

The Economists' Approach to Globalization, and the Significance of Consumerism: The Turkish Case

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Abstract

Globalization continues to process despite its economic and social crises. Scholars also continue to study on globalization. However, it is not understood truly. Especially economists see globalization as a one-sided phenomenon. So the social substance cannot be perceived profoundly. The concept of consumerism implies a culture and an ideology as a plank of globalization (global capitalism), and it enables economists to develop an interdisciplinary view and to understand multidimensionality of globalization.

Keywords: Economics – Global Capitalism – Consumerism – Culture – Ideology

1. Introduction

Globalization is an economic process for many people. Especially economists explain and assess globalization within some concepts in economics. Whereas the multidimensional structure of globalization comes close to reality, while economics cannot work for social reality in functional sense. The concept of consumerism pays attention to multidimensionality of globalization, on one hand; it makes economists see consumption as not only economic term in the context of global capitalism.

I aim to display economists' approach to globalization in terms of Turkish case and to explain the concept of consumerism that is one of the planks of global capitalism. In this framework, in first section, economists' point of view is assessed, examining some books and articles on globalization, which economists published in Turkey. In second section, the concept of consumerism is explained as both a culture and an ideology for attracting economists' attention.

2. The Economic Literature on Globalization in Turkey

The discussions in economic methodology generally focus on that economics abstains from interdisciplinary studies, though it studies on human beings' behaviors/practices. This condition stems from that the traditional economic doctrine has mathematical and individual substance in terms of being a pure science such as physics, chemistry, biology, and so on. We can also observe an instance of this discussion in books and articles on globalization, which are written by economists. This situation is not only peculiar to Turkish economic literature on globalization, but also economists generally study in this context all over the world. As regards, in first stage, I assess the books and articles that have an economic content on globalization in Turkey.

In this study, I examine the issues of the journals that are indexed by Scientific and Technological Research Institution of Turkey (TUBITAK-ULAKBIM) in 2000s, and evaluate the articles involving economic themes on globalization along with some books focusing on globalization. The related articles and books are the publications that include the word 'globalization' in their title, rather than in the text. A scholar may make only one sentence by using the word 'globalization' in the text, but it is expected that a scholar examines globalization particularly and broadly by using the word in the title. With regard to this criterion, I aim to determine how economics and economists see globalization.

Here is the examined journals' name and coverage:

- Uludağ University Journal of the Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences (the period of 2007-2015, 17 issues),
- Hacettepe University Journal of the Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences (the period of 2002-2015, 30 issues),
- Gazi University Journal of the Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences (the period of 2000-2015, 47 issues),
- Ankara University Journal of the Faculty of Politics (the period of 2000-2015, 63 issues),
- Journal of Economic Approach (the period of 2000-2012, 50 issues),
- Dogus University Journal (the period of 2000-2015, 32 issues),
- Middle Eastern Technical University Studies in Development (the period of 2000-2015, 39 issues).

The electronic version of the articles has been obtained via the websites of the journals. The books were evaluated from their printed version. I can bring forward my assessment related to the books and articles at this point:

Globalization and National-State (Book)

(Author: Gülten Kazgan, Turkish title: *Küreselleşme ve Ulus-Devlet*)

Gülten Kazgan is an outstanding scholar in economics in Turkey. Her book has an instructive analysis on globalization especially on the basis of economics. She assesses globalization in terms of inter-state system or the relations between the Core and the Periphery, and she views globalization as a field of national-states' struggle for economic and political hegemony. Besides she examines that national-state weakens in respect of political identity, non-governmental organizations, and so on. Her analysis depends on economic issues in particular, such as financial flows, labor flexibility, globalizing capital, and so forth.

The Other Face of Globalization: Poverty (Book)

(Author: Fikret Şenses, Turkish title: *Küreselleşmenin Öteki Yüzü: Yoksulluk*)

The author Fikret Şenses is a leading scholar who takes up developmental economics and the impacts of neo-liberalism. In this book, Şenses proposes that globalization is a main reason of poverty taking root in our age. However, he does not explain what globalization is, to be understood truly.

“Economic Crisis, International Relations and the Future of Globalization” (Article)

(Author: Davut Ateş, Turkish title: *“Ekonomik Kriz, Uluslararası İlişkiler ve Küreselleşmenin Geleceği”*)

In this article, the author draws attention to that current global economic crisis causes some formations of international cooperation, and that the crisis results in some changes in international political relations because of the multidimensionality of globalization.

“The Crisis of Globalizing Labor, and Global Inequality” (Article)

(Author: Sibel Çaçkurlu, Turkish title: *“Küreselleşen İşgücünün Krizi ve Küresel Eşitsizlik”*)

The author sees globalization as a process that emerges against labor who is articulated to the flexible structures of global production network, and whose rights are shattered, in terms of wage, working hours, social security, labor-union rights, income inequality, and so on.

“Globalization, Deunionization and Poverty” (Article)

(Author: Yüksel Akkaya, Turkish title: *“Küreselleşme, Sendikasılaşdırma ve Yoksullaştırma”*)

The author point out that globalization emerges on two planks in terms of the expansion of capitalism: Capital mobility and technological development. Furthermore the author claims that the flexible capital also makes labor flexible while globalizing, and that deunionization occurs along with poverty.

“On Globalization” (Article)

(Author: Gülten DEMİR, Turkish title: *“Küreselleşme Üzerine”*)

The author, in the beginning of this study, briefly points out that globalization has some different dimensions. She mentions wholeness of globalization in short terms, but do not assess it in detail. She explains globalization in the context of international labor of division and the relations between the Core and the Periphery, so her assessment involves economic themes in particular.

“Globalization, The North-The South and Poverty” (Article)

(Author: Fethullah Akin, Turkish title: “Küreselleşme, Kuzey-Güney ve Yoksulluk”)

In this article, economic terminology prevails while explaining globalization. The author sees globalization as a process causing imperialism, economic inequality and poverty, in terms of some economic conceptions, such as GDP, foreign direct investments, multinational corporations, and so on.

“Globalization, Economic Policies and Convergence Thesis” (Article)

(Author: İsmail Seyrek, Turkish title: “Küreselleşme, İktisat Politikaları ve Yakınsama Tezi”)

The author compiles some references explaining globalization in terms of some economic themes, such as economic liberalization, open economy, free trade, foreign investments, financial flows, economic policies, and so on. He assesses that such processes cause convergence or divergence between countries, with some statistical indicators on the basis of economic growth and per capita income.

“A Distinctive Dimension of Economic Globalization: Workplace as a Mechanism for Adaptation” (Article)

(Author: Belkıs Kümbetoğlu, Turkish title: “Ekonomik Küreselleşmede Farklı Bir Boyut: Bir Uyum Mekanizması Olarak İşyeri”)

The author claims that globalization emerges highly by way of global mobility of capital and multinational corporations and that labor flow or immigration occurs globally in conjunction with capital mobility.

“International Problems on Competition in the Globalized World: The Power of Multinational Corporations, and Developing Countries” (Article)

(Author: Sibel Çaçkurlu, Turkish title: “Küreselleşen Dünyada Rekabete İlişkin Uluslararası Sorunlar: Çokuluslu Şirketlerin Artan Gücü ve Gelişmekte Olan Ülkeler”)

The author sees globalization as a given phenomenon and she does not need to examine this concept in the article. And she treats trade and competition policy in the process of globalization and competitive capacity of multinational corporations, and monopolistic/oligopolistic global firms' effects on developing countries.

“Globalization, Structural Transformation and Growth: An Evaluation for Turkey in the Light of Information Indicators” (Article)

(Author: Alev Söylemez, Turkish title: “Küreselleşme, Yapısal Dönüşüm ve Büyüme: Bilgi Göstergeleri Işığında Türkiye Açısından Bir Değerlendirme”)

The author evaluates the economic situation of Turkey in the light of the indicators of information society and technological changes that she sees as a main component of economic structural development. This article does not include a whole, theoretical underpinning of globalization. And the author assesses only technological changes without explaining barely globalization.

“Globalization: To What Extent is It One-Dimensional?” (Article)

(Author: Davut Ateş, Turkish title: “Küreselleşme: Ne Kadar Tek Boyutlu?”)

The author treats globalization as a multidimensional process, in contrast to the most articles written on globalization by economist scholars. He claims that globalization also involves cultural and political processes and their actors, although it is perceived generally as an economic-determined process. And he describes globalization as new phase in the historical perspective.

“Globalization and Trade Unions in Turkey: Two Class Strategies in Countering Neo-liberal Restructuring” (Article)

(Author: Elif Uzgören, this article is in English)

This article focuses on the relations of production in the process of globalization in Turkey, and the author reviews the labor class' strategies for globalization and neoliberal restructuring within the context of economic crisis. The study is based upon interviews conducted with twenty-two trade unionists. In this study, globalization is taken as a process within which production and finance are transnationalized through deregulation and liberalization of financial markets and the rise of transnational corporations and/or foreign direct investment.

In respect of the examined studies above, some ideas can be put forward about the economists' view on globalization:

- In the academic realm of Turkey, the scholars, especially economist scholars, do not publish much more on globalization. The articles on globalization are mostly written with citations like a compilation and they are not systematic.
- The scholars do not need to assess the theories or theoretical approaches to globalization in their studies, and they do not strive to develop a theoretical approach.
- The scholars mention the process of internationalization, and the concept of transnationalization or transnational practices and structures are known barely, which depict the substance of globalization.
- Globalization is reduced to international economic relations, and it is explained in respect of economic concepts, such as foreign trade, financial flows, foreign direct investments, GDP and so forth.
- The other dimensions of globalization are not regarded profoundly, and the connectivity between the dimensions and culture-ideology underpinning the economic processes are excluded.
- The other dimensions of globalization are not assessed analytically and systematically, those are mentioned in very short terms.
- Globalization is not evaluated comprehensively in the studies that involve the effects of globalization on some economic themes, such as income distribution, labor markets, small- and middle-size- firms, social security, and so on. Those are viewed as the effects of neo-liberal economic policies and global economic relations. This means economic reductionism.
- Globalization is perceived as the synonym of imperialism, and it is criticized ideologically in terms of the claims of Dependency School in particular. This tendency can be observed especially in the books on globalization, which are written by Turkish authors.
- The translated books on globalization are more than the books written by Turkish authors. And the books that criticize globalization ideologically are translated into Turkish, in particular. The books that theorize globalization are not translated adequately.
- Some studies on globalization can be observed in the field of sociology, business administration, and so on. However these studies are one-dimensional, like in the economic field.
- Especially economist scholars undervalue what globalization is and its definition and/or theories in terms of its multilayered structure; only one dimension of globalization is commonly considered and analyzed.

In terms of Turkish case, it is understood that especially economists view globalization as a one-dimension-process. The economists' insight can be accepted within the principle 'ceteris paribus', but also it interferes to understand the essence of global system. Even economists may not profoundly understand the economy/capitalism that is their own object to study. Consumerism that is a plank of global capitalism is also valuable to assess for economists. Even if sociologists and some economists that study on *political economy* embrace the concept of consumerism, the economists that study on *economics* should pay attention to consumerism for comprehending global capitalism truly, as well.

3. Consumerism in the Context of Globalization

Consumerism is a concept that is one of the underpinnings of global capitalism in our age, but also it has been developed for the first time in order to explain the social structure in 1970s. In that period, consciousness about consumer rights arose, and politicians and firms played some roles towards this consciousness. The concept of consumerism has been claimed for describing this process. George Day and David Aaker who are among the authors studying on consumerism, evaluated consumerism on the basis of protecting consumers. For Day and Aaker, government, firms and socio-economic organizations play some roles to protect consumers from practices restricting their rights. Consumers have some rights such as security, information, choice freedom, alternatives to choose, being regarded by firms, and so forth. To protect these rights, governments should function on providing security in the process of consumption, making markets competitive for choice freedom, and so on; and firms should inform consumers sufficiently and consider consumers' suggestions and demands (Day and Aaker, 1970: 13-14). Robert Herrmann argued that consumerism is a conglomeration of separate groups which form temporary alliances on consumers' rights, such as labor organizations, consumer cooperatives, credit unions, consumer educators, state and local consumer organizations, and so forth (1970: 56). Similarly, Max Brunk described consumerism as an activism that promotes some helpful practices for consumers (1973: 9).

The concept of consumerism emerged in 1970s within consumer rights and political position and discourse towards the rights. Afterwards, consumerism has been theorized with regard to global capitalism rising as from 1970s. Hence consumerism is viewed as a plank and the cultural-ideological dimension of global capitalism.

For Leslie Sklair who is one of the theorists of global capitalism, the culture-ideology of consumerism can be explained in terms of two central factors that are historically unprecedented. First, capitalism entered a qualitatively new globalizing phase in terms of the electronic revolution in the 1960s. Second, the technical and social relations that structured the mass media all over the world made it very easy for new consumerist lifestyles to become the dominant motif for these media. Mass media perform many functions for global capitalism to inculcate the dominant ideology into the minds of people, thus a reformulation of consumerism is created. And mass media sells ideas, values, products, in short, a consumerist world-view (Sklair, 2002: 108).

Sklair argues that the success of the culture-ideology of consumerism can be observed all over the world in shopping malls, where now large numbers of workers and their families flock to buy, usually with credit cards, thus locking themselves into the financial system of capitalist globalization. The integration of the medium of the mall and the message of the culture-ideology of consumerism had a formative influence on the trajectory of global capitalism (Sklair, 2002: 109).

Mike Featherstone also speaks to the connections between global capitalism and the culture-ideology of consumerism. He points out that goods are framed and displayed to entice the customer, and shopping becomes an overtly symbolic event. In this process, images play a central part, which are constantly created and circulated by the mass media. Acquisition of goods leads to a greater aestheticization of reality (1987: 21).

In respect of the importance of consumerism on capitalist globalization, what is the meaning of consumerism as the cultural-ideological dimension of global capitalism?

3.1. Consumerism as a Culture

Before the cultural meaning of consumerism is explained, it can be helpful to bring out the concept of culture.

One of the most famous definitions of culture is that by Edward B. Tylor (1871): 'That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habit acquired by man as a member of society'. Ralph Linton (1940) also sought to address 'the whole': 'The sum total of the knowledge, attitudes and habitual behavior patterns shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society'. This adds notions of 'habit', 'sharing' and 'transmission'. A.L. Kroeber (1948) expands on this as follows: 'The mass of learned and transmitted motor reactions, habits, techniques, ideas and values, and the behavior they induce' (Hearn and Roseneil, 1999: 3). Consequently culture is an understanding that is related to all dimensions of a society's or a group's way of life, and it can be transmitted among people. And consumerism is important as an understanding on the basis of global capitalism.

Steven Miles puts forward that the concept of consumerism is different from the concept of consumption. For Miles, while consumption is an act, consumerism is a way of life. From this point of view, consumerism is the cultural expression and manifestation of the apparently ubiquitous act of consumption. And it is described as the social impact of consumption as ubiquitous rather than excessive. The term must be considered in a systematic manner as an environment within which social lives are currently constructed (Miles, 1998: 4). In this respect, the concept of consumerism is more workable to understand and explain the social structure today, than the concept of consumption that is one of the main research fields of economists. Consumerism that is a qualitative fact comes into prominence rather than consumption that is a quantitative-measurable fact on which economists study mostly. The economists and sociologists that study on political economy and/or economic sociology have more prosperous box of tools to understand and construe the reality of global capitalism and/or globalization.

Consumerism has a meaning in the perspective of economic sociology; in this way, consumerism comes into prominence for describing an identity in social structure. Robert Bocoock asserts that the phenomenon of consumption can be seen as a social and cultural process with sign and symbols, not as an economic process with utilitarianism. Consumption is not formed by animal functions that consist of eating, drinking and reproduction, as Karl Marx also argues. Modern consumption arises on symbolic meaning systems. These systems occur within the design and advertisement of modern consumer goods. Consumer goods are parts of the method in that people create their identity senses through the symbols in consumption patterns (Bocoock, 2009: 13, 56 and 59).

Jean Baudrillard who is known with his conceptualization of 'consumer society' puts forth that consumption is a social narrative that is generated through symbols. For Baudrillard, a realm of signs and distinctions, instead of needs and pleasures, underlies the consumption system. The distinctive goods and signs bring about our language, our norm that we use for communicating with the society in everyday life. This is the language of consumption (Baudrillard, 2004: 92-93). Hence consumption implies an act about a narrative told our social environment, which is related to who we are and/or what our identity is. We determine our individual identity in society on the basis of consumption.

Consumerism is a culture that constitutes a relation between an individual and a social group or society. In this way, Miles claims that consumerism can be defined as a psycho-social expression of the intersection between the structural and the individual within the realm of consumption. The consuming experience is psycho-social in the sense that it represents a bridge that links the individual and society (Miles, 1998: 5). In the psycho-social process of consumption, an individual build a way of life for herself/himself, on one hand; she/he tells society her/his social status within signs and symbols, on the other hand. This situation differentiates consumerism from consumption.

Lifestyles created by consumption are distinct from the others; and social distinctions originate in cultural context, not in terms of relations of production as Marx claims. Pierre Bourdieu asserts that consumption is an order of social/cultural practices that are useful to create some distinctions between social groups, not to state some distinctions taking root because of some economic factors. Main motive on consumption patterns is cultural and symbolic values of family, rather than income. Bourdieu strive to combine the fact that social status groups use private consumption patterns as distinctive way of life from the others, with the fact that signs, symbols and values also become in the scope of consumption (Bocock, 2009: 71). Baudrillard claims, about social distinction, that people are equal to each other on objects providing use value, are not equal to each other on objects providing signs and distinctions that become excessively hierarchical (2004: 107).

Consumerism is an understanding that depends on building a lifestyle in respect of signs, symbols and values concerning consumption; hence consumerism is a culture. It can be seen as an ideology, like a culture, as they have similar meaning in a collective context. But its ideological dimension involves tougher discussions than the cultural.

3.2. Consumerism as an Ideology

Ideology can be defined as a system of widely shared ideas, patterned beliefs, guiding norms and values, and lofty ideals accepted as 'fact' or 'truth' by significant groups in society (Steger, 2009: 6). Ideology is irrational because of sentimental loyalty of its followers, on one hand; and it is rational because of its thought system, on the other hand. Ideologies involve some strategies to be legalized in society or among the other ideologies' followers, such as promoting values, naturalizing beliefs, universalizing thoughts, excluding rival ideologies, dispraising new rivals' thoughts and distorting social reality, and so on (Eagleton, 2005: 22-24). In the context of the meaning and features of ideology, individuals are driven by the ideology of consumerism to make global capitalism work.

The ideological sense of consumerism becomes crucial to globalize and institutionalize capitalism. How does this effect take place?

For Bocock, capitalism is viable and appealing due to the fact that it supplies (or appears to supply) the consumer goods that people have desire to belong. People are affected by social and cultural practices that are related to the ideology of modern consumption; and then they want to belong the goods that are shown in movies, newspapers and television, even if they do not have purchasing power. (Bocock, 2009: 12-13).

Even if people do not have interest and desire in fact, they take interest in the goods' meaning and conspicuous effect in a system that producers found. Baudrillard sees consumption as the system of productive powers. For Baudrillard, consumerism is a structural form that is described by productivity that is the main feature of the system of productive powers. The system is productive because it is able to produce needs and signs. Consumers are formally free; they can choose their desired goods freely. However, consumers are substantively dependent as their needs are determined by the system. The system creates consumerist individuals and these individuals are positioned in society like the system's slaves while they exchange the signs (Baudrillard, 2009: 84-93).

Featherstone claims that consumer culture especially in Western societies is shaped by capitalist production of commodities, within consumer goods and spaces. Materialist culture affects leisure and consuming practices by means of ideological manipulation, while people are excluded from social relationships. Ideological manipulation on consumption incorporates social meanings into common consumption behaviors of people via media and advertisements. For instance, some common consumer goods such as soap, dishwasher, car, drinks, and so on involve some meanings and signs such as romantics, exoticism, desire, beauty, pleasure, sharing, scientific improvement, good life, and so on (Featherstone, 2005: 37-40).

Conrad Lodziak is another author who draws attention to capitalist manipulation on people/consumers. For Lodziak, manipulation on needs is perceived as the force of media and advertising to make people need the things that they do not need in practice. This manipulation provides reproduction of capitalist system. Consumerism is a symbolic activity in that consumer uses goods to create an identity, and consumerism is on focus of the process of manipulation (Lodziak, 2003: 40-43). The reproduction of capitalism depends on its capability to produce an identity or a way of life for consumers. So ideology and culture articulate to each other and consumerism implies both ideology and culture of global capitalism.

Some anti-capitalist ideologies dissent about the fact that the ideology of consumerism is one of the planks of global capitalism. Consumerism that means consumer rights and consciousness in 1970s as it is seen above comes into prominence in terms of protecting consumers again; but also the discussion arises particularly on the basis of ideology. Some authors, like Naomi Klein (2012), draw attention to that global firms/trademarks exploit consumers in everyday life. So they argue that consumers should organize in political realm and people should struggle against capitalism beyond protecting consumer rights.

4. Conclusion

Economists study on the model 'homo oeconomicus' which strengthens them methodologically. The rational, full-informed model, homo oeconomicus is far from the sociological context in that it lives. So the reality of this model is debated. Here this exclusion/abstraction can be observed in economists' view towards globalization, as well.

The concept of consumerism is good instance, good chance for economists to regard multidimensionality of globalization. Economists may claim that this concept is not in their study/discipline field. But interdisciplinary approaches should be allowed in economics to light the way for human life scientifically. As regards, it is important to pay attention to the concept of consumerism and to study on it.

The fact that Turkish economists also study on the basis of scientific cooperation with other social sciences, especially sociology and political science, would amount to enrichment of economics. Turkey is a country that would be able to usher in emerging heterodoxy in economics in respect of the concept of consumerism, by means of its social structure hinging on culture.

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