ISSN: 2581-8422, Vol. 08, No. (2) 2025, Pg. 123-126

Current Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities

journalofsocialsciences.org

The Dis-Integrative Revolution: A Challenge for Social Sciences and Humanities

JACK DAVID ELLER

Woxsen University, Hyderabad, India.

Article History

Published on: 23 December 2025

In the wake of World War I and the formation of multinational states like Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, the founder of American anthropology, Franz Boas (1962 [1928]) confidently opined that the desirable and inevitable human future was ever-increasing political integration and peaceful co-existence. Roughly a generation later, Clifford Geertz (1963) gave this felicitous dynamic a name: the integrative revolution. At that time and for several more years, the hope and belief was that cultural and political differences, and with them conflict, would fade in the "new states" emerging from colonialism as people embraced higher-level and more inclusive (and less "primordial") identities, emulating the model of Western states like the UK that had achieved national tranquility and stability.

Of course, even at the time, these pronouncements of integration were exaggerated. New multinational states arose, but old ones like the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires collapsed. Even the UK had fragmented in 1921, most of Ireland breaking free to become the Republic of Ireland (and prophesying a struggle over Northern Ireland). Throughout the recently decolonized world, conflicts flared between peoples, nations, or "ethnic groups" arbitrarily enclosed within a single state, from Sri Lanka to Bangladesh, Biafra, Eritrea, Turkey, and eventually Sudan, Rwanda, and Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, the immediate post-World War II era seemed like a period of inexorable integration, including supra-national institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union, not to mention a thickening web of non-state and inter-state governmentalities including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Health Organization, the World Trade Organization, and an endless array of NGOs (non-governmental organizations). In fact, painful schisms like the partitions of India/Pakistan, Israel/Palestine, and East/West Germany in the 1940s felt like necessary divorces to allow for happier marriages.

By the 1990s if not earlier, the consensus was that two global processes had largely secured a new integrated world order. The first was "liberal internationalism," which according to John Ikenberry (2018)

CONTACT Jack David Eller jdeller@bu.edu Woxsen University, Hyderabad, India.

Doi: https://dx.doi.org/10.12944/CRJSSH.8.2.01

rests on several premises: openness of trade, knowledge, and technology; a rules-based set of inter-state relations; a degree of security cooperation; the notion of an "international society" with shared values; and a commitment to democracy. The alternative, he reasons, is "closed systems" of power blocs, spheres of influence, and protectionism. The second was "globalization," the ambitious and allegedly largely complete "integration between the world's nations, markets, and social and political systems" (Alkharafi and Alsabah 2025: 1). Even more than liberal internationalism, but intimately related to it, globalization means connection and with it, flow: flow of people, capital, goods, technology, and culture (from popular culture to cultural beliefs and values like "freedom," 'human rights," "democracy," and "capitalism"). So certain were many Western pundits of the attainment of this goal that some declared the end of history and the triumph of Western capitalist democracy.

However, at the moment of its apotheosis, the flaws and failures of the integrative revolution became apparent; Ikenberry declares the entire system in crisis. The threats and counterforces, which we could and probably should acknowledge as a *dis-integrative revolution*, come in several mutually reinforcing forms.

Separatism

Geertz himself conceded that the integration of disparate peoples and cultures into unified "nation-states" was not as simple or successful as usually imagined or hoped. Inexpungible "primordial" sentiments and identities survived, demanding recognition if not autonomy. Indeed, he granted that "nation-building" projects often resulted in intensified non-state or pre-state identity and thus identity-based resistance. Walker Connor (1994) went further, hypothesizing that nation-building often if not necessarily entailed nation-destroying, as those previously mentioned primordial ties were suppressed or erased in the campaign for a post-primordial and modern/civil state-society. Consequently, many scholars, fieldworkers, journalists, and diplomats have documented separatist/secessionist movements and violence around the world. Damien Kingsbury (2021), for instance, dedicates chapters to separatist efforts in Europe (Irish, Scots, Basques, Flemish and Walloons, Croats and Bosnians, Czechs and Slovaks, Catalans, etc.), the Caucasus (Chechnya, Dagestan, North Ossetia, Georgia, Azerbaijan), the Near East (Palestinians, Kurds, Yemenis), Africa (Somaliland, Western Sahara, Katanga, Darfur, Mali, Ethiopia, Senegal), South Asia (Sri Lanka, Nagaland, Jammu-Kashmir), and Southeast Asia and Oceania (Kachins and Rohingya in Myanmar, Muslims in Thailand and Philippines, West Papuans and East Timorese in Indonesia), not to mention the achievement of independence by South Sudan and the subsequent clash between the indigenous Nuer and Dinka.

Deglobalization

At the apex of globalization, a countermovement that can only be called deglobalization has been occurring, which Harold James (2018) characterizes as "disembedded unilateralism" featuring trade protectionism (for instance, tariffs on imports) and promotion of domestic industry (for job creation and manufacturing security). Deglobalization also often entails disengagement if not withdrawal from international institutions like the World Trade Organization as well as the abrogation or renegotiation of multilateral trade treaties like NAFTA. For an increasing number of countries and peoples around the world, globalization (by that name and its earlier moniker, neoliberalism) not only failed to deliver prosperity but actually exacerbated dependence and inequality, destroying local agriculture and industry through imposed trade conditions and an influx of cheap foreign goods. Simultaneously, weaker and non-Western states frequently feel that Western/capitalist economic principles and practices are forced on them to their disadvantage through essentially Western-defined and –managed organizations such as the WTO and the World Bank, and lately Western states themselves have complained of the limitations created by rules-based international economic arrangements. Finally, competition from new economic powers, especially China, has shaken the globalized international order—China even offering its own vision of cross-state cooperation through its Belt and Road Initiative and its pursuit of a rival "Sino-centric global order, in which China replaces the US as the dominant state and reshapes the entire order according to its preferences" (Fravel 2025).

Anti-Internationalism Nationalism, and Populism

Running through or beneath the other forces is a rise of political nationalism and a rejection of internationalism, which is ironic in view of recent diagnoses of the death of the state. Purportedly, state borders and state governments were obsolete in the liberal internationalist and globalist environment, but lately states have come roaring back. At the heart of the new nationalism or statism are two factors: sovereignty and culture/civilization. Many state leaders and their citizens sense a loss of sovereignty or freedom of action under the sway of internationalist organizations (to which we should add the International Court of Justice) and agreements; this is one contributor to so-called "Euroscepticism" in which European governments and populations feel victimized by the distant bureaucracy of the European Union and its policies, from economic to immigration policies. Euroscepticism was one driver of "Brexit" or the UK's departure from the EU, a classic gesture of disintegration. The second factor is closely related but distinct, in that transnational integration and the surrender of sovereignty is widely felt to be corrosive to what makes the country or society unique and worthy of respect: its culture or civilization. This culture/civilization may refer to its language, arts, and other customs; it may also refer to its values, which often do not include tolerance of other religions or commitment to liberal democracy, gender diversity, or even human rights. Indeed, religion is commonly at the forefront of the new nationalism, with European countries like Hungary or Poland, for instance, defending their Christian heritage against both modern secularism and immigrant Islam. Sometimes, culture or civilization is a thin disguise for racism. At any rate, as Koen Abts and Sharon Baute (2022) emphasize, this revived and often prickly national exclusivism and chauvinism is typically related to the experience of being "left behind" by international agencies and domestic elites, leading to a populist backlash in which (a) the "true" people or nation strives to regain its control over the government, economy, and culture and (b) this true people/nation attaches itself to a leader who promises to represent them—virtually to embody them—in their campaign of palingenesis or national rebirth, at the expense of international institutions, global economics, and even domestic parties, laws, and legislatures that stand in their way.. This brand of populism (a true people/nation plus a leader/strongman) portends to cut through the dross of modernity and globalism as well the corruption of domestic politics to restore the nation, through the power of the state, to its former political sovereignty, cultural authenticity, and civilizational greatness. It is no wonder that a recurrent slogan is "Make (insert country name) Great Again."

As this short essay has illustrated, there is something tremendously widespread and important happening in the world today, and scholars in many disciplines—especially anthropology, political science, economics, and international studies—have contributed to the description and analysis of this epochal dis-integrative revolution. Hopefully, it is clear that all social sciences and humanities could and should join the effort to understand, critique, and rethink the trajectories of separatism, deglobalization, and virulent nationalism and populism. One key question is whether the dis-integrative revolution we are undergoing is a temporary reaction and adjustment to integration or a new long-term arc of history. Also, social scientists and humanities scholars must be actively engaged in preventing extreme nationalism and strongman populism from becoming the new normal while also imagining a future that is not a mere return to the admittedly Western-dominated internationalism of the last century.

References

1. Boas, F. *Anthropology and Modern Life*. W. W. Norton: New York, 1962 [1928].
2. Geertz, C. (1963) "The Integrative Revolution." In Geertz, C. (ed.). *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa.* The Free Press: New York, 105-157.
3. Ikenberry, G. J. (2018) "The End of Liberal International Order?" *International Affairs* 1, 7-23.
4. Alkharafi, N., & Alsabah, M. (2025) "Globalization: An Overview of Its Main Characteristics and Types, and an Exploration of Its Impacts on Individuals, Firms, and Nations." *Economies* 13 (4), 1-33. https://doi.org/10.3390/economies13040091
5. Connor, W. Ethnonationalism: *The Quest for Understanding. Princeton University Press*: Princeton,

NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.
6. Kingsbury, D. *Separatism and the State*. London and New York: Routledge, 2021.
7. Fravel, M. T. “02 China: Balancing the US, Increasing Global Influence.” Available at https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/03/competing-visions-international-order/02-china-balancing-us-increasing-global-influence.
8. Abts, K., & Baute, S. (2022) “Social Resentment, Blame Attribution and Euroscepticism: The Role of Status Insecurity, Relative Deprivation and Powerlessness.” *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 35 (1), 39-64.