Book Review

Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton (2018) *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 9781108452632. 336 pp. $34 paperback.

Reviewed by
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Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton have written *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis* as the result of years of increasing intellectual collaboration. Their book presents an ambitious enterprise: to provide an interpretation of contemporary capitalism that is grounded in both classical and contemporary historical materialism but that does not separate the economic sphere from the political arena, structure from agency, materiality from ideologies, domination from resistance. Drawing mainly on the works of Antonio Gramsci and Nicos Poulantzas, in each chapter of the three parts comprising the book, the authors start by presenting the current mainstream lines of thought in a given field of study, expose critiques to them and finally present their own historical materialist perspective.

Through a critique of ontological dualisms that separate spheres in external interaction with one another rather than in their inner actions, the authors review well-established approaches such as those of Robert Gilpin, Kenneth Waltz, Susan Strange and John Hobson, proposing instead the adoption of a philosophy of internal relations as their contribution to the critique of contemporary political economy (pp. 6, 8, 13). That is the case with the classic agent–structure dichotomy, proposing to understand agency and structure within a critical theory of world order, thus overcoming the limitations of both structuralism and intentionalism (p. 27).

In fact, constantly rebuilding the basics of Marxian argument throughout the entire book, Bieler and Morton's analysis focuses on the structuring conditions of capitalism: a) "free" wage labour and the private ownership of the means of production ensured by the state; and b) capitalism's crisis-prone inner tendency. The same goes for c) the movement of history: classes make their history, but they do so under circumstances they did not choose (pp. 39, 44).

The state form is then conceptualised as a condensation of class forces in internal relation with social property relations, the wider interstate system and global capitalism. The authors do not follow mainstream international relations (IR) or international political economy (IPE) theories either in asserting the dominance of states in the global economy, or analysing how markets and new actors have taken over traditional state authority. Instead, they maintain that in order to conceptualise the contemporary global restructuring of capitalism, it is necessary to analyse the uneven and combined way and extent through which the interests of transnational capital become internalised within specific forms of the state (pp. 21, 22).

Framing this problematic is achieved through a critical review of Immanuel Wallerstein's state-centred notions of centre–periphery and the external relation between state and market, Giovanni Arrighi's systemic cycles of accumulation in which different hegemonic cycles are closely linked to specific dominant states (p. 84), and William Robinson's idea of a Transnational State which suggests the overriding of national states by supranational institutions, agreements

and regimes in the role of shaping capitalism. The authors prefer to adopt, instead, the Gramscian concept of passive revolution: the dialectics of revolution-restoration that allows addressing state and class forms of agency with the structuring conditions of uneven and combined capitalist development. Thus, it becomes possible to capture residues from the past that shape social forms in the present, as well as to theorise on both the inner dynamics of capitalist modernity within states and how processes of developmental catch-up are internally related to the geopolitical pressures of the state system (pp. 99, 105).

The trajectories of various state formations are therefore embedded in the uneven worldwide spread of capitalism, combined with the condition of differently constituted prior political forms and social relations (p. 96). Bieler and Morton state that within IR theories, realists and liberals both take the separation of the "state" and the "market", the interstate system and the global economy as their ahistorical starting point of analysis. In the authors' historical materialist perspective, on the other hand, both the political and the economic are simply differentiated forms of the same underlying historical social relations of production (pp. 160–161).

In order to analyse contemporary capitalist dynamics, the book focuses on the ruptures of capitalist order promoted by the United States government during the 1970s (Nixon shock; Volker shock). It recalls how at that time economic growth was no longer strong enough to ensure both capitalist super-profits and rising wages for workers. This in turn had led to a period of increasing monetary interstate rivalry (Triffin's dilemma) and industrial conflict across the industrialised world (of which "Thatcher versus unions" is the best expression). As history has demonstrated, since the 1970s capital forces renounced the post-World War II national class compromise and reorganised production across the global political economy through a series of "fixes" to the economic crisis (technological fix; spatial fix; product fix; financial fix). Within capitalist classes, power shifted from manufacturing to finance capital (pp. 165–166).

Building on this background, the last section of the book – Part III – presents empirical interventions and analyses a set of spatial dynamics linked to the expansion of spaces of capital, the geopolitics of conflict, and violence-bolstering conditions of dispossession through forms of new imperialism (p. 249). Having as its departure point the allegation that the economic core of the global political economy is slowly but steadily moving from the traditional industrialised countries in Europe, Japan and North America towards rapidly industrialising and developing emerging markets elsewhere in the world (p. 159), Chapter 7 proposes to analyse the emergence of the BRICS, and China in particular – internally related to the global labour arbitrage-driven outsourcing practices of traditional powers, put in place from the 1970s onwards (p. 170).

Actually, it would have been interesting to extend the detailed analysis of inner relations of the uneven and combined capitalist development presented for the Chinese case to the other four BRICS countries, to which there are few concrete references concerning class struggles and the internalisation of transnational capital into those particular state forms. In the book's index, specific references to Brazil appear on only three pages, to Russia on seven pages, to India on twelve, to China on thirty-three, to South Africa on six, and to the BRICS in general on sixteen pages. Besides this small critical point, it is important to note that while affirming that the BRICS countries have become increasingly integrated into the global political economy, the authors aver that this does not automatically imply the integration of their national capitalist classes into the Transnational Capitalist Class itself – in line with William Robinson (p. 174).

The Chinese state form is, indeed, presented in an in-depth analysis, suggesting that capitalist restructuring in China may be interpreted as a case of passive revolution. In this, a crucial role is played by the state in instituting and/or expanding aspects of capitalist social

relations in a very gradual process (understood in the Chinese case as capitalist revolution and socialist restoration). Although gradual, this passive revolution march has led China to become an active participant and tacit co-manager of the established global order (pp. 178–179, 181).

As the authors highlight, capitalist expansion goes hand in hand with social resistance against exploitation, in a structured agency dynamics. Where capital moves, collective resistance by labour follows (p. 257). Drawing on the works of Antonio Gramsci and Harry Cleaver, the book adopts the notion of an extended social factory that goes beyond the traditional workplace and the confrontation between wage labour and employers. Class-struggle analysis is thus expanded to the political economy of the capitalist mode of reproduction, encompassing productive and unproductive wage labour as well as non-wage labour in the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus value. Alongside with Silvia Federici, the authors posit the relations of race, gender, ecology and sexuality as internally constitutive of historically situated class processes of becoming (as in E.P. Thompson) and identity building experiences (pp. 22, 133, 134, 142, 148–149).

Clearly, according to this understanding existing trade union organisations need to reach beyond the workplace, as the division between the few still regularly employed and the vast fractions of the surplus population is becoming the key division within struggles today. The authors maintain that new forms of community unionism can emerge if they are rooted in the local wage and non-wage working class and if they address class-specific issues (pp. 152, 155).

Chapter 8 presents a critical view of the Iraq war. The authors engage with classical Marxist debates on imperialism portrayed by inter-imperialist rivalry perspectives (Lenin, Bukharin) and ultra-imperialist alliances (Kautsky). Linking classical debates to the contemporary work of Alex Callinicos on renewed inter-imperialist rivalry, Panitch-Gindin and Ray Kiely on inter-imperialist alliances, and William Robinson on the transnational state (pp. 190–191), Bieler and Morton develop an account of global war that internally relates geopolitics to processes of capital accumulation – in line with Rosa Luxemburg's idea that the military is often mobilised as the executor of the accumulation of capital.

The United States' foreign policy is not to be mistaken for that of a unitary actor, and there is a need to reassert the centrality of the US state form while unpacking the class contradictions and struggles therein (pp. 174–175). Their analysis of the Iraq war frames it as related to different aspects of capital accumulation, maintaining that there has been a clear intra-class conflict in the US over the decision to invade Iraq, ultimately won by the more nationally grounded military and oil-service industries, but also industries that benefit from the creation of physical infrastructure in the built environment through fixed capital. This Bomb-and-Build strategy provides temporary relief from the problems of over-accumulation and the crisis tendencies in the general rate of profit raised by the contradictions of capitalism (pp. 202–203, 215).

It is important to note that the authors consider the uneven and combined development of capitalism and the variable adoption of different state strategies of accumulation, territoriality and class struggle as integral elements related to one another as a whole. In the case of uneven and combined development as framed in the context of the European political economy (Chapter 9), they identify a financialised debt-led growth model in Europe, with Northern export-led economic growth models versus Southern debt-driven economic models that have been reinforced by the institution of the European Monetary Union and the wider project of European integration. Since the 2008 financial crisis started in Wall Street, bailouts by the European Central Bank have been pegged to austerity policies towards Southern European countries, promoting new cycles of accumulation by dispossession (as in David Harvey), through which austerity policies are also a way of internalising the interests of transnational capital at the

expense of labour. At the same time, the supranational EU regime is able to contain social conflicts at the national level, to be politically dealt with by national governments and national police forces (pp. 229, 234–235, 240, 243).

Although the environmental and climate crisis dimension underpinning *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crisis* is not extensively dealt with in the main arguments in the book, the authors do state that the expansion of new frontiers of accumulation and, therefore, struggles over accumulation by extra-economic means are often advanced through the constitution of abstract social nature: the mapping, identification, quantification, measuring and coding of nature is enacted to extend value relations beyond abstract labour (p. 255).

This kind of connection established between classic Marxism and contemporary perspectives in international relations and international political economy is just one of the many merits of this inspiring book. Another one is making the linkages between modes of production and reproduction, and between wage and non-wage labour under the capitalist social order. In their path to demonstrate the internality of uneven and combined development (global capitalism), the role of the state and geopolitics (global war) and the conditions of exploitation and resistance (global crisis), Bieler and Morton have set an extremely fruitful ground for continued research by scholars and provided an enhanced understanding of the dynamics of contemporary capitalism.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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