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Globalization and International Relations Theory

In his book, *Globalization and International Relations Theory*, Ian Clark systematically juxtaposes competing lines of scholarship in International Relations against Globalization literature. He explores the rise of literature on globalization and the specific implications it has on International Relations theory. Clark's central theme is to construct a basis from which to promote his plea; to develop a new theoretical framework for analyzing the global system and the nation-states within it. Clark calls for a holistic approach to the study of the international system, one that treats globalization and the states not as mutually exclusive, but as mutually reinforcing.

Clark presents a social constructivist approach to the study of international relations. He is essentially asking if the gap can be bridged between competing perspectives reasoning that it's crucial to developing a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the international system and the states which create it. Specifically, it appears that Clark seeks to develop a grand theory of sorts, which encompasses all components of the system (economic, social, cultural) and all units or levels of analysis (international, state, individual). He is committed to the notion of bringing competing sides of the theoretical "divide" together under his proposed method of inquiry.

Clark addresses the “great divide” throughout his volume, marshaling concepts and lines of argument against one another in an effort to demonstrate their polarizing effects. To Clark, the debates are inherently binary and present dichotomous oppositions which stagnate and prevent our level of understanding from advancing beyond the current trap. His scathing criticism makes his position clear that the debate between state-centric and globalization theories is a futile, “narrow and unenlightened” endeavor, like a dog chasing its own tail. He is passionately dedicated to squashing the current debate, which monopolizes academic discussions, in favor of a new approach that attempts to blend both perspectives in a way that analyzes the system as a whole with many interconnected parts.

An accurate analogy of Clark’s petition could be compared with the medical examination of the human body. A physician does not study the heart alone; they also examine additional internal parts such as the vascular system, muscles, and the consistency of the blood. Yet, the physician does not stop there. They take into consideration external variables (which could possibly seem extraneous) such as stress, lifestyle and dietary patterns. The body is analyzed from numerous different perspectives, yet treated as a single unit, a human, nominally. This is the approach Clark is calling for to analyze international relations and globalization, as a full spectrum where the “globalized state” serves as the fundamental unit of analysis.

Clark vehemently denies the suggestion that the importance of the state is receding, implied by globalization literature. Globalization literature argues that international structures, such as transnational corporations and NGO's, threaten the identity and sovereignty of the state. This line of logic runs parallel to Political theories based on territorial concepts which once defined the state. Normatively, it is argued that domestic citizenship values decrease with declining state autonomy, or simply put, citizenship is "devalued".

Clark forcefully interjects the relevance and role of the nation-state in creating and manifesting the global structure, calling these lines of theory into question. He is defensive of his position. He attempts to head off any tendency to criticize his approach as being merely state-centric by incorporating globalization as an equally important consideration. To Clark, the state should be perceived as reconstituting itself, or dynamic in nature, which is operating within the context of globalism while simultaneously creating it. Clark sites Armstrong to make his point, "...it is instructive that we regard globalism not as a mere environment in which states find themselves but as an element within the shifting identity of the state itself." So, the state embodies globalism as globalism embodies the state.

Additionally, Clark addresses competing "unified" theoretical apparatuses for approaching IR and globalization, including world-systems theory and IPE. He criticizes these approaches for conceiving of the political realm as secondary to or "lagging behind" other categorical areas of inquiry (capital, cultural, social).

Clark is calling for these particular theorists to move beyond presenting a critique that is purely rooted in economics. He notes the apparent disjunction between the political and economic, and calls for the transformational nature of globalism to be added as a consideration, placing it in the context of other subcategories and units of analysis. To their credit, however, Clark concedes that these theorists do at least confront the divide between internal and external by reducing both to functional properties of an integrated system.

Clark addresses constructivism and comments that the problem with most constructive theory is that it happens to be politically uninteresting. He believes constructivism and the concept of mutual constitution can be reconfigured into a sexier line of argument by interjecting an account of the "costs, sacrifice, and pain". To Clark, if constructivism is to emerge as an intellectually intriguing perspective, it must recognize political costs and the asymmetrical balance at play in the dynamics of the relationship.

Clark questions the notions of "community", both domestically based on a spatially defined identity, and internationally, and notes that the basis of community is dependent upon how it is understood. He positions positive and negative viewpoints of globalization against one another, asking if community is a given or if it grows. He marshals the argument that economic inequalities compromise international community by undermining the basis for a common identity against arguments predicated on normative optimism, claiming notions of a globalized community are created through international solidarity and

transnational relations. Clark challenges the concept that communities even exist domestically and cites Robertson's assertion that it's essentially an "imagined community".

Clark substantiates his argument that there should be a mutually constitutive theoretical framework of IR and Globalization by structuring a discussion which posits three central normative lines of argument in the context of a hypothetical global environmental disaster. Chris Brown's "common interest, common identity" perspective attributes common interest to the biological realm, not the cultural, social or political. Linklater attributes cooperation and working together in the face of adversity to a global civil society, not an ethical state. Lastly, Hurrell attributes cooperation to the desire to ensure human survival and interjecting survival into domestic environmental policy. Clark's point is to demonstrate that all three lines of reasoning stray from the notion of community.

Regarding the "democratic state", Clark asserts in terms of the "great divide", democracy is a domestic business, which does not extend into the realm of international politics. He comments that democratic and IR theories touching each other of recent fall under the "shadow of globalization". He touches on 1990's literature that presented an optimistic view of proliferating democracies and a utopian vision of globalism, an argument which he states has died out of recent. Next, he introduces theories of states being deficient in the production of democracy, or claims that globalization has hollowed out domestic democracies. Lastly, he interjects liberal theory's conception of the democratic

peace; liberalized democracies avoid using military force and seek diplomacy and non-militaristic methods as a means to conflict resolution.

Clark reasons that if domestic democracy has been hollowed out by globalization, than democratic prospects for the future of peaceful inter-state relations looks bleak, even if there is more democracy around. Proponents of creating global governing structures argue that they are the next step in the evolution, essential to facilitating and serving as a basic democratic controlling measure to correct the path of the unbridled force of globalization. Clark assertively counters the perspective by challenging the notion that a collective of failed domestic democracies actually possess the capacity to construct a viable exogenous democratic. Essentially, democracy will not trickle down from the top to intervene and save us from ourselves.

Clark works diligently to incorporate the various theories of international relations into his argument. He methodically confronts the gamut, being mindful not to exclude any one perspective. Lurking beneath Clark's skillful attempt to compare and contrast competing theories within the context of IR and globalization seems to be a tone of infallibility and intellectual superiority.

Clark carries on in protest against dichotomous polarizations created by scholars in the field, while at the same time invoking an argumentative scheme, to contrast the very theories he's accusing for being dichotomous, in a dichotomous juxtaposition. He offers a scathing critique of recent debates for being polarized and unenlightened, and then approaches the topic using the

same binary logic to cancel competing approaches out. His method seems to be unsound in terms of building the case or convincing others of the need for a new theoretical framework. He uses established theories as tools against each other, like matching a positive to a negative, to cancel out their relevance. Through his masterful deconstruction of dominant theories, Clark constructs a theoretical void, which he uses as an opportunity to assert his prescribed agenda for the discipline.

Along the lines of realism, Clark's argument could effectively be shut down in as much as Realists would counter by identifying the international system as nothing more than a mere product of nation-states (Clark concedes that globalization is just that throughout his book, so his theory is a "cross pollination", as Yohannes might point out). The international system has not changed; it still exists as anarchical in nature and the state is the primary unit of analysis. Clark is foolish to consider that the states are influenced by globalization because globalization does not exist. What does exist are states and the systems they create and maintain for the sole purpose of increasing their own relative capability and ensuring survival.

It appears that social constructivists are wedged into a realm where they are borrowing bits and pieces from other theories and reconfiguring them in a pattern that only serves one purpose; to justify their relevance in academia. Social constructivism does not appear to be offering anything new. It seems to be engaged in a fruitless endeavor to gain the attention of the larger players,

almost as if it is suffering from a severe case of middle child syndrome. It does not appear to be stating anything new or interesting, and Clark's desperate, grasping attempt to present a case for constructivism was intellectually tedious to endure. His attempt to reconfigure and sex up the appeal of social constructivism failed miserably, leaving me with a feeling of agitation and, using Clark's choice remark, feeling "unenlightened".