The global—whether an institution, a process, a discursive practice, or an imaginary—simultaneously transcends the exclusive framing of the nation-state and partly inhabits national territories and institutions. Seen this way, globalization is more than its common representation as growing interdependence and the formation of self-evidently global institutions. It also comprises processes situated deep inside the national, which means that one instantiation of globalization actually is the outcome of a partial denationalizing of the national as historically constructed.

From this perspective, then, the fact that several authors in this book engage the global as regional specialists takes on a whole new meaning. Such a regional angle raises the level of difficulty of detecting the global: it is not enough to confine one’s study to the self-evidently global condition. If the global also comprises processes situated deep inside the national, then the development of knowledge about the global requires specialized knowledge about subnational settings. Indeed, in my research I find that it is the subnational and the global scales that become strategic for developing a global
analytics. It is knowledge about the nation-state as an all-encompassing for-
formation that loses capacity to explain the global, but not knowledge about the
subnational. Thus, rather than focusing on nation-states, one of my efforts
has been to use the nation-state as a window into more foundational condi-
tions—territory, authority, rights.

Such understanding brings with it methodological and theoretical chal-

lenges both to state-centric social science and to the notion of the global as

that which transcends the nation-state, that which lies outside its framing.

Each of these two analytic modes deploys specific instruments for discov-
ering, conceptualizing, and interpreting its x—its object of study. Though
different, they are not necessarily incompatible. But they do have different
points of entry, to use one of the organizing images in this book.

While the transcending of the nation-state is a necessary part of the larger
effort to theorize and research globalization, the state has continued to domi-
nate discussion and interpretation. And in so doing it has obscured the need
for research and theorization of denationalization processes, by which I do
not mean privatization, but the exiting of capabilities and processes from a
national framing.

From where I look at it all, one of the more important contributions this
volume makes to the scholarship on globalization is its specifying of what are
as yet ambiguous global conditions. As Hilary Kahn describes it so clearly:
“The volume offers an approach that allows global scholars, from all dis-
ciplines and with varied interests, to investigate how our diverse lives and
locales are defined by and give meaning to global processes” (2, this volume).

Many of the findings and theorizations in the chapters detect and uncover
what we might describe as emergent shapes in our current multi-sited global
landscape. These extraordinary research projects capture foundational trans-
formations that cannot be easily described in terms of the common catego-
rization of global versus national. Further, these are transformations that
can coexist with the ongoing presence of national states even as they can
denationalize critical aspects of nations and national states.

A second feature I see in this book is that together these chapters have the
effect of generating a partial, often specialized, sometimes obscure, disas-
sembling of some of the major categories in the social sciences. This is not
always made explicit, and may in some cases be far from the author’s intent. It
is the juxtaposition of these chapters, with their very diverse objects of study and methodologies, that produces this effect.

The issue here is not simply one of throwing out these categories. Rather, what I read in these chapters is a way of rendering them unstable. In so doing, the authors are making these categories work, analytically speaking, for their status as categories. Many of our major current categories have inherited their status from a time and place when they emerged out of analytic work. Now the challenge is to make new categories that help us theorize the current conditions. This book can then be read as an experiment in expanding the analytic terrain for understanding and representing what we have come to name globalization. Again, as Hilary Kahn puts it so clearly: “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” (6, this volume).

Both of these features are critical for advancing research, interpretation of findings, and theorization of the global. Ours is a time when stabilized meanings have become unstable. No meaning is permanently stable. But there are periods when they can acquire a measure of stability. In the Keynesian decades that shaped much of the post–World War II period, terms such as economy, family, middle class, and national state all had a certain stability of meaning. The current global age that took off in the 1980s has unsettled many of the major social, economic, and political meanings of the Keynesian era in the West. We can see equivalent processes in other parts of the world, with their own contents and temporalities.

My concern here is particularly with some of the major categories we use in the social sciences—economy, polity, society, justice, inequality, state, globalization, immigration. These are all powerful in that they are widely used to explain the realities they represent. Yet those realities are mutants—today’s concept of the economy dominated by finance and high-tech is quite different from that of the Keynesian period, which was dominated by mass manufacturing, mass consumption, and mass suburbanization.

I detect a cognate effort in some of these chapters, even though they focus on other spaces and contents. The challenge we confront as scholars is to reconstitute dominant categories so as to bring into the explanation that which is in conceptual tension with the established categories. Or to bring in
that which produces a “vague” edge that unsettles the category’s aspiration to clarity. For instance, when I chose the concept “global city,” I was introducing one such tension, a built-in vagueness. Indeed, many responded by saying the concept was a contradiction in terms since cities are in a national hierarchy subordinate to the national state. And this is indeed part of the condition. But I found an emergent reality that needed to be named even if it entered in tension with established categories.

This brings us back to the need to actively destabilize stabilized meanings in a period of emergent formations. We need to discover what these major categories veil or obscure about our epoch precisely because they are powerful explanations. An explanation is not a description—it selects particular features and configurations and must eliminate many others or it becomes merely a description.

Thus a category such as globalization has explanatory power. But what do I not see when I invoke it? For instance, I may not see the extent to which national governments are active makers of key features of globalization, thereby overriding the standard global versus national counterpoint. Or let’s take urbanization, a category full of content and much deployed nowadays. Yet invoking the urban condition on its own terms excludes a range of non-urban processes—from land grabs to environments destroyed by mining—that are part of urbanization in that they force rural peoples to seek a livelihood in cities.

At some point, experimental ruminations are what we need, and this requires the freedom to suspend, even if temporarily, method and its disciplining of the what, the how, and the why of an inquiry.1 I need to engage in what I think of as analytic tactics—the freedom to position myself in whatever ways I want or need vis-à-vis the object of study. I think of this as the space “before method.”

Engaging in such analytic tactics and what they allow us to see brings with it the need to construct conceptual instruments for using those findings to arrive at substantive interpretations. Using complex conditions that might be present both in national and in global institutional settings is one step in this effort. That is what I did with territory, authority, and rights: I have found these useful as points of entry—to use the book’s image—into the national. They are complex, and their meanings are made through struggles and conflicts, thereby registering and capturing the specifics of a time and
place. They exist in very diverse types of organizations (tribal societies, kingdoms, empires, republics). Each takes on specific formats, interdependencies, and hierarchies. It is their instantiation in the nation-state, where territory is dominant, which is still a sort of standard. And yet, there have been so many other instantiations across time and space. Today, the long-standing association of these three categories with the nation-state is becoming unstable, making visible the historicity of the latter.

I end with a thought that these chapters evoke, especially in their more ambiguous, undeclared aspects. There are analytic moments when two systems of representation intersect. Such analytic moments are easily experienced as spaces of silence, of absence. One challenge is to see what happens in those spaces, what operations (analytic, of power, of meaning) take place there. The lines that mark a difference sometimes need to be opened up into analytic borderlands. There are plenty of such in this remarkable collection.

**Note**

1. This point will be developed further in the book I am preparing for this series, *Before Method: Analytic Tactics* (Indiana University Press, forthcoming).
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