

Discussion Paper

Has globalization radically changed the international system?

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Frequently, the external and perceptible signs of happiness, the indications of exaltation, appear when, in reality, everything walks towards the twilight. These external signs require of a lot of time to manifest, in the same way in which the light of many stars in the sky appears in the precise moment we do not know whether, while we look at them, they begin to extinguish or they have already extinguished, at the same time their light is still shining ...

-Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks*

1.

The difficulties found in defining globalization point out its enormous importance for the understanding of contemporary reality. Therefore, after revising the major definitions and perspectives, on the basis of a different conceptual approach, this paper attempts to demonstrate that globalization has not changed the international system; rather, that it represents the culmination of the Western project (of which the international system is a contingent creation), that it is constituted by the high development of its major trends and their convergence in points of conflict that challenge the viability of the Western project as they promote anarchy and conflict at local and global level.

2.

Globalization is, according to Jan Art Scholte, the result of “a combination of: (a) the emergence of global consciousness, as a product of rationalist knowledge; (b) certain turns in the development of capitalism; (c) technological innovations, especially in communications and data processing; and (d) the construction of enabling regulatory frameworks, especially through states and suprastate institutions”¹. In a similar way, Michael Mann points out the importance of the transformations around the globe:

¹ Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A critical introduction*, (USA: St Martin’s Press, 2000): p. 3

“today we live in a global society. It is not a unitary society nor is it an ideological community or a state, by it is a single power network”² and Sands indicates the growing interdependence and the creation of a set of global structures: “interdependence caused by the avalanche of international laws means that states are constrained by international obligations over an increasingly wide range of actions”³. The reality of the change introduced in the world by recent trends is undeniable.

Evidently, these changes are not uniform and affect different regions and different strata of society in different ways⁴. Although, the notion of change is generally uncontested, there is little consensus in “explanations, implications, value judgments and prescriptions.”⁵ In other words, it seems easy to detect change and even its major sources; however, the significance of globalization is, essentially, a contested concept. In most explanations, knowledge and ideology converge in compelling ideological discourses that provide, at the same time, interpretations of the world and normative approaches that serve specific purposes⁶.

In this respect, there is no consensus in the different attempts to explain globalization or *perspectives* on globalization. According to Giddens, globalization is “an enlargement of modernity, from society to the world. It is modernity on a global scale”⁷. In a similar way, for Bull and Watson, “it was the expansion of Europe that first brought about the economic and technological unification of the globe” and “it was the European-dominated international society of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that first expressed its political unification”⁸. For John Gray it is an “historical process”⁹ and, for Jan Aart Scholte and David Held, “the advent and spread of what are alternately called ‘global’, ‘supraterritorial’, ‘transworld’, or ‘transborder’ social spaces”¹⁰.

Moreover, there are different perspectives on globalization based on the idea of change. Firstly, the *globalist* perspective, also known as the *hyperglobalist thesis*¹¹, asserts that “globalization is a vital and inescapable contemporary social process”¹²; on the other hand, the *traditionalists* or *sceptics* deny the reality of such change, pointing out the old history of world interdependence and the importance of national economies in the contemporary world¹³; finally, the *transformationalists* acknowledge change¹⁴ but

² Michael Mann as cited in Ian Clark, *Globalization and Fragmentation: International Relations in the Twentieth Century*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 1998): 22

³ Philippe Sands, *Lawless world*, (England: Penguin Books, 2006): xvii

⁴ Chris Brown, Kristen Ainley, *Understanding International Relations*, (China: Palgrave, 2005): 164

⁵ Jan Aart Scholte, *Op. cit.* p. 3

⁶ “The power of globalization orients the development of dominant knowledge. And knowledge about globalization is, in turn, represented as ideology: a way of interpreting the world and for contemplating strategies of action...Powerful knowledge sets and...compelling ideological discourses are fundamental to eliciting consent and lessening reliance on the material and coercive instruments of a hegemonic order” James H. Mittelman, *Wither Globalization? The vortex of knowledge and ideology*, *Op. cit.* p. 4

⁷ Ian Clark, *Op. cit.* p. 23

⁸ *Ibid* p. 24

⁹ John Gray, *False dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism*, (UK: Granta Books, 1998): 55

¹⁰ Jan Aart Scholte, *Op. cit.* p. 3

¹¹ David Held, Anthony McGrew (et al.), *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*, (UK: Polity Press, 2000):3

¹² Chamsy el-Ojeili and Patrick Hayden, *Critical theories of globalization*, (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006):

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¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 15

deny that they have brought a completely new era and are cautious about the future of this transformations.¹⁵ According to the previous definitions, the question whether globalization has *radically changed the international system*, implicitly challenges possible answers to be placed in some point of the spectrum within the *globalist* and the *traditional* thesis. However, it is possible to conceptualize globalization in a different way.

“Globalization is in the danger of becoming...the cliché of our times: the big idea which encompasses everything from global financial markets to the Internet but delivers little substantive insight into the contemporary human conditions”¹⁶. In the light of the multiplicity of definitions, perspectives and interpretations shown above, it is clear why Globalization appears to be irrelevant and a source of “nonsense”¹⁷. The definitions of globalization based on an identification of change in social systems suffer from the risk of falling in arbitrariness, given the conventional nature of such discussions¹⁸ and, moreover, from the incapacity to “define the main features of this change.”¹⁹ As the study of Buzan and Little on *world systems* indicates, the alleged *globalized world* possesses, in terms of the analysis of *scale, interaction capacity and structure*, characteristics of the culmination of the continuous social development of the 20th century rather than of a new social system, even if there are changes in *units, process and structures*²⁰. This places a new challenge in the previous definitions and perspectives of globalization.

Globalization can be better understood as an advanced stage in the development of the Western project for the world. In this respect, the challenges in the global system can be seen as the product of the progress of the major ideologies or institutions of the West: deterritorialization and technological development (product of rationalism and science oriented culture); economic interdependence and the creation of integrated global markets (consequence of individualism and the imposition of free market economy); global political system of states, inter and supra-national institutions (as the product of the development of the state system, democratic and universal aspirations and the belief in an international society); the creation of a global consciousness and cultural trends (modern and posmodern) associated to the development of Western thought and epistemology²¹.

3.

If, as stated above, globalization is simply an advanced stage in the development of Western civilization, it would be prudent to ask: Why is it so polemical? Why does it

¹⁵ David Held, Anthony McGrew (et al.), *Op. cit.* p. 1

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 7

¹⁷ Chris Brown, Kristen Ainley, *Understanding International Relations, Op. cit.* p. 164

¹⁸ Such as the debate on whether interdependence in the pre-World War II international system was greater than in the contemporary world or “Marx famous comments in the 1848 *Communist Manifesto*” as evidence that globalization is far from recent thing. For an historical account of globalization, see Chamsy el-Ojeili and Patrick Hayden, *Op. cit.* p. 15

¹⁹ Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History: Remarking the study of International Relations*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 2000): 349

²⁰ Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *Op. cit.* pp. 349-363

²¹ Scholte identifies as trends of globalization: global consciousness, rationalist knowledge, capitalism, technological innovation, constitution of regulatory frameworks (states and suprastate institutions). Jan Aart Scholte, *Op. cit.* p. 3

seem to provoke so many passionate reactions (both in favour and against it) and is referred to as a singular phenomenon with an agency of its own? According to Theodore von Laue:

The world revolution of Westernization—the greatest and most momentous social, moral and religious, as well as political revolution...has run its course, virtually completing its work. ‘The most refined principles’ of Western society have now been implanted in a non-Western population...the anti-Western counterrevolutionaries have been absorbed into the domestic politics of developing countries and into the routine wrangles of the global state system; the Western tools of cultural and political domination are now the property of all humanity²²

Contrary to von Laue’s opinion, it is clear that the high degree of development of the West, of the process of *Westernization*, has not run its course. Neither the counterrevolutionaries have been silenced, as the events of 9/11 clearly demonstrate – rather they have been given new tools and instruments for their agency; nor have the Western values been successfully implanted in the non-Western world, as the difficulties concerning the attempts to create artificially supported democratic states in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate²³. On the contrary, the process of *Westernization* –if understood as the Western project for the world– has indeed achieved a high development, but only to find that the institutions and values that it created and promoted have, once adopted, taken on a “logic and a life of their own”²⁴ and tend to be in constant conflict with each other.

Therefore, in globalization –as the culmination of the Western project– the high degree of development reached by each of the multiple trends has advanced points of mutual conflict. Among others, the conflicts between: (1) nation-state and free market economy; (2) free market economy and the social structure; (3) global social space and fragmentation and (4) nation-state, free market economy and the environment.

The major point of conflict within the Western project is between the Westphalian nation-state system and the advanced development of capitalism and free market economy. The argument is expressed with extreme clarity by Susan Stronge and sustained by Hoffman²⁵, Schumpeter²⁶ and Creveld²⁷:

The territorial sovereign state is no longer capable of performing the role it once did...(1) the global financial system is now beyond the control of any government and the institutions that governments have created to attempt monetary management...(2) the inability of the system of sovereign states to cope with the consequences of environmental degradations and (3) double failure of humanitarianism: (a)the present economic order works to increase

²² Theodore H. von Laue, *The World Revolution of Westernization: The Twentieth Century in Global Perspective*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 1987): 334

²³ “Cut and run? America's voters are entitled to punish George Bush. They should not punish the people of Iraq”, *The Economist*, Oct 26th 2006.

²⁴ Philippe Sands, *Op. cit.* p. xvii

²⁵ Stanley Hoffmann, *Op. cit.* p. 3-4

²⁶ Joseph Schumpeter as cited in John Gray, *False dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism*, (UK: Granta Books, 1998): 55

²⁷ Martin Van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State*, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000): p. 415

global inequality, (b) inequalities within 'successful' states grow worse, as the possibility to sustain welfare states decreases"²⁸

One of the major arguments in defence of the state in the midst of Globalization, asserts that it remains the primary agent in world politics, since it has not been replaced by any other similar institution²⁹. Some scholars even argue that it is "state action –including coercion- that makes neoliberal globalization possible" since "states are agencies of a globalizing trend."³⁰

However, it is true that globalization has unleashed "a set of forces which combine to restrict the freedom of action of governments and states by blurring the boundaries of domestic politics, transforming the conditions of political decision-making, changing the institutional and organizational context of national politics, altering the legal framework and administrative practices of governments and obscuring the lines of responsibility and accountability of national states themselves."³¹ In other words, the development of the free market in a global scale has undermined the authority and power of the nation-state, and thus is preventing it from providing the traditional protection and welfare for its population.

In consequence, the decline of the state promotes further contradictions within the Western project: on one hand, it enhances (among and within states) a "growing polarization between winners and losers in the global economy"³² and "the empowerment of civil society, and particularly economic actors (firms, banks), process formations (IGOs, regimes) and structures (markets), in relation to governments"³³.

There is no question that the Western world "rather than being a single strategic-political space, with a single set of rules of the game, the international system has divided into two worlds"³⁴, this is the conflict of the *free market economy and the social structure*. This is probably one of the major sources of conflict and instability in the globalized world and is reflected in the reality of poverty, hunger and underdevelopment. It is clear that "the worldwide promotion of neoliberal economic policies...has been accompanied by increasing inequalities within and between states"³⁵. In other words, the expansion of global free market is maintaining a broken social order and instituting a chaotic state of uncertainty and inequality: "for each person, whether the coming changes will be good or bad depends on one's sex, family relationship, economic position, social status, occupation, organizational affiliation, and so on. *Above all, it is a question of our willingness to discard old certainties and come to terms with the brave new world awaiting us*".³⁶

²⁸ Chris Brown, *Sovereignty, Rights and Justice*, (USA: Polity, 2002): 233, 234

²⁹ Stanley Hoffmann, *Op. cit.* p. 3-4

³⁰ Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes, "Policing and global governance", in Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall (ed.), *Power in Global Governance*, (UK: Cambridge University Press – Cambridge Studies in International Relations, 2005): 65

³¹ Christopher Pierson, *The Modern State*, (UK: Routledge, 1996): 192, 193

³² David Held, Anthony McGrew (et al.), *Op. cit.* p. 4

³³ Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *Op. cit.* p. 359

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 353

³⁵ Caroline Thomas, "Poverty, development and hunger" in John Baylis and Steve Smith, *The Globalization of World Politics: An introduction to international relations*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 2001): 560

³⁶ Martin Van Creveld, *Op. cit.* p. 420

What are the consequences? Some radical interpretations claim that: “global markets are the engines of creative destruction...by eating away the foundations of bourgeois societies and imposing massive instability on developing countries...is endangering liberal civilization”³⁷ Nonetheless, even the traditional authorities in the matter point out the potential risk that this global divide represents: “There is greater recognition that security and development are intimately interlinked. Indeed, Camdessus, speaking as Managing Director of the IMF, has referred to poverty as ‘the ultimate systemic threat’”³⁸.

In any case, the expansion of the free market economy has created two separate worlds, one world “defined by a postmodern security community of powerful advanced industrial democracies” and another one “of modern and premodern states [societies]...[in which] political power is frequently contested by force”³⁹, the technological development –particularly in communications and transportation systems–, also product of the Western development, permits interaction between these two and, in combination with the undermined authority and power of the state, it results in a constant source of potential conflict and anarchy. Furthermore, by empowering civil society –groups that are in nature irresponsible or unaccountable and antidemocratic⁴⁰–, it enhances the effective agency of a number of groups and interests without normative foundation⁴¹. This is the paradox or conflict of *global social space and fragmentation*: a *fragmented* world of these two types of weakened states (and perhaps societies) –postmodern and premodern, rich and poor– has been tied by technology into one single *global social space* –in which groups of civil society have increased their capacities and are able to freely interact–, prone to conflict and continuous threats to peace and security in the form of: international criminal networks and criminal activities⁴², terrorism, global pandemics and degradation of natural resources⁴³.

Finally, the conflict of *nation-state, free market economy and the environmental degradation* arises from the incapacity of states to deal with global environmental problems caused by the new way of production brought by the expansion of a global free market. Moreover, the mass production, consumption and pollution promoted by the capitalist model bring to mind the question whether –without the prompt introduction of new technologies– it is possible to maintain the system of production without endangering the resources indispensable for the survival of humanity? In this case, the traditional economic problem of externalities taken to the global scale might as well indicate how the expansion of capitalism as the main vehicle for the extension of the West has come into conflict with the very basis for the survival of civilization, to the extent that to some thinkers “environment is the national security of the early twenty-

³⁷ John Gray, *Op. cit.* p. 210

³⁸ Caroline Thomas, “Poverty, development and hunger”, *Op. cit.* p. 560

³⁹ Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *Op. cit.* p. 353

⁴⁰ Chris Brown, Kristen Ainley, *Understanding International Relations, Op. cit.* p. 180

⁴¹ *Ibid*

⁴² “In a globalizing world, the lines of legitimate authority are blurred. This tendency is especially apparent with regard to licit and illicit activities” James H. Mittelman and Norani Othman (ed.), *Capturing globalization*, (UK: Routledge Advances in International Relations and Global Politics, 2001): 5

⁴³ “Globalization, in turn, engenders both accommodation and resistance. After all, this power structure has an uneven impact on various strata in different regions and countries” James H. Mittelman, *Wither Globalization? The vortex of knowledge and ideology, Op. cit.* p. 4, 5

first century”⁴⁴ Whether the West, through the creation of new institutions of global governance or the transformation of its ideologies and trends, will be able to solve its contradictions is uncertain. What is clear is that, otherwise, chaos and anarchy seem to be the major companions of its expansion.

4.

“The world, united and split, has problems both with its floor and with its ceiling. The problem of the floor is the crisis of the states, no longer a very effective agent, often under attack, even when it is solid, and certainly no solid everywhere. The problem of the ceiling is that of world governance: we have, at present, neither a concert, or society, of great powers nor sufficiently powerful and authoritative international organizations.”⁴⁵ This metaphor effectively captures the problems of the *globalized* world from the political point of view, which has been prioritized in this argument. Nonetheless, globalization comprises not only the changes in the global political system, but those in culture, values and world views and systems of knowledge that shape the elemental social interactions⁴⁶, such as the difficulties of implementing Western institutions in non-Western cultures⁴⁷.

Nevertheless, throughout this essay it has been shown that there are several conflictive points as a result of the highly developed Western project –*Globalization*–; that this advanced stages do not necessarily represent evidence of social change⁴⁸ and that, moreover, conflicts arising from them place a major challenge to the Western civilization, particularly, as sources of anarchy and clashes, at the same time they point out the incapacity of the Western civilization to satisfy the demands it has created in the high stages of the development of its own ideologies and institutions.

Ultimately, the difficulties to deal with global anarchy –a subject to which several pages could be easily devoted- create an appropriate space to question whether “the global anarchy in which we find ourselves is an historical fate against which we are bound to struggle, but which we are powerless to overcome” since, in the light of the contradictions and conflicts of the Western project, it might well be “one of history’s darkest ironies if the Enlightenment project of a world civilization ends in a chaos of sovereign states and stateless peoples struggling for the necessities of survival.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Kaplan as cited in Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *Op. cit.* p. 358

⁴⁵ Stanley Hoffmann, *Op. cit.* p. 5

⁴⁶ Michael Mann, *The sources of social power*, (USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 22

⁴⁷ “As a largely invisible ingredient the West’s spiritual discipline has never effectively spread around the world as part of the outpouring of Western material culture...the West has left the interdependent world of its creation without guidance, without a rational explanation on how to cement the fragile life-supporting unity into a true community. Thus, both in the West and in the non-Western world, the forces of anarchy are on the march” Theodore H. von Laue, *Op. cit.* p. 362

⁴⁸ Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *Op. cit.* pp. 349-363

⁴⁹ John Gray, *Op. cit.* p. 208

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