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journals.sagepub.com/home/crs**William I. Robinson**

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Abstract

Global police state refers to three interrelated developments. First are the ever more omnipresent systems of mass social control, repression, and warfare promoted by the ruling groups to contain the real and the potential rebellion of the global working class and surplus humanity. Second is how the global economy is itself based more and more on the development and deployment of these systems of warfare, social control, and repression simply as a means of making profit and continuing to accumulate capital in the face of stagnation – what I term *militarized accumulation*, or *accumulation by repression* – and that now goes well beyond military Keynesianism. And third is the increasing move towards political systems that can be characterized as 21st century fascism, or even in a broader sense, as totalitarian. Digitalization makes possible the creation of a global police state. The mounting crisis appears to cement the emerging digital economy with the global police state. There is a triangulation of far-right, authoritarian, and neo-fascist forces in civil society, reactionary political power in the state, and transnational corporate capital, especially speculative finance capital, the military–industrial–security complex, and the extractive industries – all three interwoven with high-tech or digital capital.

Keywords

capitalist crisis, digitalization/digital economy, global police state, militarization, overaccumulation, political economy, surplus humanity, transnational capitalist class, 21st century fascism

Introduction

In their classical study *Monopoly Capitalism* (1966), Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy argued that the capitalist system needed rising levels of military spending as an outlet for ever-greater amounts of accumulated surplus: “Here at last monopoly capitalism had seemingly found the answer to the ‘on what’ question,” they wrote with regard to the rising Pentagon budget. “On what could the government spend enough to keep the system from sinking into the mire of stagnation. On arms, more arms, and ever more arms” (Baran and Sweezy, 1966: 213). The concept of military Keynesianism

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in the post-War period thus referred to expanding military budgets to offset stagnation in the capitalist economy, in the same way that Keynesian policies more generally sought to create demand and stimulate the economy.

Half a century later it is time to update our understanding of the relationship between militarization and capitalism. If military Keynesianism referred to the purchase by the state of weapons systems and military equipment from defense subcontractors as a subsidy to private capital, there has been in recent years, and especially since the events of September 11, 2001, a much more sweeping militarization of the global economy and society. I suggest here that the concept of *global police state* captures the new historical moment. Such a global police state is emerging as a response to the crisis of world capitalism that is unprecedented, given its magnitude, its global reach, the extent of ecological degradation and social deterioration, and the sheer scale of the means of violence that is now deployed around the world.

Global police state refers to three interrelated developments. First are the ever more omnipresent systems of mass social control, repression, and warfare promoted by the ruling groups to contain the real and the potential rebellion of the global working class and surplus humanity. Second is how the global economy is itself based more and more on the development and deployment of these systems of warfare, social control, and repression simply as a means of making profit and continuing to accumulate capital in the face of stagnation – what I term *militarized accumulation*, or *accumulation by repression* – and that now goes well beyond military Keynesianism. And third is the increasing move towards political systems that can be characterized as 21st century fascism, or even in a broader sense, as totalitarian.

In referring to global police state I want to underscore how there is an increasing convergence around global capitalism's political need for social control and repression and its economic need to perpetuate accumulation in the face of overaccumulation and stagnation. Transnational capital has subordinated virtually the entire world's population to its logic and its domination. In this sense the world's people live under a dictatorship of the transnational capitalist class, or TCC. The TCC as the hegemonic fraction of capital on a world scale is not an internally unified or politically united group. It is delineated structurally by its grounding in global as distinct from national markets and circuits of accumulation and to this extent shares a common class interest and outlook in advancing capitalist globalization (for further discussion see, e.g., Robinson, 2004). I mean here dictatorship in the literal (etymological) sense of the word, such that transnational capital *dictates* the conditions under which billions of people carry out their lives in the global economy and society. In this sense, it is a more encompassing, powerful, omnipresence and deadly dictatorship than any other in history. At the same time, however, I mean dictatorship in the more figurative sense that, absent a change of course, we are moving towards a political dictatorship of the TCC as it imposes and sustains its rule through a global police state played out differently in various parts of the world.

This dictatorship is *reactive*. We are seeing a breakdown worldwide of global capitalist hegemony. If the global working class and oppressed peoples were simply passive there would be no need for such repression and control. Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony to refer to the attainment by ruling groups of stable forms of rule based on "consensual" domination. Gramsci's notion of hegemony (see, e.g., Gramsci, 1957) posits distinct forms of domination, in brief: *coercive domination* and *consensual domination*. Hegemony involves the internalization on the part of the subordinate classes of the moral and cultural values, the codes of practical conduct, and the worldview of the dominant classes or groups – in sum, the internalization by the oppressed of the *social logic* of the system of domination itself. In distinction to an outright dictatorship or military regime, force and coercion in a hegemonic order are ever-present but may take a back seat to ideological control and other forms of cooptation. But now it is the revolt of the oppressed and exploited

populations around the world that is leading to the breakdown of consensual means of domination, compelling the TCC to impose increasingly coercive and repressive forms of rule.

The Crisis of Global Capitalism

Each major episode of crisis in the world capitalist system has presented the potential for systemic change. Each has involved the breakdown of state legitimacy, escalating class and social struggles, and military conflicts, leading to a restructuring of the system, including new institutional arrangements, class relations, and accumulation activities that eventually result in a restabilization of the system and renewed capitalist expansion. The current crisis shares aspects of earlier system-wide structural crises, such as of the 1880s, the 1930s or the 1970s. But there are six interrelated dimensions to the current crisis that I believe sets it apart from these earlier ones and suggests that a simple restructuring of the system will not lead to its restabilization – that is, our very survival now requires a revolution against global capitalism (Robinson, 2014). These six dimensions, in broad strokes, present a “big picture” context in which a global police state is emerging.

First, the system is fast reaching the ecological limits of its reproduction. We have already passed tipping points in climate change, the nitrogen cycle, and diversity loss. For the first time ever, human conduct is intersecting with and fundamentally altering the earth system in such a way that threatens to bring about a sixth mass extinction (see, e.g., Foster et al., 2011; Moore, 2015). These ecological dimensions of global crisis have been brought to the forefront of the global agenda by the worldwide environmental justice movement. Communities around the world have come under escalating repression as they face off against transnational corporate plunder of their environment. While capitalism cannot be held solely responsible for the ecological crisis, it is difficult to imagine that the environmental catastrophe can be resolved within the capitalist system given capital’s implacable impulse to accumulate and its accelerated commodification of nature.

Second, the level of global social polarization and inequality is unprecedented. The richest one percent of humanity in 2016 controlled over half of the world’s wealth and 20 percent controlled 95 percent of that wealth, while the remaining 80 percent had to make do with just five percent (Oxfam, 2017). These escalating inequalities fuel capitalism’s chronic problem of overaccumulation: the TCC cannot find productive outlets to unload the enormous amounts of surplus it has accumulated, leading to chronic stagnation in the world economy (see next section). Such extreme levels of social polarization present a challenge of social control to dominant groups. As Trumpism in the United States as well as the rise of far-right and neo-fascist movements in Europe so well illustrate, cooptation also involves the manipulation of fear and insecurity among the downwardly mobile so that social anxiety is channeled towards scapegoated communities. This psychosocial mechanism of displacing mass anxieties is not new, but it appears to be increasing around the world in the face of the structural destabilization of capitalist globalization. Extreme inequality requires extreme violence and repression that lend themselves to projects of 21st century fascism.

Third, the sheer magnitude of the means of violence and social control is unprecedented, as well as the magnitude and concentrated control over the means of global communication and the production and circulation of symbols, images, and knowledge. Computerized wars, drone warfare, robot soldiers, bunker-buster bombs, a new generation of nuclear weapons, satellite surveillance, cyberwar, spatial control technology, and so forth, have changed the face of warfare, and more generally, of systems of social control and repression. We have arrived at the panoptical surveillance society, a point brought home by Edward Snowden’s revelations in 2013, and the age of thought control by those who control global flows of communication and symbolic production. If global capitalist crisis leads to a new world war the destruction would simply be unprecedented.

Fourth, we are reaching limits to the extensive expansion of capitalism, in the sense that there are no longer any new territories of significance to integrate into world capitalism and new spaces to commodify are drying up. The capitalist system is by its nature expansionary. In each earlier structural crisis, the system went through a new round of extensive expansion – from waves of colonial conquest in earlier centuries, to the integration in the late 20th and early 21st centuries of the former socialist countries, China, India and other areas that had been marginally outside the system. There are no longer any new territories to integrate into world capitalism. At the same time, the privatization of education, health, utilities, basic services, and public lands is turning those spaces in global society that were outside of capital's control into "spaces of capital," so that intensive expansion is reaching depths never before seen. What is there left to commodify? Where can the system now expand? New spaces have to be violently cracked open and the peoples in these spaces must be repressed by the global police state.

Fifth, there is the rise of a vast surplus population inhabiting a "planet of slums" (Davis, 2007) pushed out of the productive economy, thrown into the margins, and subject to sophisticated systems of social control and to destruction, into a *mortal cycle of dispossession-exploitation-exclusion*. Crises provide capital with the opportunity to accelerate the process of forcing greater productivity out of fewer workers. The processes by which surplus labor is generated have accelerated under globalization. Spatial reorganization has helped transnational capital to break the territorial-bound power of organized labor and impose new capital-labor relations based on fragmentation, flexibilization, and the cheapening of labor. These developments, combined with a massive new round of primitive accumulation and displacement of hundreds of millions, have given rise to a new global army of superfluous labor that goes well beyond the traditional reserve army of labor that Marx discussed. Global capitalism has no direct use for surplus humanity. But indirectly, it holds wages down everywhere and makes new systems of 21st century slavery possible.¹ Dominant groups face the challenge of how to contain both the real and potential rebellion of surplus humanity. In addition, surplus humanity cannot consume and so as their ranks expand the problem of overaccumulation becomes exacerbated.

Sixth, there is an acute political contradiction in global capitalism: economic globalization takes places within a nation-state system of political authority. Transnational state apparatuses are incipient and have not been able to substitute for a leading nation-state with enough power and authority to organize and stabilize the system, much less to impose regulations on transnational capital. In the age of capitalist globalization governments must attract to the national territory transnational corporate investment, which requires providing capital with all the incentives associated with neo-liberalism – downward pressure on wages, deregulation, austerity, and so on – that aggravate inequality, impoverishment, and insecurity for working classes. Nation-states face a contradiction between the need to promote transnational capital accumulation in their territories and their need to achieve political legitimacy. As a result, states around the world have been experiencing spiraling crises of legitimacy. This situation generates bewildering and seemingly contradictory politics and also helps explain the resurgence of far-right and neo-fascist forces that espouse rhetoric of nationalism and protectionism even as they promote neo-liberalism.

Overaccumulation: Capitalism's Achilles Heel

The turn towards a global police state is structurally rooted in perhaps *the* fundamental contradiction of capitalism: *overaccumulation*, which is interwoven with all six dimensions of global crisis discussed above. There is a vast literature on capitalist crisis that I cannot reference here (but see: summary discussion and references in Robinson, 2014, Chapter 4; Kliman, 2011; Radical Perspectives on the Crisis²). In sum, capitalist competition and class struggle push

capital to reduce costs and/or increase productivity by increasing the organic composition of capital, which leads to the tendency for the rate of profit to fall (Marx, 1978/1894). This tendency, the “most fundamental law” of political economy, is expressed as overaccumulation crisis. The gap grows between what is (or could be) produced and what the market can absorb. If capitalists cannot actually sell – or “unload” – the products of their plantations, factories, and offices then they cannot make (“realize”) profit. They accumulate huge amounts of surplus but do not find outlets to continue to profitably invest that surplus. Hence, if left unchecked, the expanding social polarization that is endemic to capitalism results in crisis – in stagnation, recessions, depressions, social upheavals, and war.

Globalization has greatly exacerbated overaccumulation. As capital went global from the 1970s onwards the emerging TCC was able to get around state intervention in the capitalist market and undermine the redistributive programs that mass struggles of poor and working people had forced on the system in the 20th century. The extreme concentration of the planet’s wealth in the hands of the few and the accelerated impoverishment and dispossession of the majority means that the TCC cannot find productive outlets to unload enormous amounts of surplus it has accumulated. A series of lesser jolts to the global economy, from the Mexico peso crisis of 1995, to the Asian financial meltdown of 1997–1999 and its spread to several other regions, and then the dot-com busts and global recession of 2000–2001, were preludes to the 2008 collapse of the global financial system. The Great Recession – the worst crisis since the 1930s – marked the onset of a deep structural crisis of overaccumulation. As uninvested capital accumulates, enormous pressures build up to find outlets for unloading the surplus. Capitalist groups pressure states to create new opportunities for profit making. By the 21st century the TCC turned above all to three mechanisms in order to sustain global accumulation in the face of overaccumulation. These were: financial speculation; the plunder of public finances; and state-organized militarized accumulation.

Deregulation of the financial industry and the creation of a globally integrated financial system in recent decades have allowed the TCC to unload trillions of dollars into speculation. The sequence of speculative waves in the global casino since the 1980s included real estate investments in the emerging global property market that inflated property values in one locality after another, wild stock market speculation leading to periodic booms and busts, most notable the bursting of the dot-com bubble in 2001, the phenomenal escalation of hedge-fund flows, currency speculation, and every imaginable derivative, ranging from swaps, futures markets, collateralized debt obligations, asset pyramiding, and ponzi schemes.

U.S. treasury bailouts of the Wall Street-based banks following the 2008 collapse that was triggered by speculation in the housing market went to bail out individual and institutional investors from around the world, while the U.S. debt was itself financed by these same investors from all over the world. According to a 2011 report by the U.S. government’s General Accounting Office (2011), the U.S. Federal Reserve undertook a whopping \$16 trillion in secret bailouts between 2007 and 2010 to banks and corporations from around the world. But then the banks and institutional investors simply recycled trillions of dollars they received in bailout money into new speculative activities in global commodities markets.

As opportunity for speculative investment in one sector dries up the TCC simply turns to another sector to unload its surplus. The latest outlet for surplus capital at the time of writing (late 2017) seems to be the overvalued tech, or Information Technology (IT) sector (although the stock market as a whole was grossly inflated), as well as in Bitcoin and other crypto-currencies. Institutional investors, especially speculative hedge and mutual funds, have poured billions of dollars into the tech sector since the 2008 Great Recession, turning it into a major new outlet for uninvested capital in the face of stagnation. Investment in the IT sector jumped from \$17 billion in the 1970s to \$175 billion in 1990, then to \$496 billion in 2000, on the eve of the bursting of the turn-of-century

dot-com bubble, but then climbed up again to new heights after 2008, surpassing \$700 billion as 2017 drew to a close (Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2017).

The gap between the productive economy, what the media calls the “real economy,” and “fictitious capital” – that is, money thrown into circulation without any base in commodities or in productive activity – has reached mind-boggling levels. Gross world product, or the total value of goods and services produced worldwide, for instance, stood at some \$75 trillion in 2015, whereas currency speculation alone amounted to \$5.3 trillion a day (McLeod, 2014) and the global derivatives market was estimated at an astonishing \$1.2 quadrillion (Maverick, 2015). The “real economy” has also been kept sputtering along by the expansion of credit to consumers and to governments, especially in the Global North and among new middle and professional layers and high-income groups in the Global South, to sustain spending and consumption. In the United States, which has long been the “market of last resort” for the global economy, household debt is higher than it has been for almost all of postwar history. In 2016 U.S. households owed nearly \$13 trillion in student loans, credit card debt, auto loans, and mortgages (Oyedele, 2015). In just about every OECD country the ratio of income to household debt remains historically high and has steadily deteriorated since 2008 (OECD, 2015).

The TCC has also turned to raiding and sacking public finance, which has been reconfigured through austerity, bailouts, corporate subsidies, government debt and the global bond market as governments transfer wealth directly and indirectly from working people to the TCC. The global bond market – an indicator of total government debt worldwide – had already reached \$100 trillion by 2011 (Obryn, 2015). Governments issue bonds to investors in order to close government budget deficits and also to subsidize private accumulation so as to keep the economy going. They then have to pay back these bonds (with interest) by extracting taxes from current and future wages of the working class. Already by the late 20th century state income brought in by bonds often just went right back to creditors. Thus the reconfiguration of state finances amounts over time to a transfer of wealth from global labor to transnational capital; a claim by transnational capital on future wages, and a shift in the burden of the crisis to the working and popular classes.

In the perverse world of predatory transnational finance capital debt and deficits themselves became new sources of financial speculation that allow the TCC to raid and sack public budgets. Governments facing insolvency in the wake of the Great Recession turned to bond emissions in order to stay afloat, which allowed transnational investors to unload surplus into these sovereign debt markets that they themselves helped to create. Gone are the times that such bonds are bought and held to maturity. They are bought and sold by individual and institutional investors in frenzied 24-hour worldwide trading and bet on continuously through such mechanisms as credit default swaps that shift their values and make bond markets a high stakes gamble of volatility and risk for investors. The toxic mixture of public finance and private transnational finance capital in this age of global capitalism constitutes a new battlefield in which the global rich are waging a war against the global poor and working classes. This becomes a critical part of the story of the global police state as resistance to this financial pillage mounts around the world.

Yet such financial pillage cannot resolve the crisis of overaccumulation and ends up aggravating it in the long run as the transfer of wealth from workers to the TCC further constricts the market. Data from 2010 showed that companies from the United States were sitting on \$1.8 trillion in uninvested cash in that year. Corporate profits have been at near record highs at the same time that corporate investment declined (*The Economist*, 2016). As we progressed into the 21st century massive concentrations of transnational finance capital were destabilizing the system and global capitalism ran up against the limits of financial fixes. The result is ever-greater underlying instability in the global economy.

Militarized Accumulation and Accumulation by Repression

Yet there is another mechanism that has sustained the global economy and that pushes the system towards a global police state: *militarized accumulation*. While it is true that unprecedented global inequalities can only be sustained by ever more repressive and ubiquitous systems of social control and repression, it is equally evident that quite apart from political considerations, the TCC has acquired a vested interest in war, conflict, and repression as a means of accumulation. As war and state-sponsored repression become increasingly privatized, the interests of a broad array of capitalist groups shift the political, social, and ideological climate towards generating and sustaining social conflict – such as in the Middle East – and in expanding systems of warfare, repression, surveillance, and social control. The so-called wars on drugs and terrorism, the undeclared wars on immigrants, refugees, and gangs (and poor, dark-skinned, and working class youth more generally), the construction of border walls, immigrant detention centers, prison-industrial complexes, systems of mass surveillance, and the spread of private security guard and mercenary companies, have all become major sources of profit-making.

A cursory glance at U.S. news headlines in the first few months of the Trump government illustrated this militarized accumulation. The day after Donald Trump's electoral victory, the stock price of Corrections Corporation of America, the largest for-profit immigrant detention and prison company in the United States, soared 40 percent, given Trump's promise to deport millions of immigrants. The stock price of another leading private prison and immigrant detention company, Geo Group, saw its stock prices triple in the first few months of the Trump regime (the company had contributed \$250,000 to Trump's inauguration and was then awarded with a \$110 million contract to build a new immigrant detention center in California; Le, 2017). Military contractors such as Raytheon and Lockheed Martin report spikes each time there is a new flare-up in the Middle East conflict. Within hours of the April 6, 2017 U.S. tomahawk missile bombardment of Syria, the company that builds those missiles, Raytheon, reported an increase in its stock value by \$1 billion. Hundreds of private firms from around the world put in bids to construct Trump's infamous U.S.–Mexico border wall (Robinson, 2017a).

The attacks of September 11, 2001 were a turning point in the construction of a global police state. The U.S. state took advantage of those attacks to militarize the global economy while it and other states around the world passed draconian “anti-terrorist” security legislation and escalated military (“defense”) spending. The Pentagon budget increased 91 percent in real terms between 1998 and 2011, and even apart from special war appropriations, it increased by nearly 50 percent in real terms during this period. In the decade from 2001 to 2011 military industry profits nearly quadrupled. *Worldwide*, total defense outlays (military, intelligence agencies, Homeland Security/Defense) grew by 50 percent from 2006 to 2015, from \$1.4 trillion to \$2.03 trillion (Robinson, 2017a). The “war on terrorism,” with its escalation of military spending and repression alongside social austerity, has collateral political and ideological functions. It legitimates the new transnational social control systems and the creation of the global police state in the name of security. It allows states to criminalize social movements, resistance struggles, and “undesirable” populations.

The circuits of militarized accumulation coercively open up opportunities for capital accumulation worldwide, either on the heels of military force or through states' contracting out to transnational corporate capital the production and execution of social control and warfare. Hence the generation of conflicts and the repression of social movements and vulnerable populations around the world becomes an accumulation strategy independent of any political objectives. This type of permanent global warfare involves both low and high-intensity wars, “humanitarian missions,” “drug interdiction operations,” “anti-crime sweeps,” undocumented immigrant roundups, and so on.

Few developments in recent decades, by way of example, have been so functional to the global capitalist assault on the working and oppressed peoples of the Americas – and so illustrative of accumulation by repression – than the so-called “war on drugs.” This war constitutes the axis around which the vast program of militarized accumulation and capitalist globalization revolves in Mexico, Colombia, Central America, and elsewhere in the Western hemisphere, a multi-pronged instrument of the TCC for primitive accumulation and capitalist globalization that links the transnational military–industrial–security complex with neo-liberal reform and repression of social movements (Gilber, 2011; Hristov, 2014; Paley, 2014). And in the United States, as documented in Michelle Alexander’s (2012) bestseller, *The New Jim Crow*, the farcical war on drugs has been a mechanism for the mass incarceration of surplus African American, Chicano, and poor white labor.

As spin-off effects of military spending flow through the open veins of the global economy – that is, the integrated network structures of the global production, services, and financial system – it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between military and non-military dimensions of a global war economy. In this regard and crucial to the global police state is the development of new technologies associated with digitalization and what is now referred to as the fourth industrial revolution. The tech sector is now at the cutting edge of capitalist globalization and is driving the digitalization of the entire global economy (see, e.g., Srnicek, 2017). Computer and information technology (CIT) first introduced in the 1980s provided the original technological basis for globalization. In recent years there has been another wave of technological development that has brought us to the verge of the fourth industrial revolution, based on robotics, 3-D printing, the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, bio- and nanotechnology, quantum and cloud computing, new forms of energy storage, and autonomous vehicles.

Marx and Engels (1978/1848) famously declared in *The Communist Manifesto* that “all that is solid melts into air” under the dizzying pace of change wrought by capitalism. Now the world economy stands at the brink of another period of massive restructuring. At the heart of this restructuring is the digital economy based on more advanced information technology, on the collection, processing, and analysis of data, and on the application of digitalization to every aspect of global society, including war and repression. CIT has revolutionized warfare and the modalities of state-organized militarized accumulation, including the military application of vast new technologies and the further fusion of private accumulation with state militarization.

The new systems of warfare and repression made possible by more advanced digitalization include AI-powered automated weaponry such as unmanned attack and transportation vehicles, robot soldiers, a new generation of “superdrones,” microwave guns that immobilize, cyber attack and info-warfare, biometric identification, bio weapons, state data mining, and global electronic surveillance that allows for the tracking and control of every movement (see, e.g., Graham, 2010). Militarized accumulation and accumulation by repression – already a centerpiece of global capitalism – may become ever more important as it fuses with new fourth industrial revolution technologies, not just as a means of maintaining control but as expanding outlets for accumulated surplus that stave off economic collapse.

Digitalization makes possible the creation of a global police state. The TCC and state apparatuses at its disposal attempt to resolve both the economic crisis of overaccumulation *and* to manage the political conditions of that crisis, that is, the spread of global revolt and the potential – not yet realized – of that global revolt to overthrow the system. The dual functions of accumulation and social control are played out in the militarization of civil society and the crossover between the military and the civilian application of advanced weapons, tracking, security and surveillance systems (Graham, 2010). The result is permanent low-intensity warfare against communities in rebellion as theaters of conflict spread from active war zones to urban and rural localities around the world.

The restructuring of space facilitated by digitalization is captured by the notion of global green zoning. “Green Zone” refers to the nearly impenetrable area in central Baghdad that U.S. occupation forces established in the wake of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The command center of the occupation and select Iraqi elite inside that green zone were protected from the violence and chaos that engulfed the country. Urban areas around the world are now green zoned through gentrification, gated communities, surveillance systems, and state and private violence. Inside the world’s green zones, elites and privileged middle and professional strata avail themselves of privatized social services, consumption, and entertainment. They can work and communicate through internet and satellite sealed off under the protection of armies of soldiers, police, and private security forces.

Outside of the global green zones, warfare and police containment have become normalized and sanitized for those not directly at the receiving end of armed aggression. “Militainment” – portraying and even glamorizing war and violence as entertaining spectacles through Hollywood films and television police shows, computer gaming and corporate “news” channels – may be the epitome of sadistic capitalism. It desensitizes, bringing about complacency and indifference. In between the green zones and outright warfare are prison-industrial complexes, immigrant and refugee repression and control systems, the criminalization of outcast communities, social cleansing of the poor, and capitalist schooling. The omnipresent media and cultural apparatuses of the corporate economy, in particular, aim to colonize the mind – to undermine the ability to think critically and outside the dominant worldview. A neo-fascist culture emerges through militarism, misogyny, extreme masculinization, and racism. Such a culture generates a climate conducive to mass violence, often directed against the racially oppressed, ethnically persecuted, women, and poor, vulnerable communities.

The rise of the digital economy and the blurring of the boundaries between the military and the civilian sectors appear to fuse three fractions of capital around a combined process of financial speculation and militarized accumulation into which the TCC is unloading billions of dollars in surplus accumulated capital as it hedges its bets on investment opportunities in a global police state (Robinson, 2017b). Financial capital supplies the credit for investment in the tech sector and in the technologies of the global police state. Tech firms develop and provide the new digital technologies that are now of central importance to the global economy. Ever since NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden came forward in 2013 there has been a torrent of revelations on the collusion of the giant tech firms with the U.S. and other governments in the construction of a global police state. And the military-industrial-security complex applies this technology, as it becomes an outlet for unloading surplus and making profit through the control and repression of rebellious populations. This bloc of transnational capital has accrued enormous influence in the halls of power in Washington and other political centers around the world.

Absent a change of course forced on the system by mass mobilization and popular struggle from below, mounting crises will cement the digital economy with the global police state. The new technological revolution promises to increase the ranks of surplus humanity and also impose greater competitive pressures on the TCC, thus heightening its need to impose more oppressive and authoritarian forms of labor discipline on the global working class. The more the global economy comes to depend on militarization and conflict, the greater the drive to war and the higher the stakes for humanity. There is a built-in war drive to the current course of capitalist globalization. Historically, wars have pulled the capitalist system out of crisis while they have also served to deflect attention from political tensions and problems of legitimacy.

The Specter of 21st Century Fascism

Fascism, whether in its classical 20th century form or possible variants of 21st century neo-fascism, is *a particular response to capitalist crisis*. Trumpism in the United States, Brexit in the

United Kingdom, the increasing influence of neo-fascist and authoritarian parties and movements throughout Europe and around the world represent a far-right response to crisis of global capitalism. Twenty-first century fascism shares a number of features with its 20th century predecessor but there are also key differences. Above all, fascism in the 20th century involved the fusion of reactionary political power with *national capital*. It was, in part, the inability of German and Italian national capital to out-compete the national capitals of other European powers in the imperialist conquests of the turn of the 20th century and following the German defeat in World War I that led to a fascist response in the 1930s once the crisis hit full force. In distinction, 21st century fascism involves the fusion of *transnational capital* with reactionary and repressive political power – an expression of the dictatorship of transnational capital. In both cases, however, fascism is a response to deep structural crises of capitalism, such as that of the 1930s and the one that began with the financial meltdown of 2008.

The fascist projects that came to power in the 1930s in Germany, Italy, and Spain, as well as those that vied unsuccessfully to seize power, such as in the United States, had as a fundamental objective the crushing of powerful working class and socialist movements. But in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere, the left and the organized working class are at a historically weak point. In these cases, 21st century fascism appears to be a *preemptive* strike at working classes and at the spread of mass resistance through the expansion of a police state. In addition 21st century fascism is centrally aimed at *coercive exclusion* of surplus humanity. States abandon efforts to secure legitimacy among this surplus population and instead turn to a host of control mechanisms, including criminalizing the poor and the dispossessed, with tendencies towards genocide in some cases. As I have discussed above, the mechanisms of coercive exclusion include mass incarceration and the spread of prison-industrial complexes, pervasive policing, anti-immigrant legislation, and the manipulation of space in new ways so that both gated communities and ghettos are controlled by armies of private security guards and technologically advanced surveillance systems, ubiquitous, often paramilitarized policing, and mobilization of the culture industries and state ideological apparatuses to dehumanize victims of global capitalism as dangerous, depraved, and culturally degenerate.

The dictatorship of transnational capital involves newfound ability to achieve political domination through control over the means of intellectual production, the mass media, the educational system, and the culture industries. There is a much more profound and complete penetration of capital and its logic into the spheres of culture and community, indeed, into the life world itself. Corporate marketing strategies depoliticize through the manipulation of desire and of libido. The danger is that the grievances and frustrated aspirations of the excluded become channeled into petty consumption and flight into fantasy rather than into placing political demands on the system through collective mobilization. The mechanisms of cultural hegemony together with panoptical surveillance and new social control technologies would probably allow 21st century fascist projects to rely more on selective than generalized repression – unless a revolt from below comes to actually threaten the rule of the TCC. Systems of mass incarceration and green zoning may replace the concentration camps of 20th century fascism. The new modalities of social control and ideological domination blur boundaries, so that there may be a constitutional and normalized neo-fascism, with formal representative institutions, a constitution, political parties and elections – all the while the political system is tightly controlled by transnational capital and its representatives and any dissent that actually threatens the system is neutralized if not liquidated.

Twenty-first century fascist projects seek to organize a mass base among historically privileged sectors of the global working class, such as white workers in the Global North and middle layers in the Global South, that are experiencing heightened insecurity and the specter of downward mobility. As with its 20th century predecessor, the project hinges on the psychosocial mechanism

of displacing mass fear and anxiety at a time of acute capitalist crisis towards scapegoated communities, such as immigrant workers, Muslims, and refugees in the United States and Europe. Far-right forces do so through a discursive repertoire of xenophobia, mystifying ideologies that involve race/culture supremacy, an idealized and mythical past, millennialism, and a militaristic and masculinist culture that normalizes, even glamorizes war, social violence and domination.

Classical 20th century fascism in Germany and Italy did offer some material benefits – employment and social wages – to a portion of the working class even as it unleashed genocide on those outside the chosen group. There is now little possibility in the United States or elsewhere of providing such benefits, so that the “wages of fascism” appear to be entirely psychological. In that regard, the ideology of 21st century fascism rests on irrationality – a promise to deliver security and restore stability that is emotive, not rational. It is a project that does not, and need not, distinguish between the truth and the lie (Robinson, 2014, esp. Chapter 5). The Trump regime’s public discourse of populism and nationalism, for example, bore no relation to its actual policies. In its first year, Trumponomics involved deregulation – the virtual smashing of the regulatory state – slashing social spending, dismantling what remained of the welfare state, privatizations, tax breaks to corporations and the rich, and an expansion of state subsidies to capital – in short, neo-liberalism on steroids.

An essential condition for 20th and now for any 21st century fascism is the spread of fascist movements in civil society and their fusion at some point with reactionary political power in the state. Let us recall that civil and political society are a unity; there can be no stable or hegemonic project without a correspondence between the two. In the United States, fascist movements have been rapidly expanding since the turn of the century in civil society and in the political system through the right wing of the Republican Party. Trump proved to be a charismatic figure able to galvanize and embolden disparate neo-fascist forces, from white supremacists, white nationalists, militia, and neo-Nazis and Klans, to the Oath Keepers, the Patriot Movement, Christian fundamentalists, and anti-immigrant vigilante groups. Encouraged by Trump’s imperial bravado, his populist and nationalist rhetoric, and his openly racist discourse, predicated in part on whipping up anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and xenophobic sentiment, they began to cross-pollinate to a degree not seen in decades as they gained a toehold in the Trump White House and in state and local governments around the country (Robinson, 2017c). Paramilitarism spread within many of these organizations and overlapped with state repressive agencies.

It is a mistake to view 21st century fascism as a political development outside of the “normal” progression of global capitalism in this time of acute crisis. Trumpism and other far-right movements did not represent a break with capitalist globalization but rather the recomposition of political forces as the crisis deepened. Despite the rhetoric of nationalism and protectionism, Trumpism and similar movements in Europe and elsewhere were not departures from but incarnations of an emerging dictatorship of the TCC. To paraphrase the great Prussian military strategist, Carl von Clausewitz, who famously said that “war is the extension of politics by other means,” Trumpism, and to varying degrees other far-right movements around the world, is the extension of capitalist globalization by other means, namely by an expanding global police state and a neo-fascist mobilization.

Twenty-first century fascism and the global police state involve a triangulation of far-right, authoritarian, and neo-fascist forces in civil society, reactionary political power in the state, and transnational corporate capital, especially speculative finance capital, the military–industrial–security complex, and the extractive industries, all three of which are in turn dependent on and interwoven with high-tech or digital capital. The extractive and energy complexes must dislodge communities and appropriate their resources, which make them most prone to supporting or even promoting repressive and neo-fascist political arrangements. Capital accumulation in the military–industrial–security complex depends on never-ending wars and on systems of repression. Financial

accumulation requires ever greater austerity that is hard, if not impossible, to impose through consensual mechanisms.

How these three sectors of capital came together in the United States with state and paramilitary forces was abundantly demonstrated in 2016 in a military-style counterinsurgency against indigenous activists and their allies who were peacefully protesting the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline in lands near their Standing Rock Sioux reservation in North Dakota. Bankrolled by a consortium of banks that included Wells Fargo and Bank of America, the private Fortune 500 oil and gas company building the pipeline, Energy Transfer Partners, hired a mercenary and security firm known as TigerSwan, that originated as a Pentagon and State Department contractor for the Middle East wars. TigerSwan was charged with organizing a counter-insurgency campaign against the protesters in coordination with the company and with local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies, including National Guard troops. “Aggressive intelligence preparation of the battlefield and active coordination between intelligence and security elements are now a proven method of defeating pipeline insurgents,” stated TigerSwan, in calling the anti-pipeline protesters “jihadist fighters” and the protest area a “battlefield.” The “less than lethal” arsenal unleashed by the public–private counterinsurgency apparatus included rubber bullets, bean bag pellets, LRAD sound devices, water cannons, attack dogs, predator drones, metadata imaging, counterintelligence, and psyops (Brown et al., 2017: n.p.). While the Standing Rock ordeal is a chilling case study in paramilitarization of the global police state, such operations carried out against social justice movements are now routine around the world.

Twenty-first century fascism cannot be understood as a nation-state project in this age of global capitalism. This is important because much recent discussion on neo-fascism frames it in just such terms, and emphasizes nationalism as an immanent feature of fascism (Paxton, 2004; for discussion, see Chase-Dunn and Skornik, 2017). Yet the current nationalist discourse among far-right groups is entirely political-ideological insofar as the programmatic content of far-right forces such as Trumpism and others seeking to win the state is decidedly not national but global, albeit under the changing conditions of crisis and the breakdown of hegemony. Neo-fascist groups in civil society such as the white nationalists in the United States may promote an inward national program, but these civil society groups by themselves do not amount to fascism as a system. For fascism to emerge, as I have already discussed, these groups must fuse with capital and the state, yet the TCC has no interest in economic nationalism.

Both classical and current discussion on fascism also stresses national military expansionism. It is more analytically and conceptually accurate to talk of a *global police state*. The global order as a unity is increasingly repressive and authoritarian and particular *forms* of exceptional national states or national polities, including 21st century fascism, develop on the basis of particular national and regional histories, social and class forces, political conditions and conjunctures. Yet the militarization of cities, politics, and culture in such countries as the United States and Israel, the spread of neo-fascist movements in North America and Europe, the rise of authoritarian regimes in Turkey, the Philippines, and Honduras, are inseparable from these countries’ entanglement in webs of global wars and the militarized global accumulation, or global war economy. The powers that be in the international system must secure social control and defend the global order in each particular national territory lest the global order itself becomes threatened.

We must not lose sight of the fact that an expanding global police state to suppress dissent and maintain social control is driven by contradictions that are tearing apart global capitalism. If the system were doing well there would be no need for war or global police state. Trumpism and other far-right, authoritarian and neo-fascist responses around the world must be seen as *reactive* to the global revolt of the popular and working classes. In the United States, the repression against Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, the Dakota Access Pipeline water protectors, and other social movements and popular struggles in recent years signals an increasing breakdown of control

and erosion of the ruling group's hegemony. Beyond the United States, a global rebellion against the TCC has been spreading since the financial collapse of 2008. In order to move beyond the multiplicity of fragmented struggles and spontaneity we need more than ever a revitalized Marxist critique of global capitalism and of its crisis.

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Notes

1. Reports of the renewed spread of slave labor around the world are now numerous. For the Brazilian case, see, for example, Lazzeri (2017); on seafood slaves in Asia, see McDowell et al. (2015).
2. Radical Perspectives on the Crisis: a website of dozens of articles on Marxist crisis theory and the contemporary crisis. Available (accessed 18 February 2018) at: <https://sites.google.com/site/radicalperspectivesonthecrisis/finance-crisis>

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