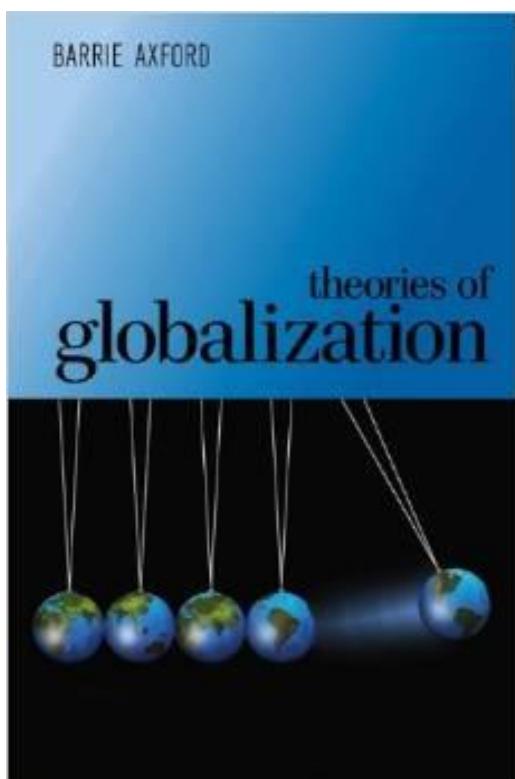


Book Review

Recent Trends in Globalization Scholarship

“Theories of Globalization” by Barrie Axford

By Colin Everett



The end of the Cold War, the proliferation of the internet, and neo-liberal trade policies all contributed to a greater sense of global interconnectedness in the 1990s. Academics, politicians, and pundits explained these changes in terms of a global identity and a global process of modernization. These worldviews fit under the broad umbrella of globalization.

Emerging as a major academic discipline in the 1980s, globalization saw its pivotal

development take place during the 1990s. As a relatively new field, globalization lacks a basic framework, curricula, methodology, and even an agreed upon definition. Like so many other grand worldviews, globalization offers the temptation of being whatever an author claims. Depending on the author, the term *globalization* is either a lens to interpret the modern age or a simple summary of the times in which we live. In *Theories of Globalization*, Barrie Axford presents an extensive collection of the recent scholarship and usage of globalization.

Axford's first challenge is presenting a coherent definition of globalization. His book counters the work of Justin Rosenberg, a scholar of globalization who argues that since theories of globalization lack an “intelligible hypothesis,” almost anything “can be described as globalization or ascribed to it” (19). Axford’s answer is to separate the usage and understanding of globalization into three separate concepts: globalization, globalism, and globality. *Globalization* refers to the process and direction of change over time, *globalism* refers to a set of ideologies ranging from the worship of the free-market to global jihadism, and *globality* is a “single socio-political space on a planetary scale” (31). Axford does not present his own definition or theory of globalization;

rather he codifies the major intellectual currents on globalization.

Seven of the book's nine chapters analyze recent scholarship on globalization by discipline. Axford argues that recent economists have largely ignored the theoretical study of globalization. Other than economics, globalization theories have been applied throughout the social sciences.

Axford starts by examining how political science, geography, and sociology have a traditional reliance on the nation-state and national societies as their dominant lens used to interpret the world. An additional chapter focuses purely on the changing nature of stateness. A major theme in the geo-political framework is the dialectical tension between the perception of static borders and the fluidity of networks built upon social relations. Anthropology, with its traditional focus on the bounded local community, has shifted toward an analysis of transnationals, Diasporas, de-territorialized ethnicities, and migration.

Separate chapters are dedicated to geography and concepts of re-spatialization theories of globalization and culture. Axford proposes that globalization challenges existing notions of physical and political spaces as being dynamic and not static, as well as the tension between local, national, and global culture. With regard to the study of history, Axford details the meaning of *world* and *global* history, as well as the historical context for studying globalization.

Perhaps the most popular appeal of globalization is the appearance of an increasingly global economy and neo-liberal economic policies. While the field of economics, according to Axford, has sparing scholarship

pertaining to globalization theory, theories regarding capitalism are numerous. But for Axford, the study of "globalization as an economic phenomenon and its equation with capitalist expansion still exercises too narrowing an influence on the study of global integration" (176).

Ultimately, *Theories of Globalization* is a difficult book to read. For a general educated reader without a specialized background in the academic fields on which Axford focuses, the internal academic debates can be overwhelming. Most of the challenges in reading *Theories of Globalization* are deeply imbedded in its academic nature. The text abounds in overly long sentences, hyper-specialized vocabulary, and exhaustive coverage of arguments between intellectuals in what is essentially one long, although truly impressive, literature review. The selection of subjects to review, with the exception of capitalism and political science, can seem arbitrary. Additional chapters on other fascinating fields like education could have been substituted or added.

As a secondary world history teacher, I wanted to read *Theories of Globalization* to better understand my course and the economic and political influences of the modern age. I have been exposed to dim-store theorists who present YouTube globalization theories (like "Shift Happens..."), but these usually are driven by a partial reading of journalist Thomas Friedman (*The Lexus and the Olive Tree* [1999]; *The World is Flat* [2005]) and end in fear mongering directed toward developing nations. I still have not found the book I am looking. For secondary educators and general education undergraduate instructors looking to use

scholarship to better inform their own instruction, *Theories of Globalization* will be of little value. It may best serve the needs of scholars looking to understand how globalization has been recently interpreted in various social scientific disciplines. Therefore, as a summary of the field, *Theories of Globalization* offers value to scholars and students wishing to familiarize themselves on the current debates over globalization.

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