

## Apology Accepted: A Possibility of Global Governance

REVIEW BY E. FUAT KEYMAN

*Department of International Relations, Koc University, Turkey*

*City of Gold: An Apology for Global Capitalism in a Time of Discontent.* By David A. Westbrook. New York: Routledge, 2004. 400 pp., \$97.95 cloth (ISBN: 0-415-94,539-9), \$27.95 paper (ISBN: 0-415-94,540-2).

The rapid pace and unpredictable direction of social and political change in our world seems to be forcefully undermining the established terms of political life. It appears to be more and more difficult, if not impossible, to think of politics solely within the national context. Such terms as the “nation-state,” “national identity,” and “national economy” have been losing their explanatory power. The increasing interconnectedness of societies has made the national context more vulnerable and exposed to global, regional, and local pressures. Political globalization, for example, is giving rise to the increasing importance of global, regional, and local actors in the formation of political community, thereby undermining and limiting the ability of the nation-state to maintain its status as the main and sovereign locus of governance. Economic globalization—that is, the globalization of capital—is challenging the authority of nation-states by creating a borderless, supranational, global market place. Cultural globalization is rendering the idea of national identity problematic by giving rise to local reactions in the form of ethnic, religious, and cultural identities, which have recently paved the way for the emergence of alternative conceptions of modernity and a new politics of recognition.

Yet, a quick glance at the last two decades reveals a mixed picture in terms of the impact of globalization on international and intranational politics. On the one hand, we have trends in the areas of economics, technology, and mobility that increase the resources, knowledge, and efficiencies available globally. On the other hand, we also have trends—especially in the areas of justice and security—suggesting that globalization has the potential to transform our world into a world of poverty, inequality, and hunger, as well as into a world of ethnic, religious, and cultural identity-based conflicts (Phillips 2005). In short, globalization could also create a world of human tragedy and suffering (Pogge 2001). Therefore, when we refer to globalization, we are speaking not only about profound transformations, but also about ambiguities, uncertainties, and insecurities that have the potential to determine the fate of the human community. In this context, it becomes important, if not imperative, to critically analyze the historically constituted interactions between the global, the regional, the national, and the local, not only to understand social change, but also to envision a democratic world as the foundation for a better form of globalization.

David Westbrook takes up this issue in *City of Gold: An Apology for Global Capitalism in a Time of Discontent*. In the process, he provides us with a very successful analysis of globalization. Westbrook brings both a strong background in international law and policymaking and a well-grounded knowledge of economics, critical social theory, and philosophy to his task. He attempts to demonstrate the validity of the assertion that contemporary globalization is, in fact, the transformation of a

nationally based capitalism of the past into a new “supranational capitalism” in which capital markets rather than nation-states are the constitutive element of governance at both the global and national levels. To substantiate this argument, Westbrook constructs a carefully organized and integrated analysis of money, governance, identity, economic justice, and “the disenchantment of liberalism.”

Westbrook knows the problems that can and do arise from any attempt to place the idea of “markets” at the center of governance. However, he believes that an effective model of governance has to be realistic and historical. To be realistic, such a model must allow for the creation of orderly markets without being blind to their destructive tendencies. To be historical, such a model must recognize that the relationship between market and polity is not static but rather constitutes a dynamic process open to reconstructions and modifications. In this sense, *City of Gold* sees globalization as a transformative process that has been widening, deepening, and speeding up—especially since the end of World War II. Today, globalization takes the form of supranational capitalism, and proposals for effective governance should be based on or derived from this reality.

In *City of Gold*, Westbrook makes a significant contribution to the literature on globalization by going beyond a purely market-based or a state-centric analysis of social change (Held et al. 1999). He does this by providing a very detailed and theoretically grounded analysis of how an economic understanding of markets and a critical theory of social change can be linked together. As a matter of fact, Westbrook’s multidimensional, multicausal, and multidisciplinary methodology along with his well developed and convincing critical reasoning enable him to avoid the twin problems of economic reductionism and political essentialism as he asserts the continued centrality of markets in our globalizing world. Thus, not only does *City of Gold* contribute to our understanding of the profound transformations that are currently reshaping our world, it also enables us to focus our attention on a most timely and urgent question: how to govern our globalizing world democratically. Westbrook’s vision is persuasive because it contributes a theoretically well-grounded and policy-oriented argument to the debate on globalization, which has so far been dominated by hyperglobalist and state-centric accounts of social change. Those accounts have, in their own distinct ways, created politically essentialist and economically reductionist explanations of globalization.

Numerous books about globalization have flooded the academic market in recent years. Indeed, globalization has become a catchphrase—a buzzword—that explains everything but also nothing. Nonetheless, globalization is a material reality with extremely powerful and sometimes devastating consequences for our lives. As a result, we need to understand the processes of globalization, and to do that we need to employ multidimensional, multicausal, and critical modes of reasoning. In this light, *City of Gold* should be seen not merely as another entrant into a highly inflated academic market, awaiting its turn to be noticed and purchased. On the contrary, *City of Gold* deserves to be taken seriously, read widely, and debated critically. Westbrook successfully bridges the fields of economics, international law, critical theory, and social change. He demonstrates an ability to combine critical reasoning with a concern about actual policy. In the process, he provides us with important insights about global capitalism. *City of Gold* should be read and debated by scholars, students, policymakers, and anyone else who is interested in transforming contemporary globalization into a force capable of promoting a democratic and just world governance.

## References

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