination of social transformation to “acts of disruptions,” “radical reform,” and “democratization of globalization.” This practice is succinctly described by the sociologist Slavoj Žižek: “No less than social life itself, today’s self-professed ‘radical’ academia is permeated by unwritten rules and prohibitions—although such rules are never explicitly stated, disobedience can have dire consequences (2002: 1).” Munck’s endorsement of “a more open-ended, less necessitarian” mode of political intervention is an implicit deployment of totalitarianism as an ideological notion; one that “sustains the complex operation of ‘taming free radicals’ of guaranteeing the liberal-democratic hegemony, dismissing the Leftist critique of liberal democracy as the obverse, the ‘twin’ of the Rightist Fascist dictatorship (Žižek, 2002: 3).”

And so today, “the moment one shows the slightest inclination to engage in political projects that aim seriously to challenge the existing order, the answer is immediately: ‘Benevolent as it is, this will necessarily end in a new Gulag!’ (Žižek, 2002: 3-4).” Don’t we also get an approximate message in this statement by Munck?: “Transformative strategies in the past have been associated with socialism and communism. These, since the 1990s at the very latest, are no longer seen as historically viable” (164).

The imbrication of an engaged and radical critique of the operations of globalization and an implicit injunction to pursue revolutionary praxiologies in the construction of a transformationalist perspective is constitutive of the elementary ludic postmodern operation of having access to the object deprived of its substance (Žižek, 2004: 174). In this case, a revolution without revolution. And don’t we also observe a parallel logic as when popular culture, in the era of late capitalism,

commands us to enjoy “coffee without caffeine, beer without alcohol, cream without fat” (Zizek, 2004:174)?

Munck strongly suggests that “radical reform is a species of transformative politics” (164). “How that process can be addressed today, in a multi-scalar way that is cognizant of the complex interlinked nature of today’s world, is the key task,” he adds. So in the end, what we actually get is an anemic mixture of the constitutive elements of social transformation to be savored with a frenetic engagement with “the complex and fluid world in which we live” (164). “Let’s go on changing something all the time so that, globally, things will remain the same (Zizek: 2004: 170)!”

And is not Munck’s declaration that “it is through the process of deconstruction that a politics of transformation is constructed” (164) an instance of ludic postmodernism, which “articulates a diverse series of post-all notions that it sees as constitutive of new truths and realities—chief among this is a politics that subverts the very ground of transformative politics and substitutes a discursive or cultural politics in its place (Ebert, 1999: 181)?”

“Bringing back politics into governance debates could make it a fruitful terrain of struggle.” This is Munck’s gripping answer to the impasse of globalization (154). Meanwhile, Slavoj Zizek raises more compelling questions: “What if ... modern capitalism, which generates economic globalization, cannot simply be supplemented by political globalization? What if such an extension of globalization to the political project forces us radically to redefine the contours of economic globalization itself (2004: 299)?” —SARAH RAYMUNDO, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES-DILIMAN AND SECRETARY-GENERAL, CONGRESS OF TEACHERS/EDUCATORS FOR NATIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY (CONTEND).

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