Introduction

Jerry Harris
Editor

The Global Studies Association of North America (GSA) was established in 2001, alongside its sister organization in the United Kingdom. Each year the GSA brings together scholars and activists from the United States, Canada, and Mexico to discuss and debate the many diverse aspects of globalization. As a multidisciplinary association, we promote the rich contributions of all disciplines that touch upon the economic, political, social, and cultural integration of our world (http://net4dem.org/mayglobal).

In 2008, our conference was held in New York City at Pace University, under the theme “The Nation in the Global Era: Conflict and Transition.” Chapters in this book are contributions from the NYC conference and mainly address the complex and changing role of the nation-state as it confronts globalization. Some of the major topics explored are the relationship between class and state under the impact of globalization; how states and nations in the South are affected by globalization; and the development of national identity within the context of global relationships.

Section I, “Transnational Class Structure and the State,” explores an important new field of study: the composition of the capitalist class and working class within the global economy. The lead essay by William Tabb challenges the conception of a transnational capitalist class (TCC), presenting a historic view of the development of the world capitalist system and class formation within the nation state. Tabb confronts the arguments of TCC theorists William Robinson and Jerry Harris, maintaining the importance of the nation-state even as he recognizes the expansion of the transnational economy. Next is an exploration by Jerry Harris of the rapidly developing power of what he terms “statist globalization” in China, Russia, and the Gulf States. Harris shows that control of the state economy is an avenue for the development of a state-based TCC as distinguished from the free market methods found in the United States and Europe. The next chapter, by Georgina Murray, “Australia Has a Transnational Capitalist Class?” is a detailed examination of national
and transnational capital as well as the social and political links among Australia’s capitalist class. This chapter is followed by a study of El Salvador by Cori Madrid. As with Murray, Madrid’s essay is driven by a detailed examination of a specific national economic structure, relating her research to an analysis of the local TCC contingent.

The last two chapters in this section turn their attention to questions of transnational labor. In his essay, titled “The Migration-Development Model Can Serve Two Masters: The Transnational Capitalist Class and National Development,” Rubin Patterson addresses migration and its relationship to national economic development. Patterson frames his investigation by examining both world-systems and TCC theory as applied to labor migration from India, South Korea, China, and Taiwan. While showing that migration-development strategy can advance national development, he argues that it “can also reinforce the entrenched dominance of the transnational capitalist class throughout the world.” Lastly, Jason Struna offers a highly original analysis of the global working class. Struna marks out spatial relationships between transnational capital and labor based on workers’ physical mobility relative to nation-states. His method is to identify labor strata by whether or not workers move to the point of production or remain territorially fixed to production sites; and if products move across borders to workers or remain nationally fixed.

Section II on the “Political Economy of Globalization” begins with Kwang-kun Lee’s overview of world-system theory. Lee makes a critical assessment of Immanuel Wallerstein’s division of the world into core, semi-periphery and periphery countries, suggesting that neoliberalism has eliminated the semi-periphery from the capitalist world economy. The next several chapters are examinations of specific countries and their relationship to patterns of global accumulation. In the chapter by Ismael Hosseinzadeh, he makes the controversial argument that the US occupation of Iraq was not motivated by the oil economy, but rather by the needs of the military/industrial complex. Greg Nowell further investigates the political economy of the United States in his detailed study of Wal-Mart. Nowell uses Rudolf Hilferding’s classic work, Finance Capital, as a historic analysis of imperialism in contrast to Wal-Mart’s business model, which the author presents as a representative of contemporary capitalism. The last four chapters in this section turn our attention to the role of the South in the global economy. Magda von der Heydt-Coca takes us into Bolivia’s indigenous rebellion against neoliberalism, its devastation of the economy and the election of indigenous leader Evo Morales as president. The next chapter by Lorena Ruiz García explores economic developments in Mexico. But instead of looking at large transnational corporations, Ruiz prefers to study small and mid-size enterprises and their ability to operate in the global