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globalization

The term “globalization” emerged from management and business literature in the 1970s to describe new strategies for worldwide production and distribution, entering the social sciences through **geography** and sociology, and the humanities through **anthropology** and cultural studies.

Globalization is generally used in academic discourse to describe the purportedly world-encompassing reach of global corporations; the unprecedented flows of goods, money, people, and images across national boundaries; and the concomitant possible demise or transformation of the nation-state and of sovereignty. The term is also used to describe post-Fordist strategies of flexible accumulation such as niche marketing and just-in-time production as opposed to Fordist strategies of mass marketing based on large inventories, and changes in finance and the meaning of money with the end of the Bretton Woods system of capital controls and fixed exchange rates.

Analytically, the term has been used in two ways. First, it functions as a response to earlier theories of capitalism, such as the world systems theory of Immanuel Wallerstein and the world historical perspective of Fernand Braudel. Globalization scholars ask whether there is anything new about the current era of global capitalism, answering that question by directing attention away from mechanistic or totalizing theories of capital and **history**, and toward the contingent metaphysics of movement entailed in global systems of production and consumption. Instead, emphasis is placed upon forms of identity construction and power, and incompleteness and **indeterminacy**.

Second, it functions as a response to triumph-alist narratives of globalization put forth in business literature and by theorists of the “end of history” or the “end of geography” who view three events as completing the modern project of bringing the peoples of the world under the benevolent mantle of one rational system: the global reach of capitalism, the demise of the socialist bloc, and the creation of new information technologies. Critics respond to these narratives by challenging their tropes of dominance, totality, and penetration, and by directing attention to the problematic iconography in corporate rhetoric that recognizes globalization as the new idiom of power. As an alternative, such scholars present images of the globe in order to call attention to global civil societies emerging in tandem with or in response to global capitalism, highlighting hybridity hyperre-ality and paradoxical identity formations co-occurring with postmodernity.

See also: Jameson, Frederic

Further reading

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