The Globalization Phenomenon: Different Perspectives of Analysis

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Theme: Global Economy, History

*An overview of the literature on globalization shows the presence of **four great waves of theoretical approaches** to the analysis of this social phenomena (Martell 2010, Berry 2011).*

The first wave is represented by the **hyperglobalist approach**, which is focused on the idea of **globalization as economic transformation**, from both a neoclassical (Ohmae 1993, 2001; Wolf 2005; Levitt 1986) and marxist perspective (Callinicos 2001, 2002; Bieler et. al. 2006; Gill 1995; Robinson 2001). **This approach conceives globalization as a matter of fact: the inevitable emergence of a single global capitalist market economy.**

The second wave is represented by the **skeptical thesis, which disputes the reality of globalization as a structural change** (the emergence of a single global economy and the impact of global market forces on state capacity). For this approach globalization doesn't exists: the world is not globalized or globalizing; nation states still have the power to influence the effects of globalization and regional alliances – on the basis of common interests – can contrast the structure of global power (Hall 1986; Helliwell 2000; Ruigrok & van Tulder 1995; Zysman 1996; Weiss 1998, 2006; Hirst & Thompson 1996; Cerny 1995, 2000, 2006; Hobson & Ramesh 2002).

The third wave is represented by **transformationalism or geographical approach.** This wave, which has been strongly influenced by Giddens (1990, 2002) and Castells (1996, 1997, 1998), consider globalization essentially in terms of geographical transformation (the inevitabile emergence of a supraterritorial social space) and uphold the role of cosmopolitan democracy in dealing with its economic, political and social effects (Held, McGrew, Scholte 2005; Rosenau 1997; Phillips 2005a, 2005b).

All these waves treat globalization from a materialist perspective, in terms of structural change. The role of ideas and subjective reflexivity in shaping social reality and influencing agents action is not taken into consideration. People act in function of their location in the structural context and material interests are the main drivers of human behaviour (Berry 2008).

The fourth wave represents **a variegated approach to the ideational and discursive dimensions of globalization**. Within it Berry (2008, 2011) includes four main perspectives: Hay's third wave of globalization theory, the post-structuralist, the neo-gramscian and the ideological ones.

The Hay's perspective conceives globalisation as a set of ideas produced by certain economic and political actors to justify or legitimate change. These ideas provide cognitive

frames through which interpret social reality and defining what is economically and politically acceptable in terms of public policies. This perspective, which draws upon the skeptical thesis, is focused on the empirical investigations of these ideas, especially in British political discourse, with the purpose of demistifying globalization as a false idea (Hay 1997, 1998, 1999, 2002; Hay & Marsch 2000; Hay & Rosamond 2002; Hay & Smith 2005; Hay & Watson 1998, 1999; Rosamond 1999, 2003; Smith 2005; Watson 1999, 2005).

Post-structuralist perspective conceives globalization as a set of narratives which provide meaning to reality and exercise of power by reframing the collective economic imagery of society on the basis of a space-time compression. The core concept of these narratives is the arrival of a post-national economy represented by three different domains: the offshore and global economy; the national economy, subservient of the first as states become competitive in serving the global economy; the peripheral economy of socially excluded, which must be retrieved in order to take part to the competition. In this sense, globalization prescribes a new role for the state as an exclusive economic actor subject to economic logic, rather than being capable of shaping economy from an independent point and relating with its citizens only in economistic terms. Hence it would be more related to the subjectivities of the powerful than with objective fact. (Cameron & Palan 2004).

Neo-gramscian perspective focuses its analysis on both the structural and the ideational dimensions of globalization: the former conceived as the emergence of a single global capitalism system and the latter as the dialectis between hegemonic (the liberal globalization based on the ricardian free trade theory and the anti-statist individualism), and counter hegemonic ideology (the global democratization of the global movements). Drawing upon foucauldian thought (Foucault 1969, 1971), this perspective considers globalization as a form of intellectual power expressing through the knowledge system of neoliberal ideology and propagated by institutional authority (Rupert 2000; Mittelman 2004; Antoniades 2007).

The ideological perspective is represented by the work of Manfred Steger (2002, 2005, 2008), which is focused on the emerging of the new ideology of market globalism: a hegemonic ideology fostered by elite to legitimate their power and which represents the dominant perspective on what globalization. It is conceived as the product of globalization discourse made by neoliberalist by associating globalization with market, in order to legitimate the notion of free trade.

The fourth wave challenges the materialist approach of previous three waves, focusing on the role of ideas and beliefs about the structural change in shaping its meaning and influencing action upon it. This approach proposes a radical change of perspective on the analysis of globalization, moving the focus from the dispute about the fact that the world is or not globalized or globalizing to the beliefs about globalization. It conceives as more important understanding how people interpret globalization, than globalization itself, because the belief that the world is globalized, will make act as it is. Globalization is considered thus an ideational force which influence human action and policy making (Martell 2010; Berry 2008).

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