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I have come to expect a great deal from Harm de Blij over the years and he has always delivered. So, when I was presented the opportunity to review this new look at globalization from the de Blij perspective I jumped at the chance. The purpose of The Power of Place is to examine the many assertions of a flattening of the earth; of the globalization we are constantly being told is leading us to a loss of regional cultures.

So how does de Blij accomplish this task considering the flattening of the earth has been widely recognized as gospel? First he introduces us to some terminology; “globals,” “locals” and “mobals”, and the concept of “rough” landscapes. The vast majority of people around the globe are locals, people who will live and die in the same general area in which they were born. These people do not participate in global culture in any substantive way, and some not at all. For these people, the world will never be flat. Some of the locals will, for various reasons, leave their village or countryside and become urbanites in search of jobs; these are the mobals. For them the world is slightly more flat. The globals, well, we are them. Every country has its share of each, just in different proportions. For the globals the world is, indeed, increasingly becoming flatter. But since the overwhelming majority of the world is made up of locals, the world for the overwhelming majority of the world is far from flat. Instead it is rough. There are many hills, valleys, and mountains on the globalization landscape out there.

To prove his point de Blij examines language, religion, human health, hazards and
disasters, political systems, economic and social development, urbanization, and supranational organizations (and the devolution they often “promote”). For example, with respect to religion, the religious landscape of the world is far from flat. Few of us are willing to give up our religious beliefs. In fact, wars are fought over religion; therefore there is no flattening taking place here. Gender is also a factor. In the vast majority of societies of the world men are more mobile, both geographically and upwardly, than are women. That makes the world, on average, flatter for men than for women. Men are also far more prominent in government than are women. Each chapter provides examples of a rough earth. For a better understanding one must read The Power of Place as I cannot do it justice here.

The result, according to de Blij, is that the world is flatter for men than for women, and flatter for globals than for others, and, on average, it is fairly rough for most of the world. It is virtually impossible to not very easily agree with de Blij. As with everything else he does, this is well researched, well thought out, and well written. As I was reading The Power of Place I was modifying globalization material in my world regional course. The world is not flat. The world is actually still relatively rough. Place does matter (and always will). de Blij has, yet again, masterfully explained why geography matters. If you care about geography, and since every one of us must, you need to get your hands on a copy. This is yet another masterpiece from Harm de Blij. This is a must for your bookshelf. ESPN would call it an “instant classic.”
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