

Manuel Castells' Network Society and an understanding of the 'Subject' as Formulated by Alain Touraine

Alhaji Mustapha Javombo

Lecturer, Department of Governance and Leadership
Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM),
University of Sierra Leone (USL), A. J. Momoh Street, Tower Hill,
Freetown, Sierra Leone

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Abstract: This work examines "Can We Live Together? Equality and Difference by Alain Touraine (2000) and "Rise of the Network Society by Manuel Castells (2000). The work discusses the role of Touraine's sociological 'Subject' in Castells' network society and the challenges posed by globalization.

The aim of the study is to discuss the obstacles posed by globalization to a peaceful and coexistent society endowed with its fully recognized universal rights that guarantees the participation of individuals in public life. The work investigates contemporary socioeconomic, cultural and political change brought forward by globalization, information and communication technology. Alain Touraine's sociological 'Subject' as the actor and corrector of the ills of our current society and the differences that has been brought about by the proliferation of global networks in the network society and the equalities that are non-existent in our present society are being discussed.

The study concludes that the 'Subject' as formulated by Touraine is a mechanism to engineer the process of reorienting the network society by Castells and a sort of resistance to the manipulating tendencies of globalization. A way of bringing peace back to the family by reconciling the symbolic and instrumental worlds that has been long gone their separate ways.

Keywords: The Subject, Network Society, Globalization, Information and Communication Technology, Social Movement.

1. Introduction

The concept of equality and difference portrayed by Touraine dignify the social and political diversity witnessed by our present society. The author's approach in his formulation of the Subject provides a vivid view of our present world by painting a picture of the divorce from the cultural world to a globalized world. Our present society suffers from both political and social malice and the emphasis on equality demonstrates the level of cultural diversity faced by our present world. The threat imposed by demodernization on society is the central pillar of discussion for resurrecting the death of societal ego whereas the proliferation of different social movements within the network society undermines the personality of the Subject. Mass media has become increasingly important and also critical for politicians in the face of reaffirming democratic institutions at both national and international spheres. According to Touraine, the Subject is being threatened by mass society and due to individual selfish desires; people have abandoned the reality principle in the pursuit of their impersonal liberations (Touraine 2000: 53 -54). The quest for both individual and societal liberation from global flows is also treated as one of the central themes in the author's projection of the Subject in the network society.

Touraine opined that social and political theory has been adversely differentiated in terms of culture and globalization and there is a breakdown of social order transcending beyond the former structures of early totalitarian and authoritarian rules of the past. The modern civilizations achieved by institutions and cultures during both the French and American Revolutions are no more in our present society and the disunity of the family and the former structuring authority of the father has been all replaced by new forms of social order and civic responsibility. Our education system has also been sacrificed and made chaotic for global demands and the responsibility of maintaining social norms have been forsaken (p. 55). Touraine's Subject is a mechanism used to reinstate the lost identity and individuation in the network society and a process by which people take responsibility of their own actions by becoming social actors in the wake of demodernization. Mass society has consumed cultural identity and

posed a serious threat to the personality of the Subject due to individual selfish desires. Foucault's study on the way a human being turns himself into a subject is equally important in Touraine's work. Foucault argues that we need to be aware of our current circumstances and the type of reality that we are dealing with by understanding the power relations (Foucault 1982: 778). We should be able to understand what we mean by right from wrong and have the capacity to withstand the social evolution of our time.

This work is set out to discuss the role of the Subject in the network society and the challenges posed by globalization. What are the obstacles to a peaceful and coexistent society endowed with its fully recognized universal rights that guarantees the participation of individuals in public life? What are the difference that has been brought about by the proliferation of global networks in the network society and the equalities that are non-existent in our present society? Touraine's focus on the sociological Subject as the actor and corrector of the ills of our current society is also examined.

2. The Emergence of the Network Society

Castells position on the neoliberal illusion of the past indicates that social movements within specific societies now direct their anger against the global market flows (Castells 2010: 76-78). The author however, define the network society as a "specific form of social structure tentatively identified by empirical research as being characteristic of the Information Age". Human beings are said to form their behavioural patterns along the principles of social structures which serves as a "connection between relationships of production and consumption; and relationships of experience; and relationships of power" (Castells 2000: 5-7). For Touraine, social movements are a form of social conflicts aimed at the "social control of the main cultural patterns of a particular society" (Touraine 1985: 754). Hall argues that the transformation of a cultural community into a global village marked the turning point in our current society with the Subject struggling to harmonize the past with the present (Hall 1986: 291). We have therefore, entered into a "new society" that is comprise of new information technology and genetic engineering of living matters (Castells 2000: 693). As observed, the manipulating hand of globalization has on the one hand put a knife upon the cultural things that once held society together and the two ridges of politics and culture are now falling apart. On the other hand, the king has lost grip of his power to global financiers and the legitimacy of his subjects in what we once called nation states are given way to global networks. Our current society has been mortgaged to global financiers by yielding to the dictates of global networks in the network society. The rise of different social movements and the Subject poised to withstand the wave of globalization has made the falcon to no longer listen to the falconer and the predicament of the Subject has led to a fight between the polarities created by globalization, information and communication networks through an old law of social revolution (Castells 2010: 72). Castells further argues that "the king and the queen, the state and civil society, are both naked, and their children-citizens are wandering around a variety of foster homes" (p. 420). Our present society has become a shameless society where the golden princess has lost her love for the prince in the market place and the off-springs in turn have traded their birth rights for the proceeds of the global market.

3. The Role of the Subject and State in the Network Society

In the network society, the praise singing and melodies of the great achievements of our political leaders are no more and the folktales of our forefathers including their ancestors have all become disinteresting and obsolete. There is a generational divide in terms of culture and the media between those born before the internet and those born digital¹. The clarion call of global information and communication technology have all blocked our memories of the past, fine tuning our desires and self interest in the name of globalization. The Subject as formulated by the author is seen as a resistance identity in the network society struggling to reinstate the principle of equality that has been eroded by the advent of global networks (Touraine 2000: 56). The question is how individuals and states can freely associate themselves with the community of free citizens? The answer to the above question is that individuals within the network society have been trapped by the global flows of the market economy and the level of inequalities and cultural differences witnessed by individuals within the network society deprived people and nation states of their rights to freedom and equality. One best way to reassure this social and political dimension is through the projection of identity in the network society. However, it is a common place in our present society that social and political identity serve as the basis for individual and collective actions. As demonstrated by Castells,

¹ The advent of globalization marks the digitalization of our current society. Individuals born before the emergence of computers are considered to be less socially inclined as compared to those born during the computer age.

collective identity is largely determined by its symbolic content and its meaning for those associated with it both within and outside of it circles (Castells 2010: 7). Calhoun also argues that “identity serves as people’s source of meaning and experience” (Calhoun 1994: 9-10). It is this source of meaning and experience that has been challenged by the emergence of market, communication and technology. The Subject therefore, can be seen as a “defence against social reality” brought forward by demodernization. A form of “reason in the pursuit of freedom and rejection in the liberation of society” (Touraine 2000: 57 – 58). It is this manipulating mechanisms that form the notion of the Subject in Touraine’s work. The rationalization of the individual by freeing society and man from the dictates of globalization in the network society.

Hall also opined that “human beings become agents, capable of effective action only when they are actively engaged ‘in place’ through social and historical connections and disconnections” (Hall 1986: 291). This kind of relational positioning ensures that subjects as well as social actors “function in terms of discourses of the present and the past”. For Hall, it is such positioning that he refers to as ‘Identities’ (p. 291). According to Castells, the sociological notion of identity shows that all identities are constructed but how, from what, by whom and for what remain critical part of his analysis. (Castells 2010: 7-8). The author further discusses the three major types of identity as legitimizing identity, resistance identity and project identity. Identities can start as a resistance and then transform into a project and then becomes dominant or legitimized (p. 8-9). Castells argues that legitimizing identity leads to the formation of civil society by quoting Gramsci as a resistance method used against “the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded” (p. 9). Project identity therefore, produces subjects as defined by Alain Touraine and individuals against the community (Castells 2010: 10, Touraine 1995: 29-30). Identity should be situated historically in terms of culture and geography and the Subject’s role in the network society is however, determined by the social connections and disconnections in terms of individuation or collective actions.

3.1 The Network Economy

The culture and history of our present society has been alienated by the rise of the network society. The prevalence of modern technology and its use has also reversed the mode of human socialization whereas politicians, business leaders, institutions and social organizations have taken the lead in welcoming the use and adaptability of new technologies in terms of production and consumption in the network society. By inducing new forms of social change through globalization, our present generation now question the mode of identity in late modernity. Developed countries like the United States of America and Japan as well as developing countries such as China and India enjoy immensely from the application of new technologies in their production of goods and services that has led to their rapid development in recent years. On the one hand, certain small and medium level firms have been able to cooperate with each other by serving as subcontractors to big corporations at the global spheres. On the other hand, big corporations have also formed global partnerships on various projects through networks in the network society. Castells and Cardoso are with the view that the network society is based on the systemic disjunction between the local and the global for most individuals and social groups.

Society as pointed out by the authors has evolved from the “organization man to the flexible woman” through the process of individualization and fragmentation of the forces of production (Castells and Cardoso 2005: 8-9). These processes take into consideration three distinctive features of development in the global transformation of labour and work in the network society. One of the key features is the generation and diffusion of new microelectronics/digital technologies of information and communication. The second and most outstanding feature is also the transformation of labour through educational advancement. The third feature which is the diffusion of a new form of organizations through networking is considered mostly as what our present society has metamorphosed into in the phase of global demands (p. 8). In modernity (early or late), project identity was constituted from civil society as in the case of socialism on the basis of the labour movement, but as observed in our present network society, project identity if developed grows from communal resistance (Castells 2010: 9). The formation of different social, political and religious movements in the wake of globalization manipulates the manner through which the Subject is perceived to act in the network society by means of social change.

3.2 The Social Man and the Network Society

The network society has transformed individuals into social men and internet users are mostly considered sociable than non-users². This as a result has led to the global digital divide among people living in different parts of the world. In the network society, sociability is of paramount concern as compared to other forms of individual daily life. “The network society is not an isolated society but a hyper social society” (Castells and Cardoso 2005: 11). The Subject as formulated by Touraine is caught within the walls of socialization in the network society. Networked individualism or individuation underscores self-interested spirit of the social man in the network society. A society full of networked individuals transformed by the wings and caprices of global communication and information technology. Mass media in the network society also formed the basis for self-directed communication which makes politics largely dependent on it. The political fate of networked politicians in the network society are mostly determined by the mass media. In the network society, “media politics and image politics lead to scandal politics” (p. 14). The disconnection between the local and the global seem to have much influence on the social life of individuals in the network society. According to Giddens, the more tradition loses its hold on the social man, the more lifestyle is being reconstructed on a daily basis (Giddens 1991: 1-5). Individuals are exposed to a variety of lifestyle choices among a diversity of options and organized life planning that underscores the structuring of individual self-identity.

3.3 The Concept of Nation States and Global Networks of States

The concept of globalization gradually replaces nation-states of the industrial era through the formation of global networks. In the network society, the state cannot exist on its own without involving global networks at the international level. The state has to constantly engage with other networks in a form of global governance. The branding of national flags by nation-states in the network society and the sharing of sovereignty at the international realm undermines the sovereignty of nation states in the network society. It is argued by Castells that even though nations like UK and Sweden still maintain their own currency, but they are all dependent on the monetary policy of the European Union (Castells 2010: 303-306). Following development after the post-world war II era, Europe achieved what came to be known as nation-states whereas newly independent and underdeveloped countries within Asia and Africa face the reverse of forming state-nations (Rejai and Enloe 1969: 140). Globalization as argued by Castells when considered in its different forms undermines the legitimacy and decision-making authority of nation-states (Castells 2010: 323). We are presently witnessing a world that is captured by the proliferation of markets managed by different rational actors. One outstanding issue found with actors in pursuit of identities in the network society is that, they barely communicate with each other and the state but they “struggle and negotiate on behalf of their specific interests/values”. The power also to reorganize society is no longer concentrated in the state but diffused in global networks of wealth that circulate geometrically and are determined geographically (p. 421-424). The restoration of political leadership and the regaining of legitimacy by political leaders of nation-states is also portrayed by Touraine as one of the solutions to the problems of our present network society through his formulation of the Subject.

4. The Impact of Globalization on Man and Society

In the struggle to re-establish state authority through supranational institutions in the global arena, the state faces serious challenge in standing up to the task of maintaining the sovereignty of its territorial constituencies. According to Castells, the modern nation-state has lost much of its power and sovereignty to global networks of wealth, power and information, communication technology (Castells 2010: 418). The dramatic turn-around in the media landscape of 1980s and 90s of nations systematically resulted into a clear distinction between what came to be known as state and private owned media institutions. In many parts of the world, governments lost total control of the media except in totalitarian states where the political leadership still exercise monopoly over media houses. One clear example of an influence created by the emergence of the media such as Al Jazeera indicates that most cultures now have influence on the media and political interest of nations by shaping the flow of public opinion from the local to the global (p. 319). The emergent use of the internet has also made most governments such as France to be terrified about the negative impact of the media on national politics. As pointed out by Castells, in 1996, the French Minister of Information Technology proposed to the European Union (EU) a number of measures to be considered in

² Social networking through the use of the internet has transformed men, women and children alike of our present world into social and digital actors. We now live in a wired global village of social networks and digital connections.

banning free access to the Internet (Castells 2010: 319-22). What is most damaging about the current flow of the global economy is organized crimes and the pattern of operation at the international arena. The scale of the criminal economy is alarming and the devastating effect of money laundering activities surmount to serious impacts on national states that are summarized by Castells in three folds: First, the higher echelon of state authority are often penetrated by criminal networks through corrupt means thereby creating bad havoc and undermining the territorial integrity of nations. Second, the international relations between nations in the handling of international and cross border criminal activities also result in the mishandling of cooperation and security related matters by members. Examples can be drawn from the relationship between the United States and Columbia, Germany's pessimism with the Russian Mafiya in the trafficking of radioactive materials and Russia's worry over the significant influence of the Silician Mafiya and Columbian Cartels. Lastly, the growing tendencies of the financial gains from these criminal activities further undermines the ability of nations in fully implementing viable economic policies considering the negative impact of these criminal activities (p. 322). The phenomenon created by the activities of different national and international actors in the global market threaten the peace and security of our present society whereas the addiction of people to the use of information and communication gadgets deprived states and the political leadership control over individual actions in the network society.

5. Conclusion

Although in the beginning God created everyman equal, but some are more equal than others in our present society. This societal injustice in terms of fair distribution of wealth and resources and the controlling nature of the nation states by global financiers and international institutions like the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) in the name of global governance has led to most uncompromising nation states and members going their separate ways. Our present world is in a quagmire and the building blocks of our self-created walls are falling apart. Globalization therefore, has turn nation-states into networks of global villages and the cultural value of communities has been consumed by the mass society of global communication and information technology. In the network society, the concept of global governance has also taken charge of the role of nation-states while global financiers and institutions now control the political leadership of nations. The Subject as formulated by Touraine is a mechanism to engineer the process of reorienting the network society and a sort of resistance to the manipulating tendencies of globalization. A way of bringing peace back to the family by reconciling the symbolic and instrumental worlds that has been long gone their separate ways.

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