

Book Review

New Age Globalization: Meaning and Metaphors by Aqueil Ahmad. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, ISBN: 978-1-137-29341-1, 312 pp. \$94.78, hardcover; \$84.00 Kindle edition.

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Ahmad's approach to the topic of globalization establishes a comparison of theoretical approaches to analyze the history, culture, economics, demographics, political systems, conflicts, knowledge, and religions of regions throughout the world. This is a well-researched book packed with information on complex topics for the global researcher, corporate planning executive, human resource manager, and educator, among others seeking to understand social and organizational systems in our global world. Leaders planning and managing global organizations must understand trends and implications from demographic, cultural, and political backgrounds, as well as the governmental regulatory setting in various parts of the world. Even beyond the extensive content in the text, the author's notes provide leads to sources of additional information on a myriad of essential topics.

The purpose of this book is to examine interdependent and interconnected global society in terms of its structure, including both functional and process characteristics. From an historical perspective, "it is important to [consider] non-Western influences that have shaped and reshaped globalization through time—influences that may easily escape the attention of a common person in Europe and America" (Ahmad, 2013, p.7). From a values perspective, the book expresses an underlying concern for global consciousness resulting in global social change for human welfare on this planet.

This volume is a follow-up to a previous book entitled *Exploring Globalization: Structure and Processes, Impacts, and Implications*, published in 2010 by Ahmad. In our fast-changing world, the period of 3 years since has been eventful with the reelection of President Obama in a contentious campaign by highly divisive and polarized political interests in the United States, in addition to frightening threats of Wall Street disaster and near-economic crashes of most countries worldwide and in particular Greece, Italy, Spain, and Ireland. In recent years, the economy all over the world has been the major source of concern, while the level of uncertainty of the financial soundness of governments, organizations, and individuals has been uncomfortably evocative of the Great Depression of the 1930s. We may be seeing signs to breathe a sigh of relief, but globally, the earlier promises of global change have not resulted in improved lifestyles or reductions in poverty.

Early in the treatise, Ahmad shares his international background, which authenticates his later demonstration of scholarly study and research of many parts of the world. A reader remarked that we might think of the author as "Mr. Global" because of his first-hand knowledge of life on the major continents. Much of his adult career was involved with sociological research for international agencies prior to his respected academic teaching and research in sociology for major universities in the United States. His first-hand knowledge of the cultures around the world makes his research and treatise all that more valuable.

The book begins by providing a theoretical framework—consisting of sociological systems, modernization, and world system and dependency theories—with which to explain globalization in particular and society in general, but each with its own strengths and weaknesses. These various

views of the world provide a more balanced focus on the problems, trends, social changes, and future implications as one travels through the chapters. Each chapter explains the recent related events for the topic according to each of the theoretical viewpoints and each major culture of global society. The author emphasizes that global research may be divided into proglobalization and antiglobalization viewpoints, with a group of researchers straddling the middle ground simply to explain and label it.

The first category for theoretical approach was an outcome of attempts by Parsons (1951) and Boulding (1980) to apply systematic planning and intervention to post-World War II and postcolonial societies. Systems theory is useful for the analysis and planning for long-term change but may result in inconsistencies due to unintended results because of unexpected interdependencies when applied to complex societies and organizations. An example for consideration is addressing crime rate through changes in public policies, even though factors such as education, employment, and income and others such as infrastructure, business investment, and other political, economic, and judicial aspects have a direct or indirect impact. An interesting benefit of systems theory is the observation of how the interdependencies have become global in nature, primarily due to instantaneous global communications. As we have seen in the Middle East, unrest in one country may have a major impact on political conflict in other countries.

A second theoretical approach developed from the observed lack of focus on techno-economic modernization by some non-Western developing countries, corporate entities, and large operational systems, which led to the perceptions that problems in societies could be resolved by applying modernization theory. Western intellectual sources felt that the problems of the parts of the world that are developing could be best addressed with the modernization model and systems logic for greater efficiency. It has been assumed that developing countries would happily agree to change their forms of government, to replace bartering with financial institutions, to adopt industrial production, and to accept the importance of individual initiative and enterprise. “Critics of modernization theory suggest that it is a disguised formula for Westernization or the spread of global capitalism in the non-Western world, with disastrous consequences for native cultures and environments” (Ahmad, p. 23).

The third category contains the world system and dependency theories, which are highly critical of the resulting impact of the corporate globalization movement, such as “its negative social, economic, and environmental consequences for world societies” (Ahmad, p. 23). These provocative views assume that “a capitalist world economy will lead to unequal distribution of global power and resource exploitation by few at the expense of many” (Ahmad, p. 25). The author explains how world system and dependency theories have evolved from observations of the effects of the dissolution of colonial empires and the establishment of economic imperialism, only to be more recently replaced by multinational corporations “as extended arms of the ex-colonial governments—a unique collusion of business/economic and political power in an otherwise ‘free world’” (Ahmad, p. 25).

Thus, the theoretical framework serves the reader to provide a comparison of interpretation of the author’s discussed observations, which appear from the perspective of each theoretical category as point-counterpoint. Clearly, the framework serves an invaluable role in helping Westerners have a clearer grasp of the opposing mindset, which explains that local cultures may not welcome globalization.

Ahmad maintains an objective and balanced approach to each of the key topic areas with few exceptions. In the discussion of global conflicts, some readers may disagree with his criticism of the War on Terror. While he recognizes the horror resulting from 9/11 and the need to capture the perpetrators, he describes the “war on terrorism” as “not having a well-defined enemy, army, or

country to defeat ... and has been unsuccessful to destroy them and stop further acts of terrorism” (Ahmad, p. 161). However, Ahmad points to the position of Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Laureate, who “warned of growing inequality in America as the single most destructive aspect of capitalism and the failure of rational market theories ... to correct economic imbalances in the Western world” (Ahmad, p. 3). These views will be hard to accept for some of our most diligent free-market theory advocates, but the author clarifies the results of some international policies of the West, which have been viewed adversely by individuals in underdeveloped countries. The author’s explanation of these perspectives helps the reader move beyond a parochial view for greater understanding of the thinking of people from other parts of the world.

This jam-packed book would benefit from maps and illustrations for visual helps, as demonstrated by Steger (2009) in *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*. However, it seems that Steger felt that the visual aids would overcome the limited content in his tiny volume with tiny print. To his credit, Steger also provides a view of globalization from the perspective of history, economics, politics, culture, ecology, and ideologies of globalization. Ahmad recognizes Steger’s book as exceptional in the field and provides an analysis of the other competing volumes on this subject with their strengths and weaknesses. *New Age Globalization* is more expansive, with sections on global population and demographic trends, underground global economy, global conflicts, and world religions. Its theoretical basis provides a thorough scholarly approach.

This most recent publication is not just an update of Dr. Ahmad’s previous book. Of course, this publication includes the implications of the most recent worldwide economic great recession. He emphasizes that recent events have exacerbated the division of the haves from the have-nots, rather than correct or improve the conditions of poverty throughout the world as promised by proponents of globalization. The author digs deeper than the obvious to the effects of globalization on the underground illegal activities, which are discussed from an economic perspective rather than as purely social problems. These include international drug trade, arms trade, and trafficking of women and children.

Overall, *New Age Globalization* is an impressively balanced and comprehensive book, so richly constructed as to become a reference to be returned to again and again, rather than a one-time read. The book is timely and current and thorough, while including a framework for analysis based upon major economic and sociologic theories. This book on globalization will not disappoint.

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