

Theory of the Global State: Globality as an Unfinished Revolution, Martin Shaw, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and the State in a Transnational World, William I. Robinson, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004.

Theories of a Global State: A Critique

After two decades of countless studies on ‘globalisation’, the most recent bout of US imperialism has radically altered debates on world politics.¹ Consequently, the globalisation craze has apparently come to a rest.² In light of these developments, one might cringe at the sight of two more books dedicated to the subject. However, Martin Shaw and William I. Robinson’s contributions to the globalisation debate should be taken very seriously by Marxist and non-Marxist scholars alike.

A particularly illuminating aspect of these studies is the way they transcend the false ‘state versus globalisation’ dichotomy plaguing the literature. Globalisation studies have too often attempted to theorise globalisation without the state, obfuscating the role of state power in globalising processes. Yet, as Shaw notes, theorising globalisation without the state is like playing *Hamlet* without the Prince. Indeed, whatever one might say about ‘globalisation’, it has never been nor is it about the eclipse of the state. As Robinson puts it, it is only ‘under globalisation’ and ‘*from within*’ the nation-states system that a transnational state could ever emerge.³ Therefore, rather than falling into the ‘end of the nation-state’ trap, both books present the nation-state as being *reconstructed* and *reconstituted* via contemporary globalising processes.

Shaw and Robinson’s respective theories of a nascent ‘global’ or ‘transnational’ state are the most original and challenging aspect of their studies. Of course, the subject of a world state is hardly new. As Dostoyevsky remarked:

Mankind as a whole has always striven to organise a universal state. . . . The great conquerors, Timours and Genghis-Khan, whirled like hurricanes over the face of the earth striving to subdue its people, and they too were but the unconscious expression of the same craving for universal unity.⁴

Is mankind on the way to finally reaching this universal state?

The following review critically examines Robinson and Shaw’s affirmative answer to this question. It begins by focusing on Shaw’s conceptualisation of the ‘global’ in relation to his theoretical exposition of the emergence of ‘globality’ and the global state. This is followed

1. I would like to thank Josef Ansoorge, Sam Ashman, Tarak Barakwi, Alex Callinicos, Ray Kiely, Luke Williams, the editors of *HM* and, above all, Gonzalo Pozo-Martin for their comments on earlier drafts of this piece.

2. See Rosenberg 2005.

3. Robinson 2002, p. 215.

4. Dostoyevsky 1950, p. 305.

by an examination of Robinson's strong globalisation thesis and a critique of his problematic conception of a transnational capitalist class-for-itself, the pivot on which his theory of the transnational state rests. The analysis then proceeds through a critical investigation of Robinson's state theory and his conception of the states-system vis-à-vis global capital. Lastly, it addresses one final point which further problematises Shaw and Robinson's global/transnational state theories: the absence of any effective state monopolisation of the legitimate use of violence at the global level.

Conceptualising the global

Proclaiming that the national-international era of modernity is undergoing a process of profound change, Shaw attempts to reconstitute some of the key concepts of the social sciences in global terms. He identifies three dominant 'narratives of change' (postmodernism, post-Cold-War and globalisation) at the heart of contemporary debates about the nature of these world-historical transformations. Criticising these narratives for failing to provide any 'core meaning' to the global, Shaw presents three alternative concepts: *global revolution*, *globality*, and the *global state* (see Chapter 1).

The 'global revolution' entails the transformation of worldwide social relations, at the core of which lie fundamental changes in relations of political and military power. According to Shaw, the 'traumatic political upheavals' in the former Soviet bloc were a defining moment in this global revolution, which ushered in a new era of 'globality' and an incipient global state (p. 145). To understand the significance of these concepts we need to examine Shaw's historical narrative before going on to criticise his account of global state relations.

At the heart of Shaw's historical account of modernity is a strong emphasis on the dynamics of organised violence in the 'development of the national-international order, its crisis and hence the emergence of globality' (pp. 61-2). This is demonstrated, above all, in his examination of the effects of World War II. The post-WWII era signalled a crisis in the national-international system which was only fully realised in the recent 'global-democratic revolution' centred in the ex-Soviet bloc. In particular, the fighting, organisation and conclusion of WWII brought about three interconnected changes to world order. Firstly, there was a substantial re-alignment of power relations among the metropolises. This led to significant alterations in the centres of state power, producing two hierarchically defined and mutually opposing 'state-blocs': the Western Alliance and the Soviet bloc.

In contrast to the illegitimate and imperial nature of the Soviet bloc, the unity and cohesion of the Western Alliance led to the international integration of previously autonomous centres of state power through the creation of international organisations such as NATO and the European Community. This signalled a 'profound internationalization of the Western state' providing the 'structural precondition for all the "globalization" of recent decades' (p. 87). The emergence of this two state-bloc system, therefore, represented 'the most important single change in world politics in recent centuries'. The era of 'nation-state-empires' was transcended, thus signalling an end to the inter-imperial relations that had once lain at 'the core of the interstate system' (p. 119).

Secondly, the conclusion of WWII brought about the creation of 'legitimate' world organisations such as the United Nations. The worldwide nature of the war meant that it was experienced 'as a common calamity – and victory – for the people of the world' bringing

about ‘an unprecedented sense of common worldwide humanity’ (p. 116). The newly formed international institutions were brought into existence to represent a ‘common authority framework for the entire world’ in response to these shared worldwide experiences (pp. 120–1). This latter point further relates to the third key impact of WWII.

The common traumatic experiences during WWII – for example, the area-bombing of German cities, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Holocaust – are conceived by Shaw as the ‘prime foundation of contemporary global consciousness’. The lessons derived from these experiences, and subsequent events which have compounded these lessons, promoted developments in global law and morality (p. 122). Here, we come to the heart of Shaw’s conceptualisation of the global, defined as a ‘common consciousness of human society on a world scale: an increasing awareness of the totality of human social relations as the largest constitutive framework of all relations’ (p. 19).

The truly revolutionary and progressive potential of WWII in creating a common global society was, however, largely curtailed by the political and ideological system of the Cold War. It was not until the subsequent global-democratic revolution of 1989–91 and after that the era of globality could emerge. Concurrent with these developments, Shaw claims that there have been decisive transformations in state *relations* and *forms*. State relations denote the ‘social relations of state power, through which society constitutes state institutions and state forms constitute the framework of society’. State forms indicate the configurations of state institutions and the relations between these institutions within and across state boundaries. Thus, both state relations and forms include state-society and inter-state relations (pp. 16–17).

According to Shaw, in the ‘global’ epoch, state relations have ceased to be ‘national and international in the historic sense’. Instead, they have begun to coalesce around a core of world-state institutions. This signifies an essential transformation ‘in the political structure of social relations on a world scale’, entailing a progression of ‘global’ state forms which represent the institutional expressions of state relations along global lines (p. 17). It is important to note Shaw’s emphasis on differentiating between *state forms* and *state relations*. This point ties into his insistence that theorising the state is not only about its internal social relations, but must also be concerned with its interactions with other states. As he claims, the principle of ‘nationality-internationality’ was the ‘prime categoric framework’ accounting for the rise of the ‘pre-global, modern social order’ and, in the current world order, ‘globality’ thus emerges out of global state relations and global state forms (p. 29).

An upshot of this argument for Shaw is that all Marxist attempts to explain state behaviour by ascribing class meaning to it are ‘intrinsically problematic’. While this point is well taken, any sophisticated theory of the state would certainly necessitate some account of the effects of global economic processes on the state and an analysis of the relations between state managers and capitalists. Unfortunately, these subjects remain conspicuously absent in Shaw’s state theory.⁵

Additionally, there is the thorny issue of the states-system in Shaw’s theoretical framework. Shaw places a great deal of explanatory weight on the states-system in contrast to the ‘economisms’ and ‘sociologisms’ of the Marxists he seeks to rebuke (see pp. 80–90). Yet to use the states-system – or, more accurately, inter-state relations – as an explanatory factor

5. See Morton 2004 for a similar critique.

irreducible to any social system (capitalism, for instance), Shaw would need to illustrate the sociological source(s) of its distinct determinations or risk falling back on a reified conception of it. Surprisingly, he does not even address this fundamental issue. The states-system is thus left untheorised in sociological terms and, in this way, we are left with a 'proto-realist' conception of the international.⁶

In addition, there are the difficulties in Shaw's idealist conceptualisation of the 'global' and its relation to the global state. He claims, for instance, that 'global state relations and forms' are unevenly developing 'in ways that correspond to the demands of global consciousness' (p. 21). Here, and in other places, Shaw implies that global state forms and relations are ultimately *driven* by the emergence of 'global consciousness'. Elsewhere, he emphasises the role of state-building and warfare as central globalising forces, as mentioned above. Globality *emerges* out of and is constituted by global state relations and global state forms (see pp. 220–31). Yet, if globality emerges out of global state relations and forms and 'the global' demands these state relations and forms, does this not make for a circular logic? There is an internal incoherence to Shaw's theoretical framework.

What is more, the status of the determinations Shaw posits in explaining the emergence of globality – cultural, socio-economic, (geo)political, collective consciousness, etc. – are left in disarray. The causes and effects of these determinations and the interconnections among them in the transition to the global epoch remain elusive. One is left wondering: what are the central forces driving this transition? Is it the role of 'state power in global change', as he claims in his more materialist moments? Is it the 'traumatic political upheavals' of the 'global democratic revolution' of the 1989–91 period of Soviet bloc disintegration? Or is it the 'unprecedented sense of common worldwide humanity' in the post-WWII era transformed into a 'global consciousness' after the fall of the Soviet Empire (p. 90, 145, 116)? These questions are never fully answered. In the end, one is left with a sense that it is all of them and more. But the precise interrelations among these various causes are left relatively unexplored. Thus, Shaw's theory is marked by a nagging analytical indeterminacy.

This leads us to a final difficulty underlying Shaw's work: his qualified commitment to a liberal-cosmopolitanism vision of world politics.⁷ This is exemplified in his treatment of the 'global democratic revolution' in 1989–91 and after. Shaw views this as the 'central causal factor in the transition to the "global state-system"' and a living testament to the force of universal values such as democracy and human rights (p. 145; see also pp. 160–70). Now, Shaw is certainly correct in claiming that the relationship between democratic revolutions (current and past) and global change cannot be solely explained from an 'outside-in relationship'; that is, as a result of the imperialist actions of Washington and other Western powers.⁸ Nonetheless, while one needs to recognise the bottom-up role of 'people power' in struggles for human rights and democracy, particularly during the revolutionary upheavals of the 1989–91 period, Shaw fails to appreciate how Western states

6. For this general critique and the term 'proto-realist' see Rosenberg 2006, pp. 312–13, 337 fn. 9. See also Allinson and Anievas (forthcoming).

7. See, for example, Gowan's comments in the roundtable discussion with Leo Panitch and Martin Shaw in *Historical Materialism*, 9.

8. Gowan, Panitch and Shaw 2001, p. 23.

have often subsequently instrumentalised these processes for their own interests. Moreover, the manner in which Shaw presents the West as the keeper and defender of these universal ‘global’ values completely ignores the myriad ways in which the Western powers have utilised human-rights discourses as a battering ram to open up reluctant nation-states’ internal markets to the penetration of foreign capital. The European Union’s Eastern enlargement policies have repeatedly demonstrated this point.

These problems are also exemplified in Shaw’s tripartite categorisation of different state forms in contemporary world politics. Firstly, there is the globally-legitimate ‘post-imperial’ form of the ‘global-Western state’. This ‘global layer of state power’ comprises four main elements: (1) global political power and legitimate force; (2) global legal institutions, including means of enforcement; (3) global economic and social institutions; and (4) a global ideological framework (pp. 215–18). It is ‘post-imperial’ because its state power is ‘based on a radical modernisation, in which the imperial character of its old nation-states has been transcended’. If ‘it is any kind of imperialism, it is something like Kautsky’s “ultra-imperialism” with many of the progressive implications of that concept’ (p. 203).⁹ Secondly, there are the ‘quasi-imperial’ states, approximating something like the classic nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperial state models and exemplified by nation-state empires like contemporary Russia. Finally, there are those ‘new’, ‘proto-’ and ‘quasi-states’, appearing after the Cold War within the various war zones throughout the ‘Third World’, which have attempted to institute themselves as autonomous state centres.

What emerges from this tripartite conceptualisation of state forms is a more or less qualified liberal explanation of world politics. It is one that ‘others’ the sources of contemporary war to the non-Western world. As Shaw argues: ‘the most acute political conflicts of the global era are’ the result of ‘*contradictions in the relations of non-Western state power to society*’.¹⁰ Yet, since the US-led Western invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Western powers have more than adequately displayed their own ‘quasi-imperial’ character. While Robinson is more attentive to these imperialist characteristics of the current world order, he nevertheless adheres to a more qualified though equally misguided ‘post-imperialism’ theory of transnational statehood.

A contribution to the critique of contemporary globalisation

At the heart of Robinson’s theory of global capitalism are three interconnected claims. First, globalisation is theoretically defined as the near-culmination of a centuries-long process of capitalist production relations spreading and supplanting precapitalist relations around the world. As such, it represents a qualitatively new form of connection among people, marking an ‘epochal shift’ within the capitalist era. A decisive turning point in the development of global capital was the world economic crisis of the early 1970s, which is viewed by Robinson as ushering in ‘a new period of restructuring in the capitalist system’. This crisis led capitalists to seek out new modes of accumulation, exemplified in the emergence of the post-Fordist flexible accumulation régime and the accumulation strategy

9. On these points, also see Shaw 2002a and 2002b.

10. Shaw 2001, p. 1.

of globalisation (p. 21). In sum, globalisation is conceptualised as a phase in the evolution of the capitalist system that has produced novel socio-political, economic and cultural processes and structures which, in turn, react back upon capitalist development itself.

Second, a defining characteristic of the global capitalist epoch is the emergence of a transnationalised fraction of capital. As circuits of capital become globalised they subsume local circuits. Domestic capitalists who manage these local circuits of capital become ‘swept up’ in a ‘process of transnational class formation’ (p. 20). According to Robinson, not only have these objective conditions of global capital engendered the materialisation of a transnational fraction of capital, but this fraction has actually become *class-conscious* and *hegemonic*.

With the emergence of a hegemonic transnational *class-for-itself* is the construction of a new global historic bloc, what Robinson terms the ‘globalist bloc’. This new ruling globalist bloc is defined by the fact that it is the logic of global capital accumulation, as opposed to national accumulation, that guides its political and economic behaviour (p. 75). This hegemonic ‘globalist bloc’ provides the backbone of Robinson’s third key claim: the development of a transnational state (TNS) apparatus.

The TNS is conceptualised as a ‘multilayered and multicentered’ apparatus functionally interconnecting an array of supranational (e.g. UN, WTO, World Bank, etc.), regional (NAFTA, EU, ASEAN, etc.) and national organisations. Hence, Robinson views the transformation of the nation-state and the ascendancy of supra-national institutions as two intricately interconnected dimensions of the process of state transnationalisation. With the shift from world to global economy and the colonisation of national state institutions by the agents of transnational capital, nation-states are transformed into ‘neo-liberal nation-states’.

It is important to emphasise that Robinson is *not* claiming that the functionality of the nation-state to global capitalism has ended.¹¹ While the nation-state ‘is in the process of being transcended by capitalist globalisation’ it is not simply ‘withering away’ but becoming a functional component of the TNS ‘which has been brought into existence to function as the collective authority for the global ruling class’.¹² This continuing functionality of nation-states is exemplified by their implementation of policies conducive to global macroeconomic stability, a secure social order and infrastructures essential for global economic activities (see pp. 102–10 and 124–5). Thus, nation-states have not only become ‘transmission belts’ for global capital, but its active agents.

We now turn to a critique of Robinson’s empirical analysis to demonstrate the insecure grounds upon which he formulates these theoretical claims. Much has been written criticising the novelty of contemporary globalisation in general and in relation to Robinson and others’ theories of transnational/global statehood.¹³ It would be futile to repeat all these arguments here. However, an engagement and further elaboration of these extant critiques of Robinson’s thesis is necessary to dislodge the empirical underbelly of his theoretical claims.

11. Some critics have mistakenly accused Robinson of proclaiming the irrelevance of the nation-state. In doing so, they have reiterated many of the same functions of the nation-state vis-à-vis capitalism identified by Robinson. See, for example, Went 2002 and Wood 2002.

12. Robinson 2002, p. 210.

13. See the symposia in *Theory and Society* 2001 and *Science and Society* 2002.

To begin, there is Robinson's spurious conception of the 'transnational corporation' (TNC) which directly ties into his thesis about the hegemony of transnational capital. A key issue here is the degree to which 'transnational corporations' can be considered transnational at all. While the world's largest TNCs account for almost four-fifths of total world industrial output, they typically employ two-thirds of their workforce within their host country. Furthermore, if one goes by the UNCTAD's Transnationality Index of the 100 world largest corporations (a study Robinson frequently cites), we see that most of the largest TNCs are not so transnational after all. For example, less than 60 companies in the Top 100 of 2002 had a transnationality index over 50 per cent and only 18 companies held an average over 75 per cent. Indeed, the overall transnationality index average in 2002 was slightly less than 50 per cent. Yet, we would expect these figures to be substantially higher since what is being measured are the assets, sales and employment that compare home country to all other countries.¹⁴ Moreover, some of the largest and most globally influential US-based corporations on the list are the least transnational – for example, General Electric (40.6 per cent), General Motors (27.9 per cent) and Wal-Mart (23.5 per cent).¹⁵

These points are further evinced in other empirical studies. A 2004 study of 365 of the largest corporate enterprises (taken from the *Fortune 500* list), found that only nine enterprises could be considered 'unambiguously global', meaning that at least 20 per cent of their foreign sales went to all three major trade-bloc regions (ASEAN, EU, NAFTA) but less than 50 per cent in any one of these regions.¹⁶ A similar study of the regional sales patterns of the top 20 TNCs (as defined by *World Investment Report 2002*) concluded that only a single firm could be considered 'global'.¹⁷ Moreover, the vast majority of TNCs are not pursuing 'global strategies', as Robinson suggests. Many TNCs are actually struggling to maintain reasonable profit levels from their foreign operations, pointing towards a trend toward 'de-globalisation'.¹⁸

Further problematising Robinson's global capitalism thesis is his use of the data on the 'global' proliferation of foreign direct investment (FDI). For Robinson, the 'most comprehensive indicator of the growth of transnational production is the global stock of FDI... which was valued at nearly \$1.3 trillion in 2000' (p. 22). This is certainly a development that cannot be denied. However, does it mark the type of 'epochal shift' within capitalism that Robinson suggests? This seems unlikely.

As Robinson notes, rising levels of FDI have been overwhelmingly concentrated within the 'core' triad of the world economy – North America, Europe and Asia-Pacific – which cumulatively accounted for approximately \$1 trillion of the FDI in 2000 (p. 23). Furthermore, a good deal of this FDI and inter-capital penetration remains *within* these various regional trade blocs, notably the EU. While FDI to 'developing' nation-states has somewhat increased in recent years, these levels still remain relatively low and highly concentrated. The Asia-Pacific region alone accounts for 62.2 per cent of the entire share of

14. Kiely 2005.

15. UNCTAD, *World Investment Report 2004*, Chapter I, annex table.

16. Rugman and Verbeke 2004.

17. Rugman and Brian 2003.

18. Elliot 2002, p. 23.

FDI flowing to the developing world. And, within this region, just ten economies account for 90 per cent of all FDI inflows. China alone receives \$53.5 billion; a figure representing the second largest amount for a single nation-state in the world and approximating half of all inflows to the region.¹⁹

Moreover, due to massive population disparities between the developed and developing world, FDI indicators actually *over-estimate* both the quantity of FDI flowing to the developing world and total investment figures. If one examines FDI inflows per capita, the proportion is actually far more biased towards the developed world. For example, between 1995 and 1999, developed countries received \$474 per capita whilst in the same period developing countries received \$37.²⁰ While capitalism has undoubtedly spread to the global level, these developments have not been accompanied by a universal economic integration of nation-states and their respective capitalist classes. A process of regionalisation and not globalisation, *stricto sensu*, has taken place. It therefore seems more appropriate to speak of transnationalisation in a few particular regions, among a few particular states.

None of this is to dispute the importance of increased manufacturing sectors in Third-World states. Nonetheless, taking this into account there remains a continuation, if not acceleration, of the hierarchies of uneven development immanent to the capitalist mode of production. This persistent developmental tendency of capitalism acts as a centrifugal force against the emergence of the type of global capital postulated by Robinson.

A critique of Robinson's transnational-capitalist class thesis

Robinson certainly demonstrates that TNCs have grown in size and breadth over the past thirty years. Few would deny this fact. This could indicate an amplification of the social power of TNCs over other less monopolised and nationally-embedded capitals. Nevertheless, none of the empirical evidence cited by Robinson, even if taken at face value, would suggest that the growth and expansion of TNCs would automatically result in the emergence of a *single* fraction of transnational capital self-consciously pursuing a global capitalist project.

Robinson's analysis of a globally hegemonic transnational-capitalist *class-for-itself* is the pivot on which his theory of global capitalism and the apparatus of the transnational state rests. This hegemonic fraction 'imposes the general direction and character on production worldwide and conditions the social, political and cultural character of capitalist society worldwide'. It is 'represented by a *class-conscious transnational elite*' constituted by an inner circle of transnational capitalists, as well as transnational bureaucrats, managers, technicians, and organic intellectuals working 'in the service' of transnational capital (p. 48, emphasis mine).

In addition to the critical analysis of economic globalisation provided above, two interconnected points need to be emphasised in casting Robinson's conception of a TCC into doubt. Firstly, there is the issue over the degree of cohesion in the TCC. Robinson conceptualises the TCC as an over-determining global capital. This tendency towards conceiving transnational capital as a kind of monolithic and relatively homogenous bloc of

19. All the above data is taken from UNCTAD 2004, Chapters 1 and 2.

20. Kiely 2005, p. 42.

finance capital is demonstrated when he approvingly quotes Prabhat Patnaik, who avers that ‘instead of several contending blocs of finance capital, we have one gigantic entity, of which capitals of specific countries are so many constituent elements’ (p. 52).

According to Robinson, the phenomenon of global class formation surpasses classical-Marxist class analysis. Under globalisation, class fractionation cannot be conceived in terms of the functionality of capitals in the overall circuit of capital since transnational capital cuts across the original functional fractions identified by Marx. Thus, the standard interpretation that contrasts a spatially mobile banking capital to a more geographically embedded industrial capital (with commercial capital falling somewhere in between) is no longer tenable. Yet, while specific capitalists or sectors within these fractions of capital might be more transnationally-oriented than others, this would not lead to the conclusion that all transnationally-oriented capitals form a single fraction of capital or even share similar objective interests.

While Robinson emphasises the various tensions and contradictions within the TCC, it seems that any formulation of an ‘ideal-type’ concept of transnational capital would be necessarily much more heterogeneous and differentiated than he allows. In this way, Robinson repeats the past mistakes of classical-Marxist theorists, such as Hilferding and Lenin, who conceived the emergence of monopoly finance-capital as having subsumed all other fractions of capital. The point is that however illuminating a concept of transnational capital might be about the empirical reality of the evolving structure of globalising capital, it does not eliminate the necessity for distinguishing between the functional fractions of capital. For, as Kees van der Pijl has argued in regards to the classical-Marxist conception of finance-capital,

even in a situation where the financial oligarchy is no longer effectively challenged by a subordinate, ‘non-monopolistic’ bourgeoisie, certain conflicts within the capitalist class remain traceable to the different fractions persistent in the context of an apparent fusion.²¹

The same holds true for any concept of transnational capital.

Secondly, the idea that the TCC is a globally hegemonic class-for-itself remains conceptually abstract, with little concrete empirical foundation. What it fails to adequately acknowledge are the objective and multileveled factors conditioning capitalist class relations. Robinson views the TCC as both a relatively self-governing entity free to determine the historical conditions of its own development and interprets contemporary globalisation as a process consciously engineered by it. Robinson thus privileges an overly *subjective* conceptualisation of capitalist class agency (see Chapter 2). Robinson not only ignores any possibility of a territorialising logic to capital accumulation, but also overlooks the fact that classes are mutually constituted through exploitation processes, often local or regional in scope, which fundamentally affect the global reproduction of class antagonisms.²²

21. Van der Pijl 1984, p. 7.

22. Colás 2002, pp. 200–1.

State theory and the states-system

Now that we have critically analysed Robinson's TCC thesis, we may turn to his theory of an incipient TNS apparatus. To begin with, there is the problem of Robinson's general theory of the state; namely, that he does not allow for any possibility of a non-identity of interests between capitalists and state managers. As Martin Shaw suggests, Robinson's state theory is marked by a strong sense of 'sociologism', a term referring 'to a one-sidedly "social" account, emphasising social forces such as classes at the expense of, for example, state organization' (p. 86). Shaw's general point that state organisation need be taken into account when conceptualising the state was broadly accepted by many (neo)Marxist scholars in the state debate of the 1970s and early 1980s.

In this debate, various (neo)Marxists examined the potential for a divergence of interests between state managers and capitalists (either as a whole, or in relation to particular fractions).²³ If state managers are not necessarily part of the capitalist class, as Marx indicated in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, then one would need to examine the various 'structural' and 'subsidiary' (and often conjunctural) mechanisms linking capitalists to state managers. These 'mechanisms' assist in explaining why state managers so often serve capitalist ends irrespective of whether capitalists directly and consciously intervene in state policy-making.²⁴

As mentioned, Robinson conceives nation-state policies as functional to global capital, thereby allowing for a 'relative autonomy' of states in relation to particular non-transnationalised capitalist class fractions (p. 97). However, if nation-state policies are conceived as functional to global capitalism then how are we to explain the foreign policies of the current Bush administration? It is unlikely that the invasion and occupation of Iraq was in any way functional to US capital or global capitalism as a whole. Robinson's own ambiguity over the issue seems to illustrate the more general problem of functionalist analyses of state behaviour: specifically, identifying a function that must be executed for a specific result to be produced does not in itself clarify why the execution of such a function takes any specific form.²⁵ Nothing in a functionalist analysis of the state can explain why the US chose to invade Iraq.

This ties into a more general point against Robinson's conceptualisation of the TNS: if the members of the TCC are conceived as the 'direct agents' of capitalist globalisation and the TNS, Robinson would need to back these claims up with concrete examinations of the various relations between state managers and the capitalist class, 'transnational' or otherwise. Instead, he offers a conceptualisation of the general connection between state and capital, arguing that as the latter transnationalises so too does the former (p. 98). In other words, superstructural processes are reduced to a mere epiphenomenon of the economic base. Such an economically mechanistic analysis of the relationship between state and capital is not only theoretically problematic, but would need to be based on a wealth of empirical data on specific state/capital relations which Robinson fails to provide.

Robinson repeatedly emphasises that the nation-state system is nothing but the historical outcome of capitalist development. It is not immanent to capital. It is doubtful any serious

23. See, *inter alia*, Barker 1978; Miliband 1983; and Block 1987. Even the Poulantzian-inspired state theory of Bob Jessop, from which Robinson draws, admits this much.

24. See Block 1987, Chapter 3.

25. Callinicos 2007.

historical materialist would ever deny these points. From a historical-materialist perspective, there is no logical reason why capitalism could not theoretically dispense with the national-state form. As Hannes Lacher argues, the ‘interstate-ness of capitalist political space *cannot* be derived from the nature of the capital relation’.²⁶ However, while the capital relation may not necessitate the ‘interstate-ness of capital political space’ this does *not* mean that there is nothing inherent to the capitalist mode of production that would fortify and perpetuate a multiplicity of states (see below).

That Robinson cites Lacher’s point regarding the contingent nature of the territorially-bounded state form vis-à-vis the capital relation only demonstrates an antinomy in his own theoretical rationale for an emerging TNS.²⁷ For, if Lacher is correct, then Robinson’s *cannot* claim that the state must necessarily become transnational as capitalist class relations transnationalise, conceiving the former as nothing but the institutionalised political form of the capital relation, since this logic is exactly what Lacher is disputing.²⁸

Now, as noted above, Robinson is not arguing that the nation-state system is ending. Instead, he claims that the TNS apparatus is transcending the nation-state system as the ‘organising principal of capitalism’ (p. 40). The central question then is whether there is anything inherent to capitalism which would perpetuate a territorial configuration of class interests and state power and, therefore, a multiplicity of states. I believe the answer lies in what Trotsky termed the ‘law of uneven and combined development’.²⁹

Crudely summarised, uneven and combined development under the capitalist production mode can be explained in the following way. The capital relation consists of two mutually constitutive dimensions: the ‘vertical’ antagonisms between capitalist and labourer and the ‘horizontal’ relations among individual competing capitals.³⁰ The latter dimension, inter-capitalist rivalry, functions as an in-built mechanism of capitalism which perpetuates and intensifies the tendency towards the universalisation and differentiation of social development.

On the one hand, the competition among capitals leads them to search out new markets and ever greater sources of profit across the globe, thereby producing an inherent tendency to unify the world through the universalisation of specific combinatory mechanisms unique to the capitalist production mode. As the capitalist system matures, more and more societies become locked into processes and structures of interconnection and constitution through the emergence of world economy. In this way, capital creates ‘world-history for the first time’.³¹ On the other hand, as capitals are confronted with the necessity to maintain or enhance their position on the marketplace, they attempt to secure profit margins over and above sectoral averages. This implies that the costs of production must somehow be reduced. Such reductions can be achieved through organisational

26. Lacher 2002, p. 161.

27. See Robinson 2002.

28. See Lacher 2005.

29. The following argument draws on Callinicos 2007. In addition, I have greatly benefited from our conversations and correspondences on the topic.

30. Brenner 1998.

31. Marx and Engels 1947, p. 57.

restructuring and/or an enlargement of the scale of production, the latter being expressed in capital's tendency to concentrate and centralise, which leads to monopolisation.³²

Yet, a capitalist may also achieve decreasing production costs through the introduction of technological innovations. Indeed, in those sectors where monopolisation has run its course or the benefits of economies of scale are negligible, technological innovations are the chief source of higher profits. These technological innovations are then generalised throughout the sector, eliminating the market advantage of the original innovating capitalist while also revolutionising the forces of production. This may achieve a moment of developmental 'equilibrium'. It is, however, only a fleeting moment since capitals' search for differential profits will necessarily continue, thereby spawning a new cycle of innovations and market disequilibrium. The upshot of this is that capitalist development is inherently uneven.

Another central factor perpetuating this uneven development, manifested in territorialised and geographical forms, is the construction of spatially-embedded physical infrastructures (e.g. transport and communication technologies) necessary for the expanded reproduction of capital. Investments in built environments come to define regional spaces for the circulation of capital. Within these spaces, myriad factors – from production, exchange and distribution to culture, consumer-preferences and class struggle – are held together in a kind of 'structured coherence', accounting for the propensity of capitals to be attracted to existing areas of accumulation. Capital demonstrates a clear tendency towards concentrating in specific regions at the expense of others, thereby producing a somewhat porous but nevertheless identifiable 'territorial logic of power' – regionality – inherently arising out of the processes of capital accumulation in space and time.³³

This systematic and economically destabilising form of uneven development is unique to the capitalist system. The effect of these tendencies is that they will perpetually act to undermine any unification of 'many capitals' into a single fraction of 'global capital'. Lenin made a very similar case when disputing Kautsky's theory of ultra-imperialism.³⁴ Analogous conclusions can be drawn from Marx's comments on the antagonistic, self-negating nature of inter-capitalist rivalry: 'Capital exists and can only exist as many capitals and its self-determination therefore appears as the mutual interaction of these upon one another'. It must by necessity 'repel itself from itself'. This means that a 'universal capital, one without alien capitals confronting it, with which it exchanges – is therefore a non-thing'.³⁵ Since Robinson conceptualises transnational capital as a *global* ruling class, these arguments hold against his concept of the TCC as the agent of global capital. But how do these economic effects of uneven development relate to political processes such as the territorial configuration of the state? How does it provide us with a multiplicity of states?

32. 'The battle of competition is fought by cheapening of commodities. The cheapness of commodities depends, all other circumstances remaining the same, on the productiveness of labour, and this depends in turn on the scale of production. Therefore the larger capitals beat the smaller' (Marx 1992, p. 777).

33. Harvey 2006, p. 102; Kiely 2005, p. 41; Harvey 2003, p. 103.

34. Lenin 1964, pp. 294–5.

35. Marx 1973, pp. 401 and 421.

As David Harvey has demonstrated, the reproduction and spatial expansion of the capital accumulation process *produces* and *necessitates* the creation of relatively immobile and concentrated organised territorial configurations. Dense spatial constellations of capitalist economic relations provide the territorial foundation of states by both commanding and supplying the necessary resources to sustain a functioning state apparatus. Once formed, these territorial states ‘become relatively fixed attributes of capitalism’s geography’³⁶ resisting pressures to change through their geopolitical and economic relations with one another. While we should be careful not to make the same mistake as Robinson – who views superstructural processes as the effect of the economic base – it seems that the uneven and combined nature of capitalist development does reinforce and perpetuate territorial fragmentation.³⁷

Robinson would likely counter these arguments by claiming that globalisation has fundamentally transformed the spatialising nature of uneven capitalist development. Indeed, a running theme in his work is that there nothing inherent to the nature of capital which obliges it to concentrate spatially and geographically. He claims, for instance, that processes of uneven development are ‘denoted primarily by social group rather than territorial differentiation’.³⁸ Thus, while

we can expect sustained class polarisation and also continued uneven accumulation between regions... there is no theoretical reason to posit any necessary affinity between continued uneven development and the nation-state as the particular territorial expression of uneven development.³⁹

One could concede Robinson’s point that the particular territorial expression of uneven development – the *national* state form – could be overcome by the forces of capital. However, this would say nothing about the persistence of a states-system which could take various scales and forms of territorial configuration (regional, multinational forms, empires, etc.).

If uneven development is continuing between regions, as Robinson admits, does this not act as a centrifugal force against the emergence of a ‘global capital’? More importantly, what

36. Harvey 2006, p. 10.

37. The relationship between capitalism and the persistence of the states-system is, of course, a much more complex issue than this brief analysis can do justice. In particular, the term ‘combined development’ is primarily used here in describing the relations between capitals and states. However, in order to fully account for the perpetuation and effectivity of the states-system, one would also need to take into account Trotsky’s more restricted conception of ‘combined development’ as the fusion and interpenetration of different modes of production within a single social formation. Further, one needs to be careful not to mistake the question of why there is a states-system in the first place with the distinct, though related, question of why capitalism perpetuates this states-system. Here, it would be necessary to explore, *inter alia*, the issue of whether uneven and combined development might be a characteristic of social development in general and of the relationship between this social development in general and the modern states-system. See Rosenberg 2006; Allinson and Anievas (forthcoming).

38. Robinson 2003, p. 28.

39. Robinson 2003, pp. 32–3.

evidence does Robinson provide in substantiating his claim that uneven development has become decoupled from territorial and geographical articulations? Unfortunately, hardly any. He admits that ‘well known empirical evidence’ indicates a growing gap between states and regions, but adds the caveat that this ‘evidence obscures the parallel widening gap between the rich and the poor within countries’.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, a widening gap between rich and poor within states does not negate the same parallel process going on among states and regions. It seems then that capitalist uneven and combined development remains inherently tied to producing a plurality of territorially differentiated states. And, if this true, it seems unlikely that state power and class interests have become decoupled from their long-standing territorial base: the nation-state.

Where is the global military?

One last point can be made regarding the unfeasibility of Robinson and Shaw’s global/transnational state theories: that is, the clear lack of any state monopolisation of the legitimate use of violence at the global level.⁴¹ Robinson attempts to get around this problem by claiming that the US military alone provides such a monopoly. He asserts, for example, that the ‘US military apparatus is the ministry of war in the cabinet of an increasingly globally integrated ruling class... *The empire of capital is headquartered in Washington*’ (p. 140). Yet, it is highly unlikely that the US government would ever go to war on the behalf of any capital(s) outside its national domain.

The notion that the US might have intervened in Iraq as ‘the ultimate guarantor of global capitalism and its authority’, as Robinson claims, is theoretically conceivable (p. 138). Nevertheless, it still overlooks, or more precisely excludes, the fact that it is nationally-based US corporations such as Halliburton and Bechtel that are the main beneficiaries of the invasion. If the US could be truly considered the ‘ministry of war’ for a ‘global ruling class’ than certainly the majority of reconstruction contracts in Iraq would have gone to a substantial amount of non-US corporations or predominately transnationalised corporations. Yet, the exact opposite has been the case.

To take one of numerous examples, sectoral programme management in Iraq is headed by all US directors and all prime contractors are administrated by corporations with head offices in the US. Just how overwhelming US corporate and state dominance over the entire Iraqi reconstruction process is demonstrated by the fact that ‘out of 59 prime contracts awarded from US appropriations in the 2004 financial year up to November 2004, 48 (more than 80 per cent) went to US companies’.⁴² Therefore, it is hard to observe exactly how the reconstruction of Iraq is benefiting a ‘global ruling class’ free of national ties when such an overwhelming majority of the corporations are the bearers of nationally based US capitals.

40. Robinson 2003, p. 28.

41. See also Callinicos 2002 and Bloc 2001.

42. Herring and Rangwala 2005, p. 673. For a complete list of Iraqi reconstruction contracts see *Windfalls of War* project, available at: <http://www.publicintegrity.org/wow/>.

Shaw offers a different though no less problematic solution to the issue of a global military. He does so by circumventing Weber's strict definition of a state necessitating a 'monopoly' of violence, using instead Michael Mann's more flexible criteria of an 'authoritative, binding rule making' backed by 'organized political force' (p. 191). From this standpoint, he postulates that the global-Western state constitutes 'an integrated authoritative organisation of violence which includes a large number of both juridically defined states and international interstate organisations' (p. 199). He argues that 'the Western state functions as a *single center of military power in relation to other centres*' (p. 200, emphasis mine). And that this 'single center of military power' is embodied within NATO. 'Most member-states of NATO maintain some secondary "national" military capabilities, but alliance roles are the major context in which their military roles are determined' (p. 201, emphasis mine; see also pp. 240–1). Yet, to say that 'most' NATO member-states' military roles are determined by their alliance role is not nearly the same as saying that *all* are. There is a crucial exemption to Shaw's point: the United States, far and away the most militarily dominant nation-state in the world.⁴³ In light of this fact, there appears to be a gaping hole in Shaw's argument.

In addition, since the Kosovo fiasco, the US has increasingly sought to distance itself from NATO. It must not be forgotten that Washington rejected NATO's invocation of Article 5 after 9/11 and that this was not, as some argue, the result of a peculiarly unilateralist Bush administration but rather a symptom of more widespread sentiments among US military officials. During the 1990s, US military leaders became exasperated by NATO's joint decision-making process in pursuing military action in the Balkans. Therefore, after 9/11, when 'faced with [the] arduous task of hurriedly mounting a military campaign in a remote part of the world, American military leaders viewed the prospect of working with European forces not as a help but as a nuisance'. Hence, the current particularities of US unilateralism did not derive from the Bush administration but grew directly out of the military realities of the 1990s, which witnessed various operational difficulties between the US and allied forces in the Balkans and an overall disparity in military power between America and Europe.⁴⁴ In sum, it is hardly plausible for Shaw to claim that NATO currently functions as some sort of 'single centre of military power' for an emerging global state.

Conclusion

What the above analysis seeks to make clear is that the current imperialist actions of the Bush administration must not be seen as either a deviation from the norm, as Shaw does, or as the actions of the most powerful state in the world acting solely in the interests of a consolidated ruling global class, as Robinson claims. The US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq must instead be analysed in the context of a more or less continuous US grand strategy that has been pursued by all White House administrations since the culmination of WWII.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the disputes between the US-led 'coalition of the willing', on the one hand, and Germany, France, Russia and China, on the other, over the use of force in

43. Turkey and the United Kingdom also generally work outside the sphere of NATO.

44. Mann 2004, pp. 304–5.

45. On the continuities of US grand strategy since WWII, see Callinicos 2003.

Iraq illustrate the continuing persistence of geopolitical rivalries embedded within processes of capital accumulation.

The US-led invasion of Iraq was never merely about the reaping of speculative oil profits and the potential opening of new foreign markets. It was also a show of force to potential US 'peer-competitors' (notably China and Russia) and a means to situate the US in a geopolitically vital region of the world. Tying into this, the significance of oil in the rationale for the US invasion of Iraq must be situated within a geopolitical context. It is not only about protecting the future of America's domestic economic security, but about sustaining US global hegemony in the face of emerging potential threats.⁴⁶

As a consequence of the various problems with Shaw and Robinson's global/transnational-state theories demonstrated above, either the idea of an emerging global state needs to be abandoned altogether or it must be reworked along different lines. While both works correctly stress that a conceptualisation of contemporary globalising processes must begin with a theory of the state, these processes can be better understood under the more apposite term 'imperialism'. In addition, what Shaw's account lacks and Robinson's offers in highly flawed terms is a theoretical understanding and empirical demonstration of the relationship between the capitalist logic of accumulation and state interests.

Nonetheless, a point made by Shaw is certainly accurate: social relations within a state cannot alone explain the constitution of its particular form. One must also analyse the interactions amongst states to elucidate the structural specificities of particular state forms over time. The practical significances of these issues could not be of greater concern for those wishing to construct a more just and equal future world order. In order to struggle against the injustices of the powerful, one must first understand where the power lies.

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46. See Callinicos 2003, pp. 93–8; Harvey 2003, pp. 18–25.

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