

Review

The Effects of Globalization in Latin America, Africa, and Asia: A Global South Perspective

Kema Irogbe. New York: Lexington Books, 2014. 175pp.

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Kema Irogbe's study of the effects of globalization on Latin America, Africa, and Asia, is an informative and interesting read, but, unfortunately, it also suffers from many flaws, most of which derive from information and arguments outside the scope of the subject of globalization and its effects.

The author announces the theme of the book early in the first chapter—"that globalization accentuates poverty or the 'development of underdevelopment' of the periphery" (1), yet he frequently steps outside his own defined scope with an extensive discourse on the misdeeds of the U.S. and the CIA during the Cold War, denunciation of capitalism and multi-national corporations, and excoriation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The misdeeds of the CIA in Iran, Guatemala, and Chile (20–28) during the Cold War are well known and well documented, but they are not relevant to the new epoch of globalization. They are a relic of a bi-polar world that has now become "flat," to use Thomas Friedman's term for the effect of globalization. Irogbe does not address the flattening effects, and to ignore such an important contributor to the debate on globalization as Friedman is a significant oversight. Friedman's book is mentioned briefly (9–10), but otherwise ignored. Worse yet, Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* is denounced as "anti-communist drivel and presumptuous meddling" (6) and Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* as "barren ethnocentrism" (6). Such

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opprobrium directed at some of the most significant contributors to the field of globalization makes one question Irogbe's objectivity.

His denunciation of multi-national corporations (chapter 2) is more relevant to the subject, but is unbalanced and loaded with hyperbolic language: "MNCs have left no other bond between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous cash payment. They have stripped every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. They have converted the physician, the lawyer, the politician, the priest, the poet, the man of science into their paid wage laborers" (30). Though no one can dispute the power of capital in the age of globalization, he gives no thought to the dynamic "corporate social responsibility" (CSR) movement that, despite Milton Friedman's famous objections, has become an increasingly important part of doing business anywhere in the world, has been adopted by most of the world's top multi-national corporations, and is regularly featured in courses taught at the nation's top business schools. Considering that they emerged around the same time, it is at least plausible that the CSR movement is related to the globalization of capitalism.

But Irogbe has no truck with this notion. He concludes that "MNC's have continued to pose the greatest threat to global political economy. They do more harm than good in their ceaseless pursuit of profits and they serve the interest of no one but themselves" (34). The news that corporations are concerned with profit-making is hardly earthshaking. But Irogbe's solution for underdeveloped countries in the struggle for power against MNCs—nationalization—is a remedy that is certain to be the economic kiss of death for any country wishing to succeed in the global economy.

He is equally condemning of the influence of the WTO, the World Bank, and the IMF in chapters 3 and 4. Again, with overly-hyperbolic language, he writes that "the WTO is a global free trade organization that is anti-poor and anti-nature in its decisions to enable corporate elites to steal the world's harvests through secretive, undemocratic structures and processes" (40) and "the IMF and the World Bank, as a tool of the U.S. foreign policy, followed the prescriptions laid down by the American policy makers to strengthen allies and weaken adversaries such as the then Eastern bloc led by the Soviet Union in the East-West competition for world hegemony" (84). These condemnations of the WTO, World Bank, and IMF are not sufficiently supported by evidence, particularly when the author's conclusions are so potentially damning.

The greatest contributions of the book are its legitimate concerns about the creation of a “global monoculture” driven by the culture of the West through economic, government, and media channels (chapter 5). Doubtlessly, some “flattening” of cultures is taking place, as youth in underdeveloped nations desire to emulate the youth culture in Western nations. Yet, the “U.S.-driven monoculture” argument is undercut by the very fact that the U.S. itself is becoming more diverse in the age of globalization, not less so. Consider these examples: The President of the United States is an African American man, whose father was from Kenya. Both the Asian and Hispanic population in the United States grew by 43% in the decade between 2000 and 2010 (U.S. Census). Presently, there are two current state governors who are Indian American, two Mexican American, and one Japanese American. Of nine African Americans who have served in the U.S. Senate, five of them have served in the last 10 years. None of this was true of the U.S. culture 20–30 years ago.

McDonald’s Corporation is often used as an example of the nefarious influence of American culture throughout the world, modifying traditional dietary habits and worse. Irogbe also adds another lash to this whipping boy. Yet, no one complains about the “sushi-fication” of the West, but sushi is now itself a global culinary influence (Bestor 2000).

In this global age, examples abound of the cultural influence of the rest of the world on the United States and the West. Many of the cars on the roads in the U.S. are now of foreign origin. There are more foreign Ph.D.’s educated in U.S. universities than U.S. nationals. One finds in any U.S. metropolitan region of any size multiple ethnic restaurants and frequent ethnic festivals from around the world. *Netflix* makes it easy to rent foreign films as well as the standard fare from Hollywood. Clearly, globalization and its cultural influence is not a one-way street.

The author saves some of his harshest criticism for the perceived U.S. government efforts to “promote gay rights around the world,” arguing that it is “tantamount to ethnocide—the destruction of a culture—of Africa and other peripheral regions” (99), yet he ignores legitimate efforts by the U.S. government to promote human rights worldwide, something most countries have already committed to by signing the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Phenomena such as child brides, female genital mutilation, slavery, religious persecution, intolerance and violence, and

discrimination against minorities are not legitimate cultural choices, and the U.S. and the West is right in its condemnation of these practices anywhere in the world.

Furthermore, the argument of the “hegemonic” influence of the West and the “development of underdevelopment” is undercut by the rise of China, previously one of the countries in the “periphery” category that the author uses to support his argument. Other economic success stories—South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and to a lesser extent, the Philippines, Indonesia, Brazil—show that it is not impossible to compete against the West in a globalized economy and win.

In sum, the book has its merits, and is informative about the age of globalization. However, its lack of balance and hyperbolic language limits the influence it might otherwise have.

REFERENCES

- Bestor, Theodore. (2000). How Sushi Went Global. *Foreign Policy* November/December: 121, 54–63.