



# Globalisolationism and its Implications for TNCs' Global Responsibility

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## Abstract

The complex structure of the tragic aspects of globalization has been accounted for in extant literature. What remains unclear is how deglobalization, isolationism and all the radically disruptive movements and politics in-between will shape transnational corporations' (TNCs) organizational practices. The purpose of this study is to interrogate and problematize the implications of anarchic 'globalisolationism' vis-à-vis the atlas of insurrection and the TNCs' global responsibility towards human-centric management practices. We situate our analysis in the heavily politicized and contested discursive space of emergent global geopolitical and environmental tensions and the global quest to reclaim dignity, freedoms, right to resources and decisions—stakeownership. 'Globalisolationism' is conceptualized as a radically non-compromising coexistence of globalization and isolationism by design, aided by new information technologies, reactivated mass consciousness and slack political resources. It is characterized by the radical pursuit of new deals within the global geopolitical and economic order; renegotiation of existing deals for resource appropriation and democratic space for the marginalized; the collapse of the old political order via auto-implosion as a beneficial constraint; and the defence of the status quo in global resource and environmental governance due to 'translocal' insurrection. Therefore, the paper suggests how TNCs' current modus operandi could be transformed into responsible human/environment-centric organisational practices to accommodate emerging sociopolitical and environmental challenges. It further highlights the implications for novel game-changing policies and political action by 'subaltern' societies and their metamorphosis from victims of planetary vandalism to stakeowners with sovereignty over their resources.

**Keywords** Globalization · Global sustainability · Human-centric world order · International development order · TNCs

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## Introduction

There are multiple phenomena that are transmuting into a delicate global economic and political turbulence (Rosenberg 2017; Stiglitz 2015). These include political and economic nationalism, populism, deglobalization (not the same as anti-globalization) and environmental movements (Davies-Venn 2017; Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Spruyt et al. 2016). In the decades before and after the new millennium, globalization became a buzzword which gained currency in management literature and much enthusiastic following in the media (Bauman 1998; Jameson and Miyoshi 1998; Ietto-Gillies 2012; Stiglitz 2002, 2006; Srikantia 2016; Sachs 2006). Its modern form had however started over 150 years earlier (or 500 years earlier with European exploration across the world; see Sachs 2017) with enhanced transportation and lowered communications costs, allowing economic globalization and global economic integration to outpace political globalization (Sachs 2006; Stiglitz 2006). Much earlier however, there was Chinese-African (in modern-day Tanzania and Kenya) trade in ivory during the T'ang dynasty (A.D. 618–907). Trade from the East African coast to China involved “elephant tusks, rhinoceros horn, tortoise shell, aromatic woods, incense, and myrrh” (Rotberg 2008). By the A.D. 1127–1279, Sung era, Chinese naval trade operations were reaching Europe and the Indian Ocean (Rotberg 2008). West African trade routes across the Sahara have also existed for millennia (Cipolla 2002).

Modern globalization was presented in academic literature and in the media as being about openness, access to factors, technologies that facilitate movement of people, a world of capital without borders, trade liberalization, the import and export of cultural commodities (Jameson and Miyoshi 1998) and the rise of the transnational corporation (Ietto-Gillies 2012). In sum, it entailed harmless geo-commercial exchanges that spread wealth and served as the engine of prosperity and economic development (Srikantia 2016). This could not be further from the reality as it produced enormous gains which were unevenly distributed, leading to serious discontents (Bauman 1998; Srikantia 2016; Stiglitz 2002; Bauman 2013). Over time, its central ideological driver, neo-liberal capitalism (Fotaki and Prasad 2015), like any human inventions that are pushed forward too precociously, showed signs of fatigue, imperfection, pitfalls and irrationality that produced massive inequalities (Piketty 2014; Ahen and Zetting 2015b). This further produced more discontents among those who were left behind. This process (via neoliberal capitalism/neocolonialism and imposed blueprint of hegemonic structures for ensuring development) was, in turn, violently forced on many a nation state without considering their history, local exigencies, institutions and conditions (Srikantia 2016; Sachs 2006)—making them very vulnerable to external shocks (Stiglitz 2006).

Globalization essentially threatened national sovereignties by eroding established national institutions and governance systems (Matten and Crane 2005; Scherer and Palazzo 2007) as foreign control of national industries by TNCs (Ayres 2012) increased and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), instead of governments, controlled much of the aid money (Ahen 2015b). The above have led to the emergence of intense politics of economic isolationism and national politics of self-determination (Davies-Venn 2017; Kobrin 2017; Coughlan 2017)—the dismantling of imposed categories (Said 1993) and rejection of vestiges of colonialism, articulated in the ‘Othering’ of free people. Others refer to this resentment and contestations as deglobalization, isolationism, economic nationalism (Davies-Venn 2017; Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Spruyt et al. 2016) *or*, protectionism (Basso 2017). However, the matter goes far beyond giving labels because it is complex and blurred—going beyond mere localization to a struggle for survival and human dignity. This is because the accelerated manner of modern

globalization (in a free market system of liberalization and privatization) was probably by design, some argue, essentially to employ structural violence to expropriate lands (Zuckerman 2013) and resources from ‘developing economies’ (Acosta 2013; Banerjee 2000, 2011; Banerjee et al. 2009). Although the process weakened and destroyed communities, the world is told a different story of development and poverty (Srikantia 2016) especially in the case of indigenous peoples (Banerjee 2011). They constitute 5% of global population but endure 15% of poverty and their livelihoods are threatened by extractive activities of transnational corporations (TNCs) in cohorts with rent-seeking political clients (Dearden 2017; Acosta 2013; Ayres 2012). More prominently, the global interdependence and interconnectedness has meant that the coexistence of the irreversibility of globalization and the discontents with socio-economic environmental disequilibria points to chaotic and paradoxical scenarios. For example, better sea, air and land transportation systems have increased international tourism exponentially along with the all-inclusive hedonistic and *privileged mobility type* (Ek 2016), vis-a-vis environmental pollution, climate change, adventures of the military industrial complex and economics-induced refugee mobility from the ‘South’.

There are urgent calls for human-centric practices of TNCs. Currently, serious forms of such practices exist more in the annual corporate sustainability reports and less in the realities of the resource-deprived communities around the world (Ahen and Zetting 2015a; Omotoso and Yusuf 2017; Srikantia 2016).

Building on the above foundations, the purpose of this study is to interrogate and problematize what the implications of anarchic ‘globalisolationism’ (the non-compromising coexistence or escalating tensions between globalization and isolationism) and the TNCs’ global responsibility are for the human-centric management practices (Pirson 2018) where voice is given to values (Waddock 2016). The complexity of the structure of the current geopolitical and economic order leaves little space for superficial questions or simplistic answers but requires a critical perspective of the scope of the emergent turbulence. In some ways, globalization has produced both wealth and inequality. The world is getting better with increase in novel science, health and information technologies as well as improving living standards (Gates and Gates 2014). It is worth recognizing that China, a struggling economy before the 1990s, has ‘benefitted’ from the recent phase of globalization on a massive scale. The fact that its economic liberalization is soon pulling close to 1 billion people out of poverty is significant. That outcome can also be attributed in part to the state-controlled manner which gave them better bargaining power vis-à-vis TNCs compared to other smaller nations. In other ways, however, irresponsible and unsustainable human activities such as overconsumption and environmental destruction are pushing the world to a breaking point, symbolically, rhetorically, and materially (Ahen and Zetting 2015b). This much is neither under-reported nor under-analyzed, but there is more.

The impasse about globalisolationism has gathered steam and neither the pro-globalization side nor the pro-isolationism side is giving up its guns any time soon. In the purest sense, there was never real globalization or real isolationism—or if there ever was, it was mostly a lopsided relationship between the ‘North’ (globalizers) and the ‘South’ (the globalized). There is hardly any major political/economic influence from the South. The globalizers mostly employ a mechanism of protectionism whilst the globalized have always existed in (inter-)dependence. The globalizers had the competitive advantage and enjoyed the lion’s share of the trade liberalization and movement of factors through rentier capitalism, which allows patent owners to monopolize profits by shutting out competition for 20 years. Even 70 years after their demise, patent owners’ can profit. Rentier capitalism also allows above-normal profits from

intellectual property, debt interest and other assets artificially made scarce (Standing 2016). The globalizers also leveraged the production, distribution, packaging and sales capabilities of their TNCs (Ietto-Gillies 2012). The globalized on the other hand have been no match for the level of rigged competition (Dearden 2017), thus far. It has been a globalization in which the powers of the dominant or historically hegemonic group increased exponentially with growing prominence (Piketty 2014) whilst other communities, especially those with natural resources became weaker, with less control over their natural resources (Acosta 2013; Bougrine 2006) and political space (Bauman 1998). This is no resource curse but a political design. In some cases, such communities became invisibilized, distal stakeholders (Ahen 2017) with abstract promises of trickle-down economics and prosperity that turned out to be a collective illusion to many but ‘the 1%’ (Piketty 2014). This much was taken as the natural order of things because the fittest survives and the weaker succumbs with little room for an ‘exit’ strategy (Hirschman 1970). However, succumb, they (the weak) will no more, hence the current geopolitical turbulence (Zibechi 2012; Misoczky and Böhm 2015).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: a theoretical background to the concept of globalisolationism is presented along with its defining characteristics. We discuss the central role of TNCs and emerging politics of insurrection against dispossession and planetary vandalism that cause environmental problems. We further interrogate the nature of the problem by comparing the emerging changes in Western societies with Asia, Africa and South America. Finally, we provide proactive strategies for adaptation through human-centric management policies followed by conclusions.

## Theoretical Foundations: What Is ‘Globalisolationism’?

This study employs an approach that seeks to historiogeographically chronicle ‘globalisolationism’ as the profoundest and most radical expression of the pivotal turning point of the current state of world’s socio-economic, political, environmental and technological affairs. It is characterized by the escalating tensions between the globalized (communities, nation states) and the globalizers (TNCs as proxy for the powerful economies). It explains the collision between globalization on one side and isolationism, nationalism and indigenous resistance for sovereignty over resources. Here, communities reactivate slack political resources by marshaling vociferous stance and new disruptive information technologies to legitimize and assert their visions. This represents a simultaneous employment of ‘voice’ and ‘exit’ strategies (Hirschman 1970).

Anarchic globalisolationism stems from the simultaneous emergence of numerous historically unprecedented supportive phenomena and transmutations in the areas of technologies of governance, as well as populism, environmental and geo-strategic turbulence (Ahen and Zettinig 2015b; Rosenberg 2017). In introducing the construct of globalisolationism as an umbrella term in contemporary political economy and international management scholarship, we situate our analysis in the heavily contested, yet interconnected discursive space where we underline the central role of TNCs and its implications for freedoms and wellbeing outcomes for humanity.

Globalisolationism takes inspiration from Banerjee’s (2011) ‘Voices of the governed: towards a theory of the translocal’ and Karl Polanyi’s double movement as in the ‘Great transformation’ where there is commodification of all things for profits (Polanyi 1944 [2001]). Such critical perspective properly captures the tensions between globalization and

isolationism. At the same time, it does justice to the emergent issues of nationalism and rights of indigenous people who seek to protect (not protest) their resources from TNCs and their own crony governments. The latter are seen as disempowering communities through the technologies of dispossession, destruction and death. Globalisolationism does not trivialize these issues nor does it pretend to be values-neutral to TNC monopoly over resources in cohorts with some governments (Acosta 2013; Dearden 2017) in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It also does not romanticize neo-colonialism, characterized by human rights abuses, structural violence (Srikantia 2016) or management by dispossession as if it were just a minor ‘penalty of progress’ (Hirschman 1970). Additionally, globalisolationism contributes specifically to critical management studies of emancipatory struggles (Banerjee 2000).

Globalisolationism is not to be confused with ‘glocalization’ as in the contribution of Robertson (1995) ‘Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity’ although they share some commonalities. There is a nuanced analytical distinction between the two, except the root word (globalisation). Anarchic globalisolationism presents novel conceptual elements which are specific, historically contextual and do not seek to explain anything and everything. We acknowledge the broad spectrum of glocalization but not its initial premise in the way it is conceptualized; its marketing/consumption culture point of departure, its scope and direction (about product differentiation and standardization or homogenization)—initially conceived in business schools as an adaptation strategy to the local preference in marketing. Au contraire, we focus on TNC governance practices and their impact on human dignity, development, freedoms vis-à-vis emergent radical responses to dismantle neocolonial systems of economic and political oppression (Misoczky and Böhm 2013, 2015). We underscore the current realities of community-consciousness (Freire 2000) and new technologies where populations of the world, to varying degrees, do not try to be part of globalization where they feel shortchanged but actually reject the imposed systems, false historicities and one-size-fits-all interventionist approaches to development. Globalisolationism takes graduated forms from silent grumble, online protests to violence accompanied by the marshaling of complex translocal resources and the galvanization of slack, dormant or apathetic political resources. Globalizationism explains how people no longer seek permission to justify or legitimize their existence as fully human with inalienable rights while reserving the right to make moral judgment about the exploitation and human right abuses that affect every facet of their humanity. Globalisolationism challenges narratives of discovery of a people who were once deemed primal and categorized as Others, by reverting back to their own ways as equally legitimate. Globalisolationism also includes an unglamorous man-made humanitarian challenge of 68.5 million people (25.4 million refugees, 40 million internally displaced, 3.1 million asylum seekers UNHCR 2018)—isolated from the world by virtue of being found in the wrong side of the world.

In essence, the era of globalisolationism is a non-compromising, adversarial coexistence of globalization (by globalizers through TNC management practices) and isolationism (nationalists, indigenous rights groups, etc. who feel shortchanged in a beggar-thy-neighbor global economics). This is a new tension-filled paradox of geopolitical and international economic thug of war, crisis of national cohesion, identity politics and alliance formation (Coughlan 2017; Davies-Venn 2017). The global-centric who see an irreversible path towards a new world order of integrated political, religious and economic institutions have now come against anti-globalization, deglobalization, nationalism or populism that seeks to reaffirm national sovereignty (Rosenberg 2017; Xinhua 2017) in Western nations and of the translocal groups in Africa, South America and Asia.

## Isolationism Via Nationalism, Nativism & Protectionism

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines isolationism as “*a policy of national isolation by abstention from alliances and other international political and economic relations*”. In the classic sense, isolationism used to be a ‘permanent state’ (while globalization denoted a dynamic trend) but since isolationism is not permanent (because abstention from other alliances always denoted presence in another), it has no logical necessity to be treated as a permanent state since geopolitical realities and national government policies in which it is embedded remain complex, dynamic and shifting. In fact, both isolationism and globalization are approximative concepts and not accurate depiction because every isolationist geopolitical chess board game has changed its frame over time. Isolationism and globalization take different variant forms and degrees of influence of TNC practices at different epoch and contexts; either economic or political or mainly ideological. To view globalization as mainly a trend is also to negate the current disruption in the form of deglobalization and strong forms of nationalism or economic protectionism. In essence, globalisolationism is a paradox in which there is a reversal of old trends and the disruptive injection of some dynamism into what used to be a fixed state of affairs—isolationism.

Isolationism can be either (i) self-imposed (an ideological pursuit that isolates a nation), (ii) imposed (retaliation and sanctions) or (iii) both simultaneously. The sanctions hugely restrict the international trade of the respective countries, thus, impacting their economic stability and affecting the well-being of the local populations concerned. Others are convinced that “*the economic globalization is irreversible due to the establishment of the international division of labor and the volume of international trade. ‘Countries that question the economic globalization can hardly escape this process’*” (Xinhua 2017). The emergent tension between the ‘permanent state’ vs ‘dynamic trend’ fits into the theoretical framework that reveals important emergent implications for ‘people first’ management practices by TNCs.

Furthermore, Boyer and Hollingsworth (1997) have argued that globalization is in essence partly a utopian idea since it also includes many sets of fallacies “*rather than relevant sets of hypotheses for the next few decades*”. First, trading blocks and protectionism and other trade distortion policies exist. The fact that more firms are internationalizing does not necessarily translate into the convergence of socioeconomic systems or regulation. Further, Boyer and Hollingsworth (1997: 462) argue that such assumptions stand on three principal conditions: One, a complete globalization of factor markets (financial resources, and highly skilled labour); two, “*the integration of product markets that can deliver anywhere a single price for the same good once exchange rates and transportation costs are accounted for*”. The third condition is “*the high mobility of transferability of modern technologies*”; thus, social systems of production would see a point of convergence where there will be one optimal system of high productivity and improved living standards. Counter arguments are also presented in turn. Although financial markets are more integrated now than they have ever been, national competitiveness, macro-economic and fiscal policies, as well as nominal and real interest rates still diverge allowing countries with strong currencies to benefit. Increasing competition means production niches are still strong across the globe. Thus, given the differences in social systems of production, even same goods exhibit major price differentials across regions, and nations. The third condition also rests on a very weak foundation. Several modern medico-techno-scientific endowments can only be appropriated and used in the presence of prior knowledge and learning by doing. This means product specific quality standards and tacit knowledge, educational priorities and forms of specialization affect specific products and services and

remain niches associated with specific national flags. In theory then, there is more divergence than convergence in global socio-economic systems of production and consumption based on national interests to protect key sectors. This is a logically convincing explanation for the concept of globalisolationism since polity, norms, business systems, country specific approaches to labour unionization, investments and consumption patterns as well as their history and futures differ enormously. Further, different constitutional orders, national visions to imperialize or ally with others or remain nonaligned are still the prevailing norms.

The designed acceleration of globalization without responsibility towards the affected societies and their environment was clearly not the first optimal solution. It was a trade-off between high expectations from the powerful machinery of TNCs to produce super-profits from the exploitation of factor cost differentials and the avoidance of the ‘environmental’ responsibility that followed. All the above allowed TNCs to profit from internationalization and its limitless expansionism (Ietto-Gillies 2012). These have benefitted the globalizers, mostly at the expense of the globalized in net terms, critics argue (Stiglitz 2015). The consequences of global expansionism include massive socio-economic and environmental externalities (Srikantia 2016) which have generated serious stakeholder pressures for accountability (Ahen 2017).

Table 1 sums up the key characteristics of globalisolationism. The primary defining characteristic of globalisolationism consists of both turf protection and firewalling of socio-economic, political, cultural and territorial spheres. Those who pursue this goal still draw strength, resources and survival from their economic, geopolitical and diplomatic interactions with ‘the rest of the world’ while at the same time imposing limits on the degree to which other nations can integrate into the global geopolitical space.

**Table 1** Features of globalisolationism

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Isolationism contra globalization                           | Turf protection, firewalling of socio-economic, political, cultural and territorial spheres; keeping the status quo<br>Vigorous contestation by those who feel short-changed for the renegotiation of the incentive structures, of power, freedoms and resources<br>Demand for corporate responsibility for global public bad created by ‘planetary vandals’ (Orr 1991), environmental destruction by TNCs, management by displacement, dispossession (Banerjee 2011) and structural violence (Banerjee 2011).   |
| Technologies of change and bones of contention              | Race/nationalism and religion as instruments of division for effective control of masses and resources – antagonizing the structures of capitalism<br>Collision of globalization and nationalism enhanced by disruptive information technologies   |
| Technologies for reclaiming freedoms, dignity and ownership | New formation of communities of places (geo-spatial)<br>New formation of communities of concerns to reject colonial narratives and ‘Othering’. That these communities exist mostly online is a historically relevant novelty with a virtual opposition to the status quo that produces material outcomes. The same platforms are used for transferring resources for campaigns, changing public opinions, shaping public policy agenda and connecting dispersed communities of other ‘subalterns’.<br>New formation of translocal resurgence in solidarity towards common concerns of historically oppressed people. |

Both the status quo and the ‘atlas of insurrection’ benefit from post-truth and fake news (‘shared emotions’ and ‘psychic satisfaction’) = shared facts as basis for action where globalists fight ‘translocal’ insurrections/strategic essentialism

The second aspect of globalisolationism is race and religion as instruments of division for effective control of masses and resources (Alam 2000). Concerns about these long-standing, taken-for-granted structures have now gathered steam due to how new information technologies are used to pit one group against the other. The establishment seeks to maintain the historical status quo and the associated incentive structures and privileges. The marginalized both in the Centre and the periphery are on the other hand mobilizing resistance to reverse their fate especially where stakeholders see the neo-liberal capitalist system as deeply connected to economic structures of classism, inequalities and lack of opportunities. This counter movement from diverse groups is what Spivak (1990) refers to as *strategic essentialism*.

The third major aspect of globalisolationism represents a global socio-economic and geopolitical order in which those who were short-changed at the height of globalization now seek a new deal through vigorous contestation and renegotiation of the incentive structures and shared responsibility for global public bad whilst those who gained, seek to maintain the status quo at all costs. Irrespective of the vocabularies that are used, the root of the matter is the determination of the 'short-changed side' to redeem their economic, environmental and political sovereignty and dignity, recognizing interdependence but emphasizing independence from foreign control in 're-establishing' the global equilibrium and democratizing the power structure.

## TNC's Organizational Practice of Planetary Vandalism

The current era is dubbed the 'political turn of the corporation' (Garsten and Sörbom 2017). It is characterized by lobbying through political action committees to capture law makers, governments and institutions. What Banerjee (2011) refers to as technologies of extraction as the organizational practice of planetary vandalism is what provokes the atlas of insurrection: resource wars. There are several firms and social entrepreneurs that seek to create value through circular and sharing economy, ecological protection and climate change mitigation strategies to satisfy stakeholder demands (Ahen 2017). However, for some organisations, this is just a 'bourgeois etiquette' to gloss over the major social and environmental vandalism (Hanlon and Fleming 2009; Wickert et al. 2016; Manring 2014; Orr 1991) where placebo is offered as medicine (Aaron and George 2010). However, for honest firms, reputation loss is a huge damage to the whole ecosystem of the firms and it rather has negative effects on investors when managers relegate society to the margins but put shareholders first (Stout 2012).

Globalisolationism is restructuring the world order as we know it. For example the Environmental Justice Atlas (EJA 2016) offers a list of numerous local, national and regional organizations resisting different forms of exploitation around the world. Most of international business operates in noncompetitive markets because they are dominated by TNCs or state enterprises—from extractive industries to technology firms (Standing 2016). In the management literature, Hymer (1960/1976) was the first to highlight the monopolistic power of TNCs vis-à-vis the nation state. Hymer explains that TNCs possess firm-specific advantages which allow them to offset costs involved in producing in host nations. These are mainly resources, from core competences (knowledge), brand names and access to various forms of capital which are intangible and wholly owned and are used to earn monopoly rents (Eden and Hampson 1997). Corporate influence through lobbying and use of corporate political power limits the power of nation-states to embark on welfare-oriented policies. This is also reinforced by the exchanged roles or the corporatization of the government and the moralization of the corporation as in 'responsibilization' (Shamir 2008). For example, the dispute settlement



mechanisms allow TNCs to sue governments even for the loss of potential profits. As argued (although for artistic purposes, perhaps humorously and dramatically albeit seriously), in terms of the governance of global socio-economic order, to a large extent, there is neither democracy, ideologies nor nations any more due to the dominance of TNCs. And thus:

*There is only one holistic system of systems, one vast immane, interwoven, interacting, multivariant, multinational dominion of dollars. Petro-dollars, electro-dollars, multi dollars, Reich marks, rins, rubles, pounds and scheckles. It is an international system of currency which determines the totality of life on this planet. That is the natural order of things today. This is the atomic and sub-atomic and galactic structure of things today. There is no America. There is no democracy. There is only IBM and ITT and AT&T and Dupont, Dow, Union carbide and Exxon. Those are the nations of the world today.’ The world is a college of corporations inexorably determined by the immutable by-laws of business.....The world is a business (Film: Network; Lumet 1976).*

To paraphrase, there is only Google, Facebook, Microsoft, and Amazon, Big Pharma, weapons industry, oil industry, a network of financial firms, the extractive industrial complex and more Apple phones for the people who do not routinely question corporate irresponsibility and other smokescreen mechanisms for covering up corporate machinations (Solon and Siddiqui 2017; Galloway 2017). For academic purposes, let us assume for a moment that these are meaningless conspiracy theories. The critical question is what substantive counter arguments or evidence do we have in rejecting such claims? The lack of or watered down regulations of monopolies and oligopolies (more in the US than in Europe) affect society’s general welfare and democracy much more than the public understands (Solon and Siddiqui 2017). Currently, corporations control economies and even global governance (Carlson 2015; Hamm 2015; Chomsky 2016) and they are not denying their powerful position. This could also be used as a mighty force for positive social change if they so wish—but capitalism imposes no limits to profits (Wallerstein 1976) and the pillaging in weaker institutions by planetary vandals continues (Manring 2014; Orr 1991).

Corporations have the power it takes to serve as the force for good. However, for *Homo economicus*, efficiency and cost reduction (Friedman 1970) mean that ethical considerations mostly take a back seat allowing a system that favours proximate kinsmen to be kept in place in business activities (Ahen 2017; Alam 2000; Ken 2013). There are losers and winners in globalisation. That’s a fact of life. The rules are unfair; so the losers must endure their lot, or must they?

## An Emerging Global Anarchy

There is a litany of prominent novelties that require concerted action for change rather than shiny bandages. The global economy is at the threshold of a complicated era and in a lot of trouble. These problems include for example human activity leading to ecological imbalances, the shipment of toxic and electronic waste to developing economies, atmospheric pollutions, overconsumption (not overpopulation), rising inequalities, human rights abuses, grand ethical quandaries, corporate irresponsibility (Wettstein 2012; Kar and Spanjers 2015; Curtis and Jones 2017). In what follows in Fig. 1, we analyze globalization through the lens of TNCs’ global responsibility in emerging economies and nationalism/protectionism as it happens in the West.

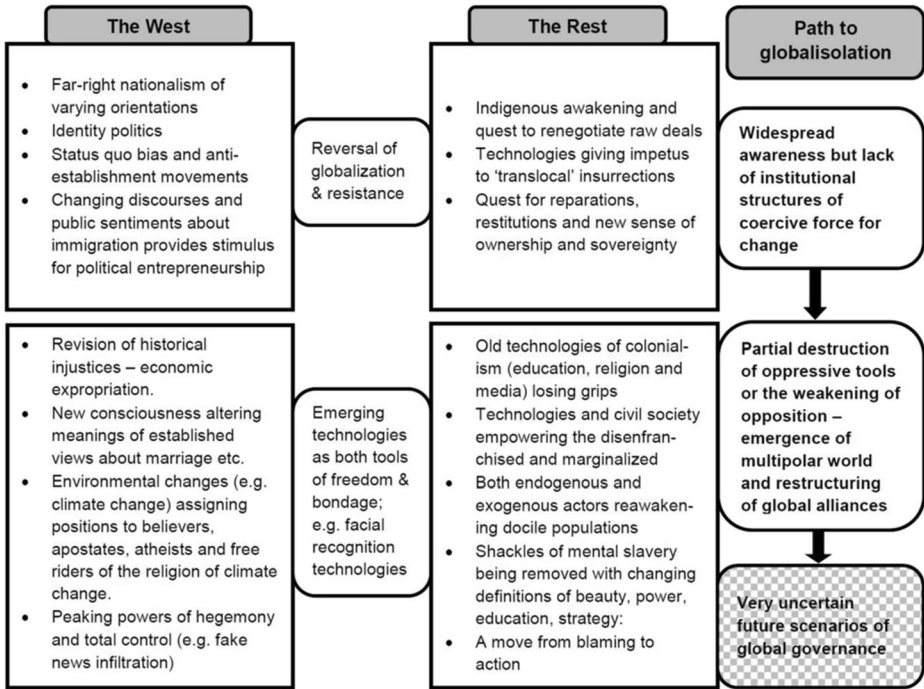


Fig. 1 Simultaneous emergence of phenomena leading to 'globalisationism'

## TNCs and the Future of International Order

African countries are advocating for more intra-African trade; *trade not aid*—a reversal of unequal international trade relationships with the West with its implicit hierarchy—hence a turn to China (Rotberg 2008). There are also separatists across Europe seeking either cultural-linguistic and historical independence or control of their fiscal policies and resources. Autonomy or self-determination is the battle cry in the Basque country and Catalonia in Spain, Flanders in Belgium, Scots in UK, South Tyrol in Italy, Corsica in France (Müller-Plotnikow 2017), Kurdistan in Iraq, Anglophone region of Cameroon and the Biafrans of Nigeria. Libya is still divided along the Tripoli-Benghazi lines after the ouster of their leader Muammar Gaddafi.

Consider further the events that unfolded within a couple of weeks across the West in autumn 2017. As the altright met in Tennessee in their thousands in the US, anti-fascists battled Neo-Nazis in the streets of Gothenburg in Sweden (Lowe 2017) and police battled Catalonians who were holding a referendum on independence (YahooNews 2017). At the same time in Austria, the law that bans burqa (the Islamic veil) came into full force (Nianias 2017). And within the European Union, Poland and Hungary's 'less democratic institutions' (Ekiert 2017) are not moving in tune with what they see as the dictatorship of Brussels over their rights to decide on immigration issues and threats to national sovereignty. Immigration in particular is deemed a weight on the national budgets and traditions as the national resources are going to the 'dogs' (the out-group), all the while spending millions on anti-immigration advertisements (Rowthorn and Růžička 2017). Much of this, however, is based on

scapegoating out-groups for failed policies, but it works very well as an emotional bait for such politicians to get the votes based on the fear of the other. There is more to the structure of the tragedy. Chydenius (1729–1803), a famous Finnish scholar and preacher used ancient Rome as an empirical illustration to carefully articulate the weakness of the state as the enemy within. He charges that:

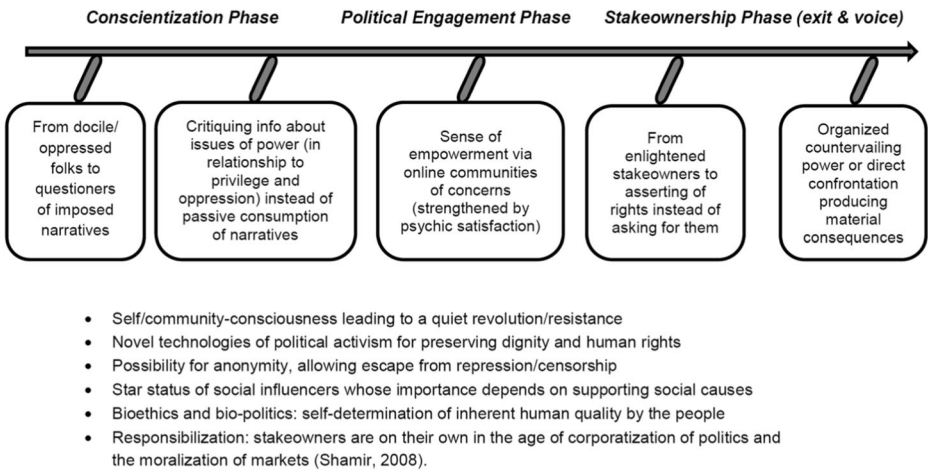
*It is a curious fact that most states keep a watchful eye on those who are outside that society but often leave those within it well armed, since we ought to know that human beings are similar they are and are always more easily able to do harm under the cloak of patriotism than in the guise of an enemy, and under cover of spurious faithfulness than open hostility* (Jonasson and Hyttinen 2012).

This is the era of ‘we firsts’ with the rise of nationalism, regionalism, populism and protectionism. However as (Kobrin 2017) argues, ‘a nation is a socio-cultural concept, an imagined political community whose culture is shaped by collective historical experience or collective myth. ‘Nationalism’ implies that ‘nation’ and ‘state’ should be territorially congruent, and any violation of that principle is seen as deeply offensive. As a crucial catalyst, the construction of national identity requires others who are placed in the box of ‘not one of us’ (Anderson 2006). Nations, organisations, groups, and individuals are aware of the current anarchy just like modern day educational institutions do. However, such enemies are allowed within to foment until they do unimaginable harm. And thus, “it was no longer a mystery among the Romans that extensive amounts of property in private hands, constituted a danger to liberty, but no one any longer was able to strike a blow against self-interest unless he wished to receive two in return” (Chydenius in Jonasson and Hyttinen 2012).

Davies-Venn (2017) asks in the aftermath of 2017 German elections, “are the election results an indication that the chorus of the far right on immigration, unemployment, Islam, national identity, fear of terrorism, social and economic disparities [are] the new yardsticks of political success. What are the implications for economics in politics?” Prime Minister Theresa May argues that Brexit will allow the UK to “become a fully independent sovereign country” (Castle 2016). Similar to many before her across Europe, she has made strong arguments against ‘multiculturalism, against citizens of nowhere’ (Kobrin 2017). For Johnson (1965) in the aftermath of the new developing nations gaining independence, even though many economically irrational policies were pursued, they had the symbolic value of providing ‘psychic satisfaction’ with their emphasis on identity and sense of belonging. It is the power of this psychic satisfaction that seems to be gathering support both in developing economies and in the West for different motives and different ends. The interpretation of the structure of globalisation leads us to something more poignant such as social discords, international retaliation and increased racial tensions especially in the US.

## Stakeownership: Reclaiming Dignity and Freedom in the Era of Globalisation

Unlike stakeholders who affect and are affected by the firm (Freeman 1984), *stakeownership* is about communities deciding and defining what and who they allow to affect and be affected by—a reverse supported by a countervailing power (Galbraith 1952). The guiding philosophy it appears is “You have to decide who you are, and force the world to deal with you, not with its idea of you” (James Baldwin). The conceptual elements of stakeownership are indicated in Fig. 2.



**Fig. 2** Graduated phases of globalisationism. Bullet points refer to the features of the phases

What is making the new post-truth even more complex is the disruptive anti-establishment positions and diverse social militarism by e.g. citizen scientists (Kimura 2016) and strategic essentialists (Spivak 1990). These are illuminating the public discourse on all issues by challenging the official versions with other types of data, without waiting for academics and their long publishing processes to govern what gets defined as truth and factually relevant. This strategy seems to be working because academia's credibility is being questioned due to its politicized allegiance that is found to be mostly with the establishment (Weingart 2002) rather than with the search for truth. In the past, editors and publishers held an almost god-like position. At present, influential vlogs, blogs and artistic productions presented in accessible language and instantly reaching millions hold as much sway in socio-political discourses as fact-based academic publications. What Banerjee (2011) predicted as possibilities of resistance via translocal resurgence in which local actors' coalitions with international and national groups attempt to promote some form of 'participatory democracy' is now a reality. These forms of resistance are facilitated by modern technologies such as Twitter, Facebook, WeChat, Instagram, WhatsApp and even drones to reveal environmental exploitation by some TNCs and complicit governments through independent investigative journalism. These forms of media are also used to engage TNCs through dialogue. Most importantly, the weakening technologies and high cost of repression (which also contradicts human rights) allows the 'invisibilized' stakeholders (Ahen 2017) to expose and punch holes into the official versions, showing where the rich hide their money in tax havens (Contractor 2016). Additionally, researchers, think tanks and citizen scientists who are socially oriented and even students are rising up to undermine and delegitimize the credibility of the existing power structure in recent times. This entire scenario is creating an anti-establishment militant group from different ideological persuasions, and they are becoming increasingly formidable. Moreover, their distrust of institutions and claims of injustice are not unsupported because too many official versions do not quite add up.

As Kobrin (2017) argues, under the climate of economic and identity nationalism, economically rational arguments will have less influence as interest group politics has now morphed into mobilizations against threats to the nation as a whole. On the other hand, it can be argued, for example that, a threat to the Amazon territory of Brazil or rain forests in

Africa by TNCs cannot be treated as interest group politics but a national or even global issue since climate change is a global challenge. Corporate public relations (PR) for damage control after unethical and illegal practices is now falling apart because smart phones allow citizens to capture phenomena that contradict corporate gimmicks (Wickert et al. 2016).

And there is more than just organised threat to the status quo. Along with this are those who come up with trolls and serious conspiracy theories just to antagonize the existing system as a payback package for the dispossession and injustice by those who once held all the power (information). Additionally, the exponential growth in information technologies thrives on a fair wind of other disruptive circumstances. These can be accounted for in the discontent with the high levels of inequalities, dwindling middle class, and the emerging peripheries within the Centre due to growing poverty in the West (Zakaria 2013). In many developing economies, the neglect of indigenous people continues while some corporations take their resources (Banerjee 2000; Carlson 2015; Srikantia 2016; Bakan 2004). There are also high levels of economic instability, volatility and uncertainty across the globe, described as new geographies of inequality (Ahen 2015a). All these have woken up concerned citizens to wise up, critique and to take action against the machinations of the establishment (Varoufakis 2017) in various nations about the current nature of globalization. Across Europe however, mass immigration has also added to the hysteria that boosts populist political entrepreneurship (Davies-Venn 2017; Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Spruyt et al. 2016). On the issues of global environmental sustainability and migration however, the futures and destinies of isolationists and globalizers are intimately intertwined, with more in common than what makes them superficially different—youthful populations versus increased aging populations and new geographies of inequality in both contexts.

However, before dismissing isolationists as trouble makers, mere bigots and antidemocratic interest groups who do not want to fall in line with the globalization agenda, it would be in the interest of intellectual honesty, curiosity and healthy skepticism to first consider their claims. Even before that, it is more important to clarify the current state of global geopolitical and environmental turbulence which can easily be described as anarchic globalisolationism in the making, which could explain their concerns.

## Discussion

Current international management literature that seeks to engage this subject of global resource distribution and environmental (in)justice approaches the issue in a tricky fashion. Here, scholars offer responses that are studied under the broader rubric of host country risks; how to neutralize antagonistic stakeholder groups in the quest to ensure that the extractivist project will succeed while maintaining a semblance of legitimacy as good firms (Banks 2008; Doh and Ramamurti 2003; Oetzel and Getz 2012; Lin et al. 2015). Paul Adler (2015) writes in his book review:

*My reading of Polanyi suggests that enterprises in a capitalist economy cannot change their environmental practices far or fast enough to avert environmental crisis—neither spontaneously under the influence of wiser corporate leaders, nor pushed by greener consumers, and not even forced by more active government regulation.*

Whilst the extent of corporate political power is undeniable, it can still be confronted where there are strong institutions and enforcement regimes, or is it an already lost cause? The

question about corporate irresponsibility in the era of sustainability is mobilizing masses for resistance. Their missions however, differ variously across regions and nations. For most indigenous people with natural resources, the stance against the negative effects of globalization is not necessarily an ideological or political resistance or luxurious political entrepreneurship, but a question of human rights at the core of their survival or extinction, and sometimes a fight against outright denial of their history and rights to resources (Blakkarly 2016; American Horse 2016; Woodson 1933). For the peripheries within the centre or the underclass, the struggle appears similar to what happens in developing economies. For example, what used to be characteristically a problem of developing economies is now grabbing headlines in the US: the indigenes are fighting for the right to protect their natural reserves from the oil companies' pipelines in the North Dakota (American Horse 2016). Also, discriminatory administrative fiat and corporate greed in the name of cost cutting led to years of distribution of contaminated water to poor neighborhoods. This became known as the Flint water crisis where zip-codes determined life expectancy and health status (CNN 2017). The vandalism has become unsustainable and such behaviours by some firms undermine the majority that is presumed to be working towards sustainability.

Globalisolationism as it currently stands can be predicted to lead to the collapse of the old political order—giving way to the formation of new alliances and the restructuring of national political visions and identities. For example, there are new alliances between African countries and China specifically, and Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) more generally as an alternative to what African nations see as a longstanding unequal partnership with the West in which they have always been short-changed. Now they can have a noninterventionist relationship based on swapping resources for infrastructural development without being dictated to as it has been with the Western donors in the past (Easterly 2014; Konijn and van Tulder 2015).

Additionally, there are now serious attempts aimed at the de-dollarization of international transactions. The galvanization of a trilateral cooperation consisting of China, Russia and Iran in their quest to confront the unipolar US 'military adventurism' appears real. Thus, the US losing the petrodollars as a world reserve currency to the petro-yuan seems like a credible threat; the oil paid for in yuan can be swapped for gold (Evans 2017). Already Russia has held a "*de-dollarization meeting and China and Iran are willing to drop the USD from bilateral trade*" (Durden 2014).

### **Proactive Strategies for Adaptation Through TNCs' Human-Centric Management**

Capitalism is at a tumultuous juncture. TNC practices are being challenged from diverse fronts, especially from the non-market environment where questions are being raised by stakeholders about efficiency gains and the distributive effects of globalization. The trickle-down effects of globalization turned into heavy losses for some while there is upsurge of profits for the TNCs. Yesterday's strategies can remotely fix emergent challenges of populism, economic nationalism (protection of natural resources from resource seekers and unfair foreign competition and bad trade deals (Cossar-Gilbert 2015)), deglobalization and fierce environmental activism. These challenges are not new. However, the scale and strategies of the political actors involved are vastly different and disruptive compared to previous times. These pressures seek to positively change the practices of TNCs, at least in normative terms, in the age of globalisolationism where there are not only firms but a powerful super-structural agency of state-NGO-firm alliance. The quest here is to respond to multiple

stakeholder needs both in host and home countries because of unprecedented environmental questions and global health challenges. The chronicle of events and explanations are pedagogically useful for enhancing understanding of the two concepts (globalization and isolationism) which are fluid in that they are sometimes dynamic and at times stable but their collision in globalisolationism is what makes for a challenging humanistic management reality requiring new rules of engagement. Here, some problems appear to have nothing to do with globalization or isolationism, yet on a deeper level, such issues as environmental questions and new geographies of inequality are the very issues which are creating new forms of uprising against TNCs around the world. Some strategies for adaptation through human-centric management practices are:

- (i) *Turnaround*. It is the sort of thing organisations do when they are in trouble. But TNCs are endowed with large-scale resource capabilities to create turn around innovations that can reverse negative trends such as global warming and environmental degradation. These can proactively meet the demands of stakeholders; e.g. millennials wanting a purposeful career and organizational cooperation with startups to provide sustainable opportunities that can save the environment while curbing graduate unemployment and attracting a pool of talents.
- (ii) *Cross-sector social partnerships*. Sustainable development goal (SDG) 17 encourages multi-sector partnership (public-private partnerships, NGO-private sector and civil society organisations, private sector and government collaboration) and sustainable investments in solving some of the most intractable environmental and social problems.
- (iii) *Sustainable FDI (foreign direct investment)*. “Commercially viable investment that makes a maximum contribution to the economic, social and environmental development of host countries and takes place in the framework of fair governance mechanisms” (Sauvant and Mann 2017). TNCs must support Southern governments’ efforts in this direction with specific targets that meet the needs of individual countries whilst making responsible practices a matter of normal organizational behavior and not just green washing (Ahen and Zetting 2015a).
- (iv) *TNCs as platforms for social change*. Responsible use of corporate political power and organisational resources can provide novel platforms for dialogue, productivity, local empowerment and other synergistic results. Thus, for TNCs, doing well by doing good and creating shared value (Porter and Kramer 2011) will bring them closer to responding to the call to humanistic approaches to management practices. In that sense, novel and bolder strategies and practices by humanistic-oriented leadership at institutional and organizational levels will be required to facilitate the global responsibility of TNCs.
- (v) *Urgency to respond to the Geist der Zeit*. Globalisolationism represents a global socio-economic and geopolitical order in which those who were short-changed at the height of globalization now seek a new deal through vigorous contestation and renegotiation of the incentive structures and shared responsibility for global public bad whilst those who gained, seek to maintain the status quo at all costs. Irrespective of the vocabularies that are used, the root of the matter is the determination of the ‘short-changed side’ to redeem their economic, environmental and political sovereignty and dignity, recognizing interdependence but emphasizing independence from foreign control in ‘re-establishing’ the global equilibrium and democratizing the power structure. There is a need for TNCs to normalize critical issues such as climate change and environmental issues in organisational practices.

- (vi) *Beyond GDP and growth averages.* Almost a decade ago, the International Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress published a report, ‘*Mismeasuring Our Lives: Why GDP Doesn’t Add Up*’. Since then, ‘Beyond GDP’ is now the rallying cry of countries, putting people before profits to measure wellbeing based on a new index that includes hitherto neglected components—to correct wrong diagnoses and misguided economic and social policies (Stiglitz 2019). FDI by TNCs are deemed to contribute to economic growth but it is time to subtract from these metrics the ecological impacts of operations.
- (vii) *Emergent information technologies:* New mass media technologies (in the post-truth era) for the maintenance of both isolationism and globalization question current TNC practices to make sustainability, moral ethical issues and emergent stakeholder concerns a central issue of strategy (Ahen 2017). In the past, stakeholder perception used to be managed with green washing, gimmicks and PR (Aaron and George 2010; Porter and Kramer 2006; Wickert et al. 2016; Hanlon and Fleming 2009). Currently, however, managing perceptions requires actual value creation that positively ameliorates societies’ aggregate wellbeing and dignity (Waddock 2016). Mere PR is generally perceived now as damage control. Thus, firms’ political and stakeholder strategies must be based on convincing actions that demonstrate that the costs of their disruptions are consciously reduced.
- (viii) *Radicalized resistance:* The drastic change in firm–society engagement is due to the intensity of scrutiny, new political actors and the technologies available to strengthen translocal resistance. Corporate narcissism which is more concerned with how a firm is perceived than what it truly is, is now brought under the limelight. This means that the *raison d’être* of globalization and isolation and the systems in which both are embedded are on a collision course and the tension they have created requires firms’ strategic adaptation as each nation-state seeks to pursue its political, economic, strategic or ideological interests in a more empowered and radicalized fashion.
- (ix) *Urgency for organizational adaptation:* For example, investors are under societal pressure not to put their money where they will be seen as “greedy capitalists”. Additionally, consumer groups are raising questions about unethical and unsustainable production modes or the use of corporate political power in weaker institutions. All these scenarios call for change towards humanistic and environmentally-oriented organizational leadership in politics and business.
- (x) *Renewal of social license to operate.* The centre piece in this high point for TNC strategy is the new quest to renew the organizational social license because of society’s new atlas of insurrection, investors and consumers’ scrutiny and the changing times. The real material danger is the disruptive competition from firms who see answers to stakeholder questions as a business opportunity. Nonetheless, what appears to be a tragedy for the status quo will also produce consumer surplus and sustainable wellbeing.

## Conclusions Based on Historicized Futures

The central tenet of globalisolationism is conceptualized as a non-compromising coexistence or the diminishing acceptance of globalization and radical isolationism by design. It is characterized by (i) the quest for new deals within the global geopolitical and economic order, (ii) renegotiation of existing deals for resource appropriation and political space, (iii) the



collapse of the old political order via auto-implosion as a beneficial constraint and (iv) Rejection of TNCs' status quo in global resource and environmental governance as a result of 'translocal' resistance.

The result is expected to be a multipolar world entailing the formation of new alliances whose birth pains will range from serious diplomatic spats to direct confrontation that will force TNCs to change their business models from their current structure of accumulation to the restoration of human dignity. It is conjectured that geopolitical instability will intensify as global health, economic and environmental sustainability weakens. However, the unsustainable arrangements to exploit the resources in developing economies through new smokescreen methods will continue as a permanent feature of capitalism. Globalisolationism is therefore a new restructuring of the unjust distribution of wealth and how justice is accorded and truth is valued to responsibly offer sustainable coexistence for all concerned and not for a few. Until this is achieved the struggle for self-determination and economic nationalism will see an exponential rise (Misoczky and Böhm 2013, 2015; Zibechi 2012). Notwithstanding the above, the futures of marginalized communities will still very much depend on the strength of their bargaining power and other unexpected 'translocal' disruptions.

This paper concludes that the simultaneous birth of several new scientific, technological, geopolitical and environmental phenomena indicate fundamental changes in the existing power structure in the governance of globalization. This imposes limits on other nations (through protectionism) while pursuing neo-imperial agenda through corporations (Boussebaa and Morgan 2014). We draw further conclusions based on insights from long-standing, repetitive, concerted and organised efforts for exploitation, structural violence and systematic destruction of the planet's biodiversity. Such mayhem is committed by 'professional vandals' for profits as foreshadowing phenomena which will lead to almost certain non-optimal outcomes if there is no change in trajectory.

None of the above will occur organically at their molecular level. In essence, Brexit, America first, nationalisms, isolationism(s) and indigenous demands are mainly controlled demolition with beneficial constraints—*“suggesting a relationship of both mutually subversive and mutually supportive conflict between the economic and social, ruling out any lasting harmony between the two, and harbouring a permanent possibility of pathological decay in both”* (Streeck 1997). In globalisolationism, those who succumb will be captured, and those who resist will be isolated. Every socio-economic and geopolitical dispensation and the available tools help differently to define the resistance to the status quo; they do not exist *ex nihilo*. We have also argued that nationalism and globalism are not new but the current developments are shaped differently due to emergent technologies and global 'translocal' integration. In our case, modern communication technologies that are capable of disrupting the established views with fake news or fact-based antithesis in the era of post-truth are used as tools of emancipation and decolonizing from designed unsustainability (Smith 2012).

There is rising poverty and economic insecurity in the West as well in the aftermath of the economic crisis (DW 2017). For example, there are several self-appointed and anointed doomsday environmental crusaders of global ecological catastrophe in the form of NGOs. And there are others who partner with firms in attempt to bring about change. Yet, the fact that certain environmental problems are self-evident does not mean that we are relieved from seeking fresh evidence and questioning existing answers. Research must seek answers from different angles beyond the heretofore exposed globalisolationism. The global South seeks to no longer depend on promises and external projections. They however seek to fix domestically unique challenges as the foundation for building prosperity without external interference.

While countries look inwards first in order to prosper through labour and production, it is noteworthy that several exogenous shocks cannot be fought against singlehandedly. Some nations pursue the path of isolationism (from environmental pacts) partly because some TNCs want to subtract themselves from the herculean task of taking responsibility for the negative effects of globalization. What will the new rules of engagement be for nations and TNCs in resolving e.g. environmental, global health and human rights issues? How will the modalities for sustainable FDI restore human dignity under globalisolationism?

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## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interest** There is no conflict of interest.

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