Globalisation is a phenomenon that dominates the defining spirit (zeitgeist) of our historical time. The article revisits Popper’s critique of the methodology of the social sciences in the light of contemporary theories of globalisation. His standpoint contributes to the establishment of new arguments in the current debate between the pros and cons of globalisation. Here, neoliberalism, the dark side of globalisation, is carefully scrutinised since it is the most controversial consequence of the world’s transformation. Not only does neoliberalisation accelerate the rapid growth of the free market, but its consequences are such that most sovereign nation-states have abandoned the previously de rigueur welfare policies. Paradoxically, the neoliberal economic programme, invoking liberal values with which it has little in common, encourages activities which diminish the importance of regulations and control by the state, ultimately leading to increased social disparity among people and permanently threatening traditional liberal values. Against such a reductionist policy of global social engineering, we oppose the arguments presented in Popper’s critique of historicism and holism in order to revise the methodology that provides the grounds for current globalisation theories through philosophical research. We integrate the facts into a coherent critical argument to revise the shortcomings of these theories and how they can be corrected. Finally, in proposing plausible solutions for the new role of the sovereign nation-state in correcting the negative consequences of the globalisation process, we clarify which aspects within the theories of globalisation require further philosophical research.

**Keywords:** Global Theory, Globalisation, Neoliberalism, Holism, Historicism, Sovereignty
1. Introduction

We aim to inquire about the current globalisation processes and their interrelatedness with global theory, neoliberal ideology and Popper’s political philosophy, in line with the concept of sovereignty. In the first part of the article, we describe the arguments of contemporary global theory and examine its ideological side, which we distinguish as neoliberalism. At the same time, we seek to determine which way Popper’s liberal political philosophy, and especially his methodological insights, laterally associated with the concept of sovereignty, can be used as a resolution for the current theoretical ambiguities. This issue is investigated from a sociological and philosophically reflexive point of view, even though much of what is explicated is relevant to a broader range of social sciences as well.

In the social sciences, global theory has been discussed since the early 1980s. Global theory also has its other side, neoliberal ideology. These two sides of the same coin are often critiqued together, and we seek to analyse the arguments from both perspectives evenly. As is well known, Karl Popper disapproved of researchers using social science methods which contained holistic and historicistic types of arguments in their research, presenting them as a significant threat to liberal values. However, advocates of globalisation theory developed their ideas within such approaches (see, for instance, Fukuyama, 1989). In the post-Cold War period, interest has been keen in founding sociological concepts which highlight the superiority of the liberal-democratic ideal. Much of contemporary social sciences enquiry has been constructed in that way. Sociological-scientific research from a holistic perspective has been pursued by Giddens (1993), for example. On the other hand, opposite attitudes and critiques of neoliberalism can also be found in the work of the contemporary researchers of the historicistic ‘neo-Marxist perspective’ (see, for instance, Harvey, 2007).

Today, regardless of the theoretical position that one advocates, the COVID-19 pandemic gives us cause for reconsideration of globalisation theory. In only a few months since the outbreak of the virus, we can observe how ‘globalisation in times of corona will structurally change the prevailing view on the relevance of borders and buffers’ (Brakman, Garretsen and van Marrewijk, 2020:3). The consequences of closing state borders and lockdowns have already been devastating for the global economy, but essential changes are required. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may lead to the structural transformation of the globalisation process. Despite the confrontation with the pandemic in our everyday lives, supervenient neoliberal economic policies are still increasing.

In the situation of ever more desired solidarity, multinational companies are trying to sell ventilators, respirators and other medical equipment necessary for the battle against the pandemic for higher prices under unbelievable conditions. It is an extreme example of the unregulated global free market and a clear sign that we need a different
social arrangement than the one provided by the neoliberal political economy: neoliberalism with its practices and policies such as the one described above abuses the basic values of liberalism. Under the pretext of being economically efficient and protecting fundamental human rights, neoliberalism is seeking to control human and natural resources in all possible ways through an excess emphasis on the freedom of individual and fewer regulations and controls for redistribution by the state (Friedman and Friedman, 1962; Friedman and Allen, 1983). The principles of equity, equality and freedom of choice that underlie all liberal values have been violated in the worst way. We are in a paradoxical situation, where an ideology which claims to have the protection of human rights at its foundation violates those rights in the most brutal way.

While ‘the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic gave scholars and social theorists an excellent opportunity to think about how this situation can change our ideas about the world’ (Zhyhal, 2020:24), Klein (2008) has warned of the possible outbreak of neoliberalistic ‘disaster capitalism’ at the global level. Many theories outlined in the past few decades in social sciences are now under scrutiny, especially those historically established ones which predict a flat, borderless world (Friedman, 2005). The pandemic phenomenon, of course, can be analysed at various levels. One example is the following statement: ‘Such a focus on individual responsibility, necessary as it is, functions as ideology the moment it serves to obfuscate the big question of how to change our entire economic and social system. The struggle against the coronavirus can only be fought together with the struggle against ideological mystifications, plus as part of a general ecological struggle’ (Žižek, 2020a).

Therefore, we can see that the neoliberal demeanour has the pretension to be a social theory, determined by general laws of social sciences. We will, following Popper’s argument, open a debate that raises the following question: why is it possible at all to predict natural phenomena, but not social actions? Why are we not capable of establishing applicable unconditional scientific predictions in the sphere of the social sciences? Should the type of criticism toward historicism and holism used in Popper’s analysis be chosen for a criticism of the neoliberal political economy? These and related questions and arguments are discussed in sections 4 and 5. The discussion is mostly carried on at a methodological level, presenting concrete examples in the presentation of the arguments.

How historicism-holism matters are dealt with here contrasts with the ways found in previous debates on the topic. Time distance and a lot of new data and experiences

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2 In a sociological study of the early global pandemic of avian influenza (aka bird flu) in the 1990s, Davis (2005) explored ways in which the economic globalist system sustained by neoliberal ideology hindered the global response to the pandemic flu, including interfering with the fair and immediate distribution of an effective vaccine (large international medical corporations were only eligible to develop it with the investment of large amounts of capital) to people in both domestic and international society.
collected by various recent encounters, such as the pandemic and ecological issues, have created a new field of research. Much of the previous research is marked by ambiguity in term of its basic concepts and argumentation. We have tried to avoid this by defining concepts carefully and by formalising arguments when appropriate. We have also tried to avoid the limitations of global theory by analysing the problem at a very profound methodological level, as it pertains to social science in general, and we have sought to reach conclusions about fundamentals before turning to issues which are more specifically sociological.

The article is structured as follows: after a preliminary sketch of global theory, different views are presented in the debate to provide an explanation of globalisation from its market-oriented perspective. We start by discussing various types of criticism along with the negative consequences of neoliberal ideology. In this part of the article, we draw heavily on sociological research. In the section that follows, however, the focus is on matters which have received somewhat less attention in the study. A particular line of thought runs through this section and serves as a central thread in the exposition: globalisation from its ideological side – neoliberalism and its problems.

We present a framework of how particular social phenomena formally viewed as typical are composed of several layers covering different aspects of social life. As presented here, global theory offers explanations of the social phenomenon of world unification while neoliberal ideology uses the same global theory semantics, but only offers dubious economic practices. Accordingly, we discuss how historicistic and holistic perspectives may be preferred by researchers who want to describe a society in a simplified non-methodological fashion. We further discuss the possibilities of finding applicable social planning concepts and re-inventing sovereignty. In the conclusion, we show how applying a historicistic and holistic perspective may be risky for matters of global justice.

2. Globalisation: social theories of the world shift

Globalisation refers to a historical process which transforms the spatial organisation of social relations, generating transcontinental or interregional systems of interaction and the exercise of power. In particular, as Wallerstein (1974) explores, one of the significant consequences of globalisation was a unification and integration of all territories into a coherent economic sphere in the restructuring of the political, technological and even cultural structures of different regions into a coherent global system. Browning says, for instance, that ‘globalisation is primarily a theory that links political economy to a wider web of social relations to provide a comprehensive explanation of the present. Its key concept, globalisation, is highly suggestive and captures undoubted features of the present, and yet it is ambiguous and elusive’ (2005:195).
Since the end of the 20th century, with the ending of the most dominant international political system – the Cold War-era bipolar order – we have begun to witness the advent of a new model of globalisation and its consequences. Social theorists such as Beck (2000), Giddens (2000) and Held (2000) have theorised the course of this latest globalisation from its early stages at the turn of this century. According to Beck (2000), contemporary globalisation has to be understood as a process of radical transformation of our social world more than before. He means that globalisation not only has an effect on the macro-structure of our economic and political status quo, it also influences our sense of individual living in modern civil society. In the same vein, Giddens (2000) noted that it facilitates our ontological questioning by increasing our sense of personal freedom and choice in everyday life (e.g. intimate relationships and daily activities in our locales) in the global context. From those accounts, it appears that globalisation must be identified as a question of our existence in the new century, as well as a radical shift in the political economy of the world today: hope and anxiety increasingly coexist within globalisation. While those theorists of globalisation have stressed the advent of a transnational civil society as a result (Beck, for example), instead of early modern civil society segmented by national borders, it should be noted that they have also focused on the socio-political differentiation progress in that process within the turbulence of the post-Cold War world (Held, 2000). In reality, while globalisation was expected to unite the world into a coherent social structure in the conquest of political and cultural differences, one must remember how many civil wars and political conflicts among different social and cultural groups occurred at the end of the last and the beginning of this century.3

In a reflection of the social theories of globalisation mentioned above, Held and McGrew summarise globalisation as follows: ‘today, goods, capital, people, knowledge, images, communications, as well as crime, culture, pollutants, drugs, fashions, and beliefs, readily flow across territorial boundaries. Transnational networks, social movements, and relationships are extensive in virtually all areas of human activity’ (1993:262). In addition to theoretical debates to identify what globalisation is, it is also pertinent to introduce a critical inquiry into the outcome of this profound social change over the last several decades. For those advocates, globalisation is an objective and a spontaneous, historically necessary planetary process, aimed at creating a networked global economic system: at the same time, for its opponents, it is exclusively a project of political domination (Sassen, 2008). For the former, this world integration process is based on a sound business and economic basis. For the latter, it amounts to fragmentation, the creation of an ever more profound social gap between the worlds and conflicts of the social classes. According to Held and McGrew (2007:5), theo-

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3 Harbom and Wallensteen (2007:624) provide the data on 122 conflicts identified in the first 17 years after the Cold War ended. The civil wars in Syria (2011), Libya (2014) and Ukraine (2014) are not included in this list.
retically, these currents can be divided into the following schools of thought: globalists (including types of cosmopolitans and communitarians) and (anti-globalists) sceptics.

So-called globalists understand globalisation as a historical necessity. For them, the world of national economies, sovereign states and self-supporting cultures belong to the past. Unsustainable economic forces, transnational financial capital, corporations and the world economic arbiter of the IMF transform sovereign countries and their economies into their local units. ‘State sovereignty over commodity and capital movements is willingly surrendered to the global market’ (Harvey, 2007:66). Another prominent thinker similarly articulates this standpoint: ‘Competitive capitalism allied to liberal democracy is the culmination of historical development, a social order that reconciles economic efficiency with a mass democratic representation’ (Giddens, 1993:289). Globalisation refers to the tendency towards the disappearance of national states and the slow abolition of their autonomy and sovereignty. Alternatively, speaking in a nuanced manner, globalisation in that account gives the state no choice but to accommodate itself to the restructuring of the international world (Sassen, 2008). While some globalists expect that the reconstruction of sovereign stations according to globalisation can result in an alternative civil society in a positive manner (Beck and Cronin, 2009), others see it as giving rise to a grave risk to our lives as a consequence of the dismantlement of the welfare state. For example, Bauman sharply warns about the shift as follows:

The most irritating of the barriers which the tide of globalisation must sweep out of the way is that of the sovereign nation-state: a nation-state trying in earnest to balance the books in order to protect its subjects and promote (as much as it can afford) the standards of just distribution and decent provision. (Bauman, 2001:9-10)

Globalisation is signified according to several dimensions: technological evolution, time and space compression, and the reduction of distance and time required for increasingly diverse communications.

Contrary to globalists, so-called anti-globalists have a sharper negative view of the process of globalisation in a straightforward way (Held and McGrew, 1998:220). They find that the globalisation process presented as an inevitable historical process, like natural events, is not sustainable for a more extended period. Their view is that globalisation creates three major financial and trade blocs, the European, Pacific-Asian, and American, not-unifying, but dividing the world. However, instead of removing the barriers and sweeping away nation-states, the end of the prior and the beginning of this century indicate not only the non-disappearance of nation-states but also an era of proliferation of newly independent states. Sovereign countries with strong economies are not merely passive but are themselves the creators of globalisation;⁴ they set up rules that shape the world economy. For those strong op-

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⁴ Beck (see 2002:42) defines this as ‘Global unilaterism’. 
ponents to the development of contemporary globalisation as a historical consequence, it can be feasible for them to understand that the basic structure of international dependence and reconstruction of social systems seen in the contemporary mode of globalisation is partly or mostly an inheritance of early colonisation and the former Cold War order. Such a historical legacy of our world history still very much affects the present structure of the global world in the 21st century.

From the aspect of the international economy, globalisation refers to the production and distribution of products and services of similar type and quality worldwide. It is, therefore, a form of standardisation of goods and services, not their individualisation. Corporations which manage to perfect their products and services and adapt them to the global market trend become leaders. ‘As the new telos of capitalism, globalisation is much broader and fast in the scope and scale of the movement of capital and commodities’ (Heron, 2008:87). The most contradictory outcome of economic globalisation is the growth of the global market at the cost of increasing inequality and unfair distributions of capital, assets, products and services in both global and domestic society. No matter that radical economic globalists (e.g. Friedman, 2005) claim ‘the world is flat’ (no borders, no controls and no regulations except those which facilitate its free trade). It is necessary to acknowledge that ‘the global economy is skewed in favour of those already wealthy and most wealth continues to reinforce this pattern rather than draw more people into the shares’ and ‘this is backed up by a liberal ideology that has proven itself as a powerful way’ (Francis, 2020:8).

Indeed, instead of the peaceful integration of the world, we have its fragmentation, in the form of the rise of political populism, religious fundamentalism, and aggressive, xenophobic nationalism, with physical violence as the most crystalline form of this process. Pro and con views of the globalisation process have resulted in a reconsideration of solidarity and social justice in the new light between the local and the global. Nevertheless, what we want to emphasise here is that both sides commonly regard globalisation as a situation of increasing social uncertainty and contingency, as well as the restructuring of society as a reaction to this. Beyond national borders and their control by the legitimated sovereign state, our lifeworld has become stretched beyond our sense of imagination and capacity. Using the metaphor of ‘juggernaut’ (Giddens) or the reconfiguration of ‘risk’ in the course of modernity (Beck), one may say that any theoretical debates on globalisation are intellectual challenges for realising how society can embrace several different degrees and levels of contingent outcomes occurring in every aspect of the world – the economic, the political and the cultural, among others.

Taking those implications into account, one can conclude that there are two underlying trends in debating the globalisation process. One is a theoretical exploration of globalisation: as we have seen, objective social processes are increasingly gaining a comprehensive, global character. In this sense, globalisation refers to the develop-
ment of modern technology, communication and scientific research, the unification of economic and political institutions and models in various parts of the world, and the interconnection of different national and regional cultures and civilisations. Those theoretical explorations of contemporary globalisation yield both positive and negative consequences of globalisation through the restructuring of our social system and everyday life. However, they seemingly agree with the point that, in recognising the process of globalisation as a natural process of the social evolution of the world, or ‘within the globalisation’, they do not give up drawing a better picture of globalisation that would entail the development of social justice and imagining a cosmopolitan sense of the world’s diversity in that account.

3. Neoliberalism as an Ideological Side of the Global Political Economy

We have observed that, in order to reconstitute a possible humane global society, some social theorists did not mean to neglect the increasing complexity and uncertainty of the world in its description. Nevertheless, the ongoing social process is reluctant to tackle such complexity and uncertainty, as well as increasing social disparity and the problematic distribution of wellbeing. In turn, a utopian ideology of the achievement of the free market is sustained by the re-organised or ‘disorganised’ (Lash and Urry, 1987) capitalism around the globe. As Browning (2005:193) indicates, this ideology, which has radically affected the reconstruction of domestic economic, political and even cultural structures, is found to be a central dogma of the contemporary world: it is a new political economy of neoliberalism.

According to Braedley and Luxton’s genealogy of neoliberalism (2010), it is a political philosophy which can be understood in the context of modern liberalism. For them, ‘liberalism’s primary value is individual human freedom from coercion and servitude, which neoliberals believe is inevitability tried to capitalism as a system that promotes expansions of wealth and allows people the freedom to pursue wealth, and therefore to pursue their desires’ (Braedley and Luxton, 2010:7). Historically, they have been opposed to anything related to collectivism and economic redistribution by the state or other authorities, since they insist that they offer an individual’s freedom and choice according to their own will. More importantly, instead of organisational activities and social interventions of the state, which have long been demonstrated by the welfare state, they see the facilitation of individual contentions as a valuable source of social good (Braedley and Luxton, 2020:8).

As a result of this, the world economy is more important than sovereign states, and it has global supremacy over the local. In a more nuanced way, in the neoliberalistic ideology, the state, for the sake of the accumulation of further capital and making common cause with the global market, is highly encouraged to relax legal regulations,
reduce taxation and privatise. As Harvey defines it: ‘neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political, economic practices which proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices’ (2007:2).

Policies related to the redistribution of capital are reformed or dismantled since they interfere with market growth and economic competition. Individual freedom is respected and supported, but there is no organisational support for maintenance or rehabilitation for one’s wellbeing is shrunk to the mantra of ‘freedom of choice of individuals’ attached to the strong connotation of ‘self-responsibility’. Although several countries commenced early neoliberal reforms of the state (e.g. the UK, the US, China and Chile) (Harvey 2007), the influence of radical neoliberalistic policy reform has been found in many post-socialist countries.

For instance, the breakdown of socialism in the countries of Eastern Europe has resulted in neoliberalism being a boosting formula, which has proven to be economically superior for those who spread it. ‘The general circulation of ideas about globalisation has been stimulated by the neoliberal discourse and policies that were adopted and canvassed by leaders of global powers governments, international institutions, and global corporations in the wake of the downfall of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe’ (Browning, 2011:83). Now neoliberalistic social reform is profoundly seen in other aspirational states of the world, such as in Asia (Ong, 2006) and Africa (Poku and Whitman, 2018).

This support also ‘comes from supranational organisations and the adjudication of international courts’ (Habermas, 2014:73, see also Habermas, 2000), which have the power to make decisions that are often inconsistent with the theory of positive international law but are purely a political-economic mechanism for controlling the global speculative capital market. ‘Neoliberals are convinced that global markets can both make economies more efficient and meet demands for redistributive justice’ (Habermas, 2018:90). Ironically, thanks to such neoliberalistic social reform, those states can be involved in the global market of free trade and gain capital accumulation at the cost of increasing economic disparity, the breakdown of social collectivity and a lack of an adequate welfare programme for their populations.

Therefore, the neoliberal project is extremely controversial and not concerned with the principles of justice. Harvey accounts for the political consequence of neoliberalistic social reform, stating that the ‘profoundly anti-democratic nature of neoliberalism backed by the authoritarianism of the neoconservatives surely should be the focus of the future political struggle’ (Harvey, 2007:205). As Harvey observes, the unfortunate consequence of neoliberalistic social reform with rapid privatisation in the domestic economies of many countries in South America is a severe insolvable increase in social
disparity and inequality among the people. In 1994, Forbes magazine’s list of the wealthiest people in the world revealed that Mexico’s economic restructuring had produced twenty-four new billionaires under the enormous severe financial crisis of the state (Harvey, 2007:103). The point here is that the more the world becomes ‘flat’ through the growth of the global economic market, along with neoliberalism, the more the socio-economic lives of the people of the world grow. So does the state that goes in hand with the global neoliberalist market, neglecting the increasing social gap between the people in domestic society.

Finally, given that the origin of contemporary neoliberalism is oriented to the traditional philosophical ideas of liberalism, we must proceed in our debate to the question of the development of alternative civil society in the era of globalisation. As seen above, neoliberalism is a mix of distorted and not-quite-puzzled-out liberal ideas, obtained by conservative selection and interpretation of traditional liberalist ideas. From that perspective, a nation-state is perceived as a necessary evil, whose only function is to prevent the bellum omnium contra omnes. Therefore, it should only take care of the criminal law and maintain public and social order. The government needs to deal with the problems of regulating the economy, public health, social protection, culture and education as little as possible, leaving these things to the free market. In contrast to those ideas, the most radical problem of neoliberalistic political and economic thinking is, we argue, that it only sees the external economic dimension of globalisation, which is regarded as equally essential as the movement of the planet, meaning that it cannot be a matter of will or choice. They are constructing a simplified utopianism from the emerging reality, idealising themselves and scorning the world of sceptics.5

Another deficiency of neoliberalism is the argument that every individual sovereignty, and even the sovereignty of national states, has historically been overcome and become obsolete, and that all human communities must join the world centre of military, political, economic and cultural power. We argue that the reinvention of the nation-state is essential since it will otherwise only support and regulate a robust process of homogenisation of globalisation regarding its economic and political reconfiguration. However, the role of the new nation-state should be viewed in respect of individual human rights and cultural diversity – contrary to the old idea of the ‘nation-state’ based on an imaginary nationalism – instead of following the dominant (and strong) ideological enforcement of the world’s neoliberalisation. That is because nation-states are still independent players in the world, all being involved in a global

5 In the neoliberalistic policy reform, of the risks individuals face due to the decline of adequate social or organisational aid provided by the state is, rather, employed to facilitate an increasing chance of ‘change’ or ‘success’ of the individual, highlighting one’s responsibility in the guise of personal freedom of choice. See Brown et al. on the analysis of the degeneration of national health policy for the youth in the UK, Canada and Australia (Brown, Shoveller, Chabot and LaMontage, 2013).
society. Given that globalisation today is full of complexity and uncertainty, the possibilities remain that the state is playful enough to affect and transform global society. Therefore, Beck says with expectation: ‘one can say contradictory things about the modern state: on the one hand, it is withering away, but, on the other, it must be re-invented, and both for a good reason’ (2018:139).

4. Popper’s Critique in Response to Neoliberal Globalisation

The cost of neoliberal economic policy is that it has led to a profound social gap between individuals across the world. Such socio-economic relations must be theoretically reformulated and based on a correct setting. Under the circumstances as such, what kind of critical interventions can we elaborate on through philosophical debate? For such purposes, we intend to criticise a neoliberal aspect of the globalisation theory through the lens of Karl Popper, a prominent liberal thinker. He offers his unique vision of the social sciences. His perspective on the field came through contemplation of the nature of the social sciences, which requires that all facts must be systematically described and explained. Popper describes the quality of scientific prediction, which provides the basis for his critical review of historicism and holism. It is essential to highlight that Popper does not mean to refute the idea of historicism. Instead, he carefully makes his argument that this method is too flawed to be constructive in social sciences. He convincingly illustrates how attractive social ideals, which have the most desirable goals, such as social justice, well-being and economic prosperity, can lead to disastrous consequences during their realisation.

The collapse of communism and the rise of the neoliberal tradition inspired various authors to construct early global theories. After all, the neoliberal economic concept and its opponents created a vast number of arguments in the social sciences (Chelcea and Drută, 2016; Bohle and Greskovits, 2007). We must emphasise that early global theory authors typically developed their theories around historically based arguments. Many of them used the authority and argumentation of respectful philosophers of modernity, such as Kant, Hegel and Marx. They sought to reformulate arguments which contained elements of historicism and create new global theories.

Along with this, in recognition of the increasing social injustice of the world in this century, how can we weave a further theoretical intervention into the legacy of the modern? In that context, it is pertinent to note that, today, the question of modern science, as the principle code set of the constitution of the modern social system, is at stake (e.g. Latour, 1993; Harraway, 1988; Latour and Woolgar, 1986). In the same vein, we believe that Popper’s critique of historicism and holism in the construction of society is highly applicable to the problem of the theoretical foundation of global theory and especially its neoliberal context.
Before examining his philosophical elaboration of the methodology of the social sciences, let us draw out the three conventional but dominant assumptions of society. First, society is simply considered to be a collection of individuals, and every property of it is a result of aggregation of the properties of its members (individualism, atomism and reductionism). Second, society can be characterised as a totality transcending its membership and is endowed with properties which cannot be traced back to either the properties of its members or the interactions among the latter, which idea calls for a conceptualisation of holism or collectivism, as we further discuss later. Lastly, society is observed as a system of interrelated individuals, that is, a system, and while some of its properties are aggregations of properties of its components, others are derived from the relationships among the latter (systemism)’ (Bunge, 1979:13). All knowledge about society in the social sciences generally takes one of those assumptions or a combination of them. For instance, within sociology, an early sociologist attempted to theorise modern society as a consequence of particular historical development, as well as premising the social as a whole in a social world (Durkheim, 1966).

In an account of his analysis of modern knowledge from those perspectives, Popper describes his project as follows:

The topic of my address is prediction and prophecy in the social sciences. I intend to criticise the doctrine that it is the task of the social sciences to propound historical prophecies and that historical prophecies are needed if we wish to conduct politics in a rational way. I shall call this doctrine historicism. I consider historicism to be the relic of ancient superstition, even though the people who believe in it are usually convinced that it is a very new, progressive, revolutionary, and scientific theory. (Popper, 2014:336)

For Popper, rationalisation (in modern science) can reduce the unknown probability and unforeseen events in society in the emphasising the reduction of complexity by knowledge. This process of rationalisation presents us with a prophetic picture of the future. Popper shows, ‘that for strictly logical reasons, it is impossible for us to predict the future course of history’. (2002: xi) On the other hand, the globalised world today rests on the premise of this fatalism. This premise of historicism and holism as such is significantly represented by Fukuyama, for example, when he declared ‘the end of the history’ at the advent of globalisation. Following the spirit of Hegelian legacy, he states:

What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the endpoint of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. (Fukuyama, 2010:7)
Along with the notion of *historicism*, Popper often refers to notion of *holism*. Arguably, *Popper’s philosophy of science in this line is thankfully insightful, one concern is that he, at a glance, adopts the notion of holism to mark the interaction between individuals as members of societies, as a source of generating contingencies on the established rationality. Against the grain of his focus on the communications between individuals, we argue that the most valuable implications of Popper’s *holism* should be drawn from the point that he probably paid more attention to the potential of our collective actions beyond a mass of individuals. He states that these groups are organic entities with their human rights; they can act and influence their members and shape their fates; and groups as such (collectives) are subject only to their development laws. He states: ‘the social group is more than a simple total of its members, and it is also more than the merely personal relationships existing at any moment between any of its members’ (Popper, 2002:15).

*Historicism*, which is partly entailed by *holism* (collectivism), suggests that history unfolds relentlessly and necessarily according to certain principles or rules and moves towards a definite end. The connection between *holism* and *historicography*, accordingly, reflects how *holists* stress that individuals are shaped within the social group to which they belong. At the same time, *historicism*, even though it implies a sense of holistic connotation, instead claims that the social group is doomed by the exclusive conditions of the internal principles which determine its progress. Socialisation under the principle of this *historicism*, indeed, might call for the risk of being exclusive and the interrelated attitude concerning collective action, no matter how much it, supposedly, represents a sense of a *holistic* view for the members, as well as the respect of individuals within it.

After all, these opinions, in the pursuit of the rational truth in scientific endeavour, lead to the concept of what Popper calls the ‘*historicism doctrine of social sciences.*’ (2014:337). In a nutshell, he claims that the primary task of social sciences is to make predictions about the social and political development of humankind, and the function of politics, once key predictions are achieved, is to reduce the births pangs of future social and political development. Popper thinks that the *historicism* view of social sciences is problematic in two ways. Theoretically, it is wrong in the sense that it grounds itself in the principles of natural science and its methodology, which is absurd and socially dangerous because it inevitably leads to totalitarianism and authoritarianism. Popper (2002) defends his view against a *holistic* kind of thinking in this account,

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6 Demeulenaere suggests that the idea of *holism* is often interpreted in a different way to this conventional sense of *holism* in traditional social science (Demeulenaere, 2000:3). An attempt to link the two meanings of *holism* sometimes can create confusion and misunderstanding. Popper, in the literature we are using in this article, clearly utilised the notion of holism (traditional social sciences meaning) to point out collectivist doctrines which are advancing the primacy of the group over the individual.
stating that the social group is nothing more than the total number of its individuals and that what is happening in history is mainly contingent and unpredictable, the result of individual actions.

To a large extent, there is no doubt that social planning with a pre-established schematic plan is ill-founded and inevitably catastrophic precisely because human actions have consequences that cannot be determined or foreseen in advance. Popper, therefore, stands at the point of view called ‘historical indeterminism’ (Popper, 1972:12): the idea that history does not involve itself with everything following fundamental laws or principles. That such rules, principles and final predictions in social sciences are absent is uncertain as several social scientists and philosophers have explored through their critical analysis of the modern (e.g. Appadurai, 2016; Luhmann, 1997; Latour, 1993), and historical necessity as such does not exist. Exact and detailed scientific social predictions are, therefore, impossible (Popper, 2002:12).

The differences between people in social politics are revealed through critical discussion, by argument, and by no means by force. Popper’s strategy is more an attempt to see the phenomenon more deeply, and he finds that every form of totalitarianism can be almost always based on historical and holistic assumptions. On a general level, Popper argues that historicism and holism have their roots in what he calls one of the oldest dreams of humanity. It is ‘a dream of prophecy’ (Popper, 2002:32) that we can know what will happen to us in the future and that we can benefit from such knowledge and profit if we use such expertise for our policies. Popper emphasises that this dream has given further impetus to historiography and holism.

The type of historical reasoning that has emerged and continues to exist can be plausibly reconstructed as follows. If the application of natural laws can lead to the successful forecasting of future events, such as the movement of the sun and the moon, it is indeed reasonable to conclude that knowledge of the laws of history can lead to a successful prediction of future social phenomena. Consequently, Popper posits the question: ‘why is it possible at all to predict the eclipse of the Sun and the Moon, but not the revolution?’ (2014:337). Eventually, it generates the question of why theoretical trajectories in social science are incapable of functioning just as those of natural sciences do, failing to make precise and unconditional predictions in the sphere of its application’?

These are some of the questions Popper poses and he tries to show that a historically and holistically conceived opinion is based on a series of wrong assumptions about the nature of science and the relationship between scientific laws and scientific predictions. For example, he argues:

Admittedly, all theoretical sciences are predicting sciences. Admittedly there are social sciences that are theoretical. But do these admissions imply – as the historicists believe – that the task of the social sciences is historical prophecy? It looks like it: but this impression disappears once we make a clear distinction between what I shall call
...scientific prediction on the one side and unconditional historical prophecies on the other. Historicism fails to make this important distinction. (Popper, 2014:339)

Popper’s argument here can be summarised as follows. With regard to a critically important concept of prediction, he makes a difference between what is meant by conditional scientific predictions that will take the following form – if X takes place \( a \), then Y will take place \( b \) – and unconditional scientific prophecies, which will make the structure Y occupy place \( b \) (Popper, 2014:339). Contrary to the ingrained belief, when it comes to the natural sciences, the former is in favour of the future. This means that the typical prediction in natural sciences is conditioned and limited in its scope and takes the form of a hypothetical assertion that certain specific changes should occur if a particular event has taken place \( a \). That does not mean that unconditional scientific prophecies, such as the prediction of an eclipse, for example, should not take place in science and still make theoretical natural sciences possible.

However, Popper argues that these specific prophecies are not characteristic only of natural sciences and that the mechanism by which these prophecies come about is significant and not understood by social scientists. On this assumption, what is a mechanism that makes unconditional scientific prophecies possible? The probable answer is that this type of prophecy can sometimes be caused by a conditional prediction, which is, however, derived from a scientific law and existential testimony. Schematically, this can be presented in the following way:

\[
[C.P. + E.S.] = U.S.P.,
\]

where C.P. is = conditional prediction, E.S. stands for = existential statement, and U.S.P. = unconditional scientific prophecy.

The most common example of a specific scientific prophecy is related to predicting such phenomena as solar and lunar eclipses and passing comets. So, when Popper presented a mechanism that generates unconditional scientific prophecies, he offered two detailed critiques of historicism: 1) historicists do not derive unconditional scientific prophecies from conditional scientific prediction; and 2) historicists cannot do that because long-term unconditional scientific prophecies only perform within systems that are entirely isolated, static and recurrent (our solar system, for example) (Popper, 2014:339). Such systems are isolated, static and repetitive, and human society is certainly not one of these systems. That is the reason why social scientists make a fundamental mistake in their learning. On this account, Popper says: ‘such predictions are possible because of the immutability of our solar system, which is isolated from other operations by the vast quantity of space. Unconditional prophecies are opposed to conditional scientific predictions’ (2002:118). Therefore, one of the mistakes made by social scientists is accepting the case of a relatively rare instance of a scientific prediction which is specific to natural science. To summarise this, Popper explains it as follows:
From it, the history-oriented social scientists try to make the essence of their learning, and they fail to see how this kind of prediction works only in those systems that are isolated, static and repetitive. But not as a method of scientific prophecy applied to human society and the history of humankind, which, of course, are not isolated systems, but are continually changing, developing, and not repeating. (Popper, 2014:340)

In every possible sense, a single event in human history is discrete, new, unique and ontologically different from any other historical event. Because of this, in principle, it is not possible to make specific scientific prophecies related to the history of humanity. It turns out that the idea that a successful prediction of a sun or moon eclipse provides a reasonable basis and hope for an actual scientific prophecy of the development of the history of humankind is based on a wrong concept and, thus, is false. Accordingly, Popper posits the question: ‘it is a fact that we can predict solar eclipses with a high degree of precision, and for a long time ahead. Why should we not be able to predict revolutions’? (Popper, 2014:338).

That we can predict that the eclipse does not provide us with a valid reason why we might think that we can anticipate revolutions or some other social event. Popper says that there is a critical difference between a social trend and scientific laws, stating: ‘While scientific law is universal in its form, this trend can only express a single existential statement’ (Popper, 2002:106). That is one of the most persuasive arguments brought against historicism, striking at the heart of its theoretical assumptions. Historicists’ failure to establish the distinction between scientific laws and trends is as equally destructive as its cause. This failure makes them think that it is possible to explain the change by discovering the patterns which have flowed through history, and that, based on such observations, it is possible to foresee and perceive future events. Thus, this logical difference is crucial because specific prophecies, as we have seen, can only be based on conditional predictions, which must nevertheless be derived from scientific laws. Neither positive nor conditional forecasts can rely on trends for the simple reason that patterns can be changed or reversed by just changing the conditions that have prompted them in the first place. According to Popper, ‘there is no doubt that the habit of confusing the laws and trends, together with the intuitive observation of trends, such as technical progress, inspires the central doctrine of historicism’ (2002:106).

Popper, of course, does not dispute the existence of trends, nor does he deny that observation of patterns can be of practical benefit. However, the historicism model is something that ultimately needs scientific explanation and, therefore, cannot function as a reference in the sense in which everything else can be scientifically explained or foreseen. For example, the increase in human knowledge has played an essential role in the historical development of humankind. Above all, it is indisputable that there is a causal link between advancements in scientific and technological knowledge and the rise and spread of global changes. In short, the course of human history has been
under the strong influence of the growth of human knowledge; all empirical evidence suggests that the link between the growth of human knowledge and human history is in progressive harmony. In the first place, Popper underlines that it is logically secure to show that no scientific prediction can predict the future of the scientific method. From this, it follows that no society can scientifically predict its level of knowledge in the future.

Therefore, while the future evolution of human history is under the influence of the growth of human knowledge and its development, as was the case in the past, we cannot scientifically determine what this knowledge will be. What we can do is, perhaps, to recognise the point that if the future contains any discoveries or any new developments in the growth of our knowledge, then we cannot foresee the future now at least concerning the future growth of our knowledge. Historicism and all the ideologies based on it, therefore, are necessarily going to collapse – academic pre-science teaching about human society is historically impossible. According to Popper, it is an impossible dream. Historical indeterminism, in this account, is the only philosophy of history proportionate to the correct (but incomplete) understanding of the nature of scientific discovery and it dramatically undermines both historicism and holism as a result.

Popper’s critique of historicism and holism is balanced. He sees society as the equivalent of the total collection of all its members, and the actions of members of the community serve to shape this society, and not vice versa, while the social consequences of these activities are often and mostly unintended. Still, we can test social theories7 ‘by way of predicting that certain developments will take place under certain conditions’ (Popper, 2002: xii). For that reason, Popper advocates what he calls piecemeal social engineering. According to him, this should be the central mechanism for nation-state social planning. Applied to the globalisation process, this approach to social planning encourages attempts to put the right thing in the right place – a commonly known political weakness – instead of trying to impose a preconceived notion of good for everyone in society and the whole community. For this reason, we can envisage that piecemeal social engineering goes hand in hand with what Popper calls modified utilitarianism, which is, according to him, the art of minimising the total amount of suffering, rather than relying upon positive utilitarianism (Popper, 2014:345).

5. Sovereignty in the Neoliberal Era

From Popper’s account, we can reconceptualise the role of the sovereign state contra neoliberal global governance using his concept of piecemeal social engineering, which rejects the idea that social injustice can be fulfilled without the sovereign nation-
state. The abolition of existing institutions and the removal of all constitutive elements which compose the nation-state would create a vacuum with unforeseeable consequences. It would completely change human rationality. As Esping-Andersen proposed in her research on the transition of the welfare state in the age of globalisation (Esping-Andersen and the United Nation’s Research Institute for Development, 1996), the state is still undoubtly responsible for the lives of people in this era. The nation-state is, therefore, the only guarantor of fundamental human rights protection. Unlike his liberal colleagues, Popper significantly deviates from the liberal tradition of promoting the idea of effective mechanisms for the acquisition of wealth rather than tackling the social problems of society. Rational social planning is reflected in the reduction of human suffering. The role of the nation-state is to create an environment for such planning and bring about new social dynamics and structures that will correspond with the contemporary globalised era.

From another point of view, the principle of sovereignty has been called into question by political philosophers in recent decades, but it is still a central part of the social sciences. Changes in the global market, the rise of the neoliberal economy and political transition in the former communist bloc states have inspired political thinkers to create a new vision of sovereignty. With the help of the IMF and a significant number of freshly created non-governmental organisations, the transition was accomplished. The old concept of sovereignty became outdated and the advocates of global theory started to diminish, terminate and criticise the role of the nation-state. To explain this, Dahbour states:

The critique of sovereignty in recent philosophy focuses on what is usually called classical or Westphalian sovereignty. Sovereignty generally denotes the idea of authority over persons or property. The classical conception, often traced philosophically to Hobbes and legally to the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, applies the notion of absolute authority to the internal relation between the state and its subjects. For a state or ruler to have sovereignty in this sense is to have absolute authority over a territory and its inhabitants. (Dahbour, 2006:109)

Such sovereignty needs re-visiting in new, changed global relations because it is still a dominant part in evaluating the legitimacy of global political powers. Accordingly, Dahbour continues:

That is the idea that sovereignty constitutes the ultimate authority over a territory and its people when there is no higher arbiter or ruler, not when the scope of the authority is absolute or undivided. A corollary of this idea is that the highest authority is not a ruler or governmental institution, but the people from which the government or ruler derives their authority. The people, in other words, not the state, are sovereign. (Dahbour, 2006:109)
Therefore, the new and changed classical concept of sovereignty with a sharp division of powers predicated on citizens’ control of government is a possible solution for the regulation of erroneous globalisation processes. Meanwhile, it would not signify the revival of the totalitarian control of the state over the freedom and individual rights of people, what Chelcea and Drută (2016) term ‘zombie socialism’ in accordance with neoliberal governmentality in the states of Central and Eastern Europe. The new constitution of the concept of sovereignty in which citizens establish their sovereignty over the nation-state is going to lead towards better international relations. With this reformulation, sovereignty, viewed as an anachronism, will get new theoretical substance.

German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas investigated this topic and offered a plausible solution to the problem. He is a ‘philosopher capable of drawing on important sociological insights that deal with the problems and challenges posed by globalisation’ (Lachapelle, 2005:641). In his work Postnational Constellation, Habermas realised that, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, modern society had begun the globalisation process, troubled with defects, but at the same time, a progressive idea that should be further designed and critically shaped. He also noted that the widening social gap (Habermas, 2018:59) was becoming more prominent, and, as a mechanism for preventing it, he suggested the survival of the sovereign nation-state to the extent to which concern for the individual’s social status would be its principal task. ‘Regarded as an ideal type, the change from princely to popular sovereignty also transforms the rights of “subjects” into the rights of human beings and citizens: into liberal and political civil rights, which guarantee both private and political autonomy’ (Habermas, 2018:65).

The sovereign national state should also consider the regulation of speculative capital and not allow this capital to be uncontrolled and destructive. The classical function of the state as the guarantor of security, law and freedom should be transferred to a supranational world organisation specialised in securing peace and implementing human rights worldwide (Habermas, 2008). ‘While the state’s sovereignty and monopoly on violence remain formally intact, the growing interdependencies of a world society challenge the basic premise that national politics, circumscribed within a determinate national territory, is still adequate to address the actual fates of an individual nation-state’ (Habermas, 2018:70).

The sovereign state, therefore, needs to put itself in the market, not to limit the national economy at state borders to encourage healthy competition, but to point towards piecemeal social engineering and not to allow the domination of speculative capital. The sovereign country should respond to the emergence of the global order by its transformation and opening it to multilateral cooperation (Sassen 2008), while retaining all those mechanisms which will maintain a state of social equilibrium. ‘In complex societies, it is the deliberative opinion- and will- formation of citizens,
grounded in the principles of popular sovereignty, that forms the ultimate medium for a form of abstract, legally constructed solidarity that reproduces itself through political participation’ (Habermas, 2018:76).

The mentioned neoliberal model of sweeping away the nation-state or the radical reconstruction of the sovereign state to accommodate global capitalism, where things should change fundamentally, is troubled. However, the possible rise of hyper neoliberal ‘disaster capitalism’ (Klein 2008) can be assumed in a time of increasing financial socio-economic disturbance on the globe: what we have to recognise is, perhaps, that the current international social circumstances surrounding COVID-19 might quickly result in a call for an immediate reconstitution of the sovereign state in that manner. Although the neoliberal approach is doomed to failure, with the elimination of all institutions and relations of the nation-state, the correctives of individual rational behaviour would disappear. It would be impossible to start from scratch. So, in the process of shaping social life, we should not destroy the institutions and rules that give us some framework for successful social reforms.

6. Final Comments

The outcome of the arguments reviewed and presented in this article can be summed up as follows. In theory, globalisation is an optimistic idea, having many humanitarian values. The declared goal of globalisation is the spread of the system of democracy and universal human rights. The number of democratically proclaimed countries in the world is growing every year. In a world where we identify democracy with civilisation as such, life under authoritarian systems seems to be lagging, uncivilised. Today, ‘at the beginning of the 21st century the *conditio humana* cannot be understood nationally or locally but only globally’ (Beck 2002:17). However, a global theory which describes these processes cannot be scientifically based if it is grounded in historicistically based arguments. An alternative methodological resolution is needed. The COVID-19 incident shows how planning with a pre-established schematic plan cannot work and how the global situation may suddenly change. Depending on its form, the globalisation process opens two entirely different directions, that we, as humankind, can reach. In the social sphere, the ambiguity of globalisation is more than evident.

In practice, neoliberalism is the dark ideological side of a process that needs reformulation. Among the social sciences, economics is, for example, one of the most scientific disciplines, but it often tends to oversimplify our social world regarding economic rationality. The decisive influence of supranational institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, the G8 and NATO is slowly turning the global elite into a true sovereignty, a decision-maker beyond which there is no higher instance or demo-
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Democratic control. Economically dependent sovereign states turn out to be local executors of the decisions recommended by supranational institutions. The proclamation of the abolition of the nation-state and sovereignty is an expression of this effort.

Popper’s vision, along with some other social sciences theories, can provide arguments for such a reformulation. The rejecting of historicism and holism is necessary for that. The piecemeal social engineering concept provides conceivable solutions for the better-defined policies in the domain of public health, social services and education, and finally has its value in preserving the nation-state and its sovereignty. Together with the concept of piecemeal social engineering, a step-by-step approach in resolving current social problems is a must in the further development of the global theory. Globalisation reveals to us that complexity and uncertainty are the nature of our society. Reflexive social sciences and related humanities such as philosophy must struggle with the increasing contingency of the whole world, rather than providing an excessive reductionism with the hyper-rationality of the world.

Still, the disagreement between global theory and neoliberalism does not have to be permanent. The revisited nation-state could be a solid basis for the resolution of the problem. If it moves in the direction of a more socially and democratically regulated form of globalisation, humanity can save itself of the risk of an ecological, pandemic or nuclear disaster, the dangerous growth of poverty or global terrorism. The real conflict lies in the social nature, the traditional form of globalisation: whether it leads to the gradual and free spread of economic benefits or the globalisation of poverty, a war of various civilisations or their mutual enrichment, global democracy or an authoritarian world, ecological balance or the unsustainable destruction of the natural environment. A human or non-human, democratic or authoritarian character of globalisation is a problem that we must try to observe in all its transformations. The COVID-19 pandemic does not signal just the limit of economic globalisation, it also signals the even more fatal limit of nationalist populism, which insists on full state sovereignty (Žižek 2020b).

The conclusion is, therefore, that some of the ideal settings of neoliberals can by no means be considered correct. If this theory is to maintain its dominant role in the world political stage, then it is necessary to make significant corrections. It is, therefore, clear that we must investigate the solution to the problem. In the attempts to gradually transform some aspects within the academic setting of neoliberalism, we must distinguish how the prefix does not conform to its predecessor theory and its already proven values. The neoliberal doctrine in economics, which creates in ways that promote free-market, for-profit corporate solutions, may succeed in producing company profits but ultimately fails in terms of democracy, fairness and justice. So, the question is, how can globalisation be used to stabilise the world economically and to reduce negative social consequences, whether it is for individuals or states? Do we need a new immense prophetic social narrative after fascism, communism and neo-
liberalism or should we try the piecemeal social engineering approach? Can a re-visited *cosmo-politically* transformed nation-state be an initiator of the required social changes?

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**Preispitivanje Poperove društvene teorije u svetlu savremenih procesa globalizacije**

*(Apstrakt)*

Globalizacija je društveni fenomen koji prevladava duhom vremena u ovom istorijskom trenutku. Članak razmatra Poperovu kritiku metodologije društvenih nauka u svetlu savremenih teorija globalizacije. Njegovo stanovište doprinosi uspostavljanju novih argumenata u trenutnoj debati između zagovornika i protivnika globalizacije. Neophodno je da istaknemo da je neoliberalizacija, tamna strana procesa globalizacije, pažljivo istražena s obzirom da je najkontraverznija posledica transformacije sveta. Dodatno, naglašavamo da neoliberalizacija ne ubrzava samo rast slobodnog tržišta, već dovodi do posledica zbog kojih većina suverenih nacionalnih
država odustaje od ranije zacrtane politike države blagostanja. Suprotno tome, ekonomski neoliberalni program, pozivajući se na liberalne vrednosti sa kojima nema puno toga zajedničkog, podstiče aktivnosti koje umanjuju značaj propisa i kontrolu od strane države, što na kraju dovodi do porasta društvene nejednakosti među ljudima i trajno ugrožava tradicionalne liberalne vrednosti. Protiv ovakve redukcionističke politike društvenog inženjeringa u svetu, suprotstavljemo argumente predstavljene u Poperovoj kritici istoricizma i holizma, sa ciljem da se kroz filozofsko istraživanje revidira metodologija koja čini osnovu aktuelnih teorija globalizacije. Nakon toga, činjenice ćemo integrirati u koherentan kritički argument sa ciljem da se ukaže na manjkavosti ovih teorija i način na koji se one mogu korigovati. Konačno, predlažući moguća rešenja za novu ulogu suverene nacionalne države u korekciji negativnih posledica procesa globalizacije, autori će razjasniti koji teorijski pravci u okviru teorija globalizacije zahtevaju dalje filozofsko istraživanje.

**KLJUČNE REČI:** teorije globalizacije, globalizacija, neoliberalizam, historicizam, holizam, suverenost