

Looking at the Global Transformations

Why an Integrated Perspective is Still Required

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Abstract: *In this article, the authors offer an introduction to the Sophia Global Studies center, its methodology and framework, and offer some reflections on the ways in which this center can respond to the complex issues facing humanity in an increasingly globalized world. They argue that the recent appearance of isolationist trends in various parts of the world only confirms the relevance of this center of global studies.*

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Sophia Global Studies is the fruit of ten years of academic experience at Sophia University Institute. From the beginning of its journey, Sophia established itself as an international, intercultural, and transdisciplinary institution, an academic laboratory for discussion, study, and networking on concepts and categories such as unity, communion, fraternity, peace, and dialogue. Sophia Global Studies is a platform for sharing pioneering research, experiences, and perspectives regarding global challenges and opportunities, in close conversation and synergy with other programs and initiatives inspired by the culture of unity and other academic institutions and centers wishing to collaborate. At the same time, it offers a space where a new generation of leaders can prepare themselves for dealing with complexity and working toward a more peaceful and united world.

The center's methodology and framework are expressed by the Sophia University Institute's academic programs: 1) a transdisciplinary collaboration that gathers the principal research finding in areas related to global studies; 2) attention to diverse sociocultural contexts and their transformations; 3) an integrated and relational educational environment that emphasizes grassroots experiences and the societal dimension of economic and political phenomena. In some sense, despite a lack of initial clarity about their meaning, we believe that categories such as "unity" and "peace" are not empty concepts but form the basis of social practices and should be explored and fully exploited in the process of understanding and addressing global challenges.

Paradoxically, the complexities of today's world demand more integrated and more unified analytical and pragmatic perspectives. Many labels have been used to describe the age of complexity we

are living in, which is characterized by uncertainty, multipolarism, postglobalism, exclusionary identity, illiberal political systems, and protectionism. While certain forms of globalization are responsible for violent reactions and counter movements in many regions of the planet, the process of globalization has made increasingly clear the extent to which countries, societies, and cultures are interconnected and interdependent.

The reappearance of isolationist trends and the temptations of inward-looking narratives and policies has complicated, but not reversed, this process. Globalization has become an increasingly contested process. In fact, globalization is now being contested by the same movements and powers that helped its extraordinary growth over the last century, namely, the nations of the unsteady Euro-Atlantic alliance. It is not an exaggeration to speak of a crisis of globalization, especially in the West, and the very use of terms such as “global” and “globalism” are undergoing an epistemic crisis. Some might argue that instead of promoting a globalist framework, we should rediscover categories such as those represented by the word “universalism.” Why, then, are we opening a new global studies initiative?

We are retaining the word “global” because global studies and affairs, notwithstanding challenges to the term itself, still provide a rich field within which disciplines, cultures, and generations can debate, advance, and confront the challenges and opportunities opened by contemporary worldwide transnational trends. In a comprehensive, broad, and inclusive way, global studies still allows researchers and students to examine the otherwise puzzling and contradictory factors on the world scene within a reasonably coherent framework.

The ongoing debates regarding world transformations and global affairs demonstrate the need for an integrated yet diversified approach to analysis and study. To illustrate the kinds of research and teaching topics that we expect to develop in our center, we present some examples.

Example 1: There are different and conflicting reactions to globalism. China, for example, presents itself as defending some “liberal” positions, such as open borders and internationalization; thus, the nation that built the Great Wall is today a promoter of an ambitious intercontinental infrastructural “bridge” throughout Asia and Europe, known as the Belt and Road Initiative. In contrast, the United States, which was considered the “Liberal Leviathan” of the twentieth century, is heading in the opposite direction, moving away from the very world system it helped to create.

Example 2: The role of regional powers in balancing the international order is changing. There is consensus that we live in a multipolar international system, but the question of how such multipolarity translates into a truly connective multilateral world system needs further study. What is the role of international institutions within this scenario? What weight will be assumed by emerging powers? The answers are far from obvious. On the one hand, we see formal multilateral institutions; on the other, we witness the emergence of new informal institutions like BRICS or the G20. In the context of such transformation in international cooperation, how can a new kind of realpolitik be reconciled with a rule-based international order?

Example 3: Our world has been so deeply transformed that we can no longer distinguish center from periphery. The so-called emerging powers, for instance, are no longer emerging but are

already driving forces from the perspective of the global economy, not to mention their role in managing political and military crises. Where is the center and where the periphery?

Example 4: We know that most conflicts today are civil wars and intranational conflicts, and that these conflicts are usually waged by nonstate actors and armed groups. We see the bold consequences of this “deconstructed” warfare: transnational terrorism, ethnic confrontations, religious and cultural tensions, stress on borders and boundaries (a case in point is human mobility). This raises new questions about how we define war and peace today and, consequently, how we develop efficient and applicable tools to prevent or resolve conflicts.

Example 5: The transformation of “Westphalian sovereignty” is underway. There is great variety in the ability of a central power to rule effectively over a specific territory and population. Adjoining states operate under governance types that range from “too strong” to “too weak.” One side effect of such diversification is the increasing emphasis on *human security* as opposed to *national security*.

Example 6: Finally, we observe the shift toward identity-based national and international politics. Identity is a rather generic notion and perhaps for that reason has gained political consensus all around the world. But what do we mean by identity? What can we expect from an identity-oriented national or supranational policy? We could point to the fact, for example, that in many contexts, an emphasis on identity has led to the rise of exclusionary policies. Carl Schmitt famously stated that “the sovereign is the one who decides on the state of *exception*.” Many governments today seem to follow Schmitt’s assertion in a rather convoluted way, apparently

believing that “sovereign is he who decides on the state of *exclusion*.” This is happening in the Global South, in the West, and wherever processes of fragmentation and integration coexist. It is still unclear where these trends are leading. In the case of Europe, we are witnessing a renationalization of policies, with the risk of a disintegration of the European Union.

Inspired by its culture of unity, one of the tasks of Sophia Global Studies is to study and advance a responsible sovereignty and a reflexive politics, capable of deciding on the state of *inclusion* and factoring in transnational citizenship and universal care. The Sophia Global Studies initiative offers the university a pathway to build on its diversity as it strives to become a more global and broadly inclusive institution of higher education.

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