

Populism and Globalization – an Ideological Clash

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Abstract

If we accept Globalization as a form of, or an alternative to Modernization Theories we can see some of its key elements in many policies and political programs developed throughout the world.

We can also argue that EU is a good advocate of this process and that many of its programs and development policies are crafted following a subtle line of what modernization mea [ns in the perspective of the view mentioned earlier. One of the most important attributes of globalization is that it does not want to assert itself ideologically, and this is one of the characteristics that EU certainly adopted throughout its policy making. This kind of approach is very wise regarding the problem of political cohesion, and in many ways, focusing on numbers and procedures may help creating a better development process without any political pressure in terms of values and biases. But what is to do when a wave of Populism arises and it threatens the integrity of the EU and its policies? What happens when something like Brexit brings the end of many development and modernization projects that not only affect UK or the rest of the EU member-states but also other beneficiary-states?

My thesis is that Populism as a rising political view of the modern era is certainly a threat for modernization processes akin Globalization. In my opinion if the impact of this threat is needed to be lowered the entity that asserts and implements policies based on Globalization or any other form of modernization theory, needs to adopt some kind of ideological affiliation. By not asserting any political, ideological or principled element, you might lose the battle with a powerful ideological wave like Populism – as you might not even be present on a value-based battlefield. Numbers are not and will never represent a simple dichotomic view for many people – as such, whenever an ideological view will assert

any wholesome good, you will most certainly combat it with the wrong weapon – only diffuse data.

In this study, I want to analyze globalisation as a Modernization Theory from an ideological point of view and follow the line that you can find in EU's modernization policies. Throughout the paper, I will try to analyze the modernization processes and policies in an ideological spectrum and try to identify any ideological elements that could represent some affiliation. This has the role of identifying any way that the EU could've argued for the importance of the processes that stopped along with Brexit (as a representative of the rise of Populism). I will try to estimate the importance of these elements in a presumably ideological battle between the two and determine the possibility that with some kind of ideological or valoric arguments and background, a modernization process like Globalization (here represented by the EU) would not be so easily defeated.

Globalization as a Modernization Theory

It is not my intention to talk about the origins, the root causes or the need for globalization. I will try not to defend nor to criticize the results of the globalization process. I will merely assert that we can consider globalization a modernization theory – good, bad, the best there is or not, efficient enough or not, it does not matter to my analysis. I will try to consider this process as a modernization mechanism with an ideological component (that shall be analysed) and so, will try to debate the result of the clash it had with populism in one recent relevant political event: Brexit. In my view this clash may represent not only the victory of populism on a political level and an example for the whole Europe, but moreover it may be an example of how Modernization and any processes alike (here represented by globalization) can be threaten, slowed or stopped if the theory or the theoretical construct behind it avoids or misrepresents ideological elements, values and rhetoric.

These being said, let's look at why Globalization can be defined as a Modernization Theory.

Globalization has a very wide understanding, this may be because of its so ample impact upon the modern society. For Giddens, this process is primarily a dialectical and interactive one that ***“can thus be defined as 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”*** [1].

However, the most often invoked, and most criticised side of globalisation is the economic and business view that endorses a global market for production, distribution and consumption leading to a homogenization of consumer markets around the world: *“Banking is rapidly becoming indifferent to the constraints of time, place and currency...an English buyer can get a Japanese mortgage, an American can tap his New York bank account through a cash machine in Hong Kong and a Japanese investor can buy shares in a London-based Scandinavian bank whose stock is denominated in sterling, dollars, Deutsche Marks, and Swiss francs”* [2]. Thus, it is inevitable to criticise (and with good reason) the contemporary form of globalization (being driven almost solely by economic train of thought) of putting communities at risk in the rich countries and exploiting cheap labour in the poorer countries, increasing threats for the environment and undermining the social stability by subjecting institutions to forces of economic change beyond their control. All of this, as a dark side of globalization, is certainly one of the main factors that led to the rise of the “ethnic revival” and far- right or national populism that Europe deals with these days.

With all this in mind, we also cannot ignore the fact that globalization represents the increased mobility of goods, services, labour, technology and capital throughout the world all of this leading to the development of technology, communications, education and healthcare services and programs and has been known as an important progress factor since the 1970s [3].

Globalization can be considered the rightful successor of Rostow's Modernization Theory and the natural

descendent of the idea of development through forced economic injections, but also, we cannot ignore the role it has into the development of trans-national research, education, healthcare programs, services and mobility. It would be a mistake not to consider the impact globalization had on the development of emergent democratic countries, specifically on those part of the EU. The trans-national accessible funds, the new high-standards set by adherence to the Union, with all their negative effects are nonetheless reasons why globalization can be considered a modernization process.

Ideological Dimension and Ideological Discourse of Globalization

Globalization has, without any doubt, its uniqueness as a political phenomenon and this is maybe why Freedman considers that *“it is far too early to pronounce on globalism’s status as an ideology”* [4, pp. 5] while for others, like Steger, *“globalism not only represents a set of political ideas and beliefs coherent enough to warrant the status of a new ideology, but also constitutes the dominant political belief system of our time against which all of its challengers must define themselves”* [5].

I can hardly disagree with Steger, globalisation has a very stable foundation that relies on values captured in neoliberalism and conservatism alike regarding the importance of the free market, and this concept is the main locomotive behind any process that globalisation endorses [5]. Starting with this claim, there arises the inevitability and the anonymity of a dynamic process that nobody is in charge of – these being the main reason that sets further the dominance and seemingly a high degree of incapacity to resist it. One proof of economic growth as the imperative element of globalisation’s rhetoric is the stunning similarity between two speeches: in 1996 – G-7 and the one from the 2009 – G-20 that promote the same way of development based on economic surges as the only highway to a better future, even if between the two meetings one of the most extensive global financial crisis happened [6].

Up until now we can point out globalization as a modernizing process that relies on the neo-liberal and conservative view of free-market as the main driver of progress, even when the latest years have not necessarily proven that. It is its core ideological element – economical growth. Alongside this we can also have another example: the European Union’s recipe – a somewhat watered down approach; learning maybe from the criticism of Rostow’s theory, the EU has a high regard on social cohesion, development and improvement of own means of production, innovation and nurturing of local advance on a very broad variety of industries. Therefore, globalisation expressed in the policies of the EU have a more socially-oriented speech and practices, trying to use specific indicators when implementing and investing into national infrastructure and a variety of institutions.

This leaves us with two main ways that globalization expresses ideologically: 1. economic growth and global research networks for education and development and 2. classic liberal value-related narrative regarding human rights and freedom of speech, thought and mobility. The first, a global crisis as a big mark of failure, as for research and education, the results are on a far too long term to consider them, or way too invisible for the majority of the people in the context of a constant economic struggle. The second – nonetheless values that need to still represent the core of society and that should be valued for humanity to thrive for a better future, they seem a kid’s poem in the context of the same economic struggle earlier mentioned and in the constant terrorist threats that shake the European community and not only.

Populism vs Modernization

In the earlier described context, the latest years nurtured the rise of European populism as a thin-centred ideology that can embody numerous shapes and can find as root a very diverse composure of values that define other classic ideologies. At its core, it separates the society into two antithetical groups – the people and the corrupt elites, with the clear distinction that the politics are in the full command of the latter and

not an expression of the general will. Therefore, the need to regain power, distribute it to the people and try to avoid specific groups (economic elites, intellectuals, military or political cadres or even ethnic groups) to gain the power and capacity to dictate their will to others.

This distinction is set on a moral level, it's not just a contextual contrast – the elites are forever tainted and are responsible for the bad state and the slow progress of development to come. This paranoid fight against shadowy forces also implies that the elites are working against the national interest by putting the practices and policies of the EU over the development of their country – as an example, in eastern and central Europe the right-wing populist parties such as Attack in Bulgaria and the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) have publicly accused the national elites of being agents of Israeli or Jewish interests [7]. The case it's simple: without any national solidarity, there cannot be any international solidarity.

With a fearmongering and authoritarian rhetoric, attacking the EU culture and values, invoking the “natural order of things” (even on a private matter like sexual orientation, as it's the case of the far-right movements); or with an obvious anti-EU economical globalisation (in the case of the far-left movements) the separation from EU and its policies is required. For populists, the only way to salvation is by doing things with our own hands, in our own way.

As the root causes of populism, we can clearly invoke the economic state, the global GDP and GDP per capita decrease from 1990 and concentration of GDP on the top 1% to 10%, as well as the general disappointment combined with the fear of immigration – in all its forms: the constant war on terrorism, the higher and higher unemployment rates and the uncertainty of cultural homogeneity.

The cleavage between the way of life in major cities and capitals vs periphery – in the former the experience with immigration is more vivid, present and the human connection is real, the future has a more clear and optimistic form, as in the latter you experiment less and less, and you have no control or even direct contact over the global processes – this leads to fear and uncertainty.

All these causes are beyond doubt understandable, but populism is trying to address all these with a direct instrument like referendum, considering it one of the few if not the only instrument that can show the general will of the people. One remarkable example is Brexit – a radical exit from the EU. By oversimplifying and obscuring facts, by using the human capacity to easily over-estimate the past and compare it with the disillusion of the present, populist rhetoric made it possible for one of the most important members of the EU, to stop, among others, the funding of many research programs, educational collaborations and grants.

In this image, we have a modernization process – globalisation (with all the awful aspects that are involved) versus a rising political view (that maybe is the result of the failing globalization also). In this clash, the former had virtually nothing else on an ideological plane besides economy to hold on, when the latter had everything the first lacked in: myth, over-estimation of the past, invoking of history and a better past as an example, promises of re-establishing a clear natural order, reuniting the community of the good people, purging the “uncleanness” of current politics and giving back the proper and well deserved care and nurturing of the nation and its citizens.

Conclusions

As stated earlier, we have in front a clash of a somewhat hegemonic modernization theory with a rising political view. For me, the only valid question is whether a modernization theory that wants to succeed at developing countries (as it states from the beginning of the Cold War) needs a deeper ideological definition and discourse than globalization does. Do we see the failure of a modernization “recipe” because of its lack of ideological consistency? Is populism (or any other ideological counterpart) a real threat to modernization

only because of the capacity to use a clearer logic, based on emotions and evocations of ideal images?

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