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NARRATIVES OF GLOBALIZATION AND THE PITFALLS OF NEUTRALITY: A BRIEF CRITIQUE OF *SIX FACES OF GLOBALIZATION*

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Six Faces of Globalization–Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why It Matters. By ANTHEA ROBERTS and NICOLAS LAMP, Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 2021. ISBN: 9780674245952, 400 pp.

Narratives serve as the very foundations of human relationships, playing a crucial role in shaping the way one interacts with others and the world around them. People use narratives to construct stories, describe their surroundings, and create cultures and communities. Narratives are also inextricably intertwined with personal emotions, contribute to the refinement of knowledge, and guide creative tensions in all fields of human knowledge. Stories possess the power to construct universes and worlds and allow one to understand and empathize with the lives and experiences of others. Narratives reconstruct the world and the role of people, groups, cultures, and nations. Humans cannot do without narratives to give meaning to life; since every phenomenon can only be known through its narrative, a book exploring the various narratives surrounding globalization should be considered a welcome addition to the scholarship on the impact of capitalism on contemporary international relations. In an era where the integration of the world's economies, the interdependence of societies, and the transnationalization of cultures have become focal points of debate, it is crucial to thoroughly examine and understand the various narratives that define globalization. *Six Faces of Globalization*, however, appears to have fallen prey to its own narrative—specifically, the endeavour to offer an impartial perspective on the manner in which the primary actors of globalization portray the phenomenon.

Six Faces of Globalization is composed of four parts. Part I, titled 'Globalization through Dragonfly Eyes', is effectively an exceptionally comprehensive introduction that sets the scene for the readers, providing brief synopses of the six sections composing Part II—aptly named 'Six Faces of Globalization'—as it addresses six different narratives of the phenomenon the description of which is the core of the book. In Part III, the focus shifts to the power of narratives and their

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ability to shape perceptions and understandings, how they often overlap in spite of their apparent irreconcilability, and how each narrative entails a certain hierarchy of values. Finally, Part IV suggests switching from a cubic approach to globalization to a kaleidoscopic one, and accepting that such an approach is the only one capable of allowing one to understand 'the full ramifications of global issues'.[1] In a nutshell, *Six Faces of Globalization* is a richly informative volume on globalization under capitalism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is, moreover, a book that has been bestowed with numerous accolades from renowned publications, such as the Financial Times, Fortune, and ProMarket, as well as garnering prestigious endorsements from scholars worldwide, cementing its reputation as a significant and impactful contribution to contemporary discourse. This cannot surprise anyone familiar with the work of Anthea Roberts and Nicolas Lamp: both are prolific and widely cited leading authors, and Roberts' previous book (*Is International Law International?*) has influenced and enriched the debate on international legal scholarship in many ways since its publication.[2] Furthermore, a noteworthy aspect—often overlooked in the appraisal of scholarly literature—is that *Six Faces of Globalization* is not only an insightful and thought-provoking work but also an exceptionally well-written one, making it an enjoyable read for a rather diverse audience.

At the same time, *Six Faces of Globalization* is a controversial and, in some respects, debatable work of scholarship. The topic of capitalist globalization addressed by the book is a highly contentious and divisive subject matter, and any attempt at tackling it is inherently prone to elicit a wide range of criticisms. From this perspective, it is indisputable that Roberts and Lamp deserve admiration for venturing into such a dangerous undertaking, as well as a certain degree of leniency, considering the complexities inherent in the subject matter and the formidable challenges involved in addressing it. However, what truly renders the book problematic are some of the authors' methodological choices, which are deserving of close examination. Specifically, two of such methodological decisions stand out as particularly contentious and warrant detailed scrutiny. The first of these debatable elements relates to the theoretical framework of the book. In spite of the various narratives on globalization that dominate political, academic, and journalistic debates at the international level, attempting to write about this subject matter is akin to discussing the weather: both subjects are rather difficult to navigate without prejudice. Similar to how the very same forecast may appear fantastic to some and bleak to others, one's approach to the topic of globalization is unavoidably influenced by their personal experiences and viewpoints. From this perspective, Roberts and Lamp's choice of presenting the Rubik's cube as a metaphor of the presence of concurring, clashing, and overlapping narratives is not only a sophisticated rhetorical strategy but also a remarkably potent one. Each narrative of globalization, though characterized by unique traits, incorporates—more or less willingly—aspects of other narratives to the point that some are to be distinguished by their basic assumptions even though their outcomes are not radically different.[3] At the same time, however, the cube is a perfect synthesis of the problems relating to the theme of the book. Each face of a cube is, by definition, perfectly equivalent to the other five; in a Rubik's cube, the only difference between one face and the other is the colour, and the colours are only relevant as long as one plays with the cube. Once the cube is successfully solved, its colours take on a purely aesthetic significance. The inherent difficulties of using the Rubik's cube as a metaphorical device are made manifest in the

[1] Anthea Roberts and Nicolas Lamp, *Six Faces of Globalization—Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why It Matters* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2021) at 281.

[2] Anthea Roberts, *Is International Law International?* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017). See among others, Josef Ostřanský's review in 32 (1) Leiden Journal of International Law 193–97 (2019); Gleider Hernández, 'E Pluribus Unum? A Divisible College?: Reflections on the International Legal Profession', 29 (3) European Journal of International Law 1003–22 (2018); and Katerina Linos' review in 112 (4) American Journal of International Law 795–79 (2018).

[3] See, in particular, Chapters 4 and 5 on the left-wing populist and the right-wing populist narratives, respectively.

very fabric of the book. Similar to the faces of the cube, the authors' treatment of the six dominant narratives of globalization ('establishment', left-wing and right-wing populist, corporate power, geoeconomics, and global threats) is presented in a manner that, albeit approximating their relative weights, does not fully account for their nuanced differences and interdependencies. Indeed, in a bid to remain impartial, the authors avoid favouring any one narrative over the others, instead opting for an ostensibly neutral exposition of the diverse narratives at play. On the one hand, this choice seems justified: as Roberts and Lamp explain, '[n]o single narrative can capture the multifaceted nature of such issues, and no perspective is neutral. Each narrative distils a certain set of experiences and tells part of the story; none tells the whole. Each narrative embodies value judgments about what merits our attention and how we should evaluate what we see; none is value free.'[4] Indeed, any narrative represents a particular set of experiences and is inherently biased by the value judgments of the narrator, and it is an impossible endeavour to try and provide a completely objective or comprehensive account of an issue. Any narrative highlights certain aspects of a problem and overlooks others, and that depends chiefly on the storyteller's own beliefs and priorities. On the other hand, however, Roberts and Lamp's analyses illuminate the flaws inherent in each narrative, making it challenging to contend that the said narratives ultimately counterbalance one another. To be sure, Roberts and Lamp refrain from suggesting that the narratives in question are equal in value—and it would not be fair to presume such a stance solely on the basis of the book's impartiality. At the same time, it would be simplistic to assert that the narratives in question lack any practical impact: in fact, they serve as foundations for the development of policies and laws, rather than being mere descriptors of a purely factual phenomenon. Is it thus possible to carry out such an analysis remaining equidistant from each of the positions covered by it? An approach of that nature would require the narratives themselves to be impartial, devoid of any favouritism towards particular interests. Were the narratives entirely impartial, it would indeed be feasible to analyse them without expressing (or at least formulating) an assessment of their significance to legal systems and policy-making activities from a social, moral, or ethical perspective. A choice like this, though, would call for a further question: should scholarship ever restrict itself to an analysis of a phenomenon in a strictly factual manner? Or is it rather meant to assume a role of observation, assessment, and critique? It is arguably not desirable, for academics, to abstain from aspects of scholarship such as appraising and reviewing phenomena. Indeed, a claim of neutrality already represents a defined stance, regardless of whether or not the said stance is openly taken. Such a position would be entirely acceptable in an ideal world, where law, politics, and economies were perfect by definition. Regrettably, this is not the case in reality.

The second issue worth addressing in *Six Faces of Globalization* is one of the perspectives. The core question of narratives seems to have been conceived and presented primarily from a Global North (if not entirely North American) standpoint. This is rather surprising, especially in light of the much more open and global positions expressed by Roberts in the aforementioned *Is International Law International*?; nonetheless, by taking the approach mentioned, the book's theoretical structure is left incomplete, presenting a major issue. With the exception of China (whose economy, however, outperforms those of many developed countries), developing countries are often depicted as a homogeneous group, stripped of their unique nuances, and in general not presented as protagonists of the phenomenon of globalization. In fact, they are often portrayed as passive observers. This approach overlooks the diverse experiences and perspectives of many an individual nation within the Global South and perhaps fails to recognize the agencies and contributions of these countries to the phenomenon of globalization.[5] There is, perhaps,

[4] See Roberts and Lamp, above n 1, at 15.

[5] These perspectives have been previously explored in publications, among others, such as Arlene B. Tickner, Karen Smith (eds), *International Relations from the Global South: Worlds of Difference* (Routledge, Abingdon 2020); Vishwas Satgar (ed.), *BRICS*

a notable exception to this approach in Chapter 12, which indeed is structured around the recognition of the problem that '[m]any in the West still treat Western experiences as universal' and that '[t]he narratives that [Roberts and Lamp] have reconstructed in this book dominate debates about economic globalization in the West, but they do not reflect the experiences of many outside the West.'[6] Roberts and Lamp thus not only acknowledge that the concept of globalization is conventionally viewed and analysed through a Western lens but also recognize that such a Western-centric approach leads to the prevalence of 'blind spots and biases'.[7] This recognition should have underscored the importance of adopting a critical and self-reflective approach to the problem, acknowledging if not addressing biases and limitations in the analysis. However, the fact that non-Western narratives are confined in one single chapter reinforces the perception that *Six Faces of Globalization* might be, if not a book victim of those same biases highlighted in Chapter 12, a work solidly rooted in that aforementioned Western-centric perspective—a perspective that ultimately weakens the analysis and challenges the supposed neutrality of the analysis. Then again, as questioned beforehand, is it really possible to discuss globalization while maintaining an objective perspective? Or will any discourse be irreparably flawed by the personal and subjective perspectives of the writer?

This second hypothesis, though less desirable from the standpoint of academic rigour, appears to be a more realistic approach. The concept of objectivity in legal scholarship has already been defined as 'not an empirical concept, but a transcendental one' and for rather valid reasons.[8] It would not be fair to expect Roberts and Lamp, or any scholar for that matter, to strive for an unattainable level of objectivity. However, the crux of the matter here lies not in objectivity but in the notion of purported neutrality. Choosing not to evaluate the narratives from a moral, ethical, or any other standpoint can be regarded as a choice in and of itself. While the book, as previously stated, is abundant in analyses and descriptions, it appears in fact rather tentative in assessing the various narratives. Furthermore, the suggestion that each position can learn from one another is not entirely convincing—unless, that is, one believes that the *status quo* is ultimately the most desirable state of affairs. It is debatable that such a position can be attributed to Roberts and Lamp, as their previous work seems to reflect a rather more nuanced and layered approach, but reading *Six Faces of Globalization* leaves one with the feeling that, ultimately, capitalist globalization has become a permanent fixture of contemporary societies, and no critique of it can be entirely convincing. In other words, the book ends up undermining the critiques of globalization and perpetuating the hegemonic narratives—including some of the more problematic—instead of confronting their various imperfections and inconsistent elements.

In summary, *Six Faces of Globalization* is a work that demands attention and careful perusal and that ultimately deserves to be read. Despite the academic backgrounds and positions of the authors, it cannot not be considered solely a piece of legal scholarship, which may be disappointing to some readers but certainly appealing to others: the book occupies in fact a unique position at the intersection of law, economics, political science, and sociology—which is perhaps one of its most compelling aspects. It is probable that the work will be cited extensively in the coming years, and any criticism levelled against it in this review notwithstanding, the thorough research carried out by Roberts and Lamp is expected to be of great value to many a scholar.

and the New American Imperialism: Global Rivalry and Resistance (Wits University Press, Johannesburg 2020); Élise Féron, Jyrki Kaökoönen, Gabriel Rached (eds), *Revisiting Regionalism and the Contemporary World Order: Perspectives from the BRICS and beyond* (Barbara Budrich, Leverkusen 2019); and partially, Takao Suami and others (eds), *Global Constitutionalism from European and East Asian Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2018). It is important to underscore that these works have different objectives, emphases, and focal points than that of Roberts and Lamp. They are thus not being suggested as replacement but rather as supplements to their analysis, as they offer perspectives and evaluations that are absent from Roberts and Lamp's work.

[6] Roberts and Lamp, above n 1, at 220.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Edward L. Rubin, 'The Practice and Discourse of Legal Scholarship', 86 (8) Michigan Law Review 1835–1905 (1988), at 1856.