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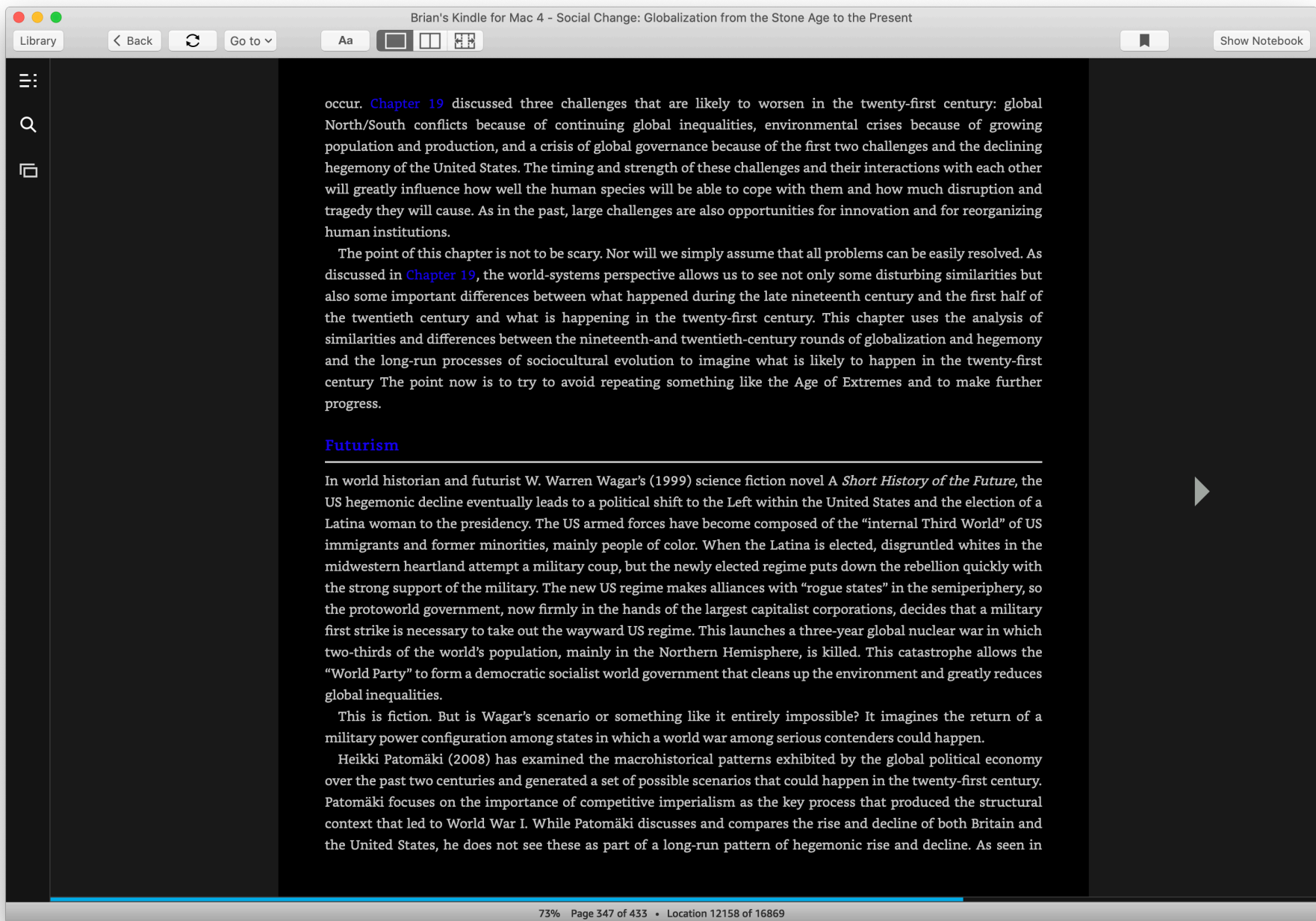
## The Next Three Futures: Another Round of US Hegemony, Global Collapse, or Global Democracy?

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Prediction is always a risky business, but some things are actually quite predictable, while others are less so. Natural cycles such as the seasons will continue, although human-caused global warming may be changing them to some extent. Human demographic processes are fairly predictable as well. Because of the spread of the demographic transition (to lower birthrates) in the Global South, demographers predict that the total population of the earth will peak around 2075. The steepness and duration of this continuing rise will determine how many people will eventually be on earth—estimates vary from 10 billion to 12 billion. The timing and height will be affected by the usual factors: food supply, diseases, and natural and human-caused disasters. The education of women and their employment in jobs outside the home are the main things that affect the demographic transition. Its rapidity or slowness and the consequent eventual size of the global population will have a huge impact on the effort to move toward a more sustainable global economy. The fewer humans that need to be accommodated, the easier the required adjustments will be.<sup>1</sup>

Cosmologists and astrophysicists observe that the sun is burning out, like a match. Eventually our solar system will turn very cold, and life will no longer be possible. But that will take another 4 billion years (Christian 2004, 487). On the scale that most humans reckon time, this is not very worrisome. Some observers think that the biosphere of the earth is seriously at risk as a result of human activities, such as from the ecological consequences of industrial capitalism (Foster 1994). But geological evidence shows that there have already been several huge species die-offs from natural causes and that the processes of biological evolution have always resumed along new paths and toward higher levels of complexity. Thus the biosphere would probably eventually recover in a few million years despite the possibility that humans might wreak unbelievable havoc on earth. It is rather we, the humans, who are primarily at risk. Because we are a large animal that requires a lot of food and energy, and because—unlike other populations of large animals (megafauna)—there are so many of us, both our civilizations and our very existence could conceivably be brought to an end by some human-caused cataclysm.

This chapter considers the likely future trends of the twenty-first century and three possible scenarios that might



occur. [Chapter 19](#) discussed three challenges that are likely to worsen in the twenty-first century: global North/South conflicts because of continuing global inequalities, environmental crises because of growing population and production, and a crisis of global governance because of the first two challenges and the declining hegemony of the United States. The timing and strength of these challenges and their interactions with each other will greatly influence how well the human species will be able to cope with them and how much disruption and tragedy they will cause. As in the past, large challenges are also opportunities for innovation and for reorganizing human institutions.

The point of this chapter is not to be scary. Nor will we simply assume that all problems can be easily resolved. As discussed in [Chapter 19](#), the world-systems perspective allows us to see not only some disturbing similarities but also some important differences between what happened during the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century and what is happening in the twenty-first century. This chapter uses the analysis of similarities and differences between the nineteenth-and twentieth-century rounds of globalization and hegemony and the long-run processes of sociocultural evolution to imagine what is likely to happen in the twenty-first century. The point now is to try to avoid repeating something like the Age of Extremes and to make further progress.

### Futurism

In world historian and futurist W. Warren Wagar's (1999) science fiction novel *A Short History of the Future*, the US hegemonic decline eventually leads to a political shift to the Left within the United States and the election of a Latina woman to the presidency. The US armed forces have become composed of the "internal Third World" of US immigrants and former minorities, mainly people of color. When the Latina is elected, disgruntled whites in the midwestern heartland attempt a military coup, but the newly elected regime puts down the rebellion quickly with the strong support of the military. The new US regime makes alliances with "rogue states" in the semiperiphery, so the protoworld government, now firmly in the hands of the largest capitalist corporations, decides that a military first strike is necessary to take out the wayward US regime. This launches a three-year global nuclear war in which two-thirds of the world's population, mainly in the Northern Hemisphere, is killed. This catastrophe allows the "World Party" to form a democratic socialist world government that cleans up the environment and greatly reduces global inequalities.

This is fiction. But is Wagar's scenario or something like it entirely impossible? It imagines the return of a military power configuration among states in which a world war among serious contenders could happen.

Heikki Patomäki (2008) has examined the macrohistorical patterns exhibited by the global political economy over the past two centuries and generated a set of possible scenarios that could happen in the twenty-first century. Patomäki focuses on the importance of competitive imperialism as the key process that produced the structural context that led to World War I. While Patomäki discusses and compares the rise and decline of both Britain and the United States, he does not see these as part of a long-run pattern of hegemonic rise and decline. As seen in



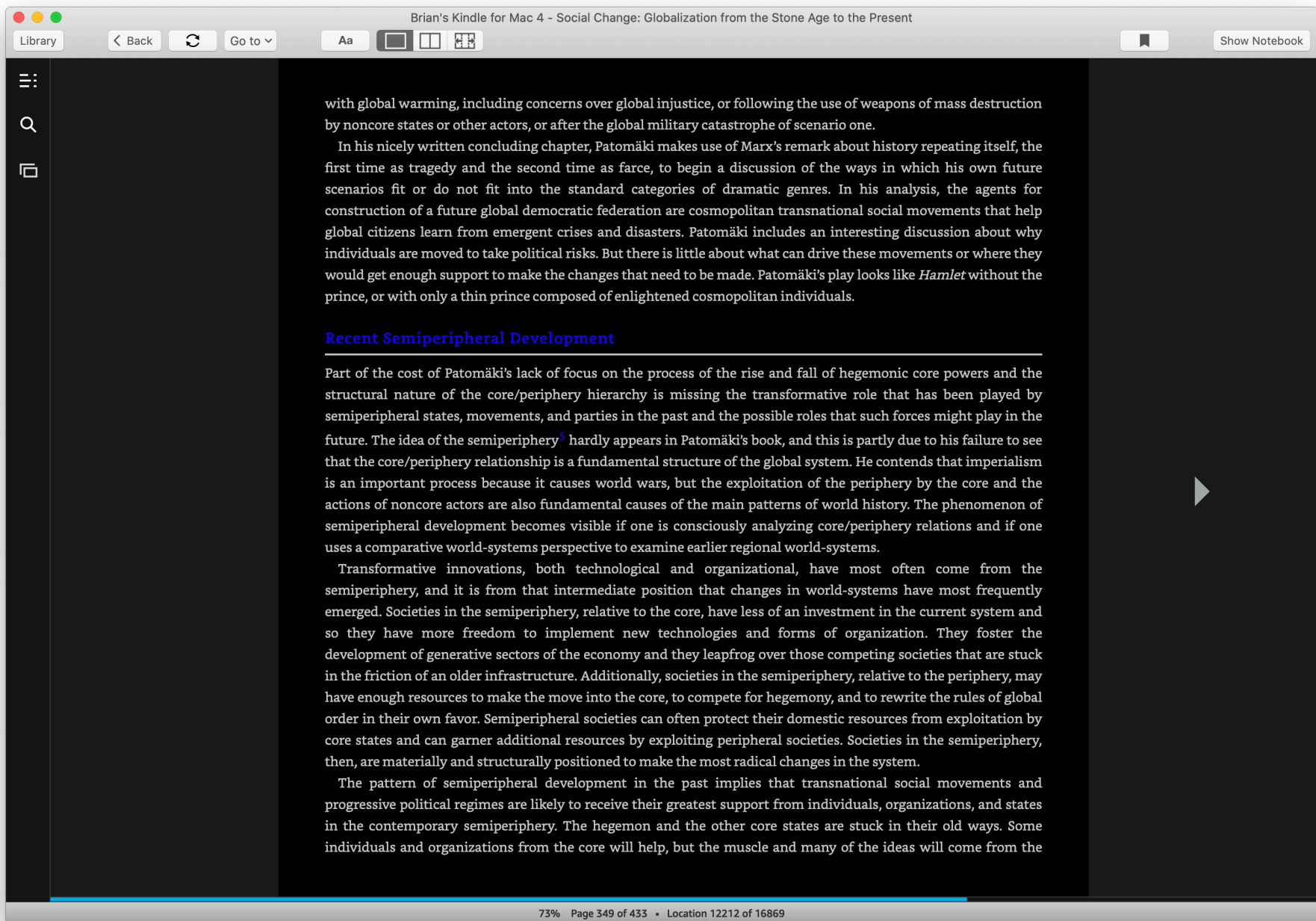
earlier chapters, all hierarchical interpolity systems experience a sequence of the centralization and decentralization of power in which a powerful polity emerges and then declines. In the modern world-system, this has taken the form of the Dutch, British, and US hegemonies. Both Immanuel Wallerstein (1984) and George Modelski and William R. Thompson (1996) have outlined a sequence of stages that each hegemonic rise and fall passed through. Giovanni Arrighi (1994) depicted this as an evolutionary process of the development of the relationship between state power and finance capital in which more and more functions of the whole world-system have become internalized within the purview of the hegemonic state. This provides a centuries-long perspective on the evolution of global governance and implies future state formation, although Arrighi did not develop this implication of his model (but see Chase-Dunn et al. 2009).

Patomäki discusses the causes and effects of the revolution of 1848 in some detail, though he does not see the connections among the socialist forces in Europe, the new Christian sects in the United States,<sup>2</sup> and the Taiping Rebellion<sup>3</sup> in China that made it a world revolution. He also sees the importance (mainly negative) of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 but does not mention connections with the Mexican and Chinese revolutions in the same decade. He also discusses the student-led world revolution of 1968 to some extent, though he does not mention the links with the Cultural Revolution in China. A more systemic approach to world revolutions could serve to inform the project to construct a global democratic federation that Patomäki favors for the future. Patomäki has elsewhere discussed the world-historical emergence of global political parties since the nineteenth century (Patomäki and Teivainen 2008). And yet in his 2008 book, *The Political Economy of Global Security*, Patomäki claims that global civil society first emerged in the 1990s. In earlier chapters we discussed how elites have organized world parties at least since the Protestant Reformation (e.g., the Jesuits), and popular transnational social movements and parties became important players in world politics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Were these not earlier forms of global civil society?

Patomäki's possible future scenarios include (1) war among the core states and regions, (2) peaceful and democratic reforms of global governance, and (3) global warming or a catastrophe as a trigger for global reform. The trigger for all of the scenarios is the continued downslide of the global political economy that began in the mid-1970s. The first scenario, global military catastrophe, is spurred by a desperate United States and/or regional "superstates" such as the EU. It occurs because competing neo-imperialisms are marked by "reciprocal securitisation<sup>4</sup> and enemy construction" (2008, 159). The potential mechanisms for this scenario are uneven economic growth, global financial crises and the decline of the US dollar, the deleterious effects of neoliberalism that exacerbate inequality, competition over scarce resources, de-democratization, and an armaments race.

In Patomäki's second scenario, global governance is reformed by leaders of movements with new ideas for "regulatory innovation." Patomäki suggests that this could occur through collective learning from past and present failures of the global political economy, or, more likely, in response to the deepening economic crisis, failed states, and war.

His third scenario sees reform of the global political economy that occurs as a response to problems associated



with global warming, including concerns over global injustice, or following the use of weapons of mass destruction by noncore states or other actors, or after the global military catastrophe of scenario one.

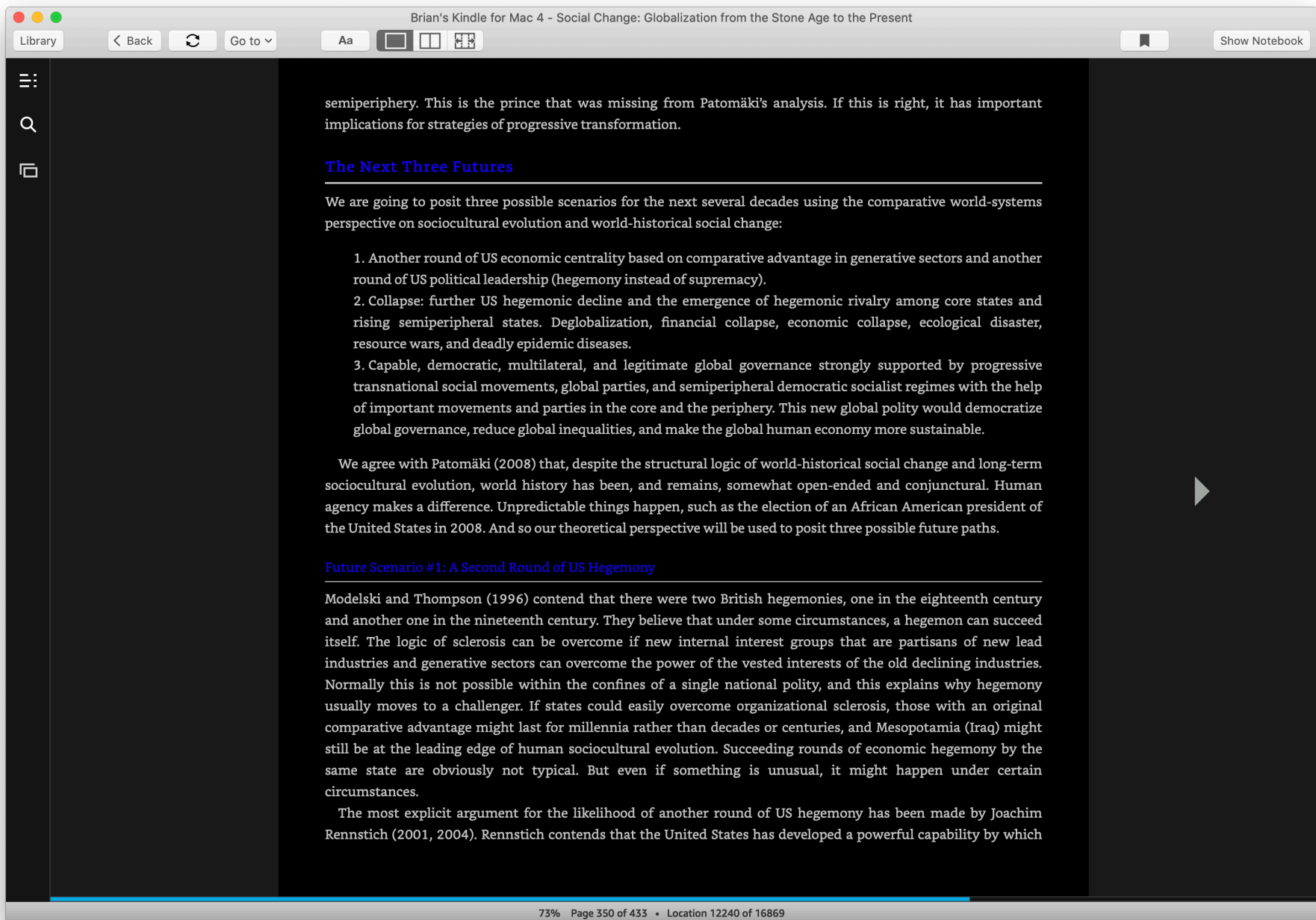
In his nicely written concluding chapter, Patomäki makes use of Marx's remark about history repeating itself, the first time as tragedy and the second time as farce, to begin a discussion of the ways in which his own future scenarios fit or do not fit into the standard categories of dramatic genres. In his analysis, the agents for construction of a future global democratic federation are cosmopolitan transnational social movements that help global citizens learn from emergent crises and disasters. Patomäki includes an interesting discussion about why individuals are moved to take political risks. But there is little about what can drive these movements or where they would get enough support to make the changes that need to be made. Patomäki's play looks like *Hamlet* without the prince, or with only a thin prince composed of enlightened cosmopolitan individuals.

### Recent Semiperipheral Development

Part of the cost of Patomäki's lack of focus on the process of the rise and fall of hegemonic core powers and the structural nature of the core/periphery hierarchy is missing the transformative role that has been played by semiperipheral states, movements, and parties in the past and the possible roles that such forces might play in the future. The idea of the semiperiphery<sup>5</sup> hardly appears in Patomäki's book, and this is partly due to his failure to see that the core/periphery relationship is a fundamental structure of the global system. He contends that imperialism is an important process because it causes world wars, but the exploitation of the periphery by the core and the actions of noncore actors are also fundamental causes of the main patterns of world history. The phenomenon of semiperipheral development becomes visible if one is consciously analyzing core/periphery relations and if one uses a comparative world-systems perspective to examine earlier regional world-systems.

Transformative innovations, both technological and organizational, have most often come from the semiperiphery, and it is from that intermediate position that changes in world-systems have most frequently emerged. Societies in the semiperiphery, relative to the core, have less of an investment in the current system and so they have more freedom to implement new technologies and forms of organization. They foster the development of generative sectors of the economy and they leapfrog over those competing societies that are stuck in the friction of an older infrastructure. Additionally, societies in the semiperiphery, relative to the periphery, may have enough resources to make the move into the core, to compete for hegemony, and to rewrite the rules of global order in their own favor. Semiperipheral societies can often protect their domestic resources from exploitation by core states and can garner additional resources by exploiting peripheral societies. Societies in the semiperiphery, then, are materially and structurally positioned to make the most radical changes in the system.

The pattern of semiperipheral development in the past implies that transnational social movements and progressive political regimes are likely to receive their greatest support from individuals, organizations, and states in the contemporary semiperiphery. The hegemon and the other core states are stuck in their old ways. Some individuals and organizations from the core will help, but the muscle and many of the ideas will come from the



semiperiphery. This is the prince that was missing from Patomäki's analysis. If this is right, it has important implications for strategies of progressive transformation.

### The Next Three Futures

We are going to posit three possible scenarios for the next several decades using the comparative world-systems perspective on sociocultural evolution and world-historical social change:

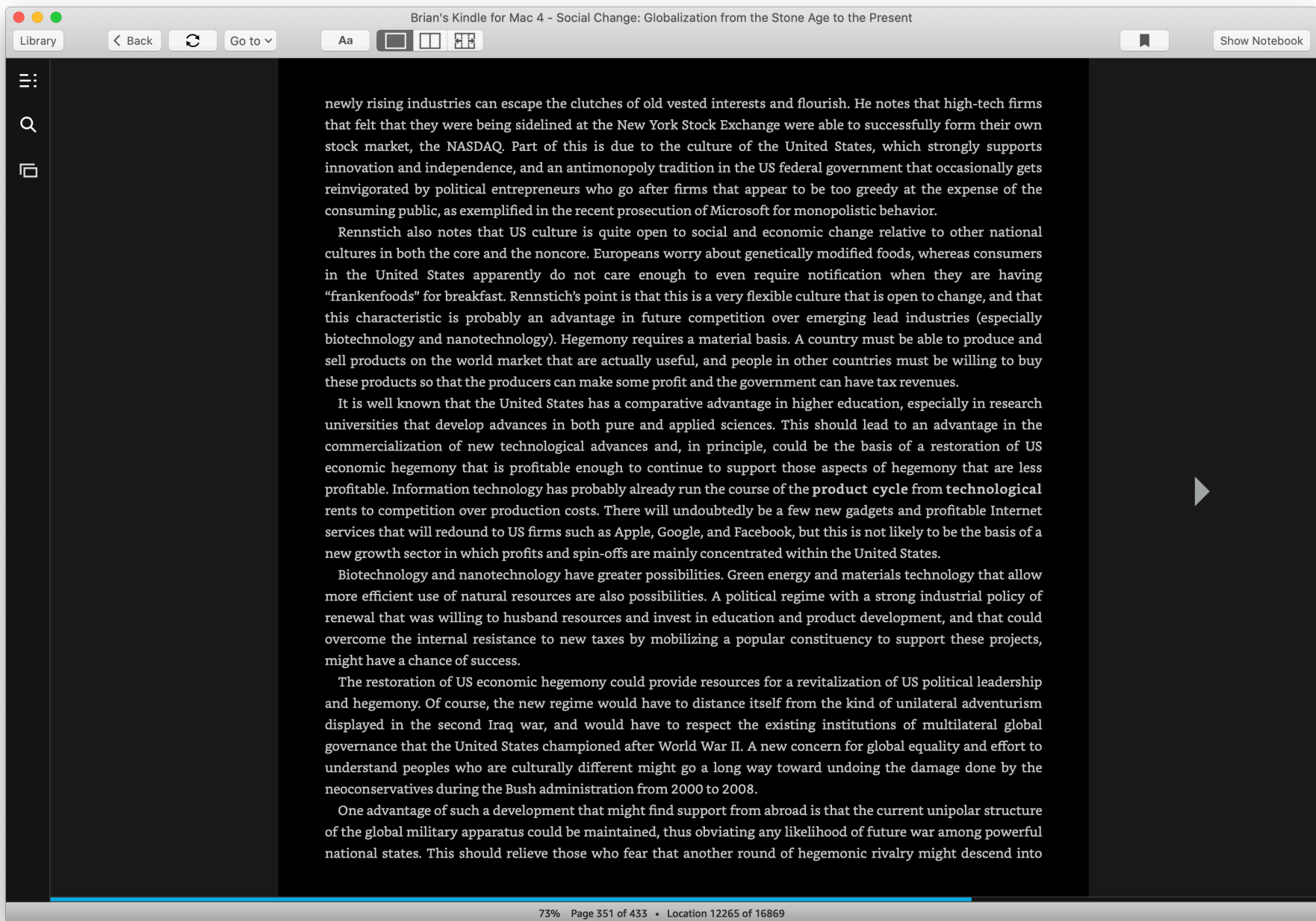
1. Another round of US economic centrality based on comparative advantage in generative sectors and another round of US political leadership (hegemony instead of supremacy).
2. Collapse: further US hegemonic decline and the emergence of hegemonic rivalry among core states and rising semiperipheral states. Deglobalization, financial collapse, economic collapse, ecological disaster, resource wars, and deadly epidemic diseases.
3. Capable, democratic, multilateral, and legitimate global governance strongly supported by progressive transnational social movements, global parties, and semiperipheral democratic socialist regimes with the help of important movements and parties in the core and the periphery. This new global polity would democratize global governance, reduce global inequalities, and make the global human economy more sustainable.

We agree with Patomäki (2008) that, despite the structural logic of world-historical social change and long-term sociocultural evolution, world history has been, and remains, somewhat open-ended and conjunctural. Human agency makes a difference. Unpredictable things happen, such as the election of an African American president of the United States in 2008. And so our theoretical perspective will be used to posit three possible future paths.

#### Future Scenario #1: A Second Round of US Hegemony

Modelski and Thompson (1996) contend that there were two British hegemonies, one in the eighteenth century and another one in the nineteenth century. They believe that under some circumstances, a hegemon can succeed itself. The logic of sclerosis can be overcome if new internal interest groups that are partisans of new lead industries and generative sectors can overcome the power of the vested interests of the old declining industries. Normally this is not possible within the confines of a single national polity, and this explains why hegemony usually moves to a challenger. If states could easily overcome organizational sclerosis, those with an original comparative advantage might last for millennia rather than decades or centuries, and Mesopotamia (Iraq) might still be at the leading edge of human sociocultural evolution. Succeeding rounds of economic hegemony by the same state are obviously not typical. But even if something is unusual, it might happen under certain circumstances.

The most explicit argument for the likelihood of another round of US hegemony has been made by Joachim Rennstich (2001, 2004). Rennstich contends that the United States has developed a powerful capability by which



newly rising industries can escape the clutches of old vested interests and flourish. He notes that high-tech firms that felt that they were being sidelined at the New York Stock Exchange were able to successfully form their own stock market, the NASDAQ. Part of this is due to the culture of the United States, which strongly supports innovation and independence, and an antimonopoly tradition in the US federal government that occasionally gets reinvigorated by political entrepreneurs who go after firms that appear to be too greedy at the expense of the consuming public, as exemplified in the recent prosecution of Microsoft for monopolistic behavior.

Rennstich also notes that US culture is quite open to social and economic change relative to other national cultures in both the core and the noncore. Europeans worry about genetically modified foods, whereas consumers in the United States apparently do not care enough to even require notification when they are having "frankenfoods" for breakfast. Rennstich's point is that this is a very flexible culture that is open to change, and that this characteristic is probably an advantage in future competition over emerging lead industries (especially biotechnology and nanotechnology). Hegemony requires a material basis. A country must be able to produce and sell products on the world market that are actually useful, and people in other countries must be willing to buy these products so that the producers can make some profit and the government can have tax revenues.

It is well known that the United States has a comparative advantage in higher education, especially in research universities that develop advances in both pure and applied sciences. This should lead to an advantage in the commercialization of new technological advances and, in principle, could be the basis of a restoration of US economic hegemony that is profitable enough to continue to support those aspects of hegemony that are less profitable. Information technology has probably already run the course of the product cycle from technological rents to competition over production costs. There will undoubtedly be a few new gadgets and profitable Internet services that will redound to US firms such as Apple, Google, and Facebook, but this is not likely to be the basis of a new growth sector in which profits and spin-offs are mainly concentrated within the United States.

Biotechnology and nanotechnology have greater possibilities. Green energy and materials technology that allow more efficient use of natural resources are also possibilities. A political regime with a strong industrial policy of renewal that was willing to husband resources and invest in education and product development, and that could overcome the internal resistance to new taxes by mobilizing a popular constituency to support these projects, might have a chance of success.

The restoration of US economic hegemony could provide resources for a revitalization of US political leadership and hegemony. Of course, the new regime would have to distance itself from the kind of unilateral adventurism displayed in the second Iraq war, and would have to respect the existing institutions of multilateral global governance that the United States championed after World War II. A new concern for global equality and effort to understand peoples who are culturally different might go a long way toward undoing the damage done by the neoconservatives during the Bush administration from 2000 to 2008.

One advantage of such a development that might find support from abroad is that the current unipolar structure of the global military apparatus could be maintained, thus obviating any likelihood of future war among powerful national states. This should relieve those who fear that another round of hegemonic rivalry might descend into



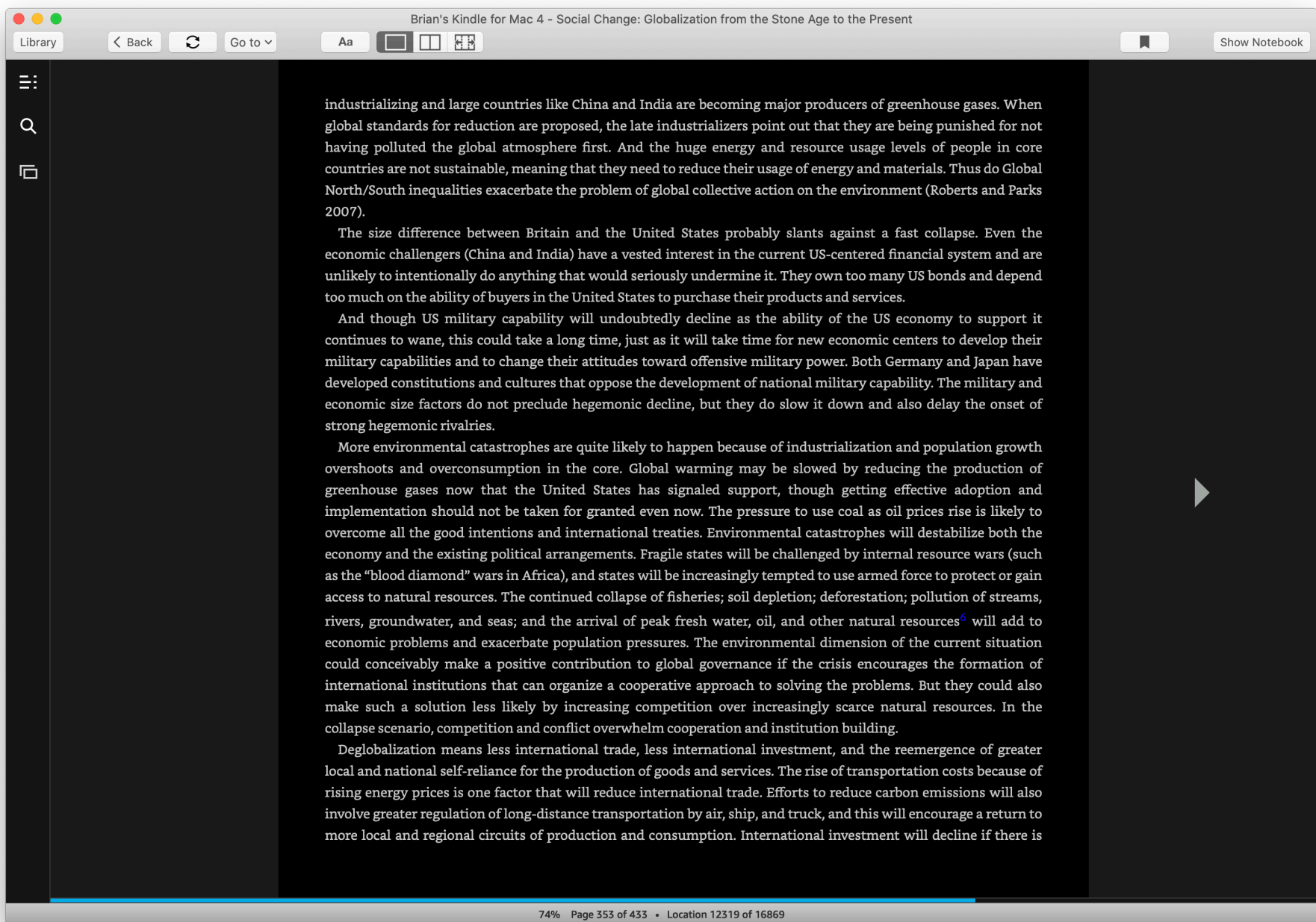
world war, as it always has in the past. Such a unipolar structure of military power could also be made more legitimate by bringing it under the auspices of the UN or of NATO. And if this were combined with a larger disarmament of national forces, the size and expense of the global military apparatus could be reduced. Current multilateral efforts to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction would be made more legitimate if the institutions that control military power were themselves democratized, and if the most powerful states were more politically responsive to the majority of the world's people (see Scenario #3 below).

#### [Future Scenario #2: Collapse—Rivalry, Ecocatastrophe, and Deglobalization](#)

The second structural world-system scenario is that of continued US hegemonic decline, further disruption of the global financial system, an ecological train wreck, and a rapid decline in international trade. Here the scenario bears a strong likeness to what happened during the decline of British hegemony and the first half of the twentieth century, but with a few important differences. We have already seen that some of the recent developments are strongly reminiscent of the period of British hegemonic decline. As we saw in [Chapter 18](#), the neoliberal globalization project was mainly a crisis-management response to a profit squeeze in manufacturing when Japan and Germany caught up with the United States after recovering from World War II. The rise of the neoconservatives and unilateral imperial overreach was again crisis management in response to the obviously untenable position of the US balance of trade that emerged after 1990. These and the rise of new economic competitors such as China and India are strongly similar to what happened during the earlier period of hegemonic decline. We have also mentioned the expansion of finance capital that was an important characteristic of the last phase of both the British and the US hegemonies.

Regarding differences, we have already mentioned that British decline and the interregnum between the British and US hegemonies occurred during a period of transition from the coal to the oil energy regime in which the cost of energy was falling. This time around, hegemony is declining during a period of generally rising costs of nonrenewable resources. Another difference already mentioned is the much greater size of the US economy and military supremacy compared with that of the British. And yet another difference is the disappearance of formal colonialism in the interim between the two hegemonic declines.

The energy cost difference probably slants the system toward chaos. It is well known that the rise of greater centralization and state formation over the long run of sociocultural evolution has been tied to the ability of complex systems to capture free energy (Morris 2010, 2013). Hierarchies and further differentiation are expensive in energy terms. Reductions in the availability of free energy have often been associated with the collapse of hierarchies and of complex divisions of labor (Tainter 1988). The coming peaks of renewable resources probably also raise the probability of future resource wars, especially in the absence of a strong and legitimate hegemon or a legitimate global state. The huge Global North/South inequalities in energy use also make it difficult to put together a cooperative global strategy for confronting global warming and other aspects of environmental degradation. In the past the biggest polluters have been the industrialized core countries, but now the semiperiphery is



industrializing and large countries like China and India are becoming major producers of greenhouse gases. When global standards for reduction are proposed, the late industrializers point out that they are being punished for not having polluted the global atmosphere first. And the huge energy and resource usage levels of people in core countries are not sustainable, meaning that they need to reduce their usage of energy and materials. Thus do Global North/South inequalities exacerbate the problem of global collective action on the environment (Roberts and Parks 2007).

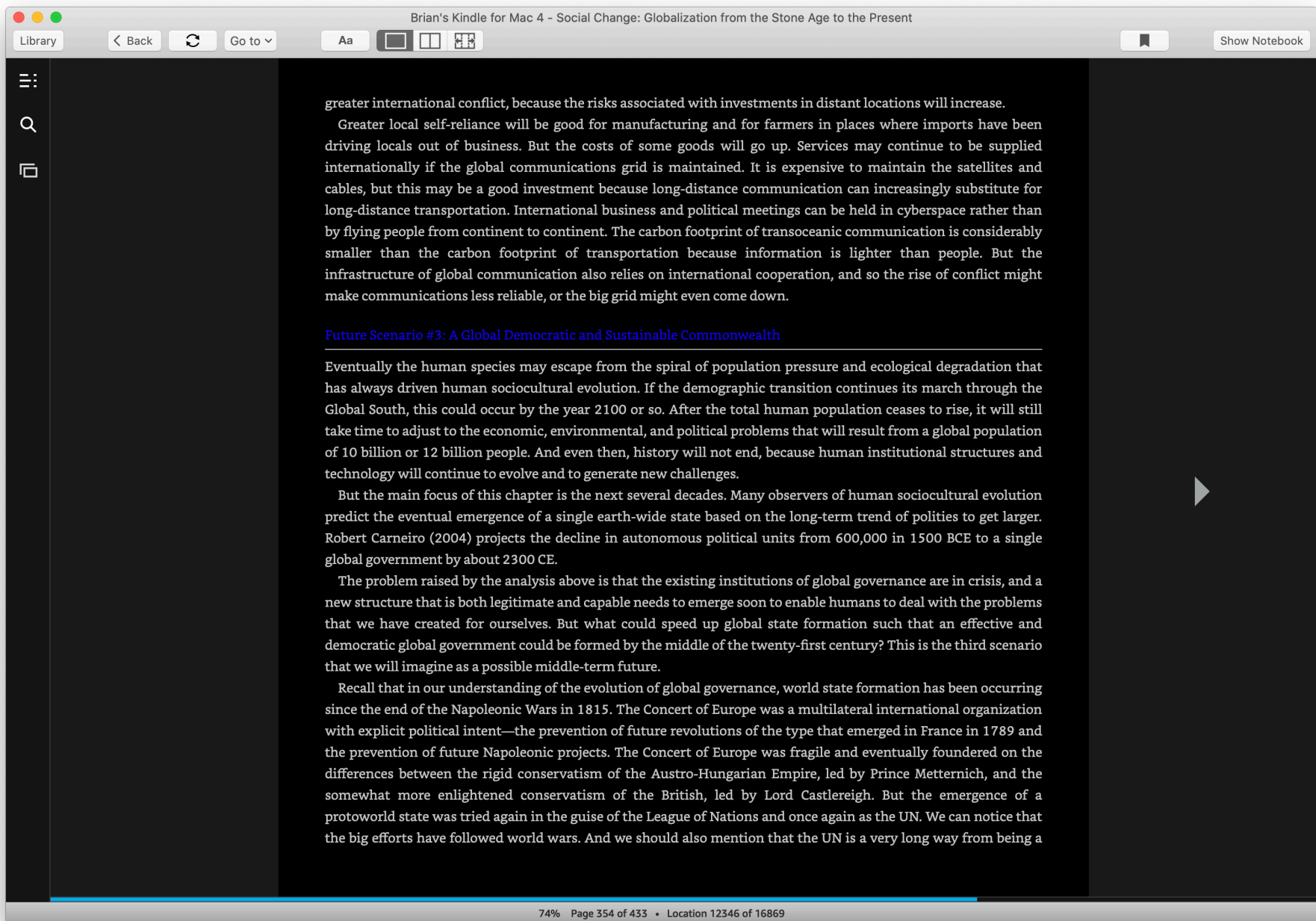
The size difference between Britain and the United States probably slants against a fast collapse. Even the economic challengers (China and India) have a vested interest in the current US-centered financial system and are unlikely to intentionally do anything that would seriously undermine it. They own too many US bonds and depend too much on the ability of buyers in the United States to purchase their products and services.

And though US military capability will undoubtedly decline as the ability of the US economy to support it continues to wane, this could take a long time, just as it will take time for new economic centers to develop their military capabilities and to change their attitudes toward offensive military power. Both Germany and Japan have developed constitutions and cultures that oppose the development of national military capability. The military and economic size factors do not preclude hegemonic decline, but they do slow it down and also delay the onset of strong hegemonic rivalries.

More environmental catastrophes are quite likely to happen because of industrialization and population growth overshoots and overconsumption in the core. Global warming may be slowed by reducing the production of greenhouse gases now that the United States has signaled support, though getting effective adoption and implementation should not be taken for granted even now. The pressure to use coal as oil prices rise is likely to overcome all the good intentions and international treaties. Environmental catastrophes will destabilize both the economy and the existing political arrangements. Fragile states will be challenged by internal resource wars (such as the "blood diamond" wars in Africa), and states will be increasingly tempted to use armed force to protect or gain access to natural resources. The continued collapse of fisheries; soil depletion; deforestation; pollution of streams, rivers, groundwater, and seas; and the arrival of peak fresh water, oil, and other natural resources<sup>6</sup> will add to economic problems and exacerbate population pressures. The environmental dimension of the current situation could conceivably make a positive contribution to global governance if the crisis encourages the formation of international institutions that can organize a cooperative approach to solving the problems. But they could also make such a solution less likely by increasing competition over increasingly scarce natural resources. In the collapse scenario, competition and conflict overwhelm cooperation and institution building.

Deglobalization means less international trade, less international investment, and the reemergence of greater local and national self-reliance for the production of goods and services. The rise of transportation costs because of rising energy prices is one factor that will reduce international trade. Efforts to reduce carbon emissions will also involve greater regulation of long-distance transportation by air, ship, and truck, and this will encourage a return to more local and regional circuits of production and consumption. International investment will decline if there is





greater international conflict, because the risks associated with investments in distant locations will increase.

Greater local self-reliance will be good for manufacturing and for farmers in places where imports have been driving locals out of business. But the costs of some goods will go up. Services may continue to be supplied internationally if the global communications grid is maintained. It is expensive to maintain the satellites and cables, but this may be a good investment because long-distance communication can increasingly substitute for long-distance transportation. International business and political meetings can be held in cyberspace rather than by flying people from continent to continent. The carbon footprint of transoceanic communication is considerably smaller than the carbon footprint of transportation because information is lighter than people. But the infrastructure of global communication also relies on international cooperation, and so the rise of conflict might make communications less reliable, or the big grid might even come down.

[Future Scenario #3: A Global Democratic and Sustainable Commonwealth](#)

Eventually the human species may escape from the spiral of population pressure and ecological degradation that has always driven human sociocultural evolution. If the demographic transition continues its march through the Global South, this could occur by the year 2100 or so. After the total human population ceases to rise, it will still take time to adjust to the economic, environmental, and political problems that will result from a global population of 10 billion or 12 billion people. And even then, history will not end, because human institutional structures and technology will continue to evolve and to generate new challenges.

But the main focus of this chapter is the next several decades. Many observers of human sociocultural evolution predict the eventual emergence of a single earth-wide state based on the long-term trend of polities to get larger. Robert Carneiro (2004) projects the decline in autonomous political units from 600,000 in 1500 BCE to a single global government by about 2300 CE.

The problem raised by the analysis above is that the existing institutions of global governance are in crisis, and a new structure that is both legitimate and capable needs to emerge soon to enable humans to deal with the problems that we have created for ourselves. But what could speed up global state formation such that an effective and democratic global government could be formed by the middle of the twenty-first century? This is the third scenario that we will imagine as a possible middle-term future.

Recall that in our understanding of the evolution of global governance, world state formation has been occurring since the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. The Concert of Europe was a multilateral international organization with explicit political intent—the prevention of future revolutions of the type that emerged in France in 1789 and the prevention of future Napoleonic projects. The Concert of Europe was fragile and eventually foundered on the differences between the rigid conservatism of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, led by Prince Metternich, and the somewhat more enlightened conservatism of the British, led by Lord Castlereigh. But the emergence of a protoworld state was tried again in the guise of the League of Nations and once again as the UN. We can notice that the big efforts have followed world wars. And we should also mention that the UN is a very long way from being a





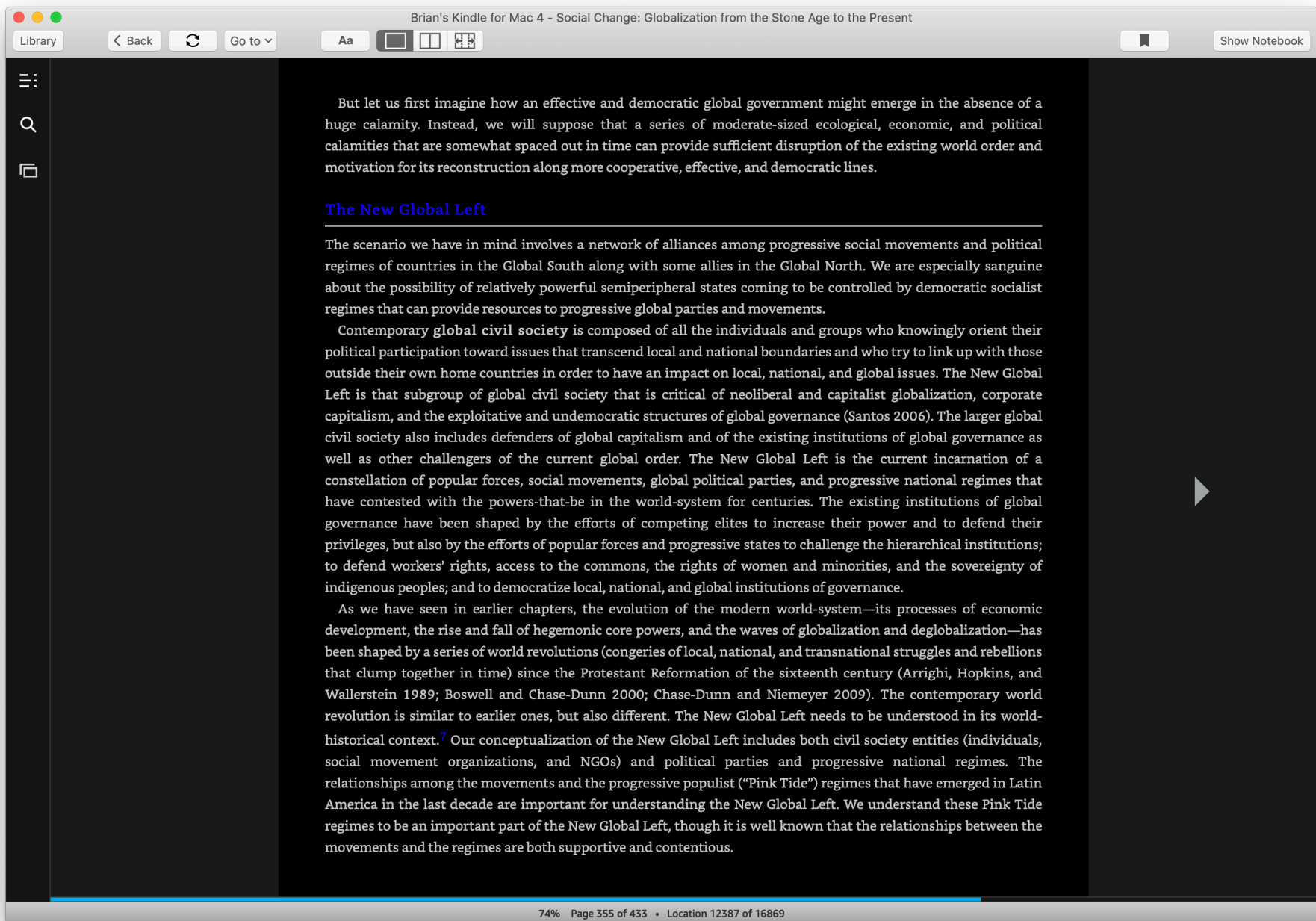
true world state in the Weberian sense of a monopoly of legitimate violence.

All the previous advances in global state formation have taken place after a hegemon has declined and challengers have been defeated in a world war among hegemonic rivals. Recall that in Warren Wagar's (1999) future scenario discussed above, a global socialist state is able to emerge only after a huge war among core states in which two-thirds of the world's population is killed—a similar scenario is also suggested by Patomäki (2008). The idea here is that major organizational changes emerge after huge catastrophes when the existing global governance institutions are in disarray and need to be rebuilt. But using a global war as a *deus ex machina* in a science fiction novel is quite different from planning and implementing a real strategy that relies on a huge disaster in order to bring about change—"disaster socialism," to borrow a phrase suggested by Naomi Klein's (2007) examination of how neoliberal globalizers have been able to make hay out of tragedies. Obviously, political actors who seek to promote the emergence of an effective and democratic global state must also do all that they can to try to prevent another war among the great powers. Humanistic morality must trump whatever advantages might follow such a catastrophe.



UN headquarters, New York City

That said, it is very likely that major calamities will occur in the coming decades regardless of the efforts of farsighted citizens and social movements. That is why we have imagined the collapse scenario above. And it would make both tactical and strategic sense to have plans for how to move forward if indeed a perfect storm of calamities were to come about.



But let us first imagine how an effective and democratic global government might emerge in the absence of a huge calamity. Instead, we will suppose that a series of moderate-sized ecological, economic, and political calamities that are somewhat spaced out in time can provide sufficient disruption of the existing world order and motivation for its reconstruction along more cooperative, effective, and democratic lines.

### The New Global Left

The scenario we have in mind involves a network of alliances among progressive social movements and political regimes of countries in the Global South along with some allies in the Global North. We are especially sanguine about the possibility of relatively powerful semiperipheral states coming to be controlled by democratic socialist regimes that can provide resources to progressive global parties and movements.

Contemporary **global civil society** is composed of all the individuals and groups who knowingly orient their political participation toward issues that transcend local and national boundaries and who try to link up with those outside their own home countries in order to have an impact on local, national, and global issues. The New Global Left is that subgroup of global civil society that is critical of neoliberal and capitalist globalization, corporate capitalism, and the exploitative and undemocratic structures of global governance (Santos 2006). The larger global civil society also includes defenders of global capitalism and of the existing institutions of global governance as well as other challengers of the current global order. The New Global Left is the current incarnation of a constellation of popular forces, social movements, global political parties, and progressive national regimes that have contested with the powers-that-be in the world-system for centuries. The existing institutions of global governance have been shaped by the efforts of competing elites to increase their power and to defend their privileges, but also by the efforts of popular forces and progressive states to challenge the hierarchical institutions; to defend workers' rights, access to the commons, the rights of women and minorities, and the sovereignty of indigenous peoples; and to democratize local, national, and global institutions of governance.

As we have seen in earlier chapters, the evolution of the modern world-system—its processes of economic development, the rise and fall of hegemonic core powers, and the waves of globalization and deglobalization—has been shaped by a series of world revolutions (congeries of local, national, and transnational struggles and rebellions that clump together in time) since the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century (Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1989; Boswell and Chase-Dunn 2000; Chase-Dunn and Niemeyer 2009). The contemporary world revolution is similar to earlier ones, but also different. The New Global Left needs to be understood in its world-historical context.<sup>7</sup> Our conceptualization of the New Global Left includes both civil society entities (individuals, social movement organizations, and NGOs) and political parties and progressive national regimes. The relationships among the movements and the progressive populist ("Pink Tide") regimes that have emerged in Latin America in the last decade are important for understanding the New Global Left. We understand these Pink Tide regimes to be an important part of the New Global Left, though it is well known that the relationships between the movements and the regimes are both supportive and contentious.



The boundaries of the progressive forces that have come together in the New Global Left are fuzzy, and the processes of inclusion and exclusion are ongoing. The rules of inclusion and exclusion that are contained in the charter of the WSF, though still debated, have not changed much since their formulation in 2001.<sup>8</sup>

The New Global Left has emerged as resistance to, and a critique of, global capitalism, especially those policies and political ideologies that have become known as neoliberalism. It is a coalition of social movements that includes old social movements that emerged in the nineteenth century (labor, anarchism, socialism, communism, feminism, environmentalism, peace, human rights), along with more recent incarnations of these and movements that emerged in the world revolutions of 1968 and 1989 (gay rights, anticorporate, fair trade, indigenous) and even more recent ones such as slow food/food rights, global justice/alterglobalization, antiglobalization, health/HIV, and alternative media. The explicit focus on the Global South and global justice is somewhat similar to some earlier incarnations of the Global Left, especially the Comintern, the Bandung Conference, and the anticolonial movements. The New Global Left contains remnants and reconfigured elements of earlier Global Lefts, but it is a qualitatively different constellation of forces because:

- There are new elements
- The old movements have been reshaped
- A new technology (the Internet) has been used to try to resolve Global North/South issues within movements and the contradictions among movements

There has also been a learning process in which the earlier successes and failures of the Global Left are being taken into account in order to not repeat the mistakes of the past. The relations within the family of antisystemic movements and among the populist regimes are both cooperative and competitive.

One scenario that could move the world-system in the direction of global democratic and sustainable development during the next few decades would involve a coalescent party-network of the New Global Left that would emerge from the existing “movement of movements” participating in the WSF process (Fisher and Ponniah 2003). Positive exemplars of what is possible have historically emerged as “globalizations from below” (della Porta et al. 2006). For example, direct participatory democracy emerged in the form of workers’ councils that were formed during the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Seattle General Strike of 1919, the Spanish Revolution of 1936–1939, and the Chilean Revolution of 1970–1973. Similar formations have emerged recently as factory committees in Argentina and Venezuela and peasant councils in Brazil. Transnational social movements have expanded in recent decades, as discussed in [Chapter 19](#). The hugely popular WSFs have been remarkable efforts to build the foundation for a just and democratic world society. The WSF international meetings have been held exclusively in countries of the Global South: Brazil, India, Pakistan, Mali, and Kenya.

The New Global Left has been theorized by **autonomists** such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004) as a “multitude” of workers who have been casualized by the emergence of flexible specialization. As William I. Robinson’s (2008) study of the effects of globalized capitalism on Latin America makes clear, flexible specialization



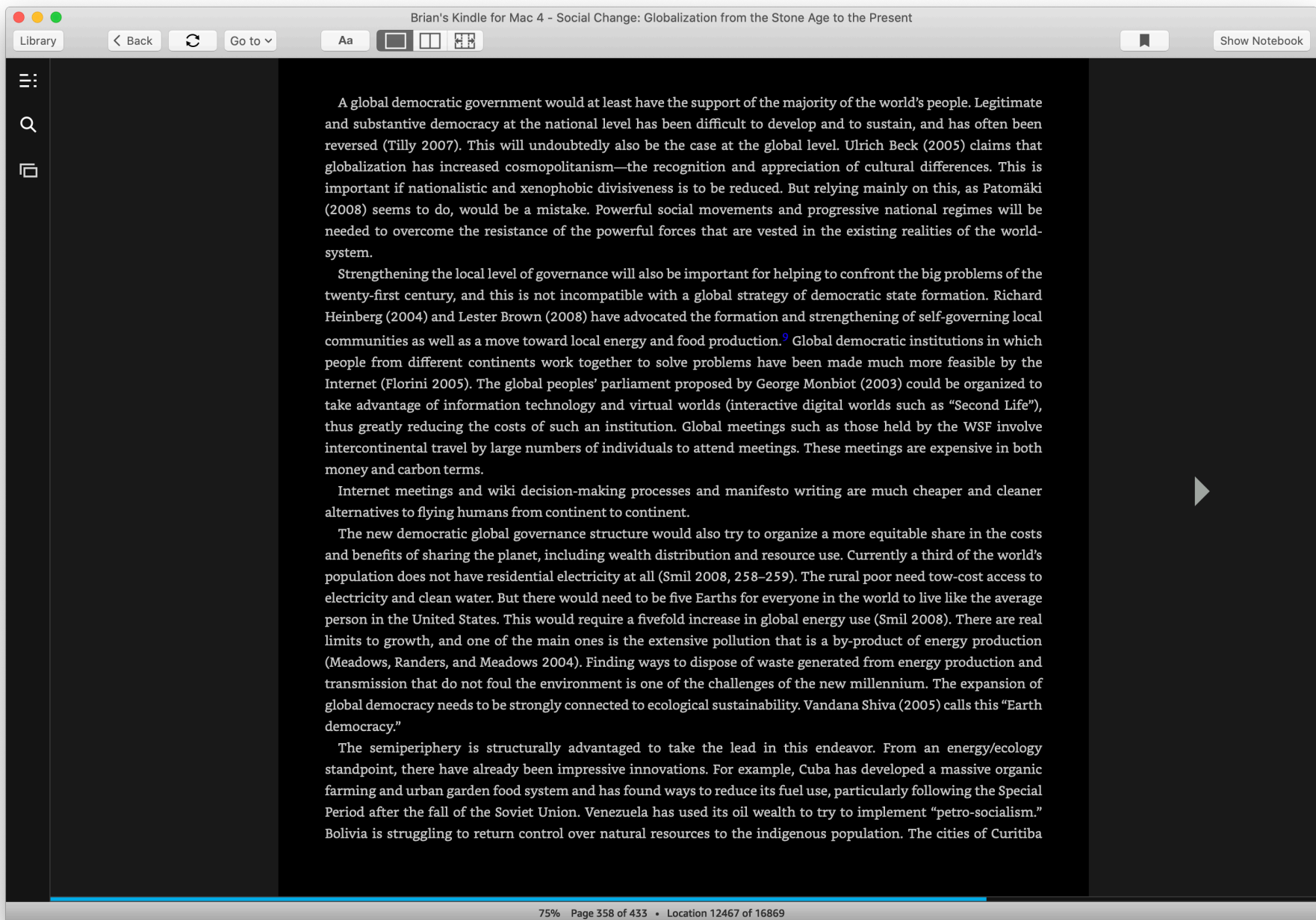
and the casualization of labor are not confined to the Global North. The vastly expanded shantytowns of the cities of the Global South are the homes of the informal-sector workers, many of whom were formerly employed in the formal sector of large firms and public bureaucracies. Neoliberal schemes such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the SAPs promoted by the IMF and the World Bank have required the downsizing of public employment. So the informal sector has grown in most countries of the Global South.

But the formal-sector workers have not disappeared. As large-scale industrialization has moved from the core to the Global South, the formal-sector working class has grown along with trade unionism, labor unrest (strikes), and workers' parties (Silver 2003). President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil is a former auto worker, and the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT), which brought him into office, is mainly based on the formal-sector workers of Brazil. In other Latin American countries, domestic neoliberals allied with the neoliberalized IMF and the World Bank attacked the institutions of the welfare state, labor unions, and the political parties of the formal-sector workers. In many countries these attacks were successful. Downsizing, streamlining, and the destruction of welfare safety nets drove many formal-sector workers into the informal sector. In some of the countries where these things occurred, powerful social movements emerged from the informal sector, some of which were able to elect national governments—the populist Pink Tide regimes.

Thus the globalized working class of the Global South is a mix of formal-sector workers in mass production industries and informalized workers. The class basis of the other transnational social movements (feminists, environmentalists, farmers, peace/antiwar, alternative media, human rights, indigenous, and so on) is similarly complicated. Thus, Hardt and Negri's (2004) use of the term "multitude" is quite appropriate, though they seem to have missed the point shown clearly by the labor unrest research of Beverly Silver (2003) that the formal working class is still an important player in many countries.

### Low-Energy Global Governance

A new energy regime will be a necessary component of the long-term sustainability of the human relationship with the biosphere and the geosphere. The best way to accomplish this would be the construction of a relatively low-energy global state. A reduction in the overall complexity of the world-system is needed. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the framework of a protoglobal state already exists as world-level institutions such as the UN, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the International Criminal Court. The global level of governance needs to be strengthened and made more capable in order for it to help humanity deal with the emergent challenges. This can be partly accomplished by eliminating redundancies. For example, transferring security responsibilities to a global institution could reduce the extensive military industrial complexes maintained by nation-states and regional security institutions such as NATO. A global democratic and collectively rational commonwealth with a unified authority and a program for reducing national military apparatuses (disarmament) could greatly reduce the vast expenditures on military weapons that are now being made. The global state's military capability does not need to be much larger than the forces that might be brought against it.



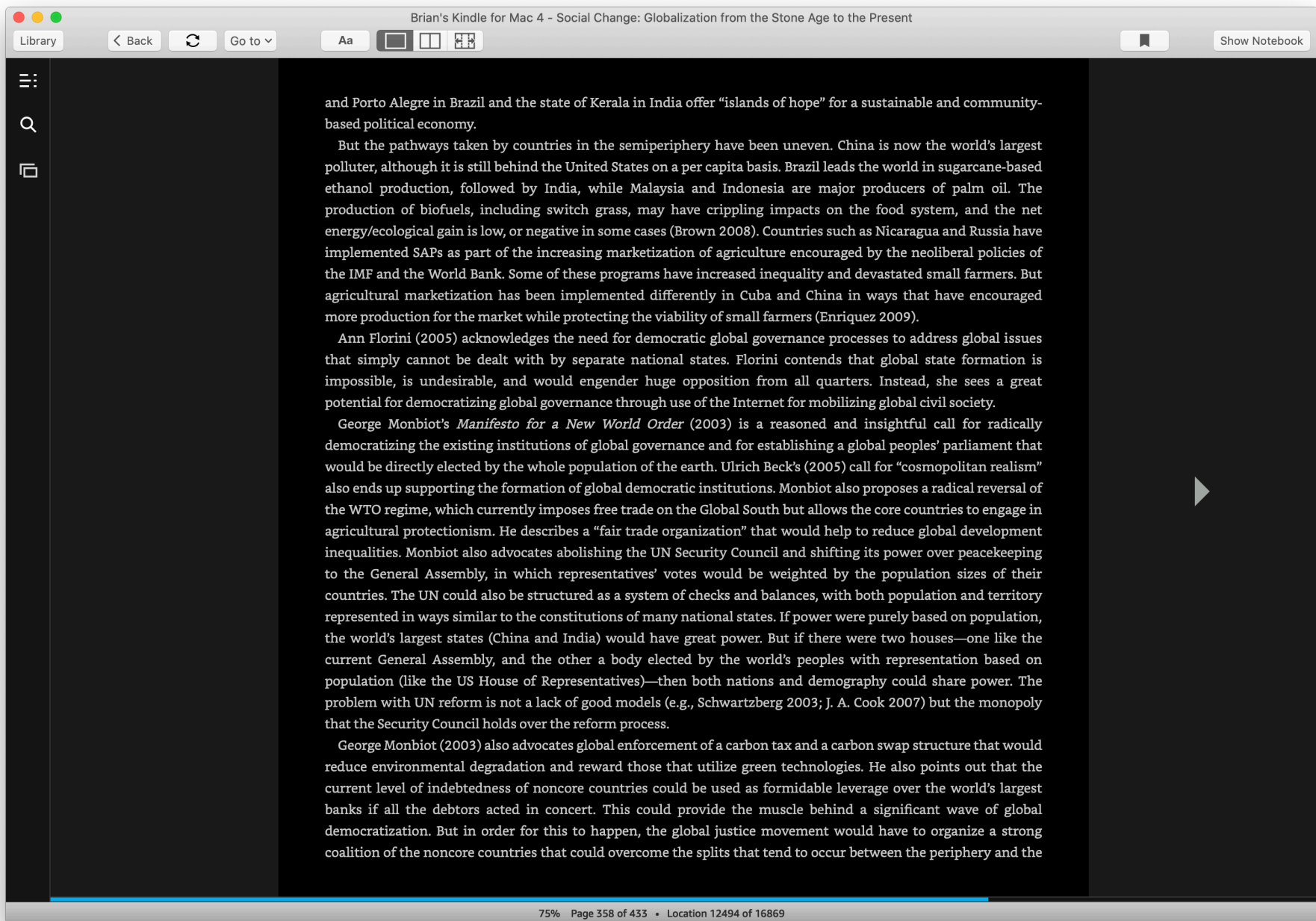
A global democratic government would at least have the support of the majority of the world's people. Legitimate and substantive democracy at the national level has been difficult to develop and to sustain, and has often been reversed (Tilly 2007). This will undoubtedly also be the case at the global level. Ulrich Beck (2005) claims that globalization has increased cosmopolitanism—the recognition and appreciation of cultural differences. This is important if nationalistic and xenophobic divisiveness is to be reduced. But relying mainly on this, as Patomäki (2008) seems to do, would be a mistake. Powerful social movements and progressive national regimes will be needed to overcome the resistance of the powerful forces that are vested in the existing realities of the world-system.

Strengthening the local level of governance will also be important for helping to confront the big problems of the twenty-first century, and this is not incompatible with a global strategy of democratic state formation. Richard Heinberg (2004) and Lester Brown (2008) have advocated the formation and strengthening of self-governing local communities as well as a move toward local energy and food production.<sup>9</sup> Global democratic institutions in which people from different continents work together to solve problems have been made much more feasible by the Internet (Florini 2005). The global peoples' parliament proposed by George Monbiot (2003) could be organized to take advantage of information technology and virtual worlds (interactive digital worlds such as "Second Life"), thus greatly reducing the costs of such an institution. Global meetings such as those held by the WSF involve intercontinental travel by large numbers of individuals to attend meetings. These meetings are expensive in both money and carbon terms.

Internet meetings and wiki decision-making processes and manifesto writing are much cheaper and cleaner alternatives to flying humans from continent to continent.

The new democratic global governance structure would also try to organize a more equitable share in the costs and benefits of sharing the planet, including wealth distribution and resource use. Currently a third of the world's population does not have residential electricity at all (Smil 2008, 258–259). The rural poor need low-cost access to electricity and clean water. But there would need to be five Earths for everyone in the world to live like the average person in the United States. This would require a fivefold increase in global energy use (Smil 2008). There are real limits to growth, and one of the main ones is the extensive pollution that is a by-product of energy production (Meadows, Randers, and Meadows 2004). Finding ways to dispose of waste generated from energy production and transmission that do not foul the environment is one of the challenges of the new millennium. The expansion of global democracy needs to be strongly connected to ecological sustainability. Vandana Shiva (2005) calls this "Earth democracy."

The semiperiphery is structurally advantaged to take the lead in this endeavor. From an energy/ecology standpoint, there have already been impressive innovations. For example, Cuba has developed a massive organic farming and urban garden food system and has found ways to reduce its fuel use, particularly following the Special Period after the fall of the Soviet Union. Venezuela has used its oil wealth to try to implement "petro-socialism." Bolivia is struggling to return control over natural resources to the indigenous population. The cities of Curitiba



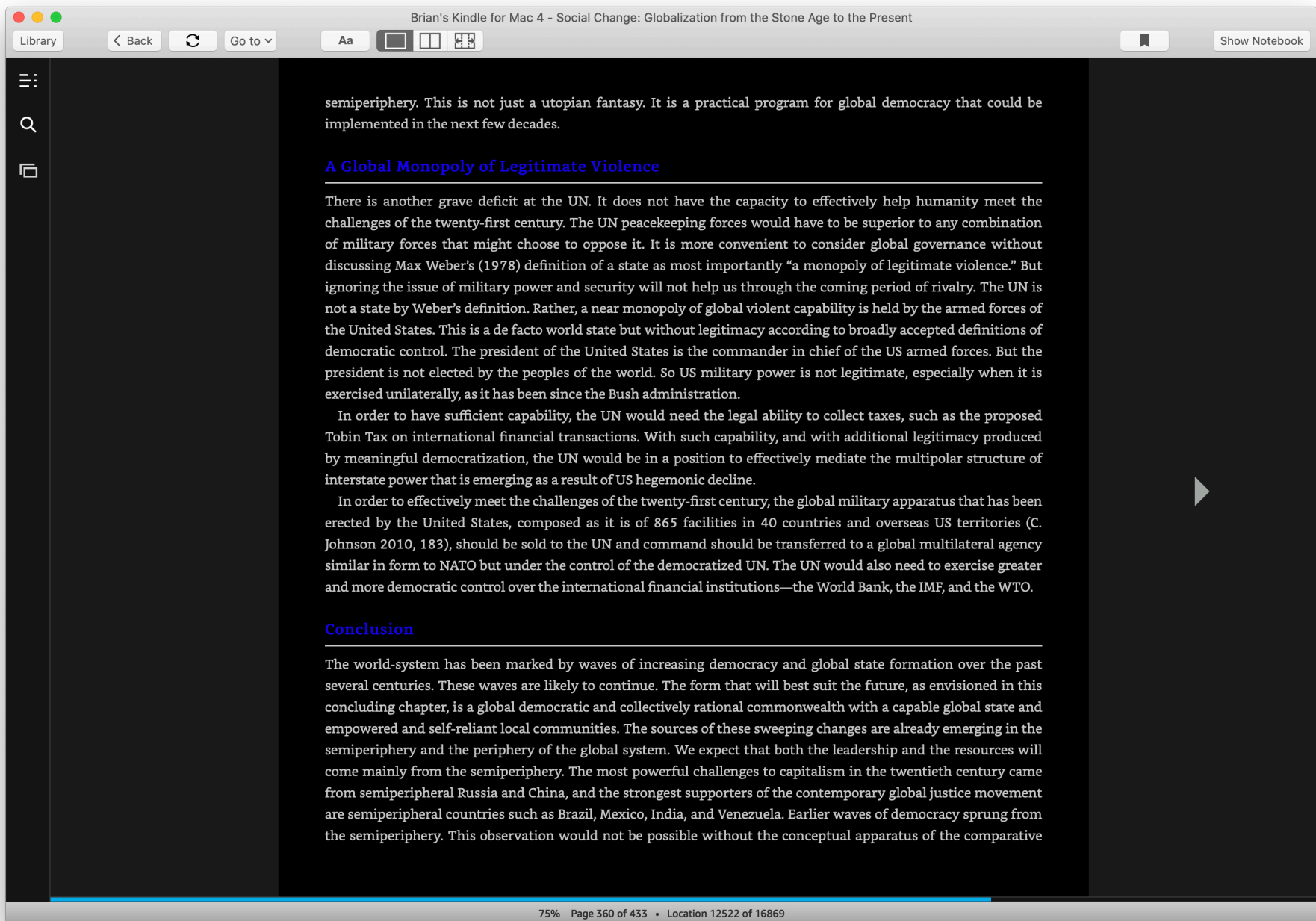
and Porto Alegre in Brazil and the state of Kerala in India offer “islands of hope” for a sustainable and community-based political economy.

But the pathways taken by countries in the semiperiphery have been uneven. China is now the world’s largest polluter, although it is still behind the United States on a per capita basis. Brazil leads the world in sugarcane-based ethanol production, followed by India, while Malaysia and Indonesia are major producers of palm oil. The production of biofuels, including switch grass, may have crippling impacts on the food system, and the net energy/ecological gain is low, or negative in some cases (Brown 2008). Countries such as Nicaragua and Russia have implemented SAPs as part of the increasing marketization of agriculture encouraged by the neoliberal policies of the IMF and the World Bank. Some of these programs have increased inequality and devastated small farmers. But agricultural marketization has been implemented differently in Cuba and China in ways that have encouraged more production for the market while protecting the viability of small farmers (Enriquez 2009).

Ann Florini (2005) acknowledges the need for democratic global governance processes to address global issues that simply cannot be dealt with by separate national states. Florini contends that global state formation is impossible, is undesirable, and would engender huge opposition from all quarters. Instead, she sees a great potential for democratizing global governance through use of the Internet for mobilizing global civil society.

George Monbiot’s *Manifesto for a New World Order* (2003) is a reasoned and insightful call for radically democratizing the existing institutions of global governance and for establishing a global peoples’ parliament that would be directly elected by the whole population of the earth. Ulrich Beck’s (2005) call for “cosmopolitan realism” also ends up supporting the formation of global democratic institutions. Monbiot also proposes a radical reversal of the WTO regime, which currently imposes free trade on the Global South but allows the core countries to engage in agricultural protectionism. He describes a “fair trade organization” that would help to reduce global development inequalities. Monbiot also advocates abolishing the UN Security Council and shifting its power over peacekeeping to the General Assembly, in which representatives’ votes would be weighted by the population sizes of their countries. The UN could also be structured as a system of checks and balances, with both population and territory represented in ways similar to the constitutions of many national states. If power were purely based on population, the world’s largest states (China and India) would have great power. But if there were two houses—one like the current General Assembly, and the other a body elected by the world’s peoples with representation based on population (like the US House of Representatives)—then both nations and demography could share power. The problem with UN reform is not a lack of good models (e.g., Schwartzberg 2003; J. A. Cook 2007) but the monopoly that the Security Council holds over the reform process.

George Monbiot (2003) also advocates global enforcement of a carbon tax and a carbon swap structure that would reduce environmental degradation and reward those that utilize green technologies. He also points out that the current level of indebtedness of noncore countries could be used as formidable leverage over the world’s largest banks if all the debtors acted in concert. This could provide the muscle behind a significant wave of global democratization. But in order for this to happen, the global justice movement would have to organize a strong coalition of the noncore countries that could overcome the splits that tend to occur between the periphery and the



semiperiphery. This is not just a utopian fantasy. It is a practical program for global democracy that could be implemented in the next few decades.

### A Global Monopoly of Legitimate Violence

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There is another grave deficit at the UN. It does not have the capacity to effectively help humanity meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. The UN peacekeeping forces would have to be superior to any combination of military forces that might choose to oppose it. It is more convenient to consider global governance without discussing Max Weber's (1978) definition of a state as most importantly "a monopoly of legitimate violence." But ignoring the issue of military power and security will not help us through the coming period of rivalry. The UN is not a state by Weber's definition. Rather, a near monopoly of global violent capability is held by the armed forces of the United States. This is a de facto world state but without legitimacy according to broadly accepted definitions of democratic control. The president of the United States is the commander in chief of the US armed forces. But the president is not elected by the peoples of the world. So US military power is not legitimate, especially when it is exercised unilaterally, as it has been since the Bush administration.

In order to have sufficient capability, the UN would need the legal ability to collect taxes, such as the proposed Tobin Tax on international financial transactions. With such capability, and with additional legitimacy produced by meaningful democratization, the UN would be in a position to effectively mediate the multipolar structure of interstate power that is emerging as a result of US hegemonic decline.

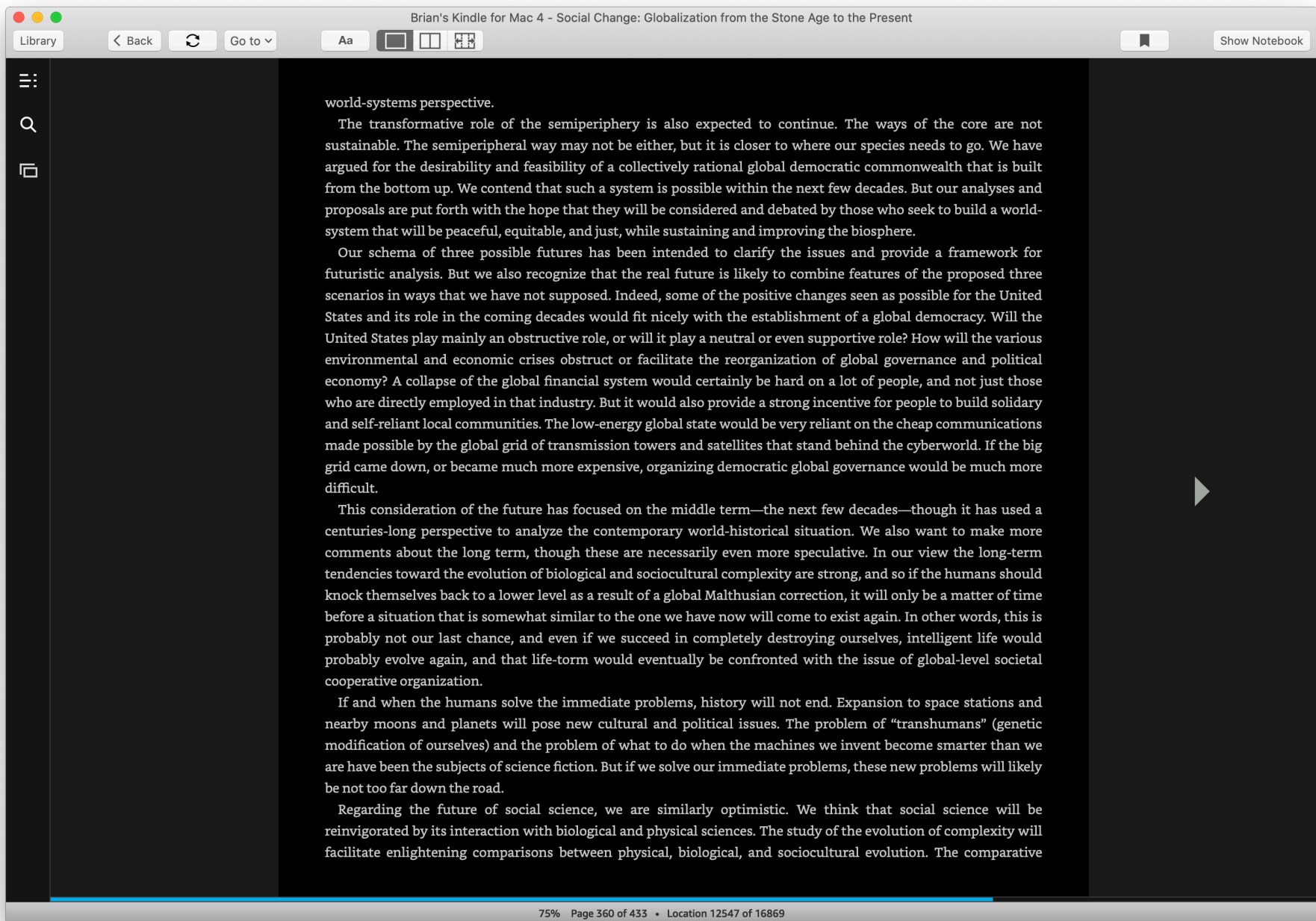
In order to effectively meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, the global military apparatus that has been erected by the United States, composed as it is of 865 facilities in 40 countries and overseas US territories (C. Johnson 2010, 183), should be sold to the UN and command should be transferred to a global multilateral agency similar in form to NATO but under the control of the democratized UN. The UN would also need to exercise greater and more democratic control over the international financial institutions—the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO.

### Conclusion

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The world-system has been marked by waves of increasing democracy and global state formation over the past several centuries. These waves are likely to continue. The form that will best suit the future, as envisioned in this concluding chapter, is a global democratic and collectively rational commonwealth with a capable global state and empowered and self-reliant local communities. The sources of these sweeping changes are already emerging in the semiperiphery and the periphery of the global system. We expect that both the leadership and the resources will come mainly from the semiperiphery. The most powerful challenges to capitalism in the twentieth century came from semiperipheral Russia and China, and the strongest supporters of the contemporary global justice movement are semiperipheral countries such as Brazil, Mexico, India, and Venezuela. Earlier waves of democracy sprung from the semiperiphery. This observation would not be possible without the conceptual apparatus of the comparative





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world-systems perspective.

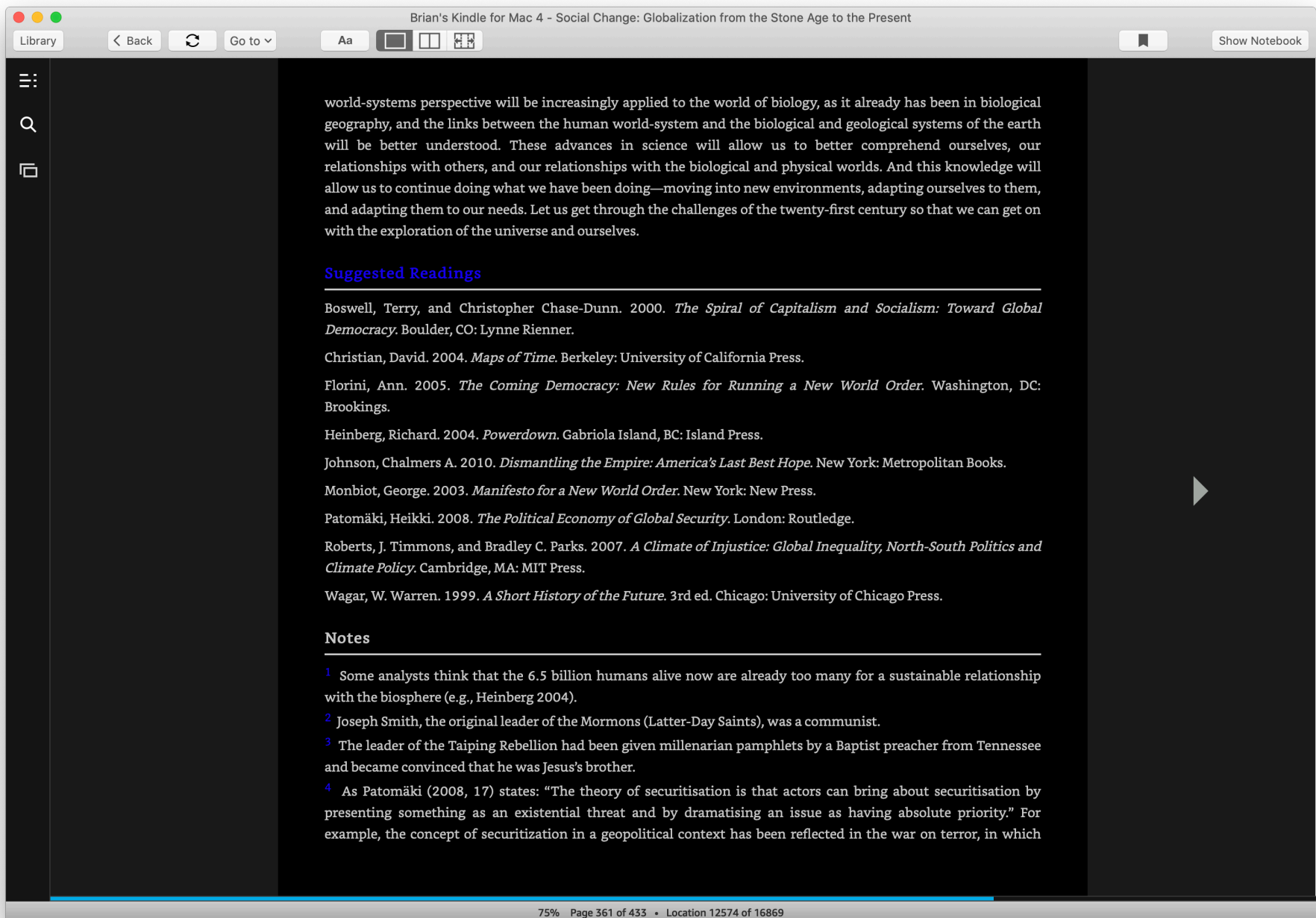
The transformative role of the semiperiphery is also expected to continue. The ways of the core are not sustainable. The semiperipheral way may not be either, but it is closer to where our species needs to go. We have argued for the desirability and feasibility of a collectively rational global democratic commonwealth that is built from the bottom up. We contend that such a system is possible within the next few decades. But our analyses and proposals are put forth with the hope that they will be considered and debated by those who seek to build a world-system that will be peaceful, equitable, and just, while sustaining and improving the biosphere.

Our schema of three possible futures has been intended to clarify the issues and provide a framework for futuristic analysis. But we also recognize that the real future is likely to combine features of the proposed three scenarios in ways that we have not supposed. Indeed, some of the positive changes seen as possible for the United States and its role in the coming decades would fit nicely with the establishment of a global democracy. Will the United States play mainly an obstructive role, or will it play a neutral or even supportive role? How will the various environmental and economic crises obstruct or facilitate the reorganization of global governance and political economy? A collapse of the global financial system would certainly be hard on a lot of people, and not just those who are directly employed in that industry. But it would also provide a strong incentive for people to build solidary and self-reliant local communities. The low-energy global state would be very reliant on the cheap communications made possible by the global grid of transmission towers and satellites that stand behind the cyberworld. If the big grid came down, or became much more expensive, organizing democratic global governance would be much more difficult.

This consideration of the future has focused on the middle term—the next few decades—though it has used a centuries-long perspective to analyze the contemporary world-historical situation. We also want to make more comments about the long term, though these are necessarily even more speculative. In our view the long-term tendencies toward the evolution of biological and sociocultural complexity are strong, and so if the humans should knock themselves back to a lower level as a result of a global Malthusian correction, it will only be a matter of time before a situation that is somewhat similar to the one we have now will come to exist again. In other words, this is probably not our last chance, and even if we succeed in completely destroying ourselves, intelligent life would probably evolve again, and that life-form would eventually be confronted with the issue of global-level societal cooperative organization.

If and when the humans solve the immediate problems, history will not end. Expansion to space stations and nearby moons and planets will pose new cultural and political issues. The problem of “transhumans” (genetic modification of ourselves) and the problem of what to do when the machines we invent become smarter than we are have been the subjects of science fiction. But if we solve our immediate problems, these new problems will likely be not too far down the road.

Regarding the future of social science, we are similarly optimistic. We think that social science will be reinvigorated by its interaction with biological and physical sciences. The study of the evolution of complexity will facilitate enlightening comparisons between physical, biological, and sociocultural evolution. The comparative



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world-systems perspective will be increasingly applied to the world of biology, as it already has been in biological geography, and the links between the human world-system and the biological and geological systems of the earth will be better understood. These advances in science will allow us to better comprehend ourselves, our relationships with others, and our relationships with the biological and physical worlds. And this knowledge will allow us to continue doing what we have been doing—moving into new environments, adapting ourselves to them, and adapting them to our needs. Let us get through the challenges of the twenty-first century so that we can get on with the exploration of the universe and ourselves.

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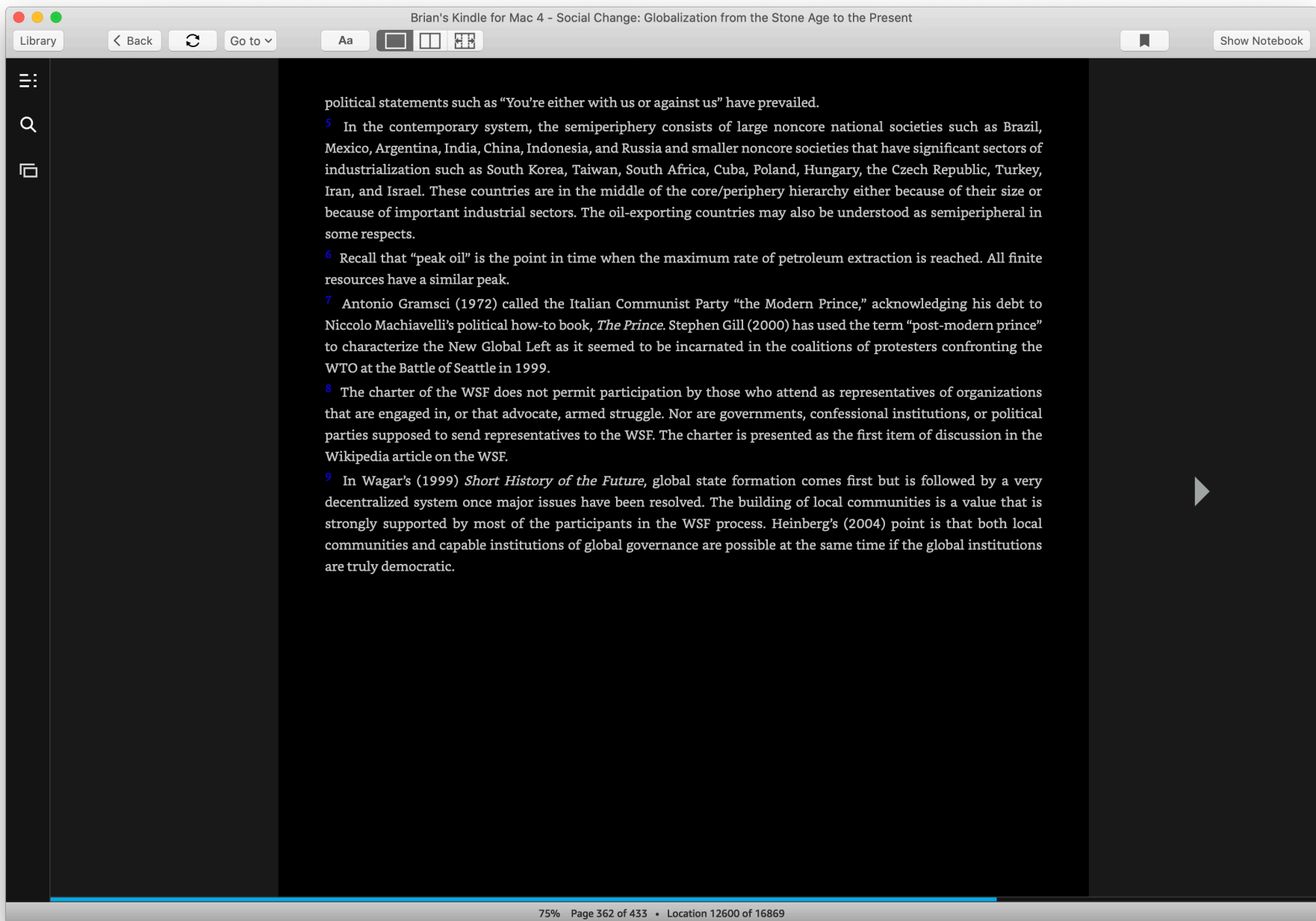
### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Some analysts think that the 6.5 billion humans alive now are already too many for a sustainable relationship with the biosphere (e.g., Heinberg 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Smith, the original leader of the Mormons (Latter-Day Saints), was a communist.

<sup>3</sup> The leader of the Taiping Rebellion had been given millenarian pamphlets by a Baptist preacher from Tennessee and became convinced that he was Jesus's brother.

<sup>4</sup> As Patomäki (2008, 17) states: "The theory of securitisation is that actors can bring about securitisation by presenting something as an existential threat and by dramatising an issue as having absolute priority." For example, the concept of securitization in a geopolitical context has been reflected in the war on terror, in which



political statements such as “You’re either with us or against us” have prevailed.

<sup>5</sup> In the contemporary system, the semiperiphery consists of large noncore national societies such as Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, India, China, Indonesia, and Russia and smaller noncore societies that have significant sectors of industrialization such as South Korea, Taiwan, South Africa, Cuba, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Turkey, Iran, and Israel. These countries are in the middle of the core/periphery hierarchy either because of their size or because of important industrial sectors. The oil-exporting countries may also be understood as semiperipheral in some respects.

<sup>6</sup> Recall that “peak oil” is the point in time when the maximum rate of petroleum extraction is reached. All finite resources have a similar peak.

<sup>7</sup> Antonio Gramsci (1972) called the Italian Communist Party “the Modern Prince,” acknowledging his debt to Niccolò Machiavelli’s political how-to book, *The Prince*. Stephen Gill (2000) has used the term “post-modern prince” to characterize the New Global Left as it seemed to be incarnated in the coalitions of protesters confronting the WTO at the Battle of Seattle in 1999.

<sup>8</sup> The charter of the WSF does not permit participation by those who attend as representatives of organizations that are engaged in, or that advocate, armed struggle. Nor are governments, confessional institutions, or political parties supposed to send representatives to the WSF. The charter is presented as the first item of discussion in the Wikipedia article on the WSF.

<sup>9</sup> In Wagar’s (1999) *Short History of the Future*, global state formation comes first but is followed by a very decentralized system once major issues have been resolved. The building of local communities is a value that is strongly supported by most of the participants in the WSF process. Heinberg’s (2004) point is that both local communities and capable institutions of global governance are possible at the same time if the global institutions are truly democratic.