

## **Book Review: Globalization and the Nation-State**

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Holton, Robert. *Globalization and the Nation-State*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. 232 pp. \$25.00 (paper).

Most social science scholars agree that globalization has become one of the leading socio-political and economic theories after the fall of the Soviet Union. The worldwide capitalist economy has been a major force of convergence since the late 1980s, to the extent that it has compelled many leaders to propose local economic strategies for restructuring their economies and integrating them into the world economic system. Though the academic circle has been preoccupied with explaining globalization and how every one in the world is adapting to it, the preponderance of the analysis missed a focus on the effects that globalization may have on the well-being of the citizens in any given nation; especially, when the focus is on globalization and its relevance to nation-state, the growing ethnic upheaval, and the ways in which these three items tie together.

Because of its unique approach to globalization, Robert Holton's *Globalization and the Nation-State* is a pioneering work that can be characterized as focusing on the interplay among the three—globalization, the nation-state, and the growing ethnic upheaval. The study, in this regard, is interdisciplinary in nature; and, its intended design covers a broad range of cross-disciplinary audience. The book draws upon a wealth of information that characterizes the massive transformation in contemporary societies in terms of the increasing transnational development and the growing multicultural and multiethnic tendencies that transcend transnational political and economic policies.

Holton's underlying premise in this book is that globalization can not be summarized to economic globalization; it is as a force that dictates changes in the fabric of societies which, in addition to economic globalization, includes a change in affective judgment, moral righteousness, values, and a host of other socially and politically relevant variables. Despite such a strong approach, Holton is neutral while defining globalization as a manifestation of a common ground, similarity of insight, and "one single world of human society in which all elements are tied together in one interdependent whole" (2). In addressing these points, he attempts to define globalization by raising a series of provocative questions that evaluate the positive and negative opinions regarding globalization. The book, therefore, covers globalization in terms of its meaning; its history and dynamics; and, its economic, political and cultural aspects in each of its main six chapters, respectively.

In Chapters Two and Three, Holton discusses the current images of world order under globalization, and focuses on the range of evaluative standpoints—from a commitment to cosmopolitan ideas of social harmony and communities free from conflict, to valuing national autonomy and localism—from which globalization, and specifically economic globalization, is discussed. Here, the author presents a series of criticisms against theories of globalization and their incapability to deliver a viable explanation that accounts for diversity in the rise of counter-movements that emphasize national differences and the continuing cultural appeal of particular countries or localities. In this regard, Holton emphatically rules out the notion of globalization as a unitary process with a single logic (i.e., capitalism), but quickly suggests a more complex multinational descriptive of globalization that becomes the building block of his approach to globalization. Holton's multinational description of globalization, as he claims, aims to sensitize us to similar complexities in normative debates—e.g., attempts to secure global human rights, democratic governments and the exercise of self-determination, or environmental protection movements—that revolve around globalization. Because the social multi-dimensionality of globalization is mirrored by a normative multi-dimensionality, Holton prefers to think of the phenomenon in plural rather than singular terms—globalizations, not globalization.

Whether democratic challenges and national sovereignty lose themselves in economic globalization is the question that Holton addresses in Chapter Four. His general sentiment regarding the rise of nation-states alongside the globalization process is optimistic. Therefore, Holton believes that it is unhealthy to assume that the global challenges to democracy at the national level are tainted with the loss of some absolute sense of national sovereignty. He further argues that the "challenges globalization poses to democracy are more to do with increased global interconnectedness and with inequality of access to power both between nations and between different interests within them" (200). Therefore, he is aware of the difficulties that democratic ideals at national levels can create, and the complexities that global governance can produce by relying on experts and the powerful position of scientists and professionals from the First World. Nonetheless, he agrees that the globalization process permeates those political boundaries within which democratic self-determination is seemingly practiced.

Although the discussion in the first four chapters, for the most part, rested on economic globalization, Holton shifts his attention in Chapter Five toward political globalization

in terms of a global polity. To him, a sense of global order is similar to a complex cobweb that links governmental and non-governmental bodies. With this notion, Holton sees emerging new players on the political scenes which may be either multiple or overlapping powers and may constitute several layers of interconnectedness among peoples and nations. The interesting point regarding this issue is how Holton advocates the notion that a more “complex globally organized polity” is needed for a “territorially bounded world” to operate effectively. This way, it would appear that Holton is suggesting to bridge the gap between the global, national, and local level polities or political organizations through the recognition that can be given to their diverse communities so that global harmony can be maintained.

The underpinning notion in Chapters Four and Five is that there are other developing forces in the making. While Holton is constantly challenging the power of globalization vis-à-vis the growing continuity in the development of nation-state and ethnicity, he maintains that these developmental forces are complementary rather than conflicting. In the meantime, he sees the fusion of ethnicity and nation-state as a reaction against the hegemonizing tendencies of [capitalistic] globalization. Hence Holton rejects the idea of globalization as an evolutionary process. Instead, he argues that globalization is developing alongside of ethnicity and nation-state: a culmination of many mini-globalization. Such thinking has given two distinct characteristics to Holton’s thesis, which separates his approach to globalization from those of others in this area: (1) he looks at the scopes and limits of globalization (global development) not as a uniform or unifying force, while treating globalization as a phenomenon that transcends a simple idea of economic growth driven by the logic of capital accumulation. And, (2) he looks at globalization as an historical, rather than a contemporary, phenomenon that is intensifying the economic, political, social and cultural relations that transcend national boundaries. Thus, Holton contends the world may be seen as politically centered pockets when the relationship between interest groups, such as national governments, and a range of international bodies, such as NGOs, are concerned.

In support of this thesis—i.e., the multifaceted globalization due to the rise of ethnicity and nation-states—Holton pays much attention in Chapter Six to the recent explosion of ethno-nationalism and the revival of ethnicity in settings of migrant settlements. The preponderance of the discussion in Chapter Six revolves around the development of such anti-global trends. In verifying the mechanisms of nation-state building and the rise of ethnicity, Holton carefully argues that the trends—in cultural identity—all suggest in them “different ways that the project of mutual accommodation between contrasting loyalties is an extremely difficult one” (203). While cultural identity in terms of cosmopolitanism is restrictive in the age of globalization, Holton expects territoriality and national sovereignty to continually affect cultural identity. But, the issue remains whether cultural iden-

tity reinforces territoriality; or territoriality and cultural identities lend themselves to mutual accommodation instead of a unidirectional effect or conflict. These are among the questions that Holton addresses in Chapter Seven.

From the overall discussions presented in *Globalization And the Nation-State*, it can be concluded that Holton is alerting us of the links between cultural diversity (i.e., the rise of ethnicity) and national sovereignty (i.e., the rise of nation-state) that are included in recent globalization processes, which raise great challenges to the uniformity or the homogenizing effects of globalization that other works on this subject have envisioned: that globalization is predominantly based on the Western principle of capitalism. The justification for Holton’s diversion from this general universal theory of globalization, as we have implicitly seen so far, is that globalization is not an all encompassing social trend, but one that is mediated by local developments that affect nation building. Hence Holton argues that globalization does not overwhelm nation-state or destroy cultural differences at the local level. For example, a small indication in support of this assertion is Holton’s focus on the unevenness that can be observed in the process of globalization of loyalty; an oddity that makes the debates resting on globalization of culture far from any viable resolution. Thus, Holton’s emphasis on the roles of international bodies—e.g., NGOs—in reviving political and cultural activism within a nation-state is to reinforce this idea.

In addition, Holton does not deny the profound influence that globalization has on patterns of local social change, given that each nation has a varied share of power distribution in global scene. Whether globalization has a polarizing, homogenizing, or hybridizing effects (terms that Holton uses extensively and excessively in the latter part of the book), the underlying analytical challenge in his analysis of globalization is the equity he would need to maintain between local-historical specificity and the significant dynamics of globalization at the macro-level operation. In this course, Holton deliberately spends quite a bit of time critiquing facets of globalization theory and tries to expose them, while treating globalization as a challenge to human society—particularly, in the areas where globalization, buy its nature, can permeate “autonomous” and “self-constituting” societies. Unfortunately, Holton is entrapped in a similar cyclical approach that criticizes other theories of globalization—specifically, when he maintains that globalization represents a powerful force for social change in autonomous regions toward convergence, yet autonomous and self-governing sovereign nations are on the rise. Whatever this dynamic, Holton tries to rescue himself by asserting that the nature of globalization is vague. This may seem true, but isn’t a book on globalization supposed to unveil its vagueness? Nevertheless, Holton agrees with those whom he has criticized that globalization is an unstoppable force; and, it is creating a new form of discourse that permeates the relationship between the nation-states and localities. But he diverts from others by indicating that globalization has not

been able to overrun nation-states nor localities. Whether globalization is good, bad or a mixed reception, the bottom line for Holton is that the judgment depends on what we

believe globalization to be, or which voices or interests are doing the judging. This seems to qualify Holton's theory of globalization as middle range.

