

# Global Studies METHODOLOGY

It was shown in the previous article that global studies is qualitatively different from international relations, as a separate sub-discipline. It then becomes necessary to be clear about the defining criteria, the theoretical approaches adopted and the thematic scope of subject matter employed in global studies. This, in turn, raises epistemological issues that may need to be addressed.

## Criteria

The two criteria identified in the first article – global scale and global community – are naturally contestable. Can each be taken as a given, or must global studies adopt them as assumptions for heuristic purposes only?

Of the two criteria, the first is taken in the early 21st century as a given, a self-evident fact. Humanity faces challenges of global scale, whose impacts affect the planet and are beyond national resolution. The second criterion requires a hypothesis: the existence of a global community. Can such an assertion

provide a sufficiently robust foundation for analytical and prescriptive work by a think-tank? This invites exploration of several related concepts: citizenship, community, society and polity (Graham, 2015, ch.10).

The concept of 'citizenship' has two meanings:

- the state of being vested with the rights, privileges and duties of a citizen;
- the character of an individual viewed as a member of society; behaviour in terms of the duties, obligations and functions of a citizen.<sup>1</sup>

The distinction is important; a person may exhibit behavioural characteristics independent of whether s/he is of that particular state of being. This raises the question of whether a person can acquire and exhibit behavioural characteristics pertaining to a state of being which does not actually exist, or at least which is not fully developed.

These nuances are of critical application at the global level to the concepts of community, society and polity.

- A 'community' is defined as a social group of any size with three characteristics: its inhabitants reside in a specific locality; they share in government; and they have a common cultural and historical heritage.
- A 'society' is stronger, being defined as a community that has evolved certain stronger governmental characteristics.
- A 'polity' is stronger again: the condition of being constituted as a state or other organised community or body; a particular form or system of government.

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Thus, a community is a precondition of a society, which is a precondition of a polity. In this schema, a person could be a member of a society without being a citizen of that society's non-existent polity. Clearly, no global polity exists, but a global community of peoples may be said to exist, though perhaps not yet a 'global society'. Thus, a person could be a member of a global community without necessarily being a member of a global polity.

The idea of a 'global community', then, that enables the acquisition of behavioural characteristics by a group of persons can credibly take hold. That being so, the idea of such a group exhibiting behavioural characteristics that reflect a global interest – the interest of the global community – can equally obtain. And there is nothing to prevent that group of persons encompassing all of humanity, in the most basic sense.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in May 2016 the United Nations secretary general submitted an Agenda for Humanity which was adopted by governments at the World Humanitarian Summit. As he put it in his report:

In 1941 ... leaders recognised the need for a fundamental change in the way they collectively managed threats to international peace and security. ... While the challenges of today may differ, I believe we are approaching a similar point in history. ... We need to restore trust in our global order. ... [t]he World Humanitarian Summit presents an opportunity to affirm and renew our commitment to humanity ... I ask global leaders to come to the World Humanitarian Summit prepared to assume their responsibilities for a new era in international relations, one in which safe-guarding humanity and promoting human progress drive our decision-making and collective actions. (Ban Ki-moon, 2016, paras 6, 7)

And:

One Humanity: a vision for change. Such change requires a unified vision. In a globalised world, this vision needs to be inclusive

and universal to bring people, communities and countries together ... At a time when many are expressing doubt in the ability of the international community to live up to the promises of the Charter of the United Nations to end wars or to confront global challenges, we need, more than ever, to reaffirm the values that connect us. Our vision for change must therefore be grounded in the value that unites us: our common humanity. (ibid., para 15)

Given the explicit nature of the secretary general's call, and given the adoption by governments of the Agenda

- underpin institutional reform through the expression of global governance.

### Theory

The interests of a global community are by definition different from the interests of a particular nation state. It follows, then, that the theoretical approach to analytical study and prescriptive reasoning employed in the field of global studies may be different from the traditional theory embraced in international relations.

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for Humanity, it is probably safe to assert that the concept of humanity, or otherwise the global community, is now accepted in customary international law.

The idea of an emerging global community may, therefore, be adopted as an assumption for academic enquiry in the field of global studies. An epistemic community of scholars and practitioners are working, today, on the basis of that premise. This critical thinking lays the foundation for further logical reasoning. Thus:

- an accepted definition of 'global citizenship' provides foundational conceptual clarity, which
- facilitates exploration of the philosophical foundations of a global community, including values, which
- informs the socio-psychological dimension of a sense of global identity and loyalty, which
- bestows a political status for a theory of global constitutionalism, which
- underwrites juridical concepts relevant to the global commons and transnational jurisdiction, which

modern Europe. The central assumption is that world politics is quintessentially a field of conflict among actors pursuing power. In its classical version, this is the natural order, humans being inherently self-centred, competitive and aggressive. Neorealism attributes the cause to the anarchical nature of the modern state system. Neo-classical realism sees both as causal factors.

The realist approach to political affairs can be traced back over two millennia to Thucydides and Sun Tzu. In the early modern era it drew upon European thought – Machiavelli and Hobbes, then Metternicht. In the 20th century it drew largely on an American intellectual contribution – Kennan, Morgenthau and Kissinger. It is no accident that such thought emerges from the major powers of the time. Contemporary exponents of realism in today's world include Xi, Putin, Erdogan, Duterte and Trump.

Realism is essentially positivist and analytical. It requires a rational, dispassionate interpretation and understanding of world affairs, and a

measured policy formulation for its navigation by nation states. It eschews normative considerations, taking the world as it comes. International organisations, being relatively new, offer merely an arena for competition in the name of 'common ends'. To the extent that realism is prescriptive, advice is tendered to the nation state on how to survive in a tough world, one that has been that way since time immemorial and is not about to change in the blink of a career.

A milder version of realism, the liberal English School, has been developed within the academic community by Hedley Bull and Barry Buzan: the international system, while anarchical

and self-determination, the rule of international law, and social progress, with better standards of life in larger freedom.

Yet the charter, having identified the common vision in the name of 'we the peoples', immediately delegates operation of the United Nations to their respective governments. It asserts sovereign equality of states as the central principle of the UN, with veto power on issues of peace and security accorded to five of the 193 members. So idealism in international relations theory scrutinises not the UN's visionary goals themselves but its institutional capacity to attain them.

For its part, global studies in its purest form adopts a theoretical approach

thought is the contestation of ideas and the potential falsification of policy prescription. But global studies as a sub-discipline rests on the theory that current international organisation and diplomatic method are unfit for purpose in solving global problems. That includes the essential nature of the 'anarchical state system', which needs fundamental change more than calibrated reform. Those remaining satisfied with the institutional status quo will be content to continue with traditional international relations theory.

There are, in fact, leading thinkers behind the theory of rational idealism. In the mid-20th century, Dag Hammarskjöld, described by US president John F. Kennedy as the 'greatest statesman of our century' (Linnér, 2007), developed a world view during his tenure as UN secretary general (1952–61) which rests on three central tenets:

- the United Nations as a dynamic institution, with an organic capacity to adapt to change;
- the charter as a 'living instrument', with teleological capacity for implied powers;
- humanity coming to 'self-consciousness' as a species through the United Nations. (Frölich, 2008)

Hammarskjöld is not alone; his pioneering statecraft has been augmented by leading intellectual contributions in the early 21st century. The ideas are shared by Allott, who writes of the 'self-constituting of international society' from the international community of states to a global community of peoples, and progression from 'international security' (a diplomatic concept) to 'international public order' (a constitutional concept) (Allott, 2001). It is found in the work of Macdonald and Johnston on world constitutionalism (Macdonald and Johnston, 2005), Fassbender's analysis of the UN Charter as an international constitution (Fassbender, 1998, 2009), and Frölich's exploration of Hammarskjöldian thought as a 'political philosophy of world organization' (Frölich, 2005, pp.130-45). These theorists provide the philosophical foundations of the theory of rational

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in nature, nonetheless forms a society of states where common norms and interests underwrite a degree of order and stability.

The principal alternative theory, however, is political idealism. This embraces values, ideals, principles and goals, asserting their primacy over immediate realities, at least prescriptively: the world as it ought to be, rather than as it is. Political idealism is rooted in Kantian thought of the 18th century, with a structured liberalism securing a state of 'perpetual peace'. In the early 20th century the political idealism of Woodrow Wilson paved the way to international organisation in the League of Nations, with collective security as the doctrine underpinning peace and security. The United Nations, younger sibling of the League by only 25 years, followed this path, providing further glimpses of idealism in its charter ideals of universal peace, general and complete disarmament, universal human rights

best described as 'rational idealism'. Adopting the perspective of the global community for political judgement, it aspires to prescribe a methodology that produces policies not for a better world but for its protection. The goal focuses not on what 'ought to be' but on 'what needs to be'. The approach is not normative but imperative. During the entire Westphalian era, from the 17th to the 20th centuries, idealism rested on promoting the normative dimension to human life and society – how better to live together in peace, justice and equality. In the post-Westphalian, early-global epoch, idealism rests on a demonstrable imperative – how to survive as a species on a single, finite and fragile planet.

That is a tall order, but it reflects less hubris than rationality. Those engaged in global studies do not assert that any particular policy deriving from their work is necessarily correct. The point of academic, and indeed political,

idealism that are likely to cement global studies as a far-reaching and innovative field of enquiry.<sup>3</sup>

#### Scope

If the sub-discipline is global in scale, accepts the idea of a global community, and employs rational idealism as its theoretical approach, the question remains as to breadth of scope. There are three alternatives.

The narrow view is that global studies should remain coterminous with international relations in thematic scope, focusing essentially on the politics and law of contemporary international institutional architecture, and on the competing theories of globalisation and economic well-being. This results in the two sub-disciplines being nearly identical in focus, differing only in their defining criteria and theoretical approaches.

The broader view is that global studies is naturally all-encompassing. The only constraint is that of scale: anything sub-global is not in focus; but thematically there can be no constraint. Issues of global concern in a fast-changing world must naturally be subjected to scrutiny. Beyond economics and politics, diplomacy and law lie potential areas for analysis: social media, digital information, artificial intelligence, robotic substitution, genetic determination, species self-direction, even virtual reality. To some extent the current United Nations, through the General Assembly and specialised agencies, explores these issues, but again from a traditional Westphalian perspective. The juxtaposition of postmodern technology and an increasingly archaic diplomatic method is the cause of the dysfunctionality evident in contemporary global politics.

The broadest view is that beneath these phenomena is the role of humans on the planet and their place within the cosmos. Our knowledge of cosmic history, the nature of space, and the unresolved crisis in physics between the classical macro-model, the quantum world and gravity is now subject to continuous discovery. That includes the search for life elsewhere. Should

these most fundamental issues of the human drama become 'politicised' under academic and political scrutiny? It is hard to see how they cannot in the burgeoning field of global studies.

#### Epistemology

This takes us to the edge – whether global studies should enter philosophical enquiry, exploring the question of absolute knowledge. Few may choose to do this, but it may be necessary if the broadest thematic view is adopted, with thought being devoted to the interdisciplinary foundations of the subject matter.

It has, for example, always been accepted that there should be a crossover in method and knowledge among the

advances in the understanding of human nature:

- genes prescribe epigenetic rules, which are the regularities of sensory perception and mental development which animate and channel the acquisition of culture;
- culture helps determine which of the prescribing genes survive and multiply from one generation to another;
- successful new genes alter the epigenetic rules of populations;
- the altered epigenetic rules change the direction and effectiveness of the channels of cultural acquisition. (ibid., pp.2-14,164-74, 210, 291-94, 325.)

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physical sciences. Many theorists in the past century have argued that this must apply even between the physical and the social sciences. E.O. Wilson contends that all knowledge is intrinsically unified: that behind disciplines as diverse as physics and biology, anthropology and the arts exist a small number of natural laws. Their interlocking within the context of causal explanation he calls consilience. The idea is that 'all tangible phenomena, from the birth of stars to the workings of social institutions, are based on material processes that are ultimately reducible, however long and tortuous the sequences, to the laws of physics' (Wilson, 1998, pp.8-9). This enables us, he argues, to link genes and culture together, allowing for the development of a set of epigenetic rules as the best means to make important

It is not yet clear whether global studies naturally extends its philosophical-psychological reach this far. But perhaps it does. Perhaps it draws from a branch of knowledge that might be termed 'global consciousness'. The underlying unity of knowledge, across all academic disciplines, is, probably inevitably, a precondition of an all-encompassing scope of enquiry in the field.

1 These definitions and those in the following paragraph are taken from [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com).  
2 See, for example, UN General Assembly, 2005, para 4 for a list of 'common human values' agreed by the international community of states representing 'we the peoples of the United Nations'.  
3 Some theorists might seek to broaden the group to include normative fields of enquiry such as John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*. But global studies, as noted, adopts the imperative approach (embracing philosophical, legal and political-institutional enquiry), not normative. Once the normative approach is included, the way is open to subjective argumentation, as would emanate from, for example, Amartya Sen, and even Rawls' own Harvard colleagues (Nozick, Walzer and Wolf).

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