

Review  
“Die globalisierte Welt:  
Genese, Struktur und Zusammenhänge”  
by Vincent Houben and Boike Rehbein<sup>1</sup>

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The book under review, *Die globalisierte Welt: Genese, Struktur und Zusammenhänge* [*The Globalized World: Genesis, Structure, and Interrelationships*] by Vincent Houben and Boike Rehbein, investigates the historical, regional, and contemporary dimensions of globalization. As the authors interpret globalization as the unfolding process of global capitalist integration, the book is about global capitalism.

The text is the result of a series of lecture courses given by two authors at the Humboldt University of Berlin since 2009. As a participant and contributor to these courses, the reviewer can identify three specific Global Studies Programme (GSP) modules informing the book: Theories of Globalization, Social Theories, and Methodology. While Vincent Houben primarily taught Theories of Globalization, Boike Rehbein taught Social Theories and the methodology module. In the latter of the two modules, Rehbein shared insights from his ongoing research project on global inequality, the results of which can be found in the book. Through their collaborative effort, the authors have synthesized the disciplines of global studies with area studies, examining the unique characteristics of various world regions and their dependence on global structures (19). This alone confirms the perfect marriage of the two fields.

By remaining strictly loyal to the book’s wording, the critical research question of the text can be formulated as follows: How has the five-century-long progression of globalization contributed to the unequal integration of world regions/areas and the development and establishment of the present-day worldwide capitalist structure? The hypothesis can be formulated as follows: The uneven integration of world regions results from the interaction of international capitalism, colonial endeavors, and the nation-state framework, leading to the transformation of regional, national, and worldwide power dynamics (9–10).

Departing from the above-mentioned statement and interpreting the content itself will give better insight. The book is about understanding and explaining the structures of uneven integration in the current world order. It puts a particular emphasis on global capitalism and its relationship to colonialism and the nation-state system. This is how the book contextualizes and examines Western social theories regarding their relevance to other regions. It argues that the social sciences have predominantly pursued a Eurocentric universalization paradigm, and this tendency has obscured other perspectives of the world and prevented adequate knowledge of it.

This is why the book seeks to contextualize and examine the bearing of Western social theories on other parts of the world and to understand and explain the structure of the contemporary world.

The introduction outlines the book's primary objective to interconnect four theses woven throughout the chapters, exploring the complexities of globalization. The theses cover 1) globalization as a five-century process rooted in capitalism, colonialism, and state apparatus; 2) world region integration involving the transformation and persistence of earlier structures; 3) an analysis of interdependent structures from local to global levels; and 4) the brief domination of Europe and the United States in global capitalism, leading to a multicentric world. These core concepts create a comprehensive framework for understanding globalization's intricate dynamics.

In order to deliver its arguments, the work is organized into three parts. Part I is dedicated to providing a historical overview of the development of the structures of what the authors refer to as uneven integration. To do so, they discuss the origins of the world system, taking a direct excursion to world-systems theory. Naturally, the rise of Europe and the consequential global spread of capitalism are given substantial space in the text. Overall in Part I, the authors set the stage for a critical examination of the role of European colonialism in shaping the global capitalist system.

Building on this background, Part II delves into the sociocultural and historical contexts of various world regions. This undertaking emphasizes the importance of understanding Western social theories in relation to other world regions. The approach challenges the Eurocentric perspective by showcasing the impact of colonialism on different regions and the emergence of postcolonial sociocultures. The authors argue that a deeper understanding of these regional histories is crucial to grasp global structures' complexity and diversity fully.

Part III examines the contemporary global landscape, focusing on the world economy, institutions, culture, and inequality. It explores the capitalist economy's development, the role of global institutions, the impact of globalization on culture, and the historical and structural roots of inequality. These chapters provide a comprehensive understanding of the interconnected aspects of the global landscape, highlighting the complex relationships between the economy, institutions, culture, and inequality.

Against this background, we can evaluate if different parts of the book support the stated research questions and the hypothesis. Part I thoroughly analyzes uneven integration in the contemporary world, emphasizing global capitalism's ties to colonialism and the nation-state system. It advocates for a non-Eurocentric approach to understanding global structures better. It explores the historical development of colonialism, the nation-state, and global capitalism, successfully reinforcing the research question and hypothesis.

Part II delves into various world regions' sociocultural and historical contexts, highlighting the need for a contextual approach to understanding global structures beyond Eurocentric theories. By examining the regional impacts of colonialism, postcolonial sociocultures, and social class differences, the text supports the research question and hypothesis on comprehending uneven integration in the contemporary world.

Part III examines various aspects of the contemporary world, such as the global economy, institutions, cultural globalization, and inequality. These sections also support the research question and hypothesis, focusing on understanding uneven integration, global capitalism, colonialism,

and the nation-state system. The book highlights the need for a more nuanced and contextualized approach, critiquing the dominance of Eurocentric social theories.

The organization of the text is well-suited to its topic, with a logical progression of its content. Each part focuses on a specific subject matter, building upon previous knowledge with each chapter. While the structure may make the text feel segmented, it effectively allows the authors to comprehensively explore the research question and hypothesis. One potential limitation of the organization is that the division into three parts might make it difficult for readers to navigate and find the specific information they are looking for quickly. Additionally, some readers may find the content too topical, making it less accessible to a broader audience as it does not allow uninterrupted reading.

The book offers a successful interdisciplinary analysis of globalization and capitalism, highlighting their complexities and heterogeneity. It challenges Eurocentric perspectives and emphasizes the importance of including the perspectives and knowledge of the Global South in the social sciences and humanities. However, part of the analysis may be overly theoretical and complex for a particular group of readers, limiting its accessibility. From another particular perspective, the book's focus on the sociocultural dimensions of globalization and capitalism, rather than the economic and political aspects, may also be seen as misleading. The author of this review does not necessarily agree with these potential critiques, but they are worth mentioning as they relate to the concerns of the broader readership.

The book calls for a more contextualized approach to understanding the structures of the contemporary world. To support this suggestion, the authors offer a detailed analysis of the evolution of globalization, capitalism, and sociocultures. Due to the nature of this critical engagement, the authors render themselves vulnerable to the critique that they have yet to explore further a dialogue between Western and non-Western forms of knowledge production more attentively. Despite best intentions, the book focuses mainly on the limitations of "Eurocentric science."

While there are some limitations, as would be the case with any work, the book is an essential reading for our field. It challenges the reader who, often without knowing, may be lost in the dominant worldview to reconsider the complexities of our world. In a certain sense, remembering the role of historical context in shaping present structures and hierarchies is a much-needed reminder for many social science practices today. This compelling examination of the multifaceted nature of globalization and capitalism critically scrutinizes prevailing narratives and misconceptions on the subject. It is essential reading for scholars and students seeking to contemplate our current critical times.

It would be appropriate to finish with a remark for the students of the two authors. Although the book's arrival might seem less than optimal from their perspective, as they may have preferred the guidance it offers at the beginning of their studies, it should be possible to see it from at least two perspectives. First, the book remains a valuable resource for students at any stage of their academic journey. As it provides a comprehensive summary of the guiding questions and content of the core courses, it will be equally beneficial during the research phase when revisiting learning material. Second, both authors remained committed to Socratic teaching principles in their careers, emphasizing that learning is a proactive, engaging process that deepens understanding as connections between concepts and theories form. From such a viewpoint, there should not be a need for a guiding manual for independent critical thinkers. It is a highly recommended read

for scholars and students in our field.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Houben, Vincent, and Boike Rehbein. 2002. Die globalisierte Welt: Genese, Struktur und Zusammenhänge. Stuttgart: UTB GmbH.

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