
Neoliberalism Debate Since 2008: A Theoretical Balance Sheet

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Résumé

Since the onset of the global financial meltdown in 2008, we have witnessed an intensification of the scholarly debate revolving around the concept of neoliberalism coming from various theoretical backgrounds and political positions. This paper aims to provide a theoretical balance sheet of the neoliberalism debate in the last decade by presenting a critical survey of the key contributions and issues. The immediate aftermath of the crisis has been marked by widespread and arguably "hasty" verdicts announcing the end of neoliberalism. This line, however, has then met with serious critiques which, underscore the inherently variegated and flexible nature of "actually existing" neoliberalization processes, as opposed to neoliberalism as a fixed template. Contrary to the end of neoliberalism verdict, this second approach has insisted on the "continuing ecological dominance" of neoliberalism despite the crisis situation. On the other hand, widespread confusions about the definition and essence of the term have led some to an altogether dismissal of the concept as a relevant analytical tool to explain contemporary capitalism. Since 2014, the gravitational center of the debate has shifted towards explaining the linkages between emerging authoritarian rules across the world and the contradictions of uneven neoliberalization. More recently, the election of Donald Trump and the Brexit referendum has once again revitalized arguments declaring the end of neoliberalism and/or questioning the validity of the term as such. Regarding these as proof of the collapse of neoliberalism in the heartlands, these accounts argue that contemporary political scene represents a break from neoliberalism towards protectionism, nationalism and discretionary personalized politics. A more nuanced and historically sensitive approach that builds on the neoliberalism debate of the last decade, however, would recognize the "return of politics" as a novel trend but point to the fact the structures of global political economy remains intact despite the rhetorical political moves. From this perspective, the current global scene is better captured by a Gramscian notion of "interregnum." Informed by this approach, I conclude with a sketch of a contemporary map of neoliberalization that aims to capture recent changes both in the Global North and the South.

Mots-Clés: neoliberalism, Trump, Brexit, variegation, protectionism

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