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Envisioning Alternatives to Capitalism: On Recent Debates from the Great Recession to the Global Pandemic

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Abstract

Amidst historic crises with deep socioeconomic and political consequences in the first two decades of the 21st century, there has been a renewed interest in the critique of and alternatives to capitalism. Particularly between the Great Recession and the Global Pandemic, there has been an increasing number of publications on this topic. This article provides a critical review of five recently published books by some of the leading publishers in the world. On the basis of this critical overview, I argue that the analysis of class dynamics should be integrated rigorously into the discussion on alternatives to capitalism not only at the level of economic relations but also the state and international relations. This is indeed essential for the theoretical efficacy and strategic pertinence of any transformative project that seeks to go beyond capitalism.

Keywords

Alternatives to capitalism; post-capitalism; critique of capitalism
The 21st century has been a century of historic crises with deep socioeconomic and political consequences. Before the end of its first decade, the world was hit by the 2007-2009 Great Recession, the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, followed by the European Sovereign Debt Crisis. While the ecological crisis with its colossal levels of human and environmental devastations continues to break every historical record, we entered into the second decade of the century with a global pandemic, the worst since the 1918-1920 Spanish Flu. The new century has also seen some of the longest, deadliest, and most widespread wars since the Second World War. These crises have also underpinned the emergence of morbid backlashes in the form of far-right movements and authoritarianism (Tooze 2018). A glance at the rise of far-right political parties and populist politicians around the world is enough to see that democratic backsliding and xenophobic, racist, sexist, and elitist politics are threatening not only unconsolidated and fragile democracies but also those political regimes that were considered as the most stable of liberal democracies.

As alarming as these developments are, they certainly cannot be identified as temporary anomalies in the long history of capitalism seen from a global perspective. Capitalist development since its inception in the 16th century has always been riddled with systematic exploitation, economic recessions, colonial oppression, genocidal wars, and ecological devastation, all the while generating the most massive expansion of productive capacity and monetary wealth in human history. Nevertheless, the scale of its crises and the extension of its consequences into the core capitalist countries particularly after the Great Recession have led to a renewed interest in the critique of capitalism and alternative socioeconomic models. Critical discussion on contemporary capitalism is no longer confined to the radical left (e.g. Deaton and Case 2021; Milanovic 2019; Block 2018; Pope Francis 2015; Piketty 2014; Calhoun et al. 2013). It has now found considerable traction among a much wider audience both within and outside academia.

This article offers a critical overview of five books on the topic published between the Great Recession and the Global Pandemic by some of the leading publishers in the world. These titles are a small fraction of this burgeoning literature. However, they have been selected to give a sense of the diversity of the debate while highlighting a general failure to incorporate class analysis into their critique of capitalism and visions of alternative. I argue that the analysis of class dynamics should be integrated into the discussion at the level of not only economic relations but also the state and international relations. This is indeed essential for the theoretical efficacy and strategic pertinence of the analysis.

The ambitious title of Giacomo Corneo’s book promises a broad examination of alternative socioeconomic models to capitalism. His general approach to the question of the obsoleteness of capitalism is predicated upon finding an alternative system that is “superior” to capitalism. He surveys the ideal type of the major socioeconomic alternatives to capitalism including strictly egalitarian communism, anarcho-communism with associational ownership of luxury goods, democratic centralized state-planning, self-management system, and market socialism. As the book approaches the end, the discussion goes into some variations and progressive policies within capitalism.

Underneath Corneo’s seemingly normative disposition to find a more humane, just, and efficient system than what exists under capitalism, there are essentially two economic criteria,
the "cooperation" and "allocation" tests, both rooted in a liberal conception of capitalism. Accordingly, capitalism is seen as a transhistorical system of private property ownership in a competitive market economy that governs the relationship between analytically isolated and rational individuals in the economic sphere. The cooperation test examines the abled individuals’ preparedness to “participate actively in the production process” (p. 33) at the best of their skills and to consume according to the available resources. The allocation test looks at the efficient deployment of available economic resources. These are not simply neutral considerations but are derived from the particular characteristics of capitalism with its extended market imperatives to ensure that all who can work do so “actively” – note that it does not say “freely” – in the production process for wages. This already puts a cap on the scope of their consumption, and with its competitive market coordination, to ensure the efficient use of resources – in which the author includes human talent, labour power, and nature.

There can surely be other tests to examine both the desirability and feasibility of different socioeconomic systems. But Corneo’s choice of these two criteria that presuppose capitalist social relation, already implicitly holds the structure and conclusion of the book in its basic setup. The rest of the book is a slow and predictable exercise in showing the failure of alternative models to pass these two distinctly capitalistic tests as brilliantly as capitalism. It is not just his evaluation criteria that are skewed towards capitalism. Corneo’s individuals are depicted as isolated, self-interested, and rational economic agents without a sense of communal belonging or civic duty so much so that he has to resort to a superfluous analysis using game theory (which also shares similar presuppositions at its core) in order to make sense of any collaboration between various social aggregates such as families or communities. His conception also distorts the historical reality of technological transformation by assuming that they emerged naturally out of expanding division of labour within a competitive market, “due to the assertiveness of individual entrepreneurs” (p. 117).

Corneo begins the book with a visit to ancient Greece to discuss Plato’s idea of Philosopher King as the ideal governing structure of an otherwise capitalist economy. Such an imposition of capitalism onto ancient Greece is only intelligible within a transhistorical conception of capitalism. Through his critique of Plato’s model, he agrees for the apparent compatibility of (a limited form of) democracy and capitalism. Corneo then commences his journey through what he considers to be the ideal type of various alternative models from the most different to the most similar to the ideal type of capitalism. It is outside the scope of this article to examine his critique of each of these models in detail. However, in each case, he shows how the alternative models fail one or both of the two tests or at least does not perform as well as capitalism. Unsurprisingly, the closer he gets to models that share the basic characteristics of capitalism, the more he feels at ease about the defensibility of the model. Conversely, the quality of his critique increases, or at least becomes less circular, as the book progresses in its consideration of models that are more compatible with his biased measuring rod, for example in schemes such as Universal Basic Income and Basic Capital schemes. At the end of this arduous journey, he reaches an underwhelming vision for a pluralist market economy in conjunction with a generous welfare state, with some room for more progressive policies such as an international coordination of tax policies and limited buy-out nationalization, as the best corrective to the existing system.

This brief critical overview of Corneo’s book highlights the indispensability of a substantive critique of capitalism for the discussion on alternatives. It would be a circular
exercise to assess different socioeconomic arrangements according to a set of essentially capitalistic parameters. Furthermore, it is crucial to expand the scope of our analysis beyond the economic considerations to incorporate the social, political, and ecological aspects.

Having a substantive critique of capitalism does not however guarantee that the analysis can illuminate a radical path beyond capitalism. Azmanova’s recent book stands as a bizarre example of what can be metaphorically called a sheep in wolf’s clothing. The book builds on an elaborate critique of capitalism both abstractly and historically only to reach conservative conclusions about the transformative horizon and strategic orientation to go beyond capitalism. Her general approach to capitalism is commendable for taking capitalism as a historically constituted and dynamic social relation, rather than as a transhistorical economic configuration as in Corneo’s account. However, underneath her extensive and intriguing elaborations, I find a consorted effort to distance the critique of capitalism and consideration of alternatives from class analysis and politics. Furthermore, her analysis remains explicitly Western-centric (or even more restrictively focused on Western Europe and the United States). This not only distorts the dynamics between Western and non-Western countries that are essential for deciphering the thoroughly global nature of contemporary capitalism but also deprives non-Western countries of the agency to contribute to or resist the imagined process of overcoming capitalism.

The core premise of the book is that the contemporary form of capitalism, which Azmanova calls “precarity capitalism”, has made it possible to subversively overcome it independently of “a deliberate and politically articulated endorsement of socialism or any other vision of good society as an alternative to capitalism” (p. xii) or of “a grand crisis” (p. 2). To support this bold claim, she presents an analysis comprised of theoretical, historical, and policy dimensions.

In her theoretical framework, capitalism is conceived along systemic, structural, and legitimation dimensions. The systemic dynamics are comprised of two aspects: the “competitive pursuit of profit” as the constitutive logic of capitalism and the “primitive appropriation” as the enabling condition of capitalism. The structural dimension is broadly associated with a wide range of institutional structures, including the form of ownership, labour relations, the church, and patriarchy, through which the systemic dynamics are enacted. The legitimation dimension, which includes individual ethos, legitimation deal, and legitimation matrix, regulates the relation between individuals, society, and the state in order to ground the social order within the existing social relation with regards to the correlation between risks and opportunity as well as the normative distribution of life-chances.

The interaction between the two aspects of systemic dimension (i.e. the constitutive logic and the enabling condition) as well as between the systemic and structural dimensions are left unexplored. However, these analytical separations enable her to progressively marginalize and effectively discard the whole idea of class politics from the analysis, leaving a sense that a capitalist society in which the means of production are truly democratized is even conceivable.

Azmanova tries to undermine the centrality of the structural aspects of capitalism by arguing that if a society, like China for example, abolished private property of the means of production and market mechanisms, it would not necessarily mean that it ceases to be a capitalist country as it relates to global capitalist economy. However, this claim misidentifies the issue. It ignores the fact that the abolition of private ownership or market coordination does not necessarily imply the abolition of wage relation, which for a theorist like Karl Marx is
indispensable to the abolition of capitalist social relation. But such recognition would bring us right back to class struggle as ultimately integral to the operative logic of capitalism. But class struggle is effectively neglected in Azmanova’s account. Furthermore, the question becomes even more complicated when discussing the contradictory dynamics of non-capitalist entities with the larger capitalist market pressures. This is indeed similar to the dilemma that workers’ cooperatives face in relation to the capitalist market imperatives within which they operate.

As part of her historical account, Azmanova argues that capitalism underwent a transformation in the 1990s, as the process of globalization under intense deregulation undermined neoliberalism’s legitimation dynamics, and morphed into precarity capitalism, i.e., “the universalization of insecurity, which is now affecting the majority of the population, almost irrespective of employment type and income level” (p. 2). This emerged due to decreasing ability of capitalism to create jobs in the national economy, increasing flexibility of the job market, and the reduction of the social safety net. It has also changed the role of the state in actively contributing to the redistribution of resources to the winners of globalization and justifying it by referring to “the national economy’s global competitiveness” (p. 119). She argues that the latest modality of capitalism effectively replaced the old left-right divide and reoriented sociopolitical forces along a risk-opportunity pole with diametrically opposing approaches to cultural and economic concerns.

Therefore, the main logic of stratification in contemporary capitalism has become the “uneven distribution of society’s decommodification capacity and pressures” (p. 148). For Azmanova, the central antimony now revolves primarily around the access and ability to exit the labour market which in turn determines the risk of globalization to “translate as an opportunity for increased wealth and autonomy (for control of one’s life trajectory) or hazard” (p. 150). It is in this generalized precarity that she sees transformative possibilities for broad cross-class alliances that can fundamentally undermine the operative logic of capitalism (in liberal democracies). Azmanova further argues that despite such possibilities, the sociopolitical resistance during the decade following the Great Recession has misplaced the central issue of the time and instead focused on structural or relational rather than systemic forms of domination.

While remaining skeptical of the distinction between neoliberalism and precarity capitalism beyond some ideological adjustments, I agree with her that the struggles around the gross levels of income inequality are not (at least on their own) transformative and can in fact contribute to the stabilization (if not deepening) of the system. It is also true that much of the progressive agenda inside and outside academia has been taken by such limited reform projects that often go as far as certain tax reform proposals. Nevertheless, it seems to me that her historical interpretation is used to further marginalize the relevance of the structural dimension of capitalism and class politics from the analysis. The pursuit of profit in precarity capitalism is presented as having created a condition that impacts a vast majority of people (in liberal democracies) regardless of the structural dimension or class dynamics, hence exposing the operative logic of capitalism most vividly. Primitive appropriation, the one place in her theoretical framework where class appears in the systemic dimension, is absent from the historical account. Therefore, we are left with a strategic horizon where class politics plays no role in charting the territory of transformative projects.

The consequence of this is reflected vividly in Azmanova’s strategic analysis. The outline of her practical suggestions goes even further and abandons politics altogether as its sees (relatively modest) policy adjustments on the basis of a broad cross-ideological consensus as
sufficient to abort the operative logic of precarity capitalism. In what is called “political economy of trust”, she advocates for transferring the task of “allocating productive inputs and social surplus” not to the market but public authority while preserving private ownership of the means of production and market mechanism of exchange (p.180). At the domestic level, such a project implies the implementation of a universal minimum employment platform, a universal basic income, and robust citizen-based (rather than employment-based) social provisioning. It is unclear to me why these would necessarily lead to a decommodification of labour since it is conceivable, as Corneo also argues though positively, that such policies could act as a conveyor belt for those in hyper-exploited and precarious positions to have the means to work towards higher-paid wage work in more stable employment conditions. This is not to say such policies cannot be important progressive tactics in the long process of building the capacity to transform the system. However, contrary to what she claims, they are not radically subversive on their own.

At the global level, Azmanova calls on the European Union and the United States to rewrite the rules of globalization to ensure high standards of employment, consumer protection, and environmental sustainability. This not only ignores the political process necessary to transform these capitalist states to engage with such policy measures at all but also fails to show how they would hinder the constitutive dynamics of global capitalism. Furthermore, the disregard for the structural dimension and class politics conceals national and international dynamics of global capitalism in her analysis. It also leaves the vast majority of the world as neither part of the explanation nor the solution, but the passive recipient of the transformative possibility in the United States and Western Europe.

Christoph Hermann bases his critique of capitalism and alternative vision on the central notion of commodification process. This has the advantage of avoiding Azmanova’s analytical distinction between the systemic and structural dimensions of capitalism. However, it essentially confines itself to the very early conceptual steps in Marx’s Capital, and marginalizes the centrality of class relations and class politics in the critique of capitalism.

Marx conceives of capitalism at the most abstract level as a generalized form of commodity production under capital/labour wage relation. Accordingly, he sees the commodity form as the appropriate point of entry into the critique of capitalism since it is where the distillation of the main contradictions of capitalism is found in their most abstract form. Initially, the commodity form is taken to stand as the contradictory unity of use-value and exchange-value. Marx then goes on to examine the exploitive nature of this cellular form that is but the abstract reflection of the capitalist class relation. Hermann’s conceptual framework, however, stays at the most basic level of a crude (and undialectical) antagonism between use-value and exchange-value, with the former being subjugated by the latter under capitalism (pp. x-xi).

His main argument is that commodification is an undesirable and possibly harmful process that excludes those who cannot pay, promotes profit-based rather than socially based production, and results in an unequal distribution of social production. His approach, which is based on moral, pragmatic, and material critique of commodification, ultimately calls for a “use-value society” based fundamentally on democratization, sustainability, and solidarity.

His theoretical ambivalence towards class relation as an essential part of the notion of commodification enables him to single out the ecological above the social, political, and systemic factors as the ultimate limit to the commodification process. Therefore, climate solidarity is presented as a more inclusive concept than working-class solidarity to form the basis
of such transformative politics. Somewhat paradoxically, this also allows him to conceive of a
generalized decommodification project as a theoretically (rather than strategically) cross-class
project, even though decommodification for him necessarily involves a shift towards self-
management enterprises and the introduction of democratic planning, both of which are
inseparable from class politics. In other words, while class politics asserts itself in different parts
of the analysis, it never takes the spotlight either in the theoretical or the strategic aspects. The
practical consequence of this is reflected in his disregard for the question of the transformation of
the political sphere, including the state. Instead, he argues that the transition to the “use-value
society” is feasible through the piecemeal expansion of “islands of use value in the sea of profit
maximization” (p. 157) that can include measures such as establishing cooperatives, local
markets, non-for-profile organizations, etc. to pave the way for systemic changes.

Nonetheless, Hermann’s emphasis on the democratic, sustainable, and solidaristic
maximization of use-value shields the analysis from the pitfalls of technological utopianism
(sometimes referred to as “accelerationism”) found in a popular segment of the literature on
alternatives as exemplified in the writings of Jeremy Rifkin (2014), Paul Mason (2015), and
Aaron Bastani (2019). Hermann argues that the “use-value society” does not depend on
technological fixes but on the prioritization of social needs through the development and
deployment of human beings in their full capacities to engage freely and creatively in the
productive process. It also lays the groundwork for his critique of the literature on degrowth. He
argues that rather than economic downsizing, transformative projects should focus on qualitative
changes to our modes of living as integral to the possibility of a “use-value society”.

There have been a growing number of publications on degrowth amidst the ravaging
effects of climate change and continued failure of governments to make meaningful
environmental commitments. In reexamining the basic parameters of a sustainable society,
degrowth is generally a call for an equitable and democratically led reduction of the material and
energy that are extracted, used, and disposed of. It seeks to undermine the assumption that
societal prosperity requires economic growth. There has been an increasing critical engagement
towards capitalism within the degrowth movement in the last few years, of which Tim Jackson’s
book stands as an example that explicitly grapples with the question of alternatives to capitalism.

The general approach of degrowthers differs from eco-socialists in their rather
historically transcendental rejection of growth (though while preserving some room for short-
term selective growth if proven necessary), regardless of the particular social relation within
which it operates. It should hence not come as a surprise to see, for example, the frequent
references to the law of entropy as a physical limit to perpetual growth in this literature. The
notion of growth in degrowth literature approaches the role that the notion of class struggle plays
in historical materialism: as an instrument of historical investigation into the pre-capitalist
societies, as a prism to critique capitalism with its essential affinity to growth, and as a goal to
overcome in a post-capitalist future. However, unlike class struggle, growth is not a relational
concept internal to historically specific forms of society but an ideological construct that may be
used to legitimize particular modalities of accumulation and distribution whose outcome is again
realized as growth. The shift from class politics to growth creates the tendency in the degrowth
literature to alter the focus from democratization of work, which would not necessarily imply
degrowth understood meta-historically, to emancipation from work. But degrowthers cannot rely
on an expanded productive capacity towards full automation as accelerationists would since it
would imply growth. Instead, degrowth politics gets centered largely on the critique of the
ideology of growth and the fundamental reconsideration of needs. It is in this corner, far from the powerhouses of capital in the economy and the state, that the emancipatory project of degrowth movement often resides. The reflections of much of these characteristics and shortcomings can be found in Jackson’s book both in his critique of capitalism and strategy to transition into a post-growth future.

Jackson sees the ideology of growth as preceding capitalism yet having acquired an essential affinity under capitalism. He argues that the pursuit of social progress, which he takes as capitalism’s most significant claim to legitimacy, is inseparably linked to economic growth. But growth, he claims, not only has become empirically untenable due to the decline of long-term productivity in the last half a century but also is theoretically unattainable in the long term due to “thermodynamics impossibility”. Such realization, he believes, fundamentally undermines capitalism’s source of legitimacy and the long-term possibility of its promised social progress. However, he seeks to show that the end of growth does not need to imply the end of social progress. This requires a project of myth-making in our pursuit of alternatives to counter capitalism’s “myth of growth”. Therefore, just as described above, Jackson’s account gradually shifts from a (rather crude) political economy of capitalist growth to a normative project of ideological reconstruction. He also focuses on the discussion of emancipation from labour rather than the democratization of the economic relations. This is done by building on Hannah Arendt’s distinction between labour and work as well as South American notion of *buen vivir* (good life), thereby shifting the focus from politics to ontology.

Erik Olin Wright has produced some of the most coherent and influential publications in the debate on alternatives to capitalism. In his book published amidst the Great Recession, Wright offers the outlines of his critique of capitalism and an extensive discussion of the alternatives to capitalism and possible pathways to get there. The critical engagement with this widely reviewed book seeks to highlight the importance of incorporating class analysis not just in the general outline of the critique of capitalism but also in the substantive and strategic analysis of alternatives to capitalism.

Wright defines the notion of real utopia as “the utopian ideals that are grounded in the real potential of humanity […] utopian designs of institutions that can inform our practical tasks of navigating a world of imperfect conditions for social change” (p. 4). To give this investigation a directionality towards an emancipatory alternative, Wright introduces a notion of “socialist compass”. This rests on his understanding of “socialism” which he defines as “a process of increasing social empowerment over state and economy” (p. 6).

Wright lays out a combinatorial scheme that shows possible pathways shaping the nature of the economy with respect to the allocation of resources and control of production/distribution (see pp. 96-105) through different combinations of three fundamental spheres of power in society: social power, economic power, and state power. If the goal is to institute democratic socialism, then the pathway should enable the subordination of both economic power and state power to social power. Wright argues that the success of such a transformative project depends on a vibrant civil society, institutional mechanisms to channel social mobilization, and the capacity to counter likely reactions to such projects. He then provides a critical overview of a number of real utopian projects aiming towards social empowerment that has been tried in different countries.
Wright defines socialism not as the final destination in a classless society but a transformative process out of capitalism. However, the class character of such a process does not explicitly appear in the definition. This begs the question of whether the process of socialization necessarily implies socialism. I argue that socialism is, in its essentially democratic sense, a project for a radical expansion of social power through the process of socialization. However, the latter is not necessarily a socialist project since the specific balance of class forces involved in such a process would determine its political nature.

Following Wright’s own argument that any mode of production including capitalism is a hybrid composition that involves the non-hegemonic presence of other modes of production within it, the class composition of the “social” involves classes beyond the principal classes of that mode of production, not to mention the dynamics of various class fractions. Therefore, increasing “social power” on its own is not necessarily a working-class or even emancipatory project for subaltern classes. The decomposition of the “social” according to the complex dynamics of class struggle immediately opens a whole series of crucial strategic questions regarding the discussion of potential strategic alliances between different class forces. This itself requires political articulation of class and class politics which involved not only key civil society organizations such as labour unions but crucially also political parties. For reasons that can be traced back to the negative legacy of the model of vanguard party in the actually existing socialism of the 20th century, the question of political parties is has not taken up systematically in the literature on alternatives.

Even the state appears largely as a black box in Wright’s account. This is despite the fact that he alludes to the state not as the state in capitalist society but the capitalist state (p. 132). Nonetheless, how the class character of the state is reflected in its institutional architecture and the subsequent strategic considerations for transformative projects are unaddressed in the book. I believe this stems from the absence of class in Wright’s conception of state power, defined as “based on control over rule making and rule enforcing capacity over territory” (p. 74). This conceals how the capitalist state plays an essential role in the reproduction of capitalist social relation and conversely how the necessary transformation of the state can be carried out.

A part of the book is dedicated to alternative strategies of emancipatory transformation. He offers a critical overview of three modes in particular, namely, ruptural, interstitial, and symbiotic transformations. Ruptural transformation seeks a radical break from the existing institutional structures through direct confrontation with the state and the capitalist class to create new institutions of social empowerment. Wright identifies classes organized in political parties as the pivotal collective actors of this mode of transformation. Interstitial transformation pursues non-confrontational strategies that ignore the capitalist class and build alternatives outside the state. Social movements are identified as the pivotal agents of this mode of transformation. Lastly, symbiotic transformation focuses on class collaboration with the capitalist class and using the state to facilitate the projects of social empowerment based on class compromise. Its pivotal agents are coalitions of social forces and labour.

These modes of transformation, for Wright, are not necessarily mutually exclusive but can feed into each other depending on the context and phases of transformation. Nonetheless, Wright does not hide his strong skepticism with regards to the relevance of ruptural strategies in developed capitalist democracies, considering them as “extremely unlikely to ever muster mass popular support”. So, what we are left with for the most part are interstitial strategies, which are “limited to restricted spaces”, and symbiotic strategies, which in their success “strengthen the
hegemonic capacity of capitalism” (p. 255). One can certainly question Wright’s pessimism towards ruptural strategies especially amidst the rapidly unfolding ecological crisis, the historic crisis of accumulation that capitalism has been experiencing from the early years of the 21st century, and massive disparities between different nation-states within global capitalism. But I want to focus on another aspect of his reservation about ruptural strategies.

Political parties are recognized as the pivotal collective actors only in the ruptural mode of transformation – and even there as relevant entities in frontal attack on the state, thereby remaining effectively outside the state or at best acting as a trojan horse that has temporarily penetrated inside the fortress of the state. The other two modes of transformation relate to the state only externally, either by consciously avoiding the state as in the interstitial strategies or by utilizing the state through the pressure by associational power of civil societies. This makes the important consideration that the state is itself a crucial terrain of class struggle, which Wright reasserts a number of times in the book, strategically vacuous. As crucial as this is, the importance of political parties in class politics goes beyond their function in the class struggle within the state. As recent studies in political sociology have suggested (see, de Leon, Desai, and Tügel 2015), political parties are essential in the formation and political articulation of class. Therefore, any discussion of alternatives to capitalism should engage with the question of political parties as indispensable in any collective transformative politics. This requires a fundamental rethinking of the party as a mass democratic organization capable of carrying out emancipatory projects. It should not only engage in the political articulation of the subaltern classes but also be able to build class power inside the state as well as within civil societies. This is not to deny the vital role of associational organizations within civil society, most importantly labour unions, but to emphasize the other essential piece that is very often ignored in the literature on alternatives, that is, political parties.

In conclusion, this review article highlights the need to both widen and deepen the discussion on alternatives by putting the class structure of capitalism in its place in the analysis. As I tried to show, the failure to do this has profound consequences for the theoretical validity and strategic applicability of the visions of alternatives to capitalism. At the basic economic level, capital-labour wage relation should be placed side by side with the dynamics of the competitive pursuit of profit in the market. It is also essential to extend the analysis of class dynamics further into the terrain of the state. I suggest that the Gramscian notion of “integral state” can be utilized effectively here. It extends the relationality of the state and overcomes the dichotomy between political society and civil society. It would also highlight the crucial question of capitalist hegemony and counter-hegemonic movement that is required for any transformative project. It is here that political parties play an essential role in par with associational organizations. Lastly, given the global nature of capitalist social relations all the more in the 21st century, the analysis of class dynamics within contemporary capitalism cannot remain at the level of the nation-state. Any transformative project must take into account the historicity of these global dynamics, which includes the colonial and imperialist legacies while remaining attentive to the particulates of social formations in different geopolitical contexts. In short, our visions of alternative must adopt an expansive framework as comprehensive as the social relation that they seek to transcend.
Other References:


