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THE PARADOX OF GLOBALIZATION: WHERE IS ALTERNATIVE?

Abstract: The author critically discusses all too common assumption in the time of social transition that deep political, economic and cultural crisis as manifested through globalization is not properly confronted with alternative. It is argued that more effort should be focused toward paradigmatic shift in the sense of overcoming the old paradigm of methodological nationalism in favour of methodological globalism. In this vein author questions the inflationary use of the notion of globalization and defends a serious and critical stand toward this salient social phenomenon. The paradox of globalization is thus explained through a number of contradicting constituent themes and relevant building blocks of globalization: conceptual ambiguities, diverging theoretical strategies and *last but not least* chaotic (deficit) nature of global governance.

Key words: *social transition, globalization, democracy, civil society, autonomy, global governance*

INTRODUCTION

Proper identification and complex understanding of present social transition requires systematic and coherent scholarly confrontation with the epochal phenomenon of globalization. Due to all too often inflationary use of the notion of globalization it is thus urgent to take a serious and critical stand toward this salient and recent social phenomenon. Researchers in the field of globalization often discuss whether globalization is a recent or historically older social phenomenon. Differences in their viewpoints are not even that big, if we bear in mind that their answers depend upon the definitions used, of course. A possible “compromise” between competing definitions is a distinction between “old” and “new” globalization. “New globalization” in that respect includes at least four sociologically identifiable dimensions (Pauly and Coleman 2008) which were not present in the previous (“pre-modern”) societies.

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Firstly, modern society in the second half of the 20th century is also itself globalized, which, for instance, at least for Europe means that the social formation contextualized in this manner does not exclusively draw on its (ethnic and cultural) roots. *Secondly*, globalization has brought to the surface completely new and so far in history unprecedented challenges, which are supranational by their nature. Consequently, these challenges cannot be resolved only by action of individual states – they demand their close cooperation. *Thirdly*, under the circumstances of globalization, (national) states and communities are by far not as powerful and influential as they were during the Westfalian order. And *fourthly*, globalization opens up new spaces and opportunities for a plural social imagining, which radicalizes the attitude of individuals towards their closer or broader communities (societies). For the definition of “new globalization” we could in this respect use the argument that globalization represents a “transformative” growth of all possible connections and relations between people on our planet, which are essentially transterritorial.

1. CONCEPTUAL FRAME

Due to inflationary use of the term globalization, as already mentioned, it is worth to particularly emphasize the need for a serious and critical treatment of the term. If we bear in mind the relative novelty of the concept understood by users either discursively or descriptively, this is one of the hardest challenges. Apart from that, the concept of globalization is informed by various strategic theoretical choices and, last but not least, by ideological or political affinities. In this sense we could understand globalization as a new social paradigm resulting from the analytical distinction between globalization as an old historical phenomenon – at least as old as capitalism – and globalization as a new paradigm of modern society. Thus, we find it important to discard such perspectives on globalization, which reduce the phenomenon merely to global integration and at the same time overlook the fact that it simultaneously triggers very substantial processes of fragmentation and differentiation.

Our notion of globalization refers to the enhancement of worldwide social processes interconnecting even the most distant places on our planet. The accelerated compression of time and space results in the fact that events on one side of the planet influence the events on the other side in the shortest possible time. As an example, let us mention only the following: the decision of the U. S. Government (or of any other bigger and influential state) to change the interest rates, excessive tropical deforestation, damages and accidents in nuclear plants (for instance Chernobyl), various epidemics, the spreading of AIDS, decisions of supranational institutions such as the European Union, NATO, IMF, World Bank, etc. These examples prove that we should reconsider our existing understanding of time and space.

The notion of globalization as a new paradigm of social sciences has a recent date of origin. It appeared in a dictionary, namely in the *Oxford English Dictionary*,

as late as in 1962, whereas globalization as a paradigm was fully elaborated at least three decades later. Literature about globalization in this respect discusses the spatial turn, i. e. the domination of the space dimension over the time dimension. This fact emphasizes its contradictory nature, that it simultaneously stimulates or addresses two different (contradictory and unifying) processes: localization and in the long run also fragmentation and integration. That is why one of the first researchers of globalization, Roland Robertson (1992), while introducing the notion of “globalization” at the same time appealed to scholars that, when analysing globalization, they should be particularly attentive to processes of heterogenization, which are triggered by it, and not to confine it only to homogeneity. Heterogeneity *per se* of course does not bring only (socially) good and thus the future task is to build an epistemological apparatus capable of understanding both positive and negative aspects of globalization.

If definitions and conceptualizations of globalization should serve to the advancement of knowledge we should note the following (Scholte 2005): definitions and conceptualizations are normatively and politically neutral, they are relative to a concept, they are not definitive; we have to bear in mind their variability, i. e. to be as clear, precise, concise, explicit, consistent and cogent as possible. According to these limitations the author suggests five open definitions of globalization. *First*, globalization as internationalization, which characterizes processes of growing international exchange and interdependence. *Second*, globalization as liberation in terms of removing obstacles on the path to “open” global economy and economy “without borders”, respectively. *Third*, globalization as universalization in terms of “planetary synthesis of cultures” and “global humanism”. The *fourth* definition equals globalization with westernization or modernization, which both include key social structural constituents of modernity (capitalism, rationalism, industrialism, bureaucratism, etc.). The *fifth* definition understands globalization as reconfiguration of geography, i. e. that social space is not anymore in command of primarily territorial spaces, distances and borders. A more precise and general definition of globalization refers to the transformation of whole spatial organization of social relations and transactions.

For optimal exploring of globalization the implementation of concepts *per se* is not enough. In this regard it is necessary to consider the distinction between objective and subjective globalization (Eriksen 2007). The first comprises the reality of the global system acting independently of whether individuals are aware of it or recognize it in all of its dimensions, while the latter refers to its subjective perception, namely that it is rejected or critically and selectively accepted by individuals and collectively. Because globalization is not destined to people and society, they are able with their own action to influence it in one way or another and with different results. When doing so, of course, individuals and communities do not have the same starting-point and therefore the final result of the processes of globalization depends on whether the state in question is big or small, rich or poor, in the centre or (semi-)periphery.

The relative usefulness of these concepts, used in globalization studies, refers to the fact that the global system produces effects on three relatively autonomous levels as well: on the economic, political, cultural and value level respectively. Although dominant form of globalization is determined by capitalism, that does not mean capitalism itself is without contradictions. The power and influence of representative institutions are, regarding their specific role, asymmetrical, which is reflected in conflicts and confrontations between mostly national and transnational actors on the abovementioned levels. The question of who might gain the decisive advantage in taking over the steering wheel of globalization remains unanswered in academic, political and cultural debates. After the onset of the global economic (financial) crisis in 2008, initial enthusiasm regarding the advancing of globalization was replaced by more moderate judgements that there is a lot of room for manoeuvre for processes of internationalization (as predecessor of globalization) to be complemented, while a more sophisticated form of globalization is a prospect which only future might deliver.

2. AVAILABLE THEORETICAL CHOICES

Regarding different theoretical strategies of grasping globalization it is worth mentioning the following “schools” and their three “challengers”: (1) hyperglobalists; (2) sceptics; (3) transformationalists (Held et al 1999). None of the mentioned “schools” is rigidly linked to any ideological view or perspective. Therefore it is not surprising that one can find among “hyperglobalists” both advocates of the orthodox neoliberal view of globalization and marxist authors as well. On the other hand, among sceptics there are also conservatives and radicals which both share similar views on social implications of globalization. It should be added that among the three greatest traditions of social research – liberal, conservative and marxist – there is no uniform point of view on globalization as a social, economic or cultural phenomenon. If they have anything in common, it is precisely the key analytical problems which all three are more or less occupied with: conceptualization, causal dynamics, social and economic consequences, effects concerning state and politics and, finally, historical evolution of globalization.

The hyperglobalistic thesis derives from globalization as a completely new phenomenon in the history of mankind where in global economy there is no place for national states. The global market, global competition, transnational networks of production, trade and finances all accelerate processes of “denationalization” of economies and consequently lead to economies “with no borders”, in which national states (governments) are left only with the role of transmission. Among hyperglobalists neoliberal adoration of individual autonomy and domination of market principles over power of (welfare) state is to be found, as well as more radical or neomarxist oriented critics of actual globalization, in which they all see victory of the oppressive global capitalism. For neoliberal oriented authors the current state of globalization is a harbinger of the first truly global civilization, while for radical thinkers globalization is merely “market civilization” which facilitates new structur-

al patterns of inequality between and within states. For hyperglobalists, new institutions of global regulation and accelerated hybridization demonstrate that we are witnessing the birth of a radically different or new world order, which announces the decline of national states.

The sceptical thesis on the other hand also succumbs to an economical understanding of globalization or to the assumption that globalization primarily means a completely integrated global market and “the law of one price”. “Sceptics” rest upon statistical data on the volume of world trade, investment and workforce flow in the 19th century, which demonstrate that the present degree of globalization is not without a historical precedent and that it is represented in an exaggerated way. Their understanding of globalization is limited to “regionalization” in the context of three big financial and trade blocks: Europe, Asia-Pacific and North America. Moreover, globalization and “regionalization” are understood essentially as contradictory tendencies – as a consequence, global economy nowadays is less integrated was in the classical period of economics when money was backed by gold. Sceptics also call into question the claims of “hyperglobalists” that the present degree of globalization anticipates times of a less state-centric world and are, on the other hand, convinced that national states and their governments in fact shoulder bigger burdens and responsibilities in the domain of regulation and promotion of economic activities across national borders.

The transformational thesis advocates the claim that in the 21st century globalization is the key force which triggers quick and profound social, political and economic changes. These are processes so far unprecedented in history, which forces states and governments to adapt to modified global conditions where there is no distinction between international and internal or foreign and “domestic” affairs. Unlike “hyperglobalists” and sceptics, transformationalists do not foretell the destiny of globalization, in that respect they do not burden themselves with teleologism. “Transformationalist” first of all assert globalization is responsible for a new form of global stratification, i. e. individual states, societies and communities successfully integrate into the emerging world order, whilst others remain on the (semi-)periphery. The global stratification pyramid “in the making” consists of three concentric circles: the first comprises a small number of elite stratum, the second one more or less content people and the third marginalized social strata. Transformationalists otherwise argue that (national) states will preserve a high degree of effective sovereignty and control over its territory in international relations, yet they are aware globalization will on the other hand force them to radically restructure their power, duties, influence and authority which have existed to date. Besides, transformationalists highlight the growing importance of non-territorial forms of economic and political integration, such as multinational corporations, transnational social movements, international agencies in the field of global regulation etc. In that respect the (new) world order is certainly not based anymore on exclusive state-centric political principle and, similarly, also national states should no longer be taken as the only and last instance of governance and decision making in a globalized world.

3. OPEN QUESTIONS

Researchers dealing with problems of globalization, in the last two decades relying on the various (combined) theoretical strategies and methodological applications, have so far in most cases not succeeded in intellectually integrating diffuse discovered knowledge. Canadian researchers of globalization Pauly and Coleman (2008) were therefore trying to abolish or at least improve this shortcoming and so they, together with their collaborators, relied on a much broader repertoire of research questions as usual. They thereby pointed out the following questions:

- Which opportunities and restrictions does globalization bring for individuals and communities trying not only to secure but also to strengthen their autonomy?
- By what means and strategies could individuals and communities optimize their opportunities and minimize the risks of globalization?
- Under what conditions could their strengthened autonomy open real opportunities to either oppose globalization or transform it with a view to productive/creative and not destructive effects?

Not only these two researchers, but also many others are aware that these questions need to be placed in a broader historic context within which we could better understand present processes and identify middle- and long-term trends in them. In such a manner we are able easily and more plausibly identify what is really new in processes of globalization and if there is a historical continuity. In order to understand the relation between globalization and autonomy it is also important to know that this relation is changing in relation to those geopolitical changes which themselves are consequences of permanent transfigurations of (social and political) power. Such complex sociological dynamics is also responsible for perpetual (re)configuration of relations between globalization and autonomy in which pluralistic (individual and collective) identities as the most visible agent of autonomy are simultaneously constructed and (re)constructed. It is precisely identities that are often – when there is a rupture between globalization and autonomy – faced with the highest risk. However, the same applies in reverse: when the relation between globalization and autonomy is in a sufficiently productive cohabitation, identities not only maintain but also more or less freely develop their living potential.

With the advent of globalization, especially in the last two decades, there was a tremendous growth in the number of international normative acts regulating the intensive flow of goods, money and knowledge. Although national states still remain the key players in the global arena, more important role is increasingly assumed also by different international organizations and networks. Above all, supranational organizations, transnational corporations and professional associations in which experts and pragmatists are participating, should be mentioned here. The global information/communication architecture thus contributed to the improved standardization of various normative systems and professional praxes common before the advent of globalization. All that on the other hand widely opened the door to their

continuous exchange and thereby fostered innovations which bring new stimulations necessary for the advancement of the processes of globalization.

The imperative for understanding or expertise in globalization is one side of the coin, but the other, which should be taken into account, is its management, if we, of course, with good reason renounce the occasional and implicit claims that globalization is guided by an “invisible hand”. Such perspective is usually most consistently advocated by “hyperglobalists” who are convinced globalization is an external force which obliges states to subject to it. In this context the case of the European Union is mentioned, where members states give up or share (“pool”) part of their sovereignty to dismiss obstacles in their economic exchange. “Hyperglobalists” are forgetting that such a decision and all the following activities were made precisely by the states themselves and not by some “invisible hand” or enforced political will from outside.

CONCLUSION

An important and unavoidable challenge for sociological exploration of globalization is its relation toward democracy. This problem was not and in some cases even today is not considered as a priority. Partly this could be attributed to the fact that globalization is the latest social phenomenon “discovered” and addressed by sociologists only in the last three decades and partly to the traditional methodological commitment of social sciences to “methodological” nationalism. Or, in other words: regarding the topic of democracy, too many social scientists remain “loyal” to the national state and consequently to the representative model of democracy attained so far in the historical development, including historical regression or authoritative alternatives to democracy. Going beyond “methodological nationalism” with “methodological globalism” is nowadays a challenge addressed only by the boldest scholars.

Just as the ancient idea of democracy could not be applied to states with hundreds of thousands or millions of citizens, we have now a representative democracy which similarly cannot simply be applied to a global sociological and politological level. Instead of (national) states, unable to do that by themselves, decision making with consequences for the entire humanity is nowadays taken over by supranational institutions (IMF, World Bank, G-2, G-8 and others) without democratic or deliberative legitimacy, which are not really responsible to anyone for their – often misguided – decisions. It is possible to agree with experts in the field of international relations that this is the lesser of two evils and better than the conditions in which the mentioned institutions would not make any decisions, leading us – due to the absent “world government” – to the state of anarchy. Some authors express doubts about real and present functioning of democracy on the global level, since they are convinced the latter would strengthen and legitimize hegemony of the global capital and the states behind it. Sceptics draw to our attention that even a minimally practised democracy in territorial states is a better choice than a maximally soft tyrann

ny in the global political community. Besides, in times of global crisis, it is becoming ever more obvious that capitalism is by far not in symbiosis with democracy.

Critics of transnational democracy highlight that there is no necessary condition for democracy on the global level – i. e. a global demos. Global community could hardly be recognized as global demos, however, it should be added that it is ever more crisscrossed and subject to increasing constitutionalisation. The latter refers to rising numbers of multilateral, regional, bilateral and transnational agreements which regulate economic, political, security, environmental, cultural and other relations in the global world. After all, it is possible to find embryonic forms of democracy in them, which may gradually and with necessary political support evolve into a recognizable though not yet sufficient form of transnational democratic governance.

The power of civil society should not be overestimated, since it is itself a social phenomenon from the (most) recent history, just as globalization. Global civil society (Keane 2003) in this respect could be understood as one of the key “tools” for the accomplishment of a large and necessary transition from international society to global community. Whether this is going to happen is for now hard to predict. Many times history has taken an unpredictable path. Globalization reached a point where (national) states are not capable of regulating everything that happens on the global level anymore. The application of the rules of the game from the repertoire of democratic norms of individual bigger and most powerful (national) states on the global level could not be regarded as global governance. Global civil society in this respect offers an alternative, although for now in a form that is not sufficiently elaborated. It is evident that for a more or less convincing if not robust form of global governance – if we neglect the hardly reachable ideal of cosmopolitan democracy, which could to a certain extent satisfy minimal democratic criterions – in addition to historical time much more political responsibility or will is required and, especially in order to make sense of it, adequate sociological imagination.

Bauman (1998) is arguably worried because on the global level we witness not only that nobody manages globalization, but also because there is a critical and maybe fatal deficit of knowledge about what globalization really means. According to him, such a state of a “new world disorder” is due to the fact that in confrontation between globalization and universalization the latter is the weakest link. For globalization it is fatal that it has lost its “centre”, which is hard if not impossible to determine, while universalization is maintaining the specific discourse appropriate for the modern society, which is based on the hope that even on the global level an order specifically tailored to humans and their authentic social communities is possible.

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