

# **Globalization and the Monomyth**

Bob Roan

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[Robert.Roan@post.harvard.edu](mailto:Robert.Roan@post.harvard.edu)

This paper looks at globalization in the context of the Monomyth. I start by describing globalization as a mythological process and explaining its challenges and benefits, then linking it to the idea of the monomyth and discussing mythological imperialism, next talking about finding the monomyth while honoring mythological diversity and concluding by suggesting some ways that mythologists and globalizers can work together productively.

Globalization is a process of homogenization because it's a process of spreading out, mixing and accommodating. Globalization has a variety of aspects. One is geographic and involves the blurring of political borders. It's characterized by an increased movement of physical objects (goods and people) across those borders. We usually think of national borders, but the globalization sensation applies at all levels. For example, traveling from California to Mississippi can involve more of a mythical displacement than traveling from California to Canada.

Another aspect is internal and refers to the myths that comprise our personal mythology. This aspect looks for a set of core myths which can apply across a variety of realms in our personal life to replace separate myths for each realm. It's all about a consistent vision for the world whether we are looking at our business life, sex life, leisure time or financial activities. Examples of this include introducing democratic principles from the political realm into the operation of the family or reading self help books which show how to apply the wisdom of sports to interpersonal relationships.

A third aspect of globalization is concerned with reducing diversity in our daily lives. It involves trying to be like the other people we encounter so there are not conflicting mythologies with our friends and coworkers. We look for a common set of myths which we can all safely internalize if we want to fit in. The ruling oligarchy, using the media and other means, is a major force behind the second and third

aspects of globalization because it is easier to manipulate and control uniformity than diversity and chaos.

A fourth aspect of globalization is social and involves social networks that transcend traditional boundaries. If I have an interest in some obscure field, I may find a network of people built around that interest on the Internet even though the members live all over the globe.

Globalization is closely linked to imperialism. Economic imperialism requires us to learn to function in and understand other societies so we can sell to them. Political imperialism requires that we understand enough about another society to force it to act democratically. Religious imperialism requires that we understand another religion well enough to effectively question and undermine it.

The two main challenges facing globalization are mythological conflict and Psyche's tendency to individuate. Mythological conflict occurs as we spread out and encounter new and different myths. For example, the myth of the economies of scale has permeated the approach to farming in the United States to a much greater extent than it has that of Europe. The myth of technology is more integrated into the myth of agriculture in the United States as well, so we have a much more positive attitude toward genetically modified organisms (GMOs.) These mythical differences were of mainly intellectual interest until we started integrating our agricultural production and marketing. But globalization requires that those mythologies learn to coexist.

Psyche's tendency to individuate and differentiate is what has driven the move from the monomyth to the local inflection. This suggests the direction of time is toward the local idea. This possibly irresistible tendency to find what makes us special and to live it out is contrary to the uniformity which simplifies globalization. The dark side of globalization may be the very process of homogenization that is necessary if we are to avoid crippling mythological conflict.

Imperialism inevitably meets resistance and causes upheavals. If imperialism and expansion are natural tendencies, then globalization and mythological thinking can provide a peaceful process of dispute resolution. Global organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the World

Trade Organization can both help resolve disputes and provide aid to mitigate the effects of upheavals and dislocations.

Instead of going to war over disputed territory, an understanding of the archetypes who deal with boundaries, such as Hermes, could lead to alternate resolutions. Instead of offending markets with insensitive products that won't sell, a switch to mythological thinking can smooth the process of commerce for all.

Globalization hypothesizes that there are certain shared principles that can be tapped into and that the common bonds are strong enough to hold us while we bring most of the uncommon bonds into alignment. The monomyth, as the hypothetical ground of individual mythologies, is the common denominator where those commonalities exist. As the primary archetype from which everything springs, it is both the personal mythology of the self of humanity and the unified field theory of mythology.

If there is a monomyth, then globalization can work (if everyone starts to think archetypally) because a first order corollary is that the myths we use to govern the areas of our daily lives can co-exist because they have the same psychic center. So a move toward the monomyth is a move toward the shared essence that could be the foundation of globalization.

We need to keep the possible existence of a monomyth separate from the conceit that our mythology is the monomyth. One specific mythology gives just one way of experiencing the monomyth and there are many other equally valid mythologies. For globalization to succeed in the long run as an affirming, not domineering, force requires that we refrain from mythological imperialism. Instead of running roughshod over other mythologies because we are so convinced of the rightness of our way, we must be willing to negotiate even when our most strongly held myths, such as those regarding gender, conflict with the myths of other cultures around the globe.

This is a difficult path, complicated by the fact that proselytizing is part of many mythologies. Their adherents can't just let differences be differences, but need to confront and change the other mythology. The battles can rapidly escalate when a number of mythologies are fighting for domination,

which is the current situation with the western secular myth, the fundamentalist Christian myth and the fundamentalist Islamic myth. Both democracy and terror are also mythologies and they, too, are globalizing. There is a strong trend to mythological imperialism as the leaders in the United States talk about spreading freedom. There is a counter movement to spread terror across the globe. Even if people aren't called to spread their own mythology, many are still convinced of its superior claim to truth and aren't interested in finding the self of humanity because it's an admission that the myth in their own conscious is not the end, but the beginning.

Many religions are evangelistic and therefore have an imperative to mythological imperialism. Outreach into other ethnic communities is based on the monomyth and mega churches are a first step toward globalization, creating a self contained world of their own. Global religions such as Catholicism have been using the monomyth for centuries.

There is no standing still. Religions need to become global as their practitioners move to other countries where their religion may either form an isolated outpost or can be part of the process of assimilation into the new community. Assimilation can happen if people from the host country start attending services or if the immigrants adopt some of the cultural attitudes of the host country. In the latter case the religion won't work for them if it can't understand the realities of their new personal mythology.

Because of its archetypal nature, the monomyth doesn't really exist, but is a way of understanding that each mythology is a symbol, a pointer to some ultimate, fundamental essence. Therefore, we should not look for the monomyth as much as learn to think monomythically, which involves a commitment to experiencing, holding and honoring a variety of mythologies.

Globalization depends on understanding where to pursue mythical combination and where to honor the local inflection. For example, the Greeks had a habit of bringing local deities into the pantheon, which led to a more expansive and inclusive mythology. The empire that prays together, stays together.

Since mythology springs from the unconscious, the main difference between our mythology and the other mythology is that we are more conscious of our own. It may help for us to think of our mythology as the conscious and the other mythology as the unconscious. We can then think of the monomyth as the self of humanity and the pursuit of the monomyth as a society's pursuit of individuation because it brings it into contact with other mythologies and thus challenges the society's consciousness.

"When a gap occurs between (conscious and unconscious life,) it leads to the formation of strong counterpositions of the unconscious resulting in severe disturbances" (Ellenberger 716.) We see those severe disturbances in the riots when the World Trade Organization meets. We see them in guerilla movements and when our President declares other countries to be part of an "axis of evil" and they brand us the "Great Satan." We saw them when unemployed auto workers in Michigan killed an Asian for driving a Japanese car.

How much similarity do the mythologies need to share for globalization to succeed? I believe the key to that answer lies with our personal mythologies. We need to feel secure in our personal mythology even though other, alien, mythologies are all around us. The level of threat probably depends on the magnitude of the difference and the perception of the relative strengths of the mythologies and their level of aggressiveness. For example, a very different mythology that is very powerful but keeps to itself is not threatening.

A business that hopes to succeed globally will need to learn to think mythically about itself and how to map its archetypal nature from one culture to another. The fact that different mythologies combine different archetypes into each divinity is a structural element and makes this much more complicated than just switching names. It requires thinking in terms of stories, not just individual archetypes.

The company needs to understand which archetypes are in its product and how those archetypes play out into stories for each culture (E.g. Barbie in the Middle East.) The challenge is to understand the

essence of the product or service and reposition it to play out those archetypes in a way that is both consistent and affirming with each local culture. A maker of household goods might explore Hestia energy, party products and entertainment companies could explore Dionysus, high tech toy manufacturers could explore Hephaestus for craftsmanship and Apollo for calculation, and purveyors of outdoor products for women could look at Artemis.

For a business involved in globalization, a successful outcome will start with the leaders learning to think mythologically about all the different ways business is practiced in the various operating countries. They need to let the conflicting mythologies meet and allow the tension of opposites to get them to a new third position. These insights must then be communicated through the organization so everyone can understand the new evolving mythology.

It's a long, perhaps never ending, process that should start at the place of least resistance, make progress there, and then move to the next biggest payoff point. Some resistance will be met forcefully and some with toleration.

Marketing may be the most obvious place that archetypal thinking is required, but it's not the only one. Other business functions require this approach as well. Production asks that the company understand the Hephaestus-like archetypes of each culture and how they play out in a way that works for that culture.

Financiers should learn the stories of the archetypal energies surrounding money in the various mythologies in which the organization operates. The number and levels of the gods can even give clues about the best form of governance in that culture. If Olympus is equivalent to the executive committee then a large pantheon may call for a less hierarchical business structure.

Understanding the globalization of financial markets requires that we explore the mythology of valuation. The traditional measuring approach looks at the measurables (financial statements) but there is a lot of mythology in the bardo between the points, even within a single culture. Our own stock market is a strong statement that even investors are heavily influenced by stories.

If a company has a powerful mythology, how does that effect its valuation? The same company can be part of a different mythology in a different country, so it can be looked upon very differently. It would be interesting to look at some companies in the same industry (probably a rather glamorous one,) see how their stock is valued and then look at the companies mythologically by looking at the articles about them as stories, remembering that "there is a model reader not only for Finnegans Wake but also for a railway timetable" (Eco16.)

Sexuality is a powerful force that is meeting a lot of resistance in its process of globalization. Liberal sexuality appears to be the mythologically aggressive force and it gets a reaction of abstinence in our country and other strong statements around the globe.

The hidden narrative in our culture is that a better sex life can lead to a happier existence and that we can learn to have a better sex life. Ours is a heroic sexual mythology about the power of change, our ability to change ourselves and the boon at the end of the rainbow.

Our main conflict with the sexual mores of other countries is about female sexuality. Magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* are part of our mythology of sexuality. The advertisements are just as important as the articles. The articles tell women to be themselves and the ads tell them to be someone else. It's a powerful combination of loving ourselves as we are while desperately wanting to change. After a woman returns from her journey, her boon is that she resembles the women in the advertisements in some important way. She gets Aphrodite's girdle, but other cultures, such as those ruled by fundamentalist religions, may not have an Aphrodite. Perhaps mythological conflict is greatest when one of the mythologies doesn't have a similar divinity so that something that is worshipped in one culture is not at all divine in another. "We forget that whatever is not offered up to the gods is likely to fall into the gutter" (Whitmont 98.)

Sexuality is both personal and cultural and true globalization will require all views to be integrated into each home society. Just as our mythology of liberal sex will find expression in the

Middle East, so their mythology will need expression in our culture or it will not be true mixing, but dressed up mythological imperialism.

For example, the top executives at the New York headquarters of *Cosmopolitan* could support by both word and example the exploration of more conservative women's clothing and encourage study groups of the Bible and the Koran. This could even provide creative outlets for clothing designers and generate new advertising revenue! This suggestion is meant as a process example, because the real results will come as a result of a creative tension between the cultures of sexuality.

The global financial markets and the turmoil surrounding sexuality are just two of the evolving, high stakes areas where businesses and mythologists could work together. I have also shown that there is a need for mythological thinking in all aspects of business.

Globalization is a wonderful opportunity for mythologists to impact the daily lives of millions of people and create well paying careers in business because it's a place where the worlds of commerce and mythology have common ground. It's also an opportunity to do research about the monomyth by working with businesses in those commercial areas where mythologies are in conflict and using the insights and approaches of depth psychology to mine that turmoil.



## Works Cited

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