

BOOK REVIEW/ COMPTE RENDU

Robinson, William I., *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2014. \$30.95 paper (9781107691117)

As William Robinson explains, the goal of *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity* is to move beyond “the extant nation-state-centric paradigms that purport to explain world political and economic dynamics as interactions among nation-states and competition among national classes in an interstate system” (3). Following from his earlier theory of global capitalism, in which globalization represents a qualitatively novel epoch distinguished by transnational capital, a transnational capitalist class (TCC), and a transnational state apparatus (TNS), the book attempts to respond to Robinson’s many critics through the analysis of a wide variety of crises that affect the world today.

The book begins with an overview of Robinson’s main claim that globalization has entailed the creation of a global capital-labour relation. The chapter will be familiar for those acquainted with Robinson’s earlier work, especially *A Theory of Global Capitalism*, as it is more or less an updated version. Demonstrating the extent to which production has globalized through computer and information technologies (CITs) and organizational innovations, Robinson argues that capital is now predominantly global in the form of transnational corporations (TNCs) and the TCC that owns them. Shifting from capital to labour, the second half of the chapter focuses on familiar arguments about the subordination of labour on a global scale and the rise of a global “middle class” that has “high incomes, college degrees, English-language skills, and global connections; can afford televisions, refrigerators, music systems, and computers; and can dine at a Pizza Hut or buy Nike shoes” (60).

The second chapter is, much like the first, a re-hash of Robinson’s earlier work on the TNS. Pointing out that the nation-state is a historically-specific form of state, Robinson argues that the nation-state is being incorporated (not weakened) into TNS apparatuses consisting of a diffuse collection of supranational institutions, organizations, agreements, and fora. The theory follows three main points: (1) that the state advances the interests of the capitalist class because that class is dominant; (2) that the state is a relation, not a “thing”; (3) that the state serves the interests of capital by virtue of both instrumental and structural dimen-

sions. The chapter closes with an overview of how the financial crisis has brought forth further TNS institutions to mediate global financial flows.

The rest of the book consists of updated and expanded versions of previously published articles. Going back to his earlier comments regarding the historically-specific nature of the national state, the third chapter attempts to refute theories of “new imperialism” put forward by David Harvey and others. Robinson argues that since the world is now characterized by global capital and not national capital, theories of “new imperialism” are rooted in a false global/national dualism, in which the transformation of the nation-state is separated from economic phenomena and relations.

Somewhat disjointed, the fourth chapter flows into a discussion of the recent financial crisis. The main point of this chapter is to demonstrate that the combination of neoliberal policies and CITs have led to a revolution in finance which has provided for the “ability to transform any current *or future* stream of earning (dividends, interest, mortgages, credit card payments, state and private bond maturities, commodity deliveries, and so forth) into an easily tradable capital asset” (136). Against his critics, Robinson argues that there is less the domination of financial capital over industrial and commercial capital, and more the general financialization of the circuitry of global capitalism.

The latter half of this discussion deals with what Robinson calls “militarized accumulation.” Speaking of the US in particular, Robinson argues that after 9/11, America was greatly able to militarize the global economy—shifting the “real” economy from CITs (i.e., the tech bubble) to a military-security-industrial-construction-engineering-petroleum complex. Against the claims that this is similar to “military-Keynesianism,” Robinson points out that “much of warfare itself and the related processes of social control and repression have been privatized or semi-privatized” (151).

In the fifth, and perhaps the most interesting chapter (a revised and expanded version of an article co-authored with Mario Barrera), Robinson discusses responses to the financial crisis and the rise of what he calls “twenty-first-century fascism.” While careful to note that at present there are only tendencies of fascism emerging, the chapter focuses on a variety of these different tendencies: deunionization; the *Citizens United* ruling; the rise of the Tea Party, and other reactionary social movements; and the new concentration camps—private prisons to house surplus labour (predominantly young men from various minority groups). These changes have coincided, claims Robinson, with the rise of a law and order style police state that institutes things like mandatory minimums as a result of the failed and so-called war on drugs.

For the reader not acquainted with Robinson's work, the book provides a useful overview of the main concepts and themes that he has utilized in constructing his theory of global capitalism—although the book does presume a certain amount of familiarity of the work of Marx and Marxist state theory. For those readers familiar with Robinson, however, the book is somewhat old hat. Long criticized for an overly abstract global perspective, this book provides more of the same, full of, what Robinson notes is an “inevitable simplification” (15). This is not to say that I disagree with the book's main points, but rather, that, for all the criticism he receives, it would seem that another overview of the various ways in which capitalism is “going global” is rather unnecessary. What would be more theoretically rewarding, I suspect, for both Robinson and his critics, would be a close, grounded analysis of one or more cases—a small community, a factory, a commodity, etc.—that could be used to further elucidate his main claim that global capitalists are the dominant fraction conditioning the character of society worldwide. As it stands, Robinson is left re-iterating his earlier justifications (e.g., that his critics are merely stuck in nation-state-centric paradigms) and expanding and updating his critical essays with more contemporary examples.

There are also a number of curious omissions from the book. Despite writing about the TNS apparatus for well over ten years now, Robinson has shifted terminology in this volume, referring to it in the plural: TNS apparatuses. There is no discussion of this shift, but one presumes that it would be theoretically important. Similarly, despite a later chapter on the rise of “twenty-first-century fascism” there is no discussion of George Liodakis (2010) and his similar theory of “totalitarian capitalism.” This is rather surprising given that they both regularly publish in the same journals and, to the lay observer, would both appear to be part of the “global capitalism school” that Robinson so frequently mentions.

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REFERENCES

- Liodakis, George. 2010. *Totalitarian capitalism and beyond*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub. Company.

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