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Transversalism and Transformative Praxes: Globalization from Below

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Viewed in a world-historical perspective, social change, or social transformation, is not an “event” but rather a constant, a perpetual historical process. Human social organisation is perpetually in motion but within certain parameters of continuity. For over five millennia, since the origins of cities, the state, and class society, human social order has continued to evolve through a number of recognisable patterns of social change, including the historical formation of an ever-larger system of mutual interactions, or “World System” (Frank and Gills 1993). The historical trajectory of that world system has reflected and expressed the fundamental structural aspects of urban-class and state-based civilisation itself, including material, ideational, technological, and ecological sources, and dimensions of social change. These patterns have also reflected the particular social ecology of this form of civilisation, and its modes of human relations with the ecological systems upon which humans depend.

“The most important aspect of social change in this century involves how humanity must realise a relationship with the web of life based upon recognition of the unity and the sacred value of all life forms and living within the objective “planetary boundaries” of earth system dynamics.”

Over the course of these past five millennia of the history of this form of civilisation and world system, fundamental patterns emerged constituting extractivist relations with the “environment” or “nature”, culminating in the present global patterns. There have been certain continuities in the global history of this world civilisation and World System, including some secular trends, cycles, and rhythms, as well as alternating phases or periods of relative systemic stability and systemic crisis or instability. In periods of world systemic crisis, far-reaching social change and systemic reorganisation is a prominent feature (Gills and Frank 1992). These changes not only include such large-scale structural changes as “centre-shift” within the World System, but may also entail very significant ideational, technological, and other “material” changes in the social order.

Today we live in a “globalised” World System, but one which has significant continuities with the past, both structurally and ideationally, and in terms of some of the fundamental patterns and practices of human relations with the “natural” or “non-human” world and

web of life. We now live in a globalised civilisation, though one which entails proximity and encounters with many still existing alternative cultures, especially those of the world's remaining "indigenous peoples". This globalised and globally dominant world civilisation has now however entered a period of acute multiple and inter-acting crises. At present, these can be summarised under the triple conjuncture of the global crises of capital, climate, and COVID (Gills 2020).

The modern phase in the history of the world civilization system is characterized by its foundational dependence on 5Cs: (1) *Capital* replacing labour as the ultimate source of value; (2) *Carbon*—fossil fuels or more generally speaking, *extractivism*; (3) *Compulsive economic growth* through relentless commodification of socio-ecological relations and a multi-century mass appropriation of the commons, sustained through the constant promotion of consumerist cultures across the world; (4) *Coloniality*, i.e. the ongoing stratifying power relations and epistemes necessary for maintaining the integrity of intersectional hierarchies; and finally (5) *Corruptive politics*, energized by the rise of monopoly-finance capital, corporate-state interest-driven advances in surveillance, datafication, bio-, and neuro-technology, and robotic warfare (Hosseini 2020). The system is inherently crisis-prone since the 5Cs require an endless expansion of the planet's capacity. Since we have already passed the earth's biocapacity, and with no present technological solutions on the horizon that can retain this capacity, the same characteristics behind the ascendancy of modern civilization are now contributors to its demise.

The present trajectory of this globalised world civilisation and world system is rapidly approaching or already crossing several vital planetary boundaries and thresholds, and crossing key tipping points in earth system dynamics, which threaten to accelerate one another and deepen and amplify their negative effects (Steffen and Morgan 2021). Together, these patterns indicate the onset of what Gills has elsewhere referred to as the "great implosion" in the present form of civilisation (Gills 2020), implying a critical turning point in human history bringing the future of human civilisation into question. What we (i.e., humanity as a whole) do in the coming decade of the 2020s to change our collective trajectory and establish a profoundly harmonious relation with the natural or non-human world will determine the future of humanity for several centuries to come. The most important aspect of social change in this century involves how humanity must realise a relationship with the web of life based upon recognition of the unity and the sacred value of all life forms and living within the objective "planetary boundaries" of earth system dynamics (Henry, Rockström, and Stern, 2020; Rockström et al 2009; Rockström and Gaffney 2021).

The urgent imperative question of our times is how to organise sufficient social, structural, and systemic transformation to resolve the multiple crises now facing humanity, and how to bridge the "local" with the "global" dimensions of this transformation. It is clear that to date, the responses of the dominant actors, including governments, corporations, leading financial entities, and many prominent international organisations, have been largely a failure, incapable of making the necessary dramatic radical transformations required in this era of global crises (Hosseini, Goodman, Motta, and Gills, 2020). In many respects, a culture,

and a discourse, of delay and deferral has been the dominant trend (Gills and Morgan 2019; Gills and Morgan 2020), both reflecting and perpetuating systemic complacency in the face of what is objectively a planetary emergency. The severity and the urgency of the present multiple global crises demand far-reaching mass social mobilisations, a “globalization from below” capable of realising the scale of social change and systemic transformation required to resolve the present global crises. This era requires radical transformative praxes (Hosseini and Gills, 2020). The concept of “transversalism” (short for “transversal cosmopolitanism”) speaks to this situation and offers us a way of understanding a modality of social change through actively creating new forms of global solidarity and collective action across local and global dimensions (Hosseini, Gills, and Goodman, 2017; Salleh, Goodman and Hosseini, 2015; Goodman, 2007; Jung 2009).

Transversalism (transversal cosmopolitanism) is identified by its being founded on the *aspirations for an evolutionary move into a post-capitalist network of democratically governed and sufficiently autonomous alternative systems, and by the strong aspiration to build meaningful common ideological and political action orientations that transcend existing or potentially counterproductive divisions among diverse transformative movements.* It seeks an “accommodative mode of social consciousness” (Hosseini, 2011), centred on establishing common ground for dialogue, collective learning, and concrete action among multiple transformative identities and visions within the field of transformative praxes (Gills, Hosseini, and Goodman, 2017; Hosseini, 2015b; Hosseini, 2015a, 2013).

Transversalism aims at consolidating political coalitions and achieving ideational accommodation between social groups on both a class and a non-class basis. Therefore, it does not imply uniformity or a general theory of social emancipation and the collapse of all differences, autonomies, and local identities. It requires an attitude of openness, and the intention of exchanging mutual experiences (via engagement of Self with Others), and the intentional active sharing of ideas for social transformation across a variety of local fields of movements of social change and of “resistance” (Hosseini, 2006, 2011).

Transversalism grounds cosmopolitanist values on the foundations of local, grassroots, and communal particularities. This is a process of forming solidarities that requires “critical openness” (Hosseini and Saha, 2018) and systematic attempts to co-create common(ing) platforms for transformative perspectives, plans, and praxes. Transversalism thus consists of the following elements: (1) recognition of diversity and difference, (2) dialogue (deliberation across differences), (3) systemic self-reflection, (4) intentional openness (intention to explore the reality of the Other), (5) critical awareness of the intersectional nature of power relations that affects interconnections, and finally (6) strong commitment to creating alterity through hybridization and creolization of ideas and actions. On these premises, forms of transversal cosmopolitanism can emerge and develop, bridging the local and the global dimensions of social change. Human capacities of reflexivity, communication, and collective learning are vitally important aspects of the process of forming transversalist cosmopolitan movements for social transformation during this era of crises. It is upon these modes and sources of social change and “globalization-from-below” that much of the hope of humanity now rests.

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