

Globalisation and Neoliberalism: A New Theory for New Times?

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1 The Concept of Globalisation

As far as intellectual fashions go, the concept of globalisation has been a phenomenal success. Popularised in the financial and business press in the 1980s, the concept became the staple of academic conversations in the 1990s, especially in the social sciences. While globalisation cannot be singled out as the only concern among contemporary social scientists, it is in all probability the most popular topic of the past two decades, having been described as a ‘near obsession’ (Ritzer and Goodman 2003, p. 569). Such epithets are not based on mere impressions. For instance, in the Oxford Libraries Information System (OLIS) database, which contains over five million titles (mainly books and periodicals) held by over 100 libraries associated with Oxford University, there are over 2,500 titles with the word ‘globalization’ or ‘globalisation’ in them, published between 1988 and 2008. For comparison, this leaves even the key concept of the 1980s, postmodern (and its derivatives), behind, together with a serious current contender, namely, social capital (Fine 2010, p. 15; see also Ampuja 2012, p. 12; Scholte 2005, p. xiv).

Besides this huge volume, another characteristic of academic globalisation literature is its inclusiveness. Rather than being tied only to changes in the economy, it ‘might be better’, so argue a team of researchers that have been crucial for establishing globalisation discourse in academia (Held et al.), to conceive globalisation ‘as a highly differentiated process which finds expression in all the key domains of social activity (including political, military, the legal, the ecological, the criminal, etc.)’ (Held et al. 1999, p. 12). No wonder, then, that globalisation has become a central theme in widely different fields of social science, including sociology, economics, anthropology, psychology, education, communication studies, and political

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science. Yet the capacity of globalisation to appear in innumerable scholarly contexts is a double-edged sword. Several commentators have pointed to the indeterminacy and lack of specificity of 'globalisation', characterising it, for example, as a concept that creates 'an accumulation of confusion rather than an accumulation of knowledge' (Van Der Bly 2005, pp. 890–891). In light of such suspicions, a remarkable feature of globalisation discourse has been its resilience, its continuing capacity to generate debate within and across different disciplines.

Why is this so? An important reason why the concept of globalisation has gained such a firm foothold in academia is due to the fact that it is not only used to *describe* a host of changes in social and cultural life, but that it has also been developed, with much ambition, into a *theory or explanation* of their causes and consequences. Writing about the implications of globalisation for sociology, Urry warns against viewing it 'as merely an extra level or domain that can be added to existing sociological analyses that can carry on regardless'; instead, globalisation refers to a new type of research that is not 'focused upon the study of given, bounded or 'organized' capitalist societies' (Urry 2003, p. 3). Here one encounters the key argument that is repeated by globalisation theorists time and again, namely, that the logic of nation-states with their exclusive borders has given way to the logic of cross-border interactions and flows and that this completely transforms the way in which we should think about society and its change.

Such discussions of globalisation belong to a broader perspective according to which our epoch is so different from previous ones that earlier models of change, including the classical sociological tradition as a whole (functionalism, Marxism, etc.), no longer provide the means by which we can understand the economic, political, social and cultural logics of our time.

Globalisation is the most important keyword of this intellectual movement, but it is closely accompanied by many other catchwords and metaphors that are used to define the social today, such as flows, networks, hybrids, cosmopolitanism, mobility, connectivity, speed, time-space compression, uncertainty, and contingency. These concepts have become dominant in the social sciences, to the point of establishing a new theoretical orthodoxy that we can define as globalisation theory.

Globalisation theory thus refers to a renewal of social theory, to a claim that we need a new theory for new times that explains how and why complex and geographically expanded social forms, qualitatively distinct from previous ones, have emerged. As I will note later on, such explanations rely heavily on arguments about technological developments, especially the so-called information revolution that has attracted much interest in social theory in recent decades.

While the concept of globalisation as such is no longer considered even by its advocates as fresh as was earlier the case, the substantial theoretical and political ideas that lie behind this concept continue to influence social scientific thinking in powerful ways. In this article, I will critically examine those ideas. In the first section, I will discuss the general nature of globalisation theory and identify its key arguments. After that I will point out the centrality of media and communications in several noted globalisation theorists' work, calling into question their preoccupation with new media technologies and their assumption that the impact of

those technologies is historically so significant that it necessitates a complete renewal of social theory.

A consequent point, developed in the final two sections of the article, is that at the same time as globalisation theorists have diverted attention to new communication technologies and networks, they have shown a massive disinterest in powerful political and economic forces that continue to shape the society. I will argue that this feature is not unrelated to the specific historical conjuncture in which globalisation theory rose to prominence, that is, the post-1989 period characterised by the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the global triumph of neoliberal capitalism. Besides analysing the contours of globalisation theory, I will thus also address its political implications, namely, the question of whether or to what extent neoliberalism, as a political ideology, has affected the focuses and ways of reasoning that are typical for globalisation theory.

2 Globalisation Theory as the ‘Spatiotemporal Reformulation of Social Theory’

Academic discussions concerning globalisation took off in the period between late 1980s and mid-1990s. Advocates of the idea that globalisation should take the centre stage in social theory stressed the importance of increasing interconnectedness of the world. What they claimed was that instead of conceiving the world as a system constituted by economic, political and sometimes overt military competition between hierarchically positioned nation-states, the proper way to capture the nature of the post-cold war era was to forget such ‘territorialist’ analyses. They had been made redundant by the realisation that the most important development of the new historical moment was ‘the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa’ (Giddens 1990, p. 64). Much of the early efforts to define globalisation followed similar cosmopolitan lines in claiming that the world had become, more than ever, a singular whole in which the humanity together faces common threats and risks (e.g. the global climate change, pandemics) and where people all over the world have developed a global consciousness (rather than one that is tied to the nation or their immediate locality; see, e.g. Robertson 1992, p. 8).

A more analytically differentiated definition of globalisation was offered by Held et al., for whom it referred to ‘a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power’ (Held et al. 1999, p. 16). Such a definition gave globalisation a truly extensive scope. Synchronically, Held and his associates analysed globalisation in a way that could, in principle, include all imaginable material and nonmaterial processes, provided that they could be demonstrated to be about ‘interregional flows’ that give rise to ever more complex

global social interactions. Diachronically, it transpires that globalisation, thus understood, has a broad time frame, stretching far back in human history, although the authors emphasised the intensity and velocity of contemporary 'thick' patterns of globalisation against their previous forms (Held et al. 1999, pp. 429–431).

Such search for novelties is common for globalisation theorists. They are interested in answering the question of how is our era different from the earlier one, typically with the help of dualistic concepts that propose a shift from modernity to another kind of modernity (whether it be 'late', 'high', 'second', 'liquid' and so on). Following this mode, Albrow (1996) argues that 'globalisation' or 'globality' are terms that offer a way of speaking about radically new things that should not be reduced back to *modern* experiences. For him, globalisation is a 'marker for a profound social and cultural transition' which, like 'Renaissance', refers 'to the aggregate of historical changes over a determinate period of history' (Albrow 1996, p. 95). Gesturing polemically towards Marxism, Albrow maintains that the new problematic of globalisation or globality 'can never be as precise as that of capital' (Albrow 1996, p. 90). This is so because old certainties have given way to new ambiguities, and today, 'we are aiming to depict the character of an epoch without deriving it from any single principle, or indeed from any set of principles' (Albrow 1996, p. 109).

While Albrow's proposition here is extreme in its indeterminacy, it marks a general difficulty in mainstream sociology of globalisation: a lack of analytic precision. It is quite common for academic analyses of globalisation to end up claiming that it is such a broad and multidimensional process that one cannot define who or what is driving it forward; it is therefore symptomatic that Anthony Giddens (2002) has written of globalisation as a 'runaway' phenomenon or that globalisation theory has recently mixed up with theories of complexity which propose that the future trajectory of society is so open-ended and indeterminate 'that current phenomena [may] have outrun the capacity of the social sciences to investigate' them (Urry 2003, p. 38).

Defeatism of this kind is rejected by Jan Aart Scholte, another key globalisation theorist, who argues that 'every study of globalisation should include a careful and critical examination of the term itself', since '[i]f a core definition is slippery, then the knowledge built upon it is likely to be similarly shaky' (Scholte 2005, p. 54). Seeking more precision than Albrow or Urry, Scholte claims that globalisation requires 'a multifaceted social explanation' that 'attributes the growth of transplanetary connectivity' to four primary dynamics: (1) capitalist production and accumulation strategies; (2) changes in regulatory and governance mechanisms that have facilitated increasing global connections in the economy, travel, cultural exchange, disease control and so on; (3) changes in identity construction so that there is 'a shift from nationalism towards pluralism and hybridity in respect of identity'; and (4) the spread of rationalism and instrumental reason as the dominant knowledge framework, accompanied by the rise of a secular global consciousness (Scholte 2005, p. 121).

In this way, Scholte gives a more concrete picture of what drives globalisation than many of his colleagues. However, Scholte (2005, p. 135, 154) admits that his

explanation is ‘an eclectic synthesis’ that refers to ‘an intricate combination’ the named four dynamics, none of which has primacy over the others. Because of this, he does not want to analyse how these forces are connected vis-à-vis each other. Such an analysis would lead to a theoretical discussion of, say, the kinds of relationships between capitalism and the rise of instrumental rationality or between recent changes in political regulation and capitalism in its neoliberal phase. Without this kind of theoretical discussion – which is not attempted primarily in order to avoid the charge of this or that form of determinism (Scholte 2005, pp. 153–154) – even the kind of causal framework of globalisation that Scholte puts forward is bound to remain more or less vague, which is a recurrent and, indeed, intentional feature of mainstream globalisation theory.

Is there something wrong here? Many academic globalisation experts would answer in the negative: globalisation is a ‘multicausal’ and indeterminate affair and it should be analysed as such. Period. But here is the core issue: the main argument of the kind of globalisation literature that has been reviewed above does not really analyse in great detail the causal forces *behind* globalisation. At the least, it is not on this terrain that the most prominent intellectual battles are being fought. A more important theoretical development has been the attempt to turn globalisation *itself* into a causal force.

This is a significant distinction. Rosenberg (2000, p. 3) has noted that any attempt to involve globalisation in the explanation of social change has two alternatives: either it must rely on preestablished social theories (i.e. classical sociological theories of modernity or capitalism) in order to provide an answer to the question of what globalisation is, how it is being caused and with what consequences or it must try to claim that the concept of globalisation *itself* denotes a new kind of social theory that will make these changes comprehensible. Rosenberg argues that in the first strategy, ‘globalisation’ remains a descriptive term, something to be explained by other means; only in the latter it becomes ‘the *explanans* of the argument’, and it ‘can legitimately function as such only insofar as a spatiotemporal reformulation of social theory succeeds’ (Rosenberg 2005, p. 12).

The reference to ‘spatiotemporal reformulation’ here is crucial and one that requires more elaboration. A basic definition of globalisation as increasing worldwide ‘interconnectedness’ could not suffice alone to make it the central category of social theory. In other words, evoking global ‘interconnectedness’ in every social and cultural domain does not explain anything, for it begs the question of what has made the world more interconnected. Similarly, Scholte’s ‘eclectic synthesis’ of different dynamics behind globalisation is inadequate to produce a theory of an epochal change. Instead, such an effort, as expressed by many globalisation theorists, rests on more sturdily built theoretical foundation: the elevation of the status of time and space as theoretical concepts and tools for sociological analysis.

Already quite a while back, Giddens (1979, p. 54) lamented that their importance was neglected in social theory and demanded that it ‘must acknowledge, as it has not done previously, time-space intersections as essentially involved in social existence’. He didn’t have to wait for long, as the rise of globalisation as an academic topic in the 1990s answered to his call perfectly. In the burgeoning globalisation

literature, references to the spatial and temporal restructuration of society became frequent, and we have witnessed a surge in discussion concerning ‘the annulment of temporal/spatial distances’ (Bauman 1998, p. 18), the demise of the nation-state, the deterritorialisation or hybridisation of culture, the formation of ‘Empire’ (Hardt and Negri 2000) that displaces former imperialist power struggles and so on.

After reading through many influential globalisation theorists’ work, we can reconstruct the contours of a recurrent intellectual procedure that consists of four arguments. First, globalisation is defined by them as a process of intensification of worldwide network and flows; second, in order to raise the stakes, it is claimed that this phenomenon has huge causal significance in that it enforces overall social and cultural transformation (e.g. Held et al. 1999, p. 31); third, the elaboration of the significance of globalisation is transmuted into a spatiotemporal framework that purportedly transcends previous sociological perspectives; and fourth, claims concerning the novelty of new media and communication technologies are presented in support of this framework, so as to convince the reader once and for all that we live today in a different kind of global era. Although media and communications is only one ingredient of the argument, it should not be seen merely as a rhetorical ornament of little significance. Instead, it is of strategic importance for the named ‘spatiotemporal reformulation’ that globalisation theorists have advanced, in different ways, as the basis of a new social theory.

3 Globalisation and Communications Technology

Emphatic declarations concerning qualitative differences caused by new means of communication to social relations are a typical feature of globalisation theory. Giddens, for example, argues that especially with the advent of satellites and other types of advanced electronic communications, ‘[f]or the first time ever, instantaneous communication is possible from one side of the world to the other’ and that this ‘alters the very texture of our lives’ (Giddens 2002, pp. 11–12; see also Held et al. 1999, p. 15, pp. 436–437; Beck 2000, p. 12). More programmatically, the salience of media-based arguments for globalisation theory is shown by Scholte. He claims that globalisation – if superficially discussed – easily gets mixed up with processes that have a long history, such as internationalisation, liberalisation, westernisation or modernisation. Since these concepts have been around in social theory for a long time, they are not helpful in identifying what is new in globalisation today. Therefore, Scholte (2005, p. 59) proposes that we need an understanding of globalisation that will break new ground and that this can be reached by conceiving globalisation as the rise of ‘supraterritoriality’. From this perspective, globalisation is viewed as a process that causes social and cultural relations to disengage from the restrictions of time and space, due to which we need to bid farewell to ‘methodological territorialism’ (Scholte 2005, pp. 65–66; see also Beck 2006; Urry 2000).

The crucial point here is that Scholte justifies the novelty of ‘supraterritoriality’ through references to media-technological innovations, in particular. Ever since the

birth of printing, advancements in communications technology – the continuous acceleration of communication by the succession of one type of electronic means after another – have led to a continuous reduction of the significance of location and distance as limiting factors in human connectivity, without eliminating them completely. With the invention and expansion of new communications technology, however, territorial distance is suddenly of little significance as ‘distance is covered in effectively no time, and territorial boundaries present no particular impediment’ (Scholte 2005, p. 62; see also Rosenberg 2000, p. 24). It is this feature that compels the use of new concepts, such as ‘transplanetary simultaneity and instantaneity’, the spread of which has taken ‘social relations substantially *beyond* territorial space’ (Scholte 2005, p. 62). A prime example of such a qualitative change is the Internet, a ‘supraterritorial communication par excellence, instantly relaying a full range of visual and auditory signals anywhere on the planet’ (Scholte 2005, p. 67).

Arguably the most influential sociologist of the recent two decades, Manuel Castells, repeats in many different variations the key argument of globalisation theory, according to which place-based social structures give way to networks and flows that give rise to a new economy, new kinds of social and power relations and new cultural experiences, together with providing new frames for political action. In a passage towards the end of the first volume of his trilogy, Castells sums up his position, arguing that ‘as an historical trend, dominant functions and processes in the Information Age are increasingly organised around networks’ and ‘that this networking logic induces a social determination of a higher level than that of the special social interests expressed through the networks; the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power’ (Castells 2000, p. 500). This constitutes his ‘overarching conclusion’ (Castells 2000, p. 500).

For Castells, advances in information and communications technology, especially the emergence of the Internet, form the basis for a new ‘social morphology’ that dominates the society today: the network that he speaks about is primarily an electronic communications network. Even though Castells admits that there have been networks in earlier periods of human history, he maintains that they are today of different kind. New information and communications technologies ‘have spread throughout the globe with lightning speed’ in the past decades, ‘connecting the world’ in a more fundamental sense than was the case with previous technological revolutions (Castells 2000, p. 32).

The main theoretical point offered by Castells is the argument that while networks of today are not ‘placeless’, their ‘structural logic’ is, so that while ‘places do not disappear ... their logic and their meaning becomes absorbed in the network’ (Castells 2000, p. 443). It is of significance that in making such claims about new communications networks, Castells borrows strongly from Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian cultural philosopher popular in the 1960s and 1970s, who is known for his technologically determinist ideas according to which the history of civilisation can be divided between different stages dominated by different communications technologies.

An additional example of the prominent role that media and communications play in academic globalisation literature comes from the fields of cultural anthropology

and cultural studies. Arjun Appadurai, another 'key thinker' (Jones 2010, pp. 209–226) of globalisation, calls into question the importance of national and territorial boundaries for cultural identity. He argues that group identities 'around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous' (Appadurai 1996, p. 48). This poses 'an urgent need to focus on the cultural dynamics of what is now called deterritorialization' (Appadurai 1996, p. 49), that is, the weakening of the ties of culture to place and geographical territories (García Canclini 1995, p. 229).

In the age of globalisation, people and ideas come into contact with each other in a way that is less determined by their immediate locality or their national 'home', and this opens up new imaginations and new subjectivities. Appadurai emphasises that none of this would be possible without the media and communications, arguing that '[u]ntil recently, whatever the force of social change, a case could be made that social life was largely inertial, that traditions provided a relatively finite set of possible lives, and that fantasy and imagination were residual practices, confined to special persons or domains, restricted to special moments or places' (Appadurai 1996, p. 53).

However, 'in the past two decades, as the deterritorialization of persons, images, and ideas has taken on new force', '[m]ore persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by the mass media in all their forms' (Appadurai 1996, p. 54).

Note again how the media are singled out here as transformative agents of history. As such, globalisation theorists more often than not endow them with potent emancipatory qualities. For Castells, the network society is a different kind of modernity, characterised by democratisation and emancipation from the alienating standardisation of previous industrial mass culture, and these features are enabled above all by the new 'horizontal' communications technologies. He claims that the Internet, the paradigmatic media of the network society, 'will remain technologically open, enabling widespread public access and seriously limiting governmental and commercial restrictions to such access, although social inequality will powerfully manifest itself in the electronic domain' (Castells 2000, p. 384). They are pervasive, decentralised and flexible, and 'unlike the mass media ... they have technologically and culturally embedded properties of interactivity and individualization' (Castells 2000, p. 385).

Although in his recent writings Castells has been more aware of the limits set by the state and capital to Internet-based political emancipation, he remains confident that in the new regime of what he calls 'mass self-communication', exemplified by blogs, the 'exercise of power relationships is decisively transformed', 'new opportunities for social change' have opened up and audiences are more autonomous than ever before, 'at the origin of the process of cultural change' (Castells 2009, p. 4, 126, 413). A media-technological optimism characterises also the cultural globalisation theory of Appadurai (1996), who sees the media as a harbinger of a 'post-national' world. Since the media, due to their new technological properties, are increasingly able to bypass national boundaries and make cultural expressions

available in more spatially expanded and complex ways than before, they are undermining Western cultural domination and offering new sources for identity everywhere. Giddens agrees: ‘globalisation tends to promote a renewal of local cultural identities’ (Giddens 2002, p. xxiv). Even though academic globalisation theorists do not subscribe the kind of simplistic enthusiasm that features in mainstream business commentary on globalisation (e.g. Friedman 2006), they, too, associate the concept of globalisation with diversification, expansion, egalitarianism, pluralism, reflexivity and liberation. Arguments concerning media and communications are crucial for the utopian imagination of globalisation theory, in particular the idea that globalisation brings about the downfall of the sovereignty of the nation-state and, consequently, helps to realise the vision of a more decentred and democratic political and cultural order.

4 Critical Reflections

How credible is the emancipatory vision of globalisation theory and how should we assess its theoretical foundations? Even though the space here does not allow for a comprehensive treatment of this subject, some critical comments are in order.

First, one may question the notion that globalisation today signals a qualitative change in the spatiotemporal constitution of society (the coming of a new social form determined by networks and ‘supraterritorial’ relations). In response to Castells’s (2000, p. 508) claim that ‘the network society represents a qualitative change in the human experience’, it can be argued, as historical sociologist Michael Mann (1986, p. 13) does, that ‘overlapping interaction networks [spanning over long distances] are the historical norm’ – for example, networks related to trade and religion.

Even if one wants to focus specifically on electronic communications networks as the base of a new social formation, they, too, have a long history that can be traced back to the period of roughly between 1860 and 1930. Writing about the history of the globalisation of media (telegraph, news agencies) between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Winseck and Pike (2007) argue that rather than being tied to territorial dominance (although that was also a factor), the early formation of global electronic networks resulted from the actions of liberal globalisers from many countries who wanted to make the world open to investment and capitalist property relations, often in the guise of discourses of ‘modernisation’. Those interests were realised to a considerable extent, and as a result ‘globalization during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth was not just shallow and fleeting, but deep and durable ... built around networks and hubs that supported huge flows of capital, technology, people, news, and ideas which, in turn, led to a high degree of convergence among markets, merchants, and bankers’ (Winseck and Pike 2007, pp. 1–2).

Thus, whatever one may think of the difference regarding the intensity and extensiveness of the mentioned technological processes today, the fact remains that

a similar 'structural logic' of 'spaces of flows' to which Castells refers – the absorption of distinct locales into networks that link them together and the extension of communication beyond nation-state borders – was well established already in the earlier period. The notion that electronic media networks obliterate former barriers of time and space is hardly a new theme for social scientists who have made similar comments for at least 150 years (Mosco 2004).

More theoretically, the attempt to turn globalisation into an explanatory concept that compels a renewal of social theory, based on the mentioned technological changes, is highly dubious for the reason that former social theories can be used to make sense of exactly the kind of processes that globalisation advocates now single out as historical novelties. Marx argued in the mid-eighteenth century that 'capital by its nature drives beyond every spatial barrier' and '[t]hus the creation of the physical conditions of exchange – of the means of communication and transport – the annihilation of space by time – becomes an extraordinary necessity for it' (Marx 1973, p. 524). From this perspective, globalisation is not at heart a technological issue, but 'something intrinsic to capitalist social relations themselves' (Rosenberg 2000, p. 33) – in other words, it is a concept that describes rather than explains social change.

Second, academic discussions on globalisation do not only revolve around its nature from a theoretical angle, but they also concern 'its impact on values such as wellbeing, justice and democracy' (Callinicos 2007, p. 341). In the main, globalisation theorists are optimistic in claiming that globalisation refers to the dispersal of power and the consequent political democratisation and cultural pluralisation everywhere. For instance, Castells (1998, p. 400) argues that 'Information networks, in the age of Internet, are truly out of control', offering massive potentialities for agency and political action. For him, the rise of a global network society betokens the end of grand totalitarianisms and hierarchies of the industrial society: statist forms of governance, one-way communication to anonymous masses and an increasing political indifference among the populace. In Appadurai's account, as noted, globalisation refers to the formation of a decentred world order where cultural impulses crisscross in surprising ways due to the proliferation of global media flows. These undermine the power of tyrannical nation-states that seek to control their citizens by maintaining homogenous identities.

The problem with these arguments is that they tend to assign too much causal power to the development of communication technologies alone, at the expense of looking at how their uses (or nonuses) are embedded in their social contexts. Castells, following McLuhan (1962, 1964), reasons that the properties of media and communications technology allow different things in different stages of history and we can analyse their societal and cultural effects primarily by looking at those properties. It is not that Castells would leave enduring social and economic dynamics out of his analysis, but the force and logic of technological innovation is ultimately decisive for him. Yet a belief in the revolutionary technological nature of the Internet as a prime force of democratisation shrugs off persistent inequalities in Internet access, class differences in Internet use (Turner 2010, p. 134) and material advantages possessed by powerful commercial corporations in the development of

online content, which also translates into advantages in terms of which sites receive most of the online attention (Fuchs 2009; Foster and McChesney 2011).

A similar lapse of memory is evident in Appadurai's argument concerning the liberation of imagination through deterritorialised media flows: there are major differences in how culture, including media, is consumed between classes and thus one cannot analyse the consequences of media proliferation merely in terms of the assumed technological potentialities of these media. Also, Appadurai leaves out of the picture the question of how imagination today is increasingly geared towards advertising and different types of marketing that are practically ubiquitous.

This process does not necessarily have to be interpreted as increasing Western cultural imperialism or Americanisation, but as a more general process of 'capitalist imperialism' (Harvey 2003) which in the cultural sphere refers to the globalisation of commodity aesthetics (Haug 2005, p. 47). Such critical themes, however, are rarely addressed by globalisation theorists who focus on a 'radically open cultural future' (Tomlinson 1997, p. 190) promised by deterritorialisation and cosmopolitanisation.

Third, globalisation theory is a theory of the weakening, if not the demise of the nation-state. To an extent, that theory makes sense. Nation-state governments have indeed lost much of their political capacity to manage the contradictions that arise from their role as mediators between the interests of the capital and the democratic aspirations of their citizens: market forces 'have begun to dictate in unprecedented ways what presumably sovereign and democratic states may still do for their citizens and what they must refuse them' (Streeck 2012, p. 26).

Yet this does not mean that nation-states are now 'merely instruments to record the flows of the commodities, monies and populations' (Hardt and Negri 2000, p. 31). Even under the global hegemony of neoliberalism, capitalist markets require certain amount of 'extra-economic' protection; in other words, they rely on the power of sovereign states 'to create and sustain conditions of accumulation and maintain the system of capitalist property' (Wood 2002, p. 178). Market forces cannot by themselves provide the political, legal and social authority that will guarantee necessary levels of stability, security, infrastructure, education, social welfare or legitimisation, on which the functioning of global economy relies. This still makes the nation-state a terrain of political contestation and democratic struggle.

In recent years, characterised by the global financial crisis – now escalating into an acute political crisis in the European Union, in particular – the relationship between the markets, the state and democracy has become ever more volatile. In such conditions, it is justifiable to ask how much insight one can derive from the notion that the weakening power of the nation-state will open the gates to a more cosmopolitan global order. No doubt, there are examples of countries that have witnessed dissolution of exclusive national identities in recent decades, both officially and in every-day culture.

Furthermore, it is not to be doubted that the media and new means of communication have provided a variety of resources for 'experiments with self-making', as Appadurai (1996, p. 3) claims. Yet it is far from clear if changes in the media are fundamentally responsible for such increasing reflexivity, or, conversely, if the

recent surge in xenophobia and populist parties in many countries, also in the West, can be reduced to a cultural question of how nation-states try to maintain exclusive ideologies of ethnic purity. The capacity of citizens to be tolerant of difference and resistant to populist-nationalist rhetoric seems to be much more intimately intertwined with changes in the balance of power between sovereign states and the markets: in the current conditions of neoliberalism in which international markets increasingly dictate what is politically acceptable, the whole liberal democratic process based on party representation and national governments is becoming unresponsive to citizens who feel increasingly powerless to have an influence on politics through electoral pressure (Streeck 2012, p. 26). Such a situation is a breeding ground for venting one's powerlessness on nationalist hatred of 'lazy' outsiders, international organisations and cosmopolitan elites who are perceived as the enemies of the common people. Important as these themes seem, globalisation theorists are generally not interested in examining the specifically capitalist dynamics that are involved in the creation such worldwide crises tendencies. This omission leads me to consider, in conclusion, possible links between globalisation theory and neoliberalism.

5 Conclusion: Globalisation Theory and the Neoliberal Moment

Neoliberalism has established itself as the dominant political and economic dogma throughout the world (Harvey 2005, p. 3; Zajda 2014), constituted by a forceful defence of private property, competitive markets and 'individual freedom', in addition to an all-around attack against state intervention. As noted, globalisation theory is an intellectual current that has emerged in the post-1989 period marked by the hegemony of neoliberalism. What this means is that it has been developed in an intellectual milieu that was formerly permeated with, or at least much more conducive to, discourses that were critical of the political-economic power of capitalism. In the recent two decades, social scientific discussion has centred on issues other than the human consequences of the present socioeconomic system or is characterised by different degrees of submission to it. Although they recognise and comment on growing social and economic inequalities worldwide, globalisation theorists do so in a context of 'capitalist realism' (Fisher 2009). In other words, by and large, they succumb to the proposition that capitalism is inevitable and that one can only 'remain concern[ed about] how far, and in what ways, capitalism should be governed and regulated' (Giddens 1998, pp. 43–44).

Armed with such realisation, many influential social theorists have recently produced epochal diagnoses that posit a shift in the nature of modernity, namely, the coming of 'another' or 'late' modernity (Beck 1992; Lash 1999; Giddens 1991) that is different from its earlier national-industrial phase. A key ingredient of these diagnoses is the claim that the contemporary period is characterised by individualisation, the dismantlement of hierarchical bureaucracies and the dissolution of

paternalist forms of domination. They have also promoted the idea that the whole world system has become less hierarchical and more networked, together with being politically, economically and culturally more pluralistic. Globalisation theory is an organic part of this significant theoretical transformation.

While its representatives certainly do not sing the enthusiastic praises of ‘the free market’, globalisation theory is in a crucial sense consistent with neoliberalism. Besides accepting, though critically, the inevitability of capitalism, globalisation theorists share with neoliberals a polemic against the nation-state and a belief that individuals have become more autonomous of former ‘statist’ power structures and more fluent in choosing their identities themselves. A fascination with shifts in the spatiotemporal constitution of society which new media and communication technologies are said to have caused is also an expression of the same optimistic idea that we are dynamically moving towards a new social existence that is superseding the old. When grand societal utopias have been declared impossible, and when the power of capital seems more consolidated than ever, belief in the revolutionary nature of new media and communications carries on the hope that we are still on the threshold of millennial change that is pregnant with possibilities.

Focusing on the democratising tendencies of global ‘modernity’ or ‘network society’, globalisation theorists remain less concerned with ‘the continuities imposed by the logic of capitalist institutions’ (Bromley 1999, p. 14) or the fact that ‘democratically unaccountable concentrations of economic power’ (Callinicos 2007, p. 305), in the form of transnational corporations and financial markets, have dramatically increased their influence over the rest of the society in recent decades. Because of this, globalisation theory is incapable of properly addressing the ‘outrage’ (Therborn 2007, p. 113) that capitalism continues to reproduce through old and new forms of exploitation, inequality, insecurity, inauthenticity and uneven development of the world. Globalisation theory is not uncritical, but as a form of social theory, it falls short from realising its critical potentials in full.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-94-017-9492-3>

Second International Handbook on Globalisation,
Education and Policy Research

Zajda, J. (Ed.)

2015, XXXIV, 854 p. 28 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-94-017-9492-3