Globalization and Identities – A Constructivist Approach

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Abstract

Globalization is associated with a new regime of sovereignty as a result of the emergence of some new forms of non-territorial economic and political organization in the global field. Such a reality transforms the state into an interface between the global system constantly shaped by the forces of globalization (especially economic) and the substatal system mainly characterized by the decentralization of power. First, nation-states have functionally become parts of a vaster pattern of global changes and, second, the idea of global politics underlines the complexity of the interpenetrations that transcend states and societies, adding to them a large network of agencies and organizations. Within such an anarchical context the predictability of these interactions may be analyzed through the perspective which reflects the intensification of the global and regional engaging patterns. In such a context, from a constructivist perspective, the study tries to underscore the way the state is shaped by the global transformations and, at the same time, the way the state is transforming itself under the pressure of such challenges. So, I will underline the shift from globalization to fragmentation as a reflection of political costs mediated by the state: sometimes, globalization changed the accent from the domestic sectors; on other times, the domestic interests had priority and so the result was international fragmentation.

Keywords: state, globalization, constructivism, identity.

Far from generating a theoretical consensus, or at least a functional convergence among analysts, globalization deeply affects the economic, political and socio-cultural contemporary reality – "globalization is a complex historical process which manages to unify the continents. It is equally a cultural, political and technological process and also an economic one" (Smith 2006: 5). Or, as Ian Clark said, the great challenge of those analyzing such process is "to measure and quantify the impact of globalization over the economic, political and cultural spheres" (Clark 1999: 34).

In this study I will try to stress the manner in which, at the political level, the state is affected by the global changes and, at the same time, the way in which the state reacts and transforms under the pressure of these challenges. I will not argue in favor of a zero-sum game: if nation-states don't completely lose their meaning then, certainly, the nature of modern politics, and especially contemporary one, changes profoundly.

Traditional Theoretical Perspectives

Globalization is the favored term to describe the international reality after the end of Cold War, and most of its researchers refer to it as an evolutionary process (Modelski 2008: 12-29), a historical transformation (Mittelman 2004: 4-5) or as a multidimensional reality (Hopper 2006: 139) which comes from "diversity which is part of its intrinsic nature" (Clark 1999: 35). The constant element of these approaches is represented by the illustration of the growth of
interdependences as the result of the "growing interconnectedness reflected in the extended flows of information, technology, capital, goods, services, and people throughout the world" (NIC 2004) on one hand, and of the growth of the opening, transparency level, on the other hand (Modelski 2008, Group of Experts on the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance 2000: 2-4).

Thus, "globalization implies complex processes which internationalize domestic politics – but, at the same time, shape foreign politics according to the growing internal pressures”, which actually reflects the fact that "nation-states have learnt to share sovereignty using national and global institutions and, at the same time, to open their economies regionally and globally" (Group of Experts on the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance 2000: 1). Moreover, globalization becomes synonymous with the acceleration and intensification of mechanisms, processes and activities which promote global interdependence and, ultimately, the global economic and political integration.

Especially economic processes have been in the center of attention. It becomes more than obvious that "the globalization of the world economy has affected and will continue to affect almost every aspect of the domestic and foreign affairs" (Gilpin 2004: 219). Accepting such a reality, depending on the way we regard the advantages or disadvantages generated by the free market, the debates on globalization have shaped three large perspectives. On one end of the spectrum we find the neoliberals who see the free market as the only way to maximize prosperity. On the other end, we find the economic nationalists who support a populist perspective, rejecting globalization by applying restrictions on the free trade in order to correct economic inequalities created by globalization. Globalization is also criticized from the communitarian perspective; the supporters of this radical point of view think that globalization is responsible for capitalist tyranny, imperialist exploitation and also for the unprecedented degradation of the world ecosystem (Gilpin 2004: 221-39). Dani Rodrick, one of the most important representatives of the communitarian perspective, thinks that the core objective of this approach is represented by the "return to the local independent and cohesive communities" (Rodrick 1997: 2).

Leaving behind this extremely limited paradigm of globalization There are other ways in which we may analyze globalization. David Held identifies three distinct schools: hyperglobalists, skeptics and transformativists (Held 2004: 26). For the followers of the hyperglobalist thesis, globalization produces profound changes within the organizational and functional structure of the human communities because "the traditional nation-states have become unnatural, even impossible business units in a global economy" (Ohmae 1995: 5). The skeptics try to demystify globalization claiming that the internationalizing does not imply "a profound or even important restructuring of the world economic relations" (Held 2004: 30) or the position and role of nation-states in international politics. Placing themselves between these two extremes the transformativists (Giddens 1990, Scholte 1993, Castells 1996) will argue that "globalization is a core driving force of the fast social, political and economic changes which recreate modern societies and the world order" (Held 2004: 31). According to transformativists, governments and states in their traditional form pass through a series of profound changes which result from the fact that the border line between domestic affairs and the projection of national interest on the international level is blurred and, in some cases, even disappears.

**Globalization and State Identity**

State contracting and the decline of official regulation determine the actual abolishment of the existing restraints for the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital. As Scholte (2000: 34) says, "the public sector must come to an end in coordinating the forces of the market in global context". Moreover, according to Martin Carnoy and Manuel Castells,
the very source of globalization has been represented by the capitalism restructuring process – both of the state and corporations – meant to overcome the mid 1970's crisis. This reform was profoundly liberal in nature: "deregulation, liberalization, and privatization, both domestically, and internationally were the institutional basis that paved the way for new business strategies with the global reach" (Carnoy and Castells 2001: 5).

On the other hand, at the international level, globalization represents or creates the necessary conditions for the manifestations of some entities which erode the traditional role of the state as the single international actor. This means that globalization is associated with a regime of sovereignty as a result of the emergence of some "new and mighty forms of non-territorial economic and political organization in the global field, similar to multinational corporations, transnational social movements, international regulatory agencies, etc." (Held 2004: 33). In other words, international and transnational organizations and movements compete with the state, generating a crisis of state authority; in this manner, loyalty is transferred from the state and/or society to the lower or higher level units (Viotti and Kauppi 1997: 6-9).

As we have already mentioned, there are three classical perspectives to talk about the state and globalization. From the first perspective, the state loses its meaning, because important decisions are made outside the state apparatus, either in private entities or international organizations (such as World Trade Organization or International Trade Chamber) (Hall and Biersteker 2004). From the second, the state remains about the same as always without registering important changes; from this kind of view, globalization becomes possible mainly because of the state, and thus there are not so many changes in the international system, the state maintaining its traditional power of implementing the policies it formulates (Krasner 2004: 60-81). The third perspective is based on the argument that the state adapts or even becomes transformed but it still remains the critical actor in the international system.

Apart from the major differences that are encompassed by these approaches we need to stress that all of them are elaborated on the "assumption that the national level and the global level are mutually exclusive" (Sassen 2007: 45) and that the direct implication is to exclude some terms which cannot be analyzed from the perspective of this dual-disjunctive logic (an example is represented by the technical regulation agencies such as the IMF).

Thus, what we need is a new analytical perspective, different from the above mentioned: "the state becomes one of the strategic institutional realms in which the critical analysis of the development of globalization takes place" (Sassen 2007: 45). This development does not automatically produce the decline of the state nor it maintains its original form – "the state becomes the place for the foundational transformations within the relations between the public and private sectors, in the internal balance of power as well as within the larger space of national and global forces where the states must now function" (Sassen 2007: 45).

Such a via media (Wendt 2011: 66-67) or middle ground (Adler 1997: 319-63) will allow for conceptualizing state identity as "at the same time changeable and relatively stable" (Zehfuss 2001: 339). This means that accepting the interpretative approach of the constructivism we can decide that international system (in the hypostasis of globalization) as a hypostasis of social reality builds the actors and determines the mechanisms through which they (self-) define. Equally, the international system is constantly (re)constructed on the basis of the system actors' interaction (including states). From the constructivist perspective, social agents and structures are mutually built through interactions, complex interdependences (Keohane and Nye 2009). Interpreting the identity meaning, Maja Zehfuss claims that for Alexander Wendt "the international environment is created and recreated in process of interaction" meaning by this that "actors' identities are not given but are developed and sustained or transformed in interaction" (Zehfuss 2001: 317-18).
From a similar point of view, Ian Clark considers that easy value judgments must be avoided when they refer to globalization and fragmentation. If globalization is synonymous with technological and political developments after the Second World War, it is not synonymous with cultural uniformity and homogenization, even though the economy has become internationalized. Culture (even knowledge), in its wider sense, has become a major political force which will constitute an important challenge towards the state because "cultures avoid to be localized and linked to the spaces physically defined" (Saurin 1995: 256). Therefore, globalization will depend on our understanding concerning fragmentation (both on the regional and national level). "Without understanding fragmentation as a dialectical response to globalization" but rather as "a new aspect, even as a creation of globalization" (Clark 1997: 29) we will need to exclude any form of political determinism and underline "the impact both globalization and fragmentation have on the behavior of the state. The stress must be on the shift between globalization and fragmentation, not as a mechanical instrument but as a reflection of the political costs transfer mediated by the state: sometimes globalization shifted the stress from domestic sectors; on other times, domestic interests had priority and thus it appeared as international fragmentation" (Clark 1997: 31). The integration / regionalization process from the European Union represents an example for the manner in which fragmentation and globalization can function in a different way than in an exclusive logic.

Such a reality – with the two presented components – place the state as the interference between the global system constantly shaped by the forces of globalization (especially economic) and the substatal system characterized mainly by decentralization of power, decision-making and knowledge.

In this paper, I argue that globalization can be understood as a manner in which "identities may change through interaction" (Zehfuss 2001: 319), even if these identities are the states (or just because of this). "Globalization needs also to be understood as a number of changes within the state, and not simply as a range of external forces set against it...Historically, transnational forces and the separate state have developed in tandem" (Clark 1997: 52). In other words, such a model allows us to capture the interaction between the substate and suprastate levels at the state level like a "combination of relative autonomy and symbiotic interdependence" (Mann 1997: 477).

If globalization is a process, and some of its main consequences can be analyzed at the state level, then, the state itself can be analyzed from the processual perspective. The postmodern state is no longer based on the balance of power system and no longer underlines the importance of sovereignty or a clear division between domestic and external politics (Cooper 2007: 41-81). The postmodern state is a product of globalization and is one of the actors populating the space of "postinternational politics" (Rosenau 1990: 6).

Today, globalization limits state sovereignty and at the same time redefines its social borders. If the classical nation-state implies the existence of a national community as a referent, then globalization forces the state to modify this frame of reference, national communities lose their political representation channel and the next move is represented by the development of nationalism against the state. Therefore, as a natural development of the state "the separation between nation and the state is a fundamental process characteristic of our time" (Calhoun 1998: 98). Without generalizing this separation, we must underline the fact that the state loses its attributes offered by modernity. The global economy and the informational revolution have seriously reconfigured the fundamental institutions of the governing processes peculiar to the modern state and thus they modified two of the central features of the modern state: sovereignty and territory.
Conclusion

In this new power geography, globalization implies at least "a partial denationalizing of national territory and a partial shift of some components of state sovereignty to other institutions, from supranational entities to the global capital market" (Sassen 1996: 146). In other words, sovereignty and territory are relocated in other institutional arenas outside the state and outside the traditional territory framework, sovereignty being decentralized and territory partly denationalized. As a result of such changes the nation-state finds itself forced on one hand by the global market forces, and on the other hand by the political imperatives of the power shift. Therefore, if the market forces denationalize the territory, the power shift is made placing sovereignty in a variety of institutional arenas of the transnational (legal) regimes.

In this framework, globalization must be understood considering the redefinition of the power relations. First, nation-states have functionally become parts of a vaster pattern of global changes and, second, the idea of global politics underlines the complexity of the interpenetrations that transcend states and societies, adding to them a large network of agencies and organizations. Within such an anarchical context the predictability of these interactions may be analyzed through the perspective which reflects the intensification of the global and regional engaging patterns.

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