

Book Review

Social Changes in a Global World, by Ulrike Schuerkens. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2017, ISBN-13: 978-1473930216, ISBN-10:1473930219, 270 pp. \$28.18, paperback; \$29 Kindle.

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Walden University's social change approach is an essential part of its vision and is transmitted through the academic work and knowledge of its graduates, who are trained to find solutions to critical societal challenges in pursuit of advancing the greater global good. Schuerkens's *Social Changes in a Global World* can serve as a compendium for the Walden family and others interested in this topic. The author earned doctorates in social anthropology and sociology and is a senior lecturer at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, France. This may explain Schuerkens's exploration of globalization through both anthropological and sociological lenses along with the distinct journeys of humanity in developing and industrialized nations that are now seemingly merging and sharing commercial and cultural interests. Also, the author further explores the depths of the subjective dimensions of the researcher as a participant, rather than only an observer. The book is written in the editorial *we*, which suggests common ground with the readers, or a more inclusive way of addressing the readership.

Schuerkens contends that globalization has been challenged by social transformations and social changes, and this is what she is set to explore. Her assumptions are clear, and whether readers agree with them or not, they will find plenty of material for reflection. The author looks at how social transformations and changes are connected to issues of power and political influence; how transformations and changes have been influenced by concepts of modernity, progress, and rationalization; how transformations and changes differ in various contexts and geographical areas. Throughout the book, she emphasizes the variance of global changes and the limited universality of certain structures. Schuerkens believes that it is preferable to use the plural of transformation as any transformation has an impact somewhere else and triggers another transformation in a perpetual system of change.

Schuerkens reflects on how the North–South relationships and interdependences among countries have changed in the context of globalization. She contends that there is the Northern South and the Southern North in order to make readers understand global interdependence relationships in new ways. Also, she overtly states that we live in a multipolar world that is no longer controlled by the triad of industrialized areas (United States, European Union, Japan; p. xi), in which the world has been arbitrarily subdivided into perspectives. In addition, she sees the North (Western nations), the South (developing countries), and the East (Asian countries at different levels of development; p. 7), in which the East seems to mitigate the clear-cut distinction between the North and the South of the world. The author argues that a conceptual and empirical understanding of these transformation processes is a *sine qua non*, and she makes it the goal of her book.

The book is organized into eleven chapters. Each chapter has a summary and several other sections, all short, so that the reader can move quickly through the book. One may choose to read only one or two chapters. For example, if someone is interested only in theoretical approaches related to social transformations and social change, Chapter 1 would suffice. In this chapter, theories are explained

through historical processes, power relationships, and illustrated by case studies. The author asserts that each theory is incomplete and one should overcome this deficiency. “Without the concept of structural processes, social change cannot be explained and demonstrated,” (p. 2) affirms Schuerkens. Although there are many theories that one may use to explain social transformations and development in a globalized world, Schuerkens chooses sociological and anthropological perspectives of the theories of modernization, dependency, structural-functionalist, multiple modernities, and the theory of entangled modernities. The author acknowledges the influence on her work of Teune and Milnar, who have been a driving force in the study of social ecology and the study of development (p. 5).

In Chapter 5, “Transnational Migrations and Social Transformations,” Schuerkens raises the question whether migration triggers development and/or whether development triggers migration. The number of people who migrate for different reasons is staggering: “One billion of the world’s seven billion inhabitants are migrants” (p. 86). The author explores migration related to uneven economic development and inequality. The latter is the most important motive of transnational migration that according to the author has an ethnic dimension.

At the country level, a social hierarchy has become obvious, even if an ethnic hierarchy often accompanies this differentiation, so that some ethnic groups (e.g. Latinos, Africans originating from the African continent) are at the bottom of the social ladder. (p. 86)

The emergence of a new political world order is evident, and the author predicts that international migrations that disrupt social hierarchies will continue in the coming years. Schuerkens believes that new ways of understanding migration and immigration are necessary, as the classical analysis of migration processes is not helpful any longer.

My particular interest was in Chapter 7, “Communication, Media, Technology, and Global Social Change.” Schuerkens states, “The aging of the baby boomers and the ‘graying’ of the labour force have implications for commercial markets. Health problems and functional limitations of elder cohorts expands [sic] the market for assistive and other enabling technologies” (p. 143). Her account of technology in global societies seems balanced and reasonable. Technology is discussed with its advantages and disadvantages, as a major force that “. . . has fundamentally changed the way people meet, interact, learn, work, play, and travel” (p. 152). The author discusses the impact of technology on older generations and on women. This chapter’s sections, like all the sections in the book, are concise, postcard invitations for further research that readers can pursue based on the author’s recommendations.

Another interesting read is Chapter 9, “Conflict, Competition, Cooperation, and Global Change,” in which Schuerkens defines and discusses the notions of conflict, completion, and cooperation and supports her assertions through different theories that include the theory of modernization, dependency theories and conflict theories. According to Schuerkens, cooperation is an important element in the explanation of developmental processes “. . . because the global economy introduces competitive economic behaviour in all regions of the world even if the upper social classes are those most affected” (p. 188), whereas conflicts may have more to do with particular cultures, and this “. . . would validate Huntington’s thesis that the central political actors of the twenty-first century will be civilizations rather than nation-states” (p. 188).

Social movements are fascinating phenomena that constitute an important part of sociology. They are networks where people negotiate their ideas, ideals, and struggle for change. In Chapter 10, “Globalization and Social Movements: Human Agency and Mobilizations for Change,” Schuerkens offers explanations supported by theory regarding the links “. . .between social movements and social, economic, and political changes since the 1990s” (p. 192) She emphasizes the increasing role of transnational associations especially those that promote social change. The author’s view is that social movements, which may inspire participation of various groups and even with different political orientations, may disrupt dominant structures, but more important, they create hope.

Chapters end with discussion questions, annotated further readings, notes, graphs, and websites relevant to the chapter. The format of this book, with its condensed sections and plenty of information for further research, testifies to the information-overload age readers live in, and the author offers options for further research. The bibliography is large with 780 entries, followed by an index.

Schuerkens’s concluding remarks sound self-evident, “Today, we are in a situation of in-between: where the old is still existent and where the new finds it difficult to appear” . . . “Globalization, increasing poverty, and inequality influence our societies” (p. 212). Isn’t this the story of humanity? However, reading her perspectives on the present complex, networked world is thought provoking and reflection inducing. Her tone is not pessimistic. To the contrary, in this in-between space, she sees new ways of living, thinking, and working in networks. She wishes for a nonviolent world, but it depends on everyone’s participation in the construction of the future society and more important “leaving no one behind” (p. 212).

The audience for this book may include academics, higher education practitioners, individuals concerned with global civil society, and political activists. I recommend this book as a resource, maybe a starting point for those interested in global studies, globalization, and social movements. I am grateful to Sage Publications for making an electronic copy available to me for review through the bookshelf.vitalsource.com.

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