

“GLOBALIZATION/GLOCALIZATION:
DEVELOPMENTS IN THEORY
AND APPLICATION.
ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF
ROLAND ROBERTSON”
EDITED BY PETER BEYER

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Peter Beyer’s festschrift in honor of the late Roland Robertson (1938-2022) – *Globalization/Glocalization: Developments in theory and Application. Essays in Honour of Roland Robertson* (2021, Leiden-Boston: Brill) – compiles an introduction and 13 original essays from a group of heavy hitters in the globalization and global studies fields, including: John Boli, Didem Gulmez, Rebecca Catto, Richard Giullanotti, Ulf Hannerz, David Inglis, Paul James, Habibul Khondker, Anne Krossa, Frank Lechner, Kristian Naglo, John Simpson, Manfred Steger, and George Thomas. While each essay draws on Robertson’s work, they each contribute to furthering the readers’ understanding of the uses of key concepts like globalization, glocalization, relativism, universalism, localism, unicity, citizenship, and cosmopolitanism. As Beyer notes in his insightful introduction, Robertson’s use of the much-maligned concept of relativism serves as the red thread that connects and ties together many of the essays included within the volume. Through interaction with other cultures, we learn what relativism means and how it helps us to understand the experience of a limited universalism. Accordingly, my local views cannot be universal in the face of other beliefs

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and practices. Yet, relativism, far from the basic understanding of “anything goes”, here involves relationships and includes connection between different units (individuals, societies, states, system, etc.). Nearly every chapter includes some nuanced take on this point that is highly illustrative and insightful.

As Beyer explains, Robertson’s body of work seeks to “account for the continued, although transformed, salience of social and cultural differences as the world has ever increasingly become a ‘single place’” (Beyer 2021: 6). The impact of this theme, captured in his term “glocal”, is that it draws upon and ultimately brings together a wide range of fields of study, theoretical orientations, and methodologies revealing that globalization is not contained within any one field or observed by any one methodology. Those who agree with this perspective are typically appreciative of Robertson’s work and vice versa. After all, the finding that globalization is not just the tying together of people through economics, politics and technology (trade plus the internet) but that it is also a matter of “consciousness” of the increasing interconnectedness – a key component that is now central to most definitions of globalization. The book also includes a helpful bibliography of Robertson’s published works.

Didem Buhari Gulmez argues along with Robertson that globalization is about the ways in which the local and the global play off each other to practically guarantee local and global change. Rather than seeing the local as something in the past and the global as some kind of future perfect, ongoing diversity and difference is likely: “the local and the global can be revisited as mutually constitutive dynamics” (Buhari Gulmez in Beyer 2021: 30). In other words, her critique is that it is a mistake to view the local as a fixed point and is instead something always in the process of being remade as it responds to globalization processes. Moreover, globalization is not just a homogenizing force because it too is always changing as it responds to local processes. Indeed, her reading meshes with Ulf Hannerz’ next chapter “Anywheres, Somewheres and the Faces of Cosmopolitanism” which traces a number of terms used to describe global and local processes over the past 30 years

or so (the time of Robertson's scholarship). The titular categories Hannerz refers to are taken from a critique made by British journalist David Goodhardt and a play on former British Prime minister Theresa May's critique of cosmopolitanism; specifically, that if you call yourself a citizen of the world you are, in effect, a citizen of nowhere. But Hannerz is not buying it. He uses himself as an example of someone who is a combination of somewhere, anywhere, and cosmopolitan: an academic who has lived in many different countries and enjoys "mobility and diversity" but also is a 40-year resident of Stockholm with roots dating back several generations. But Stockholm itself does not resemble a place his grandparents would recognize owing to the forces of globalization, which have brought about a multicultural city (Hannerz in Beyer 2021: 54). Here Gulmez and Hannerz agree, glocalization is about the deep interplay between a mutually constitutive local and global: glocal.

Manfred Steger, though deeply grateful to Robertson, critiques his periodization schema which centers Europe and global capitalism. He shows the value of global history, complexity, and the "long perspective" in his fourfold periodization which begins not two thousand years ago but roughly 125.000 years ago when our hominid ancestors from Africa began to colonize all five continents and ended when small bands of hunter gatherers reached the southern tip of South America 12.000 years ago. This global perspective decenters Europe as the driver of history. Moreover, his conclusion is worth noting because it draws on Robertson's use of relativism and the mutually constituting nature of the local-global dynamic which produces endless change at all levels. While perhaps all moments in time will feel unsettling to those experiencing them, Steger, and Paul James, in the next chapter, concludes with the observation that we are living in "unsettled times" (Steger in Beyer 2021: 75).

Paul James describes the "Great Unsettling," as he and Steger call the current period, as being fraught with looming catastrophe: nuclear war, climate chaos, pandemics, and other existential threats (James in Beyer 2021: 83). Drawing on Robertson's "uncertainty phase," James homes in on his list of crises. The point that both

Steger and James make is that whether “uncertainty”, “crisis”, or “unsettling” the existential nature of the current period reminds us of the relationship between theory and practice. Theory is necessary for understanding how to act and unless people act, theory is hollow. James ends also with a warning that action today may also be hollow as civil disobedience, especially on the left, amounts to “tell the truth, act now, and ask governments to create and then be led by the decisions” of citizens’ groups (James in Beyer 2021: 97).

George Thomas further homes in on the issue of the “relativizing effects of globalization” in his titular chapter by drawing on Robertson’s insight that though interconnectivity is vital to globalization, so is “experiencing and imagining the world as one” (Thomas in Beyer 2021: 101). Whatever relativism there is, exists within the world and is thus “embedded in and encountering a consciousness of the world as a whole” (Thomas in Beyer 2021: 101). He goes on to describe the history and rise of global civil society as reactions to centralizing states and argues that global civil society can be seen as both national and international (local and global) (Thomas in Beyer 2021: 110). This leads him to remind his readers of Robertson’s analysis of the creative tension between the local and the global: “even as globalization relativizes and disrupts identities it increases pressures to have a unique, particular identity” (Thomas in Beyer 2021: 112). Both Thomas and Robertson thus reject standard binary distinctions in place because time’s movement forward makes static observations immediately obsolete.

Frank Lechner’s chapter on the “changing nature of world theory” also taps into the practical nature of globalization research and global studies by noting the way that symbols and ideas “constitute” the most important factors of human life. To do this he maps the changes that occurred within scholarly trends since Robertson’s 1979 critical reflections on the classics of sociological theory. Lechner focuses on three trends: *a*) trends towards historicism, *b*) trends of expanding the canon (i.e., including Scottish theorists but also W.E.B. DuBois), and *c*) a move away from the liberal social imaginary. Overall, these moves are not entirely a result of Robertson’s

scholarship but Lechner shows that he played a significant role insofar as those who helped in these three areas often cite Robertson.

Rebecca Cato explores Robertson's contribution to the sociology of religion and his specific challenge to the once dominant secularization paradigm. While many scholars read their data to mean that secularization was the most likely outcome of modernity, modernization, and ultimately, globalization, Robertson's work retained the "complex understanding of the individual-society relationship" (Cato in Beyer 2021: 143). As Cato ably shows, Robertson's long interest in the relationship "between religion, modernity, and secularization" evolves with the rise of the global imaginary and helps him to see things differently than those trained in the dominant secularization school. Robertson's work instead reveals that while "non-religion" rises, Christian practices decline in the West, "religion matters a great deal [...] with religious revitalization alongside relativization" (Cato in Beyer 2021: 147). Like others in this volume, Cato circles back to the creative tension, mutual constitution, and dynamism of local agency and "significant global dynamics of power" (Cato in Beyer 2021: 154).

John Simpson's essay on the sociology of belief from an evolutionary perspective traces Robertson's and his various co-authors' analysis of the social elements of global politics. It is through social relationships between people, communities, societies (of states) etc. that globalization comes into being. Moreover, Simpson shows how these relationships create the conditions for belief. In the context of nation-states, Robertson's work details states' justification of themselves through meaning: "this is what we stand for, what it means to be a citizen of this country" (Simpson in Beyer 2021: 167). Simpson's fascinating chapter then shows how the evolution of human brains makes belief possible, though not any particular belief. As he notes, "human culture is not coded for in the human genome. However, the human brain is, and it possesses the capacity to learn language and, via language, social learning and classical learning to acquire culture" (Simpson in Beyer 2021: 175). Robertson's discussion of

relativism, the glocal, and consciousness help us understand this thing called globalization.

Habibul Khondker's chapter draws our attention to the problem of global morality, which he says is an implicit concern for Robertson and is present in his work. He self-consciously admits to the challenges of creating "an overarching morality, with a set of common principles" which sociologists have rightly "viewed with skepticism" (Khondker in Beyer 2021: 179). Khondker's premise is that Robertson's scholarly foundation in the sociology of religion, his emphasis on humanity as one big society rather than limiting himself to studying a "national society," and the concern over the "human condition" all suggest an implicit concern with global morality (Khondker in Beyer 2021: 180). Indeed, Khondker appreciates the contributions of various "post-" approaches (structuralism, modernism, colonialism, and even truth) which force us to "look at the world as upside down" and yet he remains firm in his view that "there are incidents and acts that are morally outrageous" (Khondker in Beyer 2021: 198). He argues that Robertson's glocal may be the best way to "persuade rather than force people to grow out of parochialism and provincialism and embrace cosmopolitanism and globalism" (Khondker in Beyer 2021: 199).

Richard Guilianotti approaches glocalization through the example of global football (soccer to the Americans). He explains that the global game may be universally understood and be defined by a set of agreed upon rules, the reality is that the game is played differently throughout the world and changes depending upon nation, state, city, club, and even neighborhood. It's still football (universally recognized) and yet it has different strategies, play styles, fan behavior, and etc. The game's attractiveness stems from its universalism and, paradoxically, from the diversity of play and style. As he explains, "a full convergence of football styles is counter-productive: if all teams played with the same formation and style, equally matched teams would likely cancel each other out (leading to boring, probably scoreless draws), while weaker teams would accept almost inevitable defeat from superior sides" (Guilianotti in

Beyer 2021: 212). Instead, the creative mutual constitution of local and global reproduces the game endlessly.

Kristian Naglo and Anne Sophie Krossa offer a case study of a German attempt to integrate refugee children in central Germany to better assess the utility of Roberston's concept of glocalization. By focusing on power and hierarchy between volunteer coaches and refugee children the authors found that the relationships were one-sided with the coaches assuming that, since they were teachers, they had nothing to learn from the children. As a result, the children often did not return to the program or did not participate in the way that the coaches expected. The case study ultimately offers an empirical example of the failure of glocalization theory. Indeed, instead of football integrating refugee children into German society, Naglo and Krossa show that, in their case study, the global game did as much, if not more, to confirm "the fundamental differences' that divide volunteers and refugees" (Naglo, Krossa in Beyer 2021: 229).

David Inglis, like the chapters on football, introduces his readers to an empirical case study, this time on the ways that globalization has homogenized wine production and, therefore, wine consumption. The striking element here is that while globalization has allowed wine to be produced and transported all over the world, the technology and production processes that make this possible also limit the range of wine quality that is consumed globally (Inglis in Beyer 2021: 249). Inglis further shows that while one can go into a "well-stocked wine shop" and find "an apparently very diverse range of wines from many countries", the reality is that "[w]hat most wine drinkers drink most of the time has tastes and organoleptic properties that are remarkably similar wherever the wines may happen to come from" (Inglis in Beyer 2021: 238).

The final chapter, by John Boli, offers a data rich theoretical and empirical test of the relationship between global conflict and popular culture. Science fiction fans will appreciate the hard work done in this chapter because here he focuses on stories of alien invasion and the like. Boli makes and tests three predictions: "1) cultural production about the Outside increases with globalization, 2)

such cultural production declines during major disruptions in world society, and, in contrast, 3) major disruptions increase cultural production about perceived threats to the planet from the Outside” (Boli in Beyer 2021: 261). He finds that, yes, “more globalization implies more cultural production regarding the Outside” and that, yes, “major disruptions in world society lead to disruptions in cultural production regarding the Outside” but that, no, “major disruptions in world society do not lead to increased cultural productions about threats from the Outside” (Boli in Beyer 2021: 282).

This festschrift honors Roland Robertson both by its intention and by the high quality of the original essays contained within. Moreover, for anyone looking to dig deeper into the concepts central to Robertson’s work on globalization, especially glocal, unicity, glocalization, and relativism, this book is an excellent companion.

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