

# Reviews: Reports and books

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**The Amoral Elephant: Globalization and the Struggle for Social Justice in the Twenty-First Century**, *William K. Tabb*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 2001, 210 pp., paperback, Stg£12.95

There is an enduring quality to the analysis in this book. The basic thesis, which runs through the whole book, is that globalisation is not a new phenomenon—at least in its essence—but the new face of capitalist expansion, which has been progressing for many decades, if not centuries. It is the product of economic and political forces that prioritise capital over any other concern, be it labour, social purposes or environmental concerns. This is the “amoral elephant”. It has been around for a long time, but has perhaps been dressed in different clothes, making it harder for those too close to it to recognise its main features. Tabb’s core argument is that we have been there, or here, before, and that we can learn a lot from the lessons of history, in particular, the history of the inter-war years. Such an assertion is not in itself an original one. Many of those who have written extensively

on anti-globalisation in recent years have pointed to the driving forces of multinational corporations and their capacity to undermine democracy. What is refreshing is that this book is written from an American perspective, arguably for an American audience. It is an insightful, bold and lucid account of American domination, but written in an accessible style, which makes it appealing as a general text on the nature of global capitalism.

The book is written from a predominantly economic perspective, focussing on the intertwining mesh of the international financial institutions, multinational corporations and US/EU interests. It builds up a detailed historical analysis of the rise of the international financial institutions (IFIs), their abandonment of the Keynesian model, the adoption of capital liberalisation and the way this has created new dependencies within the developing world. Making extensive use of historical precedents, Tabb constructs an account of the current situation that is both reassuring and disturbing at the same time. It is reassuring in as much as one is able to see how the global system has

been able to reconstruct itself following times of crisis. It is disturbing if one shares his analysis of the current state of global financial overextension and the similarity to the interwar period: "Today, as in the interwar years, financial orthodoxy is blind to the causes of economic crisis. In large part this is because the class interests it defends tend to benefit from the damage that financial overextension and the consequences of overcapacity have on others" (p.140).

My main criticism is that there is an overly excessive amount of analysis of the system, and not enough on the nature of the resistance. The "struggle for social justice in the twenty-first century", his chosen sub-title, is reserved for a few passages on Seattle and a discussion on the future of the UN in the last chapter. Certainly, the book itself is an important tool for would be anti-globalisation movements, since it is full of important (perhaps little known) facts, key anecdotes and connections between political elites and economic policy. More space could have been given to the discussion of the movement, its methods and strategies, as an important way of raising awareness and understanding the nature of resistance. Tabb touches on the various sources of alternative thinking which

could form an alternative constitution to neo-liberalism, such as human rights. His prediction of the nature of a future "revolution" is particularly intriguing: "It may be called socialism. It may simply be the fulfilment of the promises of the world's great religions. It is not hard to think about swapping the rule of gold (those who have the gold make the rules) for the golden rule—do to others as you would have them do unto you" (p.205). Unfortunately, he does not explore such interesting propositions or make any links to the growing global ethics literature in this book.

My other criticism is that the book underplays the security dimension of globalisation. In Chapter 4, examining the imperialism of global finance, Tabb points to the IFIs as the effective replacement of gunboats and missiles—an effective means of remote control to protect domestic assets. But Tabb makes no mention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, particularly into the hands of non-state actors. Such proliferation has been facilitated and accelerated by the blindness of the neo-liberal ideology in recent years. Neither is there any serious consideration of the growth of international criminal networks, with their links to terrorist

organisations—another important face of liberalisation. The realisation of such security threats is perhaps the defining moment in whether capital liberalisation remains a feasible political project.

*Lorna Gold*

**Globalisation for the Common Good**, K. Mofid, London, Shephard Walwyn, 2002, paperback, Stg£12.95

*Globalisation for the Common Good* is a timely and valuable contribution to the debate over how the discipline of economics can be reformed in the 21st century. Unlike many of the other contributions to this debate, this book is not written by a theologian nor a sociologist, but by a professional economist who has experience in teaching and researching economics across the world. The book is written in an accessible and at times, personal manner, intertwining the author's personal Christian faith, his experience as an economics lecturer, with his extensive knowledge of the complex debates that lie behind the separation of ethics, religion and economics as an academic discipline.

The structure of the book follows the suitably religious image of a journey from a wasteland into the promised land. Mofid argues that the world we are living in today can be likened to a wasteland – in which the economic rationale of self-interest has come to dominate all aspects of human life. Like Habermas, and many others before him, Mofid sees this unsolicited intrusion of economic rationality into other aspects of human life as

“colonisation of the life world”.<sup>1</sup> It has led to the creation of a world in which any concept of the fair society has been subsumed within policies geared at maximising the interests of the strongest. Through tracing the history of economics from its roots as a branch of moral philosophy to its current scientific form, Mofid demonstrates the discipline’s moral bankruptcy. The policies of the IMF and the World Bank are a case in point. Underpinning much of this analysis is the view that economics and economists as an academic discipline, have much to answer for. The book, in fact, is also an impassioned plea to the neo-classical economics establishment to reflect on their work – in particular how they teach economics – and to mend the errors of their ways before it is too late: “My plea is for mainstream economics scholars to build these considerations into their analysis and discover how globalisation can benefit all of humanity, so that economics need no longer hang its head in shame, despised as the ‘dismal science’”.<sup>2</sup>

The promised land which Mofid points the way to is a re-engagement between religion and economics. His view is that no matter how far economics has sought to extricate itself from ethical debates, it is inextricably intertwined with

such issues. Religion, he argues, has an important role to play in opening up a new vocabulary and perspective on how economic action could be redirected to more socially and environmentally sustainable forms. His main argument for drawing on religion is the view, shared by writers such as Naomi Klein,<sup>3</sup> that economics itself has become a religion – a theology that attempts to offer redemption and happiness to its believers. Drawing on the works of liberation theology, in particular the work of Ulrich Duchrow,<sup>4</sup> as well as the social teachings of the Catholic Church, he introduces several basic concepts: solidarity, subsidiarity and the common good. Through these concepts, rooted in a different vision of the human person, the teachings of the Church point the way to an economy that emphasises equality, justice and love rather than greed. In the final chapter of the book, he throws open the question of how such a vision could be universalised. His view is that such a universalisation has to come about through inter-religious dialogue, a highly topical proposition. He draws on the writings of John Paul II, in particular, to point to ways in which this dialogue could be facilitated.

Overall, this book is a valuable contribution to the emerging debates over

globalisation and the relevance of religious responses. Like Schumacher,<sup>5</sup> Daly and Cobb<sup>6</sup> amongst others, Mofid pinpoints the central problem of a rationality narrowly defined as self-interest within neo-classical economics and offers an alternative in a religious perspective. Three critical points, however, can be made. Firstly, there is more than a slight hint of anti-American feeling within the book and the suggestion that the United States is somehow responsible for most, if not all, of today's economic ills. Certainly, the US is the country that has most radically endorsed the economic policies challenged in this book, but to blame the country itself is to contradict, in many ways, the core argument of the book. Whilst agreeing with him that the IMF, the World Bank and the Bush administration are perhaps the most blatant examples of the corruption of economics and politics, I would draw the conclusion that they are also symptomatic of the kind of perversion of economics which he is highlighting. The important point in this respect is not naming the enemy, but challenging the discourses, in the Foucauldian sense of "organised bodies of written statements, models and agendas relating to a particular

issue",<sup>7</sup> which have developed within such powerful institutions.

The second critique is that the book presents a vision of the modern economy that is excessively negative. Whilst agreeing with the gist of Mofid's analysis, this over-emphasis on the negative, tends to mask the positive benefits of modernity, which have only been made possible by the current economic system, but from which billions are excluded. Whilst the interests of much of international capitalism may be run on the neo-classical economic principles which he is critiquing, there are many positive forms of economic action co-existing with global capitalism seeking to redistribute those benefits. Some examples are the fair trade movement, social enterprises, co-operatives, non-governmental organisations, credit unions, micro-finance.... Such "emerging socialisms" as Gibson-Graham call them,<sup>8</sup> are striking empirical examples of the partial nature of the current economic rationality. They embody the values of co-operation, sharing, solidarity, love and the common good whilst operating within the market paradigm. Finally, it could be argued that he does not give enough attention to the recent debates within his own discipline to break out of

the instrumental and individualistic rationality, demonstrating the growing discontent amongst mainstream economists over this particular issue. The work of Sugden on the “we-rationality”, in particular, could have merited some discussion.<sup>9</sup>

Whilst recognising the courage of this economist in courageously challenging the assumptions of his own discipline, at the end of the book, one is still left with the question of how such a religious perspective could be re-united to economics as it is today. One cannot expect economists to buy into a religious worldview *because* it makes sense to do so for the future of the planet – and hence, economic sense in the long term. Religious belief is a question of faith. Faith, according to the Christian tradition, is a gift. The ascendancy of moral debates within economics in recent years has opened the way for new engagements, but there is an “impasse” when it comes to relating such debates to meta-ethical systems, such as religious worldviews. If anything, the juxtaposition of a Catholic worldview and neo-classical economics in this book demonstrates just how deep this gulf is.

*Lorna Gold*

## Footnotes

- 1 See Habermas, J., *Legitimation Crisis*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1988
- 2 Mofid, p. 92
- 3 Klein, N., *No Logo*, London, Flamingo, 2000
- 4 See Duchrow, Ulrich, *Alternatives to Capitalism*, Utrecht, International Books and Kairos, 1995
- 5 Schumacher, E., *Small is Beautiful*, London, Abacus, 1973
- 6 Daly, H. E., *Beyond Growth*, Boston, Beacon, 1996 and Daly, H. E. and J.B. Cobb, *For the Common Good*, London, Greyn Print, 1990
- 7 See, for example, Foucault, M., *Power-knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings 1972-1977* edited by C Gordon; translated [from the French] by C. Gordon, Harvester Press, Brighton, 1980. His view is that discourses reflect a specific worldview and a power relationship in which there is a dialectical relationship between economic practice (the economic), embedded within social and cultural values, and the theory (Economics), couched in scientific reasoning (see Escobar, 1995).
- 8 Gibson-Graham, J. K. (1996) *The End of Capitalism as We Knew It*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996
- 9 Sugden, R., “Thinking as a team”, *Social Philosophy and Policy Foundation* 10, 1993, pp.69-89. Others who have proposed a “we-rationality” include S. Hurley, (1989) *Natural Reasons*, Oxford, 1989 and M. Glibert, *On Social Facts*, London, 1989. There is also a kind of we-rationality within the works of A. Sen such as *Ethics and Economics*, London, Blackwell, 1987 cited in Kamran Mofid’s text. M. Backarach, moreover, has developed ideas of *team-thinking*. See, for example, his contribution to *Incorporating Game Theory into the Theory of Action*, forthcoming, Oxford University Press.

**Losing Control: Global Security in the Twenty-first Century**, Paul Rogers, Pluto Press, London, 2002, pp. 184, npg

In *Losing Control: Global Security in the Twenty-first Century*, Paul Rogers analyses current trends in international conflict, focusing on the linkages between socio-economic divisions, environmental constraints, arms proliferation, and international insecurity. The first edition of this book was published just a few months before the 11 September attacks, which makes his critical analysis of global security even more insightful. The second edition includes a final chapter specifically addressing the implications of these events.

Many of the arguments that Rogers puts forward, particularly on the direct causal relationship between the widening of the economic and social injustices that are the basis of the liberal market system and the unsustainability of the current levels of human development and economic growth, have often been argued by social activists. Their relevancy is not so much what is said but who says it, in this case a renowned expert on international security.

The first four chapters of the book provide a clear and detailed analysis of the legacy of the Cold War's proliferation

of weapons of mass destruction, and its impact on today's global insecurity, particularly because of the ready availability of ballistic missiles and biological and chemical weapons. The last three chapters of the book examine what he calls the drivers of the current international insecurity and the determinants of the evolution of conflict in the 21st century. Rogers argues that the two fundamental issues will be the widening gap between rich and poor, and the environment. Overriding these two is the proliferation of military technologies all over the world.

Rogers is highly critical of the current security paradigm, essentially one of an elite global community of around one billion people, mainly but not only located in western states, maintaining control of a global system that works continually to their advantage. He argues convincingly that attempts to maintain this unjust world order in the interest of that minority elite are unsustainable and will, instead, increase the risk of instability and conflict. For this he uses examples from both North and South, from Northern Ireland, and Algeria to Palestine and Japan. His analysis was eerily accurate, as the 11 September attacks and the bomb attack in Bali have demonstrated.

His answer to the current state of global insecurity is a radical rethinking of western perceptions of security, a paradigm shift that addresses the core issues of global insecurity, the growing rich-poor divide, the increasing problem of environmental constraints on human development and the wide availability of modern armaments.

In the aftermath of the 11 September attacks and the Bali bomb, international security has become the number one priority of Western states. As Rogers predicted, rather than rethinking global security by focusing on the root causes of the current global insecurity, the elite states have embarked on a "massive and violent reaction against any group anywhere in the Middle East that were thought to have had even the slightest connection with the attack". Rogers reminds us of what is to come if the elites insist on maintaining global security by blindly imposing the current security paradigm on the rest of the world. If anything it will make Western societies more vulnerable and continue to exacerbate the rich-poor divide and deplete the scarce natural resources available.

Rogers' timely book will no doubt help focus the debate on global security on the real security issues of the twenty-first century: poverty and environmental constraints.

*Emiliana Tapia*

**Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security,** Mark Duffield, Zen Books, 2001

This book explores the growing merger of development and security and the challenges, complexities and dilemmas this throws up. It is a critical reflection on the incorporation of conflict which up until the 1990s was treated as a separate discipline in security studies, into development discourse and practice. A central thesis running through the book is that development and security reinforce each other, as Duffield states clearly in his opening chapter: "Development is ultimately impossible without stability and, at the same time, security is not sustainable without development". He suggests that this shift in aid policy and development towards conflict resolution and societal reconstruction has profound political and structural implications as it embodies the increasing interaction between military and security actors, and civilian and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This increasing convergence of the UN, NGOs, military establishments, private security companies and governments is, Duffield suggests, part of an



emerging system of global liberal governance, or what he terms throughout the book as “strategic complexes”.

Duffield sets the complexities of today’s conflicts or new wars within the context of a world increasingly characterised by the decreasing competence of the nation state as a result of market liberalisation and deregulation. He also takes the view that globalisation rather than enhancing the interconnectedness of the world is exacerbating the divides that exist by consolidating and strengthening the ties between certain countries at the expense of others.

He examines the effects of the breakdown of order, of intra-state conflict and the characteristics of what Mary Kaldor<sup>1</sup> has termed the new wars which are primarily intra-state rather than inter-state conflicts. Using network theory as one of his frameworks, he looks at the transnational networks and systems that characterise, and oftentimes sustain, many of today’s wars from the commercial complicity of TNCs (transnational corporations) with war economies, illicit money flows, private security companies, the growth in shadow economies, terrorist networks, and aid. Invoking the seminal work of Mary Anderson’s *Do No Harm*<sup>2</sup>,

which has been very influential in shaping aid policy in the 1990s through its assessment of aid’s contribution to conflict, he critically examines trends in aid policy in unstable situations set against the above characteristics of modern conflict and war.

Duffield’s assessment and analysis of how humanitarian intervention operates within such situations of instability and violence is at times controversial, but definitely important reading for organisations grappling with aid and development within conflict situations. Examining aid and development policy from the end of the Cold War, Duffield charts a paradigm shift from a needs oriented relief and humanitarian assistance, towards a more transformational role of aid within war affected societies, addressing social processes and seeking to strengthen the balance of power between groups in the interests of peace and security. What he terms “rights based humanitarianism” has not had all positive effects, and he is not slow to highlight the failings of aid in complex conflict situations. His case study on the Sudan which spans two chapters of the book, draws out his own experiences in the country as Oxfam Country Representative during the later half of

the 1980s highlighting many of the failings of the international aid community there and drawing out useful policy and implementation recommendations.

While at times densely written and heavy going, and debatably trying to cover too many complex issues within one cover, this book explores a range of challenges relating to the contemporary nature of war and the dilemmas these pose for development and aid policy. Exploring and addressing issues such as underdevelopment as a source of conflict and insecurity, this book is very timely, and indeed, being published in 2001, is frighteningly prophetic of the events that took place on 11 September. It is a challenging and thought-provoking read for anyone involved in development, both in the non-governmental and official sectors. His questioning around underdevelopment and the exclusion and destabilisation of many developing countries from the global agenda might indeed provide vital reading for government security advisors, many of whom seem to find it hard to move beyond the policies of *realpolitik* in addressing today's conflicts and the myriad consequences of underdevelopment.

*Sarah McCan*

## Footnotes

- 1 Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999
- 2 Mary, B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: Supporting Local capacities for Peace through Aid*, Cambridge, The Collaborative for Development Action, 1996

### **Local Rule : Decentralisation and Human Rights**

International Council on Human Rights Policy, Geneva, 2002, pp.42, npg

This is a snappy introduction to some of the links between decentralisation, local government and human rights. It assumes little or no prior knowledge of the rudiments of human rights law or of the dynamics of decentralisation. It begins by setting out the basic parameters of the latter, exploring its various shades and motivations. For example, the book refers to three types of decentralisation: *political*, *administrative* and *fiscal* and argues that decentralisation is not always “a planned and rational process” but that in some instances (as with the ex-Soviet Union), it can occur by default or be essentially *de facto* in nature. The book proceeds to a similarly brief introduction to core aspects of the human rights ethos. The approach is a balanced one which does not seek to romanticise the merit of all that is local, nor all that is rooted in the human rights agenda.

The book seeks to draw attention to the potential for the study of human rights in the context of decentralisation and vice versa. It suggests that the flowering of the human rights ethos in western society

ran parallel to the evolution of decentralisation as a way of governance. In this context, it is considered remarkable that relatively few researchers have seen fit to treat this relationship to any significant level of academic scrutiny. This publication seeks to prompt an initiation of this investigative process.

The book however only provides a basic introduction to the dynamics of this symbiotic relationship and does not attempt to carry out any kind of in-depth analysis of the many interesting issues raised. For example: Does local government amount to a democratic right? Under what circumstances might decentralisation carry too many negative implications for the protection of human rights? Where decentralisation represents the mere first step to secession and dismemberment of the state, the minority may conceivably look forward to an enhancement of their rights. On the other hand in the case of the majority, certain of these rights are potentially heavily compromised. What balance is then to be struck in the calibration of different rights reflecting the varying opinions and priorities of central and local governments? To what effect?

Many of these questions can be answered if one takes into

account the composition and context of national government. In the immediate post-Cold War era, decentralisation was a plausible means of enabling states of diverse ethnic populations to survive. The question now is how far this facilitated the subsequent revival of radical nationalism with its attendant consequences for the protection of the human rights of the majority? Such questions are not really considered in any depth in this book.

The human rights approach has the potential to invigorate local capacity and participation in government by lending an added sense of legitimacy to it. The book argues that "the best planned decentralisation processes widen and deepen democracy". Conversely, decentralisation may just as easily give rise to the disproportionate empowerment of a local elite in certain circumstances. Accepting different varieties of decentralisation exist, it follows that different levels and shades of accountability also exist - each with their attendant consequences for rights protection. Divergent views as to the importance to be attached to the various rights, might lead to myriad calibrations and uneven standards of protection afforded in respect of each right.

Thus the relationship between decentralisation and human rights is portrayed as a fascinatingly complex one. The book provides a very digestible panoramic introduction to the subject and will surely prompt anyone with more than a passing interest in human rights to channel some energy into this very important area of enquiry for the NGO community.

*Noelle Fitzpatrick*