



# INTRODUCTION

## Framing the Global

HILARY E. KAHN

WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN A COMPLEX WORLD, BUT FEW DENY THAT today we live in a noticeably more interrelated world than we did even a decade ago. Multitudes of global linkages meet to form collections of meaning and materiality that affect our lives: in the things we make and use, the ways we think and feel, how and why we do what we do. They appear in our sociopolitical structures, economic systems, forms of governance, and foreign policies. We are conscious of many of these connections, oblivious to others. We know our shirts are made in Honduras and our iPads in China, and we know that we can now buy German chocolate, not long ago considered a rare treat, at every big-box store in the United States. On the other hand, we do not immediately see how personal feelings reflect transnational inequalities, how hippies and the U.S. countercultural movements of the sixties were part of the Cold War, or how southwestern Illinois and Punjab, India, are genealogically linked through activists and genetically modified seeds. Whether invisible or obvious, these connections transcend geographic, sociopolitical,

and disciplinary territories, and they seamlessly slip into the everyday and the personal. The approach to global studies presented in this volume provides an empirical framework to discern how transnational interconnections like these are anchored in practices, peoples, perceptions, and policies. The volume offers an approach that allows global scholars, from all disciplines and with varied interests, to investigate how our diverse lives and locales are defined by and give meaning to global processes.

Global studies has not always provided avenues into the personal, plural, and partial, nor has it necessarily transcended geographies and disciplines. Global studies emerged in the 1980s, when intellectuals, professionals, and practitioners first took note of the rapidly increasing transnational flows of people, ideas, and products, and the social, political, economic, and cultural consequences of these trends. Economics and political science dominated this emerging field, bolstering the initial interpretations of globalization as either a faceless, singular, and neoliberal force bearing down on states and societies or, contrarily, as nothing new. By the 1990s, when undergraduate degree programs, research organizations, and academic journals began to sustain this intellectual inquiry, analytic lenses saw beyond the categorization of globalization as either an omnipresent influence or the status quo. Sociologists, geographers, and anthropologists expanded the conversation around globalization from economics and politics to include space and the social. Networks and assemblages replaced anchored geographies, and scholars began to look equally at connections and at what was being connected. Soon graduate degree programs, international conferences, and advanced scholarship were being pursued under the umbrella of global studies.

Today, interest in globalization has spread throughout the academy and entered popular awareness. Yet global studies lacks a framework of understanding and a set of empirical methods that students and researchers can apply across and within the disciplines. Global studies retains several disciplinary mindsets, and many scholars still define their global research narrowly or through binaries. While scholars may argue against simple dichotomies, or align themselves on one side, binaries such as universal/particular, global/local, and micro/macro still inform how we understand global trends. And while the field is increasingly multidisciplinary, it is far from interdisciplin-

ary. Countless scholars focus in on singular frames of reference: culture, society, law, communication, economy, and politics retain their disciplinary significance; the humanities, though with increasing contributions from history, literary studies, and media studies, are regularly absent.

The contributors to this volume build upon previous global scholarship,<sup>1</sup> but in and of themselves none of the earlier approaches meets their analytic and methodological needs. While the contributors do not advocate a one-size-fits-all approach to global studies, they do recognize the need for a more rigorous global framework. Drawing on empirical knowledge to define their analytics and scholarly practices, they provide a grounded approach to global studies.

The objects of empirical inquiry, however, vary dramatically across disciplines and subject matter, from international environmental standards, financial markets, and immigration policies to the performance of aesthetics, identities, and emotions, for example. Empirical research can involve quantitative data sets and regression analysis, or it can originate in oral histories and ethnography. What the scholars contributing to this volume share is a willingness to step back in their analyses and consider the assumptions about the global implicit in disciplinary approaches and received wisdom. Each chapter is framed around an entry point or key term, with discussion of the contributor's analytical framework and empirical research. The terms and concepts that are highlighted were not chosen because of their importance in a given field or in the work of other scholars. Rather, the entry points have emerged in the course of each contributor's engagement with existing approaches to global studies, a particular research question, and ideas generated through collaboration with others in the group. They allow researchers to alter their analytics and avoid involuntarily foregrounding stubborn epistemologies and dichotomies in their scholarship. They are as much new lenses on the global as they are keywords for analysis and scholarly debate. The entry points—ranging from *Affect*, *Rules*, and *Rights* to *Materiality*, *Seascape*, and the *Particular*—offer a conceptual toolkit for global research in the twenty-first century, while the essays provide examples and insight into conducting research on a wide range of themes, from global financial gold markets and transnational labor migration to public art in China and the global significance of 1968.

## FRAMING GLOBAL STUDIES

Many of the contributors were originally trained as disciplinary and regional specialists. Going *global* meant that they had to challenge epistemological assumptions and stray at times from home disciplines and geographies. They did not modify their objects of inquiry, but asked different sets of questions about them. In the end, the focus on global phenomena did not detract from disciplinary approaches or regional studies, but rather gave greater meaning to their respective objects, disciplines, and areas of inquiry, and produced deeper understandings of lived identities, communities, cultures, histories, and intimacies.

As global scholars, the contributors to this volume demand wider frames of reference, multi-scalar optics, and interdisciplinary skills in order to be aware of and continuously adjust their vantage points. Even so, understanding of the multifaceted world in which we live remains partial. As a result, there is more than one global. Just as general theories of singular society are no longer suitable for the social sciences, it is similarly unfitting to assume one way of framing global studies.<sup>2</sup> Rather, this collection of essays and the scholarship of their authors represent various entry points for exploring a plurality of globals that emerge and come to rest in different guises, locales, and performances. The contributors thus rupture many of the analytic and methodological cartographies that provide global certainty, and they diligently avoid an “impact model” of globalization (Hart 2002). As such, neoliberalism and capitalism are not the only drivers of globalization, nor are they normative, singular, and invincible (Ong 2007). Agency, causality, sovereignty, and power do not inevitably radiate from singular geographies or entities, even though they may cluster in particular locales, actors, and materials.

Traditional renderings of globalization tend to emphasize acceleration, rapid change, movement, and an annihilation of temporal and spatial barriers, but there are also continuities and historical structures that are in interplay with our ongoing practices and perceptions. Not everything shifts at the same rapid twenty-first-century speed. Saskia Sassen (2006) demonstrates this in her scholarship. She reveals how territory, authority, and rights merge into a conceptual framework that shifts, tips, and reorganizes through time while simultaneously maintaining its integrity as loosely assembled modular structures. By allowing for change alongside continuity, grounded global

studies illustrates how transformation occurs fluidly, reliably, and at times not much at all.

This book takes a fresh look not only at global scholarship but also at what steered the authors to become global scholars. Exposing the histories, ideologies, approaches, and responsibilities that have guided them to the entry points from which they now do global scholarship, they lay bare their subjects of inquiry. They reveal the processes that led them to the global through numerous frames of reference and disciplinary points of departure. They ask essential questions and transcend the many dualisms that are regularly employed in academia and beyond to describe what is and is not global. They walk the readers through the wide-ranging methodological, ethical, and theoretical questions that bring them to far-reaching globals, anchored not only in standards, markets, media, technologies, and nations, but in identities, activisms, rights, and emotions.

If interdisciplinarity is a heightened form of disciplinarity, as Louis Menand suggests (2010), then we indeed are carving a new intellectual space for this emerging discipline. To date, global studies does not have a master concept around which theory and method can take shape, like sociology has in society, or political science has in politics. Some have suggested that globalization is the core concept (Wank 2008), but there is no consensus on this point. Other global researchers might propose *relations* or *interconnections* as a primary concept, and the authors in this volume clearly recognize the relational constructions of their global areas of inquiry. But when global studies focuses only on the connections, the specific locations and phenomena where those intersections are lodged and practiced are eclipsed, and we risk slipping back into the same dichotomies—between global and local, the general and particular, the micro and macro—that we have been working to move beyond. As Rockefeller (2011) has noted, global scholarship has too often focused on flows without a critical consideration of what is flowing. Grounded global studies must not shy away from the inequalities, anomalies, and differences that are intrinsic to global circulation.

At the core of this emerging discipline is a commitment to empirical research and a search for previously unrecognized arrangements, patterns, and productive connections and disconnections. The entry points identified in the present collection allow global scholars to scrutinize the broader relationships and particularities that intersect and emerge into visibility. They

also help scholars acknowledge the power and penetration of established dichotomies or nodes of authority, while simultaneously dissecting them and exploring their mutual constitution. Rather than propose one shared formulaic framework for global research, we encourage scholars to develop their own entry points, work through series of provocations, and create their own framings for the global however and wherever it is made manifest.<sup>3</sup> This is our intellectual space for grounded global studies.

#### GLOBAL METHODOLOGIES

Our use of entry points works toward correcting various misconceptions, including the impression that global studies is not sufficiently moored in the real lives and social meanings of people and practices. Though we recognize that the global is neither all-encompassing nor linear, meaning that it has its limits, both physical and metaphoric, we are also aware that the global is found in intimate practices, personalities, and performances. The global is not only anchored in the broader regulatory frameworks, standards, and rules that structure our lives, but it is also embodied in essential aspects of our being that may seem to have nothing to do with globalization.

Like electronic web portals, entry points consolidate diverse and far-reaching ideas, people, and resources. Like entries to a citadel, they allow scholars and readers to explore halls, chambers, and secret passageways that together give structure to objects of inquiry. Similar to disciplinary frameworks, entry points give us analytic lenses through which we may pursue our research. Entry points are fallback points, creating some didactic limits and guiding structures for scholarship of global manifestations. They help us avoid branding the global or imagining the local as the origin of meaning and intellect.<sup>4</sup> They define units of analysis and determine our empirical paths, intellectual processes that are key challenges for research in the twenty-first century (Beck and Grande 2010, 412). Our entry points direct our gazes and guide us into the global. They slice reality differently, opening up new modes of understanding.<sup>5</sup>

While global studies has no single master concept, there is an intellectual space in which basic epistemological concerns and critical ontological questions can be raised. Part of defining a disciplinary space for global studies is agreeing on key characteristics that define globals. The globals in this volume

are negotiated; they are processes that are created and reified relationally within hinterlands, cities, identities, economies, things, policies, and the personal. They are shaped and signified from within junctures, some of which, in fact, may not appear global at all. Globals can be partial; they need not be mega-processes but can be encountered as incomplete arrangements or even fragments. The contributors see globals as practice: they are ideologies, technologies, and habits that are structured and made legible through everyday lives. Globals are symbolic and embodied with authority and agency, always fashioned and explored within regimes of value and hierarchies of power across multiple scales.

Grounded global studies relies on the deep knowledge emerging from area specialization and the disciplines. This means that there are many potential frames of reference and patterns to discern. The essays in this volume posit no specific vantage point as an a priori starting point. The nation-state is not the primary frame of reference, but one of many used to pursue various global manifestations. There cannot be only one unit of analysis when investigating the connections between different scales (Amelina et al. 2012, 5).<sup>6</sup> Because scholars of the global must define their own entry points and methodological approaches, global studies avoids methodological nationalism's "bounded, static thinking while not disregarding the processes that actually construct emplacement, territorialization and the construction of ethnic, national, and diasporic identities" (ibid., 7). This approach challenges geographies while recognizing that territories and materiality do in fact still matter (Kaplan 2012).

The contributors to this volume move beyond comparative approaches to empirically probe the complex interplay among locales, practices, policies, and people (Shaw 2003). They use comparison relationally and avoid quantifying or measuring isolated cases against universal benchmarks. *Relational comparisons* (Hart 2002) emphasize how entities are formed in relation to one another as well as vis-à-vis broader contexts (ibid., 13–14). This shifts the focus from isolated units of inquiry to the transactions and relations in which they are constituted (Emirbayer 1997).

It may be an emphasis on the connections as well as on what is being connected that encourages many of these authors to embrace ethnographic methods, regardless of their own disciplinary backgrounds. One of the most pressing issues in global studies is the importance of situating understand-























