



# FALLING OFF THE EDGE:

## TRAVELS THROUGH THE DARK HEART OF GLOBALIZATION

BY ALEX PERRY

NEW YORK:  
BLOOMSBURY PRESS, 2008  
342 PAGES  
ISBN-13 978-1-59691-526-8 ISBN-10 1-59691-526-9

Review by  
Captain François Dufault, CD

**M**odern prophets describe globalization as a means of flattening the earth.<sup>1</sup> Alex Perry pushes the analogy further by stating that the problem with a flat earth is that people start falling off the edge. Alex Perry is *Time's* Africa bureau chief and is based in Cape Town. From 2002 to 2006, he was the South Asia bureau chief and was based in New Delhi. He is a reporter who has worked and continues to work on the “front lines” of today’s conflicts, mostly in developing countries. Throughout his assignments in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, he came to the realization that these local conflicts are rooted deeply in globalization.

His background and experience certainly bring credibility to the book. In his own words, it is a “reporter’s book”<sup>2</sup> that views the impacts of globalization from the front lines. This book is the result of Perry’s slow realization that in his post-9/11 experience as a reporter, he regularly found himself in some of the world’s hotspots and often was the only Western reporter there. Perry noted that the people developing the ideas and concepts that are forging globalization and global free markets are mostly located in New York, London and other big cities; they rarely travel to the locations where these policies have the biggest effects on people’s daily lives and, therefore, do not see their policies’ impacts.

Perry uses first-hand accounts to show the readers these impacts. He dedicates a whole chapter on Shenzhen—a Chinese city on Hong Kong’s border—and its sweat shops. This is followed by a good chapter on Mumbai and the vast and growing gap between rich and poor in today’s India. In the rest of the book, Perry jumps around Africa and Asia from Nigeria to Nepal to Kenya (where he got arrested for reporting without a permit). Also, he returns frequently to India and China. In fact, in these chapters he is quite hard to follow since he very frequently changes location between paragraphs, without warning the reader.

The book’s main conclusion is that the world is now entering a new era of war and that globalization is to blame. The rich are getting richer, and the poor poorer. One good example Alex Perry provides is the global standardization of television. Remote villagers—who just a decade ago had to walk several miles to get to the next village—now have televisions, can watch *Friends* and see what they are missing out on.<sup>3</sup> This is the type of globalizing effect that is brewing trouble in the developing world.

Perry tends to generalize the effects of globalization to the extreme. In doing so, he blames globalization for all the terrorist acts across the globe. In his view, terrorism is a subset of the anti-globalization movement.

If globalization is “standardizing” the world, then anti-globalization is resistance to that trend and terrorism is a means to accomplish it. This is, in his opinion, the reason al-Qaeda crashed two airplanes into the World Trade Center.<sup>4</sup> The weakness in Perry’s argument comes from this generalization. By stating that pirates operating in the Straits of Singapore are in fact attacking globalization,<sup>5</sup> he includes piracy, which has been around ever since man has traveled by sea, in the relatively recent anti-globalization movement. The counter argument is that some terrorist acts, such as piracy, are perpetrated by crooks and criminals who are motivated by easy money and greed and have little interest in globalization.

If we were to extrapolate Perry’s argument, Canada’s contribution in Afghanistan is more about fostering globalization than supporting a local democratic government. His argument has some validity, but the reasoning is somewhat simplistic. One could argue that Canada, as part of a greater NATO involvement in Afghanistan, is a means to help a developing democratic nation to benefit from globalization, effectively preventing it from “falling off the edge.”

This book provides the reader with the “other side’s” view of today’s conflicts and the impacts of globalization. It will be of particular interest to the members of the Canadian Air Force or the Canadian Forces as we are likely

to be called upon to intervene in some of these hot spots, where globalization might be a causal factor of the conflict. However, it should, in my opinion, be balanced with further readings in order to take into account the different points of view. ■

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## Notes

1. Alex Perry credits *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman with coining the metaphor “flattening the earth” in: Alex Perry, *Falling off the Edge: Travels Through the Dark Heart of Globalization* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 19.

2. *Ibid.*, 17.

3. *Ibid.*, 28.

4. In Perry’s opinion, al-Qaeda is an “interesting paradox” in that its actions are those of an anti-globalizer: “striking a more powerful foe in a guerrilla war, railing against the dominant Western way of life.” However its real intent is one of globalizer: “to impose a vast Muslim caliphate on the world.” *Ibid.*, 309.

5. *Ibid.*, 106–7.