SPECIAL ISSUE:

GLOBALIZATIONS FROM 'ABOVE' AND 'BELOW' THE FUTURE OF WORLD SOCIETY

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A Brief History of the Future of World Society
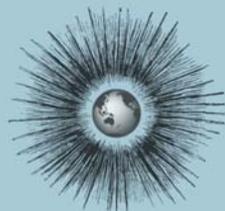
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PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Earlier versions of the articles in this issue were presented and discussed at the international symposium on "The Future of World Society," held in June 2004 at the University of Zurich.[1] The theme of the symposium implied two assumptions. One, there is in fact a world society, though still very much in formation. And two, as social scientists we are in a position to predict the future of that society with at least some degree of certainty. The first of these assumptions will be addressed in Alberto Martinelli's timely contribution, "From World System to World Society?" It is the second assumption which is of interest to us in this introduction. Are the social sciences really able to predict the future of world society?

As is well known, over the last two decades public demand for scholarly models of global social change has grown considerably, and is still growing. Increasingly dense webs of transnational trade relations and investment flows have raised the

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overall level of global interconnectedness and (uneven) (inter-) dependencies, while ever more efficient worldwide communication technologies have accelerated the pace of what Harvey (1989: 240 ff) calls "time-space compression." The nation state, hitherto the most significant locus of political decision-making and reference point of individuals' identities, has been challenged in its traditional functions by international organizations and other global governance institutions. Therefore, for most individuals these changes have brought about what they view as a new source of insecurity and loss of control over the very conditions of their daily lives. They perceive what is usually referred to as 'globalization' as an emergent phenomenon, i.e. an occurrence without historical precedents and beyond the grasp of commonly accepted everyday theory. What is needed, then, is an analysis that helps us to make sense of current processes, indicates direction, or possible directions, in which we are heading, and contributes to our knowledge of how we may alter the course of these processes.

The articles in this issue undertake this task from different theoretical and methodological vantage points. Informed by a comparative macro-historical approach, Christopher Chase-Dunn, George Modelski, and Joachim K. Rennstich draw the (very) 'big picture' of global change over the last few centuries. Their articles help us to contextualize current globalization processes and to separate characteristics that are radically new from those that are continuations of long-lasting trends or new emanations of recurring cycles. Chase-Dunn's article, for example, makes it clear that the modern world-system has been experiencing continuous waves of economic and political integration since its very origins. And these waves are again described as the "contemporary incarnations of the pulsations of widening and deepening of (intersocietal) interaction networks that have been important characteristics of all world-systems *for millenia*" (Chase-Dunn, in this issue, emphasis added). Hence, Chase-Dunn and like-minded scholars deserve credit for putting current globalization processes in an adequate long-term perspective and for enabling the analysis of historical commonalities and differences.

Practitioners of the world-systems approach help us to better "understand how the most recent wave of corporate globalization is similar to, or different from, earlier waves of globalization" (ibid.). Most importantly, they demonstrate that contemporary global change is not as radically new as many 'hyper-globalists' claim. Yet, their macro-historical approach also poses some difficult problems. In the kind of 'big picture' analyses that world-systems researchers are concerned with there is a great danger that important details are incorrectly depicted, or not depicted at all. For Appadurai (1996: 18), the study of globalization processes—not to mention the comparative analysis of different world-systems over several millenia—must therefore be seen as a kind of "mild exercise in megalomania."

For it is almost, if not entirely, impossible to simultaneously do rigorous (empirical) analyses of all the processes that are likely to have an important impact on the dynamics of global social change. It is critical, therefore, that there be dense collaboration between scholars of several disciplines and theoretical orientations. Scholars of the world-system must draw on the thorough knowledge gathered by scholars who specialize in the analysis of sub-areas of this system—and *vice versa*.

With this in mind, we combine in this special issue macro-oriented contributions with those focusing on processes at the meso level of social life, i.e. the level of organizations, groups and networks. Jeffery Kentor and Michael Nollert, for instance, examine transnational corporations and the elite networks built by their executives, whereas Neera Chandhoke and Gordon Laxer study transnational networks of social movements and non-governmental organizations. Unfortunately, however, there are no studies in this issue that look at processes of global change from the micro-perspective of individual behavior. Yet, occasional exceptions notwithstanding, there are very few such studies in the extant sociological literature (exceptions include surveys on the perceptions of, and attitudes to, global change: e.g., Eurobarometer 2003). We would thus like to encourage research on the (re-)production of global dynamics at the level of individual behavior and everyday practices. Knorr-Cetina and Bruegger's (2002) qualitative study on the "global microstructures" of financial markets—where the authors focus on the interaction orders governing interdealer communication in long-distance banking transactions—shows that microglobalization studies can indeed yield extremely interesting results. They contribute to our understanding of how globalization, both from 'above' and 'below', is produced by individuals who have to overcome the manifold challenges of intercultural communication and trust-building at a distance.

GAZING INTO THE CRYSTAL BALL: CAN SOCIOLOGY PREDICT THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL CHANGE?

Most observers of contemporary (global) social change emphasize just how fast the rate of this change has become. And yet, the social world has always been changing. Extrapolating from past experiences, the safest prediction we can make about the future of the social world is, therefore, that the world will continue to change. But can extrapolations from the past still inform us about the future? Is it not true that we are experiencing radical change and emergent outcomes? Is the world perhaps facing a transition to qualitatively new stages of social organization? To the degree that the answers to these questions vary, there is no consensus in the social sciences as to whether we can make meaningful predictions about future social change. Some argue that global social change has reached too

great a level of complexity to be grasped by conventional scholarly means. We will discuss their approach in more detail below. Others disagree, arguing that contemporary globalization processes constitute a rather unspectacular sequence of a long-lasting trend of social evolution, from which it is possible to extrapolate the probable course of the future.

For Guidry, Kennedy, and Zald (2000: 9) it seems quite clear that current globalization processes neither follow any "underlying master mechanism of rationalization" nor show any other ordered pattern. The social world must be seen as an interaction field in which vastly different interests clash, then form compromises, and bring about rather unexpected consequences. Global change, they conclude, is "embedded more in historical contingency than driven by a specific teleology" (ibid.) or any other meaningful pattern. Keck and Sikkink (1998) agree, as they emphasize that "The globalization process we observe is not an inevitable steamroller but a specific set of interactions among purposeful individuals. Although in the aggregate these interactions may seem earthshaking, they can also be dissected and mapped in a way that reveals great indeterminacy at most points of the process. There is nothing inevitable about this story: it is the composite of thousands of decisions which could have been decided otherwise" (ibid.: 213). In other words, the (globalized) world involves too many actors to think of global social change as being somehow predictable.

Keck and Sikkink's argument in their book on transnational advocacy networks is probably meant to bring an empowering message to all progressive actors who oppose the neoliberal drift of current global politics. While neoliberal thinkers try to convince the global public of their T.I.N.A. argument ('there is no alternative!'), Keck and Sikkink tell a very different story. Globalization as they perceive it is not an inevitable *vis major*. Rather, it is a process that has to be constantly (re-)produced in everyday practices, which is why acts of everyday resistance can influence the course of global change. Even small decisions can make a difference. The problem, however, is that exactly the same point of view also reinforces the notion of arbitrariness, which may again create frustration and, paradoxically, contribute to the widespread feeling of powerlessness. The notion of global change as the result of complex interactions obscures causal relations and, hence, fails to reveal the strategically important points at which resistance and protest can bring leverage to bear. If, as Keck and Sikkink put it, the dynamics of global social change are the composite result of thousands of individual decisions, to whom should social movement activists address their claims? Who should be challenged? Since social movements have to frame their claims in terms of (unassumed) responsibility, depicting the world as being driven by a myriad of quite indiscernible individual decisions is not particularly helpful.

Keck and Sikkink treat as a side issue the alleged indeterminacy of social change, an issue that is, of course, related to the question of structure versus agency . But in complexity theory and its applications in the social sciences, the same issue is one of the core concerns. Complexity theorists would clearly agree with Keck and Sikkink's point that global social change is the composite of thousands of individual decisions taken by actors who pursue quite different agendas. Yet, they also emphasize that social actors constantly change their behavior as a reaction to what other actors do, thus creating an impressive number of interconnected feedback loops. According to complexity theory, these feedback loops create dynamic systems in which causal relations are non-linear and outcomes quite impossible to predict (cf. Thompson 2004: 412). In dynamic systems, Law and Urry (2004: 401) note, "Relationships between variables can be non-linear with abrupt switches, so the same 'cause' can produce qualitatively different kinds of effects in specific circumstances." For complexity theorists, who put "emphasis on multiple futures, bifurcation and choice, historical dependence, and…intrinsic and inherent uncertainty" (Wallerstein 1996: 61, 63, cited in Law and Urry 2004: 400), the question of what the future of the world will look like is utterly inadequate and quite unanswerable. Why, then, do we pose this question? Why have the authors in this special issue not refused to use it as the starting point for their analyses?

Though skeptics might dismiss complexity theory as the ultimate expression of post-modern arbitrariness,[2] it opens up many fascinating perspectives. Its emphasis on dynamic social systems, however, clearly overstates the relevance of 'flows' and the number of 'fluid' interactions. Complexity theorists neglect almost entirely the importance of the tenacious social structures in which these flows are embedded and by which interactions are shaped. As Thompson (2004: 420) reminds us, "The trouble is that the world is not one that is in a continuous state of flux. It is not all movement and performance. Most of the time things stay the same—too often and for too long for many of us!" Most importantly, these structures drastically restrict the number of interactions that actually happen. In a model world of complexity theory, global communication and transportation systems allow for an infinite number of border-crossing contacts, while manifold (economic, technical, or linguistic) barriers prevent this potential from being sufficiently tapped. Moreover, since social actors have been socialized by the social structures surrounding them, most interactions merely reproduce and stabilize

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  [2]. Skeptics might also point to the relativistic epistemology involved in many complexity theories (see for example Luhmann 1996 [1984]). If anything goes, nothing is predictable and everything contingent.

these barriers. Accordingly, the authors in this special issue adopt a theoretical stance that recognizes the dialectical relationship of 'solid' structures and 'fluid' agency, in which one shapes the other, and *vice versa*. They acknowledge that global social change displays a certain degree of complexity and unpredictability, but do not overstate this. Therefore, some articles describe the future in very abstract terms, leaving room for a wide range of possible concretions. Or they depict the future in a somewhat more detailed manner, but provide several alternative scenarios of equal plausibility.

To apprehend the importance of 'solid' material worlds and 'tenacious' social structures, consider, for instance, that long-distance communication and transportation presume the existence of highly immobile platforms such as roads, railway stations, airports, telephone lines, ports, and so on. Urry (2004: 123–24), though himself a proponent of complexity theory, points out that, ironically, "the so far most powerful mobile machine, the aeroplane, requires the largest and most extensive immobility, the airport city with tens of thousands of workers helping to orchestrate the four million airflights each day." Add to this the fact that the use of long-distance transportation and communication presumes an adequate budget (in terms of both money and time), and it becomes clear that the geographical distribution of 'physical' transportation and communication hubs is structured by the socially produced distribution of economic wealth. For most people on this planet, the radius of meaningful interaction is limited to their immediate neighborhood, whereas communication with the 'rest of world' is mostly restricted to the (passive) reception of information produced in Hollywood, Bollywood, or the headquarters of CNN. There is only the ghost of a chance for their opinions and decisions to be taken note of on a global scale and to influence the allegedly complex course of global social change. As Thompson puts it,

> The problem encountered in the real world, of course, is that there are *boundaries and limits*, to the degree to which it is possible to count others as real contacts available for any meaningful social interaction let alone ones simply available to communicate with. The actual world is made of *barriers*—socially constructed and reproduced, calculated for and regulated, monitored and policed—which prevent (often for good reasons) the complete integration of everyone on a global scale (and even on a national, local or community-level scale). (Thompson 2004: 417, emphasis in original)

A second problem with complexity theorists' notion of dynamic unpredictability is that it eludes the issue of power. Since social power is highly concentrated, a handful of very influential actor groups have a much greater impact on the dynamics of global social change than all the others do. To stress Keck and Sikkink's metaphor once more, global social change may well be the com-

posite result of thousands of individual decisions—but most of these decisions are rather inconsequential, after all, in comparison to the decisions taken by those who control economic wealth and military might. The decisions of the US administration have obviously much greater impact on the global future than do the decisions of, say, the Peruvian government. Likewise, the decisions of Peruvian entrepreneurs are probably more influential than the decisions taken by indigenous peasants. Hence, the vectors of global social change are excessively shaped by the interests of the most powerful actors, and this clearly reduces the range of future developments that are likely to take place. This is not to say, of course, that there is no such thing as 'communicative power' or 'soft power', i.e. the ability to shape political discourses (and, eventually, political decisions) by means of persuasion. The relation between soft and hard power, however, is contested and calls for further empirical research (Nye 2004). We assume that hard power is positively related to soft power insofar as economic wealth influences the mass media and as a physical force can be used to control public gatherings. Nevertheless, the question of how these actors, who have no access to traditional sources of power, can join forces to obtain soft power, is of utmost importance. This will be addressed by Christopher Chase-Dunn, Neera Chandhoke, and Gordon Laxer.

A third problem with complexity theory (in the tradition of Luhmann, 1996 [1984]) is that it neglects the need for coordination within the (economic, cultural, etc.) sub-systems of the world-system. And it also neglects the processes of coordination between these social systems. Since social systems are conceived as autopoietic, closed, and referring to a unique system-specific binary code of communication (money, power, love, etc.), communication—and thus coordination—between systems is essentially impossible. In other words: systems have no clue how other systems perceive their environment. However, this view sharply contradicts the social reality where many instances of communication between different social systems can be observed. Most prominently, we find stabilizing structures and processes of interest articulation, negotiation, coordination, and conflict resolution all over the political sphere (the United Nations, the European Union, the World Trade Organization, or local government institutions). Not only does this sphere integrate various systems—which would not be possible without a common code of communication—but the various codes of communication seem to be highly convertible as well. If, as indicated above, hard power can buy soft power, then economic, political, and cultural systems must have a common understanding of their respective internal logics, otherwise such attempts at coordination would completely fail.

Thus, the question of how actors with limited or no access to traditional sources of power can join forces to obtain soft power becomes one of explaining

the scope and limits of institutional properties which allow for inter-systemic as well as intra-systemic communication, negotiation, and interest articulation. Christopher Chase-Dunn, Neera Chandhoke, and Godon Laxer will also cover these aspects.

In sum, the most recent wave of (neoliberal) globalization has lead to a higher degree of global connectedness, but for most people on this earth, global 'integration' is a predominantly passive one-way process. Their experience of globalization is one of heightened dependence on decisions taken 'out there' on the global level, but their impact on the course of global developments is virtually null. We thus contend that global social change is far less complex, and less unpredictable, than has been argued by proponents of complexity theory. The question of what the future of world society will look like is, after all, a perfectly valid question. Moreover, it can be broken down into a set of (interrelated) issues that are far more manageable—namely, the relation between the means of hard and soft power; the dominant interests of those who control these means; and the challenges faced by those actors who are trying to build (transnational) alliances in order to countervail their lack of hard power by collective soft power. These are the issues that, in one form or another, run through all the articles in this special issue of *JWSR*.

OVERVIEW OF THE ARTICLES

Chase-Dunn argues that despite the rather high degree of international integration among political and economic elites, there is quite likely to be another round of hegemonic rivalry within the core. As in the 20th century, when high degrees of internationalization prevailed, world wars were not prevented; so in the 21st century warfare among "the great powers" is likely to reoccur, unless serious alternatives are put forth. On a global scale, two additional major problems, which in Chase-Dunn's perspective also stem from the specific capitalist logic of production, threaten the existence of large parts of mankind: environmental catastrophes and increasing global inequalities.

However, the hegemonic cycle, Chase-Dunn argues, does not take the same form each time around. Rather, resistance from below and the interaction between the powerful and the less powerful are important driving and intervening forces in the evolution of the world-system. Transnational antisystemic movements, in the current hegemonic sequence, are central loci of resistance. In Chase-Dunn's optimistic view, antisystemic movements may succeed in ameliorating, or even in preventing, the three major negative consequences of hegemonic rivalry and capitalist production in the world-system. What may emerge, as a result of hegemonic rivalry, is therefore no longer a new hegemon but global democracy.

In a similar vein, George Modelski argues that beyond the well-known hegemonic cycle, there is a related institutional process at a higher level of organization: the evolution of global politics "from a condition in which the chief institution organizing it is global leadership, to 'global organization', one of a more fully institutionalized form of governance" (Modelski, in this issue). Today, in the early 21st century, this evolutionary process is in a long period of selection and formation of global organization, and is in a phase of cooperation and integration that might very well extend to the last quarter of the century. It is not yet clear, then, which type of global political organization will emerge from this time of transition. Will it be a multipolar system, or a 'community of democracies'? Modelski points out that, for the first time in human history, democracies hold a majority position in the world. This is why on the level of global organization "the odds for the long term do lie on the side of a democratic community" (ibid.).

The analyses of Modelski and Chase-Dunn converge in the idea that the world-system will potentially evolve to something beyond the hegemonic nation state—at least in the long-run. In contrast, Joachim Rennstich puts more emphasis on the nation states. Although regular clustering of innovations leads to the emergence of new leading sectors and these mark the pulse of the *global* economic web and determine the speed and form of its weaving, the clustering of innovations is tied to *national* territories. Systemic chaos, i.e. hegemonic rivalry, is normally driven by the clustering of innovations outside the current hegemon's realm. Against this background, Rennstich discusses two possible scenarios: the Phoenix cycle with the renewed hegemony of the United States and the new leadership, with China as the hegemonic power to come.

While many more would argue that China is upwardly mobile in the world-economy and a potential hegemonic power, Jeffrey Kentor suggests otherwise. Yet, in his analysis of the expansion, spatial distribution, and concentration of transnational corporate power, he is also able to demonstrate both the apex and (it seems) the decline of US hegemony. Although Kentor suggests that the presence of foreign subsidiaries may result in a loss of power for the host country, the impact may vary as a function of the economic and political strength of the host economy.

Michael Nollert further explores the important subject of transnational economic power, putting specific emphasis on transnational corporate networks. Several scholars have argued that the emergence of such networks would result in the declining importance of the nation state, the declining significance of the division between core and periphery, and the emergence of a transnational capitalist class as a class-for-itself—however, none of these hypotheses can be substantiated when confronted with Nollert's empirical data. Although transnational networks are undoubtedly a reality, Nollert finds no strong evidence that

the formation of transnational networks goes hand in hand with the destructuration of national networks.

If the current world-system is one of complex interdependence where agents are linked at various levels—regional, national, global—the question of world society comes to the fore. Has the world-system been transformed into a world society? The answer to this question is essential. On the one hand, the genesis of global antisystemic movements, global democracy, or global organization is inherently dependent on core attributes of societies, i.e. shared norms, values, and expectations, and shared identities and myths. On the other hand, the solution of global problems, as pointedly argued by Chase-Dunn, is bound to the successful creation of global institutions by antisystemic movements.

Alberto Martinelli stresses that the contemporary world is still a system made of societies; but he then turns to the controversial question of whether a world society is in the making. He addresses this question against the background of various concepts of world society and outlines his polyarchic model of global governance as a blueprint for a peaceful global world. He emphasizes the lack of normative consensus reflected in commonly accepted institutions on the world level, but also points to the central role civil society plays in the process of the creation and institutionalization of new norms. And as he discusses the emergence of a cosmopolitan ethics and a transnational civil society, the element of the global antisystemic movement, already discussed by Chase-Dunn, is back on the agenda. The formation of a "world association of peoples, nations, and transnational communities, integrated and regulated by a polyarchic form of global governance," will depend on "the conscious efforts of individual and collective actors" (Martinelli, in this issue).

The idea that transnational civil society—alternatively labeled antisystemic movements or global civil society—is crucial in the creation and legitimization of a just global democratic order and the propagation of human rights, is central to many scholars and to the global civil society itself. But how global is global civil society? Does civil society have to be global in order to achieve its goals? Is a global civil society at all possible?

On the one hand, Neera Chandhoke, in her discussion of the human rights movements, argues that the violation of, and not the non-fulfillment of a right, dominates the global discourse of rights and thus reflects a specific bias of the West. Hence, what is claiming to be global is highly ethnocentric. On the other hand, Gordon Laxer claims that global civil society is neither necessary nor possible. Effective and inclusive political aggregation is bound to be local, i.e. bottom-up democracy is contingent on vibrant communities, solidarity, and identity. Therefore, national and popular sovereignties remain the necessary means to achieve goals in a highly interdependent world.

Taken as a whole, the articles in this issue propose that the future of world society is neither fully predictable nor fully contingent. Instead, the authors shed light on probable futures which are the result of dialectic forces—local and global.

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