



On the Limits of Globalisation

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The popularisation of globalisation at the turn of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st century has been extensively shaped by the 1989 collapse of communism. The article examines the rise and fall of the discourse on globalisation as a topic directly linked to the post-communist New World Order. It argues that globalisation is a notion far broader than the ‘globalisation project’ of economic neo-liberalism. The institutionalisation of Global, Transnational and Cosmopolitan Studies reflects this understanding. Scholarship needs to move beyond the globalisation project and develop far more nuanced interpretations. It suggests that one such interpretation involves the notion of glocalisation, which represents an understanding of the contemporary form of hybridity, thus helping the social sciences to make sense of 21st century social complexity.

Keywords: globalisation, glocalisation, cosmopolitanism, culture

Introduction

I presented my first academic paper at the 1992 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association. It was my symbolic baptism into academic scholarship. The year 2017 marks my 25th year as an active researcher – a producer of academic knowledge.

Upon receiving the editor’s invitation to prepare a paper for the E-Symposium, it occurred to me that this milestone is a good occasion to reflect upon some of the shifts that have taken place over this quarter of a century in my areas of scholarly interest. However, in this paper, I address exclusively the topic of globalisation. I do so because it is a topic of significant interest to the ISA’s community of scholars and an issue that preoccupies contemporary scholarly and public debates, especially so in light of recent events – such as the 2016 Brexit vote and the US presidential election.

Moreover, since the early 1990s, I have been witness to the intellectual trends and developments that directly relate to this particular topic: as a young PhD student, I was introduced to the problematic of globalisation and glocalisation through the work of my former mentor, Roland Robertson. For most of the last 30 years, I have also been an international immigrant, working and living outside my country of birth; and over the recent fallout from the Great Recession and the subsequent European Union (EU) sovereign state crisis, I have had the bitter distinction of having felt directly the severe consequences of this crisis.

The rise and fall of the 'globalisation project'

Early references to globalisation date as far as back as the 1930s (James and Steger 2014). But as the increasing volume of scholarly production suggests, the 1989–90 collapse of communism in Eastern Europe reshaped the public's imagination and the intellectuals' theories and interpretations. In the early 1990s, and in large part as an extension of US foreign policy objectives for a post-communist 'New World Order', the vision of an unstoppable neo-liberal globalisation of markets was put forth as representing humanity's next stage. I distinctly recall that as late as 1990 my cohort of incoming young PhD students received some unsolicited advice by faculty members who considered the very notion of globalisation as such to be an illegitimate – if not straight out ridiculous – idea. In the 1990s, the application of shock-therapy strategies of economic reform in formerly communist Eastern Europe and the acceleration of China's Western-style economic development contributed extensively to the misconception that globalisation is but a rhetorical device meant to justify the application of neo-liberal economic policies around the world. This misconception was quickly turned into entrenched conventional wisdom.

In the late 1990s the 'battle of Seattle' (e.g. the historic protest of thousands of activists against the 1999 World Trade Organisation ministerial conference in Seattle, Washington) signaled the effective end of that short-lived consensus. The event initiated the rise of the anti-globalisation movement in most Western European and North American countries. In turn, this movement has been deeply embedded in global processes and relies on global interconnectivity (Lechner and Boli 2005; Mertes 2010). Labelling it an 'anti-globalisation' movement reflects the extent to which globalisation as a term was understood not in an open-ended sense of global interconnectivity but rather in the sense of global social integration (Held *et al.* 1999). The 2008 Great Recession prompted the formation of social movements – such as the *indignadas* and Occupy Wall Street movements – that quickly spread across state borders. And of course, one

also needs to take note of the ultra-right political movements and parties that have made a forceful return to European politics, often through the exploitation of anti-immigrant, anti-EU or anti-globalist sentiments.

Although in the 1990s protesting voices were unable to prevent the successes of economic neo-liberalism – such as the NAFTA agreement – the situation changed dramatically in the aftermath of 9/11. In an ironic twist of fate, since 9/11 simplistic visions of the 1990s 'one-worldism' were painfully shattered. As Alexander (2007) has pointed out, in the post-9/11 world the disappointed globalists of the 1990s found in the concept of cosmopolitanism a new mantra of social policy – one that allowed them to draw an explicit contrast between US unilateralism and EU cosmopolitan governance. The EU-sponsored cosmopolitanism was seemingly strengthened by its 2004 enlargement. Its spirit was broadly expressed through an intellectual debate on what came to be known as the Habermas-Derrida 'Core Europe' proposal (see Levy *et al.*, 2005). The core idea involved furthering EU integration at the expense of enlargement. That idea made new EU members feel like second-class citizens, whose rights would be curtailed at the expense of constructing a multi-layered EU. In turn, promotion of EU cosmopolitanism seemingly excluded the idea of national allegiances, going as far as suggesting that nationalism has become the enemy of Europe's nations (see Beck & Giddens 2005). This suggestion offered further support to nationalist parties that view enlargement and EU cosmopolitanism as antithetical to their countries' national interests. In this respect, the widely circulated (mis-)conception that cosmopolitanism is but an expression of the privileged few has greatly contributed to a populist backlash that has been felt on both sides of the Atlantic (see Douthat 2016 for an article that sums up this critique). In 2005, the failure of the drive toward a European Constitution indicated the limits of this type of EU-sponsored cosmopolitanism, and local Euro-scepticism was strengthened. The consequences of 2008 Great Recession, the sovereign debt crisis, and the bailout agreements only confirmed the impression of many Europeans that this 'German Europe' of

neo-liberalism and austerity leads to a bleak economic future (Wike 2016).

The end of the neo-liberal consensus of the post-communist New World Order – or what is sometimes referred to in journalistic and public discourse as the ‘globalisation project’ – has been repeatedly declared (see for example, Ioffe 2016). There are several possible dates for its demise: the 1999 battle of Seattle or 9/11 or the Great Recession or even the Brexit vote, and the 2016 US presidential election. This notion of ‘globalisation’, once hailed during the heydays of the 1990s as a new irreversible reality, is currently doubted by numerous individuals, groups, intellectuals, political parties, and even economists and entrepreneurs. Long before Donald Trump or Bernie Sanders, commentators of the Left and the Right identified this project with economic neo-liberalism, leading into the full integration of the world markets at the expense of the middle and working classes. This highly dubious proposition has become an entrenched conventional wisdom for mostly Eurocentric or ‘Northern’ perspectives (Connell 2007). Regardless of the precise date – and no doubt different scholars might choose different dates – it has nevertheless become quite clear that in the 21st century globalisation has entered a more cautious and regulated phase, whereby a ‘gated globe’ or an ‘enclave society’ is constructed (Shamir 2005; Turner 2007). Walls have been created to obstruct the free flow of trade, money, and people as governments adopt a more selective approach concerning their trade partners, the capital that is welcomed within their borders, and the individuals who are viewed as legitimate candidates for inclusion in their societies (Samuelson 2013). These trends have vindicated Calhoun’s (2007) insistence that nationalism should not be seen as a moral mistake or a defunct concept that belongs to humanity’s past.

From globalisation to global studies

As already eluded to in the above brief overview, ‘globalisation’ was a term that initially gained popularity as a means of registering and interpreting the painful trauma of the collapse of communism and the reshaping

of the globe into a new world order that greatly departed from the post-World War II entrenched Cold War battle lines (Albert 2007; Alexander 2007; Rosenberg 2005). This use of globalisation as a buzzword is echoed in Giddens’s (1990) interpretation of globalisation as involving the spread of European, or more broadly, Western modernity around the globe became accepted as an interpretation that confirmed this popularly accepted conventional wisdom. For Giddens (1990:1), modernity refers to ‘modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the 17th century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence’. This rather explicitly Eurocentric view was the latest twist in what in past centuries was the Europeanisation of the ‘world’ (e.g. of the European colonies) or what in the 20th century was referred to as Westernisation or Americanisation. Of course, serious reflection on the applicability of European modernity as a universal standard raises grave doubts for this interpretation (Bhambra 2007; Chakrabarty 2000; Martin & Beittel 1998). The critique of Eurocentric systems of thought has been based precisely on equating the modern with the European or, more broadly, the Western. Equating the West with the modern has been a long-standing Euro-American conceit that contains several questionable connotations.

This association

massages the egos of western Europeans and Americans . . . by insinuating that their culture is somehow single-handedly responsible for the shape of the modern world, and . . . by suggesting that the only way for other peoples of the world to attain economic, political, and even personal success is to abandon their indigenous social and cultural patterns and adopt the cultural forms prevalent in western Europe and the United States. (Lewis and Wigen 1997: 52–53)

Additionally, such a view ignores the multitude of processes typically referred to as Easternisation of the West (Campbell 2007) – that is, the influx of Asian religious or spiritual ideas into Western countries, the adoption of so-called ‘alternative’ forms of medicine, an emphasis on holistic approaches, the transformation of initially Asian religious practices into health

lifestyles (such as yoga), vegetarianism, and a multitude of related trends too varied and numerous to even attempt a complete listing here.

Since the 1990s, the realisation that the social-scientific understanding of globalisation involves a process *broader* and *older* than Western modernity or modernisation has grown. The implications of such a perspective are also clear: the possible reversal or drastic reformulation of the post-communist globalisation project does not render the notion of globalisation obsolete but requires greater theoretical refinement and attention to social complexity. In this regard, Robertson's (1992) original formulation of globalisation – which had already appeared in various articles and chapters in the 1980s – as a lengthier historical process that predates Western modernity, offered an alternative theoretically capable of transcending the limits of Western-centered or Eurocentric perspectives. Since the 1990s, historically oriented perspectives have greatly enriched, extended, and nuanced the understanding of globalization and have provided further verification of the thesis that a sound understanding of the world–historical character of globalisation requires recasting of agency in world or global history and a de-centering of Western-centered narratives (for examples, see O'Brien 2006; Hobson 2004; Sterns 2010; Pieterse 2012; Roudometof, 2001). This theoretical perspective and the increasing verification of this view through historical studies have opened up the theoretical space for authors to explore various alternatives, such as global modernities (Featherstone *et al.* 1995), multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2002), and glocal modernities (Roudometof 2003). These explorations have also brought forth the problematic of space and the necessity of re-thinking spatial categories that view space as extraneous to human relations.

On hindsight, it is clear that the overwhelming majority of scholarship over the years has approached globalisation analytically: authors and scholars have often looked for the 'globalisation of x', where x may be a specific facet of human behaviour or a field of study (Roudometof 2016b). Globalisation has been approached in terms of growing interconnectedness, and its content often has been shaped by the authors'

predispositions. The variety of different discourses that coalesced around the topic led in due course of time to the formation of Global Studies (for an overview, see Roudometof 2012), which was further promoted through the creation of several professional associations. The International Sociological Association has played a critically important role as well given that several presidents – ranging from Margaret Archer to Alberto Martinelli – have explicitly addressed the theme of and the necessity for global sociology. Scores of scholars have participated in these debates. Currently, it might be more accurate to speak of an inter-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary area of Global, Cosmopolitan, and Transnational Studies – as time has brought over further refinement and the articulation of related yet distinct research agendas (for overviews, see Delanty 2012; Skrbis & Woodward 2013; Levitt & Khagram 2007; Juergensmeyer & Anheier 2012).

Glocal hybridity

Until the early 21st century, little theoretical space was left for a paradigm capable of considering the interplay of the local and the global as capable of producing a sustainable fusion. A new word that appeared around 1990 has been used to capture the new forms of hybridity of the 21st century: glocalisation. The increased engagement of social scientists with glocalisation reflects a newfound reality that has become gradually apparent to most people around the globe in the aftermath of the 2008 Great Recession: the 21st century is by no means a 'flat world' but, instead, it contains numerous issues that clearly raise the question of the relationship between the global and the local. It thus generates the broader impetus to explore the conceptual promise of glocalisation (Robertson 2004) as a notion that can replace the old and by now defunct vision of post-1989 'globalisation'.

My latest monograph (Roudometof 2016a) takes me back to the concept of glocalisation. In the book, I survey the term's genealogy, review the literature produced on glocalisation in a variety of fields and interdisciplinary areas (ranging from geography to business to sociology and anthropology), offer a critical

overview and evaluation of several major theories that address the topic of glocalisation, and propose my own interpretation of glocalisation as a concept analytically autonomous from related concepts (for a preview, see Roudometof 2016b). I argue that we currently live in glocal hybridity – a state of affairs that involves growing instances of local-global fusion and mixture.

It is telling that the information and communications technology (ICT) revolution of the 1990s has increasingly endorsed the notion of glocalisation as a practical means for bridging local and global. To mention a contemporary example of recent ICT developments, in 2016 one of the most successful phone applications was *Pokemon Go*. Its success is going to produce a multitude of imitators in the coming years. *Pokemon Go* popularised the notion of *augmented reality*, which offers a concrete commercial application far more successful than the initially popularised idea of virtual reality. Certainly, the concept of augmented reality is not new, as commercial products and corporations (Google, Apple, and Amazon) use this notion to blend 'Internet of Things' technologies with everyday life. It turns out that people are perfectly willing to immerse themselves in the real world so long as it is sufficiently modified to suit escapist needs (for an analysis, see Pinchuk 2016).

Contemporary life is practically filled with glocal experiences (for several examples, see Roudometof 2016a: 67–72), but most pointedly, the Millennial generation has already come of age in a cultural and technological environment whereby the new glocal reality is the only one experienced and thus it is understood as part of everyday life and not as an unnatural imposition of a present dystopia. The emergence and adaptation of glocality by new social movements – inclusive of the *indignadas* and Occupy Wall Street movements – provides a first-hand experience of glocality being used not solely in terms of furthering commercial or capitalist ends but also on behalf of protesters and activists to affect social change.

Most importantly, the notion of glocal extends into various forms of religious, national, ethnic, or regional belonging (for examples, see Roudometof 2016a: 113–16, 2016c) – and in this respect it is clear

that glocal covers a conceptual terrain far wider than the term's initial interpretations had suggested. It is perhaps relevant to add to this context that my personal intellectual trajectory and the articulation of my own interpretation of glocalisation was one that took me from the study of religious forms of belonging to a more general theoretical framework. In my historical sociology of Orthodox Christianity (Roudometof 2014), I highlight the extent to which Orthodox Christianity has been reincarnated through a variety of historically distinct cultural fusions between local particularism and global Christian universalism. In this regard, and unlike the majority of past scholarship, I suggest that the Orthodoxy's currently dominant form of 'national religion' is not a relic of ancient primordial sentiment or a negation of modernity *per se* but rather represents the very mode through which the faith has been updated or adjusted itself into the parameters of modern society.

Even in terms of geopolitics, the rising importance of Asian countries may lead to the glocalisation of the world's politics and not in a new hegemonic world order (such as those spearheaded by the UK and US in earlier centuries). In fact, this ongoing re-imagining of the world is rather astutely reflected in the 2016 Good Design Award, Japan's most well-known design award. The prize was awarded to a new global map created by Hajime Narukawa at Keio University's Graduate School of Media and Governance in Tokyo. The AuthaGraph World Map tries to correct the widely known Eurocentric biases of past global maps by providing a new image of the entire globe that is (re-)centered on Asia and the Pacific (see <https://www.g-mark.org/award/describe/44527?locale=en>).

Although the above represent some vivid contemporary examples that highlight the significance of adding glocalisation to the social sciences' conceptual vocabulary as an autonomous concept – and not as a mere byproduct of globalisation or transnational capitalism – it is critical to stress that I do not advocate a new grand narrative. Glocalisation should not be seen through the lenses of *glocalism*; it does not offer universal answers but instead helps us ask new questions or reframe old topics and concerns (Roudometof

2016a: 75–78, 147). It is part of the new conceptual vocabulary of 21st century social sciences but not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution.

Lastly, the accelerated cross-cultural contacts and the current regime of glocal hybridity are also causes of concern for societies and cultures around the globe. Although we, as academics, are almost by default proponents of some form of cosmopolitanism (out of its many types or varieties), we have to be vigilant in maintaining the necessary distance between our normative ideals and current realities. For glocalisation does not invariably strengthen cosmopolitan openness; on the contrary, in several world regions the opposite trend has been observed (see, for example, Roudometof & Haller 2012). In this respect, although the political events of 2016 may *seem* exceptional, these may actually register anxieties and concerns that are far from peripheral or marginal.

Concluding remarks

In this brief overview, I have sought to offer an overview of the public discourse on globalisation as well as on the intellectual trajectories of the academic ‘globalisation debate’. Certainly, the above have not included neo- or post-Marxist accounts or interpretations of globalisation as a phase or extension of capitalism. In most such accounts, there is a strong tendency to narrate history from within the confines of the West – with the rather obvious exception of world-system analysis. Instead, my own approach falls broadly within the confines of cultural sociology – albeit not necessarily within the most narrow or specific incarnations of this genre.

In the above, I have stressed the extent to which the popular perception of globalisation has been shaped by the collapse of communism, and also that this globalisation project does not necessarily coincide with more sophisticated, historically-nuanced, social-scientific understandings of globalisation. It is further necessary to point out that, although the geopolitical shifts have been decisive in shaping such debates, the actual economic shifts of the last 50 years involve the rise or return of Asia to the center of the world’s econ-

omy – a ‘re-orienting’ as the late Andre Gunder Frank (1998) called it. Current reappraisals of recent public debates may actually reflect a need to readjust geopolitics to economics.

Lastly, I highlight the extent to which the current phase of globalisation involves the proliferation of glocal hybridity – or as I have called it elsewhere a ‘silent glocal turn’ (Roudometof 2015). Hybridity of course is not new; but hybridity has been understood and decoded in different blueprints and formats in different eras and world regions. The history of such words like creolisation or syncretism alone offers sufficient proof of this (Roudometof 2016a: 13–15). The very fact that glocal is a new word that has become an increasingly popular keyword in several fields – ranging from religion to information technology or urbanisation – reveals the perceived relevance of a newfound situation that warrants naming. In the 21st century, it is undeniable that the social sciences need to adjust their conceptual repertoire in ways that contribute to a successful engagement with social complexity. Glocalisation is a helpful addition to this repertoire but, as with most concepts, one should be mindful of its limits.

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