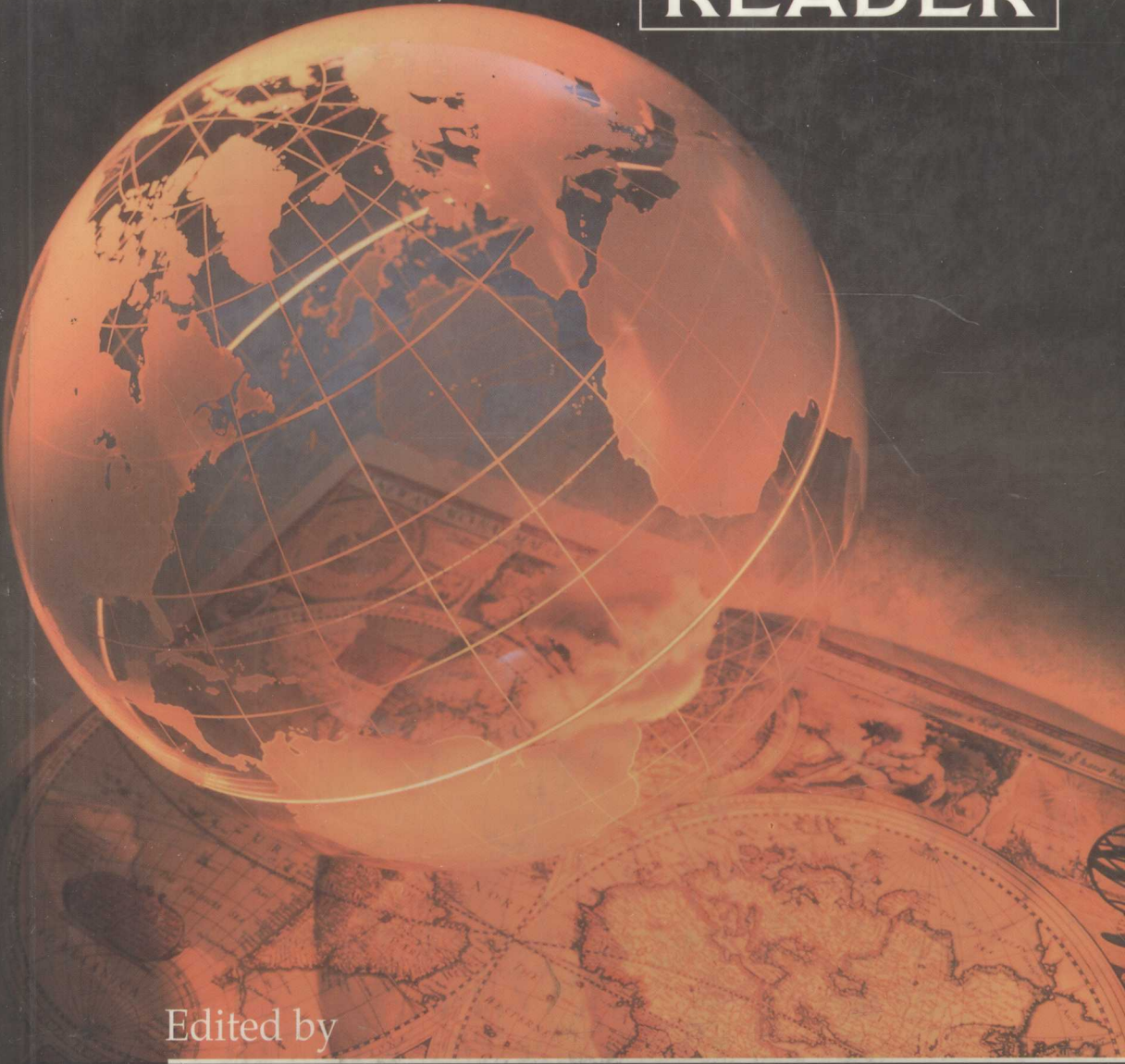


The Globalization READER



Edited by

FRANK J. LECHNER AND JOHN BOLI



The Globalization Reader

Edited by

Frank J. Lechner

and

John Boli

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First published 2000

Reprinted 2000 (twice)

Blackwell Publishers Inc.
350 Main Street
Malden, Massachusetts 02148
USA

Blackwell Publishers Ltd
108 Cowley Road
Oxford OX4 1JF
UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The globalization reader / edited by Frank J. Lechner and John Boli.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-631-21476-3 (hb.). — ISBN 0-631-21477-1 (pb.)

1. International economic relations. 2. International economic relations—Social aspects. 3. International economic integration.

I. Lechner, Frank. II. Boli, John, 1948-

HF1359.G59 1999

337—dc21

99-39722
CIP

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in 10½ on 12 pt Sabon
By Best-set Typesetter Ltd., Hong Kong
Printed in Great Britain by Biddles Ltd
www.biddles.co.uk

This book is printed on acid-free paper

The Globalization Reader



Sources and Acknowledgments

The authors and publishers gratefully acknowledge the following for permission to reproduce copyright material:

- Albrow, Martin, "Travelling Beyond Local Cultures" from John Eade (ed.), *Living the Global City: Globalization as a Local Process* (Routledge, 1997);
- Amnesty International, "AI on Human Rights and Labour Rights," 1998, courtesy of Amnesty International;
- Appadurai, Arjun, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Public Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring 1990);
- Barber, Benjamin, "Introduction" from *Jihad vs. McWorld* (Times Books, 1995). Benjamin R. Barber is Whitman Professor of Political Science and Director of the Walt Whitman Center at Rutgers University and the author of many books including *Strong Democracy* (1984), *Jihad vs. McWorld* (Times Books, 1995) and *A Place for Us* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998).
- Beneria, Lourdes and Savitri Bisnath, "Gender and Poverty: An Analysis for Action," United Nations Development Programme, 1996;
- Berkovitch, Nitza, "The Emergence and Transformation of the International Women's Movement" excerpted from *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations Since 1875*, edited by John Boli and George Thomas with the permission of the publishers, Stanford University Press. Copyright © 1999 by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Junior University;
- Boli, John and George Thomas, "World Culture in the World Polity: A Century of International Non-Governmental Organization," *American Sociological Review* (April 1997), courtesy of American Sociological Association, Washington D.C.;
- Burtless, Gary, Robert Z. Lawrence, Robert E. Litan and Robert J. Shapiro, *Globalphobia: Confronting Fears about Open Trade*, Brookings Institution, 1998;
- Cassen, Bernard, "To Save Society" from *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 1997;
- Diamond, Larry, "The Globalization of Democracy" reprinted from *Global Transformation and the Third World*, edited by Robert O. Slater, Barry M. Schutz and Steven R. Dorr. Copyright © 1993 by Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc. Reprinted with permission of the publisher;
- Fishman, Ted C., "The Joys of Global Investment," from *Harper's*, February 1997;
- Friedland, Lewis A., excerpt from *Covering the World*, Twentieth Century Fund, 1992;
- Fuller, Bruce, "Strong States, Strong Teachers?" from *Growing Up Modern: The Western State Builds Third-World Schools* (Routledge, 1991);
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- Keck, Margaret E. and Kathryn Sikkink, "Environmental Advocacy Networks" from *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Used by permission of Cornell University Press, 1998;
- Keohane, Robert O. and Joseph S. Nye, "Realism and Complex Interdependence" from *Power and Interdependence*. Copyright © 1989 by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye. Reprinted by permission of Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc.;
- Korzeniewicz, Miguel, "Commodity Chains and Marketing Strategies: Nike and the Global Athletic Footwear Industry" from Gary Gereffi and Miguel Korzeniewicz (eds.), *Commodity Chains and Global Capitalism*. Copyright © 1993 by Greenwood Press. Reproduced with permission of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., Westport, CT;
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- Lechner, Frank J., "Global Fundamentalism" from William H. Swatos (ed.), *A Future for Religion?*, pp. 27-32. Copyright © 1993 by Sage Publications Inc. Reprinted by permission of Sage Publications;
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- McNeely, Connie L., "The Determination of Statehood" from *Constructing the Nation-State: International Organization and Prescriptive Action*. Copyright © 1995 by Greenwood Press. Reproduced with permission of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., Westport, CT;
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The publishers apologize for any errors or omissions in the above list and would be grateful to be notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in the next edition or reprint of this book.

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General Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century, globalization became an all-purpose catchword in public and scholarly debate. Government officials could attribute their country's economic woes to the onslaught of globalization, business leaders justified downsizing of their companies as necessary to prepare for globalization, environmentalists lamented the destructive impact of unrestrained globalization, and advocates for indigenous peoples blamed the threatened disappearance of small cultures on relentless globalization. As different parties used the term in highly disparate ways and the concept itself became a global symbol, its meaning became inflated. Globalization risked becoming a global cliché. One purpose of this reader is to show that, worn though it may be, the concept still usefully captures significant worldwide changes. Indeed, underlying the various nuances of the term, as used strategically by various groups, is a shared awareness that the world itself is changing. We think that awareness is correct. The end of the twentieth century has witnessed the consolidation of a new world society. The selections compiled in this reader aim to describe and explain the course of globalization and the shape of its outcomes.

What does globalization involve? After World War II, the infrastructure for communication and transportation improved dramatically, connecting groups, institutions, and countries in new ways. More people can travel, or migrate, more easily to distant parts of the globe; satellite broadcasts bring world events to an increasingly global audience; the Internet begins to knit together world-spanning interest groups of educated users. Such links are the raw material of globalization. They are molded into new organizational forms as regional institutions go global or new ones take shape on the world stage. Increasing international trade and investment bring more countries into the global capitalist system; democracy gains strength as a global model for organizing nation-states; numerous international organizations take on new responsibilities in addressing issues of common concern. These institutions, in turn, are crystallizing into a comprehensive world society. The world is becoming a single place, in which different institutions function as parts of one system and distant peoples share a common understanding of living together on one planet. This world society has a culture; it instills in many people a budding consciousness of living in a world society. To links and institutions we therefore add culture and consciousness. Globalization is the process that fitfully brings these elements of world society together.

Is globalization new? Many scholars point to sixteenth-century Europe as the original source of globalization. After all, the Europeans established worldwide trade connections on their own terms, brought their culture to different regions by settling vast areas, and defined the ways in which different peoples were to interact with each other. Economically and culturally, the modern world system already existed nearly five centuries ago. Others point to the late nineteenth century as a period of intense globalization, when millions migrated, trade greatly expanded, and new norms and organizations came to govern international conduct. At the begin-

ning of the twentieth century, such scholars would stress, the movement of people, goods, and finance across national borders was at least as free and significant as it is today. We agree that globalization has been happening for a long time. We also agree that specific features of world society have their roots in earlier periods. We add, however, that the second half of the twentieth century is a significant period of globalization in its own right. World War II gave globalization a new impetus. Obscured by Cold War divisions, the transformation of world society in the past five decades – in terms of linkages, institutions, and culture and consciousness – was nevertheless profound. This reader includes selections from scholars skeptical of this claim, but it also illustrates by many examples that globalization has entered a new phase.

Is globalization driven by the expanding market? The pursuit of economic opportunity has long sent merchants around the globe, and powerful states have supported their profit-seeking activities. Capitalism knows no bounds, as Marx noted more than a century ago. Marx expected the European economy to become a truly global system, and in many ways it has. In recent years, the integration of financial markets has added a new level of interdependence. To us, this does not mean that globalization is first and foremost an economic project. While an economic system operating along capitalist lines now encompasses most regions of the world, and economic motives always have been important in creating global linkages, globalization takes place in many spheres for many reasons. The economy may be a driving force in global change in some periods, but its effects depend on what happens outside of world markets. To understand the world economy, then, one also needs to understand world society. Accordingly, this reader presents a comprehensive picture of globalization, covering economic, political, cultural, and experiential dimensions.

Does globalization make the world more homogeneous? This question would seem to answer itself: If certain activities or institutions are to become global, they must displace existing, locally variable activities and institutions. If there are more global linkages, global institutions, and global values, presumably this means that more people will have more in common. To many critics of globalization, this seemingly neutral description is nefarious. Globalization is the work of the West, they argue. Markets set western rules for economic activity; one kind of western state has taken hold around the world; by controlling information flows, western media companies shape global consciousness; the popular culture of “McWorld” is of mostly western origin. Globalization thus entails cultural imperialism.

We agree that some things become more similar around the world as globalization proceeds. There is only one World Trade Organization and it enforces one set of free trade rules; there is only one kind of bureaucratic state that societies can legitimately adopt. But we do not think this leads to a homogeneous world, for three reasons. First, general rules and models must be interpreted in light of local circumstances. Thus, regions respond to similar economic constraints in different ways; countries still have great leeway in structuring their own polities; the same television program means different things to different audiences; McDonald’s adapts its menu and marketing to local tastes. Second, growing similarity provokes reactions. Advocates for many cultures seek to protect their heritage or assert their identity – witness the efforts of fundamentalists to reinstate what they consider orthodoxy, the actions of indigenous peoples to claim their right to cultural survival, and the attempt of Asian leaders to put forth a distinctive Asian model of human rights. Third, cultural and political differences have themselves become

globally valid. The notion that people and countries are entitled to their particularity or distinctiveness is itself part of global culture. The tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity is integral to globalization, and this reader illustrates it in several ways.

Does globalization determine local events? In 1998, an Indonesian dictator stepped down and poor Indonesians got poorer; in the United States, gas prices plummeted while Asian products flooded western stores; in the Hague, a war crimes tribunal handed down convictions for atrocities committed on different sides of the war in Bosnia. Around the world, local events bear the imprint of global processes. It would be easy to infer that local autonomy and local tradition must fall by the wayside, but globalization is not a one-way street. To be sure, local and global events become more and more intertwined. But the local feeds into the global as well: the Asian crisis was compounded by domestic policy errors in various Asian countries, the Bosnian war provoked the innovative establishment of a war crimes tribunal to enforce global principles. Yet, even if globalization does not “determine” local events, there is no escaping it. As world society integrates, individuals become conscious of being enveloped in global networks, subject to global forces, governed by global rules. Some of our selections concretely illustrate this local–global connection.

Is globalization harmful? Implicit in the questions we have raised is a widespread sense that globalization may be harmful to the well-being of individuals, countries, and cultures. If the market is the driving force in globalization, many fear it is bound to exacerbate inequality by creating winners and losers. If globalization makes the world more homogeneous, others fear many cultures are in trouble. Loss of local autonomy may mean that more people will be vulnerable to economic swings, environmental degradation, and epidemics. For these and other reasons, globalization has become an extremely contentious process. Indeed, the debate about the merits and direction of globalization is itself an important component of global culture. As we indicated above, we are skeptical of the most sweeping critiques of globalization. But our purpose in this reader is not to offer definite judgments; the subject is too complex for a clear-cut assessment in any case. Rather, we present a variety of perspectives that convey the thrust of actual debates and ongoing research so readers can understand the varied consequences of globalization and make their own informed judgments.

The Globalization Reader aims to convey the complexity, importance, and contentiousness of globalization. This is an exciting time in social science scholarship, as many creative minds try to discern the outlines of a new era. The reader includes some of their best work. But making sense of globalization is not just a task for scholars and students. It is a public concern. We hope this reader will assist a diverse audience in understanding the patterns and problems of globalization, which is likely to be a dominant concern of the twenty-first century.

Note on selections

Footnotes, citations, and sources of quoted passages have been excised. Omitted text is indicated by “[. . .]”.

Part I

Debating Globalization