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Globalization: As Seen from Moscow

It is hard to find a theme in contemporary social studies that would be more fashionable than globalization. The bibliography of books and articles on global issues lists thousands and thousands of titles. Overall, they present a broad panorama of the complex processes that shape and determine the face of our dynamic world. At the same time, as noted by experts, the quality of these studies is mostly low, and there is a clear shortage of serious research into the fundamental issues of globalization. (1)

One of the reasons why researchers have a narrow – and often one-sided – view of the developments in the modern world is that much of the work on globalization is conceived and produced within a limited geographical area. The West, particularly the United States and Great Britain, has a runaway lead in global studies. There is, of course, some serious work being done in other parts of the world; however, such studies are few and they rarely become part of broad academic debate due to, among other things, the language barrier.

It is hard to imagine that the picture will change in the foreseeable future. The dominance of the West in global studies as well as generally in academic scholarship is deeply rooted in the existing system of global division of highly skilled intellectual labor. And the tilt in the global balance in favor of developed countries is even more manifest in the area of research than in production and consumption.

The circle of people who supply to the world market a lion's share of work on globalization issues is even narrower. They are middle-aged or older white middle-class urban males raised in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Clearly, we are talking about a small but very influential professional community which in many respects shapes the flow of the debate on globalization in the global academic community, as well as in socio-political and everyday life. Other voices, which repre-

represent the practice and experience of the overwhelming majority of the planet's population, are rarely and barely heard. (2)

Of course, this situation is not normal and has huge side-effects. Yet, correcting it will take time and effort. Today there is no alternative to or adequate partners for Western academic community in the world of globalization studies. Other academic schools are still too weak to assume a leading role. Nevertheless, an effort should be made to more actively involve them in cooperation and in various international research projects in order to make this work broader, more balanced and more impartial. This could provide a new, and surprising, perspective of the globalizing world.

The following is an attempt to assess from this viewpoint the current state of Russian studies of globalization. Without claiming to provide a full picture of globalization studies in the post-Soviet scholarship, we shall make some observations in the hope of providing insights into what is happening in this area of knowledge. In so doing, this writer will have to draw on his personal experience in global studies, which might unintentionally distort the general view of the subject. Of course, other Russian colleagues have their own views in this regard.

As in many other countries, global studies in Russia are just making their first steps and, as they advance, they face many problems, both inherited from the past and created by the present. They have inherited both many advantages and flaws of their predecessors in pre-revolutionary Russian and post-revolutionary Soviet social thought. For instance, Soviet-era research, which was fenced off from world and highly ideologized, distorted or simply ignored entire areas of social studies, such as economics, sociology and political science. To a certain extent their absence was offset by other areas of knowledge, in which the USSR was often a leader. Studies of global issues were carried out in the Soviet Union by prominent scientists, philosophers and experts in international affairs.

Radical changes came about after 1991. Scholarship freed itself from the authorities' ideological diktat, but at the same time it lost its status in society, influence and financial support. The rapid degradation of the superpower into a second-

rate country, total devaluation of intellectual labor, and the profound crisis of transitional transformation, which plagued Russia during the 1990s, had a most negative impact on research and on the academic community.

The old turned new “elite,” absorbed in personal enrichment, left science to the mercy of fate. Russian society, reduced to fighting for survival, had little time for such lofty matters. Many in the academic community gave up research to earn their living and looked for more rewarding work, while the rest had to adapt to new, more primitive societal needs and demands.

The Russian view of the outside world grew narrow and became strictly selective, which had an effect on academic thought. For example, in the area of international studies the focus shifted from the wide range of global issues to transition studies, whose key beliefs were borrowed in a reductionist way, uncritically applied to the Russian situation and projected into public consciousness. As a result, a distorted view of the world was replaced by another, equally one-sided one, which did little to stimulate serious thinking.

In recent years the situation has somewhat improved, but it has not yet changed radically. The severe damage done to Russian academic studies during the first post-reform decade will be felt for many years to come.

Yet, the strong cultural tradition that nurtures Russian scholarship is still there. It would be a mistake to say that the study of globalization in post-Communist Russia had to start from scratch. During the Soviet era, good prerequisites were put in place for developing the area of research which later emerged as global studies. In the view of the author of a comprehensive book on the subject, global studies in the Soviet Union “[...]constituted a serious area of academic studies, which influenced not only the development of scholarship but also such areas of public life as the economy, politics, culture, and to a certain extent even ideology.” (3) Their development was to a large extent facilitated by the systemic view of the world, which is characteristic of Marxism and which stimulated a search for universal links and regularities in the development of modern society.

As evidenced by A.N. Chumakov, "...the foundations of Soviet studies of globalization were laid out in the early 1970s." (4) At that "infancy" stage of the emergence of globalization studies in this country, academic thought developed in two main areas: 1) studies of global issues (along the lines of the ideas of the Club of Rome); 2) studies of the process of European integration as a fundamentally new phenomenon in the development of the world capitalist system that challenged many Marxist dogmas.

As noted above, entire areas of modern social studies were undeveloped in the Soviet Union. Perhaps for that reason, a leading role in the development of globalization studies in this country was assumed by philosophers, who tried to come to grips with a wide range of global issues that took on particular urgency in the second half of the 20th century. Yet, while focusing on the issues of methodology of academic studies, they were less interested in analyzing the real processes taking place in the world.

In post-Soviet Russia, due to a number of circumstances, the lead was passed to experts in international affairs. In the Soviet Union scholars of international affairs were a large, authoritative and influential part of the academic world. They were essential to the Communist superpower; they occupied a privileged position in the system of power relations and allowed themselves a certain degree of free thinking.

After the collapse of the USSR, international affairs experts were sidelined and had to seek work and ways to earn their living. Drawing on the substantial cultural capital accumulated during the Soviet period, some of them started to do research into globalization. In fairness to them, one has to admit that they were better prepared for research into those issues than many of their colleagues from other branches of social studies.

Russian international affairs experts also considerably benefited from the fact that at the turn of the 80s-90s a general shift took place from studies of global problems to the study of globalization as a process of profound changes in today's world. Here they felt in their element, since public attention focused on the issues

of the emergence of a new world order after the end of the Cold War. By gradually passing from relatively marginal issues to more general subjects they were able to quite organically fit themselves into the intellectual mainstream of global studies now under way in the world.

It would probably be an exaggeration to claim that the studies of globalization in Russia have a distinctive character that sets them apart from other schools of academic thought. However, one can try to outline some of their characteristics and identify certain special features of their approach to particular issues. This is best done by turning to the key issues of modern global studies.

Let us start with the definition of globalization. As is known, there are different definitions and underlying views of globalization among international scholars. The most common ones interpret globalization as 1) internationalization; 2) liberalization; 3) universalization; and 4) westernization. Essentially, they set the framework of academic discourse and wide-ranging debate on this subject. To a large extent, they overlap and “highlight” one another, painting a picture of a world in formation.

In contrast to these prevailing views, Jan Scholte develops his own approach, which holds great promise. For him, the transformation of the framework of social interactions and emergence of a transworld, transplanetary dimension is the essence of globalization. In his view, of particular importance is the development of supra-territorial connections, relations and interactions, and changes in the geography of human existence. He believes that the new configuration of social space has its profound impact on all aspects of life: the economy, politics, culture, science, etc. (5)

How do Russian definitions of globalization correlate with those that have become common in international literature? First, the authors who in one way or another dismiss the very phenomenon of globalization have been marginalized. One can state that in the Russian academic community the “globalists” have gained a clear upper hand over the “ultra-skeptics.”

Secondly, the overwhelming majority of writers interpret globalization as a system-forming process; they see it as a force which shapes the face of the world today and for tomorrow. Among the diverse processes taking place on our planet they clearly give priority to everything that relates to globalization.

Thirdly, differences in approach are not particularly manifest or significant. Researchers differ in their assessment of the scope and depth of the impact globalization is having on global development rather than in their understanding of the nature of the process. In other words, one cannot yet see any clear differentiation of global studies in Russia into distinct schools of thought.

Fourthly, there is a clear preponderance of critical attitudes towards specific forms and results of globalization in its current format. This critical attitude, which is generally typical of globalization studies today, is reinforced by growing doubts on the part of Russia's intellectual and political elite as to the possibilities of equal partnership with the West in building a new world order.

At the same time the range of views among Russian writers on globalization is quite broad. It is evident in everything, including their understanding of the essence of globalization. For instance, an encyclopedia of globalization states that "globalization is a process of merger of national economies into a single world-wide system..." (A.I. Utkin). (6) In accordance with the Marxist tradition, which is strongly rooted in Russia, globalization is thus seen as the process of the emergence of a global economy. Even though after the collapse of the "real socialism" Marxism ceased to be the official ideology, economic determinism profoundly permeates the Russian social thought.

There are, however, other definitions, in which the "birthmarks" of Marxism have been erased or are indiscernible. In a recently published book by A.N. Chumakov with the telling title "Globalization. Outlines of an Integral World" a different and broader perspective is presented on the same processes. Globalization is seen by the author as "...a process of universalization, establishment of structures, links and relations in different areas of public life that are common for planet Earth." (7)

A more detailed look at how Russian writers see the process of transformation of the world under the impact of globalization reveals a wide array of views. Representing the most common viewpoint, Yu. Fedorov writes: “Globalization is most often linked to a fundamentally new level of integration, integrity and interdependence of the world, although it is just a part of a more complex and contradictory picture. In many ways, the current stage of globalization amounts to a way of complementing interdependence with an increasing transnationalization of economic, informational and other types of activities.” (8)

In this case the emphasis is made on the emergence of trans-phenomena as a kind of brackets that link nation-state organisms. Transnational corporations are the first to come to mind in this regard, yet in all likelihood much more is involved here. Trans-phenomena could easily be found in areas such as law, politics, and culture.

A. Volodin and G. Shirokov point to a new feature of social life in a globalizing world. They insist on an “understanding of globalization as a complex geoeconomic, geopolitical and geohumanitarian phenomenon that has a huge demonstration effect on all aspects of life in the countries that get involved in this process.” (9) Their interpretation emphasizes the universal nature of the process of globalization, its ability to transform the lives of peoples and states.

V. Mikheyev goes even further. He sees globalization as “the growth of economic and political interdependence of countries and regions to the point when it becomes possible and necessary to raise the question of creating a single global legal framework and global bodies of economic and political governance.” (10) He believes that the time has come for the world community, which is becoming an integral whole, to think about creation of a system to govern global processes.

And finally, M. Cheshkov sees in globalization a kind of “negation of the negation,” a U-turn in the evolution of history. For him “globalization is a process of association of various components of humankind in the course of its evolution, as contrasted to the process of differentiation of humankind.” (11) In his historio-

sophic concept, globalization plays the role of a Demiurge, who fashions a new human community, a new world.

To conclude, I would like to present my own stance on the issues in question. In my work on this subject I have focused on describing the contemporary initial stage of globalization. As I see it, the most important thing is to try to identify the trends in relations between nation-state forms of societal organization and the emerging global interactions, links, structures, and institutions. A distinct feature of the globalizing world is the emergence of certain transitional hybrid forms, which are quite viable and capable of surviving for an indefinitely long time.

This is how I see the current trend: “The fact that human activities are going beyond national borders, and transnational forms of their organization are emerging, heralds radical changes in the living environment of individuals, social groups, communities, peoples, and states. *What we see is in effect the emergence of a global community, within which the existing nation-state entities act as more or less independent sub-sets. We call it a mega-society.*” (12)

To understand correctly the essence of globalization processes I find it quite useful to more fully utilize the potential of economic and political science analysis in both retrospective and future-oriented analysis: economic analysis, because it is in the area of economic activities that new demands and expectations are shaped most rapidly and fully; political science analysis, because the new demands are realized through politics.

As applied to our topic, it is important to distinguish between spontaneous, objective globalization processes and deliberate political projects. Different approaches can be applied to the same problems, with the outcome shaped by the struggle and cooperation between various social and political forces.

As a reference point, let’s take the so-called proto-globalization or globalization No.1, i.e. the emergence and rapid development in the 19th century of transatlantic markets of goods, capital, services, and labor. (13) By the early 20th century, proto-globalization collapsed under pressure of hostile forces, but, as we now know, that was just the beginning of the modern history of globalization.

The entire 20th century could be viewed as a series of dramatic clashes or collisions between different globalization projects – colonial, fascist, Communist, liberal, social-democratic, and fundamentalist. By the mid-century, two of them – the colonial and fascist projects – were rejected in the process of natural selection. The main struggle broke out between the Eastern, Communist project and the Western project, in two of its forms – the liberal and the social-democratic.

This battle of the giants went down in history as the “Cold War,” which was, at the same time, a kind of globalization on a bipolar basis, within the framework of two opposing socio-political systems. From a purely logical standpoint, three outcomes were possible: 1) the victory of capitalism in one or another of its forms (which is what happened); 2) the victory of Socialism; 3) a draw on mutually acceptable terms (a historic compromise, convergence). It is important to stress that the outcome of this battle of the century was not preordained and remained unclear for a long time.

The 1970s deserve particular attention in this regard. At that time the so-called “Socialist camp” succeeded in achieving the most favorable balance of power ever on the world arena and had reasons to look into the future with optimism. At the same time the capitalist system, having exhausted the possibilities of postwar reconstruction and growth, entered into a protracted crisis, the most visible manifestation of which was stagflation.

The capitalist world, which in spite of everything stayed in the lead, had to mobilize its inner reserves and launched vigorous efforts in various areas. A key emphasis was on using the new opportunities related to formation of transworld, transplanetary spaces under the impact of the information revolution.

Based on a correct assessment of the emerging prospects, the West focused on accelerated development of the global economy and was the first to reach the new frontiers. “A global economy is a completely new historical reality, [...] an economy in which national economies depend on the performance of a globalized core,” states Manuel Castells. (14)

The strategic importance of this shift is hard to overestimate. Having assumed the task of creating a globalized core of the world economy, the West succeeded in securing a decisive advantage in the historic argument with Socialism. Simultaneously, the economic foundation was being created for a globalizing human society. Globalization became the leading trend in the world's development.

Of course, world history does not end there. The real, all-embracing globalization is just beginning. Within the Western model, the outcome of the rivalry between its liberal and social-democratic versions is yet to be seen, while new global players are appearing on the horizon – China, India, and various clusters of non-Western states. This is not, by any means, a boring time.

1. J.A. Scholte. *Globalization*. 2005, Palgrave, p. 1, 15, 47.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.
3. A.N. Chumakov. *Globalizatsiya. Kontury Tselostnogo Mira (Globalization. Outlines of an Integral World)*. M., 2005, Prospekt, p. 92.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
5. See more in: J.A. Scholte. *Op. cit.*, ch. 2.
6. *Globalistika. Entsiklopediya (Global Studies. Encyclopedia)*. M., 2003, Raduga, p. 181.
7. A.N. Chumakov, p. 31.
8. *Pro et Contra*, Autumn 1999, No. 4, p. 5.
9. *Polis*, 1999, No. 5, p. 84.
10. *Pro et Contra*, Autumn 1999, No. 4, p. 49.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
12. *Grani Globalizatsii (Facets of Globalization)*. M., 2003, Alpina Publisher, p. 37.
13. See: O'Rourke K, Williamson J. *Globalization and History*. Cambridge, Mass., L., 1999.
14. *Postindustrialny Mir i Rossiya (The Post-Industrial World and Russia)*. M. 2001, Editorial URSS, p. 64.