Globalization and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure

B Meyer & P Geschiere (Eds.) Blackwell Publishers

One of the fundamental paradoxes of globalization is that its tendencies towards homogenisation, through for example communication, transport or McDonaldization, are often offset by continued - if not intensified - tendencies towards cultural heterogeneity. This book brings together contributors from the USA and mainland Europe to discuss of this tension between ‘global flow’ on the one hand and ‘cultural closure’ and the other and its relationship to personal and national identity. Following an introduction by the editors the volume is divided into three sections. In the first, contributions focus on the bi-directional ‘pull’ on individual identity of the national and the transnational through detailed case studies of the Soviet Union, early twentieth century China, nineteenth century Senegal and finally contemporary Europe. The second section continues this emphasis on empirical cases with contributors discussing the flows and closures associated with forms of consumer goods. Two of the contributors in particular discuss the ambivalent reaction to western consumer goods in post-colonial Africa and the manner in which the simultaneous fascination and deep suspicion engendered by them are placed within wider narratives of ‘Born Again’ Christianity and witchcraft. Finally, in the concluding section the emphasis shifts to the theoretical with three contributors discussing Anderson’s Imagined Communities, the transformations occurring within African society and ethnic violence in the global age respectively. This mixture of the empirical and the theoretical as well as the emphasis on globalization as an ambivalent situation of flow and closure are the main strengths of this volume and as such it serves as a useful introduction to the topic, if not at least to those are put off by the overly theoretical approaches usually associated with the subject matter.