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**POTENTIALS AND CHALLENGES OF GLOBAL STUDIES
FOR THE 21st CENTURY**

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COMMUNICATING GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

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KEY WORDS

global studies, globalization, interdisciplinary studies, global research methods

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¹ Philip C. McCarty (ed.): *Integrated Perspectives in Global Studies* (revised first edition). San Diego 2013.

One common approach to explaining the emergence of the field of Global Studies is to start with the rapid increase in economic globalization in the 1990's post-Cold War era. The focus of scholarship at that time was centered primarily on locating and describing the complex processes of globalization as well as the impacts those processes were having on people around the world. The academic encounter with globalization happened in the context of increasing interdisciplinary scholarship that had been impacting the academy since the 1970s. This intellectual trajectory portrays Global Studies as an interdisciplinary project that engages with complex and interrelated global-scale issues.²

One unfortunate side effect of focusing scholarly attention on the interdisciplinary roots and extreme levels of abstraction and complexity of global issues is a kind of analytical paralysis. I have heard complaints that the field of Global Studies claims to be the study of everything, or that the field simply lacks focus. Such complaints are a clear indication that global scholars aren't doing enough to convey the value of Global Studies beyond their inner circle of colleagues. To borrow a phrase from marketing, we need to do a better job of defining our product. What are we selling to our students? Is mind-boggling, paralysis-inducing complexity all that we have to offer? I think not. Global scholars need to be able to say more clearly and precisely what the field of Global Studies is and what it has to offer. Global Studies is not just the study of everything. It does have focus. It does offer unique perspectives and it does have great explanatory power.

Some of my colleagues say we shouldn't be trying to define Global Studies too rigidly. They enjoy the freedom of a nebulous or poorly defined interdisciplinary field and don't want to be constrained by a rigid set of restrictive norms. Others worry that I might be trying to define a canon of readings or worse turn Global Studies into another ossified discipline. As a devout interdisciplinary scholar I assure you that I am not interested in creating new disciplinary boundaries. My goal is simply to be clear about the field's inherent value and to make Global Studies more accessible to a wider audience. Let sophisticated global theorists soar into stratospheric levels of abstraction, but at the same time we must remember that we have to make Global Studies applicable to the real world. We shouldn't let the complexity of the issues we face prevent us from reaching out to broader audiences with a clear and coherent message.

The question "What is Global Studies?" is more than a purely academic question because Global Studies programs are not developing in a vacuum. Global Studies programs must earn a place within existing institutions, established fields of inquiry and faculties that are already under pressure from shrinking budgets and increasing student demand. As with any new interdisciplinary field, our programs must be

2 Philip C. McCarty: Globalizing Legal History, in: *Rechtsgeschichte – Legal History. Journal of the Max Planck Institute for European Legal History* 22 (2014), in press; Matthew Sparke: *Introducing Globalization. Ties, Tensions, and Uneven Integration*. Chichester, West Sussex 2013.

able to hold their own against traditional disciplines such as economics, history, political science and sociology that offer their students coherent analytical frameworks, clear issues that are framed in ways that can be understood, questions that can be answered, and powerful methodological tools with which to answer them. This is not to say that Global Studies should ask simplistic questions or offer simplistic explanations for the complex issues we deal with. However, if Global Studies programs are to establish legitimacy and compete for resources, they do need to offer some clarity about the kinds of questions that global scholars ask, the kinds of analytical frameworks employed, and the kinds of answers one can expect to find using global perspectives.

Another way to say this is that global scholars need to convey the power that global perspectives have to address pressing global issues. We need to demonstrate that we can provide practical real-world solutions. We need to communicate this potential not only to our students and to each other, but to scholars in other disciplines that are rapidly adopting global perspectives. To succeed in institutional settings, the field of Global Studies must make its core questions and issues accessible to campus administrators and funding agencies. Ultimately, we must reach beyond the academy to communicate the power and utility of Global Studies to the public and policy makers.

Why Are Global Studies Important?

One of the first and most crucial things that global scholars need to communicate is the importance of the field itself, and why engaging with issues from integrated global perspectives is essential to understanding the world today. Most of us assume that there are many reasons why the field of Global Studies is timely and important but too often we leave these assumptions unstated. The list below is an attempt to elaborate some of the reasons why I think the field Global Studies is crucial to understanding the contemporary world. This list is no doubt incomplete and I encourage others to add, revise and otherwise comment on these topics.

- **Global-Scale Issues.** Global Studies exists because scholars have discovered that there are economic, political and social issues that are truly global in scale. Issues such as economic development, environmental change, and immigration all have at least one thing in common: they reach beyond the limits of the nation-state. These issues are global in scale in the sense that they ignore political boundaries and are impacting all nations, albeit to varying degrees. This is important because up until relatively recently the largest unit of analysis was the nation-state itself. This limitation made it difficult for scholars to see the larger integrated world economic system within which various state and non-state actors operate. As a starting point, global perspectives enable a global systemic analysis that is not limited to national or international analyses.

Further, I argue that these kinds of issues are global in scale because they manifest *at multiple levels simultaneously*. Distinct manifestations of these kinds of global issues can be found simultaneously at the local, regional, national, and transnational levels. Global-scale issues such as these call on us to shift our focus not just from the national to the global, but to the entire local/global continuum.³ The ability to grasp global-scale issues, to integrate larger global systems analysis into a multilevel analysis of the entire global/local spectrum, to see the global through the local and vice versa, is a new way of understanding the world.

- **Powerful Analytical Tools.** Global perspectives offer unique insights and new analytical capacities. By situating the global-local spectrum in deep historical contexts, global perspectives have the potential to reveal temporal and spatial connections we could not have otherwise seen or even imagined. We can begin to trace the connections between empires, colonialism, modern imperialism and new forms of neo-imperialism in the world today. Global perspectives suggest that important connections exist between events and processes, even when events appear to be disconnected and separated by time, space, or even our own categories of thought.

A global synthesis supports the development of new analytical concepts. Take for example the labor movement, human rights, environmental and women's movements. These movements are often studied within the context of a single nation. Even when these movements are studied as international social movements, they are treated separately. In contrast, a global perspective would analyze these different movements as interrelated global social movements. Taking it a step further, a global perspective could link them all together as parts of a larger *anti-systemic movement* that addresses various facets of inequality and unfairness in the global geopolitical system.⁴ I would argue that global perspectives provide a framework for understanding global social movements as related systemic movements. This understanding could in turn support the formation of entirely new levels of *global intersectional solidarity* with the potential for large-scale impacts needed to effect worldwide change.

- **New Solutions to New Problems.** Global perspectives offer new ways of thinking that have the potential to bring new solutions to the new kinds of global-scale problems that our rapidly globalizing world faces. Pressing global issues such as climate change, economic development, regional violence and resource depletion are among the new global-scale issues that call for new ways of thinking and new solutions. Identifying global-scale issues, finding patterns in and connections between global issues, and then proposing new ways of addressing these global issues is one of the

3 Jan Nederveen Pieterse: *What Is Global Studies?*, in: *Globalizations* 10 (2013) 4, 499-514.

4 William G. Martin (ed.): *Making Waves. Worldwide Social Movements, 1750-2005*. Boulder, CO 2008.

core functions of Global Studies.

- **New Solutions to Old Problems.** In some cases global perspectives can provide new ways of understanding problems that have to date been overlooked. For example, global-historical analyses of the international regulatory system indicate that there may be inherent limitations in the modern international treaty system. These limitations hinder the development of strong multilateral institutions, effectively destabilizing the geopolitical order and increasing the tendency toward both regional conflict and violence by non-state actors. Until we break out of the International Relations paradigm, we cannot begin to identify, integrate and analyze global systemic and regulatory issues that operate both above and below the level of the nation-state.⁵ By shaking up the way we think about international issues, global perspectives have the potential to bring new ways of thinking to old and enduring problems, such as immigration and sex trafficking, that are notoriously difficult for nation-states to deal with.
- **Recovering Critical Perspectives.** Global perspectives are important because they have the potential to recover critical voices that are too often pushed out of the discourse of globalization. A focus on the economic processes of globalization can overemphasize the dominant processes of capitalism, global markets, international trade, development and regional trade agreements. A macroeconomic analysis displaces the local and further marginalizes voices from the periphery of the global economy. Global perspectives that encompass the entire local/global continuum necessarily encompass the voices of women, minorities, the unemployed, postcolonial subjects, people in the global south, people living in poverty, immigrants, refugees and other displaced persons, among others.⁶ By definition then, global perspectives include multiple intersectional dimensions of discrimination – gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, health and citizenship. Any global analysis must include marginalized voices, many which bear witness to unfairness in the global system that includes gross inequality, extreme poverty, human rights abuses, exploitation of human and natural resources, environmental degradation, governmental corruption, regionalized violence and genocide. It is only by deliberately making room for these critical voices that Global Studies gains the potential to *recognize* and *engage* with the many facets of the most serious global issues facing the world today.
- **Practical and Policy Applications.** The critical engagement of integrated global perspectives with multifaceted and multilevel global-scale issues is not simply an academic exercise. Global perspec-

5 See "Transnational Topographies of Power" in James Ferguson: *Global Shadows. Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*. Durham, NC 2006.

6 Eve Darian-Smith: *Global Studies – Handmaiden of Neoliberalism?*, in: *Globalizations* 12 (2014) 2, in press.

tives are important because they offer unique insights into real world problems. For example, in her book *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, author Anna Tsing analyzes the processes of cross-cultural communication and miscommunication that contribute to deforestation in the rainforests of Indonesia. The actors involved in her study include the indigenous people of the region, relocated peasant farmers, environmental activists, legal and illegal loggers, local politicians, government agencies, international scientists, resource speculators and investors, multinational corporations, and the United Nations funding agencies. The “friction” Tsing describes is the result of their collective interactions, their miscommunications, and all that gets lost in translation. Where the government of Indonesia lifted logging bans, intending to allow limited legal access, it also enabled increasing penetration of illegal logging and property rights violations that it could not monitor. The result was a type of dysfunction at the local and national levels that left the rainforests and indigenous people of Indonesia vulnerable to massive over-exploitation by global markets.

The policy implications of this kind of functional/dysfunctional analysis are many. For example, one could use this approach to argue that governments that lack resources should avoid making their natural resources available to unfettered exploitation. Where local governments lack the resources to monitor, enforce, restrict, and benefit from the extraction processes that are detrimental to the environment and local populations, they should rely on the types of regulations that are easier to enforce such as banning of all drilling, mining, fishing, and hunting in clearly delineated zones until such time as those activities can be properly monitored and controlled.

Studies such as Tsing’s indicate that the insights that result from global perspectives may be most valuable when deployed at the places where the different political, economic, cultural and legal elements of global systems interact. By focusing on processes of exchange, and the interactive processes of communication, translation and interpretation, from region to region and from global to local, global perspectives can look beyond the nation-state to highlight and interrogate the various functions and dysfunctions within larger global systems. And to the degree that geopolitical and economic forces play a part in creating problems such as international immigration and global resource depletion, analyzing larger systems is essential for understanding and acting on these problems.

- **Global Civics and Citizenship.** The field of Global Studies is important because it has the power to transform our students’ understanding of current global issues. Every day our students are confronted with headlines that present the world as a dizzying array of apparently disconnected and chaotic events. Integrated global perspectives encourage students to identify persistent patterns across time and space. For example, students may grapple with the challenge of sustainable economic develop-

ment in the global south. A global analysis of economic development can include regional histories of colonization, multinational development policies, national politics, demographic and environmental changes, local institutions, customs and agricultural practices. In the process students are likely to encounter the power and limitations of the modern development paradigm. In a similar way, students can engage with the multiple historical, economic, geopolitical and cultural factors that shape global issues such as immigration, poverty, regional violence and ethnic conflict. In this way global perspectives offer students a unique and coherent way of understanding ongoing global affairs.

Global perspectives empower our students not just to understand the world but also to act as citizens of the world. From a global perspective the various political, ethnic and religious nationalisms can be understood in the context of deep histories of colonialism and imperialism, and within the context of larger global governance issues such as human rights and global commons. Teaching students to reach beyond nationalism to embrace the wider humanity and global citizenship can transform their fundamental understanding of the individual's role in society and our collective place in the world.

Dealing in Complexity

Recounting the convoluted history of the field of Global Studies and the complexity of multifaceted global problems is intellectually satisfying, but it often doesn't help us communicate beyond our own rather small academic circles. I would like to suggest a different approach, one driven primarily by my immediate need to communicate with a diverse group of students. I teach Global Studies at a research institution where the introductory Global Studies course is very large, approximately 300 or 400 in every class. The course meets multiple general education requirements for students in different disciplines scattered across the humanities, social and natural sciences. The class also typically includes about 50 international students visiting from abroad.

One might think that communicating the convoluted history and conceptual development of the field of Global Studies to such a diverse student audience would be difficult. And it is, or at least it was, until I realized that for the most part my students do not need to hear it because they are already sold on it. To start with they are not burdened by the essentially modernist disciplinary training that scholars typically receive and they are enthusiastic supporters of interdisciplinary scholarship. In fact, many actively seek new interdisciplinary approaches. In addition, they already know that global issues are timely and important. For these students, the interdisciplinary study of global issues seems a reasonable path to understanding the highly integrated world they live in. They show up on the first day of class understanding that the academy needs to develop new approaches to the new kinds of complex global problems that the world faces today. A good many of my students sense that grappling with global issues is the most

direct path to becoming global citizens and making positive change in their world. In short, globalization is not new to them and a field dedicated to understanding it simply makes sense. Their world has always been global.

As distressing as it may be to acknowledge that our field is not really new anymore, the realization can also be liberating and challenging. It is liberating to find that students are already on board with interdisciplinary approaches to global studies and that we do not need to justify what we do. The challenge is to move beyond the globalization debates and try to present Global Studies as a coherent analytical paradigm.⁷ If Global Studies is taken-for-granted by our students, then what does it mean to approach the world from Global Studies perspectives? What are the common approaches that global scholars take? These questions are challenging enough. The greater challenge, however, comes from the fact that I teach Global Studies in a research institution. My students must not only learn to see global perspectives, they must also use them as a coherent analytical framework in their own research on ongoing global events and issues. The difficult question is how should our students go about deploying global perspectives to design and implement a coherent research project?

By happy coincidence teaching research design in Global Studies turns out to be a topic with which I have some experience. In the 1990's I was trained in multiple disciplines, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Since then I have been teaching Global Studies and global research methods at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In addition, during our summer sessions my colleagues and I take students from different disciplines to places such as Mexico and Australia to learn how to do global research in the field. Out of necessity we have developed an approach to teaching global perspectives and methods that allows students to design and implement their own research projects with very limited time and resources. Our field training experience provides evidence that global perspectives can be communicated effectively without making reference to the field's complex history, the inherent difficulty of doing interdisciplinary work, or even the mind-boggling complexity of global issues. In fact, students often develop better projects when we do not dwell on these complexities and proceed as if designing and implementing a global research project is a perfectly normal thing to do.

My approach assumes that teaching students to engage in global research is much the same as teaching them to do research using any other analytical framework. Most global research projects fall within a broad analytical paradigm that includes integrated global perspectives, addresses a range of uniquely global issues or problems, uses defined analytical concepts, and employs a range of accepted methodological approaches. Another way of saying this is that we teach students to understand the world in

⁷ Philip C. McCarty (ed.): *Integrated Perspectives in Global Studies* (revised first edition). San Diego 2013.

ways that encourage certain kinds of questions and analytical approaches. The same could be said for any other field of inquiry.

The examples of global research below draw heavily on the kinds of integrated global perspectives that I have outlined in more detail elsewhere.⁸ The following examples focus on the way these global perspectives are adopted and deployed by students investigating global issues.

- **Fair Trade Research:** My students have questioned whether or not buying “Fair Trade” coffee at a major chain of coffee shops helps coffee growers in the global south. Students are encouraged to consider this question from a variety of perspectives. The issue can be examined as a commodity chain that stretches from the local growers, through wholesale distributors, through regional trade organizations, into the global market, to local retailers, and ultimately a wide array of consumers around the world. A global analysis would assume that people at different points on the commodity chain make sense of the idea of Fair Trade in different ways. Students with limited resources can study the issue of Fair Trade from the global market perspective or from the perspective of any person at any one point on the local/global continuum, or even at multiple points along that continuum. Deploying a multi-site research strategy, they can interview people involved in different aspects of the process, including coffee plantation workers, plantation managers, business owners, regional distributors and consumers. By teaching our students to focus on the places where global issues become tangible in the lives of specific people we encourage our students to study abstract global issues from multiple and often divergent perspectives.
- **Millennium Development Goals:** Many students are interested in economic development, human rights and global governance issues. Combining such wide ranging concepts into a graduate thesis project can be challenging. However, adopting global perspectives makes it possible to turn these issues into a viable research project. For example, students interested in these issues have developed sophisticated research projects that analyze the ways different indigenous groups strategically deploy the UN Millennium Development Goals to influence state and federal government policy. The same strategy can be used to study the way NGOs and civil society organizations use UN legal frameworks for human rights (e.g. CEDAW) as political leverage at the local level. This kind of approach makes it possible for students to explore the ways the various development, rights and governance goals are negotiated by different actors at multiple levels.
- **Immigration Research:** In recent decades developments along the southern border of the United

⁸ Philip C. McCarty: Globalizing Legal History, in: *Rechtsgeschichte – Legal History. Journal of the Max Planck Institute for European Legal History* 22 (2014), in press.

States have led to increasing tension with immigrants from Mexico. Until recently, mainstream media have assumed that immigrants from Central and South America are driven almost exclusively by economic factors. The “immigrant problem” in the US has been understood almost exclusively through the lens of nation-to-nation labor migration. Several years ago students interviewing immigrants were among the first to recognize that the push factors driving immigrants from Central and South American regions to North America were changing. They noted that an increasing number of “labor migrants” were actually young people fleeing a new kind of drug violence ravaging not just Mexico, but the entire region. Now, several years on, media have finally made the public aware of increasing waves of unaccompanied children crossing the US’s southern border to escape drug violence.

Global perspectives make it increasingly clear that issues once associated with the Global South are now impacting the United States. Suddenly, the prospect of having UN refugee camps on US soil doesn’t seem as bizarre as it did only a few years ago. Adopting global perspectives can change our understanding of immigration from that of a rational-actor driven by individual economic calculations, to a more sophisticated systemic analysis. Immigration can be understood as a symptom of structural underdevelopment and non-state violence that reaches well beyond the boundaries of any one nation to impact the entire hemisphere.⁹ Recasting voluntary economic immigrants as involuntary political refugees could change their status under international human rights law. This would make the US government’s treatment of immigrants a global ethical and humanitarian issue. It also has the potential to dramatically alter the public debate and future policies about immigration in the US – not insignificant insights for a Master’s student!

The overarching goal of this essay is to help scholars communicate the importance and far-reaching potential of Global Studies to wider audiences including students, faculty, campus administrators and the public. I have argued that in recent years Global Studies has coalesced into a set of integrated perspectives with important analytical implications and practical applications. I have further argued that we can communicate global perspectives as a coherent analytical framework that students can comprehend and deploy in their own research projects. If our students can grasp global perspectives well enough to proceed with sophisticated investigations of complex and ongoing global-scale issues, what is holding us back?

⁹ Mary Kaldor: *New and Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era*. Stanford, CA 1999.

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