

Global studies and human geography: A view from Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract

This article introduces global studies to an Aotearoa New Zealand audience with the goal of thinking through what human geographers might learn by comparing elements of global studies with their own discipline. It begins by reviewing global studies and its establishment at The University of Auckland and then considers how global studies relates to human geography. A number of areas of mutual benefit are identified. The relationship between global studies and human geography is important to consider during a time of change within higher education in Aotearoa, a point discussed in the conclusion.

KEYWORDS

disciplines, global studies, higher education, human geography

1 | INTRODUCTION: THE WORLD IN AOTEAROA?

Over the past 30 or so years, a field of study called ‘global studies’ has crept into the fabric of arts faculties, social science programmes, and extensions of political science departments around the world, and specifically in North America, Europe and Asia. In its remit to tackle global challenges through a local lens by using a set of frames borrowed from individual disciplines, the degree has gained wide appeal. Since its launch in 2018 at The University of Auckland, for example, enrolment in global studies, an undergraduate degree hosted by the Faculty of Arts, has exploded to over 600 stand-alone and conjoint degree holders. A new named Master's degree in global studies began in March 2022. There are plans in motion to add a PhD degree in 2023.

Meanwhile human geography's role in English-speaking higher education is being reconstituted, and not always to enhance its presence among a crowded

set of offerings. The University of Auckland's geography programme, for example, reached thirtieth place in the 2022 QS world rankings yet is housed in the Faculty of Science where its intellectual links with the Social Sciences are weaker than if it were located in the Faculty of Arts.¹ Though geography enrolments at The University of Auckland have not declined significantly in recent years, human geography courses have been positioned to support other degrees such as global studies, environmental management and environmental science.

Said in general terms, The University of Auckland's offerings are changing, with human geography courses taking on a role in support of transdisciplinary fields as much as standing on their own as a disciplinary degree option for students. This shift can be viewed as a positive development because geography is now introduced to students outside of the School of the Environment and to students who may not have been previously exposed to it. But it also means that students may not be

easily able to distinguish between global studies and human geography or to understand why parts of the global studies degree programme feature human geography courses so heavily. From an analytic perspective, the introduction of global studies to Aotearoa's intellectual landscape has elicited little discussion in geography corners, which is an omission given global studies' strong linkages and breaks with human geography. There is thus a need for geography to 'stock-take' by learning about likeminded fields such as global studies and identifying ways to collaborate in an era of increasing calls for the university to provide transdisciplinary, skills forward degrees with global relevance.² This paper is thus a 'state of the field' treatment of a critical moment in the ongoing development of human geography in Aotearoa, one in which a close cousin to the sub-discipline is being quickly taken up by universities across the country. Instead of looking at global studies as a threat to human geography's knowledge production, pedagogical structures and relationship to higher education and enrolments, this paper takes a more open-hearted approach and seeks to offer some preliminary thoughts on the compatibility of the two fields and the possibilities for collaboration between them.

In its drive to 'write the world' (Springer, 2017) global studies shares a number of prominent features with human geography. Examples include an agnosticism toward theory, a focus on the local-global nexus, and a desire to track and influence change among humans and their environments. Other more subtle similarities come in the form of comparativism, associations with foreign language acquisition and area/regional studies expertise. There are differences between the two fields with respect to age, as geography is one of the oldest disciplines in the world and global studies is one of the newest.³ For all of these reasons it is an appropriate moment to identify some of the areas of congruence between the two fields and to begin thinking through what the future may hold for a New Zealand university system that offers both global studies and human geography programmes.

In the next section, I outline the field of global studies and explain its introduction at The University of Auckland. The following section highlights convergences between global studies and human geography, positioning the two in relation to one another. The subsequent section then sketches some intellectual and pedagogical collaborative building blocks between them. In The University of Auckland's case, the mandate to operationalise cross-faculty degrees and to teach broadly across beyond discipline/field means the time is now to begin recognising potential alliances between global studies and human geography.

2 | GLOBAL STUDIES AT AUCKLAND: A SHORT STORY

In the English-speaking world, global studies came into being in the mid to late 1990s, with a number of courses and then departments launched in the University of California system (Anderson & Holmsten, 2019; Darian-Smith & McCarty, 2017; Juergensmeyer, 2014; Stoddard & Collins, 2017). Global studies' academic cousin, international studies, began earlier and was an extension of international relations, which was itself an extension of political science (Toops et al., 2022). For the purposes of brevity, global studies can be considered different from international studies in three broad ways. The first is that global studies prioritise socio-cultural dimensions in its investigations into the world's issues to a greater extent than international studies, and to an even greater extent than international relations. Much like how many corners of human geography operate, global studies is less interested in adding a socio-cultural element to the global political economy than it is establishing a *cultural economy* where the socio-cultural and political-economic are integral components (Amin & Thrift, 2007).

Second, global studies does not emphasise national borders; its mandate is to investigate the transformation of problems and opportunities as they move across and become emplaced in the world. International studies, on the other hand, takes as its conceptual default national boundaries identified by any contemporary political map. Its point of departure mostly occurs among national responses to global issues. The requisite problems with 'scaling up' from the local or evaluating beyond the scale of the nation-state are therefore present in international studies whereas the fluidity of scale is featured in global studies.

Lastly, global studies seeks to work from the 'ground-up' as much as it wishes to tackle global problems 'from above'. Whereas international studies concentrates on questions of national governments and regional blocs, global studies takes a global issue (e.g., the public health of women, the prevalence of slums, carbon offsets and myriad others) and examines it firstly as a local problem with unique dimensions that nevertheless connect to questions facing the world. This twinned approach, examining a problem in its local manifestations and connecting it globally, is of course one favoured in many corners of geography as well.

Global studies at The University of Auckland were pioneered by the late Hilary Chung,⁴ a scholar of Asian comparative literature who embraced the transdisciplinary and issues-based concerns of the burgeoning field. She and other backers from the university established

four major streams – Global Politics and Human Rights, International Business and Relations, Global Environment and Sustainable Development, and Transnational Cultures and Creative Practice – drawing on courses from across the university to populate them. Global Politics currently enrolls over 300 students, International Business and Global Environment has over 150 current students each and Transnational Cultures stands at approximately 50 students. These numbers reflect an interest in global studies as a degree option for New Zealand-based students but may also signal scepticism toward enrolling in ‘traditional’ disciplines. Indeed, many undergraduate global studies students are not aware and do not seem to care that there is a budding intellectual field known as global studies.

Outside of the obvious interest in global issues underpinning the degree, obtaining an undergraduate degree in global studies reflects a growing interest among students for flexibility in their majors, whether as stand-alone or conjoint (dual degree) students. Moreover, sharing a snapshot of the current profile of global studies at Auckland signals what may be in store for future global studies programmes at other universities in Aotearoa. Seventy-five percent of Auckland’s global studies students are conjoint students, pairing their degrees with programmes in law, arts, business and others. Approximately 5% of global studies students are international students. Global studies at The University of Auckland requires students to take and pass four semesters of a language and three semesters of area studies in their chosen part of the world.⁵ Decisions about which language and area studies pathways to pursue are independent from major stream choices. The most popular area to study is Europe (the choice for over 60% of students) with Spanish and French the most highly subscribed languages. Students identifying as female account for 75% of the total global studies population. Three required courses fill out the global studies degree: Introduction to Global Studies (Global 102), Global Challenges (Global 200) and Research Project (Global 300). Faculty in global studies occasionally teach global studies-coded courses in their research areas as well. June 2021 saw the inaugural Global Studies bachelor cohort walk across the graduation stage. The undergraduate community has developed a vibrant independent community called the Auckland University Global Studies Society (AUGSS).⁶ In 2020 faculty leadership and the programme director created an external body called the Global Studies Council, made up of Auckland-based business, government, and media leaders to support the programme.

3 | CONVERGENCES BETWEEN GLOBAL STUDIES AND HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

One area of commonality between global studies and human geography is their ‘magpie-like eclecticism’ (Peck, 2018: 16; see also Peck, 2013: 1537) with respect to theoretical and empirical travels. The magpie is an apt metaphor because these birds, like global studies academics and human geographers, are predisposed to curiosity, able to traverse long distances and often unwilling to commit to one intellectual ‘roost’ or home, or at least not for very long. The prevailing statement from those within the ivory tower and the ‘real world’ that asks ‘what is geography?’ also pertains to global studies. As one way to begin answering this question – at least for those new to global studies – this section identifies some dominant convergences between global studies and human geography.

Global studies approaches globalisation by way of transnationalism, minimising the use of ‘scale’ often seen in human geography (Prytherch, 2007). One prominent global studies scholar defines transnational as those ‘activities and patterns ... that exist beyond the borders of nations and regions and stretch across the various areas of the world’ (Juergensmeyer, 2014: 5). The term ‘transnational’ has earlier roots in political theory, particularly international relations, and assumes processes and interactions move in, through and beyond the nation-state, its core unit of analysis (Vertovec, 2009). Global studies, however, rarely begins at the scale of the global; much like geographers, global studies scholars identify the relationality between and across the local and global, and establish connections from this starting point. That a particular event or phenomenon can be ‘upscaled’ – or identified as transnational in character – is often used as a justification for activating a global studies frame to conceptualise a process, event or engagement. Therefore it could be said that while both global studies and human geography converge on issues-based questions and thematic discussions rather than strictly locational concerns (Darian-Smith & McCarty, 2017), their conceptual roots – transnationalism and scale – are different.

A second complementarity between the two fields surrounds the idea of the local–global nexus. Global studies research sees ‘the local and global as mutually constitutive, creating and recreating each other across conceptual fields in a constant dynamic. This means that the global is found not only in macro processes but also in the full range of human activities’ (Darian-Smith & McCarty, 2017: 4). For many geographers this relationality was the initial kernel of intellectual inquiry that excited us about the discipline, and it seems the

backbone of global studies shares this interest. While global studies uses terms like a 'local-global continuum' or 'assemblage' (Darian-Smith & McCarty, 2017: 5) to present the field, human geography relies on terms such as process, scale, space and human-environment to form the centre of its canon (though local-global and assemblage also feature prominently in some contemporary work).

In global studies, the local-global nexus is understood as suffused in power, as it also is in human geography. Today the question of power is critical for all academic disciplines (even in the physical sciences: see Lave et al., 2018) but human geography foregrounds power in the making and contestations of the local-global. In a settler colonial context like Aotearoa New Zealand, the ongoing inequalities, racial injustices and structural disorders differently experienced by citizens speak to power dynamics tied directly to the spectre of the British colonial project, such that even a small, relatively sparsely populated nation like this one offers a valuable window onto broader global societal processes and divisions. I would posit that training in human geography is, at its most fundamental, interested in identifying and deconstructing power, and in making the sometimes opaque or vague connections between local and global power relations more clear.

In recent decades, however, geographers have increasingly turned from identifying and deconstructing power 'out there' in society to tracing how valid knowledge is produced, in what places, under what auspices and (critically) by whom. Human geography now demands knowledge creation 'from below', with research participants and geographers increasingly producing the discipline from positions of marginality, oppression and resistance. Relatedly, if geography has only relatively recently begun to grapple with its status as a 'white discipline' in both its composition (Pulido, 2002) and racialised production, global studies' initial analytic impulses come from a push to decentre the production of knowledge (Darian-Smith & McCarty, 2017: 7). It seems that global studies' desire to 'decentre the production of knowledge' can be interpreted as emphasising logics, practices and worldviews outside of the Anglo-American milieu when developing its canon. This is laudable but two questions arise: How is the decentring of knowledge production to be accomplished under the guise of global studies? And, how is the production of global studies implicated in societal inequalities and perpetuating voicelessness? These questions have not been attended to yet. But they are pressing: the drive to decentre knowledge production must always, as geographers remind us, be coupled with an ongoing critical assessment of our own contributions to the structures we are attempting to address and overcome (Oswin, 2020).

Another way to look at knowledge production in global studies is to make the case that it does not carry a long disciplinary history like geography. Perhaps because a critical accounting of its own contributions to injustice is not yet possible, given the relative youth of the field, global studies' relationship to power is shaped by a future-looking and perhaps confident view. Human geographers, on the other hand, look to the past to identify trends and patterns of inequality that in turn inform the present condition. There are very few geographers who would call themselves forecasters (though some new work is being done on futurity; see Bunnell et al., 2018), as their concerns are clearly set in the issues of the past and present. Global studies see value in starting from contemporary divisions and laying out possibilities to address them. Global studies believes that 'Euro-American scholars need to decentre Western conceptions of history' (Darian-Smith & McCarty, 2017: 8), which implies that 'Euro-American scholars' are not working toward this project already (Peake et al., 2018; Schmid, 2018) and minimises the significant work required to accomplish this goal. All of this said, geography and global studies both prioritise the 'need to recognize and overcome prevailing logics that put everything into hierarchies, ordered positions, centre and periphery models, and developmental progressions with directional flows and linear causalities that start at an origin point and evolve in one direction' (Darian-Smith & McCarty, 2017: 8).

4 | GLOBAL STUDIES AND HUMAN GEOGRAPHY: WAYS FORWARD

There are conceptual and pedagogical complementarities between global studies and geography that deserve comment. Staking out some provisional ways forward provides some necessary early connective tissue between the two communities that may be useful as global studies becomes a more significant part of the academic conversation in Aotearoa. The first of these is the question of comparativism. Comparativism is defined as the project of generating insights from considering similarities and differences between two or more objects, institutions or processes (Hart, 2018; Ren & Luger, 2015; McFarlane, 2010, and for a nod to singularity, see Jazeel, 2019). Primarily though not exclusively the province of urban geography, comparativism has given life to theorising beyond case studies and injected human geography with the tools to understand 'how key processes are constituted in relation to each other through power-laden processes' (Hart, 2018: 374–5). If geography's

commitment to place and space often translate to research projects conducted at one site, or among multiple locations in a relatively homogenous area (for example, in a country or region), global studies prioritises comparativism without discounting the value of single-sited research.

There are two main reasons why comparativism is front and centre in global studies while occupying an important yet perhaps not extraordinary component of a heterodox geography discipline.⁷ The first is relatively straight forward and is due to the broader disciplinary landscape global studies have emerged from. Its immediate predecessor is international studies, which itself is built on comparing national and regional trends (Toops et al., 2022). A foundational mission of international relations – which, as mentioned earlier, is an outgrowth of political science – is also to offer comparisons for the benefit of identifying global trends and patterns. Human geographers are often known by their regional or country-specific specialisations, though many eschew any regional or country lens when describing their work in the discipline.

The second reason for the primacy of comparativism in global studies is baked into its transdisciplinary and transnational character. The field's stated transdisciplinary framework – 'to move beyond the limits of both the disciplines and interdisciplinary approaches to provide new ways of organizing knowledge and modes of thinking' (Darian-Smith & McCarty, 2017: 59) – means accepting no geographical or disciplinary boundaries in the pursuit of knowledge (Stoddard & Collins, 2017). Geography is perhaps known for its domain expertise over 'place' (Cresswell, 2011) and geographers have historically but not exclusively been trained to acquire a depth of understanding about a particular location or region.

Another way to say this is that global studies has formed an issues-based praxis that sees new avenues of intellectual possibility arising from unacknowledged connections between disparate societies and their respective concerns. This is not to say that geographers are inherently more conservative in their desire to break down geographical and knowledge barriers than global studies scholars (Harvey, 1989; Marston et al., 2005), but in rejecting any disciplinary doctrine, global studies is free to borrow, blend and experiment with a variety of different problem-solving techniques. A critique that could be lodged at this approach to knowledge production is that a lack of disciplinary training leads to unreflexive, loose models of inquiry and a superficial, almost breezy approach to discovery.

There is an opportunity for human geographers in Aotearoa to offer some lessons in how to pursue comparativism to global studies scholars. This is because

geographers in Aotearoa must regularly negotiate concerns that New Zealand and Pacific island nations are too small to be representative of anywhere or too peripheral to offer realistic comparative potential. New Zealand's human geographers have been trained and are thus well-positioned to offer lessons on how Aotearoa's settler colonial background speaks to other colonised locations in the world (e.g., Australia, South Africa, Canada and the United States). Moreover, co-designed research with indigenous communities is a pathway to link to important debates on resource conflict, treatment of the environment, postcolonialism and participatory research globally (Coombes et al., 2012; Coombes et al., 2013; Coombes et al., 2014). At an analytic level, human geography nurtures its students to draw from and make connections with frameworks that inform their own interests such that the work of virtually every human geographer spans more than one sub-disciplinary field. This is arguably why human geographers are so comfortable thinking within arenas such as political economy or environment-society relations. There are therefore multiple entry points into comparativism yet to be mined among global studies scholars and human geographers.

Sitting uneasily aside my previous arguments positing the broader, more aspirational analytic frameworks inhabiting global studies is the field's concern with in-depth training in second language and area studies acquisition. Global studies reconciles this seeming contradiction by positing that the field is unique in relation to other humanities and social sciences in that it trains students to have a breadth of transdisciplinary tools to tackle a 'big-picture' problem, as well as offering them a depth of knowledge about an area and language(s) spoken within it. Global studies is both a generalist and a specialist field of study, and this combination is not seen as an impossibility but rather a time-consuming if necessary goal in assessing global problems from a particular location or area.

Although many geographers conduct research and teaching outside of the places of their birth or origin, there is no mandate that this occurs (at least among human geographers working in the English-speaking world). Indeed, it could be argued that the majority of geographers work in areas and in languages closes to home. There are some important reasons for why this happens. One is human geographers face more difficulties obtaining research funding than their science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) counterparts, therefore relying on smaller pools of money that must be stretched further. A second is that poor compensation for teaching assistant stipends and the high cost of tuition and fees obligates students to hold paid work alongside their postgraduate studies, thereby limiting the

opportunity for travel. Of course, there is also a familiarity with pressing concerns happening at home that attracts human geographers' attention. Global studies, on the other hand, mandates that its students and faculty are conversant in a global problem that they are engaged with at a local level, and among people, institutions and materials in a language other than English.

While recognising the challenges in doing so, human geography in Aotearoa could develop a stronger commitment to the usefulness of foreign language training as exemplified in global studies. Notwithstanding some detractors who find foreign language acquisition frustrating and not fit for purpose – given their expectation to use English exclusively in their careers – global studies students regularly report that the foreign language component is a central reason why they chose to pursue the degree. The most common reason given is that global studies students recognise that to be a global citizen requires communicating in languages other than English in order to effectively understand how global processes unfold unevenly across places and how people in other parts of the world interpret them.

Human geography in Aotearoa is moving gradually (some may say carefully), unevenly but with promise toward incorporating *te reo* and *mātauranga Māori* into its praxis and curriculum. To be sure, human geographers have been cultivating *te ao Māori* to great benefit to the community in Aotearoa and beyond (Parsons et al., 2016; Parsons et al., 2019). We are seeing exceptional work in these spaces in this journal (Kitson & Cain, 2022; Paterson-Shallard et al., 2022; Tadaki et al., 2022; Taylor, 2022) and in leading journals in human geography (see Yates et al., 2022). Engagement with *mātauranga Māori* is a requirement in most major and prestigious research grant applications in Aotearoa. Yet more work needs to be done to integrate *te reo Māori* in everyday research and teaching in human geography. Doing so would go some way to fulfilling the co-design principles underpinning the Treaty of Waitangi and embody one of human geography's mandates to decolonize the production of knowledge in higher education (Oswin, 2020).

5 | CONCLUSIONS

This paper is a short and admittedly partial review of the global studies field in Aotearoa New Zealand as it relates to human geography. Being new to both global studies and geography in this country, I wrote this out of a sense of passion and duty to both of my fields of study with the hope that more will be written and discussed about their intellectual and pedagogic convergences. The point of this paper is not to prescribe how an alliance between

global studies and human geography would work but to argue that undertaking a thought exercise about areas of conceptual overlap is important and timely. Outside of The University of Auckland, global studies currently exists as a major at the University of Otago and is expected to be launched soon at Victoria University of Wellington.⁸ It seems possible that other universities in the country may also take up the global studies flag, so raising awareness on the part of geographers as to where and how their activities intersect with global studies, and what steps can be taken after this mapping, have been the two overarching goals of this paper.

If other universities in Aotearoa New Zealand are going through what is happening at The University of Auckland in 2022, then they are also undergoing a profound reimagining of what their university is, who it serves, and how it conducts itself in society. Outside of comparativism and foreign language training, some potential further pathways for global studies and geography going forward which are not considered in this paper include leveraging on their similar 'big picture' thinking; their conceptual malleability and shape-shifting qualities; their ability to speak to audiences outside of the ivory tower; and the ease with which they broker conversations between the local, regional and global. There are areas of improvement needed too. Global studies could take more time and energy to acknowledge the debt it owes to academic fields like indigenous studies, black studies, feminist studies, and it could better historicise its arguments. The sense of the unboundedness of scale within global studies also has limits, as any geographer will persuasively explain. No discipline or field has the answers to all of the world's issues, and Aotearoa New Zealand benefits from having students study and derive lessons from both global studies and human geography. The trick is to lay a passage-way in the rapidly evolving university landscape to fully articulate the values and strengths of these related fields, both independently and together.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to Tom Baker for reading an early draft and providing many sharp insights. Thank you to the reviewers and David Conradson, Managing Editor, for fantastic guidance and suggestions.

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ENDNOTES

¹ <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/university-subject-rankings/2022/geography>, accessed 24/6/2022.

- ² This comment inspired by the University of Auckland's new strategic plan: <https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/auckland/about-us/the-university/official-publications/strategic-plan/2021-2030/taumata-teitei-vision-2030-and-strategic-plan-2025.pdf>, accessed 24/6/2022.
- ³ Global studies only reached academic departments in the mid-1990s but in the span of a decade grew to the hundreds, mostly but not exclusively in the US (see Juergensmeyer, 2014: xiv).
- ⁴ A professional obituary is available here: <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/news/2020/08/17/dr-hilary-chung-passes-away.html>, accessed 24/6/2022.
- ⁵ At Auckland these regions are the Pacific, Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Spanish and French are far and away the most popular languages chosen to study, with over half of all students studying one of them. In order of popularity, other choices include Chinese, Japanese, Māori, German, Korean, Italian, Samoan, Tongan, Russian, and Cook Islands Māori. The structure of the Global Studies degree is available here: <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/study/study-options/find-a-study-option/bachelor-of-global-studies-bglobalst.html>, accessed 24/6/2022.
- ⁶ The first issue of Nomad, AUGSS' undergraduate global studies journal, launched in 2021: <https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/auckland/global-studies/Nomad%201st%20edition%20FINAL%20correct%20size.pdf>, accessed 24/6/2022.
- ⁷ For canonical work on comparativism in urban geography (see Jacobs, 2012; Robinson, 2016; Simone, 2010; Teo, 2022; Ward, 2008).
- ⁸ <https://www.otago.ac.nz/courses/subjects/glbl.html>, accessed 24/6/2022. Victoria-Wellington's Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) application for a Bachelor in Global Studies was circulated for feedback to New Zealand's universities in May, 2022, which generally signals a programme's impending launch.

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How to cite this article: Gillen, J. (2022). Global studies and human geography: A view from Aotearoa New Zealand. *New Zealand Geographer*, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nzg.12342>