

# Review of: "State crisis theory: A systematization of institutional, socio-ecological, demographic-structural, world-systems, and revolutions research"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

I agree with the other reviewers that Tilman Hartley has integrated a wide array of literature on state crisis and created a systematic framework in which to analyze the range of perspectives on the causes and response to those crises. Impressive indeed. It is inevitable with such an overarching analytical project that critics with specialized knowledge of a particular field will challenge how issues in their field are being characterized within this broad framework. My background is in environmental issues/social justice debates and I will therefore make a few comments for the author to reflect on in his portrayal of the social/ecological literature as one of his five fields.

Firstly, by making the nation state the focus of analysis, it is granted a centrality that may not be warranted with regard to environmental problems. In reflecting on the sustainability debate and the climate change debate, the conclusion of many theorists is that the state is not a viable environmental actor, especially with the advent of neo-liberalism, where the state's main function is to advance global trade patterns and remove any barriers that limit access of resources, especially in the Global South. So to define the state in terms of "powers of coercion" can come across as deeply ahistorical. The state's currently legitimacy is based on a willed and intentional dismantling of regulation in the name of economic growth. It would cause a crisis if it stood its ground and resisted these forces.

This first point is connected to a second issue related to the scale and complexity of environmental challenges. Hartley sets out ecological issues in terms of shocks (volcanoes and floods) and diminishing returns (scarcity linked to pollution and overexploitation). Ecological footprint analysis would posit that the purpose of global trade is to facilitate the North appropriating the carrying capacity of the South so that it can maintain its high standard of living. Diminishing returns perspectives linked to micro-economics set out by Hartley does not really do justice to the role the state plays in laying the groundwork for these "free trade" neo-liberal agendas in which local constraints (diminishing returns) are overcome by accessing the resources of other, less powerful, groups.

A third point linked to these discussions is that the modern nation state has devastated indigenous people in both the North and South without there being any threat posed to their legitimacy. This is an ethical and moral reality that is not necessarily captured by a "powers of coercion" definition of the state that Hartley emphasizes. So whose voices are heard when a crisis is engendered? From a marginal perspective, there is no doubt that it is a "shake-down" everyday, a

“permanent state of emergency” that, although devastating to those who are powerless, poses no threat to the powers that be.

In conclusion, the environmental field yields a perspective where diminished legitimacy and crisis are in no way identical with ecological devastation and social injustice, which carry on apace with seeming impunity.

I hope the author finds these comments useful.

Regards,

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