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Perspectives on Globalization, Social Justice and Welfare

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Although the social science literature on globalization has proliferated, social policy and social work scholars have not adequately debated the consequences of globalization for social welfare and social justice. Drawing on different social science interpretations of globalization, four major perspectives that offer different analytical and normative insights into globalization are identified and their implications for social welfare and social justice are briefly examined. The implications of these perspectives for social policy and social work scholarship are also considered.

Keywords: globalization, social welfare, social justice, social work scholarship

The concept of globalization is widely used today not only in the social sciences but in journalism and popular discourse. However, it is still poorly defined. Although loosely employed to connote the processes of social change that are affecting social relations between people living in the world’s different nation states, the nature of these processes and their effects are widely debated and contested in the social sciences today. Nevertheless, these processes are said to be qualitatively different from earlier forms of international exchange in that they are more complex, intense and volatile. They are also believed...
to be fostering a historically unique interdependence between the people and nations of the world that will ultimately result in the integration of economies and societies. Of course, this interpretation has been disputed and an alternative view that defines globalization as no more than the acceleration of historic patterns of international exchange has also been formulated.

Different interpretations of the nature of global change reflect different disciplinary social science perspectives. While economists view globalization as the creation of a world economic market, sociologists place more emphasis on the role of international social relations, communications and population movements in fostering space-time compression, post-modernity and cultural diffusion. In turn, political scientists stress the way power relations operate internationally to foster new systems of global regulation and governance.

These diverse disciplinary perspectives have different normative implications that not only evaluate globalization differently but inspire different policy perspectives on how the process of globalization might and should be molded. These normative dimensions are of obvious interest to scholars in the fields of social policy and social work. However, as will be shown, different social science interpretations reach very different conclusions about globalization's consequences for welfare and justice. This article outlines four major perspectives which offer different analytical and normative insights into this issue and then considers the social welfare and social justice implications of these different perspectives. But first, it provides a brief discussion of the emergence of the concept of globalization and its social science usage.

The Idea of Globalization

Although the term globalization was popularized in the 1990s, some commentators believe that its roots are far older. Jan Scholte (2000) finds evidence that it was first employed in the social sciences during the Second World War, but notes that it was increasingly used in 1960s and 1970s and became pervasive by the 1990s not only in the social sciences but in everyday discourse. The concept's social science formulation owes much to the Neo-Marxist dependency scholars of the
1960s and 1970s (Cardoso and Faleto, 1979; Frank, 1967, 1975; Rodney, 1972) who examined the way international economic and power relations impeded domestic development effort. Although they did not actually use the term, their focus on global economic exchanges paved the way for the adoption of a wider perspective which was subsequently augmented by Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory (1975, 1980). By conceptualizing contemporary international economic exchange as the result of a historic process that began with European mercantile expansion in the 15th century and which had, by the 20th century, a produced a unitary, integrated world capitalist system, Wallerstein paved the way for the adoption of a global perspective in social science analysis.

Sociologists and scholars in communications and media studies also recognized that technological innovations had exponentially increased the flow of information around the world with profound consequences for economic, political and cultural exchanges. Innovations in communications media were, as Marshall McLuhan (1962) put it, creating a "global village." It was likely that people living in the global village would eventually share a common, global world-view that would reshape identity. It was also likely that a new, cosmopolitan, global citizen, with a global consciousness of the unity of all humankind would ultimately emerge (Robertson, 1992).

These formative accounts influenced international economic analyses which stressed the increasing interdependence of national economies and the emergence of a global market. Business writers such as Keniche Ohmae (1991, 1996) popularized these ideas by claiming that nation states were of declining importance in global affairs and that the emergent "borderless world" would being unprecedented prosperity. By the 1990's, journalists were writing about globalization with increasing frequency and a number of popular, best-selling books on the subject had been published (Friedman, 1999; Barber, 1995).

These developments reflected real changes taking place in the world economy, in communications, in international migration and in governance and political arrangements. Although it is difficult if not impossible to summarize these changes, there is widespread agreement that the last three decades of the 20th century were marked by greater economic integration,
the acceleration of information flows, increases in population movements, restructured international power relations, the emergence of a global civil society, greater cultural diffusion and enhanced multilateral cooperation through the agency of international organizations. All have facilitated more frequent interactions between nation states, growing interdependence between nation states and the likely future integration of national economies and even political systems.

However, it is important to restate the obvious fact that the term globalization is a linguistic form of shorthand which connotes an extremely complex and volatile set of international events. The widespread tendency to reify the concept and even to endow it with anthropomorphic characteristics has unfortunately parodied these events. This is particularly evident in the way that blame for a great variety of social problems, including unemployment, the spread of contagious diseases, environmental pollution and many other human ills are attributed to globalization when they are not in fact the result of some objective "thing" exerting its own, malevolent volition but the result of a complex set of human activities with intended and unintended consequences. This point is not only of methodological but normative relevance. Controlling the processes of globalization does not involve the domestication of some abstract construct but will require that the myriad actions of individuals, organizations, corporations and governments that directly affect human well-being at the international level be shaped through purposeful policy intervention. This point has obvious relevance for any analysis of the relationship between globalization, social welfare and social justice.

**Perspectives on Globalization**

Recognizing the complex and multifaceted nature of the globalization process, social scientists with different disciplinary perspectives have attempted to differentiate between its different dimensions. Perhaps the most obvious is the separation of its economic and non-economic dimensions. As has been shown earlier, globalization is closely associated with the analysis of international economic exchanges. However, others have emphasized the multidimensional features of
globalization, arguing that the processes of international change not only involve the economy but also affect communications, culture, migration, politics and many other aspects of contemporary life. This more broadly focused, multidimensional approach supports a cosmopolitan view which not only recognizes the multifaceted features of globalization but regards them as providing a sound basis for enhancing international cooperation, strengthening international institutions and effectively exercising international law. However, this interpretation has been criticized for failing to address international power relations that shape the international economy and affect social and cultural conditions around the world. Critics have drawn attention to the hegemonic features of global capitalism and the way the proponents of unipolarism insist that the diffusion of their values, institutions and worldview through the exercise of political power will benefit humankind.

These different perspectives are summarized in the following fourfold typology that addresses both the analytical and normative aspects of globalization. It offers an overview of the way social science commentaries have sought to interpret and explain the complex phenomena that are encapsulated in the concept of globalization and it hopes to excavate the normative preferences that are inherent in these accounts. These preferences lead naturally to the formulation of policy interventions that address the welfare and justice consequences of the globalization process.

**The Economistic Perspective**

The economistic perspective emphasizes the way international economic exchanges are increasing in frequency, creating greater interdependence between national economies and facilitating their integration. These accounts situate current economic activities within a historic context that stresses the demise of Keynesianism and centralized economic planning and the gradual replacement of the previously ubiquitous endogenous economic policy approach with an outward-looking growth model that is highly dependent on international investments, the flow of finance capital and trade (Gray, 1998; Hoogvelt, 1997; Scholte, 2000). These accounts usually begin
with the 1944 Bretton Woods conference. By reaffirming the gold standard, adopting policies to stabilize the world economy, undertaking to assist member states during times of fiscal and economic difficulty, and addressing the need for reconstruction and development, the signatories to the agreement hoped to avoid catastrophes such as the Great Depression of the 1930s and foster the smooth functioning of the international capitalist economic system.

However, it was not intended that the prevailing preference for endogenous economic development would be abandoned. Indeed, efforts to establish an International Trade Organization at Bretton Woods were postponed and despite the GATT agreement of 1947, which provided an interim set of regulatory trade arrangements, it was only in 1995 that the World Trade Organization came into being. By this time, endogenous economic development had been undermined by a number of important events that fostered increased economic exchanges and interdependence.

The decision by the Nixon administration in 1971 to abrogate the gold standard is usually cited as a major event of this kind. It allowed the free exchange of currency and facilitated the international flow of financial capital. It also facilitated increased trade in the form of accelerated manufacturing imports from regions of the world with low labor costs which popularized the successful export-led development policies of the East Asian tiger economies. The replacement of Keynesian with neoliberal economic policies by radical right Western governments in the 1980s built on these developments. The United States consolidated its hold over the International Monetary Fund and World Bank and used these organizations to promote the interests of powerful commercial financial institutions. These developments were accompanied by the further deregulation of international economic exchanges, increases in the volume of global trade, new opportunities for multinational corporations to maximize profits and the more frequent outsourcing and relocation of production. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the adoption of market liberalism in the former communist countries and China further expanded the global economic market. With the creation of the World Trade Organization, the neo-liberal principles governing the
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global economy were firmly entrenched (Peet, 2003).

These developments are seen in a positive light by many commentators, particularly mainstream economists and their supporters in the business world (Bhagwati, 2004; Lal, 2000; Ohmae, 1991, 1996; Wolf, 2004). Drawing on Ricardian and neoclassical analyses, they stress the positive benefits that derive from international exchanges. They point out that the global economy functions much like the domestic economy in that it benevolently satisfies the demands of consumers and appropriately rewards producers who seek to meet these demands. As with the domestic economy, when prices are the optimized and the market is in equilibrium, everybody benefits. The global market has also created mass employment in many low-income, developing economies where the production of goods for export to the high income countries has brought about increases in standards of living for millions of previously impoverished people. It has also created new opportunities for entrepreneurs and stimulated employment in the Western countries with positive consequences for incomes and standards of living. The overall result is a win-win situation in which standards of living for those who participate in the global economy rise dramatically.

As is well-known, these assertions have been widely challenged not only by critical academics but by policymakers, street protesters, union leaders and those whose jobs have been displaced through outsourcing and the relocation of industrial production. Indeed, it is hard on the basis of the evidence to accept the neoclassical view that globalization is a benign force that will ultimately benefit all of humankind. Although there are obvious examples of the positive consequences of international economic exchange, the literature is replete with examples of the negative impact of international predatory capitalism on the lives of millions of people around the world (Gray, 1998; Harvey, 1995; Lutwack, 1999; Soros, 1998; Stiglitz, 2002). In addition to this criticism, many believe that the economic perspective is too narrow and that its exclusionary focus on economic phenomena fails to encapsulate the complex multidimensional features of the globalization process.
The Multidimensional Perspective

It was noted earlier that sociologists, political scientists, scholars in media and communications studies and other fields are critical of the practice of defining globalization narrowly in economic terms. As the political scientist David Held (2004, p. 161) insists, "...the story of globalization is far from simply economic." The sociologist Anthony Giddens (1999) agrees, pointing out that globalization "... is political, technological and cultural as well as economic." (p. 10). However, critics of the economistic perspective do not deny the importance of international economic exchanges in fostering global integration. They recognize that the process of globalization is driven primarily by economic forces even though developments in communications technology, population movements, political cooperation and civil society activities also play a critical role in fostering international exchanges, interdependence and integration.

Technological innovations in communications are singled out by many as making a major contribution to globalization (Cairncross, 1997; Castells, 1996, 2001; Giddens, 1999). These innovations have not only facilitated rapid increases in economic exchanges but, through the mass media, have exposed many millions of people around the world to events in other countries. This has been accompanied by a greater awareness of diverse cultures and lifestyles and has also increased interpersonal contacts between peoples in many different parts of the world. Mass travel and ready access to internet communications have allowed ordinary people to interact promptly with others in many distant countries and regions. Places that were previously regarded as remote are now more readily accessed and communications that were previously time-consuming are now instantaneous.

Enhanced communications has also increased awareness of cultural diversity in the modern world and facilitated the consumption of cultural artifacts on an international scale. People who were previously relatively culturally isolated now consume cuisine, appreciate art and music, wear apparel and purchase crafts and other commodities from many different countries. The diffusion of culture is a matter of much debate among globalization scholars who speculate on whether
a single, global culture of internationally shared attitudes, preferences and tastes is emerging (Lechner and Boli, 2005). However, the resurgence of traditionalism suggests that the diffusion of culture and pressures of cultural homogenization are being resisted.

The increase in migration is identified as yet another dimension of the globalization process. Although migration is hardly new, there is a good deal of evidence to show that population movements have accelerated over the last few decades particularly from low to high income economies (Hatton and Williamson, 2005). The Western countries are a magnet for millions of people from the Global South in search of employment and opportunities to improve their living standards. The new migrants include unskilled workers as well as well-educated members of the middle class with sought after, technical skills. Of course, push factors such as civil conflict and economic stagnation in the developing world are also a major cause of world migration. The result is that previously homogenous cultures have now become increasingly complex and diverse.

The role of political cooperation through the agency of multilateral organizations and the growth of civil society activities at the international level are also identified as a facet of globalization that, many believe, will contribute to greater international cooperation and reciprocity. International efforts to address humanitarian, health, education and other social concerns have increased significantly since the Second World War and now make a major contribution to promoting people’s well-being in different parts of the world (Deacon, Hulse and Stubbs, 1997; Midgley, 1997). Cooperation between nongovernmental organizations has also increased and some scholars (Ireye, 2002; Kaldor, 2003; Keane, 2003) believe that globalization is being accompanied by the emergence of a global civil society in which ordinary people increasingly participate and exercise influence.

The multidimensional globalization process is transcending economic exchanges to create greater interdependence among the world’s nation states and their peoples. However, contrary to the claim that nation states are becoming less important, they continue to shape identity, structure economic activities and exert political control over the lives of their citizens. They
are likely to serve as fundamental social and political forma-
tions for many decades to come. Nevertheless, in its multifac-
eted form, globalization has brought about significant changes
in way people in the world’s nation states relate to each other.
This is often expressed as a time-space compression which, as
Giddens (1999) put it, has fostered a shared consciousness of
the world as a single place. Although Giddens and other mul-
tidimensionalists are not oblivious to the tensions and conflicts
which characterize contemporary globalization, their writings
optimistically imply that the international changes taking place
auger well for the future. With a shared global consciousness
of their common humanity, people may be more tolerant of
cultural and religious difference, amenable to cooperate with
each other, avoid conflict and support international institu-
tional arrangements that enhance reciprocity.

It is in this sense that the multidimensional view of glo-
balization is readily transformed into a cosmopolitan view
that more overtly and confidently asserts the principle that all
human beings are members of the same, global community.
Cosmopolitans believe that purposeful efforts should be made
to promote the integration of disparate societies and remove
the strictures of cultural, religious and national difference that
blinker people’s awareness of their common humanity. By
serving as an agent of universality, globalization facilitates the
realization of these ideals.

The Cosmopolitan Perspective

Derived from the Greek word meaning “world or universal
city”, the term cosmopolitan is loosely used to refer to a
form of political organization which transcends the nation
state. It is also used to characterize a disposition that rejects
narrow national loyalties and prejudices and recognizes the
unity and shared commonalities of the world’s peoples. In the
Western tradition, cosmopolitan ideas are often traced back to
the Cynics and Stoics who rejected the authority of the Greek
city state, and argued that human being are subject to a uni-
versal, natural law that transcends the actions of earthly legis-
latures. These ideas laid the foundations for many subsequent
reformulations of the cosmopolitan vision. For example,
it inspired attempts to establish multilateral, institutional
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arrangements that facilitate cooperation between the world’s nation states. It also found expression in the toleration of diversity on the grounds that difference was no more than an epiphenomenon of shared human characteristics.

Cosmopolitanism is today widely linked to the idea that the world’s nation states can cooperate through multilateral institutions, international law and human rights conventions to promote human well-being and social justice. The origins of this type of cosmopolitanism is usually attributed to the Kantian idea that the social contract can be applied internationally to create a federation of sovereign, nation states committed to the perpetuation of peace. Although the surge of nationalists fervor during the 19th century was hardly conducive to the adoption of this proposal, the carnage of the First World War persuaded many that greater efforts to secure peace through international cooperation were required. Despite the failure of the League of Nations, its resurrection in the guise of the United Nations in 1945 revitalized liberal cosmopolitanism (Kennedy, 2006). This event was subsequently reinforced through the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the more frequent recourse by national judiciaries to the principles of international law, and the creation of international juridical institutions such as the World Court and the International Criminal Court. The formation of the European Economic Community and its subsequent reconstitution as a quasi-political union has further reinvigorated cosmopolitan ideals.

Proponents of liberal cosmopolitanism draw on the multidimensional approach to optimistically and confidently assert that the growing interdependence of the peoples of the world’s nation states and will foster greater international cooperation, tolerance and the furtherance of peace. They also view globalization as vehicle for achieving these goals. As people and their governments increasingly recognize that they are members of the same human community, and that they have much to gain from cooperation, they will work together to regulate the forces of globalization to promote social well-being and social justice for all.

The belief that the forces of globalization can be domesticated to serve human interests is a key element of the
cosmopolitan perspective. It finds expression in a plethora of proposals for strengthening existing multilateral arrangements or establishing new arrangements that can effectively manage global economic as well as political processes for social ends. Advocates of this approach believe that the United Nations and other representative multilateral organizations created at the end of the Second World War have made a major contribution to promoting international cooperation. Although enfeebled in recent times, they contend that these organizations can be revitalized to address the challenges of globalization. The Bretton Woods institutions also need to be reformed so that they do not function as the agents of international capitalism but fulfill their original purpose of promoting the economic welfare of the world's nation states and their citizens. New international organizations that democratically represent these states and are able to exercise control over international economic activities should, they believe, also be created.

Held (2004) has neatly summarized these proposals and packaged them within a social democratic framework that reflects liberal cosmopolitan ideals. However, others are skeptical of the ability of the world's governments to cooperate in this way and place more faith in the role of emerging civil society institutions in fostering global cooperation. Resurrecting older cosmopolitan beliefs, others believe that nation states should be bypassed and that opportunities for direct democratic representation in new and reformed multilateral institutions should be created. Electronic democracy and other forms of direct participation in new global assemblies of the world citizens have been suggested as ways of achieving this goal (Schotle, 2000). The burning question, of course, is whether these and many other proposals for creating a democratic, just global order can ever materialize in the face of entrenched inequalities in global power, the relentless pursuit of commercial interests and the hegemonic exercise of unipolarist beliefs.

The Unipolar Perspective

Some scholars have argued that contemporary forms of international exchange are, in reality, imperialistic. Although critics of the economistic perspective, such as Noam Chomsky (1994, 1998), David Harvey (1995, 2003) Edward Luttwack
(1999) and Susan Strange (1986) have emphasized the links between globalization, capitalism and the exercise of global power, James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer (2001) are perhaps the most assertive proponents of the view that globalization is little more than a contemporary expression of age-old imperial practices. The very use of the term globalization, they contend, is designed to obscure this fact. Since imperialism is hardly acceptable in the modern world, globalization serves as a convenient cover for the exercise of economic and political power by the United States and its allies. Worse, by suggesting that current globalization processes are inevitable, the term legitimates the continued imperial subjugation of the world’s peoples. Petras and Veltmeyer urge that the term be abandoned and that globalization be recognized for what it is.

While many advocates of the economistic perspective would reject the claim that globalization amounts to the exercise of imperial power, this view has been formalized as a clearly articulated, normative perspective on contemporary global relationships known as unipolarism. The term was popularized by the neoconservative journalist and scholar Charles Krauthammer in the 1990s and drew on earlier neoconservative ideas which extolled the role of the United States in world affairs. It reflects the realist position of neoconservative scholars of the 1980s such as Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz who criticized the accommodationist policies on the Cold War and applauded the Reagan administration for its resolute opposition to the Soviet Union which, they believe, brought about its collapse (Dorrien, 2004). Unipolarist ideas found further expression in Francis Fukuyama’s (1992) neo-Hegelian thesis that the capitalist and liberal democratic values of the United States and its allies had not only triumphed over Soviet communism but diffused over the globe to herald the end of ideological struggle and ultimately of history.

Unipolarist ideas were first translated into policy in the 1992 Defense Department document authored by Paul Wolfowitz that urged the government of the United States to adopt a new strategy of “benevolent domination” by which it would exercise economic, diplomatic and military power to protect American interests and diffuse American values (Dorrien, 2004). Subsequently, this view was vigorously
promoted by a variety of neoconservative groups and think tanks such as the Project for a New American Century which called on the government to emulate the imperial achievements of the Romans and British. These imperial powers brought peace and prosperity through the benevolent exercise of power and the diffusion of values. As is well-known, these ideas were used to legitimate the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and have been restated by President George W. Bush who frequently declares the intention of his administration to spread American liberal democracy and free-market capitalism throughout the world.

Unipolarists deny that their position is imperialistic. They point out that the government of the United States has not assumed direct rule over other nations or promoted colonial settlement or, with a few legitimate exceptions, exercised military power to replace sovereign governments. Rather, unipolarism involves a consensual set of international arrangements by which the world’s peoples and nations accept the benevolent involvement of the United States in world affairs and welcomes its role as the guarantor of peace and facilitator of prosperity. Offering a neo-Hobbesian interpretation, neo-conservative scholars such as Robert Kagen and William Kristol (2000) and Michael Mandelbaum (2005) point out that the United States functions as a Leviathan that uses its diplomatic and military power to challenge the uncertain and dangerous contingencies of the modern world. Its purpose is not only to protect its national interests and promote the welfare of its citizens but to ensure the security and well-being of all the world’s peoples. However, it can only play this role if its benevolent supremacy is unchallenged and it is able to end rivalry and conflict between the world’s nation states, uphold international law, and ensure the passage of commerce and the legitimate pursuit of commercial interests. It is for this reason that unipolarists urge the government of the United States to use its military might to secure peace and maintain global stability. Proponents of this view contend that globalization as unipolarism offers the best prospect of promoting human well-being and social justice in the world today.
Implications for Social Policy and Social Work

The four perspectives outlined here not only provide analytical interpretations of current international events but offer normative insights into the social consequences of these events. In some cases, these normative implications are clearly articulated. The economistic perspective provides a clear statement of how economic globalization is said to create employment and raises the standards of living of the world’s peoples. The normative implications of the multidimensional perspective are less obvious but nevertheless suggest that enhanced international exchanges in various domains of contemporary life have positive consequences for social welfare.

The normative implications of these different perspectives are also contested but here again, some are more vigorously disputed than others. The economistic perspective has evoked intense debate and the contention that global capitalism brings positive benefits to humankind has been hotly contested. Somewhat surprisingly, the unipolarist perspective has not attracted as much attention from social policy scholars as might be expected. Responses to the cosmopolitan and multidimensional perspectives have also been relatively muted. Nevertheless, these perspectives offer very different normative interpretations and policy prescriptions about how social welfare and social justice ideals may be realized.

Although social policy and social work scholars have not written extensively on the subject of globalization, the issue of how globalization effects human welfare has been addressed by some of them (Dominelli, 1999; Ferguson, Lavalette and Wilson, 2005; George and Wilding, 2002; Ife, 1998; Midgley, 2004; Mishra, 1999; Prigoff, 2000; Reisch, 1998; Wagner, 1997; Yeates, 2001). Not surprisingly, their attention has focused on the economistic perspective. Most have emphasized the negative effects of economic globalization and most agree with (and tend to restate) the argument that globalization has had disastrous consequences for human welfare and social justice. Many have highlighted the negative effects of globalization on employment and wages in the Western countries, the heightening of inequalities, increased gender and ethnic oppression and discrimination against immigrants, retrenchments in social
expenditures and programs, the enfeebling of governments and their inability to protect the domestic economy, the spread of managerialism and a new workfare ethic in social policy that abrogates the universalism of earlier collectivist social welfare ideals.

Generally, these accounts focus on the Western countries and do not address the effects of globalization on social welfare and social justice in the Global South to any great extent. This is perhaps understandable because much of the Western social policy and social work literature is preoccupied with domestic events, infused with a Eurocentric bias and neglectful of international issues.

Social policy and social work scholars interested in international affairs have tended to favor the multidimensional or cosmopolitan view. Indeed, cosmopolitanism has a long and venerable history in the field, particularly in social work where formative social work innovations were diffused from Europe to North America and other parts of the world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Kendall, 2000; Midgley, 1981). In addition, some of the founders of social work such as Jane Addams were strongly committed to liberal cosmopolitanism particularly through the advocacy of pacifism. However, the cosmopolitan elements in international social work are seldom recognized by its practitioners and few have commented on the ideological implications of cosmopolitan values. Indeed, few have overtly asserted a commitment to cosmopolitanism which insists on mutuality and reciprocity in international relations.

On the other hand, cosmopolitanism has featured prominently in the few accounts that have been published on what is called global social policy. The work of Bob Deacon and his colleagues (1997) is a particularly good example of this approach. They contend that globalization’s negative effects on social welfare can best be addressed through supranational institutions and discuss the work of a variety of multinational agencies that currently contribute to this goal. They argue that these organizations should be strengthened to implement what they describe as a “global government reform agenda”. A commitment to strengthening cooperative efforts to promote social welfare at the international level should also be given
high priority.

Unipolarist claims about the allegedly positive benefits of imperialism have not been debated in the social policy and social work literature but recently, James Midgley (2006) has drawn attention to these claims and their implications for social work and social welfare. On the other hand, the idea that Western social policy and social work offers a universalistic set of prescriptions for promoting social welfare has been widely discussed and challenged (Gray and Fook, 2004; Midgley, 1981; Yip, 2004). Of course, the idea that Western models apply internationally is not an explicit statement of unipolarist ideology but rather an unconscious tendency to assert the applicability and superiority of these approaches. Nevertheless, Edwards Said’s (1978) admonition that Western social scientists should exercise caution when making pronouncements about other cultures is apposite to any discussion about the transferability of Western social welfare approaches to other societies.

The different interpretations of the consequences of globalization for social welfare and social justice outlined in this article need to be more thoroughly scrutinized by social policy and social work scholars. Indeed, it may generally be claimed that those working in these fields need more vigorously to embrace an international perspective that not only addresses the complex phenomena of globalization but seizes the opportunity to revise their methodological proclivity to view the world from a Western perspective. The adoption of a global perspective will broaden the scope of social policy and social work scholarship to encompass many more cultures and societies and obtain meaningful insights into the way that diverse cultures and societies define, interpret and promote social welfare and social justice. Social policy and social work will be enriched by a perspective of this kind and hopefully assert its latent commitment to cosmopolitan ideals. More frequent and meaningful exchanges between social policy and social work scholars and practitioners in many different parts of the world will also permit the formulation of interventions that effectively address social welfare and social justice concerns at the international level.


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