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# BOOK REVIEW: *JIHAD VS. MCWORLD* AND DEMOCRACY

FRED DONALDSON

*JIHAD VS. MCWORLD: HOW GLOBALISM AND TRIBALISM ARE RESHAPING THE WORLD.*  
Benjamin R. Barber, New York: Ballantine Books, 1996. 389pp.

The cover of the book *Jihad vs. McWorld*, by Benjamin Barber, shows a veiled Muslim woman holding a can of Pepsi. This photograph illustrates the stark contrast between two simultaneous and very active global forces: Jihad, or tribalism, and McWorld, or economic globalization. Barber successfully shows the occurrence of McWorld and Jihad through the use of examples, statistics, and observations. Barber explains that Jihad is a backlash against McWorld and explores, in the pages of this book, the interactions between these two global processes.

Barber uses automobile manufacturing and anecdotal statistics to describe McWorld, which represents economic globalization. He notes that in the new global economy it has become difficult to trace automobile genealogy. For example, labels required by a 1994 U.S. law reveal that Chrysler Corporation's Dodge Stealth is manufactured in Nagoya, Japan, while the Mitsubishi Eclipse is produced in Normal,

Illinois (25). Through the process of economic globalization, "American" cars can be built in Japan, while "Japanese" cars are built in America. Anecdotal statistics, cited by Barber, bolster his evidence regarding the occurrence of McWorld. McDonald's restaurants serve 20 million customers around the world every day, which is more than the people in Greece, Ireland, and Switzerland combined. Furthermore, the \$2.4 billion's worth of pizzas sold in 1991 by Domino's alone was enough to fund the collective government expenditures of Senegal, Uganda, Bolivia, and Iceland (24). These figures show the power and size of some of today's multinational corporations.

According to Barber, McWorld undermines democracy because it advocates business interests that conflict with state goals, increases interdependency, and disconnects citizens from public matters. Barber posits that McWorld does not recognize full employment as a public good. Business efficiency leads to capital-intensive

production, resulting in labor-minimizing job policies. For example, technological innovations and developments of new farm machinery have changed the nature of American agriculture. Though still a dominant world producer, America now employs just 2% of the workforce to grow crops, compared to 80% previously (27). Barber also believes that at the same time that McWorld increases global interdependency, it threatens democracy by moving nations away from self-sufficiency. Barber shows the existence of global interdependency by analyzing U.S. reliance on foreign oil and arguing that most countries import a large amount of the mineral, agricultural, and other resources they use (35).

McWorld damages democracy by causing citizens to lose interest in public affairs. Uncomfortable with what they see in a self-absorbed private sector and an unsympathetic government, consumption-weary people find themselves politically alienated (280). This problem is rooted in the way McWorld views people: citizens are nothing more than consumers. The economy, rather than democratic participation, controls policy. Without citizens, democracy is impossible. McWorld, rather than pursuing equality and justice, entertains a "bloodless economics of profit" (8). Citing Robert Putman, Barber states, "when people start bowling alone instead of together in leagues this [is a sign of] trouble for democracy" (275). The resulting lack of citizenship weakens the community institutions on which a civil society must rest.

The second section of the book discusses Jihad. Barber states that even while McWorld is bringing the world closer together through economic connections, Jihad is fragmenting it through tribalism. Jihad manifests itself in many forms: from provincialism, parochialism, and religious struggle to bloody wars on behalf of partisan identity and resistance to modernity. Barber uses the term *Jihad* to suggest extreme dogmatic devotion applied to any group, whether religious, political, or ethnic. Jihad identifies the self by contrasting it with an alien "other" and makes politics an exercise in exclusion and resentment.

A diluted version of Jihad can be seen in a tendency to resist modernity in Western Europe. "Provincialism, which sets the periphery against the center, and parochialism, which disdains the cosmopolitan...are hostile to the capital city and all it stands for." Small-town citizens are less threatened by decentralized power; they embrace the concept of town or ward government. By this reasoning, residents of Barcelona or Lyon feel freer than those of Madrid or Paris and so on. Parochialism objects to cosmopolitanism and commercialism, forces that corrupt human association. Shying away from modernity, supporters of Jihad bunker-up in local communities, seeking a return to tradition and ways of the past (169-70).

Barber believes that Jihad is at war with McWorld. An example of this war can be seen in the criticism offered by Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Islamic group known as the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Banna criticized Westerners for "importing their half-naked women into these regions, together with their liquors, their theaters, their dance halls, their amusement, their stories, their newspapers, their novels, their whims, their silly games, and their vices." Barber notes that al-Banna believed that the culture of the West was "more dangerous than political and military campaigns" (210). This quote and other examples are used as evidence that Jihad is a backlash against McWorld.

In Barber's opinion, the Christian Right's campaign for a return to family values is an American example of Jihad. The American Jihad exists in the Protestants who rebel against the culture generated by McWorld in their midst. In this McWorld, despised "liberal" politicians undermine their belief systems with textbooks that preach evolution and schools that bar prayer (212).

Barber states that although Jihad and McWorld are opposing forces, they can be observed in the same country at the same instant. "Iranian zealots keep one ear tuned to the mullahs urging holy war and the other cocked to Rupert Murdoch's Star television beaming in *Dynasty*, *Donahue*, and *The Simpsons* from hovering satellites" (4-5). Other examples include fundamentalists in the United

States plotting virtual conspiracies over the Internet and the Russian Orthodox Church teaming up with California businessmen to bottle and sell natural waters blessed by Patriarch Aleksey II. Barber argues that Jihad is detrimental to democracy within the country where it manifests itself because it destroys the mind-set that allows democracy to function. Jihad's demand for extreme devotion also limits its access to real power in a centralized independent world. Although tribes and religious clans have democratic possibilities, Jihad does not lead to the democratic values and institutions of the nation-states they fragment (233). His assertions are confirmed by historical facts, such as the military coup that ousted the formerly democratic government in Pakistan.

While Barber shows that Jihad is detrimental to democracy, his conclusions about the negative impact of globalization on democracy are debatable. Barber himself admits that economic freedom eventually leads to democracy. In a regrettable choice of examples, he uses the former Soviet Union to show that economic freedom leads to democracy in a very slow and unpredictable way. But Perestroika, an economic reform policy, was only enacted in the mid-1980s, and it quickly became the catalyst for the dismantling of the totalitarian state in the early 1990s. Other countries that have successfully transitioned to democracy from totalitarianism through economic programs include South Korea, Chile, and Hungary.

Barber's claim that McWorld harms democracy by decreasing citizen participation in public affairs is also questionable. Economic globalization has unintended positive effects on democracy. In some respects, the Internet and other innovations resulting from economic

globalization actually facilitate civic participation, thus bolstering democracy. The amount of information available at the touch of a button for individual consumption and analysis is staggering. Economic globalization often increases civic participation by creating a more-involved and better-informed citizenry. This in turn results in greater government accountability and improved democratic processes.

In the last chapter of the book, Barber offers a radical solution to the problem of eroding global democracy caused by Jihad and McWorld: the establishment of a global confederation with a single civil society. This organization would resemble the loose unit set up by the original American colonies in the Articles of Confederation. Such a confederation would allow current nation-states to "create, bottom-up, a global association" (289). According to Barber, this new organization would offer a starting place to defend against the depredations of both Jihad and McWorld.

Barber's failure to consider economic prosperity, a result of globalization, more desirable than a strong civil society and his advocacy of an idealistic world confederacy show the reader his political paradigm. Barber advocates increased democracy on a global scale as opposed to increased localized democracy. For Barber, it is global democracy alone that can bring together a planet torn apart by the opposing forces of Jihad and McWorld.

*Fredric Donaldson is a senior from Pleasant Grove, Utah, majoring in geography with a minor in political science. He plans to go on to do graduate work in political geography and law. He would also like to thank his wife Julie for all of her support.*