

Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity, by **William I. Robinson**. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 246 pp. \$72.00 cloth ISBN: 978-1-107-06747-9. \$26.99 paperback. ISBN: 978-1-107-69111-7.

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With *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity*, William I. Robinson—one of the leading U.S. theorists of global capitalism—provides an updated statement of his provocative 2004 book, *A Theory of Global Capitalism*. Robinson responds to critics of his earlier book while also demonstrating the application of his theoretical approach to context of the post-2008 financial crisis.

The premise of *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity* is that we need to abandon state-centric frameworks in order to understand the global forces that shape the political and economic conflicts in any given place. Consistent with world-systems approaches, Robinson helps readers appreciate how a world historical lens can transform our thinking about social conflicts. He argues that global change has been shaped by the practices of networks of corporate leaders, globalizing politicians, and a technical and communications professionals that make up an increasingly powerful “transnational capitalist class” (TCC). This transnational class cannot be defined by national states or territories, and its interests lie in the advance of global capitalism rather than the well-being of groups or people in a particular place (see Sklair 2001).

As Robinson uncovers the workings of the TCC, he shows the extent to which these class actors have become detached from any particular national state and its residents. Thus, he argues that the key contradiction at the world scale is class, not inter-state competition. He challenges claims that recent U.S. military interventions reflect a new imperialism, arguing that such interventions reflect not a departure from capitalist globalization and a return to more nationally-oriented projects, but rather are in response to capitalism’s crisis (p. 103). Thus, the largest winners from U.S. military operations are transnational corporations—particularly those in the military-industrial, financial and energy sectors—and their shareholders, while the losers are citizens in the United States and elsewhere who are subjected to intensified austerity and repression.

The consolidation of power in the TCC has exposed the world’s workers to increasing precarity and discipline. The search for new sources of profit has led to “the brutal ‘Thirdworldization’ of working classes and the poor in the traditional heartlands of world capitalism—a displacement that is more social than territorial” (p. 114). The global crisis of profitability and the financialization of the world economy have prevented the continued redistribution of wealth from Third World to First World workers. This change in the global organization of work and rewards reinforces the transnationalization of class formation among workers, and further

undermines the territorial bases of identity and citizenship. Most importantly, these processes fuel the system's crisis of legitimacy.

The declining *legitimacy of the world capitalist system has brought increased coercion, and Robinson's book documents this development in detail. Building on his analysis of the TCC, Robinson argues that wars like those in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Libya and Somalia "are global wars staged not by the United States but by the transnational elite."* They are part of a "global war economy" (p. 151) that is an effort to manage systemic crisis and provide new possibilities for capital accumulation.

In Robinson's globalized class analysis, "the world's people live under a dictatorship of transnational capital" (p. 52). As a result, the world's workers are being increasingly relegated to the ranks of "surplus humanity." In short, the imperatives of profit and the power of global finance have made literally *half of the world's workforce* "structurally unemployed" – that is, "expelled from circuits of accumulation just like any other input" (p. 53). This "surplus humanity" is subjected to criminalization and "preemptive containment," a theme explored in depth in the chapter on policing the global economy. Robinson's analysis of "twenty-first century fascism" and its manifestation in cities across the United States and the world provides an important world-historical perspective on the recent upsurge resistance across the United States to systemic racism and police violence.

Robinson's concluding chapter explores implications of his analysis for our understandings of popular struggle. Following the work of Christopher Chase-Dunn, he sees the contemporary period as one of "world revolutions," or "constellations of local, regional, national and transnational rebellions and revolutions that have long-term consequences for changing world orders" (p. 220). The power of today's movements lies not so much in their inherent qualities as in the world-historical moment of systemic crisis. The system's loss of legitimacy, the limits to its material and ideological regeneration, and divisions among dominant groups over how to manage the crises all create openings for anti-systemic challengers. At the same time, the "Thirdworldization" of First World and the problem of climate change are feeding the growth of a more global radical politics across the North-South divide (pp. 232-233). Globalized communication and expanded transnational networks have increased peoples' recognition of their shared vulnerabilities to global financial and ecological crises, providing a basis for collective struggle that was not possible in earlier periods.

Given this structural context, the challenge for the agents of world revolutionary movements is thus to "[replace] the logic of the market with a social logic" (p. 233, emphasis original). For Robinson, this will entail not just the horizontalism that has fueled many promising prefigurative projects aimed at building another world, but it also demands more deliberate and concerted efforts to challenge the state—an institution that is essential to the operation and survival of global capitalism. Localized projects that prefigure a different kind of system are just one part of what must be a larger effort for a *transnational project of global transformation*. Imagining what sort of institutions and logics will govern such a system, as well as the kinds of strategies that may help us realize such a project is the key task for

contemporary movements, and indeed for all of those who are ready to take action in response to the very real crisis of humanity we now face.

As a final point and provocation, I want to lift up Robinson's argument that any effective effort at global transformation must somehow engage the state (both the national state and transnational state institutions). However, I would suggest that such confrontations with the state are in fact taking place, not at the national level, but rather at the level of cities and regions. Movements for "the right to the city" and "food sovereignty," for instance, represent efforts to transform institutions of governance from below and have helped bring grassroots popular groups into political arenas that are local as well as global. Globalized conflicts over resources ultimately take place in the places where people live, and where they increasingly struggle to survive. Local arenas, moreover, give excluded groups more potential to influence outcomes and win influential allies than do extra-local settings. Significantly, they are also more appropriate to the work of popularizing a social logic that can prevail over the hegemonic market logic.

In conclusion, this co-recipient of the 2015 ASA Political Economy of the World-System Section's best book award is a welcome addition to the literature on globalization both for its clarity and for its engagements with important theoretical and policy debates. It will be useful for scholars and analysts as well as for advanced undergraduate or graduate courses related to globalization, political economy, and social change.