

Globalization: Theory and Practice

By Eleonore Kofman and Gillian Youngs, editors. Pinter, 1996. xii + 339 pp.

Globalization is a subject about which it is very easy to write copiously and badly. This is inevitable, given its literal implication of change in everything humanity holds dear, thereby eluding encapsulation within any single paradigm, theory, or perspective. Legions of authors, however, not deterred by this fact have elaborated on their uniquely true reading of the outcomes of this phenomenon, so many carefully avoiding serious criticism of the idea in so doing. Now, as the millenium nears, whole populations are certain in their knowledge that globalization is here, but very few individuals can claim credibly to know what it is, how it works, and where it will take us.

One useful approach to doing justice to so broad a topic within a single volume is to engage the services of several authors, each dealing with those facets of globalization for which they are best equipped. This is the approach taken in the work under review, where the talents of 23 individuals have been pooled. The downside is the risk that no tangible concept of globalization will emerge from the various contributions and that the reader will be left unconvinced that so many disparate treatments describe the same subject.

Editors Kofman and Youngs exhibit some sensitivity to this problem and, to their credit, designed their book to encompass a sizable part of the intellectual territory of globalization. From the vantage points of geography, politics, and international relations, as well as sociology, law, and even epistemology, each author shares his or her view of globalization in action. If, at times, the view is from quite a distance or obstructed by foreground issues of only indirect importance, this is compensated for by the novelty of the perspectives offered. As far as intellectual coverage is concerned, a stronger economic content is notable by its absence, for although economists have their say on the subject nearly everywhere else, the intimacy between politics and economics (as opposed to capitalism) in the context of globalization deserves every attention.

Kofman and Youngs are anxious to position this work as part of the "second wave" of serious and scholarly research on globalization, although in so doing they tend to assume that the "first wave" (presumably consisting of descriptive or historical narratives) yielded a solid enough foundation on which to build. The fact remains that the very hypothesis of globalization has its detractors, and in their introduction, the editors fail to convince the critical reader of globalization's conceptual or empirical validity. Similarly, several later chapters could easily be rewritten without recourse to "the G word," for they are more useful as perspectives on post/modernism, capitalism, inter/nationalism, internationalization, or regionalism, to name only a representative selection. Although many participants in academic discourse comprehend globalization in its particular manifestations, others, myself included, prefer that its elaboration on a holistic level should be featured just as often. The tendency to work within the "globalization of ..." framework, rather than "globalization is..." eventually may obscure vital truths of the same variety as a failure to see the forest shrinking due to focused interest in the growth of individual trees. A book such as this should, by its close, clarify what globalization is *not*, in order to demonstrate the theory's tractability. This would serve the additional purpose of countering those who write globalization off as fantasy, or worse, as a conspiracy to revive the fortunes of authors exhausted on other intellectual fronts. Unfortunately, despite its ostensible commitment to the "is" approach, a good deal of *Globalization* is intent on describing the more readily circumscribed incidents of an ineffable force.

None of this is to say that the book fails to be informative, interesting, or challenging, however, for at times it is focussed very precisely on globalization or facets of alternative globalizations. Youngs, in a short chapter on discourse in international relations, insightfully observes that globalization need not be "real" to have a serious social impact, not only in an academic sense but also in the empirical realm. Not only may the idea give rise to the reality, but it creates a new lens through which to review existing knowledge. Scholte makes a valuable contribution to "beyond the buzzword," and the book might usefully have started with this chapter, or at least pivoted around it as a means to provide a point of reference, both conceptually and analytically. In actuality, pinning its political colors to the mast, *Globalization* begins with a critique by Peterson, not of globalization *per se* but of the feminist paradigm Peterson fears may be ignored in its exploration and engineering. The issue of gender is a recurring one in the book, a fact that sets it apart from the mainstream. I would only suggest that it could be more tightly integrated with the title theme.

The volume's four-part organization, covering aspects of theory and academic practice, geopolitical/legal questions, gender concerns, and problems for the developing world, might deter the interested reader seeking an angle not obviously covered by one of these categories. As stated above, however, a great deal of ground is covered, and there are sure to be fruitful leads for scholars in a wide variety of disciplines. Smith's discussion of the threats and opportunities to sustainable development on small island states, for example, offers insights about the prospect for meaningful participation by peripheral nation-states within the institutional framework of international governance. In "Selling NAFTA: Gendered Metaphors and Silenced Gender Implications," Marchand reveals mechanisms that obscure or discard the views of the minority or the unempowered in top-level decision-making processes, which should resonate with the experiences of social scientists, commentators, and activists concerned with a wide range of issue-areas. In a related chapter, Runyan discusses the potentially destructive competition between groups marginalized in this manner by clearly delineating the darker implications of globalization-as-capitalism.

Given the predilections of the authors and the editors, it is not surprising that relationships between nation-states receive the most comprehensive treatment. The level here, as with the majority of the book (the latter part of which is more closely concerned with case-studies), is mainly in the realm of theory. Where this coverage comes with a revisionist intent it is less satisfying, as authors seeking to break down older models tend to over-reach, possibly due to their inability to give full expression to their ideas in the book's confined space.

Although *Globalization* is intended in large measure to link the pathways of scholars concerned with international political phenomena from within divergent paradigms, the chapters explicitly devoted to this effort may very well be the least effective. However, the book also deals with theory relating to interstate relations in the spirit of reconsideration, rather than rejection, subject to altered assumptions about the international order. In these articles, the tone of commentary regarding the fate of the state as an institution of governance is surprisingly even, considering the enthusiasm and despair emanating in equal measure from globalists and anti-globalists. Williams' "Rethinking Sovereignty" is a good example of what this book does well, as it takes an idiosyncratic but considered view of sovereignty under pressure and shows it to be capable of transformation and thus more robust than expected.

Appraising the book as a whole, one welcomes the freshness of approach but yet remains frustrated at the absence of a conscious continuity with respect to the "big picture."

There is certainly common ground, in that no author finds it unnatural to compose his or her thoughts in the language of globalization. However, this ultimately undermines the collection's credibility. Strengths lie in the book's entirety and its various parts, allow-

ing for the tendencies mentioned above—the entirety offers such a breadth of access to its eponymous theme, and it is a serious and necessary effort to advance theoretically within and across disciplines. Structurally, however, the reader cannot help but wonder whether a less ambitious canvassing of viewpoints, with the benefit of greater freedom and space afforded fewer authors, might not have generated a more solid sense of the logic behind the challenges that the world is equipping itself to meet. For those already well-versed in the globalization debate, from discourses as diverse as business strategy, literary criticism, and media studies, there is a generous amount of material that will help to further the independent development of existing perceptions. However this work should, on its own terms, elaborate a model that can be treated as a datum, refining and augmenting its constituent parts, and informing those to whom globalization remains indefinite.

It is unfortunate that the net result here might confirm the suspicion that each of us experiences our own globalizations and always have, only by other names. Globalization, as observed more than once in this book, exists as an idea that is independent of the physical world. Ideas very frequently seed ideologies. The authors and editors of this book comprehend globalization as an empirical force and as a concept, but are reluctant to question the extent to which they believe in globalization in either sense. This precaution would prevent globalization from resolving into an end, even if an unwanted one, rather than a means to ends not yet perceived. Globalization must not be wheeled out automatically whenever we encounter social change that evades explanation, or when we prefer not to explain that change in other terms. It is still too early for books such as this to dispense with debate and opposition to globalization, both in theory and practice.

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