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# Thinking Globally: Reassessing the Fields of Law, Politics and Economics in the US Academy

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**Abstract:** In the United States, students of law, politics and economics are primarily trained to think in terms of state-centric analytical frameworks. This essay argues that this training is anachronistic and does not adequately prepare students for the complex geopolitics of the 21st century. Of course, not all scholarship in these disciplines can be characterized in this way since each discipline has its own internal disputes and scholarly innovations. That being said, a mainstream state-centric approach dominates the literature and the curriculum in most law, politics and economics departments. The first part of the essay describes the rise of law schools and the establishing of political science and economics disciplines in the late 19th century. It explores the implications of these disciplines' claim to do "scientific" research. It argues that this claim continues to bind the disciplines to a state-centric framework which in turn provides obstacles to developing new theories and methods.

**Keywords:** state-centric, social sciences, methodological nationalism, United States, education, global studies

## 1 Introduction

What is striking for anyone studying law, politics or economics in the United States is the sense that time has stood still for these disciplines. The conversations, theories, and methodologies of mainstream scholarship in law schools,

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political science and economics departments are locked within a worldview that reflects an outdated modernist thinking. It is as if scholars stubbornly refuse to acknowledge that they are living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and that the world does not look the same as it did forty years ago. Specifically, these fields of inquiry continue to present a state-based approach that does not accurately reflect the complex geopolitical realities of our current era and its various assemblages of power, authority and sovereignty that no longer correlate to a “wealth of nations” schematic (Sassen 2008). As many commentators have noted, we now live in a post-Westphalian era where nation-states are only one set of actors in regional, transnational and global affairs (Falk 2002). Yet acknowledging these complex realities and adapting curriculum and pedagogy to better analyze them is rarely broached in the fields of law, politics or economics in the US academy where the nation-state still lies at the center of analysis and both contains and constrains most thinking.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, not all scholarship in law, politics and economics disciplines can be characterized in this way since each has its own internal intellectual disputes and scholarly innovations. Disciplines are not intellectual monoliths and never have been. Within some law schools more and more scholars are engaged in transnational and global legal phenomenon and institutions, exploring the porousness of legal jurisdictions and the impact of legal pluralism and global governance. That being said, these scholars are typically found in only the most prestigious of law schools and even there form a small minority, teaching third year elective classes and having as a result a somewhat limited presence in the mainstream legal curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

In political science departments, most (including that in my own university) teach standard classes centering on national democracy, voting and elections, foreign policy, the politics of specific national sub-groups such as Asian-

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<sup>1</sup> Resistance to change in these disciplines is furthered by professional standards with respect to what counts as appropriate training and publishing, which in turn is reinforced by academic promotion.

<sup>2</sup> This is not the case in some law schools outside the United States where a revised curriculum has put global and transnational law at the center of the first year curriculum. For instance, Jindal Global Law School (India) and McGill Faculty of Law (Canada) are two law schools that pride themselves on teaching a globally oriented curriculum. In 2012, these two law schools helped to establish the Law Schools Global League which is a worldwide network of leading law schools who aim to “promote legal education and scholastic research from a global prospective ... and share a commitment not only to the globalization of law, but also to integrating global law in their teaching and research.” [www.lawschoolsgloballeague.com/#about-lsgl](http://www.lawschoolsgloballeague.com/#about-lsgl).

Americans and so on. Of course, there are comparative classes that show the differences and similarities of various countries' political systems, which generally come under the banner of international relations. While such comparative work can be very illuminating it is still organized primarily on the basis of comparing one state to another, as is the case in most international political economy research. As Benjamin Cohen, one of the leading political scientists in the United States, has forcefully argued, "The great irony of International Political Economy (IPE) has long been its parochialism. In principle, our field of study is meant to be international – even global – in scope. Yet in practice, scholarship tends to be fragmented and insular" (Cohen 2015; see Cohen 2014).

The critique of being fragmented and parochial could also be leveled at most economics departments. Despite the importance of heterodox economics (i. e. Ostrom et al. 1999), the standard curriculum remains pretty constant across hundreds of departments in the United States. Course offerings include such things as micro and macroeconomics, economics of labor, finance, accounting and taxation, econometrics, international finance and trade, and some economic history and theory. All of these courses tend to take the nation-state as a given and do not problematize its dominant geopolitical framework.

In sum, scholars in the three disciplines predominantly – though not all – deploy a research strategy called methodological nationalism, which I return to and explain further in this essay. What this means is that scholars generally assume that the nation-state is the primary locus of political power and governance, around which all other state and non-state actors circulate and engage. Scholars in these three disciplines need to revolutionize their dominant ways of thinking and decenter the nation-state in order to fully engage with the complexities of our current era (Sánchez-Bayón 2014). Relations between states and global market capitalism are rapidly redefining the power and capacities of states to operate as sovereign territorial units as has been assumed throughout the modern era. As noted by Dipankar Sinha, a political scientist at Calcutta University, "The state now functions in tandem with the market, and research studies obsessed with the stand-alone state can only produce anachronistic findings" (Sinha 2017). Acknowledging this carries deep theoretical, analytical and methodological implications for all social science and humanities disciplines in the US academy, and work under the banner of "global history" as well as much work in anthropology has been particularly adept at adapting to new global perspectives (see Darian-Smith and McCarty 2017; Richardson 2016). However, other disciplines have been much slower to respond, and this is especially the case for the resistant-to-change disciplines of law, political science and economics.

## 2 What Connects the Teaching of Law, Politics and Economics?

It is not surprising that the theories and methods of the three disciplines of law, political science and economics are primarily state-centric. These fields were formalized within academia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century at a time when political leaders were building the new American nation and modern nation-states were emerging in Europe (remember Italy and Germany only became unified countries with centralized governments in 1861 and 1871 respectively). The three disciplines were valued precisely because their intellectual contributions spoke to the dominant preoccupation of Americans at the time – how to implement modern legal, political and economic structures that unite a country under one nationalist ideology, infrastructure, centralized government and system of knowledge.

Law, political science and economics are all academic disciplines that come under the broader category of the social sciences (Heilbron et al. 1998). These disciplines, as well as others such as anthropology and sociology, formed as formal fields of study in the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the height of the industrial revolution and the emerging dominance of state nationalism in Europe and the United States. Higher education was considered by most governments at the time as essential for creating a highly skilled and competitive citizenry and for advancing the economic wellbeing of the nation (Anderson 2006; Jarausch 1983; Barrow 1990; Newfield 2004). Moreover, nationalist thought and identity was bound up with the production of knowledge. As argued by Gyann Prakash, “To be a nation was to be endowed with science, which had become the touchstone of rationality. The representation of a people meant claiming that the nation possessed a body of universal thought for the rational organization of society” (Prakash 1999:7).

In the United States, private universities such as Harvard and Yale had existed on the east coast since 1636. But in the flourishing democratic nation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was strongly felt that education should be more widely available. Reflecting the great westward expansion and the growing clout of the middle classes, states set up “land grant colleges” that used federal funding provided by the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Acts of 1862 and 1890. Colleges sprang up across the country and among the first of these were Purdue University, Pennsylvania State University, Ohio State University, Cornell University and the University of California (Geiger 2014; Goodchild et al. 2014; Vlahakis et al. 2006:150). The building of new universities was accompanied by the professionalization of higher education into distinct disciplines that focused on specific topics and made claims to particular theories, methods and training.

Each of the disciplines of law, political science and economics engages with a specific focus of inquiry.<sup>3</sup> That being said, the three disciplines share three significant features. The first feature is that they all emerged as distinct formal disciplines in the American academy at roughly the same time in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. As mentioned above, at this time other disciplines were also forming as professional associations, with their own publications and canons of literature. These included the American Historical Association (1884), the American Anthropological Association (1902), the American Association of Geographers (1904), and the American Sociology Association (1905).

The second feature shared by the three disciplines of law, political science and economics is the claim that they produce “scientific” knowledge about how legal, political and economic processes operate in society. This means that most scholars in the three disciplines claim to do rigorous empirical research, which is replicable and predictive and in turn produces universal rules or objective truths such as one finds in the material and natural sciences. This claim to be doing “science” is not unique to the three disciplines, since for instance some sociologists would make the same argument. However, all scholars in the three disciplines would make this claim, and hence it became a dominant trope that affirmed their respective intellectual expertise and authority. It is not a coincidence that legal and economic scholars were in the past, and remain so today, the most well-paid social science professionals in the United States (Jaschik 2016).

The third feature, and one which underscores the scientific claim, is that scholars in these disciplines tend to think of “society” functioning in a way like a laboratory on which experiments can be conducted and generalizable rules drawn. And “society” typically correlates to that existing within a singular nation-state. As a result, each of the three disciplines is tightly bound to a state-centrist analytical framework. Moreover, since statistics provides primary data on which the three disciplines draw, and statistics are primarily collected by and for national organizations, agencies and governments, there is a circular self-referencing logic that runs across each discipline’s theory, data collection, and methodologies. The data drives the research and the research reinforces the analytical frameworks and concepts embedded in the data. This is the case even when comparative statistics are

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<sup>3</sup> In practice there is overlap in certain sub-fields (ie law and economics in law schools, political economy in political science departments), just as there are overlapping subfields between these three and other disciplines (ie law and literature, politics and culture etc).

used from international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, or International Monetary Fund which all gather primarily nation-state data.

### 3 The Importance of Producing “Scientific” Knowledge

The claim by the three disciplines that they produce scientific knowledge is significant beyond the obvious consequence of scholars in these fields commanding higher salaries and intellectual standing. Claiming to do “hard” science, as opposed to “soft” interpretive qualitative-based research suggests that the knowledge produced in these disciplines is universal in its global reach and application. As Partha Chatterjee has noted, a post-Enlightenment rationalist concept of knowledge served “as the moral and epistemic foundation of a supposedly universal framework of thought” that assumed hegemonic proportions (Chaterjee 1986:11). This knowledge could be exported around the world and was essential in the management and disciplining of subjects both in the colonies and at home. Indeed, Prakash argues that the modern western academic disciplines emerged *simultaneously* alongside modern imperialism (Prakash 1999:12). Hence it was not a matter of western countries importing scientific knowledge to the “unsophisticated” and “irrational” natives in far-off colonial outposts. Rather, scientific knowledge emerged in conjunction with encounters of foreign others, and served to differentiate those with supposedly legitimate power over those who needed to be civilized and educated. Prakash goes on to write:

One thinks, for example, of connections between the West’s global expansion and the formation of the disciplines of ethnology, political economy, botany, medicine, geology and meteorology. The Portuguese reflected on the constellations as they navigated around the globe; the Spaniards developed concepts of comparative ethnology as they encountered and conquered the peoples of the New World; the British classified plants and isolated gems as they established and ruled over their imperial possessions ...

The colonies, on the other hand, were underfunded and overextended laboratories of modernity. There science’s authority as a sign of modernity was instituted with a minimum of expense and maximum of authority. Army barracks existed side by side with, and dwarfed, hospitals; vaccinations were carried out with the drive of military campaigns; railroads transported troops and carried commodities for colonial exports and imports; and rational routines of governance doubled as alien despotism (Prakash 1999:12–13).

While the United States was relatively late in the race for colonial expansion, it too used the rhetoric of scientific superiority to shore up its imperial ambitions in the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Law, political science and economics produced knowledge that helped legitimate and substantiate the US imperial reach in the wake of the Spanish-American War (1898), resulting in the annexation of Hawaii, Philippines, Guam, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. Scientific knowledge was indispensable to these endeavors, and included the imposition of law, the institutions of military government and trade, and the implementation of social Darwinism and eugenics (Briggs 2002). These institutions and methods of control were also used domestically to justify the genocide and removal of Native American populations and the introduction of legislation such as the Dawes Act of 1887, which deliberately broke up collectively owned tribal lands into small plots for individual purchase. As was widely appreciated and applauded at the time, “At the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States was undoubtedly an uprising empire in the world of science” (Vlahakis et al. 2006:150).

Thinking of law as a science was a concept first introduced in the United States by the dean of Harvard Law School, Christopher C. Langdell, upon his appointment in 1870. Langdell was keen to standardize the emerging legal profession, and one of his innovations was to introduce the case method as taught in legal textbooks. The urge to present law as an objective science distinct from politics and cultural values served well the elite of the Gilded Age who were keen to argue that their successes derived from business acumen rather than a legal system biased in their favor. At the same time, claiming law as a science ensured the prominence and power of professional lawyers (Hall and Karsten 2009). As Sheila Jasanoff and other scholars have shown, there is a long-standing co-production between law and science in western societies, with science providing law with objective authority and technical expertise, and law in turn becoming “deeply intertwined with the production of science, technology and medicine” (Jasanoff 1987; 2004; see also Santos 1995; Silbey 2008). The result of this mutual collaboration was the creation of what is called “legal positivism”. Legal positivism, based in statistics forensics and experimentation, defines the modern science and authority of law (Samuel 2009).

One of the most important goals of any law school training in the Anglo-American academy is to present legal knowledge as rational, logical, and reasoned. Max Weber recognized more than one hundred years ago that law, as part of the modern bureaucratic state system, was essential in formalizing and legitimizing state processes of domination (Deflem 2008). By arguing that legal knowledge, like scientific knowledge, is capable of being classified, categorized, predicted and replicated across different cases, it follows that legal

rules can be universally applied to certain actions irrespective of the social contexts in which the actions occurred. If context is deemed irrelevant, then these same rules could theoretically be transferred to apply to non-western subjects and jurisdictions. Historically, law's claim to universality legitimated the imposition of western law in colonial outposts and settler societies (Darian-Smith 2010). Today, this claim legitimates certain sectors of international law such as the international human rights regime.

Thinking of politics as a science is encapsulated in the academic discipline's name "Political Science" which emerged in the United States at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Johns Hopkins University was the first institution to train political scientists and was soon followed by Columbia, Princeton and Harvard. In 1903 The American Political Science Association was established to distinguish the study of politics as different from history, philosophy and other intellectual enterprises. Political scientists argued that they were producing applied knowledge about how best to govern, administer and run a country, which found a ready audience among leaders establishing the new American nation. As a result, political scientists received substantial government funding for their research and the discipline flourished.

Like legal scholars, the majority of political scientists "view the discipline as a genuine science. As a result, political scientists generally strive to emulate the objectivity as well as the conceptual and methodological rigor typically associated with the so-called 'hard' sciences (e. g., biology, chemistry, and physics). They see themselves as engaged in revealing the relationships underlying political events and conditions. Based on these revelations, they attempt to state general principles about the way the world of politics works."<sup>4</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, these disciplinary aspirations manifested in the scientific study of individual and group behavior in what came to be known as behavioralism. In the 1970s another shift in the discipline emerged that drew on game theory and formal modeling techniques to study political institutions and political actions such as voting.

In recent decades many political scientists have become enamored with economics, and the quantification of data has become increasingly important in mainstream political science departments. Notes Benjamin Cohen, this trend can be thought of as a "creeping economism" (Cohen 2014:29). Cohen explains; "In the search for empirical regularities, research methods have become increasingly standardized, stressing above all formal propositions and rigorous testing ..." (Cohen 2014:29). Cohen goes on to explain why he thinks economics has had such a huge impact on political science in recent years, arguing that political

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4 <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/political-science/> accessed 22 May 2016



scientists in the United States have an “inferiority complex when it comes to economics” which they typically think of as the “reigning king of the social sciences” (Cohen 2014:29). This is because economics, based in statistical evidence and numerical data, makes the claim more than any other discipline in the social sciences to being scientifically objective.

Thinking of economics as a science is largely taken as a given by both scholars and the general public. There is a strong belief that numbers “don’t lie” and hence arguments made on the basis of calculation carry a weight and authority that is hard to reproduce in more qualitative and interpretative research. This is why economics is considered the “hardest” of the social sciences in the sense there is no ambiguity, and results are deemed to be clear, replicable, rationale and objective (Merry 2016).<sup>5</sup>

The American Economic Association (AEA) was established in 1885 in Saratoga, New York. From the outset the AEA was keen to distinguish American economists from the Historical School of Economics that was prevalent in Germany and associated with scholars such as Max Weber. The Historical School held that logic and mathematics alone were inadequate to understand economies, each with their unique cultural, social and political contexts. Hence scholars of the Historical School argued it was not possible to establish general economic principles that could apply across time and space (Hodgson 2001; Shionoya 2001; 2005). In contrast, the AEA from the start promoted the notion of universally valid economic theorems based on mathematical modeling and statistical analyses.

Thinking of law, political science and economics as disciplines producing scientific knowledge is as important today as it was on the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the past, these three disciplines were essential in furthering the United States’ interests abroad and at home and governing overseas and domestic populations. Today they function in similar ways to shore up the image of the United States as the world’s economic super-power and protector of democracy and freedom. The fact that this image of the country has been brought into question in the 21<sup>st</sup> century does not necessarily mean that scholars in law, politics and economics will relinquish belief in their superior scientific-based knowledge and its universal applicability. Such things as the rise of China and

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<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, the majority faculty in economics departments is male. In addition, the starting salary in the United States for an assistant professor in economics is about 1.5 times more than that of an assistant professor in other social science disciplines such as sociology or anthropology, and about 2 times more than that of a starting assistant professor in any of the humanities disciplines such as history.

other developing economies, the emergence of the Alt-Right and Black Lives Matter movements, the explicit politicization and attack on journalists and the judiciary, as well as the reality that no one nation-state can operate independently with respect to such things as climate change, terrorism and immigration, seem not to matter that much in the mainstream American academy.

## 4 The Limitations of the State-Centrist Framework in Law, Political Science and Economics

In the 1980s there was a push toward internationalism that reflected the times with the rise of an international human rights discourse in the late 1970s (Moyn 2010), the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), the strengthening of the EU with the Maastricht Treaty (1992), and calls for multilateralism with respect to nuclear arms disarmament, global economic trade, and the establishing of the International Criminal Court (1992). This push toward internationalism also called for a shift in the curriculum in US high schools, colleges and universities. A conference was held in 1979 by the Council on Learning titled “Education and the World View” that invited representatives from major humanities and social science organizations to come together to think about how to better educate the next generation. The goal was to think about how to “infuse the existing curriculum with international studies, foreign languages, and multicultural non-Western exposures” (Bonham 1980:3). As relevant today as it was back then, in a publication coming out of the conference it was argued:

In recent years, the world has been overtaken by a series of fundamental changes in technological, economic and political realities. Some of these have had a profound impact on the shape and function of national and international institutions and on the aspirations of the world’s four billion people. These changes will continue, bringing with them new opportunities and new problems and obliging us to continue to modify our thinking and our ways of doing things.

Although not alone in this regard, the US system of higher education has been relatively slow to react to these new developments. In important respects events in the world are outstripping the ability of educational institutions to respond to them. Yet it may not be overdramatic to suggest that successes in shaping these educational institutions in response to changing times will determine whether the United States, as a world leader, can have a benign effect on the world, help avert global destruction, and create a better future for coming generations (Burns 1981:5).

Unfortunately, the era of internationalism and multilateralism was steadily undermined throughout the 1980s and 1990s with the implementation of neo-liberal policies that transferred a great deal of power away from nation-state governments to global corporate interests. In the United States, any remaining pretense of internationalism was struck a death blow with the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 which ushered in a period of war, global terrorism and Islamophobia that has only escalated over the past two decades. Today, any talk of internationalism and countries working together has been replaced by aggressive nationalist rhetoric, evidenced in the rise of ultra-nationalist populism in the United States, as well as in Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. As Donald Trump touted in his 2016 America First campaign for presidency, “Americanism, not globalism, will be our credo” (Jasper 2016).

Given today’s shifting political landscape toward a reaffirmation of parochialism and insularity, it is not surprising that blinkered thinking in the US academy continues on in some disciplines despite the obvious need for revising dominant theories, analytical frameworks and methodologies. Such blinkered thinking is disturbing on two fronts. First, thinking in terms of sovereign nation-states and nationalism sustains an exaggerated preoccupation with the political, economic and cultural status of the United States vis-à-vis other countries. Is China rising and overtaking the US? Is China declining and can the US reassert its superpower status? What other emerging economies present the next big political and financial threat? Where stands Russia in all of this? While these questions are not unimportant, the way they are framed hark back to both a Cold War mentality as well as the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the US reigned supreme on the global stage. These questions evoke a sense of nostalgia for an era where categories of comparison and competition were clear and one could map the world – so it seemed – in terms of nation-state relations that correlated to mono-cultural nationalist identities and an “us/them” framing. However, this nostalgic backward glance is simply inappropriate in today’s postnational world (Darian-Smith 2015). Wrote Edward Said over twenty years ago, “We are mixed in with one another in ways that most national systems of education have not dreamed of” (Said 1993:328). Said went on to prophetically say, “To match knowledge in the arts and sciences with these integrative realities is, I believe, the cultural challenge of the moment” (Said 1993:331; see also; Said 1983).

Second, blinkered thinking in the academy is profoundly disturbing for what it fails to take into account in analyzing contemporary complexities. Thinking primarily in terms of sovereign nation-states precludes innovation and creativity that will be necessary to deal with the global challenges we all currently face such as climate change, mass migrations and world poverty.

Given that no one country will be able to deal with today's unfolding global challenges, blinkered thinking leaves countries like the United States enormously vulnerable to being left behind. This is because anachronistic thinking closes down the mind and prevents imagining alternative futures in which states and regions and continents will through necessity have to engage in collaboration, cooperation, and compromise. The idea of building walls and taking an isolationist position vis-à-vis the rest of the world is equivalent to putting one's head in the sand. As Saskia Sassen has argued, "When we confront today's range of transformations – rising inequality, rising poverty, rising government debt – the usual tools to interpret them are out of date" (Sassen 2014:7). Law, politics and economics are dynamic adapting processes that transcend national boundaries, reconfigure societies in new often unanticipated ways, and challenge concepts such as democracy, sovereignty and rational individualism. In the highly volatile globalizing world we live in, law, politics and economics look very different in reality from how they are typically conceptualized and taught in the US academy.

Of course, no one is saying that nation-states and relations between nation-states are no longer significant. What is being argued, however, is that the prevailing modernist presentation of geopolitics in the academy is outdated. By limiting the horizon of analytical thought to the boundaries of the nation-state, and framing the international as primarily constituting relations between nation-states, the three disciplines are locked into a time-warp that fails to take account of new assemblages of non-state power, authority, sovereignty and territory across regions, continents, and maybe even across the entire globe. The risks, in short, are that the disciplines of law, politics and economics are explicitly or implicitly discouraging new ways of thinking about the world and its complex interrelations.

In order for the three disciplines to fully confront the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and avoid what political scientists Thomas Weiss and Rorden Wilkinson call an "abyss of irrelevance", they will have to let go of the claim to be producing scientific knowledge which, perhaps counter-intuitively, precludes innovative scholarship (Weiss and Wilkinson 2014). Benjamin Cohen writes about this problem with respect to international political economy, a subfield in American political science departments:

By definition, a hard science model depends on the availability of reliable data. Research, accordingly, tends to become data-driven, diverted away from the issues that lack the requisite base of information. In effect, scientific method plays a key role in defining *what* will be studied, automatically marginalizing grander questions that cannot be easily reduced to a manageable set of regressions or structured case-study analysis ... Analysis is increasingly detached from real-world institutions and events, becoming more a branch

of applied mathematics than a true *social* science. An even greater cost is a failure to address many important issues – particularly questions involving underlying structures or broad changes in the global political economy. In the American school, big systemic questions are most conspicuous by their absence. Holistic thinking about the system as a whole is rare (Cohen 2014:32–33).

Thinking primarily in terms of nation-states and failing to consider the “big picture” is a criticism not confined to political scientists. As the sociologist Ulrich Beck has argued, “The zombie science of the national outlook that thinks and researches in the categories of international trade, international dialogue, national sovereignty, national communities, the ‘state nation’ (*Staatsvolk*), and so forth, is a ‘science of the unreal’ ... Just as nation-based economics has come to a dead-end, so too has nation-based sociology” (Beck 2005:23).<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the sociologist Michael Buroway calls for embracing a new interdisciplinary approach that “has to be distinguished from economics that is primarily concerned with the advance of market society and political science that is concerned with the state and political order – Northern disciplines ever more preoccupied with modeling a world ever more remote from reality” (Buroway 2014:xvii).

Interestingly, Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen (former Nobel Laureates in Economics) would probably agree with Beck and Buroway’s comments on the limitations of economics. In a Commission titled *Mismeasuring Our Lives: Why GDP doesn’t add up*, Stiglitz and his two co-authors reflect upon the use of measurements in people’s everyday lives and underscore the limitations of economics that is constrained by a nation-state framework (Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi 2010). They argue that “the theories we construct, the hypotheses we test and the beliefs we have are all shaped by our system of metrics. Social scientists often blithely use easily accessible numbers, like GDP, as a basis of their empirical models, without enquiring sufficiently into the limitations and biases in their metrics. Flawed or biased statistics can lead us to make incorrect inferences” (Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi 2010:xix). Overall, the Commission’s findings were that conventional GDP indicators are inadequate and a more holistic approach needs to be developed that includes “multiple metrics”. This is particularly the case with respect to global issues such as the environment. According to the Commission, “When problems of globalisation and environmental and resource sustainability are combined, GDP metrics may be essentially misleading” (Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi 2010:xxii; see Darian-Smith 2016b).

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<sup>6</sup> This quote appears in the mission statement of the Global Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. <http://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/pageid/1239/m/464> accessed 1 April 2015.

Law schools in the United States are also remiss in their focus on national legal systems and failure to take seriously the global dimensions of legal processes. Unfortunately, only in specialized courses in a small number of elite law schools are the concepts of non-state law or complex transnational legal arrangements discussed and analyzed (Darian-Smith 2013; Darian-Smith 2016a). Notes William Twining, a leading legal scholar in England:

viewing our discipline and its subject matters from a global perspective, both geographically and historically, my argument for a broad conception of law is that focusing solely on the municipal law of nation states ... leaves out too much that should be the proper concern of legal scholarship. A reasonably inclusive cosmopolitan discipline of law needs to encompass all levels of relations and of ordering, relations between these levels, and all important forms of law including supra-state (e.g. international, regional) and non-state law (e.g. religious law, transnational law, chthonic law i.e. tradition/custom) and various forms of “soft” law. A picture of law that only focuses on the municipal law of nation states and public international law would for many purposes be too narrow (Twining 2009:xx).

The good news is that across the social sciences and humanities increasing numbers of scholars are working on transnational issues and are unhappy that the nation-state still remains the primary unit of analysis and container of social organization even when their substantive research seeks to move beyond that framework (Khagram and Levitt 2008). These scholars are calling for the removal of the “analytical shackles of ‘methodological nationalism’” (Zürn 2013:416). Methodological nationalism is a term that was coined back in 2003 by migration scholars Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller who wrote about the need to develop new concepts and approaches to better examine transnational and global processes. They wrote:

In order to escape the magnetism of established methodologies, ways of defining the object of analysis and algorithms for generating questions, we may have to develop (or rediscover?) analytical tools and concepts not colored by the self-evidence of a world ordering into nation-states. This is what we perceive, together with many other current observers of the social sciences, as the major task lying ahead of us (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003:324–25).

This task is taken up in the edited volume *Beyond Methodological Nationalism: Research Methodologies for Cross-Border Studies* (Amelina et al. 2012). Here a range of scholars from across the disciplines seek to move beyond a critique of the nation-state framework and explicitly engage with methodological issues in doing transnational research. They ask a range of new questions such as: How does one design a research agenda and strategy that adequately enables empirical analysis of global processes? What is the appropriate context and spatial

container of social, economic and political relations? How can one keep in sight the importance of inter/national relations without prioritizing these and excluding the vast assortment and assemblages of non-state actors, institutions, relations and social and cultural translations operating across different historical times and different geopolitical spaces?

Developing new analytical tools and concepts is not an easy task, as all the contributors in *Beyond Methodological Nationalism* acknowledge. What unites their various approaches and concerns – be they exploring global cities, labor markets, indigenous movements, migrant communities – is focusing research on the exploration of a specific site, group, or process. This is not to privilege or essentialize the “local” but to examine the specified “container” as a site through which multiple intersecting transnational processes are occurring concurrently and in fact shaping the container over time and the ways we recognize it as such. Particular care is given to see relations as fluid and integrated and not necessarily correlating to national territories or predetermined geopolitical social and political entities (Brenner 2004; Pries 2008). Hence Nina Glick Schiller in her work on migrations to cities is keen to explore the city as a lens or portal through which immigrants embed transnationality in the places of people’s everyday experiences. Her focus on the transnationality of cities sees local migrants as building new forms of alliance that may resist and shape urban restructuring, link migrant labor with local labor, and possibly contribute to global struggles for social justice. Writes Nina Glick Schiller, “These struggles will be both site-specific and able to critique a world of global disparities in wealth and power. Solidarities and alliances can be built that are simultaneously spatial and global” (Amelina et al. 2012:36).

Exploring the global dimensions of local events, institutions and processes speaks to the writing of Bent Flyvbjerg. In his book *Making Social Science Matter*, Flyvbjerg argues that scholars in the social sciences should stop trying to pretend they are “scientific” and find universal theories that posit the “truth about the nature of things” (Flyvbjerg 2001:166). Rather, he argues, the social sciences should focus on people and how they make meaning of their world:

we must take up problems that matter to the local, national, and the global communities in which we live, and we must do it in ways that matter; we must focus on issues of values and power like great social scientists have advocated from Aristotle and Machiavelli to Max Weber and Pierre Bourdieu ... If we do this, we may successfully transform social science from what is fast becoming a sterile academic activity, which is undertaken mostly for its own sake and in increasing isolation from a society on which it has little effect and from which it gets little appreciation. We may transform social science to an activity done in public for the public, sometimes to clarify, sometimes to intervene, sometimes to generate new perspectives, and always to serve as eyes and ears in our ongoing efforts at



understanding the present and deliberating about the future. We may, in short, arrive at a social science that matters (Flyvbjerg 2001:166).

For Bent Flyvbjerg, making social science matter carries methodological implications. He argues that researchers need to focus on how people create values, place power at the center of their analysis, nurture multiple perspectives and interpretations, and ensure that context and grounded case studies provides the mechanism from which to generalize on the important “big” questions. As he notes, this is a decentering methodological approach that draws on the notion of “thick description” and takes as its point of departure local micropractices, always “searching for the Great within the Small and vice versa ... doing work that is at the same time as detailed and as general as possible” (Flyvbjerg 2001:133–34).

## 5 Global Studies and What it Offers

While the field of Global Studies was in its infancy when Bent Flyvbjerg wrote *Making Social Science Matter*, his ideas very much accord with the emergence of this new interdisciplinary field of inquiry. The first Global Studies programs were established in the US in the late 1990’s and over the last 20 years there has been a flourishing of stand-alone programs and research hubs around the world in places such as Japan, China, Russia, Indonesia, Denmark, Korea, Australia, Britain, and Germany. Alongside new interdisciplinary programs dedicated to the study of globalization, within conventional disciplines there have also emerged sub-disciplinary fields engaged specifically with global issues (e.g. global history, global literature, global sociology, and global legal studies). In short, the field of Global Studies and its various institutional and disciplinary manifestations has grown rapidly and there is now a burgeoning array of programs and institutional support for Global Studies scholarship in leading US universities.<sup>7</sup>

A great deal can be said about Global Studies and its related interdisciplinary theories, research designs and critical methodologies (Darian-Smith and McCarty 2017; also Steger and Wahlrab 2016). Mark Juergensmeyer, one of the founding figures in Global Studies, lists five key characteristics of the new field

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, Indiana University established the School of Global & International Studies in 2012, the Global Studies Department at the University of California Santa Barbara launched the first doctoral program at a Tier-1 research university in 2014, and Roberta Buffett gave a gift of over \$100 million to support global studies and a new research institute at Northwestern University in 2015.



that include transnationalism, interdisciplinarity, connecting past histories to contemporary analyses, promoting postcolonial and critical perspectives that don't privilege a Eurocentric view of the world, and fostering a new sense of "global citizenship" (Juergensmeyer 2011).<sup>8</sup> These characteristics speak to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that are destabilizing the modernist nation-state paradigm. Global Studies scholars are acutely aware that nation-states are being reconfigured in light of new economic, political and cultural dynamics operating beyond, within and between countries and that call into question state-bound concepts of nationalism, identity, citizenship, economy, politics, governance, law and so on. This is what people mean when they say we are living in a postnational age (Darian-Smith 2015).

Unfortunately, some scholars are resistant to destabilizing a nationalist methodology and challenging the dominance of the nation-state paradigm. However this destabilizing should be considered positively, as a creative, constructive and inclusive process that challenges scholars and students to confront their own parochialism and at the same time make new analytical syntheses possible. It short, it is an opportunity to overcome the "provincial, arrogant, and silly" posturing of scholars in disciplines such as law, politics and economics departments who assume their work applies to the entire world (Rehbein 2014:217). A Global Studies approach underscores that "we" in rich western countries may not have all the answers to the world's problems and that people other than ourselves may have new things to say and innovative solutions to offer. Moreover Global Studies, perhaps more so than any other arena of inquiry within the academy, foregrounds the message that "us" and "them" are intimately interconnected and recognizes that what is happening "over there" in terms of poverty, inequality, exploitation, environmental degradation, and new types of warfare could also happen back home in what David Held has called a world of "overlapping communities of fate" (Held 2002:57). Global Studies takes seriously non-western worldviews as presented by indigenous communities and postcolonial societies that represent the majority of the world's population.

## 6 Concluding Comments

The emerging field of Global Studies does not have all the answers to researching and exploring the world's most pressing problems. But it does acknowledge

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<sup>8</sup> See also (Juergensmeyer 2014; Duve 2013; Nederveen Pieterse 2013; Gunn 2013; Steger 2014; McCarty 2014).

that conventional disciplines such as law, politics and economics need to educate their students more creatively if the next generation of scholars is going to generate viable solutions. Just as the creation of distinct academic disciplines totally transformed the production of knowledge in universities in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, today we need another grand overhaul of the academy to accord with new geopolitical realities. Thinking globally is one small step in the right direction towards ensuring that scholarship remains relevant and applicable to today's complexities.

By way of conclusion, I would like to suggest that students in law schools, political science and economics departments would significantly benefit by taking introductory courses in Global Studies, be this in the United States or elsewhere. The students just may learn to think in new integrative ways and be better prepared to ask "big questions" and confront the global challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century innovatively, productively and openly. As argued by Alexander Hartwiger, "If students in US higher education are to have a truly global education, teachers and administrators must first start by reforming and transforming local sites of learning" (Hartwiger 2015:311).

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