

Many Globalizations, One International Relations

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ABSTRACT *Stressing that the shrinking of time and distance has led to multiplying boundary-spanning activities in diverse realms of life around the world, this paper suggests that unfortunately long-standing disciplinary habits and professional orthodoxies inhibit inquiries into the multidisciplinary nature of globalization. It argues that, in effect, there are many globalizations, but only one international relations in the sense that investigators of world affairs are too rooted into treating the state or the society as bounded and terminal entities to explore the full range of phenomena that presently mark world affairs.*

The advent of this Journal is both a unique event and part of an explosive surge in the literature on globalization. It is unique in that most of the exploding literature consists of books and articles,¹ while journals remain narrowly disciplinary in their scope. Few are those journals that dare to focus on globalization in a broad interdisciplinary context—in this case so much so that an ‘s’ is added to the end of its title in order to capture the vast scope of the subject.

It remains to be seen, however, if the journal can attract submissions that enable future issues to justify its plural title and commitment to treating globalization as a concern of numerous disciplines. More specifically, will its submissions compel it to become yet another journal of international relations (IR), authored and read mostly by scholars trained in political science? Unfortunately, equating globalization with IR may well become a recurring theme, because disciplinary habits are so strong that many analysts—natural as well as social scientists—are unable to think and probe beyond the boundaries of their fields. Such a theme would be extremely unfortunate, because the study of globalization is *not* comparable to the study of IR. Rather globalization encompasses phenomena that can span all the social sciences and not a few of the natural sciences. Indeed, the literature on the subject is exploding precisely because every discipline and most of their sub-disciplines have occasion to focus on boundary-spanning activities that are not confined to structures and processes that occur within national or societal contexts.

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Conceivably, in short, the onset of globalization could lead to drastic alterations in the disciplinary boundaries that have long prevailed in the teaching and research through which academic institutions have been organized. In a shrinking world where time and distance are increasingly irrelevant, all human activities, including those sustained through interaction with the natural environment, can no longer be readily examined through either the spatial or horizontal subdivisions that differentiate local, national and international phenomena or the vertical subdivisions through which phenomena are differentiated by disciplines. The dynamics of globalization are such that narrow specializations will have to make way for broader inquiries. The pace at which this imperative will be realized, however, is likely to be slow, and its extent is likely to be limited. The habits of specialization, and particularly the tendency to treat globalization as an aspect of IR, are deep and long-standing, with all the professional (such as reputation, promotion, etc.) and intellectual (see below) incentives stacked against the need for broadened horizons.

The Global and the International as Separate Foci

Before elaborating on the incentives that inhibit globalization perspectives, it is useful to note the several ways in which the study of globalization and IR are separate enterprises. The differences between the two are not immaterial. On the contrary, they are central to the lenses through which we assess the world, and they are stark differences, rooted in premises that can unknowingly take us down analytic paths we have no intention of traversing.

A prime difference concerns the state. It is located at the center of IR inquiries, whereas it may or may not be central to globalization studies. The very term 'international' conjures up state-to-state relations or the interactions between states and publics. To be sure, the 'nation' to which international also refers may not be a sovereign entity. Not only are there non-state nations that do not aspire to statehood (though many do have such aspirations), but people and organizations in those nations that are also states can undertake actions abroad—such as tourism or corporate restructuring—which are independent of the states they regard as their home base. Nevertheless, as the term 'international' has come to be used, it conventionally connotes the presence and relevance of states. Few, if any, are the international inquiries that explicitly indicate states are excluded from the analysis. Almost invariably, states lurk implicitly in the background of international inquiries and, far more often than not, they are explicitly in the foreground. The term globalization, on the other hand, encompasses a host of phenomena—such as the spread of ideas, disease or technology—in which the state is either absent or peripheral. Globalization studies do not dismiss, discount or otherwise ignore the state, but neither do they locate them at the center of their analyses. In short, it makes sense to conclude, at the risk of resorting to poor grammar, that while it is reasonable to speak of many globalizations, there is essentially only one IR.

This distinction between international and globalization studies underlies the reason why political scientists predominate in the former field. With the line between 'international' and 'interstate' blurred, with states viewed as the prime actors on which political science must focus, and with war and governance major issues high on the global agenda, IR has long been predominately the province of scholars trained in political science. Ever since its founding, for example, the International Studies Association has aspired to attracting sociologists, psychologists, economists, geographers, anthropologists, natural scientists and scholars from other disciplines into its membership; but its record in this regard is dismal. Most of its members are, or were, trained as political scientists, and apparently the prospects for enlarging the mix are

of globalization have developed viable theories, but these are hardly of any use when attention turns to, say, the cultural or technological dimensions. Thus, it is unreasonable to expect that a single, unified theory of globalization will ever be developed and, indeed, to date none has come even close in this respect. And even if one were to approach such a formulation, it would likely amount to an overarching theory too general to be of any value. To seek to account for all the diverse dimensions of globalization is to take the theoretical task to a rarified level of abstraction that would be inapplicable to any specific set of concerns. Perhaps the most that can be hoped for is a series of theories addressed to the prime dimensions of globalizing dynamics—economic, political, cultural, technological, social, environmental—that overlap sufficiently to allow for the framing of integrated hypotheses about specific phenomena. One can imagine a globalization curriculum that comprises seminars on its various dimensions, with an introductory course which brings them together for the purpose of demonstrating the variability of the subject; but it is difficult to foresee a theory seminar that treats the subject as a unified whole, integrated by the notion that each of its components involves expansion beyond national boundaries. The requirements of theory, in other words, once again necessitate a conception of many globalizations, of diverse, tangentially linked theories that share a focus on boundary-spanning phenomena.

It follows that to posit many globalizations is not imply that the subject is an academic discipline. Clearly, that is not the case. All the globalizations may share a focus on boundary-spanning phenomena, but this commonality is not sufficient to regard the diverse phenomena that comprise the field as having disciplinary characteristics in the sense of present-day social and natural science disciplines. Just as the field does not lend itself to coherent, unified theory, so does it fall short of the coherence an academic discipline normally requires. Given their wide scope and diverse foci, the many globalizations lend themselves to courses and curricula, but these are bound to be loosely linked around the notion of boundary-spanning concerns.⁵

Much the same can be said about IR. Even though it is predominantly organized around states and their international systems as the central actors, IR also lacks the coherence to be treated as a discipline. It, too, is a hybrid field and, as such, can theoretically serve as the organizing basis for scholars from different fields to come together, collaborate and exchange perspectives.

The Problem of Incentives

As previously noted, the accelerating preoccupation with globalization across numerous disciplines has the potential for offsetting tendencies toward narrow specialization. The obstacles to the realization of this potential are of two kinds, one professional and the other intellectual.

Professional Obstacles

There are practitioners in most disciplines who apply their training to those problems of globalization they view as covered by their disciplines. Thus geographers write about how globalizing dynamics are affected by spatial dynamics, just as sociologists probe how the dynamics affect family and group cohesion, and just as economists examine the ways in which investment and trade flows are shaped by global considerations. In effect, therefore, such studies tend to remain within prescribed disciplinary boundaries and do not stray beyond them in order to account for relevant phenomena that are the domain of other disciplines. Why? Why do most globalization studies tend to be so narrowly conceived when reaching beyond the confines of their discipline could enrich them?

very dim indeed. International relations is conceived to be the province of political scientists and, contrariwise, there are remarkably few in other disciplines who address problems in which international political processes are considered core phenomena. To be sure, one can cite exceptions in this regard. Some economists, particularly those who trace the movement of goods and money across national boundaries, undertake IR inquiries, but they are few in number and can readily be regarded as exceptions that prove the rule. The same can be said of sociologists who probe world systems theory.

Given IR's personnel and its preoccupation with war and governance, it is hardly surprising that research and writing in the field has not broken the habit of locating the state as central to analyses undertaken by its practitioners. Indeed, the habit is so deep seated that those who call attention to it and urge a broadening of the field's scope tend to be viewed as mavericks, as eccentrics whose work is marginal, if not irrelevant. Put differently, IR has long been marked by an orthodoxy that gets passed on to new generations of scholars who then start down a path wherein they are ensconced in paradigms that tend not to allow for change and address a narrow range of issues. Problems associated with technological innovation, cultural values and generational differences, for example, are rarely foci of inquiry, as if questions of war and peace are too urgent to permit exploration of such peripheral and unrelated subjects.

By its very broad and varied nature, on the other hand, globalization encourages inquiries into every facet of the human condition that extends beyond conventional boundaries, from the plight of individuals to the networks of groups to the strains of societies, from concerns about health, language and consumption to those evoked by crime, sports and music. Globalization spans such a huge array of phenomena that it has become a preoccupation in all the disciplines, thus leading increasingly to the practice of referring to diverse globalizations. Students of the several globalizations are not unmindful of the state and its interstate system, but neither are they inclined to treat them as central and ponder their relevance to all the subjects they undertake to probe. Indeed, in many instances the state is peripheral to the issues explored, with the habit of IR scholars to make it the centerpiece of their inquiries replaced by a concern for the nature of boundary-spanning processes and structures. Accordingly, many students of globalization do not even refer to IR, preferring instead to speak of world affairs or world politics when their attention turns to the panoply of interactions that transcend national boundaries and involves states as well as other types of collectivities.

It can even be argued that, increasingly, IR scholars are coming to recognize that the broader scope of globalization is superseding what now appears to be the narrower scope of IR.² In the words of one distinguished and long-time IR scholar, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 revealed underlying changes in the structures of world affairs that render 'most problematic ... the assumptions in international relations theory about the roles played by states. There has been too much "international relations", and too little "world politics", not only in work on security but also in much work on international institutions', thus suggesting that 'it would be salutary for us to change the name of our field from "international relations" to "world politics"'³ (a conclusion that reinforced his realization that the long-standing terminology of IR has been 'simply overtaken by "globalization" as the fashionable language to describe increases in economic openness and integration'⁴).

The vast difference between the scope of globalization and IR phenomena highlights another difference between the two enterprises. Because it is unified around the role and activities of states, IR lends itself much more readily to coherent theory than does globalization. Indeed, given the number and breadth of the issues, processes and structures that sustain globalization, it does not lend itself to a single, unified theory. Those who focus on the economic dimension

The professional answer to this question is an old story: for a geographer, sociologist or economist to collaborate with colleagues in other disciplines, or for them to reach out to other disciplines on their own, is to run the risk of isolation and not advancing professionally. The rewards in each discipline go to those who do not stray, who publish in the right journals, who do not collaborate outside their discipline such that the results fall outside the discipline's mainstream. It is the same old problem that has hindered interdisciplinary inquiries for decades, but it is an even more severe problem because of the broad scope of globalizing processes.

To be sure, there are individual scholars who manage to circumvent the problem by virtue of their broad-ranging concerns and their already having distinguished themselves in their disciplines. The trilogy by Manuel Castells⁶ and works by Appadurai, Bauman, Giddens and Held exemplify inquiries not inhibited by disciplinary boundaries,⁷ but these are individuals whose careers were established, allowing them not to worry about adhering to orthodox approaches. Younger professionals tend to avoid breaks with orthodoxy and, by the time they become senior and acquire tenure, their disciplinary habits have become so deep seated that many of them cannot break out of their orthodoxy. If this is an accurate assessment of the professional disincentives to avoid developing or participating in genuinely interdisciplinary globalization programs and curricula, disciplinary specialization will not readily give way to more general, cross-disciplinary orientations. Only as time and space continue to shrink and render the distant ever more proximate and the global ever more local will the obsolescence of prevailing habits begin to become powerfully self-evident and slowly yield to an inclination to see the world through globalization lenses.⁸

Intellectual Obstacles

No less difficult to overcome is at least one substantive barrier to globalizing perspectives—namely, the way in which at least three of the social sciences conceptualize the terminal entity that serves as the foundation of their discipline. For political science, that entity is the state, for sociology it is the society, and for economics it is the international economy. In none of them is it a global community that serves as the site for globalization. But why do these disciplines cling to their long-standing terminal entities in the face of evidence suggesting they need to make them more encompassing? In addition to the professional incentives already noted, I think the answer lies in the large extent to which deeply rooted analytic habits have cumulated around the prevailing terminal entities.

Many political scientists in the IR field, for example, are so excessively oriented toward the nation-state and the international system that they overlook a vast array of issues and problems in which the roles states play is matched by, if not secondary to, those of other actors and systems. Likewise, just as political scientists are trained to treat the state as the terminal entity that stands above and supersedes all other political actors in its claim on the loyalties of people, so are sociologists taught early that society is the terminal entity with respect to which organizations, groups and individuals conduct their affairs. Yes, the boundaries that separate states and societies have become increasingly porous in an age of globalization. And yes, loyalties and identities have proliferated to the point of undermining commitments to states and societies. And yes, the Internet and other microelectronic technologies have considerably lessened the relevance of time and distance, thereby further weakening the ties that bind states and societies. And yes, the vast movement of people of all kinds around the world has led to multicultural and sub-cultural bonds that weaken the competence of states and societies. And yes, the huge proliferation of transnational advocacy groups, corporations and professional

societies has served to highlight a vast array of interactions that circumvent the authority of states and societies. But, no, with the exception of an occasional sociologist⁹ and members of the American Sociological Association's section on the Political Economy of the World Systems, such developments are not sufficient to alter the notion that the state and the society are the terminal entities on which analyses should be founded.

And what underlies the prevailing resistance to reconceptualizing terminal entities in the face of such dynamic transformations? Why are able scholars in these disciplines still mired in long-standing and conventional perspectives? Partly habit, on both the part of analysts and the orientations of citizens, who are seen as so locked into historical and habitual ways that their ultimate identities and loyalties are never treated as problematic. Partly, too, notions of power in which both the society and the state are seen as so fully ensconced on the high moral ground and so fully endowed with the physical instruments of coercion that their attenuation as a terminal entity is viewed as highly improbable, if not impossible. No matter that in many parts of the world private security forces outnumber those of their state. No matter that increasingly noticeable numbers of young men avoid military service in different parts of the world or that, in Israel, a substantial group refused to remain on duty in Palestine. No matter that multicultural communities have replaced either the dominant ethnic or the melting-pot society. Such developments are seen as aberrations rather than possible signs of emergent central tendencies. As aberrations, they preserve the state and society as terminal entities.

Nonetheless, strong and powerful as the state and society premises may be, I am inclined to anticipate that sooner or later such conceptual orientations will ultimately give way to new formulations of terminal entities, probably to diverse schemes in which a multiplicity of entities are conceived to be terminal. As the age of globalization continues to shrink time and distance, and as reactions against globalization continue to stress the local community and its values, so eventually are all the social science disciplines likely to relax their long-standing boundaries and allow for transnational and sub-national perspectives that are not cast in the shadow of the national society and the nation-state.

To be sure, getting out from under those shadows will not be easy. Social scientists, like the people they study, are prone to habitual modes of behavior, and thus are more likely to cast their inquiries into habitual frameworks that are taken for granted than to treat their organizing premises as problematic. In the case of political scientists, the habitual framework is reinforced by a restless preoccupation with comprehending war, which is viewed as being initiated, sustained and terminated by states. For sociologists, the continuing strength of analytic habits derives from an overriding concern with systems and subsystems, which are seen as marked by endless interactions and frictions that unfold in the context of societies as the ultimate arbiter. Yet, and to repeat, such habits are presently under assault by the dynamics of globalization and are likely to give way eventually to new and different organizing premises. Already, for example, many political scientists posit intrastate wars as much more of a central tendency than interstate wars, a shift that is freeing them up to recognize and assess the degree to which sovereignty is undergoing transformation and the limits within which states can exercise their power. Likewise, I have the impression that sociologists are increasingly focusing on ethnic tensions, a shift that enables them to by-pass the society as the adjudicator of system—subsystem tensions. Perhaps historians, who are accustomed to subdividing their discipline into periods marked by centuries, wars, dynasties and other major developments, will be the quickest to acknowledge the advent of the age of globalization and adjust their conceptual perspectives accordingly.

Methodological Challenges

Given the non-linear, complex and messy nature of the various globalizations, analysts clearly face severe methodological problems in trying to generate and analyze empirical data that reveal and clarify the underpinning of the diverse globalizing processes. At the very least, they will have to relax the strict criteria of parsimony that IR researchers employ to probe international phenomena. Unlike the ability of the latter to posit states as prime actors and then to treat their actions as rooted in rationality, students of globalization must confront a welter of unlike actors whose goals, procedures and interactions are too complex to lend themselves readily to rational choice methodologies. In effect, they must treat feedback loops as no less central to their analyses than linear sequences. Such a conclusion obtains not only because there are many globalizations and probing their overlaps deepens the complexity of the empirical circumstances, but it is also the case within any of the globalizations, all of which are marked by a multiplicity of diverse actors whose behavior does not conform to linear analysis. As one observer put it,

[G]lobalization is never complete. It is disordered, full of paradox and the unexpected. Racing across the world are complex mobile connections that are more or less intense, more or less social, more or less 'networked' and more or less occurring 'at a distance.' There is a complex world, unpredictable yet irreversible, fearful and violent, disorderly but not simply anarchic. Small events in such systems are not forgotten but can reappear at different and highly unsuspected points in time and space.¹⁰

One possible means of addressing these methodological challenges is to borrow from complexity theory and use computer simulations and agent-based modeling to trace the complex, interactive dynamics that unfold on the different global stages. Such methods can identify feedback loops. They move analysis well beyond the conventional methods of specifying independent variables and discerning how their variation give rise to varying patterns on the part of dependent variables. The latter orthodoxy just does not serve to clarify the dynamism of any or all the globalizations. To be sure, computer simulations and agent-based modeling also have their limits as methodologies, thus emphasizing the need to ponder the methodological as well as the substantive problems posed by many globalizations. Perhaps some of these problems can be offset by case histories, but even these in combination with simulations and agent-based modeling are far from sufficient to meet the methodological challenges posed by the complexity of globalizing dynamics. Hopefully, the pages of this journal will attract, and be open to, essays that address the methodological as well as the substantive problems inherent in the various globalizations.

Conclusion

Even more hopefully, the Journal will become increasingly central and, as the complexity theorists put it, undergo a pulsating and dynamic emergence. Indeed, it has the potential of becoming the house organ for a broad association of scholars from many disciplines who share its concerns even as they employ different methodologies and rely on different theoretical commitments.

In sum, while globalization studies ought not to and most likely will not supersede international inquiries, the foregoing differences between the two are not trivial. The emergence of globalization foci will probably lead to more interdisciplinary work and the exchange of alternative perspectives, outcomes very much to be desired in a complex, messy world

marked by a shortage of pervasive and sufficient understandings of the contemporary human condition.

References

- [1] For a measure of the explosiveness of the literature, see the 713 entries of the bibliography listed in Scholte, J. A. (2000) *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (New York: St. Martin's Press), pp. 318–348.
- [2] Hints of a possible movement in this direction are embedded in the formation of the World International Studies Committee (WISC), which is sponsoring the 'First Global International Studies Conference' to be held in Istanbul in late August 2005.
- [3] Keohane, R. O. (2003) *Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World* (London and New York: Routledge), p. 284.
- [4] *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- [5] It is no accident, therefore, that the syllabus for my 'Dynamics of Globalization' seminar is the longest I have ever compiled. Since the course seeks to touch upon the many globalizations and cover their literatures, the syllabus is some 48 pages and growing. I should be happy to share it with any readers who contact me at jnr@gwu.edu.
- [6] *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, 1997, 1998).
- [7] Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press); Bauman, Z. (1998) *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press); Giddens, A. (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press); Held, D. *et al.* (1999) *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).
- [8] For one effort to assess world affairs through a lens in which localizing and globalizing dynamics are treated as inextricably interwoven, see Rosenau, J. N. (2003) *Distant Proximities: Dynamics Beyond Globalization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- [9] See for example, Urry, J. (2003) *Global Complexity* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. ix.
- [10] *Ibid.*, p. x.

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