Can theories of globalization help to explain patterns of forced migration today?

This essay will begin by examining the definitions of globalization and will contrast the theories of globalization with the reality of economic collapse and poverty in developing countries. The first section will critically analyze globalization, neo-liberal economic policies and the destabilisation of 'nation states'. The second section will focus on the role of the International Monetary Fund, The World Bank, structural adjustment policies and free trade agreements and their impact on the economic and political stability of developing countries, using examples from Africa, Europe and Latin America. The third section will concentrate on the effect of such policies on both forced and voluntary migration, the disparity between the free movement of capital and the free movement of people and the responses of the governments of Europe and North America who seek to deter migrants from leaving their country of origin in order to seek both employment and/or asylum. It will also explore the link between globalization, organised crime, human trafficking and forced migration.

Since the end of The Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the fall of the Berlin Wall there has been a huge increase in the opening up of developing economies by foreign investors and companies which had previously been excluded by socialist economies or trade barriers, and a *"transition from relatively separate national economies to an integrated single global economy"* (Harris, 2002: 20). During the 1970's two thirds of the world population lived in countries largely outside the world economy (Bensidoum, Chevalier, 2000: 15). Advocates of globalization theories in the 1980's believed that a 'global economy' or 'New World Order' and free trade would lead to global integration and harmony, and that worldwide conflicts would diminish as a result and 'migrants' would return home as the economies in their country of origin improved. Teresa Hayter describes globalization as *"an orgy of 'liberalisation'…which has led to polarisation and crisis"* (Hayter, 2000:3). According to the United Nations in 1999 the division between the worlds richest and poorest nations had grown to such an extent that the richest fifth of the world population received eighty-five percent of the world income, whilst the poorest fifth received only a quarter of that amount (U.N, 1999). Global integration has lead to an increase in humanitarian crises and increased inequality for poorer nations. The neo-liberal economic policies of privatization, free trade, short-term profit making and speculation in emerging markets have lead to further instability and poverty in weaker, less resilient economies. Trade amongst 'developed' countries has increased, whilst trade with Africa, Asia and Latin America has decreased. Manufacturing is another key aspect of globalization. Production costs are significantly lowered as multinational corporation's shift to low-wage areas, usually in 'Third World' or 'developing' countries, unregulated by minimum wage agreements and trade unions. Products are then marketed globally, often being sold for more than the average monthly salary of the workers who produced it.

In 'Modernity, Globalization, Refugees and Displacement.'(Ager, A. Refugees, 1998) Howard Adelman defines globalization thus:

"Globalization is characterized by the total abstraction of capital in the form of instantly transferable 'money' through electronic means anywhere around the world, so that investment capital can shift readily and rapidly to whichever location will show the best return on investment. The *rationality of the market is opposed to any artificial boundaries of currency controls, tariffs, duties etc. which impede the flow of capital,* services *or goods from around the world…Economic globalization is based on a consumer culture in which the quest for consumer goods by all humans…becomes the driving force of the economy"* (Adelman, 1999: 87).

This integrated single global economy has led to the destabilization of 'nation states'. The global economy is unregulated by any one nation and 'super' states have replaced sovereign states. Countries have become less autonomous as control over trade, economy, finance and production diminishes at a national level. This challenge to state structures further weakens fragile economies. The globalization process challenges the sanctity of national boundaries. (UNHCR, 2000:276). Faced with crushing poverty, governments have had to rely upon 'rescue packages' in the form of I.M.F 'structural adjustments'; strict economic reforms often related to social spending and policy. In numerous cases this has led to the collapse of the state, internal conflict, increased poverty and war. Populations are forced to flee their homes and land; many become 'internally displaced', awaiting a time when it will be safe for them to return home, others migrate in the hope of finding work and stability elsewhere.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund intervene in economic crises, offering 'credit' to struggling countries. Their economic reform policies encourage privatization, liberalization of economies and short term profit making solutions. These 'rescue packages' are implemented through 'structural adjustment' programmes with conditions attached to social policy and spending, further undermining the power of governments and destabilizing the economy. In 'Fences and Windows' Naomi Klein describes the impact of World Bank loans to poor countries.

"The World Bank has lent money to the poorest and most desperate nations to build economies based on foreign-owned megaprojects, cash-crop farming, low-wage export-driven manufacturing and speculative finance. These projects have been a boon to multinational mining, textile, and agribusiness companies around the world, but in many countries have also led to environmental devastation, mass migration, currency crashes and sweatshop jobs" (Klein, 2002:9).

The results of such policies have been devastating in South Africa. The policy of "growth through trade" has resulted in mass privatization, huge wage cuts and job losses in a country where an estimated eight million people are homeless and five million are HIV positive. (Klein, 2002:108) Half a million jobs have been lost since 1993; the cost of water to poor areas has risen by fifty-five percent and electricity by up to four hundred percent. In Soweto 100,000 people were infected with cholera as a result of drinking polluted water. (Klein, 2002: 108-109) In the case of Rwanda the I.M.F and World Bank imposed credit conditions to cut domestic programmes and civil service following the fall in price of both tin and of its key cash crop, coffee. (Adelman, 1999:97*)* *"Dictatorial regimes and weak democracies… were further weakened by imposed political and economic reforms… and were faced with civil war. With variations these problems have been encountered in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Zaire/Congo"* (Adelman, 1999:97). This has led to a tremendous increase in the numbers of refugees and internally displaced people in Africa. In the case of Rwanda, an estimated 800,000 were killed during the genocide in 1994, and a further two million people were forced to flee. (UNHCR, 2000: 245-246) It is not only in Latin America or Africa that I.M.F policies have had devastating consequences. *"In Yugoslavia the policies of the I.M.F created poverty and unemployment which was exploited by nationalists, leading to war, ethnic cleansing and mass flight"* (Hayter, 2000:170). The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) facilitating 'free trade' between North America, Canada and Mexico came into force in 1994. In 2001 three-quarters of the population of Mexico were living in poverty, a figure which had risen from forty-nine percent in 1981 to seventy-five percent in 2001. Wages were lower and unemployment higher than it was in 1994. (Klein, 2002: 50, 65) There are many more examples, in Argentina, South East Asia and Somalia to name but a few, where World Bank and I.M.F intervention has been to the detriment of ailing economies, and where the end result has been both an increase in poverty and economic instability, and a contributory factor in social unrest, internal conflict and war.

Paradoxically, globalization encourages the free movement of capital and free trade whilst attempting to discourage the free movement of people. The increase in movement of workers around the world has been met with ever tightening restrictions on immigration in the form of visa requirements, work permits, border fortifications and increased security, particularly in Europe, North America and Japan, making it increasingly difficult for refugees fleeing internal conflict, political upheavals and war to seek asylum through proper legal channels. Furthermore many 'economic' migrants claim asylum where visas and work permits are impossible to obtain. Klein observes that "*most of globalization's fenced-out people simply move: from countryside to city, from country to country. And that's when they come face to face with distinctly unvirtual fences, made of chain link and razor wire, reinforced with concrete and guarded with machine guns"* (Klein, 2002:xxii). She goes onto note that " *the seventy to eighty-five million migrant workers world wide are more than the unseen side effect of 'free trade.' Once displaced they also enter the free market…as commodities, selling the only thing they have left: their labour"* (Klein, 2002: 73-74). Free trade has been viewed as a substitute for international migration, and that the economic development of 'migrant producing' countries would reduce the number of 'economic' migrants. In reality migration has increased from developing countries, such as India, Latin America and South East Asia due to an increase in education and wealth, both from economic development and from remittances from family members working abroad. The globalization of the media, in particular the Internet and satellite television has increased awareness of life, culture, opportunities and inequalities throughout the world. Migration is facilitated by the relative ease and affordability of foreign travel, connections with families and communities settled in countries of emigration and an increased ability of relatively wealthier prospective migrants to pay 'agents' to facilitate travel where visa restrictions are imposed. Official and academic studies seem to concur that the promotion of development is likely, in the short term, to increase rather than diminish migration *"…and that there was more emigration from countries where there are more opportunities and wealth…than from very impoverished countries"* (Hayter 2000: 167). Castles and Miller elaborate upon this theory in 'The Age of Migration.'

"The first effect of foreign investment and development is rural-urban migration, and the growth of cities, Leaving traditional forms of production and social relationships to move to burgeoning cities is the first stage of fundamental, social, psychological and cultural changes which create the predispositions for further migrations" (Castles & Miller, 1998:139).

There is an established link between organized crime syndicates and human traffickers who have been quick to exploit the increasingly harsh immigration policies of North America and 'Fortress Europe', as well as the desperation of both asylum seekers and 'economic' migrants to gain entry into countries where strict visa requirements, carrier sanctions and conditions for obtaining work permits apply. According to the UNHCR *" organized crime syndicates are amongst the most successful in adapting to globalization... and they have created a global 'service industry' to move people to countries they are not permitted to enter. A report commissioned by UNHCR in July 2000 shows the very success of measures to prevent unauthorized immigration to Europe push refugees desperate to escape persecution into the hands of human smugglers"* (UNHCR, 2000:276). Many migrants die during transit, either of starvation, dehydration, hypothermia or asphyxiation. There have been numerous cases of migrants, trying to sidestep border controls by sea crossings, drowning as over-filled boats capsize, or in some more extreme cases, have been thrown over board by traffickers trying to evade capture. Women and children, in particular, suffer sexual violence at the hands of the traffickers, and are often forced into prostitution to repay the agents' fees.

It is clear that both the positive and negative consequences of globalization have had an enormous impact on patterns of forced migration. The widening disparity between the world's wealthiest and poorest nations has resulted in huge numbers of people leaving their homes and migrating in search of work. The harsh structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and IMF have had a direct impact on the economic and political stability of many of the world's poorest countries, leading to internal conflict and war, and, as a consequence, adding significantly to the global population of refugees and internally displaced people. The positive impact of globalization in developing countries has also resulted in an increase in migration, due to better education, increased wealth and affordability of travel, and the 'globalization' of the media. Stricter immigration policies, aimed at preventing immigration from poor or developing countries, have had an extremely detrimental effect upon the ability of refugees fleeing war and persecution to seek asylum, which, in turn has led to a greater dependence on human traffickers and organized crime syndicates to ensure entry into countries which would other wise have been impossible to penetrate.

" International migration is now taking place in the context of globalization of economies…the debate on migration has become inseparable from the issue of human rights, the political organization and economic development of the country of origin, and the national cohesion and future of the welfare states in host societies." (Tapinos & Delauney, 2000: 47)

In conclusion it is not the theories of globalization which impact upon forced migration but the inequitable reality of such theories put into practice. Globalization theorists believe that globalization is a panacea for ailing economies, global conflicts and forced migration. However as long as the governments and policy makers of Europe and North America continue to advocate free trade and the free movement of capital, whilst at the same time introducing increasingly draconian measures to prevent the free movement of people then migration from areas of poverty and unemployment to areas of wealth and employment will continue.

"Integration into the world market, together with continuing high levels of inequality and exploitation, have caused some enterprising people to attempt to migrate in search of work, as market economies would predict. But the logic of economic liberalisation has not been applied to the movement of people. According to this logic economic liberalisation should of course include the free movement of labour as well as of goods and capital, and this in turn, according to market theory, should lead to an equalisation of wage levels internationally" (Hayter, 2000:3).