

# End of Millennium

Manuel Castells, 1998

Book review by Robert Orr

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In *End of Millennium*, the 3<sup>rd</sup> volume of *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Manuel Castells addresses how the rise of global capitalism and the information economy have affected specific regions, countries, and groups around the world. As contrasted to the first two volumes of this trilogy, which respectively addressed the rise and character of the network society and network economy, and the meaning of identity (at the level of the individual, community, and larger social groups) in the network society, this third volume illustrates specific cases and examples of change. Castells is almost entirely descriptive in his accounts and rarely transitions into normative, “what should be” language.

The first case Castells illustrates is the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union, he argues, fell so quickly in large part because its statist communism could not adapt (at all or quickly enough) to the rise of the Information Age. Its large, centrally controlled institutions, he says, were not nimble enough to handle the transition to the network society.

From the Soviet Union, Castells transitions to addressing what he calls the “black holes of information capitalism”: those who are left out of the new economy. Groups he specifically addresses are those who reside in sub-Saharan Africa, those in American inner-city ghettos, and children worldwide (but especially poor children and children in war torn areas). He argues that the information economy easily overlooks these groups because they have little to contribute, either as producers or consumers, in the eyes of global capitalism.

From the marginalized, Castells then turns to the global criminal economy enabled by the network society. He specifically covers the Russian underworld and the Latin American drug trafficking industry, the *narcotraffico*. He argues that this emerging global criminal economy can and does significantly drain resources from the legitimate global economy while at the same time using the same techniques of global networking.

Next, Castells covers the examples of Asian and European economic unification. In Asia, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, Singapore, and other southeast Asian countries are unifying into a strong globally competitive economic block. The major significance of this unification is that it signals the end of Western economic domination. European unification, on the other hand, is still unsettled and will ultimately depend on the region's ability to solve its own historical (and ethnic) puzzle and to handle the transition from individual nation/states to a de facto European nation with constituent states.

End of Millennium ends with an analysis of the larger factors that have emerged in the information age: a new world, new society, and new avenues of social change. Through its examples, this volume addresses those groups that didn't make the jump to the new economic system, those left out of the new economic system, those who are finding their way in the cracks in the system, and those who are adapting to the new network economy. Castells specifically avoids any normative ideas here, preferring instead to let the power of his examples speak for themselves. And that they do well.