

Perspectives on globalization

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2. Perspectives on Globalization

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The Ecclesiological Basis for this Consultation

The theological and more specifically the ecclesiological basis for this tripartite consultation on globalization and catholicity may be seen as a way of living out the full communion that exists between our churches. The section III/2 of the Old-Catholic-Orthodox theological dialogue provides a good starting point:

On matters of faith and other common concerns, i.e. where issues arise which concern them all and exceed the competence of each individual Church, the local Churches take counsel together and make common decisions, faithfully observing in such synods the order of honour and rank canonically established in the Church. They do so, above all, in ecumenical synods, which are the supreme authority in the Church, the instrument and the voice through which the Catholic Church speaks, whereby there is a constant effort to preserve and strengthen its unity in love. (von Arx, *Koinonia* 189)

This statement applies especially to churches that are in communion with each other, such as the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, the Episcopal Church in the USA (and other churches of the Anglican Communion), and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht. Reflecting on such processes in a contemporary, globalized context, Urs von Arx notes, however, that such communal acts of witness to the gospel should normally retain an extraordinary character and not be caught up in some kind of permanent bureaucracy (von Arx, *Was macht* 172).

Globalization: A Question of Definition

As many would agree, globalization is a concept as well known as it is debated in terms of its definition, its origins, and the appropriate response to it. Given the disputed nature of the concept of globalization, even seasoned sociologists and political scientists have reached hardly any clear-cut agreement about the essence, origins, and effects of globalization, as the extensive discussion on the topic indicates. For this reason, no full and nuanced overview of the debate can be given. Specialists on the subject have, however, reached a helpful perspective on

globalization.¹ This perspective takes its starting point in a recent introduction to globalization by political scientist Jan Aart Scholte, expanded through the network theory of Manuel Castells, itself supplemented by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of Empire.

A network society conceptualized as an Empire is probably the most illuminating way of treating what most other scholars call globalization or, more specifically, economic globalization, the particular form of globalization to which churches have responded the most forcefully. This conceptual framework acknowledges the overwhelming importance economic factors play in globalization while denying that globalization is essentially an economic phenomenon.

Defining Globalization

In a well-received introduction to the phenomenon of globalization, Scholte offers a broad definition, which may serve as a starting point for this discussion; he defines globalization "as a respatialization of social life" (Scholte 84). Such a definition has the advantage of covering much if not all that has been designated by the term *globalization*, thus reaching well beyond its 1983 coinage in a discussion about worldwide economic developments (Scholte 50–52). Simultaneously, however, this definition has the disadvantage of being so general that it risks saying nothing at all. It is therefore necessary to move beyond Scholte's one-line definition and to look at (1) the kind of manifestations Scholte considers to be typical of globalization and (2) the kind of dynamics he sees at work behind these phenomena.

In order to answer the first question, Scholte provides a list of twelve areas in which this "respatialization with the spread of transplanetary social connections" can be observed. Other lists certainly exist, but this one at least seems to provide a good overview, taking into account many different areas of global reality.² Scholte includes the following areas: communications, travel, production, markets, money, finance, organizations, military, ecology, health, law, and consciousness (Scholte 74–75).

¹ For this section I am particularly indebted to Ms. Wytske Versteeg, M.A., of the University of Amsterdam for advice and discussion.

² Another example of such a list is the one that Derek Darves has culled from the literature ("Globalization and the Episcopal Church," appendix 2 to chap. 4 below).

In order to account for globalization and the dynamics underlying it, Scholte proposes a perspective on globalization that views it as a broad social, political, and economic process:

the perspective adopted here understands globalization as part of a socio-historical dynamic involving five interrelated shifts in macro social structures. One trend – the growth of transplanetary and supraterritorial connectivity – is interlinked with four other developments: a shift from capitalism towards hypercapitalism in respect of production; a shift from statism towards polycentrism in respect of governance; a shift from nationalism towards pluralism and hybridity in respect of identity; and a shift from rationalism towards reflexive rationality in respect of knowledge. (Scholte 136)

These five shifts in macro-social structures, according to Scholte, lead to the following “Principal dynamics of globalization”:

Capitalist production

- global markets to increase sales volume and enhance economies of scale
- global accounting of prices and tax liabilities to raise profits
- global sourcing to reduce costs of production
- supraterritorial commodities to increase the channels of accumulation

Regulation

- governance agencies’ provision of the infrastructure to effect global connections
- states’ liberalization of cross-border transactions
- legal guarantees of property rights for global capital
- establishment and growth of transworld governance mechanisms
- transplanetary standardization of technical specifications, legal principles and administrative procedures.

Identity construction

- national “selves” constituted in relation to foreign “others” within a global realm
- assertions of various national identities through transplanetary diasporas
- affirmations of various nonterritorial identities through transworld networks.

Rationalist knowledge

- secularist constructions of the social world in terms of planet earth
- anthropocentric orientation to the planetary home of the human species
- scientific notions of objective truths with transplanetary validity
- instrumentalist efficiency arguments against “irrational” territorial divisions. (Scholte 153)

This overview is illuminating. However, it also prompts the question of how to describe the interaction of these various elements, especially with the interconnectedness of things in a globalized world.

Globalization as Network Society

Scholte’s study is usefully supplemented by the work of Manuel Castells. In his trilogy, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Castells proposes a thoroughgoing analysis of globalization, which he refers to as “network society.”³ Coming originally from a Marxist background of political analysis,⁴ he moves well beyond that field in his trilogy, as his emphasis on the reconstruction of identity shows. He argues for the existence of networks other than the economic or material network.

In “The Network Paradigm,” Felix Stalder summarizes the central drive of Castells’ work as follows:

Castells’ main argument is that a new form of capitalism has emerged at the end of this century: global in its character, hardened in its goals and much more flexible than any of its predecessors. It is challenged around the globe by a multitude of social movements on behalf of cultural singularity and people’s control over their lives and environment. This tension provides the central dynamic of the Information Age, as “our societies are increasingly structured around the bipolar opposition of the Net and the Self” (1996, 3). (Stalder, Network Paradigm 301)⁵

It is important to note that while Castells reads “hypercapitalism” as a main force behind the development of the network, he does not view it as

³ See also Felix Stalder’s valuable introduction to Castells’ work.

⁴ For a critique of the Marxist analysis of globalization, see Scholte 128–30; according to Scholte, the Marxist focus on economic questions obscures other factors.

⁵ Stalder responds here to the first volume of Castells’ trilogy (*The Rise of the Network Society*, 1996).

its ultimate origin or essence. As Stalder helpfully explains, Castells gives technology a much more central role:

In the first volume, Castells covers the structural aspects of the Information Age that have created the Network Society: the new formations into which core economic activities have been organized and the new spatial and temporal conditions they have effected. At the base of this reorganization is the pervasive implementation of technological innovation since the 1970s, clustering around the convergence of computing and telecommunication. (Stalder 303)

Castells thus comes down on the side of technological innovation as the essence of the process of globalization, which as he also recognizes has subsequently been fuelled mainly, but not exclusively, by capitalism, as Stalder also points out.⁶ Stalder goes on to explain Castells' view of the effect of this process that has revolutionized the world and its economy:

This self-accelerating process has created in about 20 years a new economic condition, the *informational* and *global* economy. This new economy is informational because the competitiveness of its central actors (firms, regions, or nations) depends on their ability to generate and process electronic information. It is global because its most important aspects, from finance to production, are organized on a global scale, directly through multinational corporations and/or indirectly through networks of associations. This new global economy is more than just another layer of economic activity on top of the existing production process. Rather, it restructures all economic activities based on goals and values introduced by the aggressive exploitation of new productivity potentials of advanced information technology. Rather than creating the same conditions everywhere, the global economy is characterized "by its interdependence, its asymmetry, its regionalization, the increased diversification within each region, its selective inclusiveness, its exclusionary segmentation, and, as a result of all those features, an extraordinarily variable geometry that tends to dissolve historical, economic geography" (1996, 106). (Stalder 303)

Stalder goes on to focus further on the effects this process has on "space," a notion central to any concept of "globalization":

⁶ The limitations of what Scholte views as explanations of globalization along the lines of various "liberalisms" are to be found in the areas of the social forces fuelling the creation of the technological and institutional preconditions for globalization, to which also belongs a neglect of regard for the cultural context of globalizing tendencies. Finally, liberal analysis tends to ignore power hierarchies already inscribed in previously existing social structures, e.g., among states, classes, cultures, sexes, races, etc. (Scholte 124–26).

The common theme underlying the diversity of regional and sectorial patterns of economic change is the incorporation of similar information technology into historically very different businesses. Its most distinct result is the emergence of what Castells calls the *space of flows*: the integrated global network. It comprises several connected elements: private networks, company Intranets; semi-public, closed, and proprietary networks such as the financial networks; and public, open networks, the Internet. Social organizations reconstitute themselves vis-à-vis this space of flows. . . .

The space of flows has introduced a culture of *real virtuality*, which is characterized by *timeless time* and *placeless space*. “Timeless time . . . the dominant temporality in our society, occurs when the characteristics of a given context, namely, the informational paradigm and the network society, induce systemic perturbation in the sequential order of phenomena performed in that context” (1996, 464). Examples of such perturbations are the effects of global financial turmoil on local communities or reorganization of a global corporation on any of its local branches. “The space of flows . . . dissolves time by disordering the sequence of events and making them simultaneous, thus installing society in an eternal ephemerality” (1996, 467). In short, anything can happen at any time, it can happen very rapidly, and its sequence is independent from what goes on in the places where the effects are felt. (Stalder 304)

In his discussion of Castells’ third volume, *The End of the Millennium*, Stalder focuses on the consequences of this new society:

“The rise of informationalism in this end of millennium [*sic*] is intertwined with rising inequality and social exclusion throughout the world” (1998, 70). Castells traces the phenomenon of exclusion across different social and geographic contexts and concludes, “the evolution of intra-country inequality varies, what appears to be a global phenomenon is the growth of poverty, and particularly of extreme poverty” (1998, 81). Social exclusion is flexibly defined as the systematic inability of individuals or groups to access the means for meaningful survival. This enables Castells to connect the heritage of the colonial history of Africa with the exploitation of children around the world and the exclusion of minority groups and geographic areas in the United States. However, it is the new ability to effectively switch off areas which are viewed as nonvaluable from the perspective of the dominant social logic, embedded in the space of flows, that has created *black holes of informational capitalism*: regions from where there is, statistically speaking, no escape from suffering and depravation [*sic*]. (Stalder 306)

Castells’ theory of the network society provides a helpful way of conceptualizing and imaging globalized society. The image of the network (and the theory that comes with it) allows for the recognition of connectedness and disconnectedness (the “fourth world”), centers (characterized by a high degree of integration into a particular network), and margins

(characterized by a low degree of the same). The contrast of centers and margins, defined by access to the network, evokes the language and concept of empire, which is also characterized by a center and accompanying margins.

Hardt and Negri: Empire

Two further theorists, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, use the term *empire* as a heuristic device for describing contemporary global society. Interest in the theory of empire stems from a desire to develop further the notion of inequality contained in Castells' notion of the "fourth world." A few elements of Hardt and Negri's theory are helpful here.⁷

Hardt and Negri distinguish between the current global Empire, as they term it, and earlier versions of empire and imperialism, identifying the following new characteristics of the contemporary Empire:

There is no "outside" of the current global Empire;
The current global Empire is polycentric;
The current global Empire is multi-layered.

John Bellamy Foster expands on these ideas in his 2001 review of Hardt and Negri's *Empire*:

The term "Empire" in Hardt and Negri's analysis does not refer to imperialist domination of the periphery by the center, but to an all-encompassing entity that recognizes no limiting territories or boundaries outside of itself. In its heyday, "imperialism," they claim, "was really an extension of the sovereignty of the European nation-states beyond their own boundaries" (p. xii). Imperialism or colonialism in this sense is now dead. But Hardt and Negri also pronounce the death of the new colonialism: economic domination and exploitation by the industrial powers without direct political control. They insist that all forms of imperialism, insofar as they represent restraints on the homogenizing force of the world market, are doomed by that very market. Empire is thus both "postcolonial and postimperialist" (p. 9). "Imperialism," we are told, "is a machine of global striation, channeling, coding, and territorializing the flows of capital, blocking certain flows and facilitating others. The world market, in contrast, requires a smooth space of uncoded and deterritorialized flows . . . imperialism would have been the death of capital had it not been overcome. The full realization of the world market is necessarily the end of imperialism (p. 333). (Foster 1–2)

⁷ For the following, see Hardt and Negri, *Empire*.

Foster continues by explaining that Hardt and Negri reject old models, preferring to speak of hierarchies and differences of degree:

concepts such as center and periphery, these authors argue, are now all but useless. “Through the decentralization of production and the consolidation of the world market, the international divisions and flows of labor and capital have fractured and multiplied so that it is no longer possible to demarcate large geographical zones as center and periphery, North and South.” (Foster 2)

The question is, however, whether it is not still useful to refer to the places or groups at the top of a hierarchy as centers – such as the United States in many respects, according to Hardt and Negri, but with qualifications, as Gopal Balakrishnan suggests in his review of *Empire*:

Hardt and Negri open their case by arguing that, although nation-state-based systems of power are rapidly unravelling in the force-fields of world capitalism, globalization cannot be understood as a simple process of de-regulating markets. Far from withering away, regulations today proliferate and interlock to form an acephalous supranational order which the authors choose to call “Empire”. The term, as they use it, refers not to a system in which tribute flows from peripheries to great capital cities, but to a more Foucauldian figure – a diffuse, anonymous network of all-englobing power. Hardt and Negri claim that the sinews of this phantasmic polity – its flows of people, information, and wealth – are simply too unruly to be monitored from metropolitan control centres. Their account of its origins adds a few striking nuances to a now familiar story. An older, statist world of ruling class and proletariat, of dominant core and subject periphery, is breaking down, and in its place a less dichotomous and more intricate pattern of inequality is emerging. (Balakrishnan 143)

Thus Malcolm Bull says that in Hardt and Negri’s *Empire*:

The new world order represents a new form of imperial sovereignty “composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule”. The account of the way these organisms – the United States, the G8, the UN, the NGOs, the multinationals and the media conglomerates – exercise their authority is left rather vague, but in a sense it doesn’t matter. (Bull 5)

In another review of *Empire*, Ed Vulliamy says that Hardt and Negri argue that the flipside of globalization is that those it exploits have

a greater potential for commonality among each other. The possibility of the recognition of the multitude is dependent on us seeing our commonality as humans. . . . Global capital makes that possible in the same way that industrial capital made possible the organisation of the industrial working class. It didn’t make the [Communist] Party – but it made the Party possible.” (Vulliamy 23, insertion his)

Concluding Observations

This paper has attempted to outline a viable way of looking at what our consultation has called globalization. Viewing the world as tightly integrated and hierarchically structured, consisting of various networks that together make up a polycentric and multi-layered empire, is a helpful way of describing globalized society. Such a perspective seems plausibly to integrate the origins, prime dynamics, problems, and possibilities of this society.