



## Book Review

*Vanishing Borders: Protecting the Planet in the Age of Globalization* by Hilary French.  
New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000. Pp. ix + 257.

Reviewed by Kofi Ankomah

Even though there is no dearth of publications on the environment, Hilary French's book is a welcome addition to the flourishing literature in the field. *Vanishing Borders: Protecting the Planet in the Age of Globalization* is a special book in which French offers a positive view, in spite of the gloom data she unearths through research. French writes:

The world economy and natural world that it relies on are both in precarious states as we enter the new millennium, provoking fears that an era of global instability looms on the horizon. Over the course of the twentieth century, the global economy stretched the planet to its limits. The time is now ripe to build the international governance structures needed to ensure that the world economy of the twenty-first century meets people's aspiration without destroying the natural fabric that underpins life itself. (p. 12)

With lucid expressions and novel ways of engaging critically with other views, French's volume is a joy to read. Comprehensive in its engagements and encyclopaedic in its com-

mand of the coverage of the selected topics. A unique feature of the book is that it stresses the involvement of all stakeholders to salvage our planet from its ruins – what she terms “partnership for the planet.”

An introductory chapter titled “One World” prefaces the two-part volume. In Part I, (The Ecology of Globalization), French offers a vivid description of the frightening vulnerabilities of our planet. In Part II, (Reforming Global Governance,) she highlights inadequate measures that are taking shape to curb the abuse and plunder of nature's bequest. She offers some options for reforming and strengthening global environmental governance. French argues that controversies about globalization are not about just trade or traditional economic concerns, but are concerned with the impact of global decisions and their impact on the environment. Her view of globalization is a broad one, incorporating multinational corporations with transnational operations without accountability and allegiances to nations within which they operate; worldwide socio-cultural integration facilitated by information and communication technology; the spread of pollution, microbes, refugees, and other hazards across national fron-

tiers, endangering lives on the planet. French develops the idea that trade has outpaced growth in the world economy. She also argues that international investment by multi-national corporations, especially direct-foreign investment, has surpassed trade; so also has transportation by land, sea, and air also increased, with each resulting in tremendous environmental impact. The planet still lags behind in schemes to arrest the growing concerns. French calls for “putting a price tag on nature,” in order to arrest the impending decays.

In chapter 2, “Nature Under Siege,” French details the more sobering picture of the incessant depletion of the planet, in the recent past, of living species representing, “the largest mass extinction since the dinosaurs were wiped out 65 million years ago.” She sees the growth in international trade in timber, minerals and other natural products contributing to the current “unprecedented biological implosion.” In chapter 3, “The Biotic Mixing Bowl,” French notes that ecological integration, precipitated by accelerated trade and travel, has destroyed the planet’s natural defense devices that were viable when countries were isolated. For example bio-invasion is resulting from the spread of non-native exotic species through permeable borders. French documents the efforts that countries are making to avoid conforming to rules. Subsidies abound in spite of the general agreement under the Uruguay Round to eliminate them and agriculture continues to be a contentious trade issue. Even though current practices in agribusiness are posing considerable environmental stress, French sees some hope in organic farming and certification of production under environmentally friendly conditions. Chapter 5 deals with the “Export of Hazards” and highlights the dangers created by pesticides and plants, citing the Union Carbide experience in Bhopal among others, toxic trade across the oceans and overland, and the circles of poison in the air and in water bodies. “Sharing the Air”, chapter 6, concludes the Ecology of Globalization (Part I)

In Part II, “Reforming Global Governance,” French argues for transforming global commerce with environmental considerations. She calls for openness in the conduct of environmentally related disputes. She argues for strengthening treaties and institutions for managing environmental issues that transcend national boundaries. She offers some novel measures to resolve trade wars (chapter 7), such as overcoming what she terms “food fights,” “the tuna-dolphin challenge,” and “shrimp and turtles” problems. French advocates amending existing World Trade Organization agreements to confront the impending trade problems and to safeguard the world environment. She advocates openness in addressing procedural questions and resolving the spate of environmental disputes. In chapter 8, the secrecy governing trade and finance issues and the resulting ill health to the international trade and finance is addressed. French calls for an overhaul of the financial system and the strengthening of transparency in operations to facilitate accountability. Chapter 9 addresses the weaknesses in global environmental governance. In chapter 10, “Partnership for the planet”, French calls for an overhaul of the philosophy and structures of the international trade and finance systems to address the growing environmental decay. Even though she sees some transformation on the way she sees this as grossly inadequate to reverse the growing trend.

Arresting the steep decay of our planet necessitates a pan-disciplinary approach – technology, information and communication, economic, social, political, cultural, religious, and environmental. Democratic structures, including organizational structures to aid citizen participation in global decision-making, transparency in the operations of international financial institutions and trans-national corporations to be encouraged. We should seek, basically, to build global governance from the ground up. The extremely biased and unfair world that is being imposed, without consultation by the powerful, needs to be reformed for a peaceful

environment based on partnership with the people of the world. I agree with French that support to non-governmental organizations is critical to enable them to resist policies that have adverse effects on people everywhere. Our world needs to shift attention from undue emphasis on producer concerns, such as focus on cost efficiency and excessive reaping of profit,

to user satisfaction and control in a friendly environment.

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