

Progressing Fragmentation of Political Science: International Relations vs. Global Studies

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Introduction

International Relations is conventionally conceived of as a sub-field within political science, despite the discipline developed from diplomatic history and international law. As McClelland and Pfaltzgraff (2009) note, '[t]he emergence of international relations was to broaden the scope of international law beyond this traditional focal point' ('Historical development', para. 3).

However, the sheer complexity of processes unfolding in the world calls for a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach -- an approach that would integrate concepts and methods of history, international law, international political economy, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. Just like complexity economics recognizes obsolescence of concepts such as static equilibrium, so should International Relations recognize the complex and fluid nature of international system and develop a set of analytical tools for grasping this complexity.

While state has traditionally been the sole (or at least primary) unit of analysis in International Relations, scholars are increasingly recognizing non-state entities, such as interstate organizations, multinational companies, terrorist cells, religious institutions, non-governmental organizations, epistemic communities, and transnational advocacy networks as actors in international politics. Nowadays, 'globalization erodes any notion that states, and state boundaries, constitute the only domain of international relations' (Nexon, 2006, para. 11).

Researchers suggest that interstate relations are different from transnational relations defined as 'regular interactions across national boundaries when at least one actor

is a non-state agent or does not operate on behalf of a national government or an intergovernmental organization' (Risse-Kappen, 2008, p. 3). Indeed, present governance arrangements are best described as 'multilayered,' implying governance arrangements involving sub state, state, and suprastate regulatory frameworks (Cutler, 2005). Robert Cox (in Payne, 2003) suggests the term 'global perestroika' to denote the demise of state system into a complex web of micro-regions, traditional states, and macro-regions. Nation-states have surrendered a part of their autonomy to global intergovernmental organizations and, like in the case with the United Nations, limited monopoly on the use of force. For centuries, issuing laws has been a prerogative of national governments; nowadays 'international law, with its enlarging normative scope, extending writ and growing institutionalization, exemplifies the phenomenon of globalization' (Crawford & Marks, 1998, p. 82). In the past, issuing laws and maintaining the monopoly on legitimate use of force were central to the concept of state sovereignty. In the modern world, where a wide range of issues have ceased to be a matter of concern of one nation-state only, growing globalization of governance is a legitimate response to the increasing number of global challenges. As Stiglitz (2006, p. 21) notes, '[t]here are too many problems -- trade, capital, the environment -- that can be dealt with only at the global level.'

A natural question arises: is International Relations, as a discipline, capable of conceptualizing and explicating complex webs of relations among a myriad of actors, or is mapping a new field of enquiry required? Transnational Studies, offered at various degree levels at several universities, positions itself as a sub-filed within Humanities, mainly preoccupied with historical, social, cultural and linguistic aspects of cross-border interactions. Global Studies seems to reconcile International Relations and Transnational Studies. However, Global Studies, as a discipline, is only in the making; its emergence is surrounded by healthy skepticism.

International Relations and Global Studies: Key Differences

Network as the Unit of Analysis

Proponents of Global Studies argue that the new discipline is at least in three ways different from International Relations. Firstly, while the main unit of analysis in International Relations is a nation-state, with a growing emphasis on non-state actors, Global Studies looks primarily at ‘informal and formal networks of groups of individuals and organizations linked to each other and to the global economy and polity’ (Pomerantz, 2008, para. 4). These networks form what is referred to as ‘transnational social spaces – sustained ties of persons, networks and organizations across the borders across multiple nation-states’ (University of Bielefeld, 2006, ‘Transnationalization and Citizenship’, para. 1). At the same time, such conceptualization of the unit of analysis mirrors to a certain extent the liberal tradition in International Relations which ‘concentrates on order made from below, i.e. from individuals and groups in society...through the complex development of all kinds of relations across borders between individuals and groups’ (Sorensen, 2006, p. 350). However, International Relations is still mainly concerned with classical issues of foreign and international politics, or ‘high politics’, while Global Studies is concerned with ‘low politics’ or ‘globalization from below’ (University of Bielefeld, 2006).

This process of ‘globalization from below’ is transforming even the most basic social institutions. Education has been traditionally perceived as an intrinsically national institution serving the purposes of transmitting knowledge and socializing into certain values and perceptions. Yet nowadays people benefit from exposure to different systems of education by studying abroad; furthermore, distance and informal learning transformed education into a global and continuing process. The notion of family has always been closely connected with the notion of household, i.e. a group of people living together. Yet DeParle (2007) brings numerous examples of families scattered around the globe yet maintaining meaningful relationships and supporting each other financially.

Thus, the focus on networks as units of analysis might be justified.

Global as the Level of Analysis

Global Studies has decisively solved the traditional level-of-analysis problem in International Relations, i.e. whether to focus on the macro-level of the international system or the micro-level of the national state (Lampert, 2005). Rather than focusing on interstate relations, Global Studies attempts to ‘conceptualize the world as a composite interconnected whole – in terms of issues, agencies, institutions and histories’ (Shrivastava, 2008, p. 3). Methodological nationalism is considered obsolete in a world where many key developments happen among non-state actors or at a sub-state, regional or global level.

The difference between international and global is acknowledged by other disciplines as well. For instance, Bruce Mazlish (1998; in Shrivastava, 2007) notes the distinction between world history and global history. ‘World’ can denote a specific geographical conception (e.g. the Western World) or a historical epoch (e.g. Renaissance world), while ‘global’ implies an all-encompassing level of analysis. In a similar vein, Roger Tooze (2008, pers. comm.) insists that Global Political Economy is fundamentally different from International Political Economy by virtue of analyzing interstate relations only as part of the global. Indeed, numerous phenomena that Global Political Economy studies, such as ‘drug trafficking, illegal arms deals, smuggling goods and people, and laundering their financial products, which are estimated to amount to a trillion dollars annually, are not taking place in the framework of relations between nation-states’ (Global Political Economy, 2008, para. 7).

Global Studies, in its turn, focuses on the provision of global public goods, which is not taking place within state borders or at the interstate level. Global public goods include peace and security, environmental conservation, containing the spread of diseases, or building global communication and

transportation networks (Kaul, Conceicao, Le Goulven, & Mendoza, 2003).

Transdisciplinarity

Finally, while International Relations only strive towards interdisciplinarity, Global Studies positions itself as a transdisciplinary field, a field beyond disciplinary boundaries. Global Studies is an issue-based and problem-focused field (Pomerantz, 2008). The *raison d'être* of the transdisciplinary nature of Global Studies is the fact that processes of globalization are inherently multidimensional. Understanding the phenomenon of globalization, an originally sociological concept (McLuhan, 1964; in Shrivastava, 2007), requires knowledge of communication studies, ethics, environmental studies and other subjects that were never designed to deal with global realities (The Global Studies Association, 2009).

Proponents of Global Studies suggest one more justification for recognizing this field as a distinct discipline; it appears questionable, however. They argue that it is impossible to comprehend the ongoing change relying on disciplines which pre-date globalization (The Global Studies Association, 2009). Subscribing to this argument equals accepting that globalization is a new phenomenon with a potential for transforming the world beyond recognition. Globalization believers argue that the volume, velocity, complexity and connectedness of global financial and information flow have created a new historical reality 'with the capacity to work as a unit in real time...on a planetary scale' (Castells, 2000, p. 311). Despite these claims, the prevailing notion that the present globalization is new and unprecedented can be contested using data from belle époque of 1840-1914 which was characterized by allegedly more integrated world economy than the one we witness nowadays. Some scholars (Gordon, 1988; Weiss, 1998; Hirst and Thompson, 1999; in Held and McGrew, 2002) argue that both in terms of intensity and geographical reach current migration, trade flows, and capital flows yield to those of the belle époque. Even if globalization is an unprecedented phenomenon, devising a new academic discipline for its examination might be an example of overshooting, as it would

have questionable value outside of immediate historical context.

Globalization as the Master Concept

The proof that Global Studies is still in infancy can be seen in the absence of a consensus about the field's master concept – globalization. However, debates over the master concept have the potential for driving theoretical developments in the field. David L. Wank (2008), Professor of Sociology and Director of the Graduate Program in Global Studies at Sophia University, brings the example of the concept of 'society' in sociology. Emile Durkheim asserted that society constitutes the individual person, yet this notion was objected by the hypothesis that individuals constitute society. The debate that followed established 'society' as the discipline's master concept and suggested lines of theory development, such as society-centric structural functionalism, methodological individualism, and agency theory.

However, the absence of a definition of the master concept, which could serve as a starting point for further enquiry, complicates the development of Global Studies. Globalization can be best seen as the emergence of a new form of economic system, governance pattern, social organization, public space, and consciousness beyond the nation state. Most definitions of globalization focus on one aspect of this complex multifaceted process and thus have limitations. For example, conceptualization of globalization as the spread of transplanetary and supraterritorial connections between people (Scholte, 2005) is concerned only with the sociocultural aspect of this phenomenon. The definition suggested by Herman (1999) is preoccupied with the economic dimension of the ongoing change, which is described as an 'active process of corporate expansion across borders and a structure of cross-border facilities and economic linkages' (para. 1). The aforementioned definitions fall short of capturing all the subtleties and complexities of globalization. Defining the master concept is the most important task of Global Studies at this point in time.

Geographical Reach of Global Studies

Global Studies should be credited for its attempt to analyze the world in its entire globality, transgressing Eurocentrism that is typical of International Relations⁷. International Relations tends to focus on major powers and relations between them, consigning whole continents to oblivion. Africa and Oceania have been virtually excluded from the analysis of international relations, while most of Asia has been mentioned only tangentially. The diversity of survival strategies and economic regimes in the non-Western world were relegated to ‘area studies’ as gross ‘aberrations’ from the liberal norm (Shrivastava, 2007, 2008).

It is true that the globalized economy is dominated by the OECD countries and intensifying relations between them (Jones, 1995; in Held and McGrew, 2002). The world is imploding rather than expanding territorially; its centre is less integrated with the periphery than it was before the industrial revolution (Hoogvelt, 2001; in Held and McGrew, 2002). Most countries are dependent on the performance of the so-called ‘globalized core’ comprising financial markets, international trade, transnational production, science and technology, and specialty labor, mainly in the developed world (Castells, 2000). Certain regions and countries are less engaged in the process of globalization – either by their own will or by virtue of their inferior position in the international system. Thus, the ‘integration is extremely uneven, and highly selective’ (Castells, 2000, p. 314).

However, it is also erroneous to perceive certain regions as being totally excluded from the process of globalization. For the OECD countries, East Asia and Latin America have become both the destination for investment and the provider of imports. Contemporary globalization unites all continents and regions (UNCTAD 1998c; in Held and McGrew 2002). This is especially true today, when China is rising as a hegemonic challenger, while failed states in Africa remain a source of

⁷ See, for example, Buzan B, & Little, R 2000, *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations*, Oxford University Press, New York.

insecurity for the entire world community. In response, Global Studies pledges to be more inclusive. It seems to favor newer and more critical methods of enquiry as compared to International Relations, such as Marxist theories, world systems theories, postcolonial studies, feminism, and environmentalism. These theories, according to Shrivastava (2008), are better suited for understanding linkages between the local and the global.

While being a plausible goal, zealous commitment to ‘inclusiveness’ might pose some problems for Global Studies as a discipline. Desirous of redressing past harms, it might focus too much on the developing countries and overlap with development studies. But Global Studies can also overcome limitations of development studies, a discipline that studies third world from the first world’s point of view and reflects a ‘peculiar twist in the perspective of those academic and political representatives of the wealthier, economically more developed, politically more powerful and culturally dominating societies’ (University of Bielefeld, 2006, ‘Transnationalization and Development in the World Society’, para. 2).

More dangerously, Global Studies might subscribe to a certain political agenda and thus compromise the principles of academic impartiality. Shrivastava (2007) implicitly suggests that one of the functions of Global Studies should be to challenge the desirability of neoliberalism and Western hegemony. South Dakota State University (2009), which offers a degree in Global Studies, designates that the mission of the program is ‘to understand essentially ‘how the world works’ and to make it better’ (para. 1). Global Studies has to resolve the conflict between normative and descriptive orientations. While the notion that science is value-free is increasingly recognized as utopian⁸, explicit support of a particular set of values might preclude Global Studies from developing into an academic discipline.

⁸ See, for example, Bahm, AJ, 1971, Science is not value-free, *Policy Sciences*, Vol. 2, No. 4, pp. 391-396.

Parallels can be drawn with the early history of International Relations. At the beginning of the 20th century, the field's development was influenced by 'a growing demand to find less-dangerous and more-effective means of conducting relations between peoples, societies, governments, and economies' (McClelland & Pfaltzgraff, 2009, 'Historical Development', para. 1). The conceptualization of International Relations as a discipline happened after World War I and was fueled by the desire to design a peaceful and democratic international system. Thus, at its early stages International Relations was normative, even idealistic; this orientation was later displaced by scientific detachment brought about by realism. Thus, prescriptive rather than descriptive orientation of Global Studies might be growing pains.

Invisibility of Global Studies Outside of U.S. Academia

To date, there are few centres of Global Studies outside North America. It is only in the U.S. where Global Studies is taught at the undergraduate level; there are also several courses at the graduate level in Europe. The term 'International Studies' is much preferred in British and European academia. There are three possible reasons for this.

First of all, the 'preference for international rather than global in the non-American context appears to have an underlying political implication' (Shrivastava, 2007, p. 7). Cautious adoption of the rhetoric of the global might have to do with apprehensions that the discourse of globalization, with deregulation and privatization in the same package, is used by the U.S. to further its interests (Hay & Watson, 1999). Wank (2008) acknowledges that there are fears that Global Studies is 'an ideological spearhead of American neo-liberal imperialism' (para. 4) since 'all fields in the Academy are not only structures of knowledge but also of power' (para. 20). Such considerations may explain lacklustre interest in Global Studies outside of the West, reinforced by the invisibility of non-OECD countries in the analysis of globalization itself (Shrivastava, 2008).

The second reason might have roots in the respect for tradition in European academia. International Studies programs

in the U.K. and Europe rest heavily on traditional disciplines such as political economy, conflictology, and public policy analysis. On the contrary, American scholars are more enthusiastic about new developments, especially if they are likely to attract public attention. For example, democratic peace theory would take the form of Kant's *Perpetual Peace* in Europe and Friedman's *Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention* in the U.S. (the theory argues that two countries that have McDonald's do not go to war against each other).

The third reason is utterly pragmatic: higher education in the U.S. is for-profit, and widening the scope of courses on offer is in the best interests of faculty. Thus, Global Studies is sometimes dismissed as 'old wine in new bottles' (Wank, 2008) or 'academic branding...of a sexier version of International Relations' (Pomerantz, 2008). The fact that most schools and centres of Global Studies are concentrated in North America undermines the aspiration of the new discipline to be truly global and inclusive. The acceptance of Global Studies outside of the Western world, however, will serve as a sign of the discipline's viability and topicality.

Challenges and Opportunities

The most important challenge for Global Studies is to develop (or at least to synthesize) its own methodological apparatus in order to escape accusations that are sometimes hurled at International Relations. Mark Laffey (2000) from the School of Oriental and African Studies in London regards International Relations as 'a parochial social science' that 'has produced few works or theories that have achieved recognition beyond its own boundaries' but 'imports theory and concepts from elsewhere - often forgetting that it has done so - or reinvents them' (para. 1). While methodological apparatus of Global Studies is still lacking, some schools that offer programs in Global Studies have developed their own approaches and frameworks. For example, Wank (2008) suggests making sense of methodological underpinnings of Global Studies through three broad frameworks: world systemic framework, transnationalism, and global/local.

Furthermore, the very desirability of further fragmentation of International Relations is sometimes called into question. While research into narrow areas of enquiry might be important, there is a danger that the field might cease to be a 'discipline' in any meaningful sense if '[s]cholars lack any common ground to relate their findings to one another's work' (Nexon, 2006, para. 7). At the same time, while the use of the same methods across all social sciences (e.g. statistical, interpretative, or formal) would ease communication among researchers, 'we need multiple methodological perspectives to gain an appreciation of the complexities of social and political life' (Nexon, 2006, para. 12).

Fears that International Relations might fragment into a myriad of disconnected fields are not new. In the 1950s, a variety of new topics and methods entered International Relations, including cognition, conflict resolution, decision making, deterrence, development, the environment, game theory, economic and political integration, and systems analysis. It provoked 'some anxiety that the discipline would collapse into complete conceptual and methodological chaos' (McClelland & Pfaltzgraff, 2009, 'The behavioral approach and the task of integration', para. 1). The task of integration of the so-called 'islands of theory' into a greater, more comprehensive theory of international relations dominated International Relations during the decade.

At the same time, 'some scholars began to question the necessity – or even the possibility – of arriving at a single theory that would explain all the varied, diverse, and complex facets of international relations' (McClelland & Pfaltzgraff, 2009, 'The behavioral approach and the task of integration', para. 2). Thus, thematic and methodological diversity within International Relations is a contentious subject. Historically, such diversity has been 'a situation that supporters claimed was a reflection of rich intellectual resources and that detractors cited as an indication of fractured conceptual foundations' (McClelland & Pfaltzgraff, 2009, 'Structures, institutions, and levels of analysis', para. 5).

One more challenge for Global Studies is to define the area of its practical application. It appears as if Global Studies

is being thought of as a purely academic discipline. This may explain lack of Global Studies programs at the undergraduate level. Students that are interested in the study of globalization for practical reasons, e.g. planning an international career, opt for humanities-oriented Transnational Studies or Area Studies. However, some Global Studies programs are oriented towards training 'global leaders in business, education, government, and the non-profit sector' (University of California, 2009). The University of Winchester (2009), for example, offers a practice-oriented course titled 'Managing Contemporary Global Issues' where 'project management, decision making, critical thinking and the analysis of logistics and international strategic planning complements the theoretical approaches found in the literature on politics, international relations and global studies' (para. 2).

While few universities offer such practice-oriented courses, there are few PhD programs in Global Studies, too. Similarly to the situation in Areas Studies, holders of PhD degree in Global Studies 'can be seen as lacking training in any particular curriculum or methodology, hindering acceptance in the academic job market' (Wank, 2008, para. 12).

When International Relations was emerging, enthusiasm about international organizations such as the League of Nations led some to believe that International Relations should be a trade rather than a science; as McClelland and Pfaltzgraff (2009) note, '[s]ome of the international relations schools that were founded in the interwar period were explicitly created to prepare civil servants for what was expected to be the dawning age of international government' ('Between the two wars', para. 3). As idealism faded, the gap between policy and scholarship grew. McClelland and Pfaltzgraff (2009) inform that 'practitioners...frequently have professed that they have found little in the field that is of value in their day-to-day work' ('Scholarship and policy', para. 4).

It would be useful for Global Studies to identify itself as either an academic or a practice-oriented discipline. This would allow greater coherence of curricula across universities and ease cooperation between Global Studies scholars. At the

moment, Wank (2008) distinguishes six types of Global Studies curricula: 1) thematic courses (e.g. world systems, global history, and world literature); 2) topical courses (e.g. migration, media, nationalism, gender, food security, ethnic conflict etc.); 3) problem-focused courses (e.g. environment, population, disease, disasters, human rights etc.); 4) job-related courses (e.g. managing multicultural organizations or conflict resolution); 5) methodology courses (e.g. approaches to study of globalization, mostly qualitative); and 6) area courses. Such diversity, once again, points to the fact that Global Studies is still in infancy.

Conclusion

Globalization is a complex multifaceted process that transforms all dimensions of social reality – economic system, governance, social organization, public space, and identity. Nation-state, once being the key actor in formulating economic policies, determining governance arrangements, influencing social structures, organizing public spaces, and shaping identities, was a focus of analysis of International Relations throughout the previous century. Presently, corporations, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, sub state units, networks, and individuals play an equally important role in shaping the course of events. Instead of a narrow focus on interstate relations, Global Studies attempts to conceptualize the world in its complexity and entirety.

It might be too early to regard Global Studies as a field of enquiry distinct from International Relations, since the two ‘exist on a continuum, and greater definitional precision will allow both to flourish independently’ (Shrivastava, 2008, p. 6). Yet it is necessary to note the progressing conceptualization of the field, manifested through the emergence of a host of academic journals on the subject, such as *Global Studies Journal* published by Common Ground, *New Global Studies* published by Berkeley Electronic Pres, *Global Networks* and *Globalizations* published by The Global Studies Association and *Asia Journal of Global Studies* published by Asia Association for Global Studies. As Wank (2008) notes, the next few years will be crucial for determining whether Global Studies will become a fully institutionalized field in academia.

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