

12-1-2017

## Steger, M.B. & Wahlrab, A. What is Global Studies? Theory and Practice. New York, NY: Routledge, 2016.

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### Recommended Citation

Alahmed, Anas (2017) "Steger, M.B. & Wahlrab, A. What is Global Studies? Theory and Practice. New York, NY: Routledge, 2016.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 9 : No. 1 , Article 20.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol9/iss1/20>

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**Steger, M.B. & Wahrab, A. *What is Global Studies? Theory and Practice.*  
New York, NY: Routledge, 2016.**

In the past two decades, the field of global studies has become a dominant discipline of inquiry in which interdisciplinary research has focused on the impacts of globalization and the political, economic, and cultural interconnectedness of the world's nations and peoples. Considering the unprecedented movements within world politics as well as the spread of international organizations during this time, including the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the unequal growth of wealth and distribution between the global south and the global north, global studies constitutes a timely and significant field of inquiry. However, even though global studies has become an accepted discipline, no definition of the field exists. As such, this book sets out to provide one by using four pillars: globalization, transdisciplinarity, space and time, and critical thinking.

Before defining global studies, the authors, in chapter one, first trace the historical roots of the term 'global' and discuss how global studies became a field of inquiry. Global studies emerged as a means of examining the social and class resistances to global injustice that challenged the neoliberal market, diversity of epistemology, and division of knowledge. The authors argue that although global studies originally incorporated some global stereotypes, the field has benefited from the advent of globalization, as a result of which, global studies not only challenges mainstream (Western) academic studies of politics, economics, and culture but has also become an alternative to "academic capitalism," in which certain fields of study reproduce and perpetuate the same knowledge on a continuous basis. Global studies represents itself as "a fluid and porous intellectual terrain rather than a novel, well-defined item on the dominant disciplinary menu" (p. 2). By understanding the concepts of global imaginaries, global consciousness, and global citizenship, global studies generates critical interpretations of the complex relationship between modernity and globalization in which the field of global studies helps to sustain the theoretical reflection in regard to practical matters.

In order to define global studies, the authors must clarify what is considered global. To this end, they distinguish between global and international studies. They say, global studies is interested in culture, ecology, ideology, identity, and contingency, while international studies is interested in international systems, realism structure, and the state. In other words, global studies is interested in the links among and between nations, especially as they are related to culture. As such, global studies treats the nations of the world as similar, as the histories, ideologies, and identities of all countries share common themes and features. International studies, on the other hand, treats each nation, race, and ethnicity as a single matter of inquiry.

Next, the authors further detail how global studies differs from international relations and area studies, both of which constitute separate academic disciplines. The authors assert that while the disciplines of international relations and international studies have been used in the US to serve political agendas, the field of international studies was funded by the government and other think tank foundations to promote western-centric notions of modernization and economic development. Therefore, as the authors argued, global studies serves to

[foster] a multireferential understanding of a social whole that is no longer exclusively normalized within a national framework, but equally applicable to local and global settings.... [It] draws its core reason for being from the fact that we live today in an unprecedented age of interconnectivity brought about by globalization. (p. 13)

Specifically, while international relations is interested in borders, nations, states, war, and the balance of power, area studies are interested in language, history, national security, modernization, and the development of certain geographical and national boundaries. In contrast, global studies was born from and rose out of globalization, which likewise focuses on connectivity, not single points of interest (i.e., a nation, a language, or a culture).

During the next step in the definition process, the authors acknowledge the importance of the media and communications industries in the rise of the interconnected “global world.” This rise has been reflected in the formation of a global imaginary.<sup>1</sup> The authors continue, saying that global studies is “a reasonably coherent transdisciplinary project dedicated to exploring processes of globalization within the aim of engaging the complex global problems the world is facing in the twenty-first century” (p. 17). Thus, the emergence of globalization as a concept and prominent theme in the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century discourse has helped to cement global studies as a field of inquiry.

After establishing a clear relationship between global studies and globalization, the authors then tease out the differences between the two. The first chapter of the book focuses on the relationship between globalization (i.e., the concept) and global studies (i.e., the academic field of inquiry) as well as the historical origins and evolution of both globalization and global studies. To this end, the authors discuss how ‘global’ became a new conceptual framework during the 1990s and a unit of social analysis that enables “people to make better sense of their rapidly changing world and their place in it” (p. 25). The chapter traces the origin and evolution of global studies through the lens of globalization. The first time that the term globalization was used was in the 1920s. According to the authors, globalization has had four main meanings since that time: Globalization has been used in relation to 1) education and psychology, 2) society and culture, 3) politics and international relations, and 4) economics and business. This chapter also focuses on the history related to the struggle to introduce global studies to US university campuses during the 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

In chapter two, globalization is then presented as the first of the authors’ four pillars defining global studies. The authors argue that globalization is both the progenitor of and the primary subject/core of global studies. Understanding globalization, its theoretical foundation, and its political implications will better help one understand global studies since it is impossible to study global studies without reference to globalization. The chapter traces the pioneering research related to globalization and tries to connect such research with global studies in order to provide a proper understanding of the concept of globalization as it is related to global studies as an academic field of inquiry.

The second pillar of global studies, presented in chapter three, is its transdisciplinarity. The chapter is devoted to explaining that globalization and—by extension, global studies—entail multidimensional processes associated with different global issues and that as such, both globalization and global studies are necessarily transdisciplinary, resulting from complex issues, multidimensional connectivity, and the interactivity of different areas of inquiry. Space and time, the third pillar of the definition global studies, is covered in chapter four. The chapter explains how globalization expands across the globe in distance and over time. By reviewing the literature on modernity and territory, the chapter connects space and time with global inquiry and argues that connectivity in time and space plays a central role in global studies, as it is linked to the process of communication and the exchange of information.

Finally, critical thinking is the fourth pillar of understanding global studies. Say the authors, global studies cannot be fully understood without employing the critical thinking that

reflects the field's receptivity to the activity of social criticism, which focuses on unequal power relations and engages in ongoing social struggles to bring about a more just global society. The authors argue that critical global studies calls for "methodological skepticism...the recognition that all 'facts' are socially [and politically] constructed [to] serve particular power interests" and to serve "the decolonization of the (Western) imagination." It challenges the mainstream media's representations of the globe, and understand the global "as a multipolar dynamic reflecting the concerns of the marginalized global South" (p. 22).

The fifth chapter reflects on how the critical analysis of global studies allows for deeper understanding by examining global activism and global civil society. Critical theory, as the authors argue, is linked to global studies, in which "dominant neoliberal modes of globalization have produced growing disparities in wealth and well-being within and among societies." (p. 149-150). As such, global studies is further interlinked with critical thinking via the addressing of the critical inquiry of analysis regarding global justice and the global activism movement as well as global activist thinking. Moreover, global studies scholars are interested in addressing the ongoing struggles of the global justice movement against the dominant forces of globalization. Therefore, this chapter also describes the engagement of global studies in order to understand the forms of global society and global citizenship that exist. The chapter concludes with some criticism of global studies, including that it tends to widely generalize issues.<sup>3</sup>

What makes this book significant is the heavy use of cited resources, as these resources allow students and researchers to rely on the book as a reference regarding global studies. The book reviews the majority of existing scholarship on global studies and globalization and sums up the literature's major findings. These summaries are well-written and serve as great introductions for further study on the topics presented. This book also introduces readers to the most important figures and influential publications in global studies. The book provides summary on what these global studies theorists say about the subject matter and how these statements are related to global studies, which simplifies further investigation related to particular scholars and certain issues. It also introduces new concepts and vocabulary in the field. Finally, the book contributes to the ongoing efforts of scholars in the field of global studies to find common ground in the field that will speak to both undergraduate and graduate students through engaging conceptual frameworks and the historical development of global studies by combining theoretical matters.

This book should be required for any student majoring in global, international, or globalization studies, as it not only provides an understanding of the meaning of global studies but also serves as a great reference for use throughout any such student's educational journey.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of a "global imaginary," coined by the authors, refers to a "sense of the social whole that frames our age as one shaped by the intensifying forces of globalization" (p.2). and It "punctuated the binary language of nationalism and its exclusivist claims to the management of modern societies" (p.7).

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the earliest global studies programs were introduced by individual academic intellectuals who felt that it was their responsibility to higher education to include a globalized perspective in the curriculum.

<sup>3</sup> Even though the purpose of global studies is to understand and analyze common issues that connect the world, the field finds it difficult to come to conclusions about these issues due to the different circumstances in each state or nation.