

## The Globalization Project in Crisis

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**ABSTRACT:** The Globalization Project is in crisis – evidenced by deepening inequality, widespread civil unrest (including anti-immigrant and ethnic hostilities), a compromised WTO, and spreading bilateralism. Economies and environments are destabilized and deteriorating, as the deceptions and complicities of market rule are revealed. In this moment of international disorder, with failing US leadership, EU weakening, and Russian strengthening, China appears poised to assume a growing political-economic dominance across the world. Its recent history can be viewed as strategic manipulation of global neoliberal relations via a combination of short- and long-game maneuvers, anchored in a powerful neo-mercantilist model that resonates with rising national protectionism.

**KEYWORDS:** Austerity; Precarity; Counter-movements; Extractivism; Financialization; Fascism

### Introduction

As a hegemonic project, the Globalization Project is in a cumulative crisis of legitimacy materially and ideologically. What global order emerges in its wake is not yet clear. Its internal contradictions have been revealed starkly as the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed grave inequalities and vulnerabilities of deprived populations, exacerbated by inadequate public capacities with states having surrendered initiative to private interest in the recent neoliberal era. The world is at a critical turning point – economically, politically and environmentally. *Economically*, the Globalization Project is unraveling as ‘market rule’ has

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destabilized economies, generating widespread austerity, precarious employment, and waves of migration. *Politically*, this conjuncture is expressed in a broad set of countermovement politics of left- and right-wing populism. *Environmentally*, market deregulation, resource grabbing, and global consumerism have intensified longer-term emissions of greenhouse gases and ecological deterioration, generating widespread rural displacement and public ill-health. These developments find expression in white/ethnic supremacy movements dramatized in predatory state policies of oppression of identifiable minorities (in China, India, Brazil, the Philippines, Italy, the USA, etc.) via reactionary nationalism – by which market instabilities are transmogrified into threats from non-white and ethnic peoples.

These are doubly connected: on the one hand world-wide processes of (economic and environmental) displacement spawn migration, typically from rural spaces in the global South. On the other hand, political elites (already beholden to financial elites) use the threat of immigration, via racist appeals, to distract from root causes in global market volatility. Here, racism fetishizes by obscuring predatory market relations. And nationalist politics in turn deepens international disorder as American *imperium* and its associated soft power (embodied in the United Nations and the World Trade Organization) fragments. This essay addresses this toxic combination as a potential decisive shift in world ordering, arguing that China appears to be poised to both inherit and reorder global economic relations, offering an authoritarian political framework for a state system already compromised by capitalist power, deterritorialization and deepening political polarizations. Looming viral and climate emergency, however, complicates any predictions.

### **The Globalization Project**

The Globalization Project began replacing the economic nationalism-oriented Development Project in the 1980s (McMichael, 1996). In that ‘Lost Decade’ a World Bank/IMF-based debt regime, imposed on the global South, rolled back ‘development advances’ such as social provisioning and subsidies, public infrastructure, industrial growth and living wages, and intensified exports of mineral and agricultural resources. Such extensive Structural Adjustments merged with wholesale liberalization policies institutionalized in by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, with widespread consent by member states now embedded in a global market organized by transnational capital. In collectively establishing the WTO, states were ‘no longer writing the rules of

interaction among separate national economies... [they were] writing the constitution of a single global economy' according to the Director General (Ruggiero, 2000).

Early challenges to this geopolitical juggernaut came in the form of the Zapatista uprising on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1994, the day NAFTA was implemented, followed by the international peasant coalition, led by La Via Campesina, politicizing claims to 'feed the world' by global agribusiness at the World Food Summit in Rome (1996). Each movement challenged the privileging of property rights over territorial and food sovereignty rights. And this emergent anti-globalization politics consolidated in 1999 with the Battle of Seattle with labor and environmentalist movements joining forces in solidarity protest at the increasingly evident destabilization of economies and environments.

Less than a decade later a financial collapse and global recession provoked an international groundswell against globalization (of labor, capital, food, and austerity) and global elites' false promises. In 2015 a *Guardian* article, bylined "Is Globalization Dead?" claimed the 'failure to shield workers from foreign competition has ... undermined faith in globalization,' and that 'the impact of the financial crisis has led the public to feel they need protection from the ravages of the market' (Stewart, 2015).

Whether such protection will materialize remains to be seen, given the elusiveness of market rule, as one commentator puts it: 'unrestrained by national borders or democratic accountability, neoliberal globalization is a force without a face and a system without a centre. It is everywhere – in our pensions, mortgages and public spending cuts – until you try to hold people or institutions responsible for the mess we're in, and then it evaporates' (Younge, 2019, 13).

The crisis registers in a volatile global economy, akin to a casino, in which competitive financial mergers and acquisitions restructure firms and global supply chains, rendering employment everywhere precarious in an intensifying world-wide 'race to the bottom.' And within this vortex states are beholden to global finance to attract investment and manage debt, at the expense of social provisions (Tooze, 2018). Since the bailouts via fiscal stimulus in the 2008 financial crisis, public spending reductions have continued across the state system, institutionalizing austerity as 'the new normal' at least until 2024 – as laid out in a report entitled *Austerity: The New Normal; A Renewed Washington Consensus 2010-24*. The report notes that austerity measures – including pensions, social security reforms, public sector wages, labor flexibilities, subsidies reduction, regressive consumer taxes, stronger public-private partnerships, and

public privatizations – are ‘expected to impact 130 countries in 2021 in terms of GDP’ especially the global South, and that ‘projections indicate that austerity will affect approximately 5.8 billion persons by 2021 – about 75 per cent of the global population’ (*Bretton Woods Observer*, 2019, 1). A recipe for deepening instability and widespread revolt against inequality, corruption and concentration of power.

Urban uprisings have become standard procedure, from food riots during the global recession (Patel and McMichael, 2009) and the 2011 Arab Spring protests against majority deprivations, state violence, and profiteering of the ruling elites, through Greek uprisings against EU austerity measures (2014-15), to similar protests recently in Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Bolivia, India, Algeria, Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Sudan and Zimbabwe (Ehrenreich, 2019).

Meanwhile, rural populations are confronted by intensifying commodification grabs: of land, seeds and farming knowledge, accomplished with public or private force in the ‘new extractivism’ (Veltmeyer and Petras, 2014; see also Connell and Dados, 2014). Land & Rights Watch’s Year-end Report noted a total of 108 victims in 84 killings related to land conflicts and struggles in 14 countries for 2019 – concentrated in the Philippines, Colombia and Brazil, with state forces involved in a third of the deaths (PANAP, 2019).

The ensuing forced migration of southern peoples represents, so to speak, ‘colonial chickens coming home to roost’ in northern imperial centers. This is the logical extension of the neoliberal Globalization Project, insofar as the rights of capital compromise state and territorial/ecological sovereignty. And this forced march of displaced non-Europeans fuels neo-fascist politics and practices across the global North as an elite-based distraction from austerity. Here, the original veneer of liberalism reveals its force and illiberal underpinnings. As Ong puts it: ‘neoliberalism as exception is introduced into sites of transformation where market-driven calculations are being introduced in the management of populations and the administration of special spaces’ which express and realize ‘the territoriality of global capitalism’ (2006, 3, 7). Such assault on national/sovereign territory, with state complicity, represents the consolidation of ‘market rule’ on a global scale, and, therefore, a profound marginalization of national citizenships (McMichael, 2020a).

Liberalism’s veneer has historically enabled and concealed a racist, anti-semitic and misogynist complicity, now unmasked in the unraveling of the Globalization Project (cf. Mishra, 2017). Further, as ‘market rule’ has enlisted unequal states in deepening transnational flows of capital and commodities,

incorporating labor forces and farming cultures into globally competitive relations, socio-political unrest, resentment and xenophobia has intensified, manipulated by ruling classes incorporated into global financial relations.

Karl Polanyi observed market over-exposure precipitates protective counter-movements - social and/or environmental (1957). The 1930s combined progressive and reactionary counter-movements from below and above, with states the object and/or agent of intervention for market regulation either progressive or fascist. Protective movements from both directions are again in play, with authoritarianism on an alarming trajectory, in response to the crisis of the imperial Globalization Project. Polanyi's so-called 'fictitious commodities' are on full display: such as labor precarity and transnational migration, carbon offsets and ecological service payments, and cross-territorial financial gambling. The difference with Polanyi's conjunctural moment of social protection (the Development Project) is that states (and their international institutional complex) are overwhelmingly embedded in the Globalization Project's system of market rule. As such they are the object of countermovements demanding either livelihood rights or nativist protections. The juxtaposition of these movements is historically asymmetrical, insofar as the former addresses immediate socio-economic claims (*qua* promises) of neoliberal development, while the latter intervenes in a *longue durée* moment of ethnic replacement, to which we now turn.

### **Capitalism's Past as Present**

Capitalist development is the culmination of a systematic subordination of non-white cultures to the methods of European capitalist expansion in 'cheapening lives' via racial hierarchies (Patel and Moore, 2017), naturalizing these hierarchies in vertical ladder imagery. But, under neoliberalism, this ladder now upends as a snake, revealing development naturalism to be a hoax: as northern societies 'hollow out' while southern societies *appear* as development beneficiaries.

Development naturalism is anchored in economic rationality as the organizing principle of society, and, where this representation is revealed as deception – in job loss to, and competition from, a largely southern global labor force – it triggers a selective xenophobia centered in northern societies. This is matched by a 'coloniality of power' (Quijano, 2005) in southern societies in service of elite authoritarianism, deepening the transnational collusion of north/south elites in securing the benefits of state-sponsored market rule and transnational

governance (Halperin, 2013). Such collusion is financially orchestrated, as elites partner in creating investment outlets, corrupting state machineries in service of land grabs and extractivism, producing an oligopolistic neoliberalism, and displacing attention and resentment towards certain minorities. States routinely employ coercion, and consent (discursively), now to silence civil society in order to attract ambivalent investors.

These conditions, as Antonio Gramsci noted: generate ‘a rift between popular masses and ruling ideologies’ involving ‘skepticism with regard to all theories and general formulae.. and to a form of politics which is not simply realistic in fact.. but which is cynical in its immediate manifestation’ (1971, 276). Such right-wing skepticism stems from crisis in the neoliberal Globalization Project. A visible effect of this crisis is the aggressive nativism explicitly expressed by segments of national populations towards immigrants of color, and other minorities (eg. Jews in Poland, Muslims in India, China and the US, Rohingya in Myanmar, Roma in Europe, Indigenous forest-dwellers in Brazil, and Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories). While austerity policies condition this nationalist conjuncture across the world, northern nativism is a response to the combined impact of the outsourcing of jobs and the appearance of southern migrants and refugees on northern doorsteps.

Southern immigrants arrive from urban slums and countrysides, following a sustained assault on southern rural cultures by globalized market rule, that is, the combined effect of structural adjustment policies, and institution of a destabilizing world market via the WTO in 1995. Rural exodus has intensified with liberalization measures imposed through the 1995 WTO Agreement on Agriculture. Associated trade rules have exposed small producers across the world to competition from artificially-cheapened food dumping from the North, driving millions of producers off the land and into peri-urban slums, and across neighboring borders. This process has now intensified via a global land grab driven by financialization, bankrolling land and food futures (McMichael, 2013a).

In this context, the unfolding of far right-wing politics punctuates the end-game of a neoliberal conjuncture, with already devastating impacts on a world majority, millions now existing as displaced minorities and/or as precarious workers and citizens.

French writer Renaud Camus, originator of the phrase *le grand remplacement* as title of a 2002 alarmist book, argues that ‘native “white” Europeans... are being reverse-colonized by black and brown immigrants’ (Williams, 2017, 24). In this context it is not difficult to understand why foreign

aid/humanitarian assistance, and reproductive health programs are under threat,<sup>2</sup> and immigrant refugees are facing intensified hostility and exclusion. The liberal veneer underlying developmentalism, especially in its global form, is unraveling. The crisis of western liberalism, with its longer global lineage as white supremacy, suggests this historical moment reflects a substantially broader political rejection of liberalism than the fascist upsurge in the 1930s. Rather, the ‘modern liberal subject was made, at a colonial frontier. It shouldn’t be surprising that the modern legal person was defined and policed as strictly as the boundaries of the property that this person was allowed to own’ – and, accordingly, the modern liberal subject was both male and white (Patel and Moore, 2017, 193). But now a segment of white males are fostering a vengeful anti-liberal politics, at the level of the nation-state, where historical destinies locate (Anderson 2006, 149-50), and property inequality is most evidently associated with the complicity of governments in the globalist project. The scapegoat is both globalism and its exclusion/inclusion dialectic as embodied in the immigrant experience.

Over the last half-century the state form that was completed/universalized through decolonization came to embody national historical destiny – even as such destiny was already compromised by geopolitics. Western nations carried their imperial histories forward into the construction of a hegemonic Development Project, with which postcolonial states were enjoined to engage. But, as Gilbert Rist observed: ‘Their right to self-determination [was] acquired in exchange for the right to self-definition’ (1997, 79), suggesting that in adopting the state form Third World peoples legitimized and naturalized a liberal order constructed on the historic foundation of their global discrimination. Self-determination was, then, double-edged: formally it represented admission into a world of sovereign states with liberal national destinies, but substantively the postcolonial state was subject to the unequal market relations spun through the devices of US political-economic hegemony, military power, multilateral institutions, and the legacy of the ‘international division of nature’ (Coronil, 1997) from colonial times.

The imperial architecture of the Development Project at large promoted Third World subordination to ‘market rule,’ and this was enabled by a series of

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<sup>2</sup> Thus the chief executive of Obria, an anti-choice and anti-contraception organization in the US, amply funded by the Trump Administration, claims Christianity is dying out because of contraception and abortion, with the effect of ‘replacing’ Europeans with immigrant Muslims (Kirchgaessner, 2019).

political dictatorships engineered and supported by Western interests through the period of the 1950s to the 1980s. Where Third World states were deemed guardians of human rights by the 1948 UN Declaration their elites were granted responsibility for enforcing the disciplines and bio-politics of market rule. And this became most evident in the Cold War inspired rollback of economic nationalism, starting with the 1965 Indonesian coup by President Suharto, followed by General Pinochet's coup in Chile in 1973 as a dress rehearsal for the wholesale bio-political assault associated with the debt regime of the 1980s and the implementation of structural adjustment austerity policies. This was the internalization of a process of creeping 'global fascism,' immanent in capitalism and premised on state implementation (Patel and McMichael, 2004). Arundhati Roy perhaps said it best:

Fascism is about the slow, steady infiltration of all the instruments of state power. It's about the slow erosion of civil liberties, about unspectacular, day-to-day injustices ... Fascism has come to India after the dreams that fueled the freedom struggle have been frittered away like so much loose change ... Every 'democratic' institution in this country has shown itself to be unaccountable, inaccessible to the ordinary citizen and either unwilling or incapable of acting in the interests of genuine social justice. And now corporate globalization is being relentlessly and arbitrarily imposed on India, ripping it apart culturally and economically ... There is very real grievance here. The fascists didn't create it. But they have seized upon it, upturned it and forged from it a hideous, bogus sense of pride. They have mobilized human beings using the lowest common denominator – religion (2002).

As the sovereign vessel for fascism, the national referent is significant, as it obscures the world-historical dimensions of the nation-state form. Thus colonial rule not only expropriated non-European life-worlds via colonial divisions of labor, slavery, genocide, displacements, and the emplacement of *lumpen*-states (Fanon, 1967), but it also produced the liberal subject (and its white supremacist dimensions). So the reaction to job outsourcing and in-migration from the majority world can only take a nationalist form, which becomes the source and instrument of illiberal politics. Such epistemic nationalism is

convenient for scapegoating, but elides the world-historical origins of the immigrant phenomenon, as one palpable stimulant of rightwing (and sometimes leftwing) backlash.

A key to this moment is the re-appearance of Malthusian fascism, that is, the overpopulation thesis expounded in the nineteenth century by Thomas Malthus, referring to the mismatch between arithmetical growth in food output and the geometrical growth in human population. As the political-economic advisor to the East India Company, Malthus had first hand experience of impoverishment of Indian peasantries as the British Raj undermined their ecological securities by imposing the commodity form on grain reserves and cotton farming, as well as privatizing forests and commonlands (Davis, 2000). Malthusian echoes today focus on phenomena such as migrant surges and hunger reports that routinely ignore the highly unequal distribution of land and farming resources, an ongoing global land grab abetted by financialization, accelerating displacement of food crops and forest habitats by feed crops, ranching and biofuel production, and weak or absent support for smallholder farming cultures exposed to subsidized grain-export dumping in local markets. In this sense, the claim of ‘overpopulation’ is a fetish, insofar as the imperial origins of the present stem from ‘dispossession by accumulation.’

### **Neo-illiberalism and the Changing of the Guard**

Beyond nativism, rising *economic nationalism* stems from intensifying public anger with deepening inequality, and the perception that the trade regime favors global financial and political elites (Goodman 2019; cf Halperin 2013). Two prominent trade revisionings – US/China bilateralism following Trump’s scuttling of Obama’s multilateral Pacific trading bloc allowing Chinese access if it adopted the bloc’s rules, and Britain’s exit from the European bloc seeking bilateral trade deals with the US, China, Australia and India – signal a new era where nationalism ‘trumps’ collective concerns in the trade arena (Goodman 2019), consolidating ‘neo-illiberalism’ (cf Ong 2006).

Global impacts across North and South regions are evident in the breakdown of the WTO’s multilateral ‘free trade’ regime. As below, this arises from a combination of the G20’s successful challenge to the asymmetric hypocrisy of this regime (with the US and EU continuing to protect their farm sectors), and the post-2008-food crisis intensification of offshore investment in land grabbing in the South. Here, Middle Eastern and East Asian states, via sovereign wealth funds, model state-directed development strategies to invest directly in offshore

food and fuel supplies, bypassing WTO trade rules (McMichael 2013b). While this phenomenon intensifies the enclosure of southern farm lands and forests, it contributes to erosion of the North/South division, as middle-income southern states reproduce historic northern practices in low-income states, via bilateral deals. These entail post-neoliberal ‘new extractivism,’ whereby state/corporate joint ventures target mining, timber, arable and fishery/aquaculture sites largely in the global South (Veltmeyer and Petras, 2014; McKeon, 2014).

Such extractivism deepens environmental risk – exemplified in the recent USMCA deal, where despite curtailing the infamous Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) (Wallach, 2019), Mexican environmental protections remain subject to corporate challenge in mining disputes. In response, the Sierra Club and other environmental organizations issued a joint statement: USMCA ‘failed to eliminate this clear-cut handout to oil and gas corporations. As such, the revised deal would allow corporate polluters to sue Mexico in private tribunals if new environmental policies under their government contracts for offshore drilling, fracking, oil and gas pipelines, refineries and other polluting activities’ (quoted in Rocha, 2020). While multilateralism was no panacea for environmental and labor protections, bilateralism reduces the possibility for coordinated, UN-style monitoring across the inter-state system.

For Europe, where the formation of the European Economic Community (1957) was designed to check the destabilizing nationalism of the inter-war period (Kagan, 2019, 112), Brexit symbolizes the erosion of the international political-economic order, and more immediately European unity. *Domestically*, the 2009 Eurozone debt crisis precipitated uprisings in the European periphery against Berlin’s austerity policies, matched in turn with German anger at ‘bankrolling’ so-called profligate Southern European states (Ibid, 116). Such domestic policies contributed to the right-wing nationalist party, Alternative for Germany, claiming the third-largest number of seats in the Bundestag (Ibid, 118).

Regionally, Putin’s intervention in Georgia and Ukraine (annexing Crimea), alongside electoral interference in support of far-right parties, threatens European unity from the outside. Such military aggression from Russia, matched with its support for Syrian dictator Barshar al-Assad’s unrelenting war on domestic opposition, revealed Putin’s intentions to reconfigure regional alliances. Further, Russian support for the Syrian dictator ‘has driven millions of refugees to Europe’s shores, causing a split over immigration policy and fueling the rise of populist parties’ (Polyakova and Haddad, 2019, 112). And, *globally*, the Trump

administration encourages renationalization of Europe, embracing leaders of the populist illiberal right in Hungary, France, Italy and Poland, and even Germany, renouncing the free trade regime ‘that undergirds European and German political stability’ (Kagan, 119).

Meanwhile, rising Chinese investment in European ports and technological infrastructure ‘drives a wedge’ between the US and Europe, initially signaled in Italy’s 2019 formal embrace of the BRI, and the UK’s decision to partner with China’s info-tech giant, Huawei, in building Britain’s 5G network (Polyakova and Haddad, 2019, 112). Smaller European states are attracted to Chinese infrastructural investments, given IMF blessing as ‘sustainable debt,’ (LaGarde, 2019), even as Berlin, Paris and Brussels remain more circumspect (Smith and Taussig, 2019, 112). The combination of these internal and external threats are forcing European leaders to strategize to strengthen internal unity, within a dramatically changing context. In particular, German Chancellor Merkel reorganized the 2020 EU-China Summit to include representatives from all EU states, rather than the usual EU officials, at the same time as key EU states cooperate with China on climate change and nuclear proliferation, nevertheless concerned that China is ‘undermining western values, rules and standards’ (Smith and Taussig, 2019, 115). In consequence, ‘Brexit, illiberal triumphs across Europe, a resurgent Russia, and deteriorating transatlantic ties have sent European leaders scrambling to preserve both the European project and the international system’ (Ibid, 124).

For the United States, following the 2008 financial crisis, annual meetings of the International Financial Institutions (IFI) underscored its dramatic effect on the (neoliberal) US, weakening its ability to maintain and/or guarantee its economic power. In this moment China, with its substantial financial reserves, created the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), spurring US Presidential economic advisor, Lawrence Summers, to declare this: ‘the moment the United States lost its role as underwriter of the global economic system’ (Weisman, 2015). Since the crisis, the United States’ ‘share of global economic power fell from 50% to just 15% in 2017’ (McCoy, 2018).

Symbolic of this moment was recognition of the rise of ‘multipolarity,’ as new regional and trade alliances filled a vacuum left by a retreating US. *Financial Times* columnist Martin Wolf declared: ‘The rise of the Group of 20 leading economies [led by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa] reflects new realities of power and authority’ (2010, 7). This development was dramatized in 2006 when Brazil, India and China brought the WTO’s Doha Round to a stalemate

in 2006 on the grounds that the US (and the EU) were continuing to subsidize their farm sectors while requiring, through WTO trade rules, all other countries to withdraw protections of their farm sectors. The G-20 leaders were intent on challenging US power, but not the hegemony of market liberalization as such (Hopewell, 2016).

Kristen Hopewell observes ‘the creation of the WTO represented not the realization of the neoliberal project in the realm of trade but only its beginning. The multilateral trading system is intended to work through successive rounds of negotiations to progressively liberalize trade’ (Hopewell, 2016, 203). Doha Round stalemate left this goal unrealized, expressing state-system disorder, that is, lack of a hegemonic state. Alongside remnants of multilateralism, regional and bilateral FTAs proliferated, with the rise of multipolarity. The year 2015 recorded nearly 400 FTA’s in process. By 2019 the WTO came to its knees, with Trump’s presidency undermining the WTO’s trade dispute mechanism, maintaining a trade war with China, and advancing protectionism internationally.

The reality is that the WTO originated in an international trade environment created by the US and EU, and their TNCs. Admission of China in 2001 was on the assumption that it would embrace market rule: ‘The WTO’s rules were not written with an economy like China’s in mind, and critics say the organization has failed to adequately police Beijing for using a mix of private enterprise and state support to dominate global industries’ (Swanson, 2019).<sup>3</sup> In light of this, the US Trade Representative observes that ‘the body’s decisions constrain America’s ability to protect its workers and has insisted it be overhauled’ (Idem). Ultimately this is a dispute over the changing of the world-economic guard. Brad Setser, of the US Council of Foreign Relations, commented that ‘China is no longer seen as on a trajectory that favours the US’ (quoted in Farrer and Kuo, 2019). Meanwhile, the Brexit decision has solidified the protectionist impulse, strengthening deglobalization tendencies – and undermining ‘free trade’ ideology as the path to progressive development.

From this perspective, multipolarity appears as a (*formal*) dress rehearsal for the decline of multilateralism, insofar as the latter was premised on an international US-centered order. But that order was in transformation already by the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, expressed in the phenomenon of China as ‘workshop

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<sup>3</sup> In regard to this, Swanson (2019) notes: ‘While the W.T.O.’s ability to facilitate trade negotiations was largely paralyzed, its other arm, which settles trade disputes, has been much more active, reviewing dozens of cases a year’.

of the world.’ In addition to serving as a ‘spatial fix’ for global capitalist under-consumption, Chinese industrialization depended on assembling foreign components in a number of coastal Special Economic Zones, as ‘exceptionally neoliberal’ (Ong, 2006) spaces on Chinese territory. Here: ‘much of the Chinese economy isn’t Chinese at all. This is especially true of its technologically leading sectors, many of which are embedded in global value chains that are dominated by US companies’ (Babones, 2017, 60).

Further, and *substantively*, Amitav Acharya defines contemporary global political-economic relations as “multiplex”: ‘the nature of economic interdependence today is denser, consisting of trade, finance, and global production networks and supply chains, whereas ... multipolarity is mainly trade-based’ (2017, 11). Specifying the crisis of the Globalization Project requires transcending methodological nationalism to recognize the cross-border structuring of value flows, and recognize, first, why states are so embedded in trade *and investment* markets, and second, why state mercantilism may prove difficult to implement in the short-run, outside of China. Value flows are internal to corporate networks of global production and circulation, expressing the partnering or mediating role of states, in the interests of competitive market positioning, and/or political and economic elite access to export revenues and profitable investments and/or mutual complicity (Halperin, 2013). This is the political meaning of ‘public-private partnerships’ (PPP), which characterize much strategic investment now, enabled by global financial relations.

The Chinese government has adopted an aggressive, state-centered form of the PPP. While this has been largely an internal affair over the last two decades or so, with the rise of domestic ‘dragon-head enterprises’ sponsored by the central government (Schneider, 2017), instituting the 2013 ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI) represented a new ‘going out’ strategy. The BRI establishes an alternative global economic, institutional and diplomatic network to *extant* trade and investment relations centered in the US/EU nexus.

The BRI comprises an extensive network of highways, railways, energy pipelines, and new border crossings: south to Asia and SE Asia, and west through former Soviet republics in Central Asia to Europe and Africa to South and Southeast Asia, and to the west through the former Soviet republics, to Europe and Africa (Jones and Zeng, 2019). It involves 90 projects across 60 countries costing \$890 billion (compared with the Marshall Plan’s \$130 billion investment in today’s dollars), focused on technology investments (Hu, 2015). Africa sources oil and minerals in particular, and is an outlet for Chinese goods. In 2009, China

surpassed the US as Africa's largest trading partner, and now surpasses the US aid regime with its concentration on direct investment in resources and transport infrastructures for continental developments (Kaiman, 2007). Infrastructural development (physical and digital), enables an expanding use of Chinese currency, and, according to President Xi Jinping, breaking 'the bottleneck of Asian connectivity' to secure energy supplies from the west 'via routes the U.S. military cannot disrupt' (Chatzky and McBride, 2019, 2, 6), alongside a twenty-first century Maritime Silk Road, with ports complementing trade routes.

China's unmatched foreign reserves, along with its state-backed banking system, finance 'going out' by its State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) alongside private firms. Here, Chinese state capitalism puts the global market system to good use, complementing its state developmentalist model with trade, investment and training partners (Scoones, 2019). With finance from the Chinese Development Bank, China fashions a strategic 'Beijing Consensus' anchored in an ethic of pragmatism and 'mutual benefit,' including infrastructural development as counterpart to the western model of volatile and austere globalization. A related rhetoric of South-South cooperation expresses multipolarity, but with a difference. China commits investment to recipient countries for the longer term, without 'conditionalities' (Amanor, 2013), net of what some commentators view as 'debt-trap' diplomacy: 'For some countries that take on large amounts of debt to fund the necessary infrastructure, BRI money is seen as a potential poisoned chalice. BRI projects are built with low-interest loans as opposed to aid grants...Some BRI investments have required the use of Chinese firms and their bidding processes have lacked transparency,' with contractors sometimes inflating costs, 'leading to canceled projects and political pushback' (Chatzky and McBride, 2019).

Deborah Bräutigam disputes 'debt trap' claims, arguing that 'B.R.I. isn't debt-trap diplomacy: It's just globalization with Chinese characteristics' (2019). China's 'state-centered neoliberalism' is both hybrid as well as specific to Chinese world-historical positioning. In the *short-term*, China's opening to global capitalism in the 1990s served to strengthen the PRC state and enrich a post-revolutionary population at one and the same time: ' "Globalization" of the economy from the late 1990s was accompanied by the re-centralization of decision-making, greater coordination of development, and the reassertion of the power over the economy of state-owned financial, energy and industrial enterprises' (Dirlik, 2017a, 63). The prospect of a Beijing Consensus accords strategically at a time of unraveling of the Globalization Project. Nevertheless Arif

Dirlik argues that China's internalization of the contradictions of global capitalism imply that such 'international and domestic initiatives toward a new global order may be promising but they are hampered by their confinement within the premises of the world system to which the PRC owes its rise' (Dirlik, 2017b, 395; see also Hung, 2016).

However, a long game of pursuing global geo-political power is perhaps presaged in China's deployment of 'state-centered neoliberalism:' to re-center global capital accumulation from West to East across the twenty-first century (So and Chu, 2016, 87), perhaps reconfiguring an 'orientalist' tributary system, with an emphasis on 'development cooperation' (Scoones et al. 2016, 8-9). In relation to this, Ching Kwan Lee distinguishes the 'profit optimization' approach of Chinese state capital in Africa from global private capital's 'profit maximization' approach (2018, 12). Here, 'leaving tangible infrastructure for public use is more appealing to local populations than fungible funds which end up being embezzled or misappropriated' (Benabdallah, 2019, 9). In the meantime the PRC engages with *extant* international organizations 'to increase legitimacy for the BRI,' its long-term strategy (Olinga-Shannon, et al. 2019, 7), 'at the same time promoting Chinese-led alternative financial institutions' (Benabdallah, 2019, 2). These maneuvers ultimately unite a short-game of operating within an already frayed US-centered global framework, with a long-game constructing an alternative organizing principle, namely neo-mercantilism, anchored by the BRI framework (McMichael, 2020b). Whether this principle of economic management will include explicit population management begs the question of Chinese global hegemony.

An American market individualism *tianxia* (all under heaven) casts a long shadow across the world, enabling a new form of market rule in the form of 'surveillance capitalism' of individual behavior (Zuboff, 2019). Shoshana Zuboff notes that 'Surveillance capitalism moves from a focus on individual users to a focus on populations, like cities, and eventually on society as a whole,' and it 'depends upon undermining individual self-determination, autonomy and decision rights for the sake of an unobstructed flow of behavioural data to feed markets that are about us but not for us' (quoted in Naughton, 2019). Meanwhile, in public surveillance technologies China leads the world: 'eight of the 10 most surveilled cities [in the world] are in China,' with London and Atlanta the other two (Keegan, 2019, 24). Given global proliferation of restive citizenries as austerity policies intensify, repressive political cultures may well multiply, portending a 21<sup>st</sup> century Chinese *tianxia* of widespread state surveillance.

## Conclusion

The crisis of the Globalization Project is more than coincidental with the rising power of China. The Chinese ‘workshop of the world’ phenomenon has been the leading site of the ‘race to the bottom,’ by which states attract TNC investments in production of consumer and producer goods with minimal labor and environmental regulations. This race, combined with elite class austerity policies, escalates anti-globalization mobilizations – yet to solidify coherent, compelling paradigmatic alternatives to build consequential socio-ecological alliances.<sup>4</sup>

Intensifying material and intersectional contradictions may strengthen current authoritarian trends as socio-ecological conditions deteriorate – whether right-wing or ‘liberal authoritarianism’ (Babones, 2019). In regard to such a trend, the 2017 World Economic Forum’s extraordinary ‘liberal internationalist embrace of Xi Jinping as a free trader is emblematic of contemporary liberalism’s prioritization of economic rights over basic freedoms’ (Ibid, 59). At Davos, not only was China referred to as the ‘present champion of economic globalization’ (cited in Zeng, 2019, 578), but also President Xi Jinping claimed when organizing a country’s social and economic development path: “All roads lead to Rome” – implying that ‘today’s liberal internationalist world could accommodate many different forms of government, including China’s totalitarian one-party dictatorship’ (Ibid, 69). While this may be self-serving insofar as the BRI offers an alternative, ‘hard’ network by which to secure trade routes, it also offers justification for statist authoritarian solutions, and possibly a hegemonic outcome: ‘A dominant state exercises a hegemonic function if it leads the system of states in a desired direction and, in so doing, is perceived as pursuing a universal interest. It is this kind of leadership that makes the dominant state hegemonic. But a dominant state may lead also in the sense that it draws other states into its path of development’ (Arrighi, 1990, 367).

Such new realities have materialized in deeply authoritarian forms, marrying ideologies of nativism and nationalism claiming to secure borders

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<sup>4</sup> David Harvey’s recent study underscores Marx’s full analysis of capital’s movement and pervasive commodification of life, broadening conditions for the construction of anti-capitalist political alliances founded in production and social reproduction domains (2017) – integrating demands, for example, from workplaces through healthcare provisioning to farming systems (cf. Fraser, 2013; Caouette and Kapoor, 2015; and Selwyn, 2016).

against migrants and commodities that can be produced locally. The former claim has been more evident, effective, and brutally repressive, while the latter remains problematic, given the pervasiveness of global supply networks, formed through varying ‘multiplex’ articulations of corporate and financial deals within and across states.<sup>5</sup> Adjusting to this economic reality is not straightforward, and the Brexit experiment may well reveal just how complicating such supply chains have become.

A decade ago, Göran Therborn observed: ‘Looking backwards from 2010, globalization does not look so much an extension of US capitalism as a delimitation of it, by the rise of China and India’ (2011, 52-3). From this perspective China’s repressive development model matched with its statist BRI symbolizes the culmination, and *perhaps* the successor, of neoliberal capitalism.

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<sup>5</sup> In the wake of COVID-19, localization may become essential for food production, based in agro-ecological methods (Rosset and Altieri, 2017), given the unsustainability of industrial, agri-monoculture model, and proliferation of food-sovereignty-style practices and movements across the world in this fragile moment (Mooney, 2017; Wise, 2019).

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