

Internal Relations in Global Capitalism

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Abstract:

Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crises is a major contribution to the critique of political economy that seeks to overcome ontological and epistemological challenges in international relations and international political economy to study various aspects of the emerging global order in their interconnection. Adam Morton and Andreas Bieler develop some important Marxian concepts and insights but go beyond them by developing the philosophy of internal relations to understand the interaction of economic, political, military and social institutions, practices, and conflicts. My contribution identifies the assumptions of their approach; critiques the philosophy of internal relations where this assumes a pre-given or emergent totality and highlights competing totalizing imaginaries and societalization projects; and introduces the importance of a Gramscian critique of hegemonic, sub-hegemonic and counter-hegemonic imaginaries as the basis of *Herrschaftskritik* as well as *Ideologiekritik*.

Keywords: Adam Morton; Andreas Bieler; Critique of domination; Cultural Political Economy; Gramsci; Hegemony; Ideologiekritik; Internal relations; Open Marxism; Post-disciplinarity.

Introduction

*Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crises*¹ seeks to overcome ontological and epistemological challenges to studying various aspects of the emerging *global* order in their interconnection. Its authors' theoretical approach develops the philosophy of internal relations to understand the interaction of economic, political, military and social institutions, practices, and conflicts from the viewpoint of a comprehensive analysis of the uneven and combined development of capital relation on the world stage and its connection to forms of class struggle, broadly interpreted. This stresses the continued importance of the state form as nodal within global capitalism.² My critique is based on an emerging post-disciplinary approach, cultural political economy, to which the Bieler-Morton approach has strong affinities.

Summarizing the Argument

The authors reveal the inner connections between global capitalism, global war, and global crises by showing how capital as a social relation involves internal ties among the relations of production, state-civil society institutions, and conditions of class struggle. They focus on the internal ties that bind exploitation through value, labour, private property, class, capital, interest, commodities, the state, nature, religion or ideology.³ Their approach transcends competing studies on 'the international' that resort to the dualisms of material content and ideational form, agency and structure, and treat them as separate elements and they insist on rejecting economism.

These internal relations are explored in three sets of 'empirical interventions'. First, global capitalism is constituted through uneven and combined development and the geopolitics of global war. The authors locate China's insertion within global capitalism in this context. Second, global capitalism and a bomb-and-build approach to global war are consubstantially related to the 2003 invasion of Iraq as an expression of the geopolitical dynamics of the new imperialism, which involves divisions between the national and globalist

fractions of capital in the United States, linked to the military-industrial-academic complex.⁴ Third, the contradictions of overproduction and surplus absorption as spaces of capital exist in tandem with spaces of resistance that also endure, linking global war and global crisis as consubstantial. This is reflected in the uneven and combined development of the global financial crisis of 2007–8, notably across the Eurozone, situated in an ecological web of crisis and austerity. At the centre of the internal unity of these three moments are struggles against accumulation by extra-economic means.⁵

In this regard, they draw on Gramsci, who rejected economism in favour of a philosophy of internal relations and analysed how ideologies are viewed as historically produced through ceaseless struggle, gaining substance through practical activity bound up with systems of meaning embedded in the economy. They link this, following Gramsci, to the role of organic intellectuals in struggles over hegemony, exercising a broad ideological social function in across state–civil society relations. This approach is based on the material structure of ideology, which exists between the ideational and material realms as mediators of configurations of class forces.⁶

In exploring the dynamic of global capitalism, Bieler and Morton suggest that the world market is the presupposition and result of capital accumulation. It is driven by the exploitation and valorization of labour power as a commodity and the dynamic of profit-oriented, market-mediated competition that exists in the shadow of existing political regimes. This capitalist system originated in Western Europe based on the earliest and most complete transfer of political power to private property, which directly subordinates production to the demands of an appropriating class. Expansion then spread through diverse inherited political forms, which created multiscalar relations.⁷ When crises emerge, capital reorganises production across the global political economy as it searches for various ‘fixes’ to the economic crisis.⁸

This has created a transnational capitalist class and transnational social and class inequalities⁹ but not, pace William Robinson, a transnational state. This

concept fails to recognise the survival of national states as key factors of territorial differentiation alongside the equalisation of the conditions of production induced by global capital.¹⁰ In contrast, Bieler and Morton show the interests of transnational capital in specific state forms generate geopolitical rivalries between states, which are also part of the overall structure of class struggle.¹¹ They discuss the dialectic between the territorial logic of power and capital's spatial expansion and relate capital's outward expansion to the role of transnational capital.

Class identity is seen as an emergent process, which structures society in class ways through historical and social processes. Class struggle is related to race, gender, ecology and sexuality as relations internally constitutive of class, rather than external to it. This is linked to a 'social factory' analysis that includes productive and unproductive wage labour as well as non-wage labour in producing, appropriating and distributing surplus value. The social factory includes informal labour, the biosphere and female labour struggles within the context of race and gender dynamics. This approach enables Bieler and Morton to link class struggles within the social factory in both China and Europe and to connect them through a wider array of ruptural struggles, including world ecology struggles over the biosphere.¹² Thus, they stress that the spatial dynamics of variegated responses to capital accumulation are best analysed by focusing on struggles over accumulation that are triggered by the violent appropriation of nature, territory, labour and the sphere of reproduction as a source of value creation and exploitation. This includes women's unpaid reproductive labour as well as racial hierarchies resultant from colonial intervention.¹³

The export-driven growth model of Germany and the debt-driven models of countries such as Greece and Portugal are just as mutually interdependent as are the export-led Chinese economy and the credit-led US economy at the global level.¹⁴ The capitalist response in Europe was 'a class strategy that represents the combined efforts of European capitalist classes to respond to the global economic crisis and to the particular crisis of the European "social

model” by means of an offensive neoliberal strategy of capitalist restructuring’.¹⁵ Capital uses the crisis to justify cuts that it would not otherwise have been able to implement. This is shown by loans that do not rescue the Greek, Portuguese, Irish or Cypriot citizens and their healthcare and education systems but, rather, rescue the banks that lent French and German export profits to peripheral countries. The EU form of state continues a turn to authoritarian neoliberalism, limiting the possibilities of oppositional social forces.¹⁶

Six Issues Raised by this Summary

First, taking IR and IPE as the theoretical focus in this book leads its authors to critique positions within these disciplines more than to critique alternative positions in historical materialism. This explains a weak explanation of class agency and identity.

Second, is the philosophy of internal relations ontological and/or epistemological? Does it represent a radical social ontology of capitalist relations and/or provide an emerging class perspective on the institutional and social forms of capitalism, allowing the authors to comprehend the historical specificity of capitalism.¹⁷ The inspiration is Bertell Ollman, who posits internal relations as a philosophy of the coherence of capitalism in which everything is related around the logic of capital.¹⁸ Bieler and Morton endorse Ollman’s approach but are unclear whether internal relations stem from a totalization or are a messy set of competing totalizations around capital accumulation and embedded agency.

Third, relatedly, how are class relations related to class agency? Bieler and Morton argue that class identity and consciousness emerge from struggles against exploitation in the social factory. Do they ascribe social forces a class significance because of the effects of their actions or because they are self-aware in class action? They do not look for a ‘great refusal’ within global

political economy but study the ‘contradictory subject positions that might otherwise become points of politicisation’.¹⁹

Fourth, what is the role of sense- and meaning-making in structuring the relations of exploitation. Bieler and Morton conceive ideas as material social processes through which signs become part of the socially created world within global capitalism in a way that surpasses the deficits of social constructivist and poststructuralist approaches alike. How do ideas emerge and what is role of intellectuals in this regard? Why do certain ideas become dominant and within the specificity of global capitalism? How is this related to cultural political economy?²⁰

Fifth, how are the selection and variation of ideas related to the spatiality and temporality of uneven and combined development? Bieler and Morton focus on spatiality and have less to say about the dynamic of periodization and conjunctural analysis. They ignore spatio-temporal fixes.

Sixth, how do the authors conceive the empirical interventions in a critical realist context? What is the relation between the real, actual, and empirical?²¹ The cases studied are reconstructions within the historical materialist philosophy of internal relations based on a *postholing* method, which seeks explanations beyond immediate contingencies or sheer chance.²² They aim to reveal how the global financial crisis resulted from uneven and combined development across the global political economy while generating forms of resistance to conditions of austerity.²³

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Endnotes

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1. Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, *Global Capitalism, Global War, Global Crises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
 - 2 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 206.
 - 3 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 13.
 - 4 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 200.
 - 5 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 276.
 - 6 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 51.
 - 7 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 90-96.
 - 8 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 165.
 - 9 William I. Robinson, *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014: 2).
 - 10 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 113.
 - 11 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 128-9.
 - 12 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 131-50.
 - 13 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 253.
 - 14 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 226.
 - 15 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 233.
 - 16 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 242.
 - 17 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 10.
 - 18 Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, second edition. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); and *idem*, 'Marxism and the Philosophy of Internal Relations; or, How to Replace the Mysterious "Paradox" with "Contradictions" That Can Be Studied and Resolved', *Capital & Class*, 39(1): 7-23.
 - 19 Louise Amoore , "There Is No Great Refusal": The Ambivalent Politics of Resistance', in Marieke de Goede (ed.), *International Political Economy and Poststructuralist Politics* (London: Palgrave, 2006: 255-73: 259).
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 - 21 Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (Leeds: Leeds Books, 1975).
 - 22 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 23.
 - 23 Bieler and Morton, *Global Capitalism*: 216.

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