



Globalization and Politics: A Critique of Stephen Gill's Postmodern Views

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In outlining his views on globalization, market civilization, and neo-liberalism, Stephen Gill's main point of departure from an orthodox Marxian line is his use of discourse to "deconstruct" neo-liberalism. It is his combining of postmodernism and Marxism that makes his argument contradictory since Marxism is predicated on the historical-materialist view of history that states what people produce and their relationship to things that they produce conditions their social, political, and intellectual lives. Marxist ideology is a "humanist project" in which the individual is generally understood to be conscious, stable, unified, rational, and coherent. Since Foucault, and other postmodernists, call into question the existence of a lasting subject or individual, this is problematic for Gill's argument.

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จุดเริ่มต้นหลักจากแนวคิดมาร์กซิสต์หรือลัทธิมากซ์ของสตีเฟน กิล คือการใช้วาทกรรมเพื่อที่จะเปิดพื้นที่ที่เป็นไปได้ของแนวคิดเสรีนิยมใหม่ พื้นที่แนวคิดใหม่นี้เป็นการรวมกันของแนวคิดหลังสมัยใหม่และแนวคิดมาร์กซิสต์ที่ทำให้ข้อโต้แย้งของกิลเป็นประเด็นขัดแย้งกันในหมู่นักคิด ตั้งแต่แนวคิดมาร์กซิสต์ทำให้เกิดมุมมองวัตถุนิยมเชิงประวัติศาสตร์ที่กล่าวว่าสิ่งใดก็ตามที่มนุษย์สร้างขึ้นและความสัมพันธ์ของมนุษย์ต่อสิ่งที่พวกเขาสร้างขึ้นเป็นตัวกำหนดชีวิตเชิงสังคม การเมือง และปัญญา ทั้งนี้อุดมการณ์มาร์กซิสต์ คือ “โครงสร้างมนุษย์นิยม” ที่เป็นที่ยอมรับโดยทั่วไปว่าปัจเจกบุคคลคือบุคคลที่มีสติสัมปชัญญะ มีเสรีภาพ มีความเป็นปัจเจก มีเหตุและผล และมีความเชื่อมโยงสอดคล้องกัน ตั้งแต่ฟูโกต์และนักคิดแนวคิดเสรีนิยมใหม่ตั้งประเด็นคำถามถึงการมีอยู่ของปัจเจกบุคคลอันเป็นนิรันดร์ สิ่งนี้เป็นปัญหาในการตีความประเด็นโต้แย้งของกิล

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It is the purpose of this brief article to place Stephen Gill's chapter entitled 'Globalization, Market Civilization and Disciplinary Neo-Liberalism' within the wider framework of the current debate over the nature of globalization, and to argue that although Gill's stance is compelling, his departure from orthodox Marxism, namely his reliance on postmodernism and deconstruction weakens his position since historical materialism, I will argue, is a humanist project and therefore irreconcilable with a postmodern perspective. In order to do so, I will provide by a brief summation and critique of the arguments Gill has put forth intertwined with a brief examination of how Gill's line of reasoning fits into the current debate surrounding globalization.

In Gill's article, he outlines some of the major arrangements of political economy, governance, and culture that illustrate his

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conception of the reality of the new world order- a world order that Gill views as “the product of collective action” and “[...] a politics of supremacy rather than hegemony (2003: 116). Hence Gill’s position falls under what McGrew (2008) calls “thick” causal or “structural” explanations for globalization.

Gill attempts to situate problems of this new world order within a crisis that is affecting civilizations and the global political economy. In doing so, he examines the societal forces that are, he argues, re-creating power by outlining the incongruities involved in neo-liberal capitalism by “deconstructing and rebuffing its ideological and mythic representations” (2003: 116). Secondly, Gill attempts to connect the changes in the reality of this new world order to the prevailing “historical structures” – disciplinary neo-liberalism, new constitutionalism, and market civilization – that are part of the process of neo-liberalism which pre-dates the Enlightenment (116-118).

As noted by Steger (2002), academic approaches to globalization vary widely from analytical perspectives which emphasize the cultural, political, and economic, to those that deny its existence (19). Although McGrew (2008), cautions against “economizing” globalization, he points out that that within the literature on global political economy, the term may be concisely



defined as, “the emergence and operation, of a single worldwide, economy” (280).

Gill concedes that this integration is by no means complete (2003: 150), and he applies the term ‘disciplinary’ to neo-liberalism in his article because he argues that although neo-liberal discipline is not necessarily universal or consistent, it is “bureaucratized” and “institutionalized” in such a way that it exerts control trans-nationally through the structure of capital, and locally through surveillance and coercion, in Gill’s words, a “Foucauldian sense” (2003: 130-131).

Gill argues that neo-liberal discipline affects nations and individuals. On the macro level, he argues that this discipline has become institutionalized through the discursive formation of a “supremacist transnational historical bloc” (1998: 131) consisting of a political and economic structure, which he calls the “G7 nexus” (2003: 137), that exerts power, or “neo-liberal discipline”, across nations. This bloc, according to Gill, is responsible for the reorganization of state and international political bodies, which has resulted in a “new constitutionalism” that can be observed in the policies of the organizations created as a result of the Bretton Woods Agreement, i.e. the IMF and The World Bank (2003: 131). Gill argues that new constitutionalism is designed to help the privileged along

with corporate capital while hindering the process of democratization and repressing the marginalized, which can be individuals or nations. Finally, Gill posits that neo-liberal discipline also works on an individual level using Jeremy Bentham’s “Panopticon” to draw an analogy between individuals in modern society and prisoners who are under constant surveillance to illustrate his point that new constitutionalism results in a new form of civil society and state that are less private and more coercive for individuals.

Gill’s main point of departure from an orthodox Marxian line is his use of discourse to “deconstruct” neo-liberalism. It is his combining of postmodernism and Marxism that makes his argument contradictory. To begin with, Marxism is predicated on the historical materialist view of history that states what people produce and their relationship to things that they produce “conditions [their] social, political, and intellectual life” (Eagleton, 2001: 274). Hence, Marxism is a political economy approach, i.e. economics shape ideology. In the words of Marx, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (as cited in Eagleton 2001: 274). Therefore, in Marxian thought, beliefs are not innate but are a result of social



relations. These social relations “[...] must be explained by a critique of ideology and an examination of the historical moment in which the subject is enmeshed. Furthermore, “Marxist ideology, which is centered on the totalizing metanarrative of class [...] is therefore [...] a humanist project [...]” (Pierre, 2000: 500). “The individual of humanism is generally understood to be a conscious, stable, unified, rational, coherent, [and] endowed with a will, a freedom, [...] which is then subsequently expressed in language [...]” (Pierre, 2000: 501). Since Foucault, and other postmodernist, call into question the existence of a lasting subject or individual (Pierre, 2000: 500) this is problematic for Gill’s argument.

St. Pierre (2000) cautions against a dismissal of postmodernism by pointing out that to do so would be careless and unethical (478) since, as pointed out by Nietzsche, “One seeks a picture of the world in *that* philosophy in which we feel freest; i.e., in which our most powerful drive feels free to function (as cited in Pierre, 2000: 478). However, given Gramsci’s influence on Gill’s writing, it is a bit puzzling why Gill did not attack the ideology of capitalism as an overarching structure of hegemony presented as ‘common sense’ and non-ideological rather than arguing that neo-liberalism is a “politics of supremacy”. For in Gill’s own words, neo-

liberalism and market civilization is set of contradictory “transformative practices” that create an “ideology or myth of capitalist progress” (2003: 117).

By examining the main thrust of Stephen Gill’s arguments on globalization and neo-liberalism, against the backdrop of the current debates on this issue, it becomes clear that the Marxist aspects of his argument are incongruent with his appeal to postmodernism in explaining globalization. Furthermore, Gill’s arguments would have been more consistent if he would have stuck with a more orthodox line of Marxism to present his case.

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