

**Minutes of 11/28/2001**  
**Challenge of Nation States by Global Institutions**  
**by**  
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**1. What is Globalization?**

Guest speaker Professor Levy does not believe that globalization is either a new phenomenon (see colonialism, imperialism) or that it overrides the continuing importance of nation states in structuring our lives or the global order. However, he agrees that sovereignty and particularly state autonomy has been affected by globalization. The degree and intensity is a matter of empirical investigation.

"Globalization" is a qualitative and quantitative phenomenon related to the historical process of de-territorialization and re-configuration of states in combination with the expansion of interactions and increased interdependency/connectivity of peoples, world cultures, national economies, and political structures (democracy). Globalization processes are driven particularly by new technologies (radio, TV, PC) and an increase in international trade, investment, and capital flows in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Marc F. Plattner and Alexander Smolar. 2000. *Globalization, Power, and Democracy*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, pp. ixff). Professor Levy gave various examples for the increased power of transnational and financial corporations (McDonalds, Coca-Cola, GM), worldwide communication and information exchanges (internet, CNN) and movements across borders (migration, tourism, business travel) as well as for the emergence of supranational entities (UN, EU) and the spread of cultural ties that cut across borders (music, religions).

In Levy's opinion, the recognition of globalization in academia, the media, and in the public discourse began with growing awareness about the effects of globalization. For example, people realized that environmental risks or threats of nuclear warfare do not stop at borders. How far awareness has gone shows the fact that two decades ago there would not have been a class on globalization like ours. Whereas in the past disputes between states were bounded by territory, events like September 11, 2001 drive home the point that conflicts cannot be isolated but have a global dimension and transborder causes and effects.

In our class reading, Ulrich Beck distinguishes in his article *What is Globalization?*, between "globalism," "globality," and "globalization." "Globalism" stands for the neo-liberal ideology according to which the "invisible" hand of self-regulatory markets will promote happiness of mankind without any state intervention. "Globality" represents the recognition and awareness of global interconnectedness where no "country or group can shut itself off from others,.... anything [that] happens in the world is no longer a local event." Finally, "globalization" is a term that "denotes the processes through which sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities and networks,.....which creates transnational social links and spaces, revalues local cultures, and promotes third

cultures.” It is a definition reflecting the processes that create interdependence. Globalization, in Professor Levy's own words, is a "dialectic process not only about people going into the world, but also about the world coming back into our homes,” for example through media channels, news, music and fashion styles, food, etc.

## **2. The Challenge of Nation States**

Nation states enviously try to maintain their assets of autonomy and sovereignty against the onslaught of globalization forces attempting to wrest control from them. While states for the most part keep their sovereignty intact, their autonomy to do what they want is more and more limited by globalization processes. This is most visible in the case of transnational organizations, such as the WTO and IMF, who prescribe economic policies to countries who want to get a loan. Russia, for example, was in the 1990's prevented to print more Roubles (the local currency) and required to curb inflation. Otherwise they would not have received several billion dollar loans. South Africa's Apartheid regime was boycotted internationally for their racist policies and eventually forced to comply. Other examples are former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan (who lost both, sovereignty AND autonomy through intervention by outside powers). State sovereignty and autonomy are more and more constrained by the proliferation of multilateral agreements and supranational regional or international organizations, such as the EU, NAFTA, or the UN. The introduction of the Euro currency on January 1, 2002, is an example of how national currency sovereignty is curbed among EU members states. At the same time there is pressure on nation states' autonomy and sovereignty from sub-national levels. Witness, e.g., separatist movements (Quebec, Northern Ireland) or fragmentation processes (West Africa., see the Kaplan article) who wrest power and (legitimate) authority from state governments.

## **3. Class Discussion**

The question was brought up if cultural globalization, defined as hegemonic "Americanization" or "Disneyfication," is a threat to nations and states. This was rejected as a simplification of real processes of cultural interpenetration. The fact is that the U.S. consumer culture itself is a hybrid or mixture of other, originally non-American, cultures. Globalization, as the Hodson article *'Intercourse in every Direction': America as a Global Phenomenon* demonstrates, works both ways, though perhaps not equally strong. Second, as Barber's book *Jihad vs. McWorld* explains, other people and cultures react with resentment if they feel threatened.

On the other hand, one needs to be careful not to fall into the trap of interpreting global conflict through a cultural lens only. This would lead us to conclude that the roots of conflict are not about different interests, power, resources, territory, or ideology (as during the Cold War's clash of 'capitalism' vs. 'communism') but about a *Clash of Civilizations* (Huntington). This is a far too general conclusion and ignores the multitude of criss-crossing loyalties and causes of tensions. For example, the current conflict in Afghanistan is not simply a war between the "West" and Islam. The Taliban and anti-Taliban forces have the SAME or similar religious and ethnic background. The Gulf War against Iraq was supported by an alliance of Western AND non-Western countries. And fundamentalist, radical, sectarian, or anti-globalization protest

movements are not just the result of backward countries or cultures. They are in most instances a MODERN phenomenon and reflect the "downside" of globalization felt and feared in the West AND East, North AND South by the Left AND the Right, by religious AND non-religious groups and social movements. See, for example, the anti-WTO protest in Seattle (1999) respectively in Qatar (2001), or the existence of Christian, Jewish, AND Islamic fundamentalist movements in the West. Even current policies of the Bush government curbing civil rights in the name of security are a fearful reaction to globalization, i.e. global terrorism.

We concluded, that globalization, driven mainly by new technologies and trade, profit-making and outreach for more power, reaches almost into every locale and influences the way on what we spent our money, how we work, dress, eat, relax, it affects even our dreams or nightmares. Therefore, it is increasingly difficult to escape the influence of globalization processes since they are penetrating our daily lives. If there are differences between locales, groups, and individuals, they are differences of degree of exposure and internalization/consumption (see the comparative example of NYC versus the Mid-West). In general the class felt that our readings for the semester we summarized and applied during this last guest lecture very well.