Productive Forces and the Economic Logic of the Feudal Mode of Production

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Abstract
This article returns to the debate about the relative importance of the productive forces and the relations of production in the feudal mode of production. It argues, using western medieval evidence, that this relation is an empirical one and varies between modes, maybe also inside modes; and that, in the specific case of feudalism, not only were the relations of production the driving force, but developments in the productive forces actually depended upon them.

Keywords
feudal, productive forces, relations of production, middle ages

I want to talk today about the productive forces: that is, in Marxist terminology, the means of production, in other words, the use of tools, techniques, and productive knowledge; and the organisation of the labour process.¹ This, together with the relations of production, above all the forms in which primary producers are exploited by a dominant class or classes, are the essential features of the mode of production as an analytical economic concept.

All or most of you know this, as it forms part of what Americans might term Marxist Theory 101. It has, furthermore, been elaborately theorised, re-theorised, and argued over for over a century, not least during the high-water period of postwar Western-Marxist debate, roughly the 1960s and 1970s, though subsequently, of course, as well. But I am a historian, and it has to be said that historians as a category have tended to be much less interested in productive forces than in relations of production. That is to say, property relationships, exploitation, and resistance, class struggle, have engaged them

¹. This Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize Lecture was delivered at the Historical Materialism Annual Conference in November 2008.
far more than has the detail of technology and even the division of labour. This is certainly true of me. In my recent book, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, which won the Deutscher Prize (the prize I would have wanted, more than any other, to win) and which is the immediate reason why I am speaking to you here, I barely mentioned them at all; the labour process gets some discussion, but technological levels, in particular, get about thirty lines out of over 800 pages of text, even though the book is about social and economic history and operates explicitly inside a Marxist interpretative frame. I will not say I forgot them, but they hardly in any sense affected my analyses, including my characterisations of the feudal mode of production. Of my reviewers, Chris Harman in *International Socialism* was the one who remarked most pertinently on their absence, and I must admit that my first reaction was surprise – why should they have been there, their role was so analytically marginal? Two years later, my surprise now seems to me out of place; I should indeed have discussed the productive forces more, and more explicitly, and I want to fill that gap here. But I also want to put an intellectual, a historical, case for their analytical marginality, at least in the feudal mode of production, at least in certain specific forms of the feudal mode of production. This will be a theoretically-informed empirical argument, rather than a purely theoretical argument. This is because I am a historian, and this is how historians deal; but it is also because, it seems to me, it is at the empirical level that the causative importance of the development of the productive forces is most problematic in any study of past societies, above all in any study of feudalism.

Before getting to the early middle ages, some more framing remarks seem to me necessary. First of all, why might you want to know more about the feudal mode of production at all? There are two main reasons in my view. One is the fact that one of Marx’s main aims was to show that the economic ‘laws’ of capitalism were not universal and eternal, but, rather, specific to a single mode of production. He was seldom as explicit as that in this writings, but all his analyses of precapitalist modes assume it, as also, of course, does his assumption and hope that capitalism would eventually be overcome. Occasionally Marx said so, too, at least in an oblique way, as when in the second edition of *Capital*, Volume I, he quoted at length I.I. Kaufman’s (anonymous) review of the first edition, originally in Russian, who says ‘in [Marx’s] opinion, every historical period possess its own laws’; Marx described

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2. Wickham 2005, pp. 272–301 for the labour process; pp. 301–2, 547 for technologies. I am most grateful to Chris Dyer and Chris Harman for critiques of this text; I have clarified my argument as a result, but they will not agree with it all the same.

this review as treffend, ‘striking’ or ‘apt’. Given this, it seems to me useful and perhaps even important to develop as clear a picture as we can of the economic laws – I would prefer the term economic logic – of the most substantial and long-lasting non-capitalist mode yet to have existed in history since the development of class hierarchies, that is to say feudalism. For that is my second reason for wanting to discuss the feudal mode here today; in my view, feudalism dominated nearly the whole of human history since class society appeared.

The state-based tax or tribute systems that have been so common in so many places, from China, through the Roman empire, to Aztec Mexico, all were based above all on the forcible extraction of surplus from peasant families as primary producers, just as systems of landlordship were in medieval Western Europe. I have discussed these issues elsewhere, and do not want to do so today, but the main point that follows is that all these societies in the medieval West, in Asia, or elsewhere, can thus be seen as part of the same mode of production, and they will therefore all have had the same underlying economic logic. How the logic worked is thus the key element necessary to unpick the economic history of very substantial sections of the past; and this is the background justification for the arguments I want to set out here.

The economic logic of a mode of production includes, of course, its underlying dynamic, as well as the more short-term ways producers, exploiters and consumers react to risks, constraints, opportunities, changes in the availability and price of products, and so on. I would argue that it also includes the functional relationship between the productive forces and the relations of production. I do not want to fall into the trap of extreme substantivism, the arguments of Karl Polanyi and, still more, some of his followers, and some more romantic Marxist traditions as well, that no economic ‘law’ is universal, so that even the interaction between supply and demand is historically contingent. But it seems to me far from implausible that the way techniques and the labour process, on the one hand, interact with exploitation and resistance, on the other, is dependent on the economic logic of specific modes. For a start, the way the labour process is exploited is structurally different from one mode to another. Under capitalism, the capitalist controls the labour process directly and the fact of the exploitation of the work-force – together with the possibility that the social nature of production might not require that

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5. I used to see tax-based and landlord-based exploitation as modally different, but I have changed my view here. Haldon 1993 has been most influential on my current view, and is the best guide to it. He prefers to call the mode ‘tributary’, not ‘feudal’, but the difference here is only terminological.
exploitation – is hidden by the apparently free nature of the labour contract; under feudalism, it is producers (normally peasant families, sometimes small artisans) who control the labour process, and surplus is extracted from them in an entirely open way, however much it is justified by local ideologies. Given these specificities, I have long been resistant to abstract arguments about how ‘the’ mode of production must work, whether it tends to stress the relations of production (as in the Althusserian tradition, or much of it) or whether it argues for the primacy of productive forces (as in the work of G.A. Cohen, and indeed of Chris Harman, though I would agree with many of his more detailed formulations). I would rather suppose that different modes are different as an initial starting-point, and discover structural similarities later.

Marx, of course, posed the relationship between forces and relations of production in the Preface to The Critique of Political Economy in entirely abstract terms. He clearly gave priority to the former, especially at moments of modal change. (‘From forms of development of the productive forces, these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution.’) Marx always had the capitalist mode in the front of his mind, and this seems to be what he is mostly thinking of here. I am comforted in my initial position by Marx’s own description of ‘original’ or ‘primary’ accumulation in Capital, the historical beginnings of capitalist accumulation, in which transformations in the property rights and in the exploitation of peasants and artisans in fourteenth- to eighteenth-century England, their separation from the means of production, clearly predate changes in the labour process and in technical advance characteristic of the capitalist mode, and so were not caused by these changes. (Marx’s focus on property rights in the precapitalist sections of the Grundrisse fits this reading too.) People have attempted to make these empirical descriptions (messily, improperly, empirical, Althusserians thought) fit together with the forceful abstractions of the Preface, but in my view they have failed; Marx was not consistent here. One might, perhaps, simply say: Marx, when he wrote as a historian, found evidence for positions which were

6. For Althusserians, see Hindess and Hirst 1975, pp. 9–10, 12; Étienne Balibar in Althusser and Balibar 1970, pp. 201–308, is less explicit, but certainly argues in the same direction (e.g. pp. 297–8). For the opposite view, Cohen 1978, esp. pp. 134–74; Harman 1986. Cohen has been criticised, e.g. by Brenner 1986, pp. 40–7, and Rigby 1987, esp. pp. 92–142, historians’ critiques which work for me as a historian. Callinicos 2004 starts opposed to Cohen (pp. 57–69) and ends up more sympathetic (pp. xxxiii–iv).


8. See Althusser and Balibar 1970, p. 275, for “descriptive history”.
sometimes at odds with those he argued for when he wrote more theoretically, as an economist or as a philosopher. Doubtless he would have reconciled them, but in the incompletion of his life’s work, he did not. But as a historian it is not unreasonable for me to respect his historical arguments; and I shall do so here.

Let us move on to historians, then, historians writing in the Marxist tradition that is, and look at how they have tended to describe the feudal mode, in the specific empirical context of medieval Western Europe. I will begin by reminding you as to what the basic outlines of the feudal mode of production actually are, so you can see why historians have approached it in different ways. As I have already said, it takes as its core the peasant family unit, or else a family of part-time or full-time independent artisans. In most of human history since settled agriculture was developed, agricultural production – overwhelmingly dominant until the Industrial Revolution – was controlled by such families, and was first of all for their own subsistence. In class societies, peasants had to give proportions of their surplus to external powers, under the threat of force; these proportions were variable, and depended on actual or potential class struggle. Such external powers could be states, exacting tax or tribute, or landowners, extracting rent, or both. (Peasants possessed the land, but they did not always – in many regions or periods, not usually – have full property rights over it.) Rent, and even tax, could be in labour, on the lord’s directly cultivated land (his ‘demesne’) or on public roads or dykes; it could be in produce (the default pattern in all societies); only if exchange was sufficiently developed would it be in money, for peasants would have to be able to sell produce systematically to get the coins to do so. Exchange could be highly developed, and peasants could produce substantially for the market, but they had to be sure of their subsistence needs first; pure cash cropping was almost unknown under feudalism, and indeed was rare until the twentieth century even under capitalism. These are patterns that can be found very widely in the history of Eurasia, and indeed well beyond. They existed when states were strong, as, in Europe, under the Roman and Byzantine empires and in the sixteenth century, and also when they were weak, as in the medieval West, as long as landowning power remained dominant.

The feudal mode could also co-exist with other modes. These could be non-exploitative, as with the mode Marx and Engels called ‘archaic’ or ‘primitive communal’, in which surplus extraction was absent or unsystematic (in the European early middle ages, this ‘peasant mode’, as I prefer to call it, existed in much of Northern Europe, and, in isolated patches, even in the ex-Roman provinces of Southern Europe). Others were exploitative, but had different relations of production, the slave mode with its full enslavement and
maintenance of primary producers (this has been rare in history, however, the product of special conditions), and the capitalist mode with its paid, usually legally free, labour-force. Almost the only lasting legacy of the Althusserian moment in Marxist history-writing has been the recognition that modes of production can easily coexist, but that only one of them will dominate the economic logic of the socio-economic system (the ‘social formation’) as a whole. While the feudal mode lasted, which was for millennia in some places, wage-labour, in particular, was common; it is just that the logic of its use was determined by the economic cycles of feudalism. The dominance of feudal relations would only end when the peasantry began to be pushed off (or bought out of) their tenures, and local large owners or possessors began systematically to replace them with wage-labourers, which was what Marx was describing in his ‘original accumulation’ chapter, and which underpins his account of the transition to capitalism, along with the parallel process in manufacturing; once a capitalist economic logic came to dominate in a given economic region, the transition was complete.

This account already downplays the determinant role of the productive forces, but I have already set out my stall here, and will come back to it in a moment. It is also unspecific as to what the economic logic of the feudal mode actually was; and here I must make the crucial admission that I have not got more than part way towards an answer as to how that logic worked. Nor has anyone else, in my view; the most systematic work has been done in price theory, by, for example, Witold Kula or Luciano Palermo or Julien Demade – prices being easier to tabulate and analyse than other elements of the system; the best shot at systemic economic analysis, by Guy Bois, is too specific to a single place and period, fifteenth-century Normandy. My account here will, therefore, be strictly provisional, and restricted to the period I know best, the early and central middle ages. But this description may at least help to clarify the context in which other historians have written about the productive-forces/relations-of-production dyad, in particular about the medieval West, so let us go back to them.

The Anglo-American tradition, Maurice Dobb, Rodney Hilton, Robert Brenner, all stressed or stress above all the coercive relationship between peasants and lords, class struggle over property rights and rents, and the framework inside which rents were determined. They have seen the dynamic of feudalism pretty much in these terms. In France, Guy Bois, more

structuralist in tone (he sharply criticised Brenner’s ‘voluntarism’, and lack of interest in the laws of development of the feudal mode, in the ‘Brenner debate’ of the 1970s), nonetheless saw, in his major work on Normandy, the class struggle as an intrinsic part of a general Western medieval tendency for the rural profit of lords to fall during periods of growth, which was a core element in his influential discussion of the economic dynamic of feudalism, in which, once again, technological and productive changes hardly figured at all. In Germany, Ludolf Kuchenbuch and Bernd Michael’s important (even if intentionally abstract) characterisation of the Struktur und Dynamik of feudalism also devoted little space to the productive forces (and even, despite their title, to the dynamics of the feudal mode, except in a brief passage based on Bois at the end of their article), and they deliberately avoided the productive forces/relations of production image itself. Essentially, all these historians have argued, or have thought that their evidence allowed them to assume, that technological change was mostly marginal in the medieval period; hence, for example, the subsistence crises of the early fourteenth century in Western Europe. In the countryside, the overwhelmingly dominant agricultural sector, it was peasants, not their lords, who made most of the choices about how to cultivate their land, and, when lords managed to intervene in those choices (as, again, with the directed forced labour, or sometimes wage-labour, by peasants on the lord’s demesne, in the manorial system), this intervention was complicated to establish, and always had a tendency to break down – demesnes got divided up between peasant rent-paying tenures very easily in medieval history, and the labour process reverted back to peasant control. And this peasant dominance of the production process had a negative effect on technological change, for peasants were seen by this historical tradition as averse to risk and therefore resistant to innovation; any productive development that required co-operation beyond the family was unlikely, except for a few advances at the level of the village, and it would only be when the peasant dominance of production was uprooted that technological advance would begin.

This image of a feudal mode whose dynamic was essentially that of the struggle between peasants and lords has, it must be recognised, been challenged from several directions in recent years. For England, Richard Britnell and Chris Dyer, both influenced by Marxism, have, among others, argued for a considerable commercial development in the central and later middle ages, and for productive investment with an eye to the market by all social classes – not

12. Kuchenbuch and Michael 1977. This article remains the best descriptive analysis of the feudal mode.
least the peasantry, particularly its upper strata (e.g. in barns for better storage, and horses for ploughing). Wage-labour seems now to have been the mainstay of, some say a third, some say nearly half, of the population of England (and more in some areas), from as early as 1300, although not rising from that level until at least the sixteenth century. For Europe as a whole, Larry Epstein has generalised from work of this kind in a more explicitly Marxist direction, stressing technological innovation during the same period, although he sees its wide generalisation across Europe as having been held back by transaction costs, and also stressing the growth of rural proto-industrialisation in many places, a topic which has received considerable attention in recent years. These historians do not underestimate the development of the productive forces, that is to say (though they do not use the terminology), but they also see feudal social relations as entirely able to absorb such developments: ‘up to a point feudalism thrived on trade’, in Epstein’s phrase.

This commercialised late-medieval feudalism, open to much innovation, including by a peasantry less risk-averse than has sometimes been claimed, is increasingly different from the picture accepted as recently as the 1970s. But there is nothing in the writers I have just cited which would argue that a more active and open economy, with technological change and an increasing division of labour, and capitalist-mode elements in both urban and rural industry, was in itself contradictory to the peasant economy and to feudal exploitation. The high levels of wage-labour in England did not change for two centuries; they were a stable element of an economic system still dominated by a peasant–lord, feudal, logic, as Dyer has recently observed. It remains true that when wage-labour rose further still, and peasant farming lost that dominance, which as Bas van Bavel has argued took place in one particularly active region, the Rhine delta, by as early as 1600, a transition to capitalism could indeed begin. In most of Europe, however, outside England and the Low Countries, for all this commercialisation, such a transition by no means occurred, before the nineteenth century at least. At least one could say that feudal social relations were pretty effective at blocking, or fettering, the further development of the productive forces in most of Europe, if one wants to talk in terms of blockage. But it is also entirely arguable that it was only changes in the peasant–lord relationship, and the greater, and growing, ability of landowners and tenant farmers to push former peasants into wage-labour, that marked England and

13. Britnell 1996; Dyer 2005; for each, this is only part of their extensive writing on the theme. See Harman 2008, a review of the latter, for some of its implications.
the Low Countries out, and not the greater development of the productive forces there, which only began after the transition to wage-labour. Robert Brenner has recently returned to his old arguments in the light of some of this new historiography, and enthusiastically restated his case along these lines; I, at least, am happy to follow him here.\textsuperscript{17} This is an empirical not a theoretical issue, it must be stressed; the structural relationship between the dispossession of the peasantry and the development of English or European productive forces will eventually be established by historical research. The jury is still out over the detail of these changes. My preference for Brenner’s view that the transition was set in motion by a change in the relations of production, much as Marx described in \textit{Capital}, is in large part based on the force of his comparative European perspective, a perspective which even now is fairly rare. But I will come back to this issue at the end of my paper as well.

It was this intellectual and historiographical context that led me to neglect productive forces in \textit{Framing the Early Middle Ages}; you will see that I am not penitent about the context, but I do want to correct the neglect. In this section, then, I shall specifically only consider the history of Europe and the Mediterranean between, roughly, the fifth century and the thirteenth (twice the length of the period discussed in the book), before moving back to the feudal mode as a whole at the end of the paper.

Much of Europe had a fairly simple economy for most of the early middle ages, even if we exclude the highly localised and unspecialised economies of Northern Europe, still dominated by the peasant mode, where intensive agriculture was rare, and most exchange was limited to the village.\textsuperscript{18} In ex-Roman provinces such as Gaul (i.e. modern France, Belgium and western Germany), Italy or Spain, documentary and archaeological evidence shows for the sixth to eighth centuries highly restricted production and distribution systems. Peasant agriculture was certainly in this period focussed on subsistence. In Italy, where we have eighth- and ninth-century leases, those for the plains and those for nearby mountain valleys show strikingly similar rents, indicating that there was little productive specialisation in either, even though it would have been easy (indeed, both before 500 in the Roman period, and after 1100, it was normal) for mountain areas to specialise in stock-raising in order to exchange with the grain production of the plains.\textsuperscript{19} Subsistence varied ecologically across Europe, with more animals further north and at higher altitudes, more wine and olive oil further south, but a mixed farming tradition was standard everywhere. This period was one of a light-plough technology

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Brenner 2007, a development of Brenner 1986.
\item \textsuperscript{18} For this and the following pages, see Wickham 2005, esp. pp. 693–824.
\item \textsuperscript{19} For Italian rents, Wickham 1988, pp. 21–6.
\end{itemize}
inherited from the Roman empire, and probably a two-field fallowing system of a type traditional in Southern Europe from the Romans to the late-modern period; there was no technological regression from the Roman period into the early middle ages in agriculture as far as we can see, although archaeological evidence for the reduced size of early medieval animals indicates less of a concern for deliberate breeding for size. Nor was there, overall, a technological regression in artisanal production, in that the sophisticated traditions of the Roman empire could all still be found in some places in the early middle ages, with only a few exceptions (a well-known one is concrete). Here, though, there was certainly an involution in productive specialisation, just as there was for stock-raising. Most of the archaeological evidence for artisanal production that we have for this period (the best, as usual in archaeology, is for ceramics) shows a small scale for production and a small geographical area for distribution; the signs are that most, even though not all, artisanal activity was becoming less specialised, and usually as a result less skilled, than it had been under Rome.

There were regional differences in the scale of distribution and the intensity of production of ceramics. They were larger-scale in northern Gaul than elsewhere, much smaller-scale on the Spanish Mediterranean coast, and so on. (There is less evidence for other artisanal products, but what we have fits in with this sort of regional and sub-regional differentiation as well.) I argued in Framing that these differences correlated with differences in aristocratic wealth.20 The scale of that wealth was demonstrably greater in northern Gaul than elsewhere in the post-Roman West, for example; one can make similar general contrasts between northern and southern Italy. So can one, even more clearly, if one widens the optic to Egypt, or Palestine, or the Aegean, or England, or Ireland, where the correlations between the visible complexity of artisanal production, or the lack of it, and the existence or non-existence of rich élites, whether landowning aristocrats or state officials (in eastern regions, where the state remained strong), are tight. I also argued, as one frequently does in economic history, that this correlation was a causal one: that global economic complexity in any given region was caused by élite demand. This could even sometimes be seen in agriculture; the specialisation in wine production along the line of the ecological margin for vineyards from the Loire mouth through Paris to the Rhine, visible even in the seventh and eighth centuries, would make no sense if there were no élite buyers based too far north for their estates to grow grapes (peasants would not have been able to

afford wine outside areas where it was a normal crop, and would have drunk beer). But it is in artisanal production, however small a part of the economy it was, that aristocratic demand was most visible in our mostly archaeological evidence. Relative luxuries like glass would obviously have a restricted, essentially élite, market, and the more mass-produced glass was, the larger or richer the élite would be; but I would argue the same for large-scale, widely distributed, ceramic production, which had its most obvious, and most secure, demand base in aristocratic households, even if it was available more widely too (and it was: many of the large-scale productions of northern Gaul, from the Cologne area for example, are often found on peasant sites). This élite demand base was even there for some quite simple, but mass-produced, wares, like the rough-walled pottery of the Mayen kiln complex situated near the Rhine and Moselle confluence, initially developed for the Roman army but still available all down the Rhine and beyond, throughout the early middle ages. An exchange system complex enough to distribute products like this was never lost in northern Gaul, and it had at its core the demand of an unusually rich and stable landowning élite.

I deduced from these patterns a simple set of causal links. The richer an élite, whether based on landowning, i.e. rent-collection, or on paid positions in a state system, i.e. tax-collection, the more complex an exchange economy; but also, of course, the wealth of that élite depended on the exploitation of primary producers, i.e. the peasantry. So, the greater that exploitation, the greater the complexity of the economy; that exploitation being greater either because the exploitation itself was more intensive or because more peasants were exploited, as, for instance, when aristocratic landowning increased at the expense of an independent peasantry (a process well documented in ninth-century France, Germany and Italy, or tenth-century Spain, or eleventh-century France again). That increase in economic complexity meant, in many cases, the development of the productive forces of local economies, for there is no doubt that the division of labour and the technical knowledge of the Mayen potters, for example, was far greater than in the household ceramic production of early Anglo-Saxon England, where not even kilns were used; but this contrast in the development of the productive forces depended on a contrast in the intensity of the exploitation of the peasantry.

To summarise: I am arguing that, in the fairly simple economic conditions of the earliest middle ages, a market that was sufficiently elaborate to encourage and justify productive specialisation, and thus a greater complexity in the productive forces, depended on a demand that was aristocratic, and based on exploitation. Every time one can document a society where aristocrats were weak, the elaborate market disappears, and productive specialisation disappears,
as in Anglo-Saxon England and very generally in Northern Europe; it is clear that peasants on their own could not sustain a demand sufficiently great to keep the Mayen kilns open (or, in England, the Oxfordshire and New Forest kilns, large and active until the very end of the Roman empire but then abandoned). In this model, the productive forces of the feudal mode are not only not determinant, but actually depend directly on the relations of production.

My evidence here is mostly based on artisanal production, and it might be argued that this is not a full guide to the feudal mode in the early middle ages, since agricultural production was so overwhelming. Let us track, then, the signs of agricultural intensification that we do have, in the next two or three centuries after 800, which developed from the base line I have already described. One form of intensification is in the labour process itself, and in this period this was encapsulated in the development of demesne farming based on peasant labour service. Demesnes are little documented anywhere in Europe before 750, and recent work on them has fatally undermined the old belief that this ‘manorial’ system was a sign of a closed, almost exchange-free economy; rather, it stresses that demesnes marked productive intensification, with a close direction of peasant labour which is well-documented in our sources, at least as an ideal; this production was focussed on market sale, which again in some of the ninth-century north French or German estate surveys is explicit in the texts. Large-scale use of demesne agriculture is first attested in northern France and the Rhineland, which fits the observations I have already made about the strength of the exchange economy there; it spread across central-southern Germany and northern Italy in the ninth century, and to England by the tenth, in a period in which aristocratic control and also commercial exchange were clearly intensifying in England. It lasted longest in England, too; in the thirteenth century a renewed interest in demesne agriculture there was once again linked to market opportunities.\(^{21}\) Agricultural intensification thus depended on exchange complexity, and therefore, in my model, an aristocratic demand. (I need to add here, for those familiar with an earlier historiography encapsulated in the work of Georges Duby, that the idea that ninth-century demesne agriculture had tools of pathetic quality and yields that were ridiculously low has also been abandoned; productive intensification did, therefore, indeed have some sense.)\(^{22}\) Even outside the demesne economy, the commercialisation of peasant agriculture after 1000 or so also owed its development to aristocratic needs, for it was lords who chose, at different

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moments in different regions, to demand rents in money from tenants, for
their own commercial convenience: thus, as noted above, forcing peasants
into the market for higher percentages of their produce, which brought its
own pressures for intensification.

The steady spread of new techniques can be tied less tightly to exchange.
The heavy plough steadily expanded its range in north-western Europe, in
terrains suitable for its use, across the early middle ages, but we do not have
enough evidence for that process to allow us to provide causes for it. The same
is true of water-mills, which spread across Europe from the Mediterranean in
the same period, extending already by the seventh century even to Ireland, and
becoming standard in the England of *Domesday Book*, by which time they
were generalised in the European countryside as a whole. Ireland was far from
being at the forefront of any medieval exchange network, and the early
documentation of mills there, at least, must show a technological influence
which was unrelated to economic complexity. This lack of relationship is also
implied by the fact that water-mills (and, for that matter, the heavy plough)
were already used during the Roman empire on a substantial scale, but only in
certain contexts (in the case of mills, for urban and perhaps army supply); it
was not until after the end of the empire that they began to extend more
widely across the European countryside. All the same, water-mills can also be
shown to have been very dense on the large manorial estates of ninth-century
northern Gaul, and that density, at least, may well have been linked to the
intensification of production on demesnes, as the tight network of such mills
around many central medieval towns also attests.23

An even more extreme absence of evidence surrounds the spread of irrigation
in southern Europe, particularly in the lands under Arab rule, eighth- to
thirteenth-century southern Spain and ninth- to eleventh-century Sicily. This
must have been the single most dramatic productive advance in the whole of
medieval agrarian history, for irrigated land produces at least double the yields
of non-irrigated land, with no fallow period either; new crops were made
possible as well, imports from the East such as sugar and citrus fruits; irrigation
also impacted directly on the labour process, for whole villages had to
collaborate in order to create and maintain it. I would like to argue that this
was in the context of the installation in both Spain and Sicily of tax-raising
systems, which were normal in the eastern Mediterranean and directly
inherited by the caliphate from the Roman empire there, but new, or renewed,
in the Arab colonies of the West; a new taxation system would have required

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23. I have relied here on the useful conspectus in Papaccio 2005; for northern Gaul see esp.
Champion 1996.
the production of extra surplus, and a new official class might have wanted to buy crops as well, hence the productive intensification of irrigation. But I cannot really honestly argue this; we have no documentation at all for the origin and purpose of these irrigation systems, and in Spain we cannot say in which century they developed.Outside these areas, irrigation was also oddly slow to spread in later periods, with the important exception of twelfth- to fifteenth-century Lombardy, where it was certainly set in place for the urban market, by rural communes and landlords alike. A northern parallel to this was the water management involved in the landlord-dominated drainage of marsh areas in the Low Countries, England and elsewhere, from the tenth century onwards, which also increased productivity, although not to such a marked extent.

I could go on, for I have not exhausted the list, but I will move faster form here on. The development of intensive manuring needs to be added; so does a slow improvement in metal tools (though the dearth of these in the early middle ages has been greatly exaggerated); so does the later medieval extension of horse ploughing, already mentioned (a risky advance, for horses are more expensive to feed, but certainly an intensification of production, and one initiated mostly by peasants). So does the north-European three-field system, which put a village stamp on formerly individual choices about when to harvest and when to fallow, and which is to an extent another northern equivalent to southern village irrigation initiatives. This latter shift tends also to be seen in the context of a wider process, the expansion of agriculture at the expense of woodland and, sometimes, pasture, the central medieval agrarian expansion par excellence, with a high point in the tenth to thirteenth centuries.

This period of large-scale land clearance fits very clearly into another secular trend I have not mentioned hitherto, demographic growth: for these centuries also saw a tripling of the population of western and central Europe. As those of you who are familiar with debates in medieval economic history will know, there is a strong strand in medieval historiography which treats demographic growth as independently causal, perhaps the prime motor of economic change itself. It has also, more convincingly, been directly linked to agricultural intensification by the development economist Ester Boserup, who drew on a world-wide range of examples to reach the unequivocal conclusion that agricultural intensification, however productive, invariably requires more

labour-time, so no-one would choose to do it unless forced to by population increase, i.e. by there being more mouths to feed.\(^{28}\) I think one would have to add increases in exploitation to that causal relationship, for one might equally have to intensify production if the more mouths to feed were those of an emerging non-producing élite; the Boserupian model can easily be absorbed into a Marxist explanatory framework, that is to say. But these neo-Malthusian (or, in Boserup's case, actually anti-Malthusian) models also side-step the question of why it is that populations expand in the first place. I would see the beginnings of that expansion in the middle ages as being, precisely, in the period of the intensification of labour of the manorial system in western Europe, when it was rational to produce more children to help do the work, given that agricultural land could still easily be expanded; demographic growth then ran dialectically with land clearance for several centuries until clearance became unremunerative (or, in highly cleared regions like England and Italy, impossible), and a Malthusian limit was in many places probably reached; after which, in the fourteenth century, births began to be more restricted and the population began to decline, a process massively pushed on by the Black Death of 1347–50. Some of this brief characterisation, particularly its start, is speculative; but it removes demographic change from the role of an independent, quasi-natural force, and reinstates it in a real social and economic context. Most Marxists would argue a version of it, for precisely that reason.

Land-clearance for agriculture is a productive intensification, in that grain-fields can feed more people than can woodland or pasture, and take more work to exploit. But a world in which everyone produces more grain is not a world in which exchange is necessarily developing, except through the, certainly important, grain supply to artisanal specialists in nearby towns and villages. The land-clearance period also, however, I think more crucially, resulted in a leap forward in agricultural specialisation. By the thirteenth century, whole regions were beginning to export agricultural products systematically, wine from much of central and western France, wool from England, timber from central Germany and southern Norway, stockfish from northern Norway, and so on. This was the first time that one could begin to speak of a 'European economy', at least since the Roman empire, and certainly the first time ever that such a trans-regional economy was not dependent on a trans-regional state.\(^{29}\) It had its analogues in a growing trans-regional artisanal distribution, in Flemish and Italian cloth and in other products, and the two were often mutually dependent, for Flemish cloth depended largely on English

\(^{28}\) Boserup 1965.

\(^{29}\) See in general e.g. Spufford 2002, pp. 286–341.
wool specialisation, and the large Italian cities were increasingly fed by specialist grain-producing areas such as Sicily. Once this Europe-wide pattern crystallised in the thirteenth century, versions of it never went away. Its emphases and productive foci changed constantly, but it was still there in the early-modern period, and indeed later. It was always a minority element in nearly every regional economy, which was based above all on internal supply and demand (economies still mostly are), but it linked Europe together functionally, and this remained important.

I will stop here with my empirical descriptions, which as we advance into better-documented periods (after 1200, in particular) must inevitably be more and more schematic; we need, anyway, to return to wider generalisation and to a conclusion. I want to make two main points about this network of changes, all of which show a development in the productive forces – there is no doubt of that. One is that the main motor of most productive intensification in the period after 800 was market demand, which, as I have already argued, had aristocratic demand and therefore direct exploitation at its roots. In addition, since the new developments in the productive forces were often clearly set in motion by aristocrats (the most egregious example being directed demesne labour-service), they were not only caused by exploitation, but they often consisted of further exploitation. This reading of these processes keeps the primary cause of these developments firmly in the arena of the relations of production, with renewals in the productive forces being directly dependent on those relations. This raises a further, important, empirical question, however: even if one accepts that aristocratic demand was the motor for exchange in 800, was it still such a motor in 1300? It might be argued that by now, with new large-scale cloth, metal, ceramics productions in so many centres, selling mass-produced cheap products wares well into the countryside, necessarily also to peasants, and with agricultural specialisms and therefore large-scale agricultural interchange as well, that a mass market, not any longer simply its aristocratic core, was the new motor for consumption. In the end, this would indeed be the case. Empirically, however, when this change occurred is not as yet established. Not before 1150, I am sure, so most of the processes I have described antedate it; but maybe later still. For landed élites remained very rich across this whole period, and as a class certainly never weakened before industrialisation; and we have to add to their surplus extraction that of tax-raising feudal states, which became rapidly more numerous again in the thirteenth century, and which spent much of their money on paid armies –

31. For the structure of such a market (and its limits), see e.g. Schofield 2003, pp. 131–56.
and armies, together with their demand for both foodstuffs and material, have long been recognised as a motor for economic developments of all kinds.\textsuperscript{32} That is to say: the peasant market may have grown, but the market created out of surplus extraction grew too. A self-sustaining mass market for products, which even in principle might allow the productive forces not to depend on the relations of production, could date to quite late.

The second point I want to stress is that none of these developments in the productive forces were, even in theory, likely to come into contradiction with feudal relations of production. Not only were they arguably generated by the latter, but they fitted a feudal economic system perfectly. As in the Epstein quote cited earlier: ‘up to a point, feudalism thrived on trade’; Rodney Hilton, earlier, made similar points in his contributions to the transition debate of the 1950s.\textsuperscript{33} And the breaking of that relationship would not soon occur. The wage-labour in the big Italian urban cloth workshops of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, although fully capitalist in its relations of production, was not contradictory to a wider feudal economic logic, as can be seen most easily in the move away from workshop ownership and back to landowning among the urban élites of the fifteenth century and onwards, when landowning seemed safer, more remunerative, more prestigious, resulting in the end of Italian commercial supremacy in nearly every field. Similarly, early-modern rural proto-industry was not the origin of full industrialisation anywhere, and most of it faded back into the landscape again as its entrepreneurs refeudalised themselves.\textsuperscript{34} The point about not only the central middle ages, but the late middle ages and early-modern period as well, is that we see in Europe a high degree of commercialisation and specialisation, including, in some regions, high levels of urbanisation and/or a high degree of wage-labour, which remained intrinsic to the forms of the feudal mode then existing. We can call these forms of the feudal mode ‘high-level equilibrium’ systems, just like sixteenth-century India or China: complex economic systems, the products of cumulative development (including in techniques and other aspects of the productive forces) internal to feudalism, which were nonetheless based on peasant productive relations and which were not in contradiction with these relations. Without wishing to come to a conclusion here about the debate set in motion by Kenneth Pomeranz, hitherto by far the most impressive proponent of the view that it was only external factors (notably New-World resources) that made England, not central-southern China, the crucible of the

\textsuperscript{32} For an overview, see e.g. Mann 1986.
\textsuperscript{34} Ogilvie and Cerman 1996, e.g. pp. 232, 237.
Industrial Revolution,\textsuperscript{35} I would reiterate that one could have a very substantially developed commercial economy which did not have to result in industrialisation. It is true that once peasants were expropriated and replaced by rural wage-labour in any given region, such commercial development, a developed set of productive forces, would undoubtedly help such a region change its dominant mode from feudal to capitalist. It might still be contingent that one high-level equilibrium system did it rather than, or before, another, but the transition by then becomes a much easier process to imagine. Conversely, however, that transition by no means had to occur, and perhaps the norm was that it did not.

I want to end with these high-level equilibrium systems, not with the transition to capitalism, because I am opposed to teleology. Much discussion of the late-medieval and early-modern economy has been in terms of ‘blocked development’, of the high-level equilibrium ‘\textit{trap}’, of, in Marx’s own terminology, ‘fetters’ on development. I have dissented from Marx’s own tendencies to teleology before, and I wish here to do so again. As with Darwin on evolution, I do not see economic systems, or even the dynamic of economic systems, as ‘naturally’ going anywhere in particular,\textsuperscript{36} and I am opposed to interpreting any of them in terms of how they turned out, as with the long tradition of English economic historians watchful only for the special factors, whatever they were, that would lead to the industrial revolution, rather than for the elements which actually made the economy work at any given time. What I do think is that it is people, the actions of social forces, who create the shift from the dominance of one mode to that of another, once minimum conditions have been reached for the shift. That is true today; and it was in the past as well – so, in the case of the feudal mode, once one reached 1700 and perhaps already 1500 in various parts of Europe (although not 1100 or 800), with analogous dates, arguably, for China, after which time the relevant changes in the relations of production might have occurred in many places. Conversely, I think that if the latter does not happen, then the high-level equilibrium can happily continue for centuries, its contradictions, if any, in practice dealt with without difficulty, feudal reproduction being not less creative than capitalist reproduction in our own day. Once the shift is made, things are different; the Darwinian side of Marx comes in here, with capitalist economic logic rapidly outmatching its competitors. But one of the things, one of the few things, which we know for certain about the economic logic of the feudal mode of production was that it had staying power, lasting millennia in some regions. It

\textsuperscript{35} Pomeranz 2000. Note that Pomeranz, who does not come out a Marxist tradition, makes no reference to relations of production at all.

\textsuperscript{36} Cf. Runciman 1989, p. 449.
had great dynamism, too, and I have tried here to discuss some of that, but its staying power and its capacity to adapt to new situations are equally striking.

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Rebellion to Reform in Bolivia. Part I: Domestic Class Structure, Latin-American Trends, and Capitalist Imperialism

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Abstract
This article, which will appear in three parts over three issues of Historical Materialism, presents a broad analysis of the political economy and dynamics of social change during the first year (January 2006–January 2007) of the Evo Morales government in Bolivia. It situates this analysis in the wider historical context of left-indigenous insurrection between 2000 and 2005, the class structure of the country, the changing character of contemporary capitalist imperialism, and the resurgence of anti-neoliberalism and anti-imperialism elsewhere in Latin America. It considers, at a general level, the overarching dilemmas of revolution and reform. These considerations are then grounded in analyses of the 2000–5 revolutionary epoch, the 18 December 2005 elections, the social origins and trajectory of the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) as a party, the complexities of the relationship between indigenous liberation and socialist emancipation, the process of the Constituent Assembly, the political economy of natural gas and oil, the rise of an autonomist right-wing movement, US imperialism, and Bolivia’s relations with Venezuela and Cuba. The central argument is that the economic policies of the new government exhibit important continuities with the inherited neoliberal model and that advancing the project of indigenous liberation and socialist emancipation will require renewed self-activity, self-organisation and strategic mobilisation of popular left-indigenous forces autonomous from the MAS government.

Keywords
Evo Morales; Movement Towards Socialism; Bolivia; indigenous; reform; revolution; neoliberalism; social movements; revolutionary epoch

Evo Morales, of the Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Towards Socialism, MAS), was elected President of Bolivia on 18 December 2005, with an historic 53.7 per cent of the popular vote.¹ Morales is the first indigenous president in
the republic’s history, a particularly salient fact in a country where 62 per cent of the population self-identified as indigenous in the last census in 2001. The MAS is often associated, in popular and academic media alike, with the harder left current (Venezuela and Cuba) of a more general ‘pink tide’ sweeping Latin America through the ballot box. How should we interpret the electoral victory of the MAS, and what is its significance for revolutionary or reformist social change in the poorest country in South America, where even official figures suggest 67 per cent of the population currently lives in poverty?

This essay grapples with these questions through its evaluation of the first year (January 2006 to January 2007) of the MAS government. It does so by shedding some light on the following topics: the character of the elections that brought the MAS to office; the historical trajectory of the party; the political economy of Bolivia under the first year of the administration; crucial developments in the Constituent Assembly process; the slow re-articulation of the racist, autonomist Right and its class and geographical bases in the eastern part of the country; the dynamics of imperialism at the international scale, and; the weight of changes in the regional politics of Latin America in terms of how they influence the domestic balance of social forces in Bolivia. Such a wide scope has its strengths and weaknesses. It obviously sacrifices some depth for breadth. Yet, at the same time, it has the virtue of sketching broad overarching trends of a political process that has captured the imagination of the international Left in the current period in a manner unparalleled, except perhaps by Venezuela under Hugo Chávez.

The aim of this article is to offer an overall portrait of some of the key dynamics of the Bolivian process, something which has not yet been accomplished sufficiently in English. Such a perspective, I argue, calls into question many of the assumptions and conclusions of the existing analyses of contemporary Bolivia, whether from the Right or Left. Undoubtedly, some uncritical supporters of the Morales government will see the analysis offered here as little more than unctuous sectarianism. Be that as it may, it is necessary to rupture the debilitating torpor which has descended on the bulk of the Left’s discussions of the Bolivian process. Many analysts have heedlessly
replaced careful examination of empirical reality with casual celebration of press releases issued from the presidential palace of Evo Morales. A responsible perspective, authentically in solidarity with the popular struggles for socialism and indigenous liberation in Bolivia, can ill afford such tact.
That said, I offer eight preliminary theses in an attempt to push the debate forward.

**Thesis 1:** The left-indigenous insurrectionary period between 2000 and 2005 is best conceived as a revolutionary epoch in which mass mobilisation from below and state crisis from above opened up opportunities for fundamental, transformative structural change to the state and society. The rural and urban rebellions of this period were a combined liberation struggle to end the interrelated processes of class exploitation and racial oppression of the indigenous majority.

**Thesis 2:** Following the second Gas War in May-June 2005, the focus of popular politics shifted temporarily from the streets and countryside to the electoral arena in the lead up to the 18 December 2005 presidential and legislative elections. The move to the terrain of electoral politics and the victory of the MAS in the December elections dampened the immediate prospects of a socialist and indigenous-liberationist revolution growing out of the revolutionary epoch of 2000–5. This is because of the moderately reformist nature of the MAS party, the relative decline in the self-organisation and self-activity of the popular classes and oppressed indigenous nations in the wake of the electoral victory of Evo Morales who seemed to represent their interests, and the common tendency for social movements to sap themselves of their transformative energy, organisation, and capacity to build popular power from below in workplaces and communities when they adopt a pre-eminently electoral focus.

**Thesis 3:** The December elections were characterised by the fundamental breakdown of the traditional neoliberal parties in Bolivia which had reigned supreme through various coaltional governments since 1985. The electoral results exemplified the popular disgust in Bolivia for neoliberalism as an economic and political model.

**Thesis 4:** The trajectory of the MAS as a party needs to be understood in the context of its shifting class composition, ideology, and political strategy over time. The party originated as the political arm of an indigenous-peasant movement in the department of Cochabamba in the mid-1990s. It was anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal. It was structured on the assembly-style, rank-and-file democracy of the peasant unions in the region. Its primary social base was the *cocaleros* (coca growers) who were fighting against the machinations of the militarised, US-led ‘drug war’ against their livelihoods. Extra-parliamentary activism was the essential strategy of the party from the late 1990s until 2002. Since 2002, however, the MAS has emphasised electoral politics and distanced itself from the radical activism in the streets. The highest echelons of the party’s decision making structures came increasingly under the influence of an urban,
mestizo (mixed race) middle class intelligentsia. The party’s ideology became increasingly reformist as a consequence of this shift in the class composition of its upper leadership layers, as well as through the party’s effort to court the urban middle class in electoral contests. The ascendancy of Álvaro García Linera to the Vice-Presidency is a major indication of this trend.

**Thesis 5:** The Morales victory was a democratic gain in race relations in Bolivia in the sense that indigenous rights fully entered the national political agenda in an unprecedented manner after decades of indigenous movement struggle. The rise of a party with a largely indigenous social base and an agenda prioritising indigenous issues has been an important step towards bringing an end to white-mestizo minority control of the state and an apartheid-like culture of race relations in the country. However, there are also disturbing parallels with the 1994 electoral victory of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and the ANC’s subsequent political trajectory. Indigenous liberation has been disassociated from the project of revolutionary socialist transformation within the MAS. The combined liberation struggle for indigenous liberation and socialist transformation of 2000 to 2005 has been altered into a struggle of distinct stages. The MAS emphasises indigenous liberation today, with socialist transformation only a remote possibility, 50 to 100 years in the future.

**Thesis 6:** In many ways, MAS government policy and the class interests it serves represents a significant degree of continuity with the inherited neoliberal model. Possible exceptions to this general continuity are discernible in hydrocarbons (natural gas and oil) policy, foreign relations with Venezuela and Cuba, and relations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

**Thesis 7:** Popular social movements, beginning especially with the Cochabamba Water War in 2000, put forward the demand for a revolutionary Constituent Assembly which would fundamentally transform the Bolivian economy, state, and society in the interests of the poor indigenous majority. This vision included the organic participation of the main social movement organisations in the formation and execution of the assembly. The Constituent Assembly actually introduced by the MAS government has precluded all such revolutionary and participatory components. Instead, it resembles the traditional politics of the Congress because the MAS has made overt efforts to appease the bourgeoisie of the eastern part of the country concerning the rules defining the assembly’s conduct and content. The failure of instituting a

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3. There have of course been indigenous movements dating back to anti-colonial insurrections against the Spanish before Bolivia was even a republic. The most recent revival of indigenous struggle, however, dates back to the 1970s.
revolutionary Constituent Assembly has provided room for the rearticulation of right-wing forces. While the Bolivian Right was perhaps at its weakest politically in the Bolivian winter of 2005, because of the room afforded to it by the MAS, it has begun to rearticulate a political project in the form of right-wing autonomism in the departments of Pando, Beni, Santa Cruz and Tarija. The autonomists have obstructed the functioning of the Constituent Assembly process introduced by the MAS and increased the threat of civil war at various junctures in 2006.

Thesis 8: The domestic instability and social polarisation within Bolivia, in conjunction with weaker-than-usual imperial threats, and a favourable regional dynamic elsewhere in South America, may yet lead to a renewal of racialised class struggle from below and to deeper, perhaps even structural, reforms on the part of the MAS government. For this to transpire, the combined liberation struggle of the revolutionary epoch witnessed in the first five years of the twenty-first century would need to express itself with new life, in dramatic form, from below. The most important allies in the regional context are Venezuela and Cuba. New ties with these countries have afforded Bolivia more autonomy from imperialist forces than would have been possible otherwise. Additionally, the relative decline in the power of the IMF in Latin America as a whole, and the choice by the Bolivian government not to renew its Stand-By Agreement with the IMF when it expired in March 2006 are positive developments. At the same time, Bolivia’s foreign policy is rife with contradictions. The Bolivian state maintains troops in occupied Haiti even as MAS officials speak of Latin American liberation from imperialism. The Bolivian government also continues to seek a bi-lateral trade agreement with the US. The US, for its part, carries on with its attempts to influence the Bolivian process by way of the ‘drug war’ and ‘democracy promotion’. The trajectory of the Bolivian process therefore remains uncertain, even if we can and must do our best to highlight the discernible patterns available to date.

Part I of this three-part article seeks to introduce the basic class structure of the country, set the Bolivian process into the context of changes in Latin America more broadly, and delineate the current threats and opportunities

4. Bolivia is divided into nine departments, or states. In local parlance they have been separated traditionally into those of the altiplano, or high plateau (La Paz, Oruro and Potosí), the valleys (Cochabamba, Chuquisaca and Tarija), and the eastern lowlands (Pando, Beni and Santa Cruz). In the current period the term media luna (half moon) has gained political currency as a way of describing Pando, Beni, Santa Cruz and Tarija. These departments are home to the growing right-wing autonomist movement in the country. The media luna departments are also frequently called the ‘eastern lowlands’ today despite Tarija’s traditional positioning in the ‘valley’ departments, and Pando’s location in the northwest of the country.
posed by the contemporary state of capitalist imperialism for the advance of transformative change. The subsequent parts, to appear in the following two issues of this journal, will assess the theoretical debates on revolution in the country, chart the revolutionary epoch of 2000 to 2005, examine the results of the 18 December 2005 general elections, and explore the origins, ideology, changing class composition, and leadership of the MAS party. They will also provide a sweeping bird’s-eye overview of a number of characteristics defining the political economy and indigenous politics of the MAS government’s first months in office and examine some of the specificities of the supposed nationalisation of hydrocarbons (natural gas and oil) announced through a Presidential decree on 1 May 2006. Finally, they will analyse the contours of the Constituent Assembly process and the rise of the autonomist Right.

**Bolivia’s social formation and its place in the world**

There has recently been a healthy renewal of interest in Leon Trotsky’s associated concepts of combined and uneven development and permanent revolution, redirecting our attention to the interactions between global capitalism and the specificities of particular geographical spaces and social formations in precise historical periods. While, here, I have focused on the domestic balance of racialised class forces in Bolivia, it is imperative, following Trotsky, that we situate the unfolding process in this country within the wider regional and international context of global capitalism and imperialism. What we find is that there are considerable openings for transformative change in Bolivia within the current world order that were not available only a decade ago. At the same time, ‘democracy promotion’ by the US state and economic imperialism by various international actors remain formidable foes.

In terms of the interrelated political, military, and economic components of imperialism, Bolivia is quite obviously vulnerable to their worst manifestations. Being the poorest country in South America, Bolivia’s social indicators reflect the depth of its underdevelopment (see Table 1). In the United Nations Human Development Programmes (UNDP) Human Development Index of countries, Bolivia is ranked 113. As late as 1975, only 41.3 per cent of the population lived in urban areas.

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5. See Dunn and Radice (eds.) 2006.
Table 1: Main social indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population living in poverty (%) (2003)</td>
<td>67.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural population living in poverty (%) (2003)</td>
<td>79.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality (no. of deaths per 1,000 births) (2003)</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth (years; av.) (2003)</td>
<td>64.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schooling (av. years of attendance; population aged 19 &amp; over)</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult literacy rate (%; av)* (2001)</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Proportion of the population over the age of 15 who cannot with understanding compose and read a short simple statement about their everyday life.


As is the case elsewhere in the Third World, the country experienced rapid urbanisation during the neoliberal period. By 2003, 69 per cent of the population was urbanised. In the public-health system there are only 6.8 qualified doctors per 10,000 inhabitants, which is nonetheless double the number of doctors of only a few years ago. There are only three main highway arteries in the country, with the vast majority of the road systems outside of urban areas still unpaved. Landlocked, transportation costs for the country’s main exports are much higher than if it enjoyed access to the sea. Agriculture’s share of the GDP was 15.9 per cent in 2004. Mining was 4.9 per cent of GDP the same year. Manufacturing, if the measure includes processed agricultural commodities, contributed 18 per cent of GDP and 35.9 per cent of total export earnings in 2005. Manufacturing, however, is mostly ‘labour-intensive, small-scale and directed largely at regional markets’. Financial services accounted for only 13 per cent of GDP in 2004. As in most other areas of Latin America, the size of the informal economy is formidable:

9. However, mining accounted for 13.9 per cent of export earnings and continued to sustain entire communities in the altiplano, reflecting a political importance in excess of its economic weight (which is also rising).
By far the largest share of the workforce – around 66% – is engaged in the informal sector, including thousands of micro-businesses, small-scale and often contraband commerce and the illicit coca trade.\(^{10}\)

With a GDP per capita of only $US 974 – compared to $US 6,121 in neighbouring Chile, for example – Bolivia is an impoverished and weak country in the hierarchical configuration of nation states within the global capitalist system.

**Urban and rural class structures**

If we think of social classes as social-historical processes and relationships rather than static entities, ‘capturing a precise and complete picture of classes at any specific moment is difficult if not impossible’.\(^{11}\) Setting many complexities aside, however, the following description of Mexico’s basic dynamic of class struggle by the mid-twentieth century captures just as accurately the contemporary Bolivian reality:

> a very clear dividing line polarising the classes emerged. On one side of the line stood the triad of imperialism/state/domestic and foreign bourgeoisies; on the other side gathered much of the lower-paid intermediate classes, and the masses of workers, peasants, and underpaid, underemployed, or unemployed people.\(^{12}\)

**Urban class structure**

Regarding urban class structure, it is useful to frame our discussion in terms of sociologist Lorgio Orellana Aillón’s categorisation of three general régimes of accumulation in the history of Bolivian capitalism.\(^{13}\) All three distinct accumulation régimes fall within the general unity of Bolivia’s incorporation into global capitalism as a producer of primary materials.\(^{14}\) The first régime of

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14. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, Bolivian capitalism had as its basis silver mining enclaves. This shifted to tin mining at the close of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. Later in the twentieth century, Bolivia witnessed the growth of rubber, nuts, and soybean industries. The close of that century brought with it a shift to hydrocarbons as the new engine of accumulation, still based on the export of primary materials. There has been, therefore, a general continuity in the centrality of primary commodity exports in Bolivia’s capitalist development.
accumulation was the cycle of the ‘mining superstate’ led by a small group of tin barons combining British, Chilean and Bolivian capital. This régime solidified itself in the late nineteenth century with the expansion of silver capitalism, reached its apogee with the rise of the Liberal Party to power after the 1899 Federal War and the shift to tin capitalism, began its decline in the 1930s during the Chaco War with Paraguay, and reached its terminus with the National Revolution of 1952. This era was characterised by the promotion of liberal capitalism, the consolidation of a tiny white-\textit{mestizo} élite in power, the expansion of large-landholdings and dispossession of indigenous land, and the repression when necessary of worker and indigenous rebellions.\footnote{Orellana Aillón 2006, p. 265.}

The second accumulation régime, nationalist populism, was born in the wake of the 1952 revolution. The state in this cycle controlled and led the productive process through the establishment of various state enterprises. Most important among these were the state mining company, COMIBOL, and oil and gas company, YPFB. The state-led capitalist development model established in this period was characterised by centralised state administration, state ownership of natural resources, extensive state employment, considerable state direction in economic development and production, and a host of limited yet real social citizenship and welfare rights.

The state established its legitimacy through the nationalisation of the mines and agrarian reform, among other measures. Finance, agriculture, and mining were the major activities of capitalists in this period, with manufacturing industries only employing 3 per cent of the economically active population in the 1970s.\footnote{Conaghan, Malloy and Abugattas 1990, p. 24.} Under the dictatorship of Hugo Bánzer (1971–8) millions of dollars of cheap credit subsidised agro-capitalists in Santa Cruz, who subsequently expanded into finance, industry and the service sector.\footnote{Cocaine was also extremely important to the creation of a powerful regional bourgeoisie in the eastern lowlands beginning in the late 1970s, with activities of the narco-bourgeoisie bleeding into the enterprises of the legal bourgeoisie. This important topic cannot be addressed here.}

The cycle of populist accumulation began to decline after the right-wing military coup of 1964 and grounded to an abrupt halt in the mid-1980s in the midst of an acute economic crisis and growing worker and peasant radicalism.\footnote{Orellana Aillón 2006, p. 265.} The nationalist-populist accumulation régime was displaced by a ‘neoliberal oligarchic’ régime beginning in 1985 with the introduction of an orthodox neoliberal structural adjustment programme called the New Economic Policy (NEP).\footnote{Ibid.} This cycle was defined by the rise of domestic financial capital
subordinated to transnational companies and international financial capital, the dramatic liberalisation of trade, the penetration by foreign capital of the Bolivian economy, and the wholesale privatisation of the country’s natural resources, strategic state-owned enterprises, and public services. In the 1990s, water was privatised in various cities and the government sold the state-owned oil and gas, telecommunications, airlines, smelter, power generation and railroad enterprises to a series of multinational corporations.20

The underpinnings for the shift to this neoliberal régime of accumulation began as early as the 1964 coup, but really took off in the 1980s and 1990s. Between 1978 and 1982, Bolivia was wracked by an incredible succession of military coups producing intense uncertainty for Bolivian capitalists and foreign investors alike. In addition, peasant and worker radicalism was expressing itself with renewed vigour, continuing to mobilise in the streets after the rise of the centre-left government of the Democratic Popular Unity (1982–5) in an effort to provoke a transition to socialism.

The Bolivian bourgeoisie organised itself through the Confederación de Empresarios Privados de Bolivia (Confederation of Private Entrepreneurs of Bolivia, CEPB) and began advocating electoral democracy and neoliberalism by the end of the 1970s, ‘as a means of avoiding a further degeneration of the military and a transition controlled by the radical left’.21 Finance and mining segments of the capitalist class dominated the CEPB and played an instrumental role in the implementation of the neoliberal model.22 Juan Cariaga, an executive in the Banco de Santa Cruz, and Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, a millionaire and large stockholder in one of the most important Bolivian mining companies, COMSUR, were the most important ministers (finance and planning) in the cabinet of the first neoliberal government in the mid-1980s.23 Because industrial capitalists dependent on the development model of import substitution constituted a smaller part of the economy than in neighbouring Latin American countries, there was significantly less intra-class dispute between fractions of capital concerning the introduction of neoliberalism.

The unprecedented unity of the Bolivian bourgeoisie in the mid-1980s was made more powerful by the threat the radical Left constituted at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s. As anthropologist Harry Sanabria observes, ‘[w]hile

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22. Representatives of finance and mining worked with advisors from international financial institutions and state technocrats, many of whom had been trained in the neoliberal economic departments of American Ivy League universities. Undoubtedly the most important foreign advisor was Jeffrey Sachs, at the time a professor of economics at Harvard.
not all dominant class factions gained or lost equally in the short run, neoliberalism has enhanced the viability of the existing social order…’ 24 At the end of the 1990s the neoliberal-oligarchic régime of accumulation entered into crisis, opening up a period of massive left-indigenous rebellion that sought to resign neoliberalism to the dustbin of history.25 But, while the political project of the Bolivian capitalist class has suffered resounding setbacks, the economic power of the regional bourgeoisie in the eastern lowlands remains intact today. The Santa Cruz bourgeoisie, in particular, maintains its base in agriculture (particularly soy), hydrocarbons, and finance, with intimate ties to foreign capital. The department attracts more foreign direct investment (FDI) than any other department in the country and leads all other regions in export and tax revenue.

The structure of the urban working class forms the other side of this story. First forged between 1880 and the 1952 national-populist revolution, the Bolivian workers’ movement has been defined by powerful ideologies of revolutionary Marxism, anarcho-syndicalism and anti-imperialism.26 For much of the twentieth century, the Bolivian labour movement was unique in Latin America for its militant independence, radical consciousness, and its relative freedom from the shackles of state corporatism. Led overwhelmingly by the tin miners, the workers attempted unsuccessfully to steer the 1952 revolution toward revolutionary socialism, fought against a string of military dictatorships between 1964 and the early 1980s, and played a leading role in the recovery of electoral democracy in 1982, even as they sought to transcend liberal democracy and achieve a transition to socialism.27

Parallel to the onset of neoliberalism, the international price of tin crashed in the mid-1980s, destroying the material basis for the tin miners’ vanguard role in the labour movement. The tin mines were privatised and roughly 30,000 miners lost their jobs. This marked the beginning of critical changes in the structure of the working class over the next fifteen years. On top of the layoffs in the state mining sector, the first two years of the NEP (1985–7) witnessed the addition of hundreds of thousands of workers to the growing reserve army of the unemployed, including 6,000 from the private mining sector, 10,000 from public administration, and 2,000 from banking. In addition, over 110 factories were shut down in this period.28 As the neoliberal

27. See Nash 1993 on the tin miners.
In the Bolivian context, as elsewhere, the restructuring of the world of work was not simply capital’s attempt to exercise the best technical tools to reduce labour costs in the economic sphere. It was also an explicitly political project to restructure work in such a way as to make the structural obstacles to worker resistance as onerous as possible and to reduce the collective capacities of the working class to act on its interests.29

The most dramatic change to the structure of production on a national level was clearly the processes of accumulation by dispossession of the main state-owned enterprises.30 With the privatisation of these companies, there was a general process of ‘rationalising’ and ‘flexibilising’ their labour forces. This meant the restructuring of the enterprises in ways that maintained or reduced the number of employees, subcontracted out certain activities to non-union labour, and created obstacles to the unionisation of these new sectors.31

At a slightly lower tier of the economy, just below the peak state enterprises that were privatised, the largest 100 foreign and local enterprises in industry, mining, commercial agriculture and banking also saw an augmentation of subcontracting and the ‘informalisation’ of production processes. This level of the economy is increasingly integrated into the informal economy by way of utilising small, non-unionised production units which contribute various small parts to the final product during the production process. This almost invariably means the increasing use of non-unionised female, teenage, and child labour.32 Below the key privatised state enterprises and the 100 main firms of the next tier, there were an estimated 500,000 micro enterprises by the late 1990s in agriculture, commerce and artisan activities. Table 2 provides an estimate of the various sectors of the current Bolivian work force. Table 3 indicates estimates of urban unemployment.

In the decade between 1985 and 1995, public-sector employment in urban areas shrank dramatically from 25 per cent of the workforce to 13 per cent. Neoliberal theory held that these job losses would be compensated with new formal jobs in expanding private businesses. However, the formal private sector accounted for only 18.4 per cent of the work-force in 1995, up barely more than two points from 16 per cent in 1985.

30. See Harvey 2003 on accumulation by dispossession.
Table 2: Estimates of Bolivian labour force, 2006–7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Activity</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>1,777,288</td>
<td>1,804,569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydrocarbons</td>
<td>13,980</td>
<td>14,813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>64,006</td>
<td>70,021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>547,593</td>
<td>575,829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, Gas, Water</td>
<td>17,178</td>
<td>17,972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>159,685</td>
<td>185,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>649,127</td>
<td>672,366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>197,390</td>
<td>205,338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>19,248</td>
<td>20,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>33,593</td>
<td>36,792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Administration</td>
<td>145,945</td>
<td>151,941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>479,197</td>
<td>495,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Bolivia</strong></td>
<td>4,104,231</td>
<td>4,250,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Urban</strong></td>
<td>2,312,963</td>
<td>2,431,236</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CEDLA, 2007, ‘Bajará el desempleo, pero... 261 mil personas no encontrarán trabajo en las ciudades,’ *Alerta Laboral* (mayo): p. 4. (Centro de estudios para el desarrollo laboral y agrario, CEDLA: <www.cedla.org>.)

Table 3: Estimates of unemployment in urban Bolivia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Population</strong></td>
<td>5,875,679</td>
<td>6,055,392</td>
<td>6,129,586</td>
<td>6,388,232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Working Age</strong></td>
<td>4,659,349</td>
<td>4,831,745</td>
<td>5,010,519</td>
<td>5,195,909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economically Active</strong></td>
<td>2,563,173</td>
<td>2,625,714</td>
<td>2,695,558</td>
<td>2,769,955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employed</strong></td>
<td>2,262,035</td>
<td>2,308,397</td>
<td>2,389,753</td>
<td>2,508,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unemployed</strong></td>
<td>301,138</td>
<td>317,317</td>
<td>305,805</td>
<td>261,930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economically Inactive</strong></td>
<td>2,096,176</td>
<td>2,206,031</td>
<td>2,314,961</td>
<td>2,425,953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global Level Participation</strong></td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Growth of EAP</strong></td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* EAP, Economically Active Population

Source: CEDLA, 2007, ‘Bajará el desempleo, pero... 261 mil personas no encontrarán trabajo en las ciudades,’ *Alerta Laboral* (mayo): p. 5. (Centro de estudios para el desarrollo laboral y agrario, CEDLA: <www.cedla.org>.)
The real growth as a proportion of the work-force occurred in the informal sector which expanded from 60 per cent in 1985 to 68 per cent in 1995 (see Table 4). One of the key benefits for employers in the expansion of the informal sector is the fact that this is non-union work, and that unionisation is actually illegal in enterprises that employ under 20 individuals. The obstacles to forming new unions are consequently extremely difficult in the informal sector.

### Table 4: Employment by segment of the labour market

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Advocates of the neoliberal model point to official unemployment rates below five per cent during the late 1980s and into the late 1990s, with the exception of a level of 10.4 per cent in 1989. However, by some estimates, underemployment reached 53 per cent of the economically active population (EAP) in 1997. Work was dramatically more precarious with the proliferation of the informal economy: the employment of more and more young workers between the ages of 10 to 24 with no union experience or knowledge of their rights; increasing numbers of female workers who also had less union experience and were more vulnerable to intimidation and sexual harassment on the work site; and the decline of permanent contracts and the increase of short-term contracts, day labourers, and part-time work with no benefits.

A good deal of new hiring was made through temporary contracts. Only 14 per cent of the formal private-sector contracts registered with the government in 1994 were ‘indefinite’ contracts, as compared to 68 per cent fixed-term contracts, and 18 per cent short-term specific job projects. Increasingly, workers could obtain only part-time jobs of under 40 hours a week making them ineligible for better social benefits that come with full-time employment.

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At the same time, across different sectors of the economy, the neoliberal period witnessed the amplification of the number of hours worked per individual at lower rates of pay, as people were increasingly forced to take on second jobs. The number of workers taking home salaries without any complementary benefits increased significantly between 1982 and 1992 in various sectors: from 40 to 55 per cent in industrial manufacturing, 71 to 82 per cent in construction, 49 to 55 per cent in transportation, 42 to 61 per cent in commerce, and in services 22 to 38 per cent.

The fragmentation of the production process into smaller and smaller units means that workers are no longer concentrated in large groups, as factories are displaced by smaller workshops. The material conditions of the Bolivian working class under neoliberalism have been fundamentally rearranged through this dynamic. A central paradox has emerged as a result: the number of workers constituting the urban working class – defined expansively as those who do not live off the labour of others – continued to expand in the 1980s and 1990s, while the visibility and social power of this working class deteriorated.

The external subcontracting by large enterprises of various tasks that contribute to the overall production process meant that a growing sector of subcontracted workers laboured in small workplaces with worse working conditions and environments, no unions, lower wages, and worse quotas than the older, formal employees of the main firms. In other cases, different production stages were subcontracted to ‘one-person’ firms or ‘family enterprises’, the employees of which are sometimes referred to as ‘micro-entrepreneurs’ in the economics literature. They are better thought of as informal proletarians frequently working under awful conditions without protection, doing the tasks ‘once done by a regular worker enjoying social security, health benefits, and bonuses . . .’

By the late 1990s, full-time unionised workers represented a meagre 20 per cent of the Bolivian workforce, while the other 80 per cent were atomised and fragmented, lacking job security and social benefits. With this shift in organisational class power to the benefit of capital and the detriment of labour, employers in various parts of the public and private sectors used a series of illegal and legal mechanisms to encroach even further on the rights of workers

37. Arze Vargas 2000, p. 32.
38. Arze Vargas 2000, p. 34.
39. Olivera and Lewis 2004, pp. 20-21; see Spronk 2007a and 2007b on the rationale behind defining the Bolivian working class in these terms.
in an effort to extract more value while reducing labour costs. Some of the most obvious and egregious examples include the plain rejection by formal (public and private) and informal sector firms of the basic right to unionise, threats and firing of individuals suspected of trying to organise workers, and, at some unionised workplaces, the prohibition of union dues collection, making union sustainability virtually impossible.\(^{42}\)

Oscar Olivera, a former shoe-factory worker who attained national and international notoriety for his leadership role in the Cochabamba Water War of 2000, succinctly described the aims and consequences of the re-organisation of the world of Bolivian work under neoliberalism:

> The forms of hiring and subcontracting are extremely varied but they all have the same goals: atomising workers and dividing us against ourselves, taming our resistance and unity, inciting competition among us, and forcing greater productivity per worker at lower wages. This problem of the fragmentation of the Bolivian working class – our dispersion and the variety of working conditions we endure – is the principal problem that Bolivian workers must face up to if we really want to resist, to challenge, and to overcome neoliberalism.\(^{43}\)

The combined consequences of the new precariousness of work, the disarticulation of the Central Obrera Boliviana (Bolivian Workers’ Central, COB) as an effective organising body of the working class, the structural heterogeneity of the work experiences of the new urban working class, and the boldness of a capitalist class relatively unified behind the project of political and economic neoliberal transformation, together worked against the collective capacities of working-class resistance in the late 1980s and throughout the bulk of the 1990s.

Union strategies and the strategies of rank-and-file workers tended to be more improvisational, defensive and reactive, and less political than they had been in the past. As some analysts have suggested, this was more out of basic necessity given the balance of social forces and dramatic changes in the material world of work than the result of changing political choices and ideologies.\(^{44}\) Much of the theoretical literature on the obstacles to collective action on the part of the popular classes in Latin America suggests that social formations with large and stable industrial labour forces tend to provide the conditions for a certain commonality of interests among workers and are consequently more favourable to the organisation of unions and class-based collective action.

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42. Arze Vargas 2000, p. 27.
44. See Kruse 2002.
than social formations with more segmented and differentiated labour markets. Bolivia’s social formation certainly turned toward the more segmented and differentiated wing of this dichotomy after the structural transformations of neoliberalism were enacted. And, for much of the period between the mid-1980s and the late 1990s, the structural difficulties to mounting class-based collective resistance predicted in theories of Latin-American popular-sector collective action were accurate to a large degree.

However, there were also notable exceptions as the Bolivian rural and urban working classes began to experiment with new forms of organising and doing politics by the end of the 1990s. Most important was the growing success of the cocalero movement in the Chapare. There also emerged sectors of the urban union movement which began to forge novel ties with informal proletarian organisations and social movements, and the growing rural indigenous-peasant movements. This sort of social-movement unionism was especially evident in the cities of Cochabamba and El Alto-La Paz, the two epicentres of urban insurrection in the 2000–5 period. Thus a complex process began in the late 1990s through which the urban and rural infrastructures of dissent began to recompose themselves after 15 years of neoliberal onslaught. The result was the most important surge in left-indigenous popular mobilisation in the continent between 2000 and 2005.

**Rural class structure**

At the outset of the twenty-first century, the rural class structure in Bolivia is characterised by a dramatic concentration of land in the hands of a few, on the one hand, and a sea of poor – often landless – peasants on the other. *Haciendas* (large-landholdings) dominate 90 per cent of Bolivia’s productive land, leaving only 10 per cent divided between mostly-indigenous peasant communities and smallholding peasants. Roughly 400 individuals own 70 per cent of productive land while there are 2.5 million landless peasants in a country with a total population of 9 million. Most of the peasants are indigenous, with 77 per cent of rural inhabitants self-identifying as such in the 2001 census.

Bolivia’s rural structure prior to the 1952 National Revolution was dominated by large landholdings in which ‘neo-feudal’ social relations predominated, ‘based on established modes of colonial extraction and

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46. See Sears 2007 on infrastructure of dissent.
exploitation in the countryside’. Pre-revolutionary Bolivia had the highest inequality of land concentration in all of Latin America, with 82 per cent of land in the possession of four per cent of landowners. As the nationalist-populist revolutionary process of 1952 unfolded, mass direct-action tactics and independent land occupations orchestrated by radicalised peasants in Cochabamba, La Paz, and Oruro, and, to a lesser extent, in northern Potosí and Chuquisaca, challenged this rural class structure profoundly. The new revolutionary government of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, MNR) was forced to enact the Agrarian Reform Law of 1953 in response to the pressure from below. Forced labour was made illegal and haciendas in the altiplano (La Paz, Oruro, Potosí) and the valleys (Cochabamba, Chuquisaca, Tarija) were divided and the land redistributed, creating a new smallholding peasantry in large sections of these departments.

The MNR, though, was never a socialist party. Its interests coincided with the radical peasants only insofar as the MNR saw the break up of semi-feudal agrarian modes of production as a prerequisite for establishing and developing a dynamic capitalist agricultural sector with ample state support. The geographic fulcrum for capitalist agriculture in Bolivia became the eastern department of Santa Cruz, beginning shortly after the revolution.

Santa Cruz was relatively uninhabited at the time of the revolution and was largely unaffected by the agrarian reform. Over the next several decades, it became the most dynamic centre of capitalist agriculture in the country, producing cotton, coffee, sugar, and timber for export. The department also spearheaded the re-concentration of land in the hands of a few that eventually spread again throughout much of the rest of the country, reversing, through complex legal and market mechanisms, many of the reforms achieved in the National Revolution.

With the onset of neoliberalism in the mid-1980s, the agro-industrial dominance of Santa Cruz was solidified. Bolivian neoliberalism emphasised the orientation of agriculture toward exports for external markets. Transnational corporations and large domestic agricultural enterprises based in Santa Cruz led this intensified insertion into the global economy. The traditional peasant economy was increasingly displaced in various parts of the country as large agro-industrial enterprises solidified control and focused increasingly on a few select commodities, soy in particular. In 1986, 77 per cent of the total land

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area under cultivation was devoted to the production of cereals, fruit, vegetables and tubers in which small-peasant production predominated. By 2004, this area had been reduced to 48.2 percent. By one estimate, in 1963 peasant production represented 82.2 per cent of the total value of agricultural production in the country, whereas by 2002 peasant production accounted for only 39.7 per cent of total production, and agro-industrial capitalist production accounted for 60.3 per cent of the total.\(^5\)

Of the approximately 446,000 peasant production units remaining in the country today, 225,000 are located in the *altiplano* departments of La Paz, Oruro and Potosí, 164,000 in the valley departments of Cochabamba, Chuquisaca, and Tarija, and only 57,000 in the eastern lowland departments of Santa Cruz, Beni, and Pando. Capitalist relations of production now predominate in the eastern lowlands and are increasingly displacing small-scale peasant production in the valleys and *altiplano*, although the latter continues to be the most important form of production in the *altiplano*.\(^4\) Of the 2,118,988 hectares of land cultivated in Bolivia in 2004, 59 per cent were in the eastern lowland departments.

These departments were home to 96 per cent of industrial crop production (cotton, sugarcane, sunflowers, peanuts and soy), 42 per cent of production of vegetables (beans and tomatoes), and 27 per cent of fruit production (mainly bananas and oranges). Furthermore, these eastern departments accounted for 73.3 per cent of national cattle ranching, 36.3 per cent of pig farming, and 37.8 per cent of poultry production. Finally, 60.1 per cent of the timber extracted from Bolivian forests came from Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando.\(^5\)

Large agro-industrial capitalists dominate in this part of the country. In the valley departments, small and medium capitalist enterprises account for most of the agricultural sector. These departments play a significant role in ranching. They account for 60.3 per cent of poultry production, 48 per cent of pig farming, and 18.5 per cent of Bolivian cattle ranching. The rural *altiplano*, on the other hand, is still dominated by small peasant producers and indigenous communities. This region accounts for only 19 per cent of total cultivated land in Bolivia, and its contribution to national ranching is circumscribed to the sheep and llama sectors.\(^6\)

The rural population is diminishing throughout the country as processes of semi-proletarianisation and proletarianisation accelerate with the gradual extension of capitalist relations of production into all corners of the country.

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56. Ormachea Saavedra 2007, p. 34.
Beginning in the early 1970s, migrant semi-proletarians provided the workforce for sugarcane and cotton harvests while, for the rest of the year, they maintained small plots of their own land in the departments from which they primarily travelled – Cochabamba, Potosí, and Chuquisaca. Between 1976 and 1996, the rural population as a proportion of the total population fell from 59 per cent to 39 per cent.57

This exodus has to do with two interrelated developments in the agricultural sector. On the one side, peasant production has been going through a prolonged crisis. Peasant families are increasingly unable to reproduce themselves and must supplement their farming income by selling their labour-power, whether in the countryside or in the cities. In the altiplano, small-scale peasant producers and indigenous communities are experiencing diminishing productive capacities of their soil, the division of land into smaller and smaller plots [minifundios] as families grow in size from generation to generation, the migration of young people to cities, and an acute absence of new technologies, making competition with foreign suppliers to the domestic Bolivian markets impossible.58 Meanwhile, in the dynamic centre of agro-capitalism in the eastern lowlands, technical innovation and modernisation has led to more capital-intensive forms of agricultural production and, consequently, a paucity of employment opportunities even as industries expand.59

As capitalist social relations increase their reach, the differentiation of the peasantry into rich, medium, and poor peasants also intensifies. Survey data from 1988 suggested that 76 per cent of peasantry were poor peasants, meaning they did not have the means to reproduce their family labour-power based on the income generated from their land and were obligated to sell their labour elsewhere on a temporary basis. Medium peasants constituted 11 per cent of the peasantry when defined as peasant family units fundamentally based on family labour with the ability to reproduce that labour without selling their labour-power elsewhere. Rich peasants – those who regularly made a profit after reproducing their family and their means of production, purchased the labour of poorer peasants, and utilised modern technology – constituted 13 per cent of the peasantry.60 This process of differentiation within the peasantry has only accelerated since that time, with the transformation of some rich peasants into commercial farmers in specific regions of the altiplano and valley departments.61

Such have been the changing urban and rural class compositions of Bolivian society up to the current period. Having set out these basic patterns, it is important to situate them within the broader dynamics of global capitalism and the imperialist system it generates.

**Contradictions of capitalist imperialism**

Beginning with the debt crisis of the 1980s, the influence of the IMF, World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), various imperialist member states of the European Union, and the American state in setting the domestic economic agenda in Bolivia was dramatically amplified. As has been the case elsewhere in Latin America, the US ‘drug war’ has also supplied a useful pretext for the American state’s intervention in Bolivia’s domestic political and military affairs.

US intervention in Bolivian matters has undergone other ideological shifts as well, such as the intensification of ‘democracy promotion’, or, as William I. Robinson suggests, ‘polyarchy promotion’. Polyarchy, is a system in which a small group actually rules, on behalf of capital, and participation in decision making by the majority is confined to choosing among competing elites in tightly controlled electoral processes.

With the decline of the traditionally neoliberal parties, the rise of left-indigenous forces in the early 2000s, the perceived threat of Evo Morales and the MAS, and the overthrow of two neoliberal presidents in 2003 and 2005, US ‘democracy promotion’ intensified in Bolivia:

Publicly available information, documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and interviews with recipients of U.S. aid in Bolivia reveal that the U.S. government has spent millions of dollars to rebuild discredited political parties, to undercut independent grassroots movements, to bolster malleable indigenous leaders with little popular support and to dissuade Bolivians from talking about whether they should have greater ownership rights over their natural resources.

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63. Petras and Veltmeyer 2001, pp. 139–44.
64. Robinson 1996, p. 2. It should be noted that the brutal occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq clearly illustrate that open coercion is completely operable under the banner of democracy promotion.
In a 2002 cable from the US embassy in La Paz to the State Department, accessed through the FOIA, it was stated that a planned USAID project would ‘help build moderate, pro-democracy political parties that can serve as a counterweight to the radical MAS or its successors’.67 Along these lines, between 2002 and 2004, the US National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), with funding from the US National Endowment for Democracy, sponsored trips to Washington of emerging political leaders of the traditional neoliberal parties – MNR, ADN, MIR, and NFR – for political training. These funds were also used to support ‘party-strengthening’ initiatives in Bolivia of these same parties.

The NDI, with funding from USAID, opened an office in La Paz in January 2004. Likewise, USAID funded the activities of the US International Republican Institution (IRI) in Bolivia, allowing the IRI to open an office of its own in the capital in March 2004. The IRI focused on ‘democracy promotion’ within ‘civil society’ domains, teaching ‘democratic culture’ and ‘authority and responsibility’ to tens of thousands of children in high schools through the mass distribution of pamphlets, for example. Finally, USAID financed the opening of the Office of Transitions Initiative (OTI) in La Paz in the same month as the new IRI office was established. OTI’s 2004–5 budget was $11.8 million, with which it focused on the rebellious countryside of the altiplano and the massive urban shantytown of El Alto in an explicit effort to depoliticise popular movements rising up around the nationalisation of natural gas and water. It has also been reported that 40 per cent of the Bolivian government’s public relations budget under President Carlos Mesa was financed by OTI. Following the failure of these initiatives to save Mesa’s administration from massive insurrections in May and June 2005, USAID cut funding from the NDI and IRI projects.68 All of this is simply to note the dynamics and depth of US imperial intervention in Bolivia’s political processes and economic policymaking.

However, if we left it at that, we would miss the crucial opportunities for the radicalisation of the Bolivian process offered by the present conjuncture of imperialist strategies and regional political dynamics elsewhere in Latin America. Militarily, the US is experiencing a crisis of imperial overreach in Iraq, with its eyes set next on Iran. Despite the Americans’ new military base in Paraguay, which will enhance their military capabilities in the region over the longer term, there is no evidence thus far of imminent threats of overt military intervention in Bolivia.69

67. Ibid.
68. Lindsay 2005, pp. 7-9.
69. On the base in Paraguay see Dangl 2005a and Dangl 2005b.
Politically and ideologically, neoliberalism has been completely discredited in Latin America, with political parties of various ideological hues finding rhetorical rejection of the model a prerequisite for serious political contestation in elections. The widely held association of the US state with the imposition of the neoliberal model in Latin America, in conjunction with a particular hatred for the administration of George W. Bush, has shed the American state of any credible leverage through persuasion in good chunks of the region.70 Beginning in the 1990s, the American state began pursuing a dual strategy in Latin America of ‘free-trade’ promotion and the installation of military bases in multiple locales. However, the most important project of the last two decades, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), failed due to ‘(1) the conflicts between globalized corporations and those dependent on internal markets, (2) clashes between exporters and industrialists, and (3) widespread popular rejection’.71 While the US has brandished bilateral trade agreements as their alternative weapon of choice, the collapse of the FTAA was clearly a prodigious blow to American imperialism in its own backyard.

The economics of imperialism

We must still account for the subtler economics of imperialism, however. In a world in which imperialist domination no longer relies on permanent colonies, Capitalist imperialism has become almost entirely a matter of economic domination, in which market imperatives, manipulated by the dominant capitalist powers, are made to do the work no longer done by imperial states or colonial settlers.72

In this area as well, a confluence of conjunctural factors has enabled the Bolivian state more room for manoeuvre than a cursory glance at its economic indicators would imply. Economic domination of the global North over the global South is typically exercised through the overlapping media of multilateral lending institutions (IMF, World Bank, IDB), international financial markets, and core capitalist states. Specific mechanisms include the manipulation of trade, aid and debt, as well as a myriad of other political and

70. The two most ardent anomalies are Colombia and Mexico under the far-right administrations of Álvaro Uribe and Felipe Calderón, respectively.
military threats and actions. As Table 5 indicates, the largest part of Bolivia’s
debt is external (70.2 per cent), more than 90 per cent of which is owed to
multilateral lending institutions.73 The table shows $243.8 million owing to
the IMF, of which $232.5 million was cancelled in 2006 following the 8 July
2005 decision by G-8 countries to cancel the IMF debt for Highly Indebted
Poor Countries (HIPC). At the same time, a process was initiated through
which $1.53 billion of the $1.62 billion owed by Bolivia to the World Bank
will be cancelled: ‘So this debt ($1.53 billion) can be seen as cancelled in the
near future’.74

In mid-March 2007, the IDB also announced that it would cancel $1
billion of Bolivia’s outstanding debt to that institution.75 While the IMF
cancellation only represents 4.7 per cent of Bolivia’s total external debt it
nonetheless represents 2.5 per cent of the country’s GDP, and means that the
Bolivian state will pay the IMF $16.5 million between 2006 and 2009 rather
than the hitherto scheduled $236 million.76 Significantly, the Morales
government chose not to renew a Stand-By Agreement with the IMF which
expired on 31 March 2006, releasing the country from some of the rigid
conditionalities typically attached to IMF loans. Historically, the IMF has
played a ‘gatekeeper’ role in lending to Latin American governments such that
even though proportionally its loans have been small, without approval from
the IMF it has been difficult for poor countries to get loans from the much
bigger stockpiles of the World Bank, IDB, and bilateral lenders.77

However, since the 1990s, the IMF’s influence in middle-income countries
worldwide has been diminishing, constituting, in the words of one analyst,
‘the biggest change in the international financial system since the breakdown
of the Bretton Woods system in 1973…’.78 The portfolio of the IMF
internationally has been reduced from $96 billion in 2004 to $20 billion
today, with only 3 per cent of its outstanding loans owed by Latin America.79

According to Weisbrot and Sandoval:

74. Weisbrot and Sandoval 2006, p. 11.
75. Ikeda 2007. It should be noted that Table V does not take into account the IDB debt
cancellation because although it was reported that approximately $1 billion in debt was being
cancelled, the exact figure was still undetermined at the time of writing.
76. Weisbrot and Sandoval 2006, p. 7.
77. Weisbrot and Sandoval 2006, pp. 10–11.
Table 5: Bolivia: Total Public Debt, 2000–5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>External</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Multilateral</td>
<td>3077.3</td>
<td>36.60%</td>
<td>3261.1</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>3637.2</td>
<td>45.80%</td>
<td>4318.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>220.2</td>
<td>2.60%</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
<td>194.6</td>
<td>2.50%</td>
<td>276.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDB</td>
<td>1392.8</td>
<td>16.60%</td>
<td>1373.7</td>
<td>16.80%</td>
<td>1450.2</td>
<td>18.30%</td>
<td>1626.5</td>
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<td>World Bank</td>
<td>1096.3</td>
<td>13.00%</td>
<td>1146.8</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
<td>1323.5</td>
<td>16.70%</td>
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<td>CAF</td>
<td>255.4</td>
<td>3.00%</td>
<td>420.7</td>
<td>5.20%</td>
<td>577.4</td>
<td>7.30%</td>
<td>740.6</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<td>1.30%</td>
<td>112.9</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
<td>103.6</td>
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<td><strong>Bilateral</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>523.4</td>
<td>6.20%</td>
<td>464.1</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
<td>513.5</td>
<td>6.50%</td>
<td>567.6</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
<td>325.4</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
<td>306.1</td>
<td>3.80%</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>9.5</td>
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<td>Belgium</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>142.3</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>137.8</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>134.9</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>130.9</td>
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<td>France</td>
<td>40.7</td>
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<td>37.9</td>
<td>0.50%</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>17.2</td>
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<td>USA</td>
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<td>59.3</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>0.20%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>73.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>182.2</td>
<td>2.20%</td>
<td>115.8</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
<td>2.8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total External</strong></td>
<td>4460.3</td>
<td>53.00%</td>
<td>4496.7</td>
<td>55.10%</td>
<td>4399.7</td>
<td>55.40%</td>
<td>5141.8</td>
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Note: Percentages are of total public debt.
Table 5: (cont.)

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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Public Sector*</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>55  0.70%</td>
<td>835.6  9.90%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>68.5  0.80%</td>
<td>1261.4 15.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>64.5  0.80%</td>
<td>1331.4 16.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>55.3  0.70%</td>
<td>1518.9 18.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>38.9  0.40%</td>
<td>1768.4 20.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>44.6  0.50%</td>
<td>1997.8 21.40%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>44.6  0.50%</td>
<td>1997.8 21.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>780.6  9.30%</td>
<td>1192.9 19.60%</td>
<td>5295.9 63.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1267  16.00%</td>
<td>1267  16.00%</td>
<td>5758.1 70.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1463.6 18.10%</td>
<td>1463.6 18.10%</td>
<td>5731.1 72.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1729.5 19.70%</td>
<td>1729.5 19.70%</td>
<td>6600.7 82.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1953.3 20.90%</td>
<td>1953.3 20.90%</td>
<td>6813.7 77.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1953.3 20.90%</td>
<td>1953.3 20.90%</td>
<td>6938.6 74.30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>OMAs (Market</td>
<td>263.6  3.10%</td>
<td>538.9  6.60%</td>
<td>5295.9 63.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Auctions)</td>
<td></td>
<td>460.5  5.80%</td>
<td>5758.1 70.60%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>531.7  6.60%</td>
<td>531.7  6.60%</td>
<td>5731.1 72.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>660.5  7.50%</td>
<td>660.5  7.50%</td>
<td>6600.7 82.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>726.3  7.80%</td>
<td>726.3  7.80%</td>
<td>6813.7 77.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>726.3  7.80%</td>
<td>6938.6 74.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFPs (Pensions)</td>
<td>517  6.10%</td>
<td>654  8.00%</td>
<td>5295.9 63.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>786  9.90%</td>
<td>913.1 11.30%</td>
<td>5758.1 70.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1049 11.90%</td>
<td>1120 12.90%</td>
<td>5731.1 72.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1207 12.90%</td>
<td>1207 12.90%</td>
<td>6600.7 82.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1120 11.90%</td>
<td>1120 12.90%</td>
<td>6813.7 77.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1207 12.90%</td>
<td>1207 12.90%</td>
<td>6938.6 74.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0  0.00%</td>
<td>0  0.00%</td>
<td>0  0.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20  0.30%</td>
<td>18.5  0.20%</td>
<td>18.5  0.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0  0.00%</td>
<td>20  0.20%</td>
<td>20  0.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20  0.20%</td>
<td>20  0.20%</td>
<td>20  0.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Domestic</td>
<td>835.6  9.90%</td>
<td>1261.4 15.50%</td>
<td>5295.9 63.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1331.4 16.80%</td>
<td>1518.9 18.80%</td>
<td>5758.1 70.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1768.4 20.10%</td>
<td>1997.8 21.40%</td>
<td>5731.1 72.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1997.8 21.40%</td>
<td>1997.8 21.40%</td>
<td>6600.7 82.20%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1997.8 21.40%</td>
<td>1997.8 21.40%</td>
<td>6813.7 77.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1997.8 21.40%</td>
<td>1997.8 21.40%</td>
<td>6938.6 74.30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Does not include domestic debt owed to the Central Bank.

** This value reflects IMF debt cancellation of US$ 232.5 million plus exchange rate variation of US$ 2.6 million.

The power of the IMF has declined drastically since the late 1990s. After the East Asian economic crisis the middle-income countries of that region began to accumulate large amounts of foreign exchange reserves, partly to avoid ever having to borrow from the IMF again. The experience of Argentina since 2002, in which the country rejected key policy recommendations of the IMF and received no net funding from the Fund or allied multilateral lenders, and experienced a robust economic recovery, also had the effect of greatly reducing the IMF’s influence over middle-income countries. Most recently, there has been a sharply reduced demand for IMF loans. In the past few months two of its biggest borrowers – Argentina and Brazil, paid in full their remaining debt to the IMF.80

Indeed, as *The Economist* reports,

The IMF’s natural clients in emerging Asia and Latin America have repaid their loans and amassed their own defences against financial crises. This has left the fund all suited up with nowhere to go.81

Compounding the decline of the IMF’s influence, moreover, has been the availability of alternative financing from the oil-rich Venezuelan state under the Hugo Chávez government. Recently, Venezuela has committed $3 billion to Argentina, and hundreds of millions to Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador, among other countries.82

US influence also appears to be eroding in relation to aid. Current levels of Bolivia’s net borrowing from multilateral lending institutions remain significant, but are not overwhelming. Furthermore, they are diminishing over time through debt cancellations, alternative means of financing from the Venezuelan state, and increased domestic hydrocarbon revenues under the new arrangements negotiated by the Morales government with the transnational petroleum companies in 2006. Table 6 indicates that a majority of the grants and donations going to Bolivia come from Europe. It is true that the United States does supply other funding through its ‘Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs’ – $90.3 million for 2005. Washington also contributed $48.2 million for other projects. However, other than the $8.4 million from USAID noted [in Table 6] this money does not fund the central government.83

80. Weisbrot and Sandoval 2006, p. 11.
83. Weisbrot and Sandoval 2006, p. 15.
Finally, as can be seen in Table 7, the US state tentatively projects an 11 per cent reduction in total economic and social assistance to Bolivia in 2008 relative to 2006 levels.84

Table 6: Bolivia, grants and donations 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government/Organisation</th>
<th>US$ millions</th>
<th>% of GDP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European Union</td>
<td>24.64</td>
<td>0.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basket Funding*</td>
<td>16.94</td>
<td>0.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>12.99</td>
<td>0.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>10.32</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>8.46</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Bank for Reconstruction</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Development Agency (IDA)</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Food Programme</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan International Cooperation Agency</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgian Technical Cooperation</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Global Environment Facility</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-American Development Bank</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>0.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>109.75</td>
<td>1.05%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Weisbrot and Sandoval 2006: 16); derived from data of Presupuesto General de la Nación, Ministerio de Hacienda, Viceministerio de Presupuesto y Contaduría. 
Note: Dollar amounts and percentages are based on a projected exchange rate of Bs. 8.12 per US$ and a nominal GDP of Bs. 85,029 millions by the Ministry of Finance of Bolivia.

84. AIN 2007b.
Table 7: Economic and military aid requested for Bolivia  
(all numbers in thousands of US dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andean Counterdrug Initiative – Alternative Development</td>
<td>36,630</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Survival and Health</td>
<td>17,233</td>
<td>11,500</td>
<td>-33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Assistance</td>
<td>10,091</td>
<td>39,000</td>
<td>286%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Support Fund</td>
<td>5,940</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>186%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Law 480 (Food Aid)</td>
<td>15,953</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>-19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Initiatives</td>
<td>5,373</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace Corps</td>
<td>2888</td>
<td>2858</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Economic and Social Assistance</strong></td>
<td>94,108</td>
<td>83,358</td>
<td>-11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Unfortunately, the MAS government continues to solicit funds from the US state through the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), established by George W. Bush in 2001 as part of what his administration refers to as the ‘new global development compact’. The MCA, according to one analyst, ‘seeks to gain more control over Third World governments through the practice of extending grants as opposed to loans’.85 As Soederberg continues,

ability to adopt policies that promote economic freedom and the rule of bourgeois law, such as private property, the commodification and privatisation of land, and so on.\textsuperscript{86}

The extent to which the American state can leverage its power in Bolivian affairs through aid is contingent on various processes which are still in flux, but, overall, we can conclude that this leverage is in decline.

In terms of bilateral trade, imperialist countries can make access to their markets conditional on a series of free-market reforms in the weaker country. However, US leverage on this score is also more tenuous than it once was in the Bolivian case, for two fundamental reasons. First, between 2000 and 2004, the US already declined from first to third position in the ranking of Bolivia’s trading partners in terms of both imports and exports, primarily because of the surge in demand from Brazil for Bolivia’s natural gas (see Table 8). Second, the US market is likely to enter into further decline and saturation making it even more difficult to penetrate – and therefore less attractive and less important as a bargaining chip – for countries such as Bolivia:

in coming years the market for imports in the US is not going to grow as it has in the past. It is widely recognised by the vast majority of economists that the US trade and current account deficit is not sustainable. As a result, the dollar will have to fall, and the US trade deficit will adjust. The result of this adjustment is that the market for imports (measured in non-dollar terms) in the US will have to shrink over the next decade. This means that developing countries that want to increase their exports to the US market will have to displace other exporters (e.g. Mexico or China) that are already there. To sum up the situation regarding trade, it seems unlikely that the threat of cancelling trade preferences could be used to alter the new government’s course with regard to either trade or other policy issues.\textsuperscript{87}

In each of these components of economic imperialism, we have shown that Bolivia enjoys more autonomy to advance a radical, transformative politics in the current world order than many presume, even while tremendous obstacles clearly persist. Turning from these international dimensions, the most important regional development has been the relationship with Venezuela and Cuba.

\textsuperscript{86} Soederberg 2006, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{87} Weisbrot and Sandoval 2006, p. 18.
Table 8: Bolivia’s main trading partners (% of total)

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<td>Chile</td>
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Counter-hegemonic bloc? Bolivia, Venezuela and Cuba

Without a doubt, the relationship between Evo Morales, Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez is increasingly important at the domestic, regional and international levels. The spectre of a covert Venezuelan takeover of Bolivian domestic politics through the machinations of Chávez is a bogeyman scenario frequently invoked by the far Right in Bolivia. Exaggerated claims concerning the influence of Chávez in directing radical politics in Bolivia plainly obscures the role of the formation of massive popular movements in Bolivia over the last seven years. At the same time, the new regional alliance is, in very real ways, opening up new space and potential for deeper anti-imperialist politics within Latin America generally, and Bolivia, in particular. As we noted, US economic imperialism within Latin America in recent years has in part focused on the promotion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (Canada-Mexico-US), the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), bilateral trade agreements with a number of Latin-American countries, and, always its most important long term goal, the FTAA.

Bucking these imperial efforts, Venezuela, Cuba, and Bolivia agreed, on 29 April 2006, to work towards building the Alternativa Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our

88. La Razón 2006a; La Razón 2006b; La Razón 2006d.
America, ALBA), starting with the Tratado Comercio de los Pueblos (Peoples’ Trade Agreement, TCP) between the three countries. The latter strategic agreement seeks to build binational public enterprises and to put in place subsidiaries of state-owned banks in partner countries, as well as collective agreements for reciprocal lines of credit. In recognition of the unequal political and economic status of the countries involved, Venezuela has made available to Bolivia its air and sea transport infrastructure, as well as guaranteeing a market for Bolivian agricultural products shut out of Colombia earlier this year after the latter signed a bilateral trade agreement with the US. Cuba has set up Cuban-Bolivian ophthalmological medical centres within Bolivia with the capacity to treat over 100,000 patients free of charge each year. The Caribbean island state has also provided to Bolivia a number of other medical services, equipment, and doctors, and increased to 5,000 the number of scholarships from now until 2007 that will be granted to Bolivians to study medicine free of charge in Cuba.

All of these measures are extraordinary examples of what reciprocal agreements based on solidarity can look like. This space is critically important for increasing the possibility that the Bolivian working classes and oppressed indigenous nations will realise their own future. Elsewhere in Latin America’s so-called ‘pink tide, of governments shifting to the left, the potential for cooperation in building a counter-hegemonic bloc against the interests of US imperialism is more ambiguous, to say the least. Nonetheless, over the long term, constructing popular power from below in a socialist direction throughout the region is a necessity for the survival of any transformative change within Bolivia.

The most important facet of contemporary Latin America providing a basis for reasoned optimism on this score is the proliferation of what Argentine economist Claudio Katz calls the ‘combative impulse’. The level of popular movement activity is certainly uneven, with receding momentum in countries such as Brazil and Uruguay, for example. At the same time, though, popular protagonism has surged since the late 1990s in Bolivia, Venezuela, Argentina, and Ecuador. More recently, the relatively quiescent Chilean and Mexican Lefts have exploded with intermittent popular uprisings and workers’ revolts.

Developing the widespread combative impulse and anti-neoliberal and anti-imperialist sentiments into a continent-wide socialist consciousness with
organisational capacities to contest the ruling classes of each country leaps out as the immense outstanding challenge. Meaningful socialist and indigenous liberation in Bolivia is tethered to the outcome of current struggles across Latin America just as it is a constituent part of and leading contributing force in these struggles.

Conclusion

Part I of this essay has situated Bolivia in the international and regional contexts in a cursory fashion. It has also attempted to outline some of the core features of the country’s rural and urban class structures. We advanced a set of nine theses that challenge many of the existing interpretations of the current conjuncture in Bolivia, theses we hope to substantiate further as the essay proceeds. From this basis we are in a position to move to a much more detailed, fine-grained analysis of the domestic situation in Parts II and III. Our first task will be to tackle the question of revolution.

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The ‘Returns to Religion’: Messianism, Christianity and the Revolutionary Tradition.
Part I: ‘Wakefulness to the Future’

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Abstract
The central strength of the Hegelian dialectical tradition is that reason is not divorced from its own internal limits in the name of a reason free from ideological mediation and constraint. This article holds onto this insight in the examination of the recent (and widespread) returns to religious categories in political philosophy and political theory (in particular Agamben, Badiou, Negri and Žižek). In this respect the article follows a two-fold logic. In the spirit of Hegel and Marx, it seeks to recover what is ‘rational in religion’; and, at the same time, examines the continuing entanglements of politics (and specifically revolutionary thinking) with religious categories. That this is an atheistic and materialist project is not in a sense strange or anomalous. On the contrary, it is precisely the ‘secularisation’ of Judeo-Christian categories in Kant, Hegel and Marx’s respective theorisation of history, that provides the dialectic ground of the atheistic recovery and invocation of Judeo-Christian thought (in particular messianism, renunciation, and fidelity) in recent political philosophy. Consequently the discussion of religion, or ‘religion beyond religion’, here, has very little to do with the spread of obscurantism and anti-rationalism in the global upsurge of reactionary Christian and Islamic fundamentalisms, neo-Pagan mysticisms, and other retreats from the real, or with the left-liberal denunciation of religion in the recent writings of Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. Rather, ‘religion’ here, in its Judeo-Christian legacy, is that which embodies the memory or prospect of a universal emancipatory politics.

Keywords
Christianity, Judaism, messianism, eschatology, apocalypticism, anti-historicism, transcendentalism, dialectic

The Hegelian Philosophy is the last magnificent attempt to restore Christianity, which was lost and wrecked, through philosophy.
Ludwig Feuerbach

1. Feuerbach 1986, p. 34.
The ‘return to religion’ in political philosophy, philosophical ethics and political theory has taken various forms recently. Some of these positions emerge from the Marxist tradition, some from avowedly post-Marxist positions. But all draw on the ethical and political content of religion in order to establish, or test, the possible links between the political subject and the subject of religious passion and faith. However, this work is largely uninterested – despite its antipathy to all forms of fundamentalism – in subjecting religion to old-fashioned ideology-critique. Interestingly, it is left liberals in the natural sciences, such as Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett, who have tended to adopt this form of rationalism. As Dennett has argued in *Breaking the Spell*, religious adherents, ‘put at risk what we [that is, rational liberals] hold dear’. Rather than drawing on any hermeneutical links between the political subject and the subject of faith, the critique of religion, he insists, must be subject to multidisciplinary scientific research. Indeed, religion now needs to be exposed to the same kind of natural-scientific scrutiny as other intoxicants such as tobacco and alcohol. A good place to start, therefore, is the old evolutionary scientific question: *cui bono?* What are the actual material costs and benefits of religion?

In evolutionary science, recognising the extensive investment by a species in a given practice or set of practices has to be balanced by an assessment of the impact of these practices in the replication of the species. There has to be a trade-off that benefits the continued fitness of the species for reproduction. What is it about religion that promotes and sustains humans’ fitness for reproduction? Is religion a form of mutualism (a practice of social self-medication, honed by thousands of years of experiment, to enhance human culture); or is it a kind of parasite (extraneous, but invisible and deleterious in the long run, and therefore needing to be eliminated)? Confidently, Dennett comes down on the side of the latter. His atheism is vigorous and direct, and has much to recommend in a repressively (and comically) quasi-theistic state like the contemporary United States. But this is not the atheism of Marx and the communist Left (despite the sorry history of Stalinist and Maoist denunciations of religion in the twentieth century, exemplified at their most toxic by Enver Hoxha’s rabidly anti-theistic Albania).

Marx and Engels’s critique of religion was always accompanied by a recognition of, and sympathy towards, Christianity’s eschatological and

2. Thanks to Benjamin Noys and Alberto Toscano for their extensive comments on various drafts of this article.
apocalyptic content. As Marx declared in a letter to Arnold Ruge in 1843: ‘the world possesses something in a dream of which it need only become aware to possess it in truth’.\(^5\) And, as Engels stressed in a similar vein in *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850), ‘the chiliastic dream-visions of early Christianity offered a very convenient starting point’ for questioning the institutions and ideologies common to all class-based societies.\(^6\) Indeed, the later Engels was quite open about the links between the early Christian church and the workers’ movement. There is a broader philosophical assessment of method at stake here: the link between Marx’s understanding in *Capital* of capitalists as ‘rational agents’ (on the basis of their objective pursuit of profit) and the acceptance of religious believers as rational agents (on the basis of their objective commitment to the perceived real benefits of religion). In other words, to *begin* the critique of agency from the morally suspect character or irrationality of agents’ beliefs is to destroy the conflicted and contradictory basis of ideological interpellation, and therefore fail to show the needs that such beliefs fulfill for people.

As a philosopher of evolutionary science, rather than a social scientist, Dennett, however, is not so convinced of the social and critical benefits of this genetic-critical position, insofar as it opens the door, he argues, to a misalignment of ethics with the denial of scientific materialism. Dennett certainly has a few good arguments on his side here. The indulgence demonstrated by popular culture towards the unsupportable, anti-scientific claims of various fundamentalist religious beliefs continues to drain secular culture of its confidence – for instance, in the US, the shambles in the media over the teaching of creationism. Explaining the ‘cultural needs’ of creationists does nothing to enhance the claims of materialism or prevent obscurantism.

Yet, despite the reality of these drawbacks, Dennett’s rationalistic critique of religion is unrelentingly thin and, as such, antithetical to the wider philosophical and critical struggles in which religious belief (and political commitments) find themselves. In fact, Dennett’s position severs what has remained most vital and compelling about religion – or at least Judeo-Christian thought – for the (revolutionary) Left: the links between early Christianity and human beings’ resistance to alienated finitude. In a spirited critique of Dawkins’s *The God Delusion*, Terry Eagleton makes this link explicit by insisting that the experience of faith and redemption in Christianity is first and foremost practical and political, that is active and unselfconscious, and as such unconstrained by ecclesiastical language and religious ritual: ‘Salvation for Christianity has to do

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with caring for the sick and welcoming the immigrant, protecting the poor from the violence of the rich. It is not a “religious” affair at all…7

In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s – the last period of creative exchange between Marxism and religion – for Marxists or Christianised Marxists what was at stake was the ethical status of the political act: revolutionary consciousness was not just a matter of knowing the enemy but of taking one’s distance from its phenomenal and material forms.8 And this is why, within this dialogue, the recovery of Hegel’s debt to Christianity, and Marx’s own debt to Hegel, played such a large part: what Hegel brought to Marx’s understanding of human emancipation was a notion of human beings as the bearers of a continuous outpouring of transcendence.

Just as humans laboured on the labours of past generations, humans made and remade the conditions of their own liberation, and this, for Hegel, was continuous with the ethical demands of Christianity.

Freedom in the State is preserved and established by Religion [liberal Protestantism], since moral rectitude in the State is only the carrying out of that which constitutes the fundamental principle of Religion. The process displayed in History is only the manifestation of Religion as Human Reason – the production of the religious principle, which dwells in the heart of man, under the form of Secular Freedom. Thus the discord between the inner life of the heart and the actual world is removed.9

In this passage, Hegel takes over a theme of Saint Paul: the ‘self-appropriation’ of the self. The overcoming of estrangement begins when men and women begin to recognise (and act on) their own self-estrangement. Marxists sympathetic to the Judeo-Christian continuities in Marx’s writing in the light of Marx’s philosophical debt to German idealism, have tended then to see religion and historical materialism in Hegelian terms, as sharing the same ends: the de-alienation of humanity and the ‘struggle against dualism’.10 This, in turn, has generated a political reading of Biblical eschatology within Marxism: the principal objective of Christ’s ministry is the ‘coming Kingdom’ and the relief of want, and not the love of the other in any abstract or ineffable sense. This view is central, for example, to Ernst Bloch’s writing on religion in the 1930s and 1960s:

8. See, for example, MacIntyre 1971 and Garaudy 1976.
Christianity brought with it a resurgence of the attitude that no longer expects anything from the world, and did so despite its notion that man had been crippled by sin and was therefore unable any more to stand upright. It brought in a *transcendere* that was more than just internal, blasting a great hole through the famous Stoic constancy in life and death, and making way for the beating of wings of a glory which, though still hidden within us, was, in the intentional order, entirely indestructible.\(^{1}\)

As such, a political reading of Christian transcendence as self-appropriation reveals the Bible’s ‘profound wakefulness to the future’.\(^2\) The Bible ‘harbours no crippling historicism and no over-abrupt Jacobinism, but simply the irrepressible sense of the awakening of meaning’.\(^3\)

This politicisation of Biblical eschatology has also been central to post-1950s radical theology in Germany (in particular Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz). As with Bloch, the Bible’s ‘profound wakefulness to the future’ is taken to mean a primary insistence on the *indivisibility* of politics and religion in the Gospels: there is no Christian faith outside of eschatology as a political understanding of redemption and self-appropriation. Indeed, in this writing, early Christianity is subject, in the spirit of Marx, to an explicitly anti-statist reading. As Moltmann argues:

> The Christ of God was executed in the name of religiopolitical authority, an authority established ‘from above’. Therefore, any justification of authority ‘from above’ no longer is convincing to Christians. Political authority can only receive its justification ‘from below’. Before the time of Christianity, all political theory sought to confirm the status quo. Since Christianity all political theory should seek to criticise the nature, limits and purpose of the state.\(^4\)

In other words, early Christianity de-sacralised, securalised and democratised politics. But, it is also clear from the debates of the 1960s and 1970s that, for Christian theologians, there were real political and theological limits to what this indivisibility actually meant.

For the Protestant Moltmann, as much as for the Catholic theologians Metz and Hans Küng – all equally well versed in Marx and critical theory and all sympathetic to some of their claims – Christianity was not a revolutionary programme or a potential left-inflected politics, despite the would-be success at the time of Third-World liberationist theology. On the contrary, Christianity

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was fundamentally the activation of the memory of Christ. And the memory of Christ’s ministry was based not on that of a political revolutionary but on that of the embodiment of the Holy Spirit, even if it was clear that his ministry had had an indisputable revolutionary impact on Judaic belief and culture. Thus, although the ‘political theology’ of Moltmann and Metz is unambiguous in its criticism of the apolitical pieties of the official Church – drawing on Walter Benjamin and Jürgen Habermas for its left-radical tone – its appeal to the radical leadership of Christ’s ministry is not to be mistaken for an activist political doctrine. The first ethical commitment of Christian activism is certainly to the relief of the poor and lowly (in Eagleton’s sense), but these practical commitments cannot break the inclusiveness of God’s love. Consequently, Christian grace is not distributed in accordance with the demands of particular (sectarian) political commitments and alliances; its powers of dispensation are universal. As Küng puts it emphatically:

[Christ’s] message does not culminate in an appeal to being a better future by force: anyone who takes up the sword will fall by the sword. He appeals for renunciation of force: not to resist the evildoer, to do good to those who hate us, to bless those who curse us.15

This is why the ethical meeting between Christianity and Marxism on the nature of politics, and in particular, revolutionary politics, has always ended in dissolution for the majority of Christian theologians. Christianity has no practice or theory of revolutionary violence (although a good record on state violence as we know); it only has a practice and theory of love. Love is not one virtue amongst other virtues; it is what is good and non-negotiable for all situations.

Understandably, then, the ‘wakefulness to the future’ remains in Christian ‘political theology’, and for these writers, an essentially Pauline experience. For it is precisely Saint Paul’s separation of the notion of earthly struggle for God’s Kingdom from the ‘new life’ universally given through the resurrection-event that turns the desacralised politics of the early Church into a new kind of political order: ‘Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good’ (Rom. 12:21). This is why Moltmann, Metz and Küng all place the greatest theological importance on the messianic and apocalyptic content of the resurrection-event.

Paul’s emphasis on the resurrection-event as the source of unequivocal, universal love, transforms the individualised redemption of the soul into an

event of ‘cosmological’ proportions: the coming of the ‘new age’ as a collective redemption. In line, then, with Paul’s own separation from the teachings of Jesus, ‘political theology’ is largely indifferent to the ‘historical Jesus’ and the modern Jesus-tradition (whatever its left-leaning inflections). This is because it is only the resurrection-event that expresses the inner connection between the redemption of the created order and the triumph of God, together with the binding connection of politics to cosmological time; the historical Jesus is simply the vanishing mediator of this. As J. Christiaan Beker declares:

Paul’s church is not an aggregate of justified sinners or a sacramental institute or a means for private self-sanctification but the avant-garde of the new creation in a hostile world, creating beachheads in the world of God’s dawning new world and yearning for the day’s of God’s visible lordship over his creation, the general resurrection of the dead.16

As such, there is a clear sense in this tradition where exactly a politicised eschatology is to be found in the Bible. It is not to be found in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), where the historical presence of Jesus is strong, but politicised Christian eschatology is weak, but in Paul’s letters, where the historical presence of Jesus is essentially weak, but the apocalyptic and messianic content of political eschatology is strong.

This is not to say that Pauline ‘political theology’ has little interest in the words and historical experience of Jesus, or seeks to separate the historical Jesus from the resurrection-event – or even that it denies that the apocalyptic and eschatological informed Jesus’s thinking. Rather, the point of this political theology is that the eschatological content of Christianity is not (and cannot be) named as such in Jesus’s own teachings without turning his ministry into a form of empty and premature prophetism, particularly when so much textual evidence points to an essential (and foreseeable) ambiguity on this question. For example, in the Gospels in his exchange with Pilate and the High Priest, the words of Jesus are highly equivocal about his proclaimed status as the Messiah. In response to the direct question: ‘Are you the Messiah?’, in Mark, Jesus says ‘I am’ (Mark 14: 61–2); in Matthew, he says ‘It is as you say’ (Mat. 26: 63–4); but in Luke, he says, ‘It is you who say I am’ (Lu. 22: 67–70). This ambiguity points, essentially, to an absence of self-conscious messianism in his thinking: were a preacher in the inter-Testamental period to declare himself as the Messiah, there certainly would be consistent evidence of his placement within the Davidic tradition of kingly redemption (the King Messiah) – the prevailing Judaic messianic tradition and the only messianic

tradition that his audience would have understood. There is no evidence of this in Jesus’s surviving teaching.

Mark’s unambiguous interpretation then is very much an invention, an expression of the early Church’s (disappointed) expectations after the resurrection-event. However, Jesus was happy to call himself a prophet, and for others to call him a prophet (this was, after all, the highpoint of prophetism in Galilee) and talk in apocalyptic language about the imminence of God’s kingdom. In this regard, Jesus’s prophetism and apocalypticism is of a particular kind.

The Jesus-tradition

As a social preacher within the Nazirite tradition (Samson, Samuel and Elijah were Nazirites, as was John the Baptist), Jesus opposed any notion that belief in the impending Kingdom committed the faithful to any kind of ethical withdrawal or prevarication. Indeed, the opposite applied: it was precisely because the Kingdom of God was imminent that the faithful should be committed to bringing its good news into the realm of practical life. This is why Jesus shows little respect for traditional forms of Pharisaic observance and piety, and why he questions no one about their true professions of faith, and concentrates on the ‘lowest of the low’, those officially beyond ‘forgiveness’. His non-Davidic apocalypticism, therefore, is never a metaphysical abstraction, but is always grounded in the greatest need – what Seán Freyne has called, in a deliberately provocative way, Jesus’s Kingdom-Praxis.

In this respect, Jesus’s understanding of the Kingdom of God may not be cognate with any political programme as we understand it, yet it was politically implicated in and driven by collective aims and ideals. Opposed to Roman and Jewish injustice and structural violence, Jesus and his missionaries (and not just the twelve disciples of the Gospels) operated in lower Galilee as an itinerant network of preachers and practical supporters of local peasant interests. It was from Galilee that emerged all the revolutionary sects and movements, such as the Zealots, which so disturbed and occasionally threatened the Roman state in first-century Palestine; Jesus was not a ‘freedom fighter’ against Rome, yet he was certainly part of this fertile, politicised anti-Roman tradition in Galilee.

The social base of this network, therefore, was the disaffected Jewish rural poor who were less susceptible to the influence and constraints of Pharisaic law than the urban population of all classes. Accordingly, Jesus’s Nazirite

teaching was socially grounded in the struggles of this local peasant class. This is not to say that these struggles defined his preaching, but there is a clear elision between the content of his thinking and the experiences of his predominant peasant audience. This is why his use of rhetoric and adaptation of Greek and Jewish thinking is so radically different from other first-century Jewish devouts and Hasidim.

Jesus’s teaching does not rely on a language of judgement and casuistry, but first and foremost on qualities of empathy and emotional clarity and vividness of argument, suggesting some familiarity on his part with Greek thought. As in the Cynic tradition, what is held to be commonsensical and customary – for instance the supposedly incontestable virtues of the rich – are reversed through an unexpected image or anecdote.

Cynic itinerants and their rhetoric of confrontational reversal were common in Galilee, part of the general flow of non-Pharisaic Greek thinking into the area. Nevertheless, this rhetoric found few peasant adherents, since, in a world of pressing hardship and poverty, its espousal of a general indifference to society seemed more threatening than liberating. In order to define his own anti-Pharisaic commitments, Jesus borrows much from the Cynic tradition’s rhetorical forms, but reverses their general nihilistic polarity. As Burton L. Mack notes:

The Jesus people were looking for something to put in the place of traditional cultural codes that were no longer working in their unruly, fragmentary, multicultural world. They were searching for codes of mutual recognition. 19

One way of doing this was linking the *chreiai* [reversals] of the Cynic-tradition to the possible revocation of the world as such. This produces a very different sense of itinerancy amongst Jesus and his followers.

Instead of the nomadic cultivation of indifference to collective values, Jesus focuses on the individual household as a place where disciples could engage in sustained conversation, but also where practical acts could be performed, such as healing and the preparation of food. Thus, by placing the fundamental emphasis on the household as a place of free exchange, it was possible to offer a different sense of community in the face of the destructiveness of local custom (a Mediterranean system of patronage, clientage and honour-debts), and the perturbations of the local market economy. The increasing dominance of the market economy over the self-sufficiency of the extended household in Herodian Palestine was a major source of discontent for Galilean peasants,

leading to widespread ruin and destitution. To confront such destitution with a different conception of faith then was one way of breaking with Pharisaic hierarchy and the social indebtedness of the Law.

As Frayne puts it, when faced with the destruction of kinship values and the possible loss of land, the emphasis on the imminence of the Kingdom of God plays out in a very different way to being told that if you honour your betters you will eventually live like kings. Whereas the former accepts the current situation in order to claim to alleviate its worst effects in 'good time’, the latter actually 'calls for envisioning the world differently'.

Such considerations place Jesus's talk of the imminence of God's Kingdom in the realm of sharply contested practical arrangements and problems. It is difficult, therefore, according to the Jesus-tradition, to imagine Christian belief without recognising the earthly engagement of Jesus in the struggles of the oppressed. Yet it is also hard to imagine Jesus from this perspective as simply a benign leader of a large group of activists and social workers. Such a domesticated image diminishes the very real sense that his experimentation in new forms of sociability begins the imminent Kingdom of God. To defend the 'historical Jesus' as engaged in practical struggles then is not to oppose Jesus's social programme to his apocalyptic thinking. Rather, it indicates out how difficult it is to locate the eschatological and apocalyptic content of Christianity in the Gospels with any textual certainty.

In this light, those who turn to the modern Jesus-tradition mainly wish to invoke an image of Christianity rooted in action. This has appealed not only to many de-churched Christians, but since the 1960s to many on the Left who see in the reconstructions of the historical Christ something close to the spirit of authentic Christianity. But for all this tradition's attempts to link Christian praxis in a productive way to the apocalyptic, it has not been (and could never have been) the only way of imagining Jesus in action. The pursuit of non-combatancy in the face of one's enemies, the demands of Christian patience and tolerance relate, rather, to the injustice perpetrated on one's self. Love is only all-embracing at the time of Exodus or Advent. Before this, it is exclusively terrestrial and therefore subject to individual responsibility.

20. Freyne 1997, p. 84. Of course, a lot of questions are begged here about who the historical Jesus was; a subject of massive dispute over the last 150 years. Just as many of the parables and aphorisms of Jesus continue to be de-attributed as the work of later glosses and reinterpretations (mainly through the efforts of Robert Funk's Jesus Seminar), the notion of Jesus as political radical in Freyne and others is fraught with all the problems of historical projection. Yet, in most accounts of the historical Jesus, it is not hard to see the 'wisdom' of Jesus and the Jesus-tradition as egalitarian in character. At all times, Jesus places God's law (the love of neighbour) over and above written law. This is why Jesus called on his followers to renounce false gods and supererogation (the attempt to gain spiritual favour through good works) through the rejection of false righteousness: the pursuit of that which we believe is rightly due to ourselves. But, if Jesus places God's law above the Law, this renunciation of 'good works' does not imply non-combatancy in the face of one's enemies: the demands of Christian patience and tolerance relate, rather, to the injustice perpetrated on one's self. Love is only all-embracing at the time of Exodus or Advent. Before this, it is exclusively terrestrial and therefore subject to individual responsibility.

21. For a recent defence of this position, see Heller 2002.
be) the centre of a politicised theology, because at no point do Jesus or his disciples ever reflect on Kingdom-Praxis as a set of principles beyond their own experience. This is why Pauline theology looms so large over the history of Christianity and Christian belief and the debate between Marxism and Christianity: for it philosophically separates the meaning of Christ’s death for Christian faith from the actuality of his historical commitments and beliefs. This is also why that even for a writer such as Bloch – who is less disposed to Paul than Moltmann and Metz – there is no political eschatology without Paul’s ‘second Christ’.22 In this sense, by fully transforming Jesus into the Messiah, it is Paul, and Paul alone, who single-handedly produces the political language out of which ‘the profound wakefulness to the future’ emerges.

Apocalypticism, messianism and eschatological time

In Pauline Christianity, messianic time is determined by the redemptive relationship between the original coming of the Messiah and its completed repetition in the second coming (the Parousia), leading to the dawn of ‘new creation’ and a ‘new age’. Eschatological time is the name given to the universal fulfilment in historical time of what has dawned in this messianic time. Underlying or intersecting with both of these times is apocalyptic time. The latter rests on a profound sense of discrepancy between ‘what is’ (the realm of suffering) and ‘what should be’ (freedom from suffering). In the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, this is based on the tragic tension between faithfulness to the Torah and the apparent futility of this fidelity.

Apocalyptic time, in this respect, represents the ‘pre-historical’ ground of messianic and eschatological time, insofar as messianic time and eschatological time are both derived from the conflict in apocalypticism between the demands of faith and the realities of the world. As such, Jewish apocalyptic time delivers humanity, for the first time, to the contingencies and sorrows of historical time. In the hope of redemption, human desire is grounded in worldly endeavour rather than in mythic and Greek notions of eternal recurrence.

This is expressed most clearly in Exodus, where ‘God’s people’ are set marching through the world towards a better future. Indeed, the book of Exodus is the ‘first description of revolutionary politics’.23 But, for Paul, the insertion of messianic time (the resurrection-event) into historical and eschatological time radically transforms how this gap is imagined and fulfilled.

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22. The ‘first faith’ is that of the historical Jesus. The ‘second faith’ is the faith in Jesus Christ.
in ‘hope’. The Pauline messianic-event does not simply look to the future and the ‘end of time’ as the annihilation of ‘this time’, as in traditional Jewish apocalypticism; rather, it sees itself as an event at the end of history for the sake of history’s transformation.\(^{24}\) This is because, although Paul’s understanding of the future as a promise remains essentially Jewish, his understanding of the ‘age to come’ as already having come transforms the expectations of what this promise is. Paul is the first Jewish theorist of inaugurated eschatology – as opposed to realised eschatology.\(^{25}\)

Believers are still subject to the constraints and limitations of the present, but their actions and faith belong to the ‘coming age’. This is because God’s promise to Abraham remains the same; what has changed is that Christ has been born into the ‘old age’, thereby transforming the temporality of historical time irredeemably. In other words, Paul’s reading of the resurrection-event as the inauguration of a ‘new creation’ radically transforms the event-of-faith. Christ’s Parousia not only ratifies the Abrahamic promise of the ‘old time’, but also establishes a new (and imminent) time of ‘hope’ in which the future is not a future in history, of the end of history, but the future of history.

The eschatological-historical space of Paul’s messianism, therefore, is profoundly non-linear in its understanding of the gap between ‘what is’ and what is ‘to come’. Rather than focusing on an imagined and ever-distant future, the eschatological imagination remains in a continual state of expectant disjunction with the present, making, as Moltmann puts it, ‘every present a provisional transcendence’.\(^{26}\) In eschatological time, the future then is not a continuation or prolongation of the present. This is because the prolongation or extension of present time can only reinforce present conditions of oppression, power, and ownership. The present, rather, is the gateway through which the future is relieved of its continuity with the past, and made non-identical with itself (God’s kingdom to come).

For Moltmann, in this sense, there is no eschatological time and no promise of justice without the authentic witness of those who experience the full force of this historical non-identity: the poor and oppressed. Eschatological time, in other words, is the transcendent framework in which the atemporal messianic promise of history’s transformation through the gateway of the present moment prevails. Yet, if this framework is congruent with (anti-historicist) revolutionary practice and history, for eschatological Christian theologians such as Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz, it is not to be confused with secular revolutionary

\(^{24}\) Beker 1980, p. 167.

\(^{25}\) See Hooker 2003.

\(^{26}\) Moltmann 1993, p. 134.
history and practice. This is because the identification of secular revolutionary history and practice with the eschatological character of freedom reduces human freedom to a form of anthropocentrism. The disalienated return of humans to a realm of natural and collective spontaneity is not solely for the benefit of humans, but for the glory of God. Eschatology, on this purely theistic account, then presupposes a cosmological theocentrism.

Marx and Engels's legacy

This split between a modern politicised Jesus-tradition and a Pauline messianism is not strictly translatable into a division between Left and Right; neither tradition is internally stable politically. But certainly today, it is the Pauline tradition that has attracted the Left and is central to the ‘return to religion’ in political philosophy and theory. This is because, despite the widespread conservative reading of Pauline apocalypticism in orthodox Christianity and Christian fundamentalism, Pauline Christianity imagines a radical, collective break with the prevailing order; the Jesus-tradition, in contrast, appears, for all its social engagement, ameliorative and consensual.

Marx and Engels were not scholars of Paul; neither did they have anything like a modern Jesus-tradition available to them. Yet, clearly, what attracted them to the apocalyptic and eschatological content of early Christianity was how the notion of an impending Kingdom of God was so thoroughly politicised as a concept. Engels had the utmost respect for the great apocalyptic Christian revolutionary Thomas Münzer and his anti-Lutheran Bible communism.

By the Kingdom of God Münzer meant a society with no class differences, no private property and no state authority independent of, and foreign to, the members of society. All the existing authorities, insofar as they refused to submit and join the revolution, were to be overthrown, all work and all shared in common, and complete equality introduced.

27. This version of apocalypticism is essentially nihilistic and has thrived on the Right and far Right, for example, the rebarbative US-based Church of Christ. In the 1960s Rudolf Schnackenberg summed up this position very well: this orthodox version of apocalyptic lies in its ‘concealment from the multitude and its delivery to the wise . . . the pride of the elect and the contempt for the massa damnata – indeed the positive thirst for revenge and pleasure in the destruction of the wicked’. Schnackenberg 1963, p. 139.

28. Although something like the Jesus-tradition did inform the struggles between right-Hegelians and left-Hegelians in the 1820s, and fed indirectly into Marx and Engels's assessments of Christianity and philosophy. See Dickey 1993.

Indeed, the place of Bible communism within the history of workers’ and peasants’ struggles was a recurring concern of Engels, particularly towards the end of his life.

In 1894, in ‘On the History of Early Christianity’, he talks in prophetic language about the future of Christianity lying in socialism. This is perhaps not surprising. In a period of the growing state incorporation of the workers’ movement, Engels's sympathetic comparison between early Christianity and workers’ struggles draws on eschatological resources that both he and Marx saw essentially as anti-statist. It is mostly Engels, though, who develops this link; by the mid-1840s, Marx had taken a back seat on these questions.

In his Berlin student days, when he was developing his critique of the Christianised Prussian state, Marx rejected all Christian and theistic beliefs. There was no experience of Christianity in Prussia for Marx that did not appear to endorse the repressive and stupefying apparatuses of the state. Hence the centrality in the early writing of one of his most famous dicta: ‘the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticism’ and the vehemence of his anti-Christian sentiment.

After a certain point, Marx thus had little interest in differentiating the internal traditions and political struggles within Christianity and, consequently, used the broad generality ‘Christianity’ without distinguishing in any detail between Protestant and Catholic, and Pauline and pre-Pauline legacies (Engels was always more attuned and sensitive to these distinctions). This is largely because by the early 1840s – after a decade of deflationary attacks on religion by Strauss, Bauer and Feuerbach – Marx believed the critique of Christianity and religion to be, in its fundamentals, mostly accomplished. Thus, from 1844 onwards, it was the critique of political economy and state law, and the political organisation of human society that overwhelmingly preoccupied him, and not the development of a theory of ideology which could explain the persistence of religion despite the spread of the sciences and the workers’ movement.

A contributory factor to this removal of religious belief from Marx’s immediate concerns was the fact that public adherence to Christianity in the second half of the nineteenth century in the newly industrialising European states appeared to be largely confined to the bourgeoisie. For instance, the clergy in London in the 1860s and 1870s was consistently worried about the ‘unchurched’ character of the British working class. But if the working class in Britain was mostly ‘church-shy’, certain conservative Christian values of forbearance and piety played their part in shaping the ideological direction of the early workers’ movement, in

particular Chartism. In fact, it was the apparent deepening of these values that eventually led to such frustration for Marx in London.

The absence of a church-going working class may have worried the bourgeois clergy, but there was nothing to suggest that this was atheism – merely indifference. Yet if Christianity and the prospect of a Christianised labour movement began to haunt Marx in England, it was Engels who saw such beliefs as more than a contingent and conjunctural impediment to socialist revolution; and it is these more nuanced reflections that are expressed in the later writings.

We therefore see that the Christianity of that time, which was still unaware of itself [in the first decades after Jesus’s execution], was as different as heaven from earth from the later dogmatically fixed universal religion of the Nicene Council; one cannot be recognised in the other. Here we have neither the dogma nor the morals of later Christianity but instead a feeling that one is struggling against the whole world and that the struggle will be a victorious one; an eagerness for the struggle and a certainty of victory which are totally lacking in Christians today and which are to be found in our time only at the other pole of society, among the Socialists.32

This is not, however, a post-Marx concession to a Christianised socialism; rather, it is a renewed recognition of the place of religious dissent and disaffection in the continuum of class struggle.

In this, Engels recovers and recodifies those moments in both their joint writing and Marx’s own writing where religious anti-statism and disdain for the positivistic realm of appearances, particularly in the form of religious-mysticism, plays a liberating role. Despite his general distance from these debates, Marx retained some sympathy for radical-prophetic thought in its dissenting role against state Protestantism. And it this voice that we hear in his famous encomium about religion-as-resistance in ‘Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law’, and in the subsequent identification, in the Hegelian Marxism of the 1950s and 60s, of Marxism with transcendent revolt: ‘Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress’.33

Thus, if it is quite easy to believe that ‘Marx never sees any revolutionary potential in Christianity’,34 as John Schad puts it unambiguously, the quote from the ‘Contribution’ and Engels’s writings more generally disclose a whole history of links between Christian eschatology and communist eschatology.

33. Marx 1975, p. 175.
34. Schad 2004, p. 31.
throughout their work. And it this link that Engels draws on in his later writings. Unlike Strauss, Bauer and Feuerbach, Engels (and Bloch) argue that what distinguishes Marx from his anti-religion peers and forebears is that Marx is unwilling to see this eschatological content squandered through a rationalist and undialectical critique of religion. 35

The Engelsian problematic

Hope is able to inherit those features of religion which do not perish with the death of God.

Ernst Bloch36

The ‘turn to religion’ in recent political philosophy, in many ways, fits this Engelsian profile: religion is too important, too fertile, too full of useful philosophical materials, to be left to the religious, on the one hand, and to the natural scientists and scientific-positivistic critics of religion, on the other. Christianity, in particular, provides philosophical and revolutionary resources that can continue to redefine questions of agency, commitment and the conditions of belief, for in its core practices and beliefs, (early) Christianity designates the failure and insupportableness of present reality. But, firstly, we need to be clear about what this current ‘turn to religion’ means precisely.

In recent ethical philosophy, political philosophy and political theory the ‘turn to religion’ is in no general sense a return to religion – in any pre-Kantian conception thereof. 37 There is no fundamental posing of ‘positive religion’ against the ‘religion of reason’. Both theists and atheists submit themselves to the Enlightenment critique of religious revelation and obscurantism. In this, all writers under consideration occupy a broadly Kantian space of reflecting [reflektierende] faith, insofar as they are all committed to the porous boundaries of faith and practical reason, 38 and consequently to the fact that, by recognising

35. I say squandered, but, of course, the absent systematic discussion of religion in Marx and Engels produced an enormous hiatus in the Marxist tradition on the question of religion, only partially corrected by Bloch and Adorno. As Alexander Saxton puts it, ‘Marxism’s failure to come up with an effective hypothesis for the origin of religion left a strategic gap in the secular (materialist) interpretation of history’. Saxton 2006, p. 164. This unfulfilled project would certainly ‘have encouraged research into historical circumstances under which religions had worked as liberating forces’ (p. 163).


37. For an overview of the philosophical terrain, see de Kesel and Hoens 2006.

38. Kant 1996.
that both philosophy and religion ‘begin with a kind of faith … there is no pure reason’. 39

But if this makes for a shared recognition that our knowledge is embedded in pre-reflective beliefs that operate ‘behind our backs’ and, therefore, that such beliefs take up a constitutive place in our theories without propositional evidence, these writers differ sharply on the content of the critique of pure reason and ‘reflecting faith’. Accordingly, we need to make a number of distinctions: between those writers who draw on the Engelsian continuity between Marxism and early Christian eschatology (principally Marxists); those who identify philosophy with the limits of reason and see this as an invitation to explore the intersection of philosophy and theology (Kantians, deconstructionists and theological phenomenologists); those who treat Christianity and other religions as an actual revolutionary critique and extension of Marxism as such (the Christian ontologists, and ecumenical libertarians); and the post-Marxist or neo-Marxist revolutionary secular defenders of Christian universalism. The first category would include Slavoj Žižek and Timothy Bewes; the second Jacques Derrida, Hent de Vries and Jean-Luc Marion; the third John Milbank, Philip Goodchild and Roy Bhaskar; and the fourth Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, and Antonio Negri. 40

With the exception of Milbank, Goodchild, Marion and Bhaskar (perhaps), all are non-believers and, as such, it is the radical atheistic context of the reception and (re)translation of Christian categories that distinguishes this work in its immediate politically conjunctural sense. This calls for reconsideration, therefore, of the other (and hidden) part of Engels’s argument: in what sense does the statist assimilation of the workers’ movement represent a crisis of politics and political subjectivity? And, in turn, in what sense might (radical) Christian commitments undermine or confront this real or imagined process of crisis and assimilation?

In this way, the present ‘turn/s to religion’ is/are undoubtedly fed by a sense of crisis in politics, just as Engels’s reflections were in the 1880s and early 1890s. But, in this wide-ranging body of contemporary writing, the fact of ‘mere’ workers, assimilation, has – after the Russian Revolution, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the public destitution of Marxism and historical materialism – become a widespread crisis of political subjectivity itself under the postmodern pacification and ‘democratisation’ of the political process. Consequently, unlike the exchange between Marxists and Christianity in the

fifties, sixties and seventies, the debate is not simply about using the seditious passion of Christian hope to attack Stalinism’s mechanical materialism and utilitarian ethics. Rather, Christianity, for the likes of Žižek, Derrida, Bhaskar, Badiou, Agamben, and Negri is a means of testing and revisiting the renunciative, atemporal, self-violating conditions of political subjectivity. In this respect, the ‘turn’ to Christianity reconnects to a less forgiving and accommodating political space than the one associated with the present globalised liberal agenda – one based on the demands of sacrifice, fidelity, faith and the (non-pious) vows of poverty.

Recently, I have discussed how this turn to the renunciative subject – the subject who ‘walks away’ from heteronomy – owes to a Christianised Kantian ethics of conviction, or self-responsibility, despite the different political traditions of these writers, and different emphases they place upon the renunciative. In this regard, the renunciative Christianised subject functions in a twofold way: as an ally of anticapitalism and as a critic of the commodification of religion itself (something that was certainly less evident in the 1950s and 60s).

Here, I want to focus more generally on the broader (Marxist and Christianised) questions of agency, history and temporality. In this respect, I want to concentrate specifically on the relations between my first category (Marxism and Christianity) and my fourth (post-Marxist or neo-Marxist atheistic Christianised universalism), as they come to be defined around the ‘transcendent’; that is, specifically around the Pauline categories of the ‘messianic’, ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘eschatological’. For it is in the writings of Badiou, Žižek and Agamben, in particular, where this Engelsian crisis of politics on the terrain of Marxism and of Pauline Christianity’s ‘wakefulness to the future’ is at its most engaged and vivid. We are thus drawn into the very political heart of this ‘return to religion’ and ‘turn to Christianity’: the relationship between event, revolutionary consciousness and the end/ends of history/prehistory. This, in turn, enforces us into a older and wider debate on historicism and teleology that has shaped the critique of orthodoxy in Marxism since the 1920s: in what sense is the revolutionary event an unanticipated call from the past to the future, on the one hand, or the objective working class ‘seizure’ of the unfolding maturation of the contradictions of capitalism, on the other?

**Messianism and anti-historicism**

Badiou, Žižek and Agamben are all anti-historicists in the sense that they all identify their revolutionary politics with the rejection of the telos of
philosophical rationalism, substituting the ironies, ruses and contingencies of
the historical process for any notion of proletarian reason embedded in history.
But if this is precisely, at one level, the commonplace post-Hegelian space of
the politics of our time, its anti-historicism is neither strictly Weberian nor
postmodern. Far from identifying anti-historicism with an exit from Marx,
revolutionary dialectic and its anticipatory logic essentially become the space
of an *immanent transcendence*; that is, the future is ‘already here’, insofar as the
revolutionary event can break through at ‘any time’. Far from being ‘outside of
time’, the ‘messianic’ locates the future in the visible here and now.

This defence of an anti-historicist historical materialism has, of course,
shaped the critique of orthodox Marxism since the twenties, since its founding
(brief) ‘messianic’ moment in Georg Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness*
(1923). As Lukács argued in his defence of *History and Class Consciousness* in
*Taillism and the Dialectic* (1926), ‘there can be no moment where … the
possibility of an *active* influencing of the subjective moments is completely
lacking.’42 However, it is really only since the reception in the 1970s of
Benjamin’s explicit messianism, as exemplified by the ‘Theses on the Philosophy
of History’,43 that it is possible to talk about an anti-historicist Marxism as a
theoretically self-conscious – if heterogeneous – critical tradition.

Benjamin’s reception in the wake of the twin catastrophes of fascist and
Stalinist ‘progress’, allowed Marx’s own scepticism about the sirens of
teleological development to be reinstalled in historical materialism as a practice
of *deflected progress*. Indeed, it is at the high point of Benjamin’s reception that
Alvin Gouldner, for instance, introduced his (still useful) notional distinction
between ‘Scientific Marxism’ (instrumental, positivist, managerial, technicist)
and ‘Critical Marxism’ (praxis-oriented, conjuncturalist, culturalist), allowing
‘messianism’ to step out of the metaphysical shadows and become an anti-
historicist resource for a theory of history.44

We need, therefore, to clarify what kind of theory of history is presupposed
here by the concept of deflected progress. To do this, it is possible to divide the
messianic event into various categories of historical understanding: (i) as a
break with and universal transformation of history as dead, flat or *homogeneous
time*; (ii) as a break with and universal transformation of human history
understood as a continuous process of *regression*; (iii) as a break with, and later
re-absorption into, history as the *eternal recurrence of the same* – the cyclical

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42. Lukács 2000, p. 62.  
44. Gouldner 1980. Although Gouldner is not himself sympathetic to the messianic
tendencies in Marxism.
birth, maturation and decay of the historical process; (iv) as a break with and universal transformation of a teleological and progressivist conception of history; and (v) as a break with the historical process as a dialectical interruption of history, understood as a form of deflected but directional progress. Fundamentalist and orthodox religious believers usually subscribe to points one through four, divided as many believers are – across denominations and secular political commitments – between homogeneous, apocalyptic and evolutionary-progressivist conceptions of history. In this respect, all implicitly adhere to an idealist redemption of history and, as such, all are profoundly indifferent to the intersection between the ‘messianic’ as interruption and the dynamics of secular progress.

It is only point five, therefore, that embeds the messianic break in a conception of history that is both non-teleological and progressive. That is, in refusing to define the historical process as flat, regressive or unproblematically progressive, the messianic event as the event that interrupts the commonsense telos of historical progress becomes identifiable with, or more precisely constitutive of, a revolutionary agency that stands in the moment and passage of the event’s interruption to redirect the historical process. It is this latter position, then, that could be said to be compatible with Marx’s critique of the philosophy of history and defence of historical materialism as a non-historicist theory of history.45

All three writers (Agamben, Badiou and Žižek) operate generally, if with different philosophical materials, within this conception of the messianic. Hence, although their anti-historicism is clearly the product of defeat, it is not the product of a defeat of historical progress tout court. One of the consequences of this is that they all place renewed emphasis on politics and commitment, or politics as commitment – the move Gouldner sees as largely characteristic of critical Marxism.

As such, in a period of extended post-revolutionary defeat for the Left and, consequently, the retreat of ‘communism as the real movement that abolishes the present state of society’, the legacy of Marxism here is identified broadly with a recovery of praxis as a theory of revolutionary fidelity (a notion which is, of course, central to Badiou’s ethics).46 That is, after the collapse of communism as the real movement that abolishes the present state of society, defending and thinking the Russian Revolution in the present as the key universal moment within a process of deflected historical progress takes on not just a constitutive form for theory-as-praxis, but is the means whereby the

45. For a discussion of the distinction between the philosophy of history and the theory of history in Marx and Marxism, see Callinicos 1995.
subject is cathected to the revolutionary tradition. As Gouldner explains, in a different context:

Critical Marxism has a closer affinity with Hegelian views, for the latter ... is a kind of secular Protestantism that stresses the importance of 'sectarian' internal conviction and authentic belief, contrasting this invidiously with the 'positivity' of churchly reliance upon institutional forms, i.e., mere behavioral conformity.47

In this sense, Agamben's, Badiou's and Žižek's readings of Saint Paul all derive from this 'gap', insofar all are indebted to the 'theological' imagination or space that Benjamin's anti-linearity opened up for a reinvigoration of revolutionary conviction and revolutionary temporality, even though it is only Agamben's work that openly espouses this debt to Benjamin. Badiou's anti-historicism perhaps owes more to Feuerbach's laicisation of the infinite48 and Blanchot's open dialectic and the suppressed messianism of Merleau-Ponty's 'adventures in the dialectic', when in the early 1950s Merleau-Ponty defended Lukács against Sartre's 'ultra-Bolshevism' (historical purification);49 just as, for Žižek, it is Lukács who is the primary mediating figure between Saint Paul and Badiou.

Yet the 'returns to religion' and the legacy of Marxism here would not have the valence they have without Benjamin's messianic interpellation. Because it is precisely Benjamin's Judaic reconfiguration of the absolute in the 'here and now' as the logic of a communist practice and vision set against a self-contained 'progress', which establishes the political terrain whereupon the 'returns to religion' and the rereading of Paul from within Marxism are being contested. That is, as Benjaminian-type state-of-emergency theories, Agamben's, Žižek's and Badiou's political philosophies inherit a critical Marxism which thematises praxis as presently and necessarily 'behind' the historical process. But this state of emergency in the current period is not a politics of the interregnum as understood by Benjamin or – more loosely – by Merleau-Ponty.

47. Gouldner 1980, p. 43.
48. What Badiou shares with Feuerbach is that he refuses to submit the human essence to the idea of the Other or One, by reversing the polarity of godly infinity and human finitude. In Badiou, this is grounded in the mathematisation of being – the infinitely infinite multiplicity. In Feuerbach, it is done via the notion that the creativity of the human species is infinite precisely as a result of its collective scientific powers and boundless collective and communal resources. Humanity has no need of any externalised notion of infinity, for infinity is immanent to humans' own powers of becoming. Consequently, for both philosophers, all thinking that locates human infinitude outside of the human in the One is unreal and religious. See Feuerbach 1986. For a discussion of Badiou and Feuerbach as essentially rationalist and anti-humanist philosophers, see also Power 2005.
The impasse Merleau-Ponty famously proposed, in the spirit of Benjamin, in the 1950s – it is ‘impossible to be an anti-Communist and it is not possible to be a Communist’ – has been dissipated, for the moment at least. For it is clearly ‘possible’ indeed, utterly to be expected that the political subject ‘be an anti-communist’ subject today. ‘Communism’ as praxis and ideal, then, according to these authors, has to be made from other historical, political and philosophical materials than those already handed down to us in the name of historical Communism, whether actual or imagined. Consequently, despite Agamben’s, Žižek’s and Badiou’s antipathy to the ‘unrestrained synthetic impulses of dialectical reason’, their anti-historicism is not identifiable with its dominant post-historical form in postmodernism or compatible with the weak messianicity of deconstruction; that is, if they all take their distance from the apodictic claims of dialectical reason, this is not replaced by politics of Derridean different and undecidability. Derrida’s version of anti-historicism becomes a useful point of ideological contrast with this kind of ‘messianism’, to the extent that as a strong messianism it allows anti-historicism to recover a ‘wakefulness to the future’ which is open to the ‘transcendent move’.

‘The already’, ‘the not yet’ and the ‘to come’

Derrida’s antipathy to the possibility of the speculative transcendental move derives from a philosophy of the ‘other’ fixated on politics as ‘gap’, ‘interregnum’, ‘fissure’, and ‘trace’. The One and the All remain locked into process of particularist qualification and exchange, in which the production of a third term (the revolutionary break) is always provisional, ephemeral (different, the supplement, the pharmakon). This is to subvert the third term as a move of premature synthesis or transcendent closure; the move to the transcendent is always a move away from the transcendent. This withholding or bracketing of the third term, by dint of the third term’s emergent identity as not-One, gives Derrida’s politics, therefore, the character of a permanently delayed (melancholic) promise. The third term enacts; it cannot found, thematise or structure.

Yet, this is not to say that Derrida’s politics has no sense of the ‘to come’ on the basis of the ‘already’, or, indeed, that his writing lacks a concept of proletarian revolution; but it is to say that it is narrow, weak and self-undermining – the promise of the ‘to come’ lies only in the preservation of the

not-One.\textsuperscript{52} Hence, a fundamental conflict haunts deconstructive post-
metaphysics: at the point of liberating reflection and meaning from the pre-
ordinations of historicism and orthodox Marxist teleology, agency and
meaning are pushed back into finite actuality. The effect of this absence of the
\textit{strong} transcendent move (through the gateway of the eschatological and
messianic) is not so much openness to the direct and contingent demands of
the Other, but the effective expunging of the possibility of radical otherness
from the structures of reality itself. As Timothy Bewes has put it, the
metaphysical virtue of a strong messianic ‘third term’, mediating between
self and other, One and All, One and not-One, past and present, is that
it successfully preserves the possibility of radical alterity \textit{immanent to}
finitude.\textsuperscript{53}

Whereas deconstruction and other forms of anti-dialectical scepticism
dissolve or weaken the absorption of the anxiety of self and other into a
transcendent (emancipatory) horizon (the absolute, the Kingdom of God, the
proletarian revolution), the metaphysics of dialectical or ‘religious’ thinking
\textit{sustain} the connection between self and other in this horizon by continually
absorbing self and other into a third and emergent space: a space that is neither
that of the self nor other, but of their ‘collective interpellation’. It is not atheism
then that is the opposite of religious thought, but precisely ‘unthinkability’
and ‘undecidability’. For such ‘openness’ to the Other at the expense of the
synthesising move of the ‘third term’ suppresses what cannot be contained by
the movement and endless succession of difference.

The preservation of alterity in the finite and the call for a transcendent-
immanent third term is key to the turn to Christianised categories. Thus, what
connects Žižek, Bhaskar, Badiou, Agamben and Negri is a striking recourse to the
temporal/atemporal triadic framework of Judeo-Christian transcendentalism:
‘the already’, ‘the not yet’ and the ‘to come’. This is reflected in the widespread
reflection on Saint Paul’s theology in this corpus of writing, with Badiou and
Agamben producing extensive studies of his work, and Žižek producing an
extensive reading of Badiou on Saint Paul.

Saint Paul is exemplary for these particular writers – as for radical Christian
theologians generally – precisely because in his articulation of the resurrection
as the key transforming event of Christ’s life, introducing into historical time
the prospect of humanity’s universal liberation from the realm of death at
Christ’s Parousia, the promise of infinitude is made a \textit{finite, daily act of faith,}
\textit{instruction and struggle}.\textsuperscript{54} The transcendent is figured, therefore, through the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Derrida 1994.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Bewes 2002, p. 192.
\item \textsuperscript{54} See also Breton 1988 and Taubes 2004.
\end{itemize}
Christian subject’s fidelity in struggle to the actuality and repetition of the ‘living hope’ of the resurrection-event, and not through any abstract or supernatural ‘hope’ (the old apocalypticism). There is an irreducible mediation between transcendence and immanence. One presupposes the other.

This immanent understanding and grounding of the transcendent, then, has wider philosophical and political implications for these writers, particularly Badiou, Žižek and Agamben.55 How do we recognise a significant and universal event, and remain faithful to it in our finitude, rather than subject it simply to (localised) interpretation? How do we – once we accept its universality – continue to produce and reproduce its universal address in the present? What is the nature of a universal event? And how does it produce in us the experience of fidelity? Consequently, under what conditions, and with what means, do subjects become agents of a commitment to a truth that is universally authentic? What does such an event actually interrupt, historically, subjectively? It is these three writers’ reading of Saint Paul that I want to concentrate on in Part II of this article.56 For what they have to say about Saint Paul allows us to assess how the transcendent-immanent turn – which is constitutive of the (atheistic) Christianised turn in political philosophy and political theory – remains, or fails to remain, within a Marxist and Christian problematic.

References


55. This is also crucial to Negri’s Time for Revolution. However, Negri is the least inclined of the neo-Marxists to use the concept of the ‘transcendent’ in relation to the immanent. This is because of all the writers above he is the one most emphatic in opposing immanence to dialectical thinking: ‘materialist teleology knows no final cause from which and/or towards which it advances’. Negri 2003, p. 182.

56. To be published in the next issue of Historical Materialism.


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Postmodern Contributions to Marxian Economics: Theoretical Innovations and their Implications for Class Politics

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Abstract
In this paper I seek to establish that a widely held criticism of postmodern Marxism – that it is morally relativist and does not offer a basis for a systematic analysis of capitalism – is not warranted. I provide a systematic review of the postmodern Marxist literature in three distinct areas – value theory, class analysis of the household and state, and class justice – and I draw on these contributions to show that postmodern Marxism offers new insights into problems of concern to Marxian theorists. I argue, further, that it provides the normative grounds for a class politics that is open to new alliances and new strategies for engaging in class struggle.

Keywords
Marxian theory; class analysis; postmodernism; class politics

1. Rethinking Marxism
Over the last three decades, a group of Marxian theorists working primarily in the United States has developed a significant and growing body of literature recasting traditional Marxian debates. This work builds upon an interpretation of dialectics developed by the French theorist Louis Althusser but rejects both structuralism and relativism. Instead, this postmodern Marxism uses Althusser’s concept of overdetermination, and the specific understanding of causality and contradiction it provides, to create an epistemological terrain from which a diverse body of theory grows. This theory reinterprets a number of key assumptions underlying many Marxian debates and provides new conceptual

1. An earlier version of this article appears in the Japanese-language journal Marx-Engels-Marximus-Forschung. I would like to thank Ted Burczak, Julie Graham, Kazuo Takita, two anonymous referees and the editorial board of Historical Materialism for their comments. I take responsibility for any remaining errors or omissions.
frameworks to address problems of concern to Marxist theorists. By defining class in terms of a process of producing, appropriating and distributing surplus-labour, it also sees class struggle in unlikely places. The particular class politics it advances is thus more inclusive in its rendering of what constitutes class struggle and how class struggle both affects and is affected by non-class aspects of society and nature. Postmodern Marxism thus offers a challenge to contemporary Marxism concerning both how to think about class and what is to be done.

In this article, I seek to define the terrain of this challenge by surveying contemporary work by postmodern Marxists and elucidating how it differs from other variants within Marxism both conceptually and in its political implications. In so doing, I will make two claims which contradict widely held views concerning the project of pursuing postmodern approaches to Marxism. First, I will argue that postmodern Marxism provides a systematic theoretical account of capitalist competition that consistently interprets and extends Marx’s theories of value, crisis and competition. The integration of postmodern theory does not, therefore, imply relinquishing a careful, logical analysis of capitalism. Second, I will argue that postmodern Marxism provides a coherent normative basis for a critique of capitalist class relations that informs and motivates class politics. Postmodern Marxism is not relativist in its moral stance nor indifferent to political outcomes as some modern theorists claim.

2. It is helpful to distinguish postmodernism as an ontological claim, a statement about reality, from postmodernism as an approach to theory. Some modern Marxian theorists, for instance, Jameson and Harvey, make the claim that capitalism has entered a postmodern phase – a distinct period of development characterised by a new set of social conditions. Other theorists, for example, Lyotard, make the claim that our experience of reality has become fractured in such a way as to provoke a postmodern condition – a fundamentally new experience of the world around us that requires us to reconsider our assumptions concerning subjectivity. While postmodern-Marxian theorists do take positions regarding these claims, the approach of postmodern Marxism falls into a second category – an approach to theory. Within postmodern approaches to theory, two categories can be identified – those that rely primarily on the analysis of style and produce self-reflective deconstructions of the meanings of texts (as in Derrida) and those that are primarily directed towards postmodern critique. Resnick and Wolff’s work is an example of postmodern critique: a questioning and reframing of the underlying epistemological assumptions and an exploration of the implications of these assumptions for the theoretical positions adopted and defended. For an elaboration of these distinctions see Cullenberg, Amariglio and Ruccio 2001.

3. Some critics claim that postmodernism embraces an anti-scientific approach by failing to provide criteria by which statements are to be judged to be true or false and by rejecting totalities as inherently partial. Therefore, it cannot provide the basis for a systematic analysis of capitalism. Stabile 1997, p. 143; Wood 1997, p. 8.

4. Critics argue that the fragmented nature of subjectivity that postmodernism embraces undermines the possibility of collective action based upon collective interests. Its disavowal of
These two modern misconceptions underlie the antipathy, and, in some cases, hostility, with which modern Marxists regard this postmodern project. If left to stand, they threaten to further divide Marxian scholars and to deprive Marxism of the valuable insights postmodern Marxism offers. This paper thus represents a call to contemporary Marxists to rethink the bases of their objections to a postmodern approach to Marxism in the interests of provoking a more fruitful dialogue.

Since the concept of overdetermination deeply affects the formulation and understanding of Marxian class analysis, I will begin by explaining the basis for this postmodern interpretation of dialectics and how it affects the understanding of class. I will then illustrate the implications of overdetermination by showing how it recasts current Marxian debates over value theory, class analysis and what constitutes class justice. From these contributions, I will draw out some implications for class politics—the appropriate means, from a postmodern-Marxian perspective, for struggling to achieve class transformation. I will conclude by arguing that objections to a postmodern approach to Marxism are not justified— that postmodern Marxism offers a systematic critique of capitalism and utilises this critique to propose political strategies aimed at class transformation.

2. Overdetermination and class

The theory of knowledge underlying Marxian theory clearly has important implications both for how it is understood as well as for defining the scope of the political prescriptions that may be developed. In *Knowledge and Class*, Resnick and Wolff argue that a principle defect of much Marxian theory has been its uncritical acceptance of non-Marxian epistemology. By building on the work of Lenin, Gramsci, Mao, Lukács and Althusser, Resnick and Wolff develop a distinctively Marxian epistemology that challenges the underlying rationalism and empiricism of much contemporary Marxian theory. They read Althusser’s contribution as providing a basis for a methodological break with essentialist epistemology that allow for the development of a non-essentialist but distinctively Marxian analysis of society.

history as a source of objective insights into contemporary circumstances condemns it to an unconscious alliance with the very forces left theory is intended to combat, a real, historical, systematic capitalist system. Postmodernism thus represents ‘a call to inaction and a surrender to capitalist triumphalism’. Wood and Foster (eds.) 1996, p. 42. For a recent elaboration of this position see Markels 2006.
While Althusser was unable to fully pursue the implications of this methodological break, the concept of overdetermination he develops is adequate, in their view, to the task of overcoming the key conceptual difficulty he saw concerning the relationship of the economic base and the political/cultural superstructure. It also provides a basis for a new development of the theory of historical materialism – a class-based analysis of historical change – in which class is provided a central role in the conceptual framework without insinuating itself as a ‘last instance’ determining factor. This theoretical contribution of Resnick and Wolff is crucial for understanding the postmodern contributions to Marxian theory that follow from it and for understanding its distinctive political positions. In this section, I will begin by outlining the concept of overdetermination and the specific understandings of dialectical and historical materialism it engenders. I will then explain how these theorists apply the methodological insights of overdetermination to the central concept of class.

i) Rethinking dialectics

In explicating the concept of overdetermination, Resnick and Wolff redefine two key aspects of traditional epistemology, the relationship between theory and the underlying material reality and the concept of the ‘process’ as the basic unit of analysis. In specifying the relationship between theory and reality, Marx used the concepts of ‘the thought concrete’ (theory) and the ‘concrete real’ (material/social reality). Traditional epistemology presumes a gap between theory and the reality it seeks to explain and poses the problem of knowledge as the problem of how to overcome this gap. How, in other words, can we know that our statements about reality adequately, correctly or accurately apprehend that reality? In place of this problematic, Resnick and Wolff argue that while material reality exists (it is not a product of thought), we can only ever perceive that reality through our concepts of it. The ‘concrete real’ to which Marx refers is not material/social reality per se but our conceptually mediated experience of that reality. The problem of knowledge concerns how we specify the relationship between theory (the concrete in thought) and this conceptually mediated experience of reality (the concrete real). The gap to which traditional epistemology refers is thus a false problematic since there is no sense in which our theoretical statements can ever correspond to, approach or reflect reality itself.

Furthermore, since the ‘concrete real’ is conceptually mediated, theory itself is not independent of the reality it seeks to explain. Because theory is a constituent part of society, both reality itself (the existing society) and the ‘concrete real’ (our conceptually mediated experience of that society) are always, in part, comprised by the theory that seeks to explain it. The material
reality is dependent upon theory in two ways: (1) it is (in part) comprised of theory, in that theory constitutes part of the cultural aspects of the reality to be explained, and; (2) it is experienced through the conceptual lens of theory, in that our experience always entails our conceptual organisation of sense data. Theory thus exists within the object it seeks to explain; it both helps to constitute its own object and acts to constitute the consciousness of the theorist who views the object. The recognition of the mutual interdependence of theory and its object, their overdetermination, stands in stark contrast to the epistemological project as originally defined by Kant, Locke, and Hume that has been imported into much of Marxian theory and the reframing of this problematic has profound implications for Resnick and Wolff’s theoretical elaboration or rethinking of Marxism.5

A second key difference with modern epistemology is the conceptualisation of the basic units of theoretical analysis and how they are causally related. Rather than conceptualising causation as a relation between distinct entities, Resnick and Wolff develop Althusser’s concept of the ‘process’ as the basic unit of analysis.6 Processes are conceived of as distinct but interrelated aspects of a theoretical object that together act to constitute that object. They can be categorised for analytic purposes according to type: economic processes involve the production and distribution of means of production and consumption, political processes involve the design and regulation of power and authority, cultural processes are the ways in which meanings are produced and natural processes are the movement of matter and energy (chemical, physical, etc.). Processes are understood to be overdetermined – they act together to mutual constitute an activity, event or relationship, not as distinct entities, but as mutually determined aspects of a unified whole.

Since the alteration or removal of any one process or aspect of an overdetermined activity or relationship has an impact on all the other processes and aspects, no process can be identified to be inessential to the constitution of the whole. However, since it is not possible to take into account all processes that overdetermine an activity, relationship or event, each theoretical explanation is necessarily partial, both in the sense of being incomplete and in the sense of being constituted in part by the desires and motivations of the theorist.

5. Here Resnick and Wolff (1987) draw on the work of Kuhn, Quine, Carnap, Saussure and Rorty to develop a critique of both empiricist and rationalist attempts to pose and to resolve the problem of knowledge.
6. Resnick and Wolff note that Althusser refers to processes variously as ‘processes, aspects, instances, levels, moments and so forth’ (1987, p. 91). They systematise the concept of the process, distinguish between the types of processes as discussed below and elaborate its significance for class analysis.
Theory is thus seen to be necessarily partisan, an intervention into an ongoing argument about reality, not a description or reflection, accurate or otherwise of that reality. Overdetermination thus rejects essentialism – the view underlying both rationalist and empiricist epistemologies that produce explanations by identifying, through experience or logic, the essential characteristics of an entity as a means of distinguishing true statements from false statements about the nature of reality. Overdetermination also displaces the Hegelian dialectic underlying some variants of Marxian analysis, a dialectic that posits a binary opposition between two contradictory aspects of a given unity. In its place, it substitutes a view of causation that posits an uneven development of multiple contradictory aspects of events and, as a result, it precludes the idea that any underlying logic governs the manifestation of those contradictions. For this reason, historical ‘accident’, conjunctural factors, and contingency all play a role in determining social outcomes.

As a result, any theory is understood as a partial and provisional intervention, grouping particular aspects of the complex and conceptually mediated experience of society in particular ways for particular purposes. Interventions cannot therefore be ranked according to their correspondence to history or facts simply because any theory necessarily chooses among the array of possible facts to construct a partial explanation which then acts to change the social reality it seeks to explain. What is offered instead is a judgement about the particular social effects or consequences of these interventions as to whether or not they promote, or are likely to promote, social changes that are deemed to be desirable. Theory does not (simply) interpret the world; it also (cannot help but) change it.

For this reason, Resnick and Wolff characterise their methodology as partisan but not relativist. Postmodern-Marxian theory is partisan because it has a specific moral commitment – a revolutionary intent to explicate class and thus to inform actions to change the class character of society. The moral commitment insists that not every theoretical intervention is equally acceptable: not every position is on par. It does not judge interventions according to their correspondence to an unmediated reality or via extra-theoretical criteria for truth, but simply on a judgment as to whether they theory is likely to have desirable consequences for class transformation. It is not relativist because this partisan commitment acts to block the conclusion that any theoretical position is acceptable.

In their view, each theory develops its own criteria for judging statements to be true or false. Judgements concerning truth or falsity thus act to accord merit to the standing of interventions only within the context of the theoretical framework, including the epistemology, within which they are situated. Cross-
theoretical critique is helpful for illuminating areas of the theory that require elaboration, clarification or correction but do not carry the weight of a judgement concerning the theory’s correspondence to an objective truth.

This approach is not, therefore, ‘post-Marxist’ as those, like Hindess and Hirst or Laclau and Mouffe, who use a critique of epistemology to reject Marxism. Resnick and Wolff’s contribution is unique in that it embraces a critique of essentialism without abandoning its commitment to class analysis and to class transformation. In order to distinguish the present approach both from much contemporary Marxism, which maintains a commitment to class analysis within an essentialist epistemology, and from post-Marxism, which rejects essentialism but in so doing also rejects class analysis, I refer to this approach as postmodern Marxism. How then does the concept of overdetermination provide a basis for a postmodern class analysis?

ii) Rethinking class

Applying the concept of overdetermination to class analysis means rethinking the concept of class as a process rather than as an entity (a grouping of agents based upon their ownership of property or access to power). Overdetermination implies that any event, activity or relationship may be understood to result from the contradictions arising from the manifold processes or aspects of that activity or relationship.

The activity of production, for example, is understood as the overdetermined result of multiple processes occurring simultaneously. These include the economic processes of buying material inputs and labour-power, political processes of enforcing rules of behaviour for productive workers, cultural processes of reproducing and redefining meanings associated with work norms and workers’ identities and natural processes of transforming the physical characteristics of material inputs, burning calories and expending effort to operate machinery and equipment. The traditional characterisation of production as an economic activity comprising the society’s ‘base’ affected (even complexly) by distinct cultural and political activities comprising the superstructure is rejected. Instead the cultural and political activities associated with ideology, law, religion and art are likewise analysed in terms of the economic, political, cultural and natural processes that constitute them. In this way no ontological priority is given to economic processes over noneconomic processes.

Within the set of economic processes lies the class process – the process of the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus-labour. The process of performing and appropriating surplus-labour is distinguished as the
fundamental class process; the (equally important) process of distributing that surplus with the aim of securing conditions of existence of the fundamental class process is referred to as the subsumed (or distributive) class process. Subsumed class processes include, among other things, the distribution of surplus in the form of rent, interest, dividends and management salaries to secure land, money capital and supervision. An overdetermined class analysis thus seeks to explain how these two aspects of the class process – the production of surplus-value and its distribution to secure its conditions of existence – affect (in the sense of constitute) and are affected by each other as well as the non-class processes (political, cultural, economic and natural) that serve mutually to constitute the social totality. A primary object of Marxian theory is thus to make visible the ways in which class processes interact with other aspects of society in order to inform a politics that works towards the abolition of exploitative class relationships. In order to evaluate the merits of the theory, I will review the theoretical interventions it has stimulated and the contributions to class politics it has brought forth.

3. Rethinking value

Of all the areas of Marxian theory, Marx’s theory of value is perhaps the most systematic and formal and thus the least likely to be amenable to postmodern analysis. It is rendered at a high level of abstraction, distancing it from the areas most often considered relevant for politics. It is somewhat surprising therefore to note that the concept of overdetermination has a part in overcoming the seemingly intractable quantitative and formal problems associated with the transformation of values into prices. More surprising still is the claim that the resolution of these debates has important political consequences for Marxists.

By utilising the concept of overdetermination, postmodern Marxism has been able to resituate the terrain of these debates in a way that retains the efficacy and extends the scope of the Marxian critique of the capitalist social formation. This analysis reinterprets the relationship between value and price to overcome the alleged inconsistencies of the traditional interpretation and develops quantitative analysis of prices and values in which the equality of, on the one hand, total value and total exchange-value and, on the other, total surplus-value and total profit both hold simultaneously.

This rethinking of the traditional framing of the debates thus provides fertile ground for understanding the effects of capitalist class processes on the exploitation of workers and the contradictions engendered by capitalist competition. It strongly rejects the claims of critics that Marxian class analysis
is subject to inherent flaws. Indeed, postmodern Marxism provides a formidable intellectual defence of a core claim of Marxian theory: that capitalism can be seen as a systematic but also contradictory and open-ended means by which surplus-labour is produced, appropriated and distributed. Further than this, value theory provides a valuable means by which the overdetermined aspects of this exploitative class process can be brought to view in order to motivate the political project of class-based politics. How, then, does overdetermination contribute to a rethinking of value?

The traditional formulation of the relationship between values and prices conceives of value as being determined by labour expended in production. It treats labour as both an entity and as an essence, rather than as an overdetermined process, and in so doing fails to see the complex ways that the social constitution of labour affects how it counts as value and how, as a result, values and prices are overdetermined. A formal presentation of this argument is not appropriate here, but it will be helpful to explain the basic differences between the traditional framing of the problem and the postmodern one and then to briefly elaborate some of the contributions that the postmodern intervention has made possible.

Traditionally, the problem of transforming values into prices arises because the two aggregate equalities, total value equal to total price and total surplus-value equal to total profit, only obtain under a set of very restrictive conditions. Since these equalities are taken to be the test of the internal consistency of Marx’s value theory, the failure to formulate the theory in such a way that they both hold simultaneously is taken by many to be a critical failure of the theory – a proof of its inadequate representation of the reality of capitalism. Traditional formulations of the relationship between values and prices most often treat values as determined by the labour-time required to produce commodities independent of the process of exchange. In so doing, it values the means of production according to the labour (currently) required to produce them and not by the amount of labour-time they represent in equivalent exchange – that is, the amount required to obtain the means of production by purchasing them at their prevailing exchange-value.

Postmodern theorists point out that since, for Marx, value is specific to capitalist class relations and since, in general, capitalist enterprises must acquire the elements of constant capital via exchange, it is the labour equivalent of the

money required to purchase the elements of constant capital – their exchange-value – that is relevant to determining the amount of labour-time the means of production transfer to a commodity during production. In other words, in order to define value (the socially-necessary abstract labour-time required to produce a commodity) the elements of constant capital that enter production must be valued as products of capital, that is, the labour-time they represent in exchange. The abstract labour socially necessary to produce them, in the context of capitalist production, is the labour-time equivalent of the exchange-value of the constant capital not its embodied-labour magnitude.9

Similarly, since workers purchase their means of subsistence as capitalist commodities, it does not make sense to define the value of variable capital with reference to the direct labour requirements embodied in the wage bundle. Instead, variable capital should be defined by the labour represented by the exchange-values (prices of production) of the wage goods workers consume, since they must purchase those wage goods at prices that reflect the tendency for profit rate equalisation.

According to Wolff, Callari and Roberts, the labour magnitudes corresponding to the prices of production of the elements of means of production and wage goods should define the constant and variable components of commodity values. Value is still defined as the socially-necessary abstract labour-time required to produce a commodity, but the requirements of production take into account the capitalist nature of exchange by valuing inputs according to the labour-time required to obtain them in exchange rather than that required to produce them directly. These value magnitudes can be expressed in either labour units or in money magnitudes using the monetary expression of labour-time to convert between to two.

Defining value in this way, the transformation problem does not arise: instead it is understood as the result of mis-specifying the relationship between value and price.10 Prices of production are fully defined as distinct magnitudes from values reflecting a gain or loss in value that occurs as a result of the tendency toward the equalisation of profit rates. The two aggregate equalities thus hold not as derived results of the determination of prices from values but as identities in the definition of the interrelationship of values and exchange-

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9. So if, for example, a machine requires a hundred hours of direct and indirect labour to produce but, due to a relatively high organic composition of capital, it exchanges at a price of production higher than its value and thus exchanges for the money equivalent of one hundred and twenty hours of socially-necessary abstract labour in equivalent exchange, the value it transfers in production is therefore determined by the latter amount, one hundred and twenty hours, and not the former amount as in the traditional interpretation.

values. With this insight, value theory provides a conceptual framework to systematically analyse how production and exchange in capitalism effect, or bring about, a social division of labour-time to various industries and redistributes that value within and between industries based upon the relative labour productivities of enterprises and their relative organic compositions of capital.\(^{11}\)

This innovative insight into the relationship of values to exchange-values and prices is made possible in part by applying the logic of overdetermination. Modern value theory sees prices as being caused by the independent and prior category of value – a category fully defined by the means of production and the real wage without reference to exchange. This postmodern approach instead views values and exchange-values as mutually constituting one another. Both categories come into being as the result of the interrelationship of production and exchange.\(^{12}\)

This rethinking of values provides a basis for a number of further contributions to value theory. Two recent examples are provided by the work of Roberts on the question of the reduction of concrete to abstract labour and my own work on the integration of demand into the determination of values and prices.\(^{13}\) Roberts addresses the question of how qualitatively distinct concrete labours are compared in the process of commodity exchange. To do so, he represents the input structure of each industry as if each commodity were produced under the same physically average conditions – as if the total social capital were distributed to each industry in proportion to the quantity and composition of capital they utilise. Roberts argues that this algebraic representation reflects Marx’s repeated reference to the ‘aliquot part of the total social capital’. Each commodity output is represented as a vector of labour inputs that is qualitatively identical but quantitatively distinct. This algebraic representation corresponds to the idea that the concrete labours are reduced, through the process of exchange, to universal abstract labour and that the value and exchange-value of each commodity can be measured in terms of this abstract labour.\(^{14}\)

In previous work, I apply the concept of overdetermination in another direction to address the question of how changes in effective demand affect the determination of values and exchange-values. What I try to demonstrate is

\(^{11}\) Callari, Roberts and Wolff 1998, p. 48.

\(^{12}\) The interrelationship between value and exchange-value does not imply that the former is functionally dependent on the latter, however, since values can be derived from the technical production data without reference to the exchange-value of the inputs. See Roberts 1997.


\(^{14}\) Roberts 2004, p. 126.
that it is possible to apply Marx’s analysis of the effect of demand on the
determination of market-value in Chapter 10 of *Capital*, Volume III, to the
category of price of production. The resulting value category – the market-
price of production – defines the amount of ‘socially-necessary’ abstract labour
each commodity represents in exchange when variations in both demand and
supply are taken into consideration.¹⁵ Demand serves to distribute a given
magnitude of value among different industries according to effective demand –
according to how much labour is deemed socially necessary in the macro sense
of corresponding to the social ‘need’ as expressed by effective demand in the
market. At this more developed stage of the analysis, the techniques of
production act as limits to the variation in the market-prices of production.
The many determinations affecting the level of effective demand are thus
introduced into the theory of prices without undermining the role of the
conditions of production.

Postmodern value theory provides a *structural* analysis of competition,
including efforts to elicit demand, which is nonetheless non-structuralist in
that it does not posit a necessary effect of capitalist competition on the
distribution of social labour, an underlying logic of accumulation.¹⁶ Instead it
seeks to theorise the interrelationship of production and exchange in order to
provide a logical framework for analysing the value relations that act to
overdetermine social outcomes.¹⁷ Furthermore, the postmodern rendering of
value theory does not intend to capture an inherent logic of accumulation; rather it
permits a systematic opening to contingencies and a re-examination
at each successive step of the implications of the introduction of those
contingencies for the meaning and relation of the existing concepts deployed
by in the process of theorising.¹⁸ Postmodern Marxism thus produces an
interpretation of Marx’s theory of value that is logically coherent and systematic
in its analysis without being structuralist in the sense of positing an inherent
logic of capitalist production and exchange.

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¹⁷. Part of the overdetermination of value includes the overdetermination of the subjectivity
of the individuals participating in the production and exchange of commodities. The problem of
commodity fetishism can be understood from this perspective, not as the false apprehension of
the hidden social reality of commodity exchange, but as the problem of how commodity
exchange participates in the overdetermination of individual consciousness to reinforce the self-
concept of the self-interested maximising individual within a context of equivalent exchange. See
Amariglio and Callari 1989; Callari and Ruccio 1996.
4. Rethinking class

Traditionally, Marxism has looked to the capitalist enterprise as the primary site of class conflict. An overdetermined class analysis instead theorises class as a process of surplus-labour production, appropriation and distribution that can occur at a number of social sites including but not limited to the enterprise. By seeing class processes at the sites of household and state as well as in the enterprise, postmodern Marxism makes visible aspects of class conflict that may otherwise be overlooked or marginalised and it brings to light the contradictory effects of different types of class processes (both capitalist and non-capitalist) within and among these different sites.

This multidimensional class analysis provides new insights into longstanding debates and sees new possibilities for class politics. Here, I will examine three distinct sites of class struggle in order to illustrate these postmodern contributions to contemporary Marxian debates. Firstly I will look at the sight of the enterprise and the debate over the logic of accumulation and tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Secondly, at the sight of the household, I will examine the debate concerning the characterisation of unpaid household labour and its articulation with paid labour. Finally, as regards the state, I will go into the debate concerning the class nature of the Soviet Union. At each of these sites, postmodern Marxism raises questions concerning how class relations ought to be transformed. What criteria for class justice ought to be applied and on what basis are contending normative claims to be adjudicated? I will conclude this section by arguing that overdetermination offers strong moral grounds for preferring non-exploitative class relations without excluding competing normative claims.

i) Rethinking the logic of accumulation

By applying the insights of an overdetermined class analysis to the site of the enterprise, postmodern Marxism undermines the view that competition is characterised by an imperative towards accumulation and that, as a result, capitalism is bound by a determinist logic. Instead it argues: i) that the effect of accumulation on the rate of profit is conceptually ambiguous and therefore historically contingent; ii) that accumulation itself is only one strategy available to the enterprise to secure its survival, and; iii) enterprises have access to sources of revenue other than surplus-value that can be used to maintain profitability without expanding their appropriation of surplus-value. A postmodern-Marxian analysis thus concludes that the outcome of the strategic choices of the enterprise and of the system as a whole is dependent upon the particular historical contingencies that act to overdetermine the enterprises
choices. This conclusion is based not on an ontological assumption but on a careful analysis of the arguments put forward by contemporary Marxists concerning capitalist competition. In order to substantiate this conclusion, I will briefly outline each of the three claims that have resulted from an overdetermined class analysis of the enterprise.

From the perspective of an overdetermined class analysis, the firm is a site for the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus-value. In order to remain viable as a productive capitalist enterprise (for instance, as a producer of surplus-value), the firm must secure the conditions of existence of its fundamental class process. Fundamental class income is generated from the exploitation of workers in the production of a commodity. This income implies a number of subsumed class expenses necessary to secure conditions of existence of the fundamental class process (such as interest payments on borrowed capital and rent on land). Similarly, the firm may receive subsumed class payments (payments made out of the surplus-value produced by other capitalist enterprises) for providing other productive capitalist enterprises with their conditions of existence. These sources of income (for example, consulting fees, leasing of real estate, copyright fees) imply non-class expenses to secure their conditions of existence. Finally, non-class income generated from services provided to unproductive capitalists (for example, the sale of equipment or other non-class economic transactions) or income received in the form of transfers from the state represents a third category of income and expenses needed to maintain these income streams (including commissions on sales and lobbying fees). This class representation of the enterprise draws attention to the complex strategic problem facing the firm of how to secure its class and non-class sources of income by incurring subsumed and non-class expenses.19

Particular strategic choices of any firm are contingent on the conditions perceived most threatening to that firm’s reproduction. The economic, political, cultural and natural processes thus overdetermine the firm’s decision making. Seeing the firm as a complex social totality results in an analysis of the effect of competition on the rate of profit that is contingent on the specific social factors – the laws, regulations, customs, norms, resource availability, weather and climatic changes, aging and the prevalence of diseases, and, more broadly, the political, cultural and natural processes that together constitute the social totality.

Accumulation is one possible use of the surplus, but there is no necessity governing the firm’s decision. It may, for example, increase the availability of surplus-value more by distributing surplus to management in return for greater

surveillance and an increased rate of exploitation. The conditions under which accumulation will lead to greater surplus-value are thus contingent on the conjunctural factors that overdetermine the effect of a particular distribution of surplus in the class process.

Cullenberg argues that the effect of accumulation on the rate of profit is logically indeterminant in Marx’s analysis. He argues that the direction of change in the rate of profit resulting from a decision to reduce the role of supervisory management (a payment out of surplus-value in order to increase the intensity of labour and therefore increase surplus-value produced by workers) towards accumulation (the use of surplus to purchase additional means of production and labour-power) will depend on the relative strength of contradictory factors. It will depend on, firstly, the effect on the relative size of the opposing effects of increased accumulation and decreased supervision on the rate of surplus-value and, secondly, the effect on the rates of change of the technical composition of capital and the unit values of capital and wage goods.20 There is no reason to argue a priori that any one effect or any one combination of effects will come to dominate the others. Accumulation will sometimes raise and sometimes lower the rate of profit and it is necessary to examine the specific factors acting to overdetermine the profit rate in order to theorise its movement.

Norton supports Cullenberg’s argument by questioning the assumption made by the many Marxian theorists that accumulation is, in fact, an imperative for capital. He argues that, quite contrary to the use of Marx’s famous passage extolling capitalists to ‘[a]ccumulate, accumulate, that is Moses and the prophets!’ Marx is actually is chiding the classical economists for overlooking the claims on the surplus other than accumulation that must be met. Marx, here and elsewhere, argues that there will be a number of competing claims on the distribution of the surplus so that accumulation can not simply be given priority as reflection of the essence or logic of capital.21

Arguing in this vein, Gibson-Graham and O’Neil provide a detailed analysis of the sources of revenue and the distributions of surplus-value within the large, Australian multinational corporation, Broken Hill Properties (BHP).22 They argue that the image of the singular, maximising capitalist enterprise cannot be sustained from the perspective of an overdetermined class analysis. What emerges instead is a characterisation of the firm as the site of the production, appropriation and distribution of an ever changing configuration of class and non-class revenues and expenditures, none of which is central or

determinant to the success or viability of the firm. Furthermore, decisions concerning the distribution of surplus-value and non-class revenue occur at multiple sites within and outside the enterprise.

These decisions may or may not be characterised as ‘rational’ even by the managers and members of the boards of directors who make them. Furthermore, even the accounting rules and conventions used to calculate the rate of profit that the firm reports (what counts as revenue and what can be written off as an expense) will affect the perceived success of failure of the firm’s actions. Analysing the enterprise from a postmodern perspective results in an inquiry into the multiple ways in which enterprises appropriate and distribute both surplus-value and subsumed and non-class revenue. In so doing, it redefines the terrain of the debates concerning both the fundamental imperatives of capital and the effect on the general rate of profit of the supposedly rational decisions of profit-maximising firms.

ii) Rethinking the value of household labour

One of the reasons that class processes in the household have been difficult to theorise within a modern Marxian framework is that class has often been defined in terms of power and not principally in terms of the manner in which surplus-value is produced, appropriated and distributed. While power clearly plays a role in overdetermining class processes, using it as a means to define class and to differentiate class positions and interests is problematic for a number of reasons. With respect to the analysis of household labour, defining class in terms of power raises the question of which dimension of power is most important or dominant. It thus either sets up a division among theorists as to which dimension of power (class, gender, race, age, ethnicity) is considered to be dominant, or it considers class as one of several aspects of a multidimensional view of how power is manifested. In the first case, important alliances are impeded, in the second, the specificity of class in terms of its focus on surplus-value is lost and class becomes one facet of how power is used to dominate and how it might be used to liberate. How then does postmodern Marxism proceed differently?

Postmodern Marxism, with its use of the concept of overdetermination and its definition of class as a process of performing, appropriating and distributing surplus-labour is able to keep class distinct from questions of identity (cultural processes) and questions of power (political processes) while examining the ways that gender and class are interrelated. A class analysis of the household

begins by specifying the types of class processes performed at that site (how surplus-labour is performed, appropriated and distributed) and how these class processes interact with non-class processes to effect the various activities and relationships at that site. It would then ask how class and non-class processes at other sites affect and are affected by class and non-class processes in the household.

This approach has several benefits. It refrains from assigning ontological privilege to class processes and thus avoids the marginalisation of gender that typifies much Marxian value analysis. In order to specify how class processes are overdetermined it is necessary to examine the ways in which cultural, political and natural processes act to overdetermine class – how class affects and is affected by both gender norms and the exercise of power. However, it does not obscure class processes by conflating class processes with processes of political power or cultural identity. It does, however, privilege class as an entry-point in keeping with the (partisan) Marxian commitment to class justice and class transformation.

Some examples of modern Marxian value analysis that address the question of household labour will help to illustrate the merits of the postmodern approach. Kotz provides an example of how housework is often theorised by Marxian value theorists. Household labour is understood not in terms of its being a class process in its own right (for instance, the performance, appropriation and distribution of surplus-labour), but primarily in terms of its effect on the value of labour-power and, even here, it is given only an indirect role in the analysis. Household labour is not considered to be directly productive of value and does not directly affect the value of labour-power. However, it does affect the value of labour-power indirectly since the type and quantity of capitalist commodities necessary for the wage bundle is affected by the amount and type of labour expended in the household. Kotz argues as follows:

Despite treating household labor as non-value creating labor, it can, and should, be viewed as indirectly affecting the value of labor-power, and hence, the surplus-value created by wage labor. The link between household labor and the value of labor power arises from the fact that household labor and purchased commodities are to some extent substitutes for one another in the process of reproduction of the working-class family.25

Household labour and purchased wage goods are theorised as substitutes in each family's attempt to maximise its standard of living. Changes in the

quantity of household labour performed thus affects the quantity of wage goods required to be purchased and the value represented by the labour-power purchased by capitalist firms.26

Alternatively, household labour is treated as a non-produced input into the production of the commodity labour-power. In this view, labour-power is seen to be a commodity that is depleted in the capitalist production process and must be replenished through the expenditure of unproductive labour in the household.27 Household labour, in this view, becomes vital to supporting the class process in the enterprise, and thus can be understood to be of central political importance in terms of class politics.28 In this case, too, household labour is considered to be unproductive, as it does not act to produce value but to produce an input into the production of value: labour-power itself. Its role is therefore subsidiary to the expenditure of paid labour and its analysis is easily ignored as secondary.29

Postmodern theory offers instead to view household labour both in terms of its relation to capitalist class processes in the enterprise as well as theorising it as a class process in its own right. How then does postmodern Marxism theorise household labour?

An important aspect of postmodern class analysis is to ask the question, at any site, is surplus-labour produced? And, if so, who produces and appropriates it and how is it distributed? By applying a class analysis to the site of households, Fraad, Resnick and Wolff characterise unpaid household labour in class terms as the production of surplus-labour.30 Household production generally involves the production of use-values in the form (primarily) of services such as cleaning, cooking, repairing, transporting, serving, nursing and caring for children. The producers of these use-values generally produce more than is necessary for the reproduction of their own labour and this surplus is appropriated and distributed in ways that help to recreate the household’s conditions of existence.

28. Dalla Costa and James 1975 and the Wages for Housework Movement argue that the exclusion of women from waged work and the related marginalisation of women’s unpaid labour are important conditions of existence of capitalist class processes. Federici 2004 extends this analysis to provide an important reframing of the role of domestic labour in primitive accumulation that seeks to make visible the vital role of household labour in the transition from feudalism to capitalism and argues that the marginalisation of household labour continues to be of central importance for primitive accumulation in capitalism today.
29. Much value theory overlooks the role of household labour in determining the value of labour-power. In addition to those mentioned above some exceptions include Foley 1986 and Lebowitz 2003.
The authors then identify different fundamental class processes that characterise household production. How is the production and appropriation of surplus-labour organised in households? While some household labour is outsourced to workers engaged in capitalist class processes, three other types of class process are also relevant. A feudal class process is defined as the production of producers that is appropriated by someone who shares a relationship of mutual obligation. Fraad, Resnick and Wolff argue that the feudal class process best characterises traditional patriarchal households since, in these households, the husband appropriates the surplus-labour of the wife and the marriage contract or agreement specifies complex relationship of mutual obligation.

Like a capitalist class process, this type of class process is exploitative since the wives do not themselves appropriate the surplus that they have produced. Two other possible class processes are not considered exploitative since the workers who produce the surplus themselves appropriate it. An ancient class process is defined as one in which an independent producer produces a surplus and individually appropriates that surplus. This class process best characterises the single person living alone or with children and/or dependent adults. Finally, a communist class process is one in which a group of producers collectively produce and collectively appropriate the surplus-labour. Communal households and more progressive family structures where the household members collectively produce and appropriate surplus-labour would fall in this category.

Note that these definitions of the various class processes do not specify anything about the relative power of the household members or their access to or ownership of property. Each type of class process is consistent with a distribution of power or property which favours one party over another. For example, in a traditional feudal household, the wife may have considerable power to control the amount and types of surplus-labour she performs. Alternatively, she may be dominated by her husband in these decisions. She may be legally forbidden from owning property or she may have a legal right to half of all that is produced both within and outside the household by either partner. The exercise of power and the legal ownership of property do not themselves figure in the determination of the type of class process that occurs.

These political processes act together with cultural, natural and economic processes to effect (constitute, or bring about) the class processes. However, they are conceptually distinct. In this way, the effects of changes to the organisation of the production, appropriate and distribution of surplus-labour are not conflated with questions of ownership or political power, but neither can the latter be ignored in formulating an overdetermined analysis.
Resnick and Wolff use a class analysis of the revenues and expenditure of the feudal household in the US to analyse the contradictions of Reaganism in the US.\textsuperscript{31} They argue that the reduction in surplus appropriation by capitalist enterprises in the late 1970s relative to the claims on the surplus by subsumed class processes was solved partly by the reduction of corporate taxes. However, this solution exacerbated the crisis of traditional feudal class processes in the home by reducing the forms of class and non-class revenue while increasing the demands for feudal household services due to the cutbacks in social programmes. The crisis in the household has lead to the rapid increase in non-traditional ancient and communist class households – a class transformation of the household.

Fraad argues further that the political programme to promote ‘family values’ in the US can be viewed as an effort by conservative political groups to shore up feudal class processes in the household by undermining state support for ancient and communist class processes in the home.\textsuperscript{32} Access to welfare payments are often necessary to support ancient class processes for single-parent families, while access to affordable childcare is often necessary for two-earner families participating in communist class processes in the home. Without state support, the conditions necessary to maintain these class structures are eroded. The cultural processes of defining the role of women in marriage, family and the workplace also play an integral role in supporting the exploitative feudal class processes in the household.

Gibson-Graham provides a class analysis of traditional housewives in the coal-mining towns which further illustrates how households’ class contradictions both cause and are caused by the contradictions in the mining enterprise. Restructuring work in the mines exacerbated class contradictions concerning the production and appropriation of surplus-labour in feudal households in ways that undermined productivity in the mining enterprises. Conversely, the institution of the twelve-hour shift in the mines eliminated a key benefit for the wives working in the household – namely their ability to organise social events and activities during weekends when men were home from work at the mine.

The exclusion of women from discussions concerning changes in the capitalist class process at the enterprise ultimately undermined a key condition of the feudal class process in the home. The change to the twelve-hour shift resulted in a dramatic increase in the incidence of divorce among mine-working families and thus a transformation in the class structure in the

\textsuperscript{31} See Fraad, Resnick and Wolff 1994; Resnick and Wolff 2006.  
\textsuperscript{32} Fraad 2004.
household from feudal to ancient. The class transformation in the household, in turn, lead to lower productivity of the mine workers and helped to undermined the fundamental class process in the mine.33 The traditional gender roles subscribed to by the men and women in the mining town constitute a key element in understanding the dynamics of the class processes involved in the mining industry. Likewise, by theorising household labour as a class process it is possible to see the role of class processes in the mines in contributing to the elimination of the patriarchal relations of domination of mine workers’ wives.

In each of these analyses, class processes are conceptually distinct from the cultural and political process associated with gender domination. Maintaining this distinction provides room for an analysis of how they are interrelated without privileging one at the expense of the other. Household labour is considered productive and is placed on par with paid labour. The effect on the labour processes in both the household and enterprise are considered. By theorising overdetermined class processes at both sites, greater insight is afforded into the contradictions facing men and women working both in the paid workplace and the home. The analysis thus informs political strategies that are often overlooked by a class analysis that privileges the enterprise as a site of class struggle. Because it suggests that class and gender processes are equally important to building an understanding of a patriarchal capitalist social formation, it offers hope of reconciliation between Marxist and feminist scholars and activists and a stronger alliance in the struggle for both gender and class justice.

iii) Rethinking Soviet capitalism

By distinguish class as the process of production, appropriation and distribution of surplus-labour from notions of class based on property ownership and/or power relations, Wolff and Resnick lend new support to the idea that Soviet industry was engaged in a form of state capitalism.34 This view, if accepted, has important implications: if the Soviet Union did not practise socialism, then its failure does not imply that socialism is not a viable alternative to capitalism. Furthermore, overdetermination lends support to the idea that a number of different variant forms of communism are possible, each relying on a different combination of property ownership (state and/or private), distribution (markets and or planning) and power structures (democratic and/or authoritarian). By

separating the analysis of the class process from the questions concerning the
economic and political processes that combine to give a particular system its
characteristics, it is possible to distinguish analytically among a number of
possible variants of communism and to recognise political possibilities for
class politics that previously were not apparent. How then does postmodern
Marxism seek to reframe the debate over Soviet socialism?

Proponents of the Soviet experiment argue that the elimination of private
property and markets in favour of state ownership and central planning imply
that the Soviet Union practised socialism. On the other side of the debate,
opponents of the Soviet strategy argued that the lack of worker self-management
and/or the exclusion of workers from positions of power within the Communist
Party implied that the Soviet Union failed to achieve a socialist system.35 While
property rights and worker autonomy are both important in analysing the
Soviet Union, neither one addresses the question of how the class process was
organised.

The question from a postmodern-Marxian perspective is whether the
production, appropriation and distribution of surplus-labour was organised
communally: did the workers themselves appropriate the surplus that they
produced? In their detailed study of state enterprises and collective farms,
Resnick and Wolff conclude that, with the exception of a brief period in
agriculture in the 1930s, the Soviet Union never achieved a class transformation
to a communist class structure. Workers did not themselves appropriate or
distribute the surplus that they produced.

According to their analysis, Soviet state officials appropriated the surplus-
labour expended by workers and made decisions concerning the uses of the
surplus with the aim of securing various conditions of existence of the class
process. The decisions concerning production were managed by a central
planning authority that used assigned values and prices including wage rates.
Workers had some limited freedom to choose occupations, and they received
wages corresponding to the necessary labour they expended, wages which were
generally understood to correspond to the contribution to social production
represented by their occupation. Workers furthermore did not, in general,
have access to means of production in order to undertake production
independently, nor did they participate in the appropriation of the surplus-
labour they performed. Resnick and Wolff conclude:

35. Theorists in the debate (including Bettelheim, Pollock, Horkheimer, Buick and Crump)
use various criteria to categorise the Soviet system as state capitalism. Resnick and Wolff argue
that these theorists only nominally address the question of how the class processes is organised
and, instead, tend to conflate power and/or ownership with class. See Resnick and Wolff, 2002,
pp. 104–26, for an analysis of the debate over state capitalism.
precisely this situation – a limited freedom coexisting with a structured compulsion to produce surplus for others without seeing the class process involved resembles no other class structure so much as the condition of workers in private capitalist structures…36

While property ownership, methods of distribution and workers ability to exercise economic and political power are all important for analysing class structures, they do not themselves determine the nature of the class system since they are distinct from the question of how the surplus-labour is produced, appropriated and distributed. State capitalism is consistent with collective or private ownership of productive assets, markets or planning as methods of distributing the goods and services, and even with worker self-management as long as the workers who are making decisions concerning the production process do not also collectively appropriate the surplus. Only in the latter case, when workers participate in the appropriation of surplus-labour, is the class structure considered to be communist.

By keeping the nature of the class process distinct from questions concerning the political and economic aspects of production and power relations, it is possible to see how even a very benign form of state capitalism – one in which state officials genuinely distribute the surplus-labour to each according to their need and workers participate in making collective decisions concerning what is produced and how – may nonetheless represent a system in which workers are excluded from participating in the collective appropriation of the surplus-labour they perform. Likewise, it is possible to imagine a reprehensible form of communism in which the exercise of political power allows a small group to influence decisions in such a way that the collectively appropriated surplus is squandered and repressive conditions prevail for workers in production.37

Resnick and Wolff argue that the Bolsheviks failed to examine the nature of the class processes utilised in industry and agriculture and instead focused on the question of collective ownership of productive assets. As a result, they did not take steps to transform the class process: how the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus were organised. Workers in the Soviet Union, in addition to experiencing a totalitarian political repression, were exploited in capitalist class processes.38 It was this class blindness, in part, that prevented the Bolsheviks from achieving the overthrow of capitalist exploitation they sought. This analysis of the Soviet Union also supports the position of those who classify the Soviet Union as state-capitalist, that the eventual failure of the

Soviet Union had nothing to do with the viability of communism. Rather, its demise reflected the contradictions facing a particular form of state capitalism that developed there. While much can be learned about state capitalism by studying the contradictions of Soviet Union, the difficulties it encountered do not bear on the question of the viability of communism.

For postmodern Marxism, class struggle occurs at multiple sites, including households as well as private and state enterprises. Defining class in terms of surplus-labour and distinguishing class from questions of ownership and political domination, these sites of class struggle enter into discussions of class transformation. State capitalism is distinguished from socialism and a number of variant types of communism can be identified. Various strategies for achieving class transformation that were not previously apparent are made visible. Postmodern Marxism is not neutral with respect to these possibilities. How, then, does it provide a normative argument for class transformation?

iv) Rethinking class justice

To build political support for class transformation postmodern class analysis must provide both a clear picture of what communism looks like and a compelling normative argument for the desirability of a communist class formation. Recent work by postmodern theorists to provide a normative defence of communism provides evidence that postmodern Marxism, far from being morally neutral or relativist, takes a strong stand for the promotion of class justice while recognising the existence of other normative principles and competing values. But this stance appears to be contradictory. How is it possible to maintain a commitment to a postmodern epistemology and, at the same time, argue forcefully for the moral superiority of communism over capitalism?

DeMartino and Burczak develop, in different ways, class-based normative arguments for non-exploitative class relations. They argue that traditional Marxian critiques of exploitation, such as those advanced by Roemer, situate the injustice of capitalist exploitation in the realm of exchange rather than with reference to the class process – the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus-value. Furthermore, many Marxist definitions of class essentialise property ownership and conclude that the elimination of private ownership of the means of production is a necessary condition for the elimination of exploitation. By situating class justice in terms of the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus-value, these theorists argue that exploitation results from the nature of the wage contract, not as the necessary

39. See, for example Harman 1983.
outcome of unequal property rights. Finally, in response to the problem of who ought to be included in the appropriation of surplus, postmodern Marxists argue for including various constituencies and they express support for Sen’s concept of human functioning as a means to provide non-essentialist criteria for class justice.

From a postmodern perspective, the traditional claim that workers ought to have the right to the product of their labour is problematic for two reasons. First, the appeal to innate rights of workers to the product of their labour relies on essentialising some human attributes rather than seeing justice as the product of an overdetermined social process. The question of what gives workers a right to appropriate the surplus thus needs to be addressed. Second, it does not seem warranted to exclude non-productive workers or even non-workers from a role in the appropriation of surplus. The question of who ought to have a right to appropriate the surplus needs to be addressed as well.

Burczak defends Ellerman’s claim that workers have a right to appropriate the product of their labour (in the sense of obtaining first rights to a newly created asset) because withholding that right denies workers responsibility for the results of their actions in effect treating them as non-human. In this view, the right of capital as residual claimant in production is illegitimate because it denies workers responsibility for their actions. It is not, however, property rights per se that provide capital with rights of residual claimant; rather, it is a characteristic of the labour contract. Privately-owned means of production would not give property owners the right of residual claim to the surplus-value produced by workers if labour contracts gave those rights to workers. Workers engaged in a communist class process could, in principle, lease capital from private owners but act as residual claimants of the surplus they create.

In Burczak’s view, it is not necessary to maintain, as Ellerman does, that as workers we innately have a right to the product of our own labour. Instead, this normative claim can be grounded in an Aristotelian notion of human functionings where these functionings are not naturally given but socially constructed. The basis on which workers claim the right to appropriate the surplus is thus the socially agreed principle that no one should be absolved of responsibility for their actions. To do so violates a condition necessary for human dignity and flourishing.

DeMartino argues that class justice must include all three moments in the class process: production, appropriation and distribution. Productive justice accords with the view that each should produce ‘according to their ability’;

that structuring production relations in a way that encourages the maximal utilisation of each individual’s productive capacity is a requirement for a just economic system. Distributive class justice pertains most directly to the other half of Marx’s famous dictum ‘to each according to their need’.44 The concept of appropriative justice addresses the question, important for theorising communism, concerning who has the right to appropriate the surplus. Here, Marx’s depiction of capitalism as social theft signals the importance of a principle of justice governing appropriation.

DeMartino similarly argues that a complex concept of justice, such as that provided by Amartya Sen’s principle of capabilities equality is needed to adjudicate competing claims concerning the appropriation.45 On this basis, he argues for including unproductive workers and non-workers in the process of appropriation. DeMartino therefore argues in favour of a ‘weak’ definition of appropriative justice which does not exclude direct producers from participating in the appropriation of the surplus but leaves open the question of who ought to be included.46 Furthermore, principles other than class justice ought not to be excluded when adjudicating normative claims: class justice represents only one of a number of competing normative principles (including other dimensions of justice as well as normative principles other than justice) that ought to be considered in a given social context.

This notion of class justice does not, therefore, seek to impose a pre-given standard of class justice nor does it insist on the priority of class-based criteria. It does, however, provide a point of view from which to provide a moral critique of neoliberalism. DeMartino argues that we should object to neoliberalism not on the grounds that it fails to secure sufficient economic growth, secure employment or a just distribution of income, but, instead, on the grounds that it violates the principles of class justice.

Even were neoliberalism able to deliver the performance it promises (economic growth, job creation, rising real wages) it would still fail to provide a just allocation of work (productive justice) and incomes (distributive justice) and for widespread participation in the allocation and distribution of social surplus (allocative justice). This elaboration of the normative elements of a class analysis thus addresses one of the common misperceptions of postmodern Marxism. The rejection of an essentialist stance does not imply that all standards are equally acceptable; on the contrary, a forceful and coherent case is made for preferring a non-exploitative class system.

45. DeMartino 2003, pp. 20–1; see also Sen 1992.
5. What (else) is to be done?

One result of postmodern-Marxian class analysis is that class struggles can be theorised to occur in more ways and in more places than we might initially imagine. When class processes are understood to occur not only in the production of surplus-value in the enterprise, but also in the household and in non-profit and state enterprises, the view of class struggle is expanded. Postmodern Marxists thus advocate for a variety of strategic interventions both within the traditional domain of the labour movement but also outside it. The overriding aim of these efforts, consonant with the methodology of overdetermination, is to attend to the interrelationships and potential alliances of those both within and without traditional arenas of class struggle.

For the labour movement, postmodern Marxism urges the expansion of the goals and strategies of unions from a traditional business-unionist vision of seeking higher wages and better working conditions for their members, to a social unionism that seeks to build alliances with new constituencies in multiple communities. The emphasis of this traditional strategy of achieving rising standards of living for workers has at least three serious drawbacks. By focusing on reducing the exploitation of workers in enterprises, it exacerbates divisions within the working class between unionised and non-unionised workers and, to the extent that household labour remains the primary responsibility of women, between waged male and female workers and unwaged women.

In addition to undermining class solidarity, focusing on a strategy of bargaining for wage increases can be seen to reinforce cultural conditions of existence of the capitalist class processes by reinforcing consumerism. To the extent that workers accept the idea that the increased consumption made possible by union bargaining leads to increased wellbeing, they not only aid capital in the realisation of surplus-value through increase demand for consumption goods, but also reinforce the individualism inherent in the appeal of increased consumption. Finally, the model of business unionism recreates the political hierarchy that is antithetical to a Marxian vision of communism.

Postmodern Marxism instead suggests a focus on supporting struggles for collective appropriation and creating opportunities for workers, waged and unwaged, to act collectively not only in resistance but also more positively in creating within the union institutional structures that more closely reflect the goal of transforming exploitative class relations. It means struggling to change

47. See DeMartino 2000.
the nature of the class processes both within unions and through them in the capitalist enterprises themselves, rather than focusing on the immediate gain to the members in terms of income.

At the community level, postmodern theorists are engaged in efforts to expand the range of possibilities of the local economy from one of attracting capital and jobs to include supporting non-exploitative alternatives to capitalist class processes. In part, this is a response to setbacks of the traditional labour-union strategies but these defeats create potential for new opportunities to radicalise workers and to create alternative non-capitalist class processes. This work requires considerable attention to the ways in which participation in capitalist class processes reinforces aspects of subjectivity that need to be reclaimed in order to imagine new possibilities.49

By making non-capitalist class processes viable, while at the same time recognising other non-class aspects of oppression, postmodern Marxism is attempting to make room for constituencies that have traditionally been excluded from class politics and, as a result, develop stronger alliances; alliances that are produced and not simply expressed through the process of political activism.50 This work can be seen as adding to rather than displacing traditional notions of class struggle. It seeks to recognise the specific and contingent aspects of the ways in which class exploitation is overdetermined at particular places and times. Postmodern Marxism seeks to emphasise the efficacy of specific political interventions by analysing the effects of class struggles on the complex class structures of existing societies at the micro level.51 It is a politics that resonates with Gramsci’s call for a war of position while, at the same time, expanding the scope of the battleground.52 It suggests that what happens at specific sites matters both in terms of affecting the factors that overdetermine the class processes at those sites and on class processes elsewhere.

Class struggle includes the efforts to make class processes visible as well as taking other actions in the world to help transform class relations. It defines a political programme in which every effort to transform our thinking and every effort to promote class justice matters. Our work to inform, educate and to theorise capitalism is an important aspect of the political project of class transformation and the class processes at the sites at which this theory is produced also needs to be articulated and integrated into a political strategy.

Without an analysis of capitalism informed by class, the project of class transformation is not possible. The project of defending and extending Marx’s

value-theoretical analysis of capitalism, elucidating the class conflicts at various social sites and extending and subjecting to critique Marxian notions of class justice are integral to the political project of overcoming exploitative class processes.

6. Conclusion

Postmodern Marxism has a logical and systematic class analysis of capitalism, a commitment to articulating class and non-class aspects of the social totality and a strong moral basis for its commitment to the goal of class transformation in the interests of achieving (among other things) class justice. As the analysis of value and crisis theory demonstrates, postmodern-Marxian theory provides a logically sound and systematic analysis of the relations among the concepts that Marx initially offered. It provides a means to analyse those relations that retains the centrality of class analysis without insisting on the ontological priority of class. As the class analysis at the sites of the enterprise, household and state reveals, postmodern Marxism offers a way to integrate this class analysis of capitalism with non-capitalist class processes at various sites and to detail their interrelationships with political, cultural and natural processes that act to overdetermine their contradictions. By developing the implications of overdetermination for the question of class justice, postmodern-Marxian theory is able to motivate and to delineate political strategies at these multiple sites in the interest of promoting class transformation.

References


Intervention

Competitiveness and Critique:
The Value of a New-Materialist Research Project

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Abstract
Following Marcus Taylor’s critique of Paul Cammack’s ‘new materialism’, this paper proposes a New-Materialist Research Project (NMRP) borne out of a synthesis of the insights of both open Marxism and Cammack’s project. The rationale for this lies in the conviction that a more ‘applied’ focus upon specific forms of contemporary class practice can aid open Marxism to move beyond general and abstract critique, thereby making an original and critical contribution to our understanding of the contemporary management of global capitalism. While the proposed NMRP refutes the problematic theorisation of relative autonomy in Cammack’s original proposal, it is argued that a more rigorously theorised NMRP can extend negative critique to the current activities of international regulative agencies. By focusing on the activities of such agencies – beginning with their discursive operations – it is possible to discern how contemporary forms of ideology operate in a retroactive manner, obfuscating and distorting the contradictions being played out across the world market; and also how such agencies are seeking to exercise unprecedented levels of intervention and control in the management of individual national ‘capitalisms’, and under the rubric of promoting ‘competitiveness’.

Keywords
open Marxism; new materialism; World Bank; neoliberalism; competitiveness

In *Historical Materialism* 13.1, Marcus Taylor congratulates Paul Cammack on opening a ‘welcome chapter in the analysis of the World Bank’, but proceeds to close the book as far as Cammack’s proposal for a ‘new materialism’ is concerned.¹ Taylor’s principal criticism of the proposal is that it follows a ‘structuralist-functionalist’ tradition within Marxist scholarship by reifying the technical logics of capital accumulation (‘laws of motion’), and by

¹. I thank the *Historical Materialism* Editorial Board, and Guido Starosta and Liam Campling in particular, for constructive criticism on an earlier draft.
attributing to the World Bank the capacity to exercise ‘relative autonomy’ from class and national interests that it simply does not have. In this regard, Taylor’s critique of Cammack’s new materialism echoes debates which developed within the Conference of Socialist Economists from the 1970s onwards, and which involved criticism of, *inter alia*, Louis Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas, the ‘regulation school’, and Bob Jessop by the proponents of ‘open Marxism’. The open Marxists reject structuralism–functionalism for reifying the bourgeois state, and for eschewing the question of how social relations (as ‘content’) constitute certain ‘forms’, or ‘modes of appearance’ of value-in-movement. The upshot of the tendency toward reification in structuralist–functionalist accounts is that political institutions are treated as predetermined, independent and rational forms of organisation with the capacity – notwithstanding the consideration of conjuncturally specific constraints – to adapt, strategise, and perform appropriate forms of statecraft in order to facilitate future rounds of capital accumulation. Class struggle, therefore, is theorised in such a way as to externalise labour’s ‘agency’, often in a particular subjectified form (such as trade unions), before being relegated to a subordinate role vis-à-vis prevailing structural and institutional frameworks. Open Marxism, on the other hand, dialectically traces the internal relationship between the various modes of appearance of labour’s struggle ‘within and against’ the social relation that is capital, thereby enabling the form of the bourgeois state to be seen as a ‘moment’ within the totality of capitalist society, its constitution determined by antagonistic and crisis-ridden social relations. Open Marxism, therefore, rejects structuralism–functionalism for theorising and analysing political economy in terms of the externalised but coterminous relationship between structural imperatives, or logics, of accumulation, on the one hand; and struggles waged by a plurality of capitalist and labour interests in the ‘extra-economic sphere’, on the other.

This pluralist–fractionalist tendency is characteristic of both structuralist–functionalist Marxism and neo-Gramsican approaches, but also, in Taylor’s view, of Cammack’s work, since it ‘operates at the level of surface appearances – depicting global capitalism as the pursuit of accumulation by the established interests who must concurrently secure hegemony within this process’. In analytical terms, then, Cammack’s new materialism is diagnosed as being

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congenitally blind to the reality that ‘the subsumption of the World Bank into
global capitalist social relations imparts a complex and contradictory character
on the Bank’. By making the concept of relative autonomy the ‘central concept’
or ‘cornerstone’ of the new materialism, Cammack is accused of ‘an ahistorical
form of argument’ lacking in ‘substantive explanatory power’, which succeeds
only in its attempt ‘merely to invert the conclusions of mainstream social
science’. In other words, the new materialism, whilst purporting to be derived
from classical Marxism, is shown by Taylor to resemble a vulgarised Marxism
in that it is not negative critique. In Taylor’s view, only an ‘old materialism’ –
by which I infer open Marxism – ‘allows us to comprehend how the social and
material reproduction of global capitalist society is mediated through abstract
yet dominating social force (the movement of value) that imposes itself in
seemingly objective fashion upon all social actors’; meaning that the

pervasive irrationalities of the World Bank’s institutional form, its development
practices and its intellectual production must be comprehended not primarily as
a result of a lack of ‘relative autonomy’ from specific interests, but on the basis of
the contradictions of global capitalist social relations within which the World
Bank is subsumed.

This paper acknowledges the irreconcilable theoretical tenets of Taylor’s ‘old’
and Cammack’s ‘new’ materialisms. The article does not seek to defend the
new materialism on Cammack’s behalf; rather, it accepts Taylor’s argument
that the relative autonomy of regulative agencies involved in the management
of capital accumulation can only ever be illusory. The reasons for this are
explained in the first section of the paper. However, the shortcomings of open
Marxism are then introduced in the following section. Chief among these is
the allegation that, while the approach has been successful in asserting the
negative dialectic of the form and content of class struggle during a difficult
intellectual and world-historical period for Marxism generally, it has failed to
move substantively beyond formality and abstraction by ‘elaborating the actual
historical struggles which have mediated and formulated the development of
the contradictions of the capital relation’. In particular, it has failed to
acknowledge how class struggle can be mediated discursively. Having reviewed
both approaches, the paper goes on to support a ‘New-Materialist Research
Project’ (NMRP) borne out of a synthesis of the insights of both approaches.

10. This was the task set by Holloway and Picciotto 1978, p. 30.
The rationale for this lies in the conviction that Cammack’s more ‘applied’ focus upon specific forms of contemporary class practice can aid open Marxism to move beyond general and abstract critique, thereby making an original and critical contribution to our understanding of the contemporary management of global capitalism. While the proposed NMRP refutes the problematic theorisation of relative autonomy in Cammack’s original proposal, it is argued that a more rigorously theorised NMRP can extend negative critique to the current activities of international regulative agencies. By focusing on the activities of such agencies – beginning, as Cammack does, with their discursive operations – it is possible to discern how contemporary forms of ideology operate in a retroactive manner, obfuscating and distorting the contradictions being played out across the world market; and also how such agencies are seeking to exercise unprecedented levels of intervention and control in the management of individual national ‘capitalisms’, and under the rubric of promoting ‘competitiveness’.

The critique of relative autonomy

In order to make sense of Taylor’s outright rejection of Cammack’s original proposal for a new materialism, a brief detour into the debates on the Left in the 1970s and 1980s is necessary. A working indication of the general understanding of relative autonomy within structuralist-functionalist Marxism is given by Poulantzas in *Political Power and Social Classes*. He writes that

… the unity of power characteristic of the state, related to its role in the class struggle, is the reflection of its role of unity vis-à-vis the instances [economic, political, ideological and theoretical levels within a mode of production]; and its relative autonomy vis-à-vis the politically dominant classes or fractions is the reflection of the relative autonomy of the instances of a capitalist formation. In short, this unity and autonomy of the capitalist type of state is related to the specificity of its structures (relatively autonomous vis-à-vis the economic) in their relation to the political class struggle, which is relatively autonomous vis-à-vis the economic class struggle.11

Such formulations have been attacked principally upon the simple grounds that they construct an externalising dichotomy between the political (the capitalist state) and the economic (accumulation) which allows for the relative autonomy of the capitalist state to be posited, but which fails to grasp the internal dialectical inter-relations of political economy in doing so. For critics

of Poulantzas, the separation of the political and economic spheres, and of structure and struggle, amounts to an ahistorical and pluralist theory of the ‘state within capitalist society’ in which

there is no analysis of the development of capitalist society, of the changing forms of state-society relations and of the state itself. Because there is no systematic analysis of the relation between the capitalist state and its basis, capitalist exploitation of the working class in the process of accumulation, so too there is no analysis of the constraints and limitations which the nature of capitalist accumulation imposes upon state action. Further, his failure correctly to problematise the nature of the separation of the economic and the political leads to his identification of the economic with production relations, and... to a continual tendency to identify class struggle with the realm of the political.¹²

This ‘pluralist conception of social conflict, as conflict between distributively defined social groups organised into pressure groups and political parties which seek to achieve their ends by organising state power as their objective, operating on a given technically determined economic foundation, is the theory which Poulantzas offers as a Marxist theory of class’.¹³ And it is this pluralist conception which open Marxists have located as being central to all associated structuralist-functionalist approaches to political economy, including Jessop’s strategic-relational and, more recently, neo-Gramscian approaches. For open Marxists, the implications of this logic are not simply analytical, but also political since they tend towards advocating reformism through the recapturing of political institutions, rather than the emancipation of the revolutionary subject.

At the heart of Taylor’s critical reading of the new materialism is an objection to the way in which Cammack reproduces this logic. In the latter’s piece in Historical Materialism, he explicitly makes a case for

… thinking about relative autonomy in a genuinely global capitalist system, and [he proposes] that in such a system relative autonomy should be thought about at both national and global levels. The assumption behind this is straightforward – that where capitalist enterprises compete globally, and where the terrain of the ‘global capitalist economy’ is shared between a multitude of competing politically independent states, the contradictions generated by the development of capitalism will demand management across the world market as a whole by authoritative institutions with autonomy from both particular capitalist interests and from particular capitalist states.¹⁴

In this crucial passage, Cammack appears to presuppose that a global agency capable of disciplining individual states and capitalist interests to the functional requirements of capital in general would be desirable from the perspective of capital, and finds its closest concrete approximation in the form of the World Bank. Having already decided on this, Cammack’s interpretation of the Bank’s operations proceeds from the ‘theoretical dogma of a functionally-determined need for autonomy’.15 In this way, Cammack is shown to be theorising in terms of ‘political economy’s constituted forms’, and using ‘closed’ categories of analysis.16 In contrast, Taylor seeks to explain the genesis of the World Bank as a response to a particular period of capitalist crisis, and highlights the irrationalities of its ensuing development as an organisation whose ongoing constitution as a supposedly rational and functional capitalist institution is a profoundly contradictory process – an ‘open’ categorisation.17

The limits of critique

Taylor’s alternative account of the Bank’s inherent pathology is insightful, and is informed by a tradition within Marxism which is renowned for its rigour and its uncompromising commitment to the negative critique of political economy. However, Taylor’s preferred old materialism is not without its own detractors. Critics have attacked it for failing to move beyond formal and abstract theorisation so as to focus on the concrete specificities of what might be termed ‘actually existing’ forms of class practice and of ‘neoliberalism’ in particular. They have stressed the limits to any approach to social theorisation and explanation which fails to strike a balance between a commitment to critique, and more ‘applied’ critical research which can account for the quotidian ‘messiness’ of myriad social processes as they unfold simultaneously and concretely.18

17. In fairness to Cammack, the concept of relative autonomy is conspicuous only by its absence in the remainder of his publications since his new materialism was first proposed (Cammack 1999). And, within his other writing since the 1999 article, there is evidence of a rejection of any tendency to attribute rationality and functionality to international organisations. The original proposal for a new materialism, for example, is couched in terms of offering a genuinely critical alternative to Robert Cox’s ‘new multilateralism’ (Cox 1997). This anti-functionalism is also apparent in a later article by Cammack which argues that country ownership is fundamental to the World Bank’s current project ‘because it recognises that it lacks the means to enforce the strategy itself’ (Cammack 2003, p. 37).
Such concerns have been raised about the open-Marxist project and its failure to acknowledge how class struggle assumes forms or modes of appearance which are always mediated and contingent and therefore historically specific. Bieler and Morton, for example, conclude that open Marxism resembles a dogmatic ‘theological Marxism’ that reproduces totalising generalisations that ‘reduce the social antagonism between capital and labour to the unmediated effect of class struggle.’ Bieler and Morton’s antipathy towards open Marxism does appear to stem from a markedly different methodological starting point from the open Marxists. The former precisely wishes to privilege the ‘newer Marxism’ of Gramsci and Poulantzas, with its explicit separation of the ‘integral state’ from the wider pluralistic social formation, over the dialectical method of ‘determinate abstraction [bestimmte Abstraktion]’ in order to reveal the social constitution of economic categories, as preferred by open Marxists.

Bieler and Morton nonetheless do highlight open Marxism’s apparent reticence toward undertaking less (perhaps lower-level) abstract analysis of the complexity of concrete developments within capitalism. As I discuss at greater length below, the open-Marxist discussion of the role of international and multilateral organisations which reduces them to almost incidental interlocutors in the more general management of circuits of capital is a case in point, and one that would appear to substantiate Bieler and Morton’s accusation of a ‘creeping statism’ within open Marxism. Yet, as I argue in the next section, there is no reason why old-materialist critique cannot be extended to such global spaces of capitalist management without abandoning the notion that capitalist social relations necessarily remain organised on a national basis, nor by resting upon notions of relative autonomy, nor by instrumentally conceiving of key agencies such as the World Bank as being captured by a ‘transnational capitalist class’ or some pernicious configuration of US/neoliberal hegemony.

And, as I intend to show in the remaining sections of this paper, the roadmap towards such critique is to be found in a (relative-autonomy-less) synthesis that owes as much to Cammack’s work as to open Marxism.

However, before outlining my own version of a NMRP, one further shortcoming of open-Marxist critique deserves a mention. John Michael Roberts outlines the problem well by arguing that that open Marxism fails to accord significance to the role that particular discourses have played in the movement of class struggle over time. He finds the open Marxists’ rejection of theories which explicitly examine discursive dimensions of the reproduction and legitimation of capitalism ‘puzzling’. He argues ‘that it is important to

move beyond Marx’s account of commodity fetishism, an account that seeks to isolate the determining ideology of the capitalist mode of production, in order to explore the specificity of ‘ideology in time and space’, and that there is no reason why a discursive approach can not be made applicable within the insights of an open Marxist account. Indeed, a consistent Marxist form theory would seem to require a discursive approach for the simple reason that...the form and content of a particular social form of life is usually realised in some way through discursive means. Further, the crisis of a social form partially manifests itself discursively.22

The proposed NMRP accepts Roberts’s criticism and will retain a strong discursive focus. In doing so, I do not wish to overstate the importance of ideology, nor to attest to the rationality of neoliberal logic. As Peter Burnham stresses of earlier forms of neoliberal ideology, ‘capital does not wait for the articulation of the ideology of monetarism before restructuring. The articulation of ideology is important for the political legitimation of a set of policies that by and large have already been implemented’.23 However, it would be naïve not to emphasise the fact that many forms of neoliberal ideology have a prescriptive dimension which, whilst serving as apologia for past violences inflicted upon societies through neoliberal restructuring, stems from the ability of ‘experts’ on policy design and reform to think ‘critically’ about the management of capitalism – albeit only so far as vulgar economy permits. Hence, the NMRP will focus on key capitalist discourses in much of a similar way as Marx sought to reveal political economy discourses in his own time as wholly bourgeois forms of ideology, prejudice, and apologia.

Global capitalism, ideology and international organisations

Having summarised the principal shortcomings of both Cammack’s new materialism and open Marxism, the remainder of the paper sets out the core claims and preliminary conclusions of my own synthetic proposal for a NMRP. It is resolutely materialist in its approach to the critique of political economy, yet it acknowledges that recent developments in the global management of capitalism warrant a ‘new’ focus on the part of Marxist scholars.24 I schematically present the rationale for a NMRP in the form of three interrelated core claims:

the first concerns the interpretation of ‘globalisation’ in terms of a neoliberal offensive against labour necessitated by profound crisis; the second explains how open Marxism might be complemented with a Marxist theory of ideology in order to trace how the globalisation offensive has a discursive dimension; and the third concerns the role of international regulative agencies in transforming discourses into legitimating orthodoxies tailored to the globalisation offensive.

‘Globalisation’ and the neoliberal offensive against labour

Unlike many forms of structuralist-functionalist Marxism, Cammack does not see globalisation in terms of a ‘new régime of accumulation’ but in terms of the ‘completion of the world market’.25 In this regard, there is actually important common ground between proponents of open Marxism and Cammack. Following both camps, the NMRP being proposed here affirms the contemporary resonance of The Communist Manifesto’s depiction of capital as inherently self-expansive and disrespectful of existing territorial boundaries; ‘it compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production’ and ‘creates a world after its own image’.26 The expansion and imposition of capitalist imperatives in the decades following the international crisis of the 1970s – a process Cammack terms the ‘universalisation’ of capitalist social relations27 – can therefore be partly understood in terms of the intrinsic geographical and revolutionising propensities of capital.28 More specifically, however, a modified NMRP can historicise this universalising tendency by drawing upon the dialectic of the movement of value which open Marxism has so strongly theorised.29 Since the collapse of the Bretton-Woods monetary system in the early 1970s – prompted by a decline in profitability and revolt across the world market – unregulated monetary elasticity at the world level has led to ‘a massive increase in global monetary reserves, of which over 90 per cent now comprises “inconvertible” (i.e. paper) foreign exchange’, ‘with domestic bond markets now topping US$33 trillion compared to US$1 trillion in 1970, with an additional US$9 trillion issued on international markets (up from US$900 billion in 1987)’.30 To date, capital remains mired in a secular crisis of overaccumulation in which ‘money cannot look back reassuringly upon a hoard of reified human labour as somehow backing its

29. See the collection edited by Bonefeld and Holloway (eds.) 1995.
30. Hampton 2003, pp. 5–6; see, also, the contributions in Bonefeld and Holloway (eds.) 1995.
promise of embodying validated social wealth’. In the decades that have followed, state managers have responded to a secular global crisis in a manner which substantiates the Marxist insight that ‘if fictitious values turn out not to be backed by the products of social labour, or if, for whatever reason, faith in the credit system is shaken, then capital must find some way to re-establish its footing in the world of socially necessary labour’. It follows that globalisation can be understood in terms of ‘a major capitalist offensive’, which entails a multiplicity of states’ attempts to restore patterns of relatively stable accumulation in the context of this global crisis through the de-composition of labour into a competitive work-force of alienated individuals, and the expansion of domestic markets’ productive capacity as a means of strengthening the state’s capacity to stave off balance-of-payments crises. Neoliberal ideology obfuscates the class character of globalisation. Holloway neatly captures the class content of neoliberalism when he writes that

> the drive to subordinate every aspect of life more and more intensely to capital is the essence of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is the attempt to resolve crisis by the intensification and reorganization of subordination. The separation of subject and object (the dehumanization of the subject) is taken to new lengths by the extension of command-through-money.

The resort to such ‘new lengths’ necessitates a research agenda that builds upon the insights of open Marxism – particularly the reworking of the autonomist-Marxist theory of class composition (see below) – in order to trace the specific forms taken by capital’s neoliberal offensive in different spaces of the world market. The novelty of a NMRP is therefore justified in terms of its potential contribution to defetishising the relatively recent ideology of ‘globalisation’ and exposing it as a form of class practice. As a feature of this offensive in the South, for example, Cammack’s work draws attention to contemporary forms of the process Marx termed ‘primitive accumulation’ in spaces of world market where social relations have until recently tended to assume non-capitalistic and therefore – from the perspective of capital – anachronistic forms, or where latent sources of labour-power – especially women in the South – remain inaccessible to the command of money. And, with the increasingly orthodox discourse of promoting competitiveness – which I discuss later – a NMRP

32. Harvey 1999, p. 293.
pays attention to the specific way in which the World Bank, in particular, is articulating discourses which champion national state reform agendas that are aimed at ‘completing’ processes of de-socialisation and de-politicisation which constitute globalisation.\(^{37}\)

**The retroactive character of neoliberal ideology**

The proposed NMRP takes on board Roberts’s criticisms of open Marxism and places the focus on the ideological and discursive dimensions of capital’s offensive at the centre of the project. But further clarification is required here. The Marxist understanding of ideology differs from others in important respects, in that it cannot be isolated from the project of the critique of bourgeois society. It is therefore a critical theory of ideology, and builds upon the premise that ‘to understand that capital is objectified labour, that it stands in logical contradiction to human subjective activity, to life itself, is accurately to comprehend the dilemma of our epoch’; and that ‘there are, naturally, many powerful and determined modes of thought that seek to obscure this comprehension. The name we give to such modes of thought is “ideology”’.\(^{38}\)

In this regard, the Marxist account of ideology is discriminatory. It stresses only certain ‘insidious’ forms of thought which are related to a distinctively bourgeois episteme arising out of a vulgar understanding of class society. ‘Within specific class relations, therefore, ideology conceals objective contradictions that emanate from those relations. Under these conditions ideology can be said to benefit the interests of a ruling class’.\(^{39}\)

Cammack has laudably mounted such a sustained discriminatory and critical attack on neoliberal ideology, identifying how doctrinal forms of ideology have emerged from key institutions, such as the World Bank, professing to possess the self-endorsed authority to advise the international development community. ‘Far from simply disseminating recipes for development which will benefit all sectors of society’, writes Cammack, ‘the World Bank and other institutions are constructing a legitimizing ideology which conceals the contradictions of capitalism as a global system, translates its structural requisites into a universal programme, and re-presents it as a remedy for the very human ills it generates’.\(^{40}\) His review of a series of *World Development Reports* since 1990, for example, demonstrates neoliberal ideology at work. It is tailored to the specific requirements of ensuring that, at both


\(^{40}\) Cammack 2002a, p. 160.
domestic and regional levels, state managers are made aware of the ‘general conditions for capital accumulation’ in the context of the globalisation offensive.\textsuperscript{41} The proposed NMRP similarly draws attention to particular forms of bourgeois thought which serve to mystify the class character of the globalisation offensive.

Cammack highlights the \textit{retroactive} character of neoliberal ideology in the following passage:

\begin{quote}
As the twenty-first century dawned, a bid was underway to establish the global hegemony of capitalism. The essential elements of a global capitalist system – the authority of capital over labour, the unimpeded operation of capitalist markets for labour, goods, and investment, the receptiveness of governments to the needs of capital, the presence of domestic and global regulatory orders capable of reinforcing the disciplines essential to capitalist reproduction, and the dissemination of ideologies justifying capitalism and dismissing alternatives – were in place for the first time…. Advocates of alternative strategies are now faced with a new and powerful doctrine for capitalist development, supported and allegedly vindicated by world-historical changes in recent decades and the global shifts in power and authority they reflect…. The presentation of this new orthodoxy in seemingly authoritative texts is part of a concerted process of re-establishing the authority of the attitudes, ideas, behavioural norms and practices that capitalism requires, and embedding them so profoundly that they no longer appear as requisites for capitalism, but as natural aspects of everyday life.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

Current forms of neoliberal ideology and associated discourses can therefore be seen, firstly, to reflect a defence of earlier structural adjustment reforms undertaken in the global South during the 1980s and 90s. Despite the chequered history of World-Bank orthodoxies to which Taylor refers in his critique, Cammack has shown how Bank economists still adhere to certain ‘fundamentals’: namely, that ‘economic growth comes from investment and productivity gains; inflation should be low, labour markets flexible, and fiscal, monetary, and exchange rate policy prudent; trade should be liberalized; and property rights should be secure and enforced’.\textsuperscript{43} However, in recent years – and precisely because of the limits to the Bank-endorsed reforms – the orthodoxy has been rethought so as to encompass a partial self-critique which nonetheless allows for the legitimation of political campaigns seeking to ‘operationalise’ – to use Bank terminology – further rounds of restructuring reforms in the South.\textsuperscript{44} ‘Today, the vulgar economists’ prescription for state

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Cammack 1999, p. 21.
\item Cammack 2002a, p. 159.
\item Cammack 2002c, p. 661.
\item See Fine 2001, pp. 131–54.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
managers are couched within a discourse of promoting competitiveness – a thoroughly fetishising ideology which presents exploitative capitalist social relations in a ‘free’-market context in wholly benign terms. As I explain later, such discourses are strikingly explicit at times in their orientation towards strategising class practice and legitimating the offensive against labour.

International organisations and national states

As with Cammack’s original new materialism, the NMRP accords strategic importance to international organisations in terms of their practical and ideological role in the globalisation offensive. However, the NMRP need not overstate the significance of such organisations insofar as globalisation is, for both Cammack and open Marxists, a project in which national states play the central role. Of course, it is at the nexus between the national and the international where Cammack posits relative autonomy, so this proposal for a NMRP must proceed with caution, so as not to reproduce a Coxian account of globalisation, for instance, which is attacked by open Marxists for associating international organisations with a ‘nébuleuse personified as the global economy’. Essentially, Cox’s analysis depicts neoliberal statecraft in terms of adapting to the exigencies of an externally imposed neoliberal project. However, if globalisation is understood as class practice in which capital-in-crisis seeks to re-compose itself at the level of the world market through national states’ projects then the separation-in-unity between ‘the national’ and ‘the global’ is upheld.

Open Marxists have argued that national states derive their revenue from the capital outlay and the working class subsequently employed within the bounds of their jurisdiction. To increase the chances of attracting and retaining capital within their boundaries, national states pursue a plethora of policies as well as offering inducements and incentives for investment. However, the ‘success’ of these ‘national’ policies depends upon re-establishing conditions for the expanded accumulation of capital on a world scale…. In other words, the crisis of the capital relation is thus at the same time a crisis of the international state system.

The implications of ‘failure’ on the part of national state projects are manifold. One palpable consequence, as Alberto Bonnet has recognised, is the post hoc

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sanctioning of national projects by world money in the form of ‘capital flight’; as witnessed in Mexico (1994) and Argentina (2001). This means that it is in the interests of capital-in-general to foster compliance on the part of national governments to particular management strategies deemed appropriate in the context of secular crisis.

It is understandable, therefore, that national state projects are being lent cohesion, authority, and a degree of legitimacy by the unprecedented degree of intervention of international financial and development organisations housing ‘experts’ in economic policy reform. Such experts have played a key role in policy design initiatives which follow a specific framework based upon universally applicable criteria aimed at engineering ‘success’ across the international state system. Seen in this light, Cammack’s focus upon the World Bank’s Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) and the emphasis upon ‘country ownership’ – rather than attempting to substantiate a predetermined case for international organisations’ relative autonomy – shows how the Bank and the IMF have been drawn into the management of crisis-ridden social relations across a multiplicity of states, and to an arguably unprecedented extent. Taylor acknowledges this, but is keen to add that the CDF ought to be understood as ‘a rearguard reaction to the contradictions of uneven development’, and that national governments still take the lead in managing the contradictions of restructuring. The NMRP does not contradict this insight, but it does propose a more focused analysis of international organisations’ practical and ideological role in globalisation which moves beyond suggestive and non-substantive references to the role of international regulative agencies in helping states manage circuits of capital. In this regard, the ideological dimension to the globalisation offensive is particularly important since it is borne of out of the contradictions Taylor is so keen to emphasise, but also because (as I explain below) the increasingly orthodox

50. Bonnet 2002; on Mexico, see also Holloway 2000. On p. 119, Bonnet 2002 provides the rationale for country-risk evaluations by credit rating agencies such as Moody’s or Standard and Poor’s: ‘the most synthetic and disturbing expression of capitalist forecasting about the conditions for domination and exploitation of labour in distinct accumulation spaces in the world market’.


52. Cammack 2002d.

53. Burnham 2001, pp. 108–9, for example, writes that it ‘should be no surprise that a global system resting on an antagonistic social relationship will be subject to dynamic change as both state and market actors seek to remove what they perceive to be “blockages” in the flow of capital…. For the open Marxist tradition, “globalization” simply represents a deepening of the existing circuits and a broadening of the “political” as regulative agencies (both public and private) beyond the national state are drawn into the complex process of “managing” the rotation of capital’.
discourse of competitiveness betrays a concern within, and increasingly outside of, the Bank with the subordination of labour to the command of money in national states where earlier episodes of neoliberal restructuring have failed to adequately do so.

**Vulgar economy, neoliberal strategy and the paradox of relative autonomy**

Two prominent ‘old materialists’, John Holloway and Sol Picciotto, recognise that the ideology of the autonomous state has always been central to fetishising vulgar economy. They conclude that

> the autonomization of the state is, like all forms of fetishism, _both reality and illusion_, the reality depending on the successful struggle of the ruling class to maintain the complex of social relations upon which the illusion rests. The autonomization of the state, which forms part of, and is necessary for, the accumulation of capital, involves not only the necessity of separate political institutions, but also a constant class practice involving the structural and ideological separation and fetishisation of economics and politics and of the private and the public.54

The proposed NMRP does not insist upon the separation of the political and the economic as a real determination; indeed, I acknowledge that Holloway and Picciotto here overemphasise the moment of separation in the unity-in-separation of capital and state.55 However, it is evident that class practice in its various legal-constitutional, coercive, and ideological forms is necessarily oriented towards maintaining the moment of separation between capital and state, both within individual states and, as we witness in ‘a globalising world’, between national ‘models of capitalism’ and exogenous ‘pressures’ to liberalise. Paradoxically, then, while Cammack’s original theorisation of the governance of global capitalism must be rejected for its reliance on a structuralist-functionalist operationalisation of the concept of relative autonomy, he does, I feel, deserve credit for revealing a coherent (albeit vulgar) relative autonomy logic at the heart of World-Bank ideology. The task of the NMRP is, therefore, firstly to engage in immanent critique, to expose the true character of key discourses and initiatives like the CDF as class practice; and then to trace concretely how the moment of unity in the unity-in-separation of ‘capital’ and ‘state’ reasserts itself through the failure of such class practice to subordinate class struggle expressed through forms of crisis.

Having set out the foundational claims of a NMRP, the remainder of this paper establishes some preliminary lines of inquiry into the current activities of international regulative agencies such as the World Bank. Evidence of the retroactive and strategic properties of neoliberal ideology is rife within World-Bank literature. It is demonstrably clear that the internal coherence of the Bank’s reform discourses often hinges on a specific relative-autonomy logic; a logic which is carried through into the heart of key operational reforms – principally, the CDF. The World Bank (along with the IMF) has formulated the CDF in accordance with a *self-identified* role as an impartial managerial body best placed within the ‘development community’ to provide financial and non-financial value-added (‘knowledge’) assistance to states across the South seeking to embed appropriate ‘governance’ processes.\(^{56}\) As one Bank promotional leaflet advertises: ‘what we as a development community can do is help countries – by providing financing, yes; but more important, by providing knowledge and lessons learned about the challenges and how to address them’.\(^{57}\) Accordingly, a NMRP ought not to assume that relative autonomy on the part of international organisations or national states is either possible or being realised, simply that the Bank’s self-articulated project posits such an autonomous role for itself, as well as states, in entirely plausible terms.

Taylor does stress that ‘it is important not to take the Bank’s self-representation as the pre-eminent global development leader at face value’. The Bank is after all, as Taylor persuasively argues, wracked with contradiction. However, Cammack’s argument that the ideology promulgated by the Bank in its flagship publications represents a ‘new politics of development’ is equally as persuasive.\(^{58}\) A substantive element of the NMRP therefore synthesises these arguments, and proposes to explore the contradictory manner in which an institution that is irrational in terms of organisation and accountability to

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58. Taylor 2004, p. 26, writes that the CDF ‘represents a vision of the extension of social engineering through policy and institutional reforms in order to achieve a projected market utopia in the global South. It builds upon the basis of the neoliberal project to obliterate institutionalized impediments to the discipline of capital, yet acknowledges the need to recompose new institutional forms to facilitate the former’. Compare this with the following in Cammack 2004a, p. 203: the CDF ‘is precisely what it what it says it is – a blueprint for a complete set of social and governmental relations and institutions…. Presented as a vehicle for incorporating social and structural policies into an agenda previously dominated by macroeconomic policy alone, it is intended as a means of shaping and monitoring social and structural policies so that they reinforce and extend macroeconomic discipline, and subordinating them to imperatives of capitalist accumulation’. 
shareholders, fractious in terms of differences in the outlook of particular researchers and managers, and has often failed to impact significantly upon important policy debates does not detract from the consistent manner on which it has elaborated a ‘recipe for establishing capitalism on a global scale’ in its flagship publications.\(^\text{59}\) This recipe is embodied in the form of the CDF, which while presented as the culmination of decades of objective developmental learning, remains fundamentally neoliberal insofar as it is ‘centrally concerned with depoliticizing economy and society by weakening or removing historically accumulated forms of socialization’.\(^\text{60}\)

Drawing upon Cammack’s interpretation of key documents, but without succumbing to the mistaken theorisation of the World Bank or any other international organisation as a relatively autonomous entity, the NMRP nonetheless recognises a relative-autonomy logic within the Bank’s discourse; one which recognises – albeit in vulgar and pluralistic terms – that neoliberal strategy, as outlined by Gough, is best pursued by state institutions divorced from social groups – both capitalists and workers – who have a vested interest in preserving the status quo; as well as by international regulative agencies which are able to broker appropriate and impartial ‘knowledge’ regarding appropriate reform strategies. Evidence of this logic can be found throughout the World Bank’s flagship literature – including the annual *World Development Reports* which Cammack has dealt with in detail. A more explicit statement on this can be found in a 2004 report for the joint Bank-IMF meetings co-prepared, for the last time, by outgoing Bank president James D. Wolfensohn:

> We have a framework to deal with poverty reduction and global environmental challenges. What we do not have is a world executive committee that has global legitimacy, representing the interests of the vast majority, dealing with longer-term strategic issues. Such a world body would have three main tasks: to think seriously about these international issues, to monitor what happens, and to crack the whip when progress is not forthcoming and selfish national or parochial interests threaten to delay progress for the common good.\(^\text{61}\)

Here, we have an open plea for some form of relatively autonomous world government. To reiterate then: the task of the NMRP is to reveal the true character of such a plea as ideology, while tracing the contradictions of international regulative projects such as the CDF as they unfold.

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Competitiveness and the recomposition of developing states

It is increasingly clear within World-Bank discourses that relatively autonomous international agencies and national institutions are desirable for a reason: they are best suited to promote *competitiveness*. And competitiveness – attributable to capitalists and workers alike – is desirable as it is the driving force behind economic growth and development. An emerging orthodoxy within development-policy circles now contends that only through pro-active government involvement in transforming domestic institutions, regulatory frameworks, and discouraging culturally embedded practices deemed non-conducive to the efficient functioning of the market (rent-seeking and graft, for instance) will a suitably competitive environment for both producers and workers (‘human capital’) be created. This explains why, within key reform discourses, ‘deeper’ interventionism and ‘good governance’ – underpinned by a commitment to the promotion of competitiveness – are considered preconditions for stable, sustained, and poverty-reducing growth. The preoccupation with competitiveness at the inter-firm level is reflected in the *World Development Report 2005*, hailed by one high-profile commentator as ‘the most important the Bank has ever produced’ since ‘it is about how to make market economies work’. The report states that ‘a good investment climate encourages firms to invest by removing unjustified costs, risks, and barriers to competition’. What is required, therefore, is ‘an environment that fosters the competitive processes that Joseph Schumpeter called “creative destruction” – an environment in which firms have opportunities and

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62. According to the World Economic Forum 2005, p. xiii, competitiveness is defined as ‘the collection of factors, policies and institutions which determine the level of productivity of a country and that, therefore, determine the level of prosperity that can be attained by an economy’.

63. This is the central thrust of an ideology of competitiveness which has been propagated through World Bank literatures and policy documents, representing the culminating of, what Cammack 2004a terms, the ‘Wolfensohn-Stiglitz project’ after its principal proponents. Taylor accusses Cammack of confusing ‘competitiveness (the struggle between individual capitals) with profitability (based on the extraction of surplus-value from labour-in-general by capital-in-general)’. However, it would appear that Taylor actually confuses ‘competitiveness’ with ‘competition’. The tensions Cammack alludes to in his 2003 piece are no different than those highlighted in Bonefeld, Brown and Burnham 1995, p. 29, between the ‘national interest’ and the need to guarantee the global conditions for capitalist accumulation. And, as Cammack 2004a explains, competitiveness (which can be understood, à la open Marxism, as the vulgar economists’ measure of the capacity for a national state to secure a higher footing in the global hierarchy of prices) is central to the Bank’s retroactive ideology.

64. Wolf 2004.

incentives to test their ideas, strive for success, and prosper or fail’. And in the World Development Report 2006, the square is circled by focusing upon the need for reforms across the developing world aimed at removing inequalities of access and opportunity and empowering the poor to compete and successfully deploy their income-generating labour-power:

Interventions that build greater human capacities for those with the most limited opportunities (generally the poor) will prepare them to be more economically productive and politically effective…. And promoting fairness in markets is all about improvements in the quality of institutions that support and complement markets in ways that broaden access and ensure equitable rules…. A good investment climate is about real economic opportunities. Equity is about levelling the playing field so that opportunities are available on the basis of talent and efforts, rather than on the basis of gender, race, family background, or other predetermined circumstances.67

But how are we to make sense of the promotion of competitiveness as ideology and class practice? The key to this question is contained in a variety of World-Bank reports on countries commonly depicted as being mid-way through a process of transition from an inward-oriented development path, as is the case for much of Latin America, or from state ‘socialism’ in the case of Eastern Central Europe and the former Soviet Union. These countries are generally characterised as lacking optimally competitive business and labour-market environments owing to the institutional legacies of earlier forms of political-economic organisation and ‘incomplete’ subsequent reform efforts. A case in point is a 2002 Bank Report which reviews the progress that has been made in Central-Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union during a decade of transition from ‘a production system adapted not to a competitive environment but to the exigencies of a command economy’.68 “The transition report” is highly illustrative of the Bank’s preoccupation with competitiveness, especially in the context of ‘incompletion’.69 The report implores reformers to divorce themselves from the vested interests of particular sectors of society—reproducing a logic of relative autonomy—and to more effectively ‘discipline’ and encourage workers to capitulate to the command of capital. The class content of the strategy of ‘discipline and encouragement’ is striking:

66. Ibid.
69. See Charnock 2006 on Latin America.
Discipline forces old enterprises to release assets and labour, which are then potentially available to restructured and new enterprises. The social safety net then needs to be strengthened to ensure that labour shed by contracting enterprises and other losers from reform do not fall into poverty, while not eroding these workers’ incentives to find employment in new enterprises.

Encouragement entails policies to create an attractive and competitive investment climate in which restructured and new enterprises have incentives to absorb labour and assets rendered inexpensive by the downsizing and to invest in expansion.70

The transition report also contains a ‘stylised model’ which explicitly sets out the blueprint for the de-composition of labour in these territories. This is to be accomplished by a relatively autonomous and insulated state pressing on with the offensive against labour and completing depoliticising institutional reforms to the fullest extent possible.

**Figure 1. Winners and Losers from Reform**

![Graph showing income gains](image)

Note: $R_0 = \text{no reforms}; \ R_1 = \text{point at which income gains of oligarchs and insiders are maximised}; \ R_2 = \text{level of reforms that allows the winners of reforms beyond } R_1 \text{ (new entrants) to compensate for or exercise enough political pressure to neutralise the resistance of oligarchs, insiders, and state-sector workers} \ (\text{Source: World Bank 2002, p. 93}).$

The model exhibits that, to date ($R_1$), the extent of neoliberalisation after the collapse of the command economy remains limited. It is a legacy of centrally planned development that ‘oligarchs’ remain in an entrenched position with

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near-monopoly over capital accumulation, and that 'distortions' exist as labour-market rigidities persist. According to the Report, such distortions have led to the poor economic performance of these economies since the market transition. This demands a renewed commitment to extend reform (R2) on the part of state managers. The re-commodification of public-sector workers must be maximised so as to ensure they are exposed to competition in the open labour market, whilst also ensuring an effective market environment for capitalist entrepreneurs who will likewise fly or fall according to their ability to compete.

From the perspective of a NMRP, these reports are indicative of ideology at work: one that apologetically presents earlier offensives against labour as necessary but insufficient; which prescribes a second phase of reforms aimed at dismantling all institutionalised forms of socialisation and cultural practices that prevent the fullest possible command of money over labour; which posits a pro-active and relatively-autonomous state as essential if competitiveness – between capitalists and workers alike – is to be engineered; and which distorts the class content of the project so that competitiveness, leading to optimal 'total factor productivity', becomes the flip-side of pro-poor, poverty-eradicating growth. This implies a ‘complete’ de-socialisation of national economies, and a removal of the institutional impediments that stand in the way of money’s fullest capability of commanding labour and expanding the productive capabilities of national economies. From a vulgar-economy perspective, such discourses appear remarkably progressive, even radical. With institutions suitably reformed and potential opposition abated, these economies will be made up of ‘empowered’ (de-socialised) individuals, ‘freely’ (fully dependent) upon the market and engaging competitively in productive activities: ‘a very Eden of the innate rights of man’.

**Conclusion**

From a Marxist perspective, if ideology is both retroactive and prescriptive, then it has to be politically significant. It serves to mystify and distort actual contradictions as they reveal themselves and to insidiously disseminate a class response to those contradictions. Whether this is a product of rationality and functionality, or simply a product of vulgar logic, the political implications ought to be taken seriously by Marxists. This is even more important once it becomes apparent that such forms of ideology are becoming orthodox; when they are not particular to a specific institution’s ideational output but, rather,

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characterise the ideational and policy-related activities of a range of international regulative agencies involved in various ways with state projects across the entire world market. Cammack’s work should be commended for drawing attention to evidence that the ideology of competitiveness is becoming such orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{72}

The rationale for this paper is therefore straightforward. I have sought to propose a NMRP which draws upon Cammack’s original proposal for a new materialism, but which proceeds from an approach to critique that is – like Taylor’s intervention – critical of the structuralism-functionalism contained in the former. By means of a critical synthesis between open Marxism and the new materialism, the proposed NMRP advances a critical theory which views globalisation as a major capitalist offensive; which acknowledges the mediating influence of neoliberal discourses, doctrines and orthodoxies in the course of capital’s unfolding crisis; and which takes as its main focus of critique the activities of key international regulative agencies. As regards the World Bank, in particular, the article finds credence in Cammack’s portrait of a globally significant institution which, in the face of the profound internal and wider contextual contradictions Taylor ably highlights, has nonetheless been responsible for the sustained and ostensibly coherent dissemination of a retroactive ideology which distorts and recasts capital’s dilemma and neoliberalism’s ‘solution’ in wholly benign terms. I have argued, in a necessarily cursory manner, that a NMRP ought to proceed from the recognition of the centrality of relatively autonomous states within reform discourses that increasingly comply with an orthodoxy of competitiveness. In order to further develop the NMRP, it will be necessary to extend this critique to encompass the specific relations between such regulative agencies and those very national states being urged to promote competitiveness. Of course, it is possible that such demands will fall upon deaf ears as some state managers wage their own struggles to remove blockages to the flow of capital within spaces of the world market under their control; or as others seek to perpetuate ‘crony’ or oligarchic forms of state. Nevertheless, the critique of contemporary vulgar economy reveals a determined preoccupation with recomposing social relations (decomposing labour, in open-Marxist terms) in states immersed in a long-term transition towards competitive market societies. And, as with Marx’s critique of political economy, the NMRP seeks to reveal contemporary vulgar economy as a mere ‘sycophant of capital’: ‘in the interest of the so-called wealth of the nation, he seeks for artificial means to ensure the poverty of the people. Here his apologetic armour crumbles off, piece by piece, like rotten touchwood’.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{72} See Cammack 2004b, 2006a, 2006b, and 2006 for such evidence.
\textsuperscript{73} Marx 1976, p. 932.
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Marxists, Muslims and Religion: 
Anglo-French Attitudes

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Abstract
The article addresses the divergent responses of the radical Left in Britain and France to the emergence of Muslims as a political subject in the advanced capitalist countries. It takes the case of a recent book by Daniel Bensaïd to illustrate the influence of a secular republican ideology that acts as an obstacle to French Marxists’ recognition that assertions of Muslim identity should not simply be dismissed as reactionary but understood as potentially a rejection of the oppression suffered by Muslims in Western societies. The article calls for a recognition of the positive aspects of postcolonial theory and concludes that the Marxist interpretation of religion as a search for an other-worldly solution to real suffering and injustice should be applied consistently to all expressions of faith.

Keywords
Muslims; Marxism; religion; oppression; postcolonialism; racism

Postmodernism may be a rotting corpse; identity politics, alas, is not.1 It has become a cliché that, in the era of neoliberal globalisation and imperial war, collective mobilisations on the basis of identity have flourished. The titles of two of the best immediate radical responses to 9/11 – Tariq Ali’s The Clash of Fundamentalisms and Gilbert Achcar’s The Clash of Barbarisms – admirably evoke the sense of a world in which politics is defined by the struggle of competing irrationalisms, the Republican Christian Right threatening to destroy the planet as it grapples with its jihadi foes.

But it is around the status of Muslims as a collective political subject that the contemporary discussions of identity have concentrated – and with respect, not just to the countries where Muslims are a majority, but also to Western

1. I am grateful to Sebastian Budgen, Chris Harman, and Alberto Toscano for their comments on this article in draft.
Europe, where they live typically as impoverished migrant populations.² It is indeed on the political significance of the latter for the Left that I focus in this article: the implications of political Islam in the advanced capitalist societies are quite different from those it may have in predominantly Muslim countries. This is, of course, a matter of some practical importance. One of the principal preoccupations of British politics since the London bombings of 7 July 2005 has been the drive by the New-Labour government to push the Muslim minority, goaded into self-assertion by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, back into political acquiescence through a combination of intimidation and seduction, against the background of a media debate dominated by the idea that multiculturalism, which does not require immigrants to renounce their beliefs and practices as a condition of integration into British society, has failed.

In the autumn of 2006, this debate took a turn for the worse when Jack Straw, who as Foreign Secretary during Tony Blair’s second term helped to procure the Iraq War, but who, by then, had become New-Labour’s Leader of the House of Commons, unleashed a frenzy of media Islamophobia when he attacked the very small number of Muslim women who cover their faces with a veil [niqab]. In March 2007 the government announced it was giving head teachers the right to ban the niqab in their schools on grounds of ‘safety, security and teaching’. Maleiha Malik has compared the situation of British Muslims today with that of Jews a century ago: ‘Jews and now Muslims have been and are the targets of cultural racism: differences arising from their religious culture are pathologized and systematically excluded from definitions of “being British”’.³

Though deteriorating fast, the climate for Muslims in Britain has still a way to go before it matches that in France, the European state with the largest Muslim minority – 5 million (8.3 per cent of the population) compared to 1.6 million (2.7 per cent) in the United Kingdom.⁴ The 2003 law forbidding Muslim girls to wear headscarves in state schools reflected the widespread view in the political élite that Muslim religious practices are incompatible with the secular, republican traditions of the French state. This measure was followed

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² According to a study of the 2001 Census commissioned by the Open Society Institute, Muslims are the most disadvantaged faith group in Britain. Some 17 per cent of British Muslims have never worked or are long-term employed, compared to 3 per cent of the overall population; 52 per cent are economically inactive, compared to a third of all other faith groups; and 68 per cent of Muslim women are economically inactive. Available at: <www.eumap.org/pressinfo/press_releases/min_prot/2004_muslims_uk/pressrelease2.doc>.

³ Malik 2007.

by the even more remarkable law of 23 February 2005, Article 4 of which states:

School curricula recognize the positive role of the French overseas presence, particularly in North Africa, and accord to the history and to the sacrifices of the combatants of the French Army coming from these territories the eminent place they deserve.5

Though the riots that swept the working-class suburbs of France in November 2005 were in no sense a specifically Muslim mobilisation, these laws must have reinforced the perception by youth from an immigrant background of, as Abdellali Hajjat puts it, 'the state as an institution of repression and subjection of the oppressed in this country'.6 Elsewhere in Europe, the situation is even more polarised, as the furores over the killing of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam, the Danish cartoons caricaturing Mohammed, and Pope Benedict XVI’s attack on Islam as a less rational religion than Catholicism illustrate.

Of course, the interpellation of Muslims as a distinct political subject is itself a development that requires interrogation. In part, it is a consequence of the emergence of identity politics. To take the British case, the category of ‘black’ – established by the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, in defiance of racist labels inherited from the imperial past, as a term applying to all those subject to postcolonial racial oppression whatever their skin-colour, national origins or cultural background – was effectively displaced through a process of fragmentation where it became restricted to cover, at most, Africans and Afro-Caribbeans, and no longer applied to those of South-Asian heritage.7 In a parallel process that has acquired increasing political salience, British Asians have been themselves broken up into more specific, religious categories. Of these, Muslims now attract the most attention – in part because they have since the 1991 Gulf War have become constructed as both the privileged object of Western imperial intervention and, increasingly, a source of threat, the latter theme now reaching crescendo with the current Home Office campaign against Islamic ‘radicalism’ and the frenzied police hunt for terrorist conspiracies. But, in a familiar move in which the oppressor’s categorisation is taken up and turned against him by his targets, many British Asians have now

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5. Quoted in Le Cour Grandmaison 2005, p. 121.
7. Gilroy 1987 is an influential, if theoretically and politically problematic interpretation of the first phase of this process. For a Marxist analysis offered in part in counterpoint that takes the argument into the era of identity politics, see Callinicos 1993.
adopted the label of Muslim as a basis of collective identity and political mobilisation.

Notoriously, the radical Left in Britain and France have taken different stances towards these developments. For example, whereas virtually the entire British reformist and revolutionary Left has defended the right of Muslim girls and women to wear the headscarf \textit{[hejat]}, sections of the far-left and the \textit{altermondialiste} movement in France strongly supported the headscarf law (though many others opposed it). These divisions were very visible at the European Social Forum in London in October 2004. One complication in all this is the different relationships of the French and British Lefts have towards their nation-state. In Britain, one can identify three different approaches: the mainstream reformist tendency to tell a story of cumulative democratic advance from Magna Carta onwards that enables the further transformation of British society, with the monarchic, repressive, and imperial aspects of the state either ignored or finessed (for example, in Tony Benn’s description of Britain as ‘the last colony in the British Empire’);\textsuperscript{8} the interpretation of English history famously developed by \textit{New Left Review} as a succession of missed rendezvous that have left the UK state a premodern anachronism by comparison with its advanced capitalist counterparts;\textsuperscript{9} and the more robustly revolutionary version, taking inspiration from Trotsky’s \textit{Where Is Britain Going?}, that foregrounds the specific place of British imperialism within the world system.\textsuperscript{10} It is probably fair to say that more than a quarter century’s experience of imperial adventures abroad and neoliberal economic restructuring and increasing state surveillance at home have tended to sharpen the critical reflexes of even the surviving Labour Left.\textsuperscript{11}

Although one has to be careful about generalising on the basis of insufficient evidence, the impression from this side of the Channel is that movement in France has been in the opposite direction. The priority given to an all-inclusive republican identity that transcends social, partisan, religious, and ethnic differences seems to be a theme asserted increasingly stridently by the entire French political élite, from Jacques Chirac to Jean-Pierre Chevènement. Indeed the latter, standard bearer of the ‘sovereignist’ Left, which includes

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10. For example, Callinicos 1988.
11. Thus, see Benn’s increasingly radical response to the 1984–5 miners’ strike, recorded in his diaries. For example: ‘I never understood until now – and it has been an eye-opener – the true nature of class legislation, class law, class judges, class magistrates, class use of the police, class use of the media. It has completely shaken me’. Benn 1994, p. 383.
\end{flushright}
leading *altermondialistes* such as Bernard Cassen, has been outspoken in his defence of the record of French imperialism:

One cannot judge the colonial period by concentrating on its violent conclusion and forgetting the positive and, above all, the school, which brought to the colonized peoples, with the values of the Republic, the intellectual arms of their liberation.¹²

Of course, Cassen and his colleagues on *Le Monde diplomatique* have been firm in their criticisms of the crimes of France abroad, past and present, as have the radical and revolutionary Left. Nevertheless, the French republican myth has penetrated deep into the Left. Christian Picquet, a leading member of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) and an editor of its weekly paper *Rouge*, chooses as his key reference point, not October 1917, but the French Revolution and more particularly the radical Jacobin republic of Year II (1793–4), conceived as the highpoint of an as yet ‘unfinished revolution’. The result is ‘a double French exception’ – on the one hand, ‘a very particular relationship… between the popular classes and the “republican model”’, the proletariat excluded by successive French Republics but fighting for inclusion, and, on the other and in consequence, the permanent contestation of the French state by the conflicting classes. The agenda of the French Left was accordingly set definitively by Jean Jaurès as the completion of the work of the Year II through the establishment of a ‘social democracy’ – a task that today requires both resisting neoliberalism, which threatens to drown the French exception in Anglo-Saxon capitalism, and fighting for a Sixth Republic that would constitute ‘the radical democratisation of democracy’.¹³

The ambivalence of this republican political language is brought out well in a splenetic article by Cassen devoted, in the aftermath of the London ESF, to defending the headscarf law and denouncing the strategy pursued by the Socialist Workers’ Party of working with Muslim activists in the antiwar movement and in Respect. He concludes:

>This kind of confusion may work electorally in the United Kingdom, and it is understandable that it has given some people ideas, though it is only conceivable in an openly communitarian country. This isn’t the case in France, and it’s up to us to preserve a lay ‘exception’ that, despite the deviations that it has and still experiences, preserves its emancipatory potential.¹⁴

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¹³ Picquet 2003, pp. 11, 13, 16, 125.
¹⁴ Cassen 2005. I, under the ridiculous description of ‘the “boss” of the SWP’, am, with Tariq Ramadan, the chief target of Cassen’s polemic.
One final piece of the puzzle concerns the academy and therefore differences in intellectual culture that concern more than just the radical Left.

One of the most distinctive features of the humanities in the anglophone world in the past twenty years has been the growth of postcolonial theory, which seeks to interrogate the systematic shaping of the discourses and practices of, not just colonisers and colonised, but also of ex-colonisers and ex-colonised today in the North as much as the South, by relationships of domination, subordination, and resistance formed in the era of the European empires. But, according to Nicolas Bancel,

there is no equivalent of Anglo-Saxon postcolonial studies, applied to the history of the metropoles, in France. In fact, colonial history remains marginal in the metropole and postcolonial history simply doesn’t exist in the metropole. It is a history denied membership of the club, perceived as remote – since it applies first to the ex-colonies, in no case a history that can be integrated, by right and in full legitimacy, into the national history. This is the manifest sign of a blockage, or, at best, of an indifference.\textsuperscript{15}

The point of drawing these contrasts is not to reverse Cassen’s valuation to the advantage of the British Left. After all, France has seen the biggest social struggles in Europe during the neoliberal era (1995, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007) and can boast the strongest radical Left, partly based in political organisations, partly in the unions, partly in the \textit{altermondialiste} movement.\textsuperscript{16} The more interesting question is how to square this record of militancy with the influence of a republican ideology that can legitimise what, as I shall try to show, are at best mistaken, at worst reactionary positions on questions of oppression.

In addressing this question I shall use as a foil a recent book by Daniel Bensaïd. Like Picquet a leading member of the LCR, Bensaïd has, however, remained loyal to a revolutionary and internationalist Marxism that he has sought to defend and develop by setting it within the framework of a radically anti-determinist theory of history strongly influenced by Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida.\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Fragments mécréants}, a series of essays connected by Bensaïd’s reflections on the multiplicity of problems posed by the question of identity, offers a good starting point for discussion.

\textsuperscript{15} Bancel 2005, p. 86. For a sympathetic overview of postcolonialism, see Young 2001.

\textsuperscript{16} For appreciations of this history, see Wolfreys 2006 and Kouvelakis 2007.

\textsuperscript{17} See especially Bensaïd 1995 and 2002b.
Beyond false symmetries?

Some time ago Perry Anderson wrote: ‘Edward Thompson is our finest socialist writer today – certainly in England, possibly in Europe’. Well, there is a strong case for saying that Daniel Bensaïd is our finest socialist writer today – lucid, eloquent, with great powers of illuminating formulation, of metaphorical evocation, and of irony and sarcasm, and an astonishing literary and philosophical range. These qualities are all on display in this book, for example, in his denunciation of the ersatz republicanism of an official Left and Right whose main allegiance is to the Washington Consensus, in his excoriation of France’s bloody colonial history, and, especially, in his unflinching defence of anti-Zionism against a ferocious onslaught from a galère of influential pro-Israel media intellectuals (the power and aggressiveness of the Zionist lobby in France is another case of the ‘French exception’, which has led, for example, to successful court cases against anti-Zionist writers).

Bensaïd’s approach, however, to the Muslim presence in French society is, in my view, quite problematic. Addressing these points of disagreement may help to clarify the perplexities of the contrasting responses of the French and British radical Lefts to questions of identity. The first issue where differences emerge is the headscarf law. Bensaïd starts off by condemning the law as ‘useless and discriminatory’, and explains the context – the effort by the government of the hapless Jean-Pierre Raffarin to regain the initiative after the social struggles of May–June 2003 by forging ‘a republican union sacrée between the far Right, the centre Right, and the centre Left’. But he then drifts off into a series of reflections – starting with a discussion of the ambiguity of the distinction between public and private that leaves the reader very unclear about where he stands politically on the issue.

Bensaïd gets closer to the point when he considers the plight of people of immigrant origin, who are pressed to assimilate themselves to a society that excludes them:

It is not surprising that some, accused of rejecting what is denied them [de refuser de ce qui leur est refusé], excluded from the universal, required always to prove their sameness and to locate themselves in the local landscape, nearly

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19. Thus, in June 2005, an appeal court found the editor-in-chief of Le Monde, Jean-Marie Colombani, the Jewish sociologist and resistant Edgar Morin, the writer Daniel Sallenave, and Sami Nair MEP guilty of ‘racial defamation’ for an article that highlighted the transformation of Israeli Jews from victims of Nazi oppression into the oppressors of the Palestinians. Henley 2005 and Benbassa 2005.
20. Bensaïd 2005, p. 34.
the same, but nevertheless different, following the tested stratagem of embracing the stigmata, should champion with pride the specificity that is imposed on them and command an anti-integrationist resistance. Unlike the colonised, the immigrant of second or nth generations cannot meet this requirement by a strategy of liberation aiming at national independence. He cannot even console himself with the idea of a return to his country of origin, often unknown, and sometimes associated with failure. He is thus condemned to remain a mutant, a pariah, a *Luftmensch*.

This passage seems to reflect an understanding of the kinds of reasons that might lead a young woman of Arab origin in France, or of Pakistani origin in Britain, born and raised in these countries, to wear the headscarf – not as a sign of submission to patriarchy, but as a gesture of defiance or, at the very least, as an assertion of an identity that she has chosen rather than has been imposed on her. And, on the next page, Bensaïd criticises ‘ni-nisme’ (‘neither-nor-ism’) – in other words, the stance in this case of ‘Neither the law, nor the headscarf’ – as a case of a tame compromise, of a false symmetry between two challenges belonging to different registers and temporalities… This double refusal perpetuates, says Alain Badiou, what it claims to oppose. Roland Barthes already discerned here the ideological tick of the middle way [*juste milieu*], equidistant from the extremes, the magical formula of the third party, the escape route from an irreducibly conflictual opposition.

This passage is particularly striking because the position that the LCR has taken towards a number of international crises has precisely been one of ‘ni-nisme’ – neither NATO nor Milosevic during the 1999 Kosovo War, neither Bush nor the Taliban in the 2001 Afghanistan War. The criticism that others on the revolutionary Left made of this kind of stance was precisely that it posited what Bensaïd calls ‘a false symmetry’ between the two sides – between US imperialism as the dominant global capitalist power on the one hand and incomparably weaker, albeit obnoxious, local régimes on the other. Bensaïd seems tacitly to be distancing himself from this approach, which would lead one to expect him to draw the conclusion that in the case under discussion revolutionaries should robustly defend the right of Muslim women and girls to wear the headscarf. Instead, he retreats into ambiguity:

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In an imperialist country, haunted by its colonial past, entangled in the repressive management of migratory flows, the wearing of the headscarf is charged with so many inextricably intermingled significations that the struggle against the confinement of women that it signifies situates itself on the terrain of common struggles. The slow rhythm of the transformation of morals is not that of legislative decision or of judicial procedure. On the other hand, certain achievements of the struggle for women’s liberation cannot be put in question in the name of relativist cultural differences. These are henceforth foundational principles, ‘anterior to reason’, as Rousseau put it, that cannot be reopened. The right to abortion and contraception, the criminalisation of rape, the prohibition of stoning, of infibulation, of polygamy, are equally historical achievements of women’s liberation, which are not matters of discussion or negotiation.23

It is hard not to find this a pretty disastrous passage. The syntax of the first sentence is tortuous, but Bensaïd seems to be saying that wearing the headscarf has many significations and that it signifies the confinement of women. He must mean either that the confinement of women is one of the multiple significations of wearing the headscarf or that it is the overdetermining one. If he means the second, then his assertion is false.

It is simply not the case that all the women who wear the headscarf are submissive victims who accept patriarchal domination: anyone who has participated in the great movements of the past few years, or, like Bensaïd and me, teaches in a contemporary university, will have encountered plenty of cases of highly articulate and confident Muslim women asserting their equality with men, who often are, moreover, political subjects in their own right, not despite wearing the headscarf (or even sometimes more encompassing clothing) but because of a series of choices, one of which was to adopt it. There are indeed cases where women are forced to wear the hejab or niqab or, more typically, the adoption is part of a broader acquiescence by these women in a subordinate position. But anyone who asserts that these conditions obtain universally is revealing their ignorance or prejudice or, most probably, both.

If Bensaïd means simply that headscarf can mean submission and confinement, then of course, as I have just noted, he is right; but why privilege this particular meaning? And why target specifically this item of clothing inasmuch as it symbolises the subordination of women? As Badiou implies in his splendid philippic against the headscarf law, why is no one campaigning against crop-tops, which arguably objectify and commodify the female body in a far more dangerous and pervasive way?24

Of course, the right to abortion etc. are non-negotiable, but why is this an issue in the context of the debate on the headscarf law? Bringing them up implies that, to the extent that Muslims become political actors, they will attack the reforms that have been won through the struggle for women’s liberation. But what evidence is there to support this claim? To take the case of ‘communitarian’ Britain, leaving aside marginal jihadis who demand the imposition of sharia law, there are undoubtedly cases of Muslim jurists who sanction traditional patriarchal practices such as forced marriage. But there are plenty of Muslims, scholars and laypeople alike, who oppose these practices, and there is absolutely no sign of a ‘Muslim agenda’ one of whose aims is the restriction of women’s rights. Attacks on abortion are far more likely to come from the traditional quarter of the Catholic Church, now reinforced by a growing and increasingly aggressive band of Protestant fundamentalists, but these seem now to concern defenders of ‘secularism’ much less than the non-existent ‘Muslim peril’. Even to mention the idea of the toleration of stoning and polygamy in the context of a discussion of the headscarf is a dangerous concession to the Islamophobic atmosphere that has been created in sections of the French Left, notably by the white bourgeois feminists who, as I have personally witnessed on several occasions, seek to deny women wearing headscarves a platform and try to shout down those who disagree with them.25

Bensaïd justifies this slide into the neither-norism he rejected a page earlier when he criticises Badiou for saying that

the headscarf law is a pure capitalist law. It decrees that femininity must be displayed. In other words, that the circulation of the female body under the commodity paradigm is obligatory. It forbids any holding back in this matter – and among adolescents, the visible symbol of the entire subjective world.26

The problem with this argument, Bensaïd comments, is that

The control by capital of bodies, its determination to unveil their commodity value, doesn’t at all relativise their control by religious law and the theological will to conjure them away. The ways of oppression are as multiple and inexhaustible as those of God are impenetrable. The mediocre dialectic of principal and secondary contradictions, their infernal tourniquet has already played too many dirty tricks. And the ‘secondary enemy’, too often under-estimated in the name of

25. It is particularly surprising that Bensaïd should apparently associate infibulation specifically with Islam, when this is a practice common in Egypt and the Horn of Africa among those of Christian and animist as well as Muslim faiths, but unknown in the subcontinent, despite its huge Muslim populations.
the primary struggle against the principal enemy, sometimes turns out to be the mortal one.27

Bensaïd’s introduction of the language of primary and secondary contradictions, which of course derives from Mao Zedong’s ‘On Contradiction’, is a tacit reference to Badiou’s Maoist past. But the effect of the former’s refusal to draw any such distinction is to leave us precisely in the position he previously rejected – ‘ni-ni’, ‘Neither the law, nor the headscarf’. And, just as he said it does, this position introduces a ‘false symmetry’ here.

Even if Badiou exaggerates when he implies that the aim of the headscarf law was to make the exposure of the commodified female body mandatory, he is surely talking about an incomparably more widespread phenomenon in Western societies than the wearing of the headscarf. If one puts in the balance, on the one hand, the vast and expanding porn industry, the proliferation of lad’s magazines, the constant pressure on women to school their bodies into a norm of thinness and voluptuousness, the omnipresence of images that make this norm visible, etc., and, on the other, the wearing of headscarves by, at most, a few million Muslim women out of a total population (in the advanced capitalist countries) of over 1.2 billion, can anyone seriously doubt which bears the greater weight? This does not mean ignoring or excusing the specific oppression that Muslim women experience as Muslim women, which may (but need not) be expressed in the wearing of the headscarf, but it does mean keeping a sense of proportion.

The language of priorities

Bensaïd in effect reasserts this refusal to assign priorities to issues in a later discussion of the ‘Appel des “Indigènes de la République”’, issued by a number of French intellectuals and activists of colour in January 2005. As is implied by the self-designation of its authors as ‘indigènes’ – the colonial term for the large majority of French imperialism’s subject peoples deemed not to be capable of assimilating the superior culture of la patrie and hence of exercising citizenship rights – the main thrust of this document is to assert the position that the immigrant population of France is in the same position as those peoples were in the colonial empire.28 But the ‘Appel’ also mounts a powerful attack on the role of Islamophobia in contemporary racism:

Under the undefined term fundamentalism [intégrisme], the populations of African, Maghrebian, or Muslim origin are henceforth identified as the fifth column of a new barbarism that threatens the West and its values.

Fraudulently camouflaged under the banners of secularism, of citizenship, and of feminism, this reactionary offensive is capturing minds and reconfiguring the political landscape. It is ravaging French society. Already it has succeeded in imposing its rhetoric in the very heart of the progressive forces, like gangrene. To attribute to the extreme Right alone the monopoly of the racist and colonial imaginary is a political and historical imposture. The ideology of colonialism endures, cutting across the great currents of ideas that make up the French political field.

Decolonising the Republic is still a live issue: The Republic of Equality is a myth. The state and society must carry out a radical critical reflection on their past-present. It’s time that France interrogates its Enlightenment, that egalitarian universalism represses this nationalism buttressed by ‘chauvinism of the universal’, deemed to ‘civilise’ savages and wild kids [sauvageons]. It is urgent to promote radical measures of justice and equality that end racist discrimination in access to work, housing, culture and citizenship. We must finish with the institutions that reduce the populations that have emerged from colonisation to the status of sub-humanity.29

Now, one can think of ways in which this could have been put better, of formulations that are problematic. But it seems to me undeniable that this passage contains very important elements of truth. It is surprising therefore that the majority of the LCR’s National Leadership should have expressed themselves ‘shocked’ by the second paragraph cited:

‘Fraudulently’, ‘imposture’, ‘gangrene’… So many terms that encourage one to think that the main enemy is to be driven out from those close at hand. One cannot however make a tabula rasa of the history of the workers’ and democratic movement, of the dramatic divisions that have traversed it, setting in opposition the compromises and betrayals of some to the resistance and heroic struggles of others… The urge to clarify the present by the lessons of the past cannot sustain itself by a one-sided reading of this history.30

The odd thing is nowhere in the passage cited or indeed elsewhere in the ‘Appel des “Indigènes de la République”’ is there any blanket condemnation of the entire French ‘workers’ and democratic movement’. To say that Islamophobia has penetrated ‘the very heart of the progressive forces’ in France is simply to state a fact: it is not equivalent to – and should not be equated with – the dismissal of these forces as having gone over to the camp of reaction.

30. LCR Majority 2005.
As to the past, it is particularly extraordinary for an organisation whose origins lie in the opposition that developed in the Jeunesse Communiste (JC) to the involvement of present and future Socialist Party leaders (respectively Guy Mollet and François Mitterrand) in the escalation of the colonial war in Algeria in the mid-1950s and to their own Party’s failure to campaign actively against this war to jibe at the idea that the French Left have not always been squeaky-clean on colonialism.31 Recognising the implication of workers’ parties in imperial violence – something that has, of course, run through the history of British Labour governments from Ramsay MacDonald to Tony Blair – is, on the contrary, a necessary condition of developing a genuinely internationalist Left.32

Bensaïd’s own discussion of the ‘Appel des “Indigènes”’ is more measured than the LCR majority’s. Thus he argues, correctly in my view, that the analogy, drawn not only by the ‘Appel’ but also by the radical-feminist sociologist Christine Delphy, between the condition of the populations of migrant origin in contemporary France and colonial oppression (which Delphy conceptualises, along with contemporary racism, as a form of caste domination) is simplistic and misleading: ‘Unlike caste societies, characterised by a hereditary hierarchical distribution of social statuses, these populations live in an open society, certainly (very) inegalitarian, but involving relative social mobility’.33 He warns that the slogan of ‘autonomous indigenous politics’ threatens to fragment and divide the oppressed and exploited who have a shared interest in uniting against their common enemy: ‘It is the temptation of those who, to trace the contours of this autonomy, end up by making their potential allies agents of the system and enemies in power’.34 And he appeals to the radical anticolonialism of Fanon and the rapidly evolving ideas of Malcolm X before his assassination to evoke a universalism that is constructed out of a convergence of struggles against capitalism as an alternative to an agglomeration of mutually mistrustful communitarianisms.35

31. For Bensaïd’s personal memories of the Ligue’s eventual emergence from the JC, see Bensaïd 2004, Chapter 4.
32. The ‘Appel’ was, in fact, open to white intellectuals and activists, and contains nothing that, had I lived in France, would have stopped me from signing it. A distinction must, however, between the text of the ‘Appel’ and the thinking of some of its authors, for example, Sadri Khiari, who develops a fairly systematic case for what amounts to a version of black nationalism that gives priority to the struggle against racial oppression: see Khiari 2006 and, for a critique of the theoretical and historical presuppositions of this kind of position, Callinicos 1993.
35. The meaning of Fanon’s writing remains hotly contested; compare Bensaïd’s treatment with the attempts by Homi Bhabha to appropriate him for postcolonialism and Khiari’s for black
All these points are very well taken. Bensaïd’s arguments parallel those made by Marxists such as Aijaz Ahmad and myself when challenging postcolonialism and identity politics within the Anglophone academy during the 1990s. Ahmad is a particularly effective critic of the manner in which postcolonial theorists efface concrete historical differences by dissolving them into the transhistorical conceptions of coloniality and postcoloniality. Bensaïd is quite right to critically interrogate such conceptions. Nevertheless, what is missing again from his critique of the ‘Appel’ is a sense of proportion and priority. Is now – at a time when the French Right is dominated by Nicolas Sarkozy, now President of the Republic, who as Minister of the Interior denounced the youth of the banlieues as scum and threatened to clear them out with pressure hoses – the moment to mount a serious political assault against black and Arab radical intellectuals whose texts, whatever their weaknesses, as the passage I quoted indicates, base their critique, not on postcolonial difference, but on ‘egalitarian universalism’?

Moreover, some reflection seems appropriate on how to appreciate postcolonialism. Even in the environment where it originally emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s, the anglophone academy, it cannot simply be reduced to a form of postmodernist expansionism, an attempt to dehistoricise and textualise the historical and the political. The demand that writing in the metropoles – including theoretical discourses – should be situated within the global relations of domination that, in a different form, continue to bind North and South together was salutary: much valuable research has been carried out under its stimulus. In particular, the work of the group of scholars around the Indian journal Subaltern Studies requires a balanced assessment of its achievements as well as its ambiguities and errors. In any case, for all the defects and absurdities of postcolonialism (for example, white Canadian and Australian scholars solemnly using it to establish some kind of kinship between themselves and the real victims of colonialism; Homi Bhabha grandly enthroned in the inner sanctum of academic liberalism at Harvard at the very moment when the United States inaugurated a new era of imperial military expeditions), a dose of it might not come amiss in contemporary France, where, as we have seen, the prevailing republican ideology demands official celebration of the history of ‘the French overseas presence’.

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37. See the interesting critique by a dissident member of the group, Sarkar 1997.
38. To Bensaïd’s credit, Contretemps, the journal he edits, has devoted a substantial dossier to the theme of postcolonialism and immigration. See no. 16, January 2006.
Bensaïd’s justification for nevertheless directing heavy fire at the ‘Appel des “Indigènes”’ comes in the following passage, which, as in his comments on Badiou, associates those who argue for concentrating on the main enemy with Stalinism:

The epoch is no longer subject to binary logics of the excluded middle, which summon us to choose our camp, even to stay silent about the crimes of Stalin under the pretext of not being thrown to the wolves. In the long run, this kind of self-censorship was disastrous. Those who, in their times, have fought, often on two fronts, against colonial terror and capitalist exploitation, but also against bureaucratic terror and exploitation, have better served the cause of emancipation than the realists who kept silent, with the excuse of not weakening their camp. 39

This evocation of the moral and political climate of Beauvoir’s Les Mandarins is hardly likely to convince those of us who saw the Cold War, not as a struggle between capitalist and postcapitalist ‘camps’, but as a conflict between rival imperialisms. But, even in the terms of a Marxism that is neutral with respect to interpretations of Stalinism, Bensaïd’s refusal to distinguish among kinds of conflict does not bear close examination.

In the first place, it is undoubtedly true that a serious non-reductionist Marxism has to start from an acknowledgement of what Althusser called the ‘ever pre-givenness’ of a multiplicity of determinations. Bensaïd is extremely effective, in this book as in the rest of his writings, in conveying a concrete sense of the complexity of the social when it is understood from this perspective. But it is simply impossible to stop at this point: doing so would fail to distinguish Marxism from the post-Nietzschean explanatory pluralism of, on the one hand, Deleuze and Foucault, and, on the other, Mann and Runciman. Marx’s method in Capital involves an ordering of determinations in which the relative priority a determination occupies in the theoretical construction is a measure of its explanatory weight: to take an obvious example, the extraction of surplus-value in production therefore takes epistemic priority relative to the securing of revenue in the form of interest by money capital, without the latter being denied a real effectivity of its own. 40 So, in a very general sense, any Marxist explanation involves a non-reductive assignment of priority.

This may seem very abstract, but arguably it informs Bensaïd’s own conception of politics. In a brilliant essay – the best contemporary discussion of Lenin –, he writes:

40. See Callinicos 2005b, for a discussion of the nature and pitfalls of this method.
Revolutions have their own tempo, marked by accelerations and slowing down. They also have their own geometry, where the straight line is broken in bifurcations and sudden turns. The party thus appears in a new light. For Lenin, it is no longer the result of a cumulative experience nor the modest teacher with the task of raising the proletarians from the darkness of ignorance to the illumination of reason. It becomes a strategic operator, a kind of gearbox and pointsman of the class struggle. As Walter Benjamin very clearly recognised, the strategic time of politics is not the homogeneous and empty time of classical mechanics, but a broken time, full of knots and wombs pregnant with events.41

It is very hard to square this highly interventionist conception of ‘a politics conceived as the art of unexpected events and of the effective possibilities of a determinate conjuncture’, with the ni-nisme that, contrary to Bensaïd’s affirmations, turns out to be his default position when confronting conflicts over identity.42 Knowing how to grasp the moment when it unexpectedly comes, requires the ability to concentrate, to know how to identify the decisive features of the present situation. This is why Lenin’s career is, as Tony Cliff’s classic biography demonstrates, a succession of the ‘leaps’ that Bensaïd celebrates – of abrupt political turns each of which required intense analysis and debate of the dominant trends that demand strategic re-assessment and practical re-orientation.43

None of this implies a ‘campism’, where one remains silent about the issues on which one disagrees with one’s allies. On the contrary, inherent in the concept of the united front as common action by different political forces are the inevitability of conflict and, therefore, the necessity of debate among these allied forces. But the emphasis one gives to these disagreements will depend on one’s assessment of where they stand in the larger field of contending political forces (a field that is, of course, constantly changing, so that the relative importance of the conflicts within a united front will vary with time, at certain points threatening its partial or complete break-up).44

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41. Bensaïd 2002a, p. 76.
42. Bensaïd 2002a, p. 81.
43. See especially Cliff 1975.
44. Tariq Ali, in an otherwise unexceptionable interview, shows himself insensitive to this political dynamic when he declares: ‘The way things are happening in Respect is pure opportunism. Obviously I am in favour of working with Muslim groups, but [for] socialists the goal must be to win followers of religion to our own point of view, not to leave them in their entrenched positions’. See Ali 2006. What is ‘opportunistic’ about campaigning for the support of Muslims (the most deprived group in British society) on the basis of a secular programme of the radical Left, anti-neoliberal and antiracist as well as antiwar, is beyond me. Where Respect has had an impact among Muslims, the result has not been to reinforce ‘entrenched positions’; rather a polarisation has developed (sometimes even within Respect locally) between those Muslims...
Addressing the faithful

Why Bensaïd’s treatment of these current political controversies is so at odds with his larger theoretical position is a matter of speculation. My own hunch is that this contradiction is a reflection of the influence of the republican ideology on even so stalwart a revolutionary Marxist. The main evidence for this interpretation is the inconsistency with which he treats Muslim demands and discourses. I have already cited one example, in the context of the headscarf debate. Another is offered by his treatment of the Muslim theologian Tariq Ramadan. To an outsider observer, the intense campaign against Ramadan in the French media, which has led to the production of several books seeking to brand him as an extreme Islamist and which serious distorted the coverage of the European Social Forum in Paris in November 2003, seems simply insane, a symptom of the extent to which the dominant culture is impregnated with Islamophobia. It is particularly odd in the British context, where Ramadan has emerged since the July 2005 bombings as an eminently moderate figure, serving on a Home Office working group on ‘tackling extremism’ and arguing that Muslim communities should ‘engage’ more vigorously with mainstream politics.45

Bensaïd’s own discussion of how Ramadan has become a ‘disquieting phantasm’ in the French debate is eminently sensible and balanced. But he nevertheless qualifies Ramadan as a fundamentalist:

The late lamented Maxime Rodinson defined fundamentalism as ‘the aspiration to resolve by religion all social and political problems, and to restore the integrity of dogmas’. Unlike ‘literalists’, defenders of the letter against the spirit of the texts, Ramadan demands a right of interpretation. He remains however fundamentalist to the extent that he subordinates Reason to Faith, the profane to the sacred. Islam governs the totality of social practices, politics like morals, the sciences like everyday life. In proposing a compromise between the rule and the century, Ramadan retreats from this logical consequence of religious fundamentalism. That’s his problem, and that of reformed or reforming fundamentalism: what relationship to establish in the public space with profane legislation.46

open to working with or indeed joining the secular radical Left, and those drawn towards pro-government, communalist, or jihadi positions. This is precisely the kind of context in which, if Respect is built successfully, significant numbers of Muslims can be won to revolutionary-socialist politics. For more on Respect, see Callinicos 2004 and 2005a. [Thanks to the leisurely metabolism of Historical Materialism, I wrote the preceding sentences of this note and the paragraph to which it is attached some time before the split in Respect in November 2007 (on which see Harman 2008): I see no reason to alter them in the light of that crisis, which has, in fact, corroborated them.]

45. See, for example, Ramadan 2005.
This appraisal is certainly more subtle than the typical French treatments of Ramadan. Ramadan describes himself as a ‘Salafi reformist’. That is, like the Salafi wing of Sunni Islam more generally, he wants to return to the original text, ‘to rediscover the pristine energy of an unmediated reading of the Qu’ran and the Sunna’ that does not make reference to any of the four great schools of Islamic jurisprudence. But, he says, Salafi reformists have

a very dynamic relation to scriptural sources and a constant desire to use reason in the treatment of the Texts in order to deal with the new challenges of their age and the social, economic, and political evolution of societies.

Ramadan thus, as Bensaïd notes, upholds the legitimacy of *ijtihad*, of the creative interpretation of the sacred texts of Islam. In the Western context, Salafi reformism seeks

- to protect the Muslim identity and religious practice, to recognize the Western constitutional structure, to become involved as a citizen at the social level, and to live with true loyalty to the country to which one belongs.47

This is certainly an ambiguous agenda, full of potential tensions. But is it *fundamentalist*, in the sense given this term by Rodinson? Rather than in any simple sense affirming that ‘Islam governs the totality of social practices’, Ramadan argues that Muslims living in Western societies should not consider their position a second-best one, requiring unsatisfactory compromises between their beliefs and practices and the norms of these societies, but reconceive themselves as full citizens of the countries in which they live, going back to first principles rather than relying on inherited tradition in order to determine right ways of engaging and seeking non-Muslim partners for social and political projects that further these principles. Ramadan devotes a chapter of a recent book to an attempt to demonstrate the conflict between Islamic teaching and neoliberal globalisation and welcomes the emergence of the *altermondialiste* movement:

> The picture would be very dark were it not for a widespread movement of resistance: when faced with neo-liberal economics, the message of Islam offers no way out but resistance. In the West, as in the East, we are summoned to use our

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47. Ramadan 2004, pp. 26, 27. Ideologically, Salafism is extremely complex, since the return to the text can legitimise both the attempt to modernise Islam (itself a highly ambiguous enterprise) and, more commonly, the project of creating a pure Islamic polity that is one of the driving forces of radical Islamism. The Muslim Brotherhood (of which Ramadan’s father was a leading figure) fully reflects these complexities.
minds, our imaginations, our creative abilities to think of an alternative – using
our sources in partnership with all those who resist and mobilise for ‘alternative
ways’.48

Elsewhere Ramadan writes:

Fear, and sometimes mutual suspicion, has long prevented the formation of links
with bodies such as the League of Human Rights, ATTAC, Globalise Resistance,
and things evolve, and Muslim associations are increasingly establishing
connections beyond ‘the community’… The creation of multi-dimensional
partnerships is one of the keys to the future: not only will it confirm to Muslims
that their values are shared, but it will make it possible for their fellow-citizens
better to gauge how and why the presence of Muslims in the West, with the
vitality of their organisations and their convictions regarding social mission, is a
source of enrichment for the society they share in common.49

This just seems a long way from radical Islamist slogans such as ‘Islam is the
Answer’ or ‘Caliphate, not Capitalism’. This does not mean that Ramadan’s
social and political vision is unproblematic. There are obvious conflicts
between the weight given to private property in his version of Muslim social
thought and any conception of socialism. His call for a ‘moratorium’ on
stonings and other punishments supposedly required by sharia law is, as
Bensaïd notes, shamefully weak.50 And, as I have already implied, Ramadan’s
role in Britain since 7 July 2005 has been ambiguous, since, no doubt contrary
to his own intentions, his interventions could be used to give weight to a
discredited government’s efforts to drive Muslims back into political passivity.
But none of this makes him a fundamentalist.

Bensaïd says that Ramadan ‘subordinates Reason to Faith’. This is true in
the sense that, as a believing Muslim and a scholar, he seeks to arrive at first
principles through, in the tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, starting from a
reading of the sacred texts. I do not see how, in principle, this distinguishes
him from the great theorists of Latin-American liberation theology such as
Gustavo Gutiérrez and Leonardo Boff, who start, not from Marx or Trotsky
or Benjamin, but from the New and Old Testaments and the master-works of
Catholic thought. Does this make them fundamentalists? Surely not. They are
seeking creatively to re-interpret their religious tradition in order to develop

49. Ramadan 2004, p. 156. The reference to Globalise Resistance here is odd, since it has
consistently defended Ramadan’s right to speak at successive European Social Fora.
a radical political project. So does Ramadan, though less consistently in the political conclusions he draws.

Bensaïd’s comrade in the LCR and fellow Marxist philosopher Michael Löwy has written an interesting and generally sympathetic study of liberation theology in Latin America. Why should not the same approach be applied to Ramadan, rather than corralling him off into the ‘camp’ of the fundamentalists? Treating him like Boff and Gutiérrez would not involve taking up an uncritical stance towards him. As it happens, I think that Löwy is not tough enough on aspects of liberation theology, for example, its tendency to replace class politics with an undifferentiated populism. Moreover, there is probably a correlation between such political weaknesses and the liberation theologians’ ultimate allegiance to a salvationist religion: here we reach the ultimate incompatibility of Marxism as a materialist theory of this-worldly liberation with any religious viewpoint that projects an ultimate resolution of contradictions into a transcendent beyond.

The difference is well expressed by the Dominican friar Herbert McCabe, the closest Britain has come to a liberation theologian, a leading expert on St Thomas Aquinas (and a long-standing supporter of Official Sinn Féin):

Like Karl Marx, Aquinas knew that religious cult belongs to human alienation, and that the passing of this alienation would mean the withering away of the Church. But unlike Marx, he knew that the passing of that alienation needed more than the establishment of socialism, or even of communism; it meant a revolution in our very bodies, a death and resurrection.

McCabe here identifies the basic point of conflict between Marxism and any religious viewpoint. Marxists, while understanding that the sources of religion’s continuing hold on the human imagination lie in its acknowledgement of and offer of a cure to real suffering, nevertheless refuse the idea of an other-worldly resolution of this-worldly conflicts as illusory. It is, however, important to keep both sides of this judgement in balance.

From the 1843 Introduction onwards, Marxists have distinguished themselves from liberal rationalists in refusing to treat religious faith as a mere tissue of illusion imposed on the faithful by a conspiracy of fraudulent clerics and seeing it instead as an expression of real needs that the present social world fails to fulfil. The implication is that Marxists take religion seriously and refuse to treat believers as hoodwinked dullards. I take Terry Eagleton’s recent demolition of the particularly crass version of Enlightenment rationalism

51. Löwy 1996.
52. McCabe 2005, p. 91.
expounded by Richard Dawkins and his polemic against Martin Amis’s anti-Muslim ravings as an affirmation of this same attitude, even though it has caused much agitation in liberal dovecotes.\textsuperscript{53}

But it follows that the same standards of critical engagement and dialogue with which most sane Marxists approach liberation theology should be applied to Ramadan (and indeed other Muslim scholars) insofar as they seek to re-interpret Islamic tradition with emancipatory aims.\textsuperscript{54} To many on the French radical Left, comparing Ramadan and Boff would seem... well, like sacrilege. But this highlights an irony of contemporary French secularism: though forged in the struggle against the Catholic Church, it now tends to treat Catholicism – still a great institutionalised power that, under Benedict XVI, is unlikely to act as a force for progress – more favourably than it does the religion of people who are overwhelmingly among the poorest and most disadvantaged in European society. In other words, secularism in the contemporary French context has acquired an ethnic and exclusivist connotation, slipping into what amounts, relative to a more genuine and egalitarian universalism, to a racially coded particularism.\textsuperscript{55} So, a secularism worthy of the name would need to be rethought and re-engineered in a process of common struggle and debate that brings together the existing Left with the many Muslims, and indeed others of non-European background, who want to fight the same enemies. Throughout his book, Bensaid shows that he understands the necessity of such a reconstruction. Thus, in concluding he discusses metaphors of living together:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{53} Eagleton 2006b and 2007, Introduction. Eagleton, an old friend of McCabe’s, has referred to ‘the metaphysical or theological turn (or full circle) which my work seems to have taken in recent years’. See Eagleton 2006a, p. vi. It is, however, important to see that this ‘turn’ involves the employment of theological modes of thought for the purpose of articulating a more effective materialism, and not either belief in God or endorsement of organised religion, as Eagleton’s scabrous portrait of John Paul II in his dotage should make clear: Eagleton 2005.
\item\textsuperscript{54} Incidentally, the case of Ramadan illustrates why Gilbert Achcar is quite wrong to reject the term ‘Islamism’ in favour of ‘fundamentalism’ and ‘intégrisme’. Achcar writes: ‘The English word “fundamentalism”…, defined as “the desire to use religion to solve all social and political problems and, simultaneously, to restore full obedience to dogma and ritual” [a version of Rodinson’s definition, cited above by Bensaid], of emphasising the fact that this way of using religion is not a unique attribute of Islam. Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Hindu, etc., fundamentalisms also exist’. Achcar 2003, p. 110 n. 28. Indeed they do, but, as the case of liberation theology illustrates, not everyone who takes Catholicism as their main intellectual reference point is a fundamentalist. The advantage of the term ‘Islamism’ is that it allows us to distinguish within the larger category of political Muslims, who start from their religious faith, the real fundamentalists – most obviously the jihadis who look to bin Laden and al-Qaeda.
\item\textsuperscript{55} For more on egalitarian universalism, see Callinicos 2000 and 2006.
\end{enumerate}
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Perhaps the puzzle or mosaic is an alternative to the sterile metaphor of the national melting pot. Not a simple collection of dispersed pieces, jumbled together in one bag. Not a simple juxtaposition, a simple coexistence, more or less peaceful depending on the time and place. But an assemblage, a composition, a set, whose links and meeting points take the shape of a figure and construct a being-in-common.

Mosaics of cultures and peoples.

Work of construction.

Which unites the singular fragment with the form of the whole.

Maybe this is what internationalism is.56

This is exactly the spirit of what Bensaïd has called elsewhere the ‘new internationalism’ of which the anticapitalist and antiwar movements have offered glimpses. Building it will require on our part a vigorous and sustained effort to break with the national traditions that hold us all back. His book is one symptom of the distance this effort still has to travel.

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Review Articles


The Post-Apartheid Critic: Reviewing works by Patrick Bond and Ashwin Desai

Introduction: Resistance and critique after Apartheid

After the thrill of democracy has been enunciated, how can a politics of resistance be constructed within – or against – the confines of the new *nomos*? Will it depend on not only the memory of the defeat of Apartheid but also on the animation of a more recent political experience: the structural nonfulfillment of anti-Apartheid aspirations?¹

South Africa witnessed the dismantling of legal structures of racial discrimination and ‘separate development’ by the first democratic elections, in 1994. However, the social and

spatial inequalities as a result of colonialism, segregation, and Apartheid have proven difficult to undo. In the first decade of democracy, several important studies have reviewed the political economy of transition from Apartheid, and changes in the dynamics of power, economy, inequality and resurgent protest.²

Introducing an edition on post-Apartheid South Africa, Farred asks what exactly was secured and lost in the process of negotiated settlement with the white supremacist régime, and what emergent tactics are produced within social-justice struggles today. Farred cautions the post-Apartheid critic to be aware of the ways in which ‘struggle’ itself is fetishised by the political elite. Moreover, post-Apartheid social inequality is grounded in new legal forms and discourses of social order \[\text{nomos}\] emerging from but not reducible to its Apartheid predecessor. The post-Apartheid critic is not separable from the new \text{nomos}, which is why Farred calls attention to many forms of aspiration for resistance in a contradictory time. Certainly, some of these aspirations may be deemed illegitimate, for instance, in relation to ‘the national-democratic revolution’ or the purported imperatives of racial redress.

Late 2007 witnessed the dramatic emergence of Jacob Zuma as the new President of the ANC, with strong support from the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and constituencies representing the rural poor. The meaning of this populist upsurge is not yet clear, with its strange blend of struggle fetishism, misogyny, and anti-élitism. While there is not yet a cohesive political force unambiguously representative of the mass of South Africa’s poor, it is clear is that various forms of disaffection pervade South-African society. The key question posed by Farred is how this disaffection might continue to provoke leftist politics, within or outside the ruling alliance. With Farred’s problematic in mind, this essay explores divergent modes of critique in the writings of two radical intellectuals who contend quite differently with the contradictions of contemporary South Africa. Each writer provides a biting retrospection on the compromises of transition from Apartheid. Each, in different ways, projects a possible just future.

The writers in question are Patrick Bond and Ashwin Desai. While Bond is a more prolific writer of books, it is fair to say that they read like interwoven pieces and further elaborations, which makes the two bodies of writing comparable despite differences in volume. Moreover, reading these thinkers in counterpoint tells us something about the interplay of communities of resistance and their broader conditions of justification and control: of resistance and \text{nomos}. Since Bond and Desai conceive of critique through quite different realms of power and influence, they diverge in theory, rhetoric and writing style. Problems of ‘race’ and ideology and their relationship to political-economic crisis emerge as central themes in reading these writers in counterpoint. While some of the works considered here are written as activist texts with a reluctance to forbear in making claims or prescriptions, this impulse is restrained to varying effect in collaborations with other scholars. As a slice of broader debates over contemporary South Africa, Bond and Desai clarify Farred’s dual imperative for post-Apartheid critique to attend to ‘the memory of the defeat of Apartheid but also on the animation of a more recent political experience.’

² The best Gramscian overview of the political economy of transition is Marais 1998. Also important is the analysis of the ‘minerals energy complex’ in Fine and Rustonjee 1996, See also Michie and Padayachy 1997; Padayachy 2006; Hart 2002; Mamdani 1996, and the recent analysis of South Africa’s development trajectory and the socialist path not taken in Saul 2005; Legassick 2007.
Giving the biographical due attention, it is important to note that Bond has received his training and intellectual affirmation from a Euro-American Marxist canon. Bond studied with a leading figure of Marxist geography, David Harvey, and Bond’s work is regularly cited by Harvey and others as the exemplary source on post-Apartheid South Africa. In addition to research in Zimbabwe, Bond’s work has straddled NGOs and activism in the province of Gauteng, and work for the new South-African government in the 1990s, including policy papers for the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). Ashwin Desai’s work began with activism and research at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, engagement with various layers of anti-Apartheid activism in Durban in which he was a persisting critic of authoritarianism in various guises, activism for the rights of non-academic staff at the formerly black University of Durban-Westville where he held an academic position, to a continuing insider/outsider status in Durban’s academic and activist communities. Desai’s work with the Concerned Citizen’s Group in Durban parallel’s Bond’s work with the Municipal Services Project in Johannesburg, both of which have deepened their solidarities with poor people’s struggles in neoliberal South Africa.

While Bond and Desai are colleagues and interlocutors, they are positioned differently today: one as, until recently, the director of the Centre for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the other as a former research fellow without the tenured job his work quite obviously warrants. During the course of writing this essay, Desai fought a struggle to lift a ban on his appointment to the University of KwaZulu-Natal, for which he received international support, and which brought him to loggerheads with the Vice Chancellor. Finally, both have continued writing that does not find itself in this review.

I begin with three of Bond’s books which, in my view, are elaborations on each other, and can therefore to be considered as a single enterprise: Elite Transition, Against Global Apartheid and Talk Left, Walk Right. The premise in all three is that the transition from white supremacy has been hijacked by an élite putsch within the ANC, which has insinuated ‘neoliberal ideology’ in line with wider shifts in global political economy. A collaborative venture, reviewed briefly here, applies some of these ideas to environmental questions in Unsustainable South Africa. I then turn to Ashwin Desai’s Arise Ye Coolies and We Are the Poors, in which Desai reflects from specific histories of the ‘Indian question’ on the broader material and cultural politics of post-Apartheid hegemony and nascent counter-hegemony, before turning briefly to a collaboration between Desai, Vishnu Padayachee and Goolam Vahed in Blacks in Whites. I conclude with some thoughts on post-Apartheid critique by way of work on intellectuals through the transition.

Patrick Bond: Prometheus unbound

Patrick Bond’s most well known book, Elite Transition, begins with a promise to deliver a radical analytic-theoretic framework and some of the most telling details that help explain the transition from a popular-nationalist anti-Apartheid project to official neoliberalism – by which is meant adherence to free market economic principles, bolstered by the narrowest practical definition of democracy (not the radical participatory project many ANC cadre had expected) – over an extremely short period of time. (p. 1.)
No small task, this. One of the first and last of its kind of Third-World national-liberation movements, the African National Congress had, by the late 1980s, assumed the mantle of agent of liberation through the multiple energies of working-class, youth, underground, exiled and global anti-Apartheid activism. Reflective of the actual multiplicity of politics, and the fact that the exiled leadership of the ANC was never actually counter-hegemonic, the turn of the decade was marked by fierce debate over economic policy and development strategy, well before the ANC-led coalition in power instituted a package of neoliberal reforms in 1996 with the reassuring name Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR).

Bond’s main task is to explain this outcome as not inevitable. In the view of Vishnu Padayachee, a participant in the debates over political economic strategy over what he calls the ‘decade of liberation, 1985–95’, many participant intellectuals, economists, trade-union activists, and others, had quite differing positions from the neoliberal orientations of the reigning National Party as well as of certain exiled ANC. The textures of these debates have yet to be carefully told.³

Bond insists we must first begin with Marxist principles, particularly with spatial and temporal ‘resolutions’ to crises of overaccumulation, which he argues, following David Harvey’s Marxist geography, only shift crisis tendencies elsewhere.⁴ Throughout his works, Bond tends to agree with Harvey that overaccumulation rather than underconsumption crisis is the underlying logic driving change between relatively stable régimes of accumulation. With this in mind, when Bond begins with the statement that ‘democratic South Africa’s inheritance included an economy that proved not only difficult to manage, but also to understand, particularly in relation to financial turbulence and global integration’ (p. 15), he means that instability in Apartheid political economy was rooted in chronic overproduction from the late 1960s, and more so in the 1970s.

This overproduction only exacerbated the contradictions of the economic base in what Fine and Rustomjee call the minerals-energy complex, exacerbating the livelihoods crises faced by a majority population subject to an extremely low social wage (p. 18).⁵ This was also, of course, the period of radicalisation of the liberation movement through the black consciousness movement, the Soweto uprising, the rebuilding of the underground, the rise of independent black trade unions, and the urban mass movements under the umbrella of the UDF and MDM in the 1980s. Bond’s primary focus remains the logic of capital:

An economic ‘crisis’ – by which is usually meant a situation in which the normal functioning of the system cannot correct intrinsic problems, which instead require resolution beyond the logic of the system – surfaced during the 1970s and became acute during the late 1980s. . . . Theories of the political-economic crisis overlapped with those aimed at resolving the traditional ‘race-class debate’. But what was perhaps most evident about the way the crisis played itself out was that, from the 1960s, ‘unusually’ high levels of machinery compared to workers . . . led to chronic overproduction, relative to the size of the local market. (p. 21.)

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³ Padayachee 2006, p. 2; see also Marais 1998.
⁴ Harvey 1982.
⁵ Fine and Rustomjee 1996.
The argument goes something like this: the Apartheid state’s many attempts to stall or shift crisis in space and time – whether through massive investments in parastatals, infrastructure, housing or industrial decentralism – could not stave off the combined effects of recession, sanctions, militancy and international competition.

Crisis management was trapped in the Apartheid space economy, and capital – particularly decentralised manufacturing capital – began to be increasingly restive. Political change would be necessary to restore the conditions of profitability, and the underlying mechanism guiding the argument in Bond’s choice of materialism is the law of value, and more specifically, overaccumulation crises. This is not where Bond stops, of course. He continues to detail the many means, some fraudulent, through which capital flowed out of productive into financial circuits, and out of the country. Deregulation, capital flight, industrial decline and restoration of corporate power were preconditions within which the ANC was beginning to see its possible accession to political power. Bond’s question remains a vital one to revisit until the answers are satisfactory: was the ANC’s capitulation to these processes a foregone conclusion, and to what extent were these processes inevitable or irreversible?

While giving us several insights into this complex period and its many sleights of hand, Bond shifts gears to try to explain how the deal was struck between corporate elites and the ANC leadership. His answer turns on ‘social contract scenarios’, the topic of a provocative and suggestive chapter. Bond argues that something about the production of knowledge about the economy, wrapped in consultancy speak, was sold to the key political players. The reader is taken through a series of events, but remains unclear why and how consent was actually sought.

Since Power Point has neither intrinsic power nor point, it is unclear how ‘semi-charismatic individuals’ (p. 57) representing corporate interests in scenario planning exercises made common cause with activists of various sorts. For instance, Bond shows how Tucker’s appeal to ‘blame the victim’ analysis of the ‘underclass’ was inspired by US poverty debates, but Bond does not then explain how this argument found favour with South-African audiences (p. 60). Similarly, Bond approaches Raphie Kaplinsky’s celebration of South Africa’s great innovation, the ‘creepy crawly’ pool cleaner, with due sarcasm, to show how limited an export-led approach is to tackle South Africa’s livelihoods crisis (p. 65–6). However, Bond does not analyse how Kaplinsky and others come to celebrate ‘industrial flexibility’, how this concept found favour with thinkers emerging from the trade-union movement, like Mike Morris, and, indeed, how and to what effect these ideas become hegemonic within dominant policy discourse.

These questions ought not to detract from the usefulness of *Elite Transition*; indeed, what I would like to suggest are ways to move forward through more detailed analysis of debates as well as silences, apparent closures, un-questioned common sense, and the extent to which ideological reversals were unanticipated.

Bond does go some distance in *Elite Transition* in showing the reader how the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) was from its inception within a terrain of struggle over how to ‘decommodify’ and ‘destratify’ basic needs goods (p. 93). Bond argues that the RDP set the ground for transforming political questions concerning ‘reconstruction and development’ into a merely technical enterprise.6 Like other books that use James

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Ferguson’s argument without his ethnographic method, we do not get a sense of how development discourse actually works, despite its best intentions. One cannot then simply believe that ‘reconstruction and development… became code words for patriotism, as society’s traditional economic elite (egged on by the ANC’s comprador class) won back the ability to demarcate the national project’ (p. 96). Statements like this flatten the evidence in *Elite Transition*, presenting classes as fixed, class interests as Manichean, and hegemony as structurally necessary.

*Elite Transition* provides tantalising leads into debates and practices – for instance, in COSATU arguments for using ‘fiscal discipline’ to reign in subsidies to certain parastatals or to unproductive white farmers. And Bond does indicate that some of these debates were ‘resolved’ through the *Realpolitik* of actual state institutions, compromised in various practical ways. What this signals is the necessity to revisit not just old debates, but also the practical limits and possibilities in institutions as they dealt with the ‘merely technical’ details of incorporating agents with substantially different visions and solidarities.

The most compelling portion of *Elite Transition* is its most grounded section on the housing question. This chapter crystallises several elements of Bond’s broader argument about ‘élite transition’, by tracing the ways in which neoliberal orthodoxy insinuated itself into housing policy in the final years of Apartheid, and the ways in which a market-centric approach was reinforced rather than called into question through a technocratic, depoliticised policy process. Bond interrogates knowledge production under the pro-capital Urban Foundation through the transition, and shows how, despite a series of popular invasions of land and vacant housing stock, the multi-stakeholder National Housing Forum emerged as a market-centred institution, toothless in the wake of grossly inadequate low-cost housing for the newly enfranchised population.

However, just when Bond’s lens zooms in, it zooms back out to counter ‘conventional progressive critiques of the near-mythical importance of the Bretton Woods Institutions’ (p. 155); his point being that neoliberalism was not foisted directly by the World Bank, but was disseminated piecemeal through policy networks. How has this hegemony by other means actually worked? Once more, Bond indict the advocacy work of the Urban Foundation, particularly in supporting policy to continue to repay Apartheid’s foreign debt, and to lower the social wage in the interests of global competition. Much of the narrative turns to direct criticism of specific personalities: Thabo Mbeki, Trevor Manuel, Alec Erwin and others who, we are told, made South Africa’s ‘élite transition’ possible because ‘they believed in neoliberalism (or at best they believed “There Is No Alternative”)’ (p. 190). But what is the nature of this ‘belief’?

The question that is not answered is how ‘World Bank knowledge’ became hegemonic and how consent was sought. Instead, Bond’s approach to dialectics takes him to a specific kind of conclusion about emergent forms of post-Apartheid praxis:

> [It] could have been worse, had the Bank established the sort of lending relationship it desired and that many local neoliberals advocated vigorously. What prevented a tighter hold on South Africa was, simply, the capacity of the progressive social forces to think globally and act locally. Ironically, the ANC had shown the way to locating the vulnerabilities of the international system and developing political strategies accordingly during the successful 1980s anti-Apartheid sanctions campaign. That capacity did not die. Deepening the
resistance to neoliberal globalization at a time the world economy degenerates into both bouts of volatility and new, dangerous forms of geopolitical arrangement, is the subject of the final chapter. (p. 191.)

*Elite Transition* concludes by counterposing the globalisation of people to contemporary imperialism. From the perspective of the former, Bond then tabulates ‘five broad tendencies associated with very different reactions to the crisis which appeared, by 1998 or so’ (p. 201). These tendencies, to which he returns in *Against Global Apartheid* and *Talk Left*, *Walk Right*, are: the Washington Consensus; the Old World Order (which in *Against Global Apartheid* he calls ‘the resurgent US right wing’); the Post-Washington Consensus, Third-World nationalism, and; new social movements (or, in *Against Global Apartheid*, ‘Global Justice Movements’). The question Bond asks is how antiglobalisation activism in various parts of the world might connect. He notes

a variety of other important, organised social forces which didn’t fit neatly into any camp (such as Muslim fundamentalists, Andean left-wing guerrillas, Chinese ‘communists’ or still stodgy US trade unionists) but which had the potential to influence local or regional matters. (p. 210.)

One must add the populism surrounding Jacob Zuma to this mixture. How might these more ambiguous tendencies, and their allies, aid or thwart progressive activism?

Thankfully, Bond returns to solid ground to answer this question. He indicts the demobilisation and co-optation of civil society, and he details critiques of the entire first cabinet from farmers, welfare, rights activists, teachers’ unions, anti-privatisation groups, HIV/AIDS activists and other social forces. The conclusion is dizzying in its attempt at comprehensiveness. It is deeply informed, yet difficult to contain, and the key thread is what Bond sees as the world-historic contribution to the emerging global-justice movement:

From Apartheid to neoliberalism in South Africa is not simply a wrong turn due to elite pacting, therefore, but is also a signpost along an admittedly arduous road of social struggle, leading our comrades from one century to the next. (p. 252.)

Before turning to Desai’s counterpoint to this Prometheus vision, I turn briefly to *Against Global Apartheid* and *Talk Left*, *Walk Right*, both of which in various ways elaborate arguments in *Elite Transition*. *Against Global Apartheid* begins with a big argument: that the ANC ‘deal makers’ traded-off political liberation for economic liberalisation, or, as Bond puts it, ‘the release of local capital from Apartheid’s *laager*’ (p. viii). ‘Global Apartheid’ is a term used by Thabo Mbeki to describe international political economy; Bond does not clarify the concept’s status, but he treats it as synonymous with global inequality, to argue that, in fact, the South-African government has been contributing to such a process (p. xi).

Like *Elite Transition*, *Against Global Apartheid* roots its analysis in crisis theory, but Bond’s key question is whether, given the many failures of structural adjustment in Africa, resistance can be linked across forms, issues and scales. A chapter written with Darlene Miller and Greg Ruiters asks this question of Southern Africa as a region in relation to Samir Amin’s thesis of regional de-linking from global dependence (p. 33). This chapter is
most persuasive when it is most historically grounded in detailing the class and nationalist politics of liberation movements (p. 38), the specificities of industrialisation and de-industrialisation (p. 39), the crises of basic needs production and consumption (p. 41), and when examining the emergent forms of environmentalist and regionalist labour unionism (pp. 44–51).

Not surprisingly, the narrative in Against Global Apartheid shifts back out to a global critique of the Bretton Woods institutions, and to specific personalities tainted by them (pp. 55–6). This is Bond’s most comfortable narrative ground. There are important arguments here, as in the strong critique of World Bank support for the Apartheid state, but Bond also reinforces many of the broader arguments made in Elite Transition on the nature of transition and its global implications, as he puts it, for people and for capital (p. 106).

The five streams in global politics mentioned in Elite Transition are now tabulated in an impressive matrix that arrays the five tendencies and lists in their ‘main argument’, ‘key institutions’, and ‘key proponents’, the latter including practically everyone from Lula to Bush to Obasanjo to Vandana Shiva (pp. 94–5). One must ask how this ‘order of things’ is to be interpreted; is it a Rosetta Stone that allows anyone to see where their ideological orientations fit? Once again, I must ask my tired question: how is consent sought and challenged, since we cannot presume this takes place through a grand play of ‘main arguments’? Where are vacillation, coercion, dissent or passive acceptance of ideology? Where are the contradictions and ambiguities that provide fodder for populist leaders past and present?

Bond goes on to make an important critique of Mbeki’s use of the term ‘global Apartheid’, and then shows, as in Elite Transition, that this concept is compromised by dominant conceptions of globalisation as an inevitable process of market extension, trade liberalisation, technological change, and so on. Deftly deconstructing Mbeki’s technological-determinist use of ‘global Apartheid’ (p. 139), Bond poses his alternative, a call for global solidarity, a new global anti-apartheid movement. Once more, Bond is most convincing when he is most concrete, as in a chapter that tries to link neoliberalism and Mbeki’s ‘denialism’ of links between HIV and AIDS, by showing the many ways in which neoliberalism defeats the denialist ‘logic’ that AIDS is a consequence of poverty.

It appears Bond prefers to end books with the general and global, and he does it again in Against Global Apartheid, this time through world-systems theory (p. 208), a seemingly simple choice with respect to the Bretton Woods institutions – ‘Fix it or nix it’ (p. 209) – a world tour of antiglobalisation struggle, and, via the Zapatistas, a call for ‘antiglobalisation activists’ to both ally with international movements and also make more proximal demands to their nation-states around specific social goods (p. 237). What remains unquestioned is the fact that vast arenas of poor peoples’ activism are not conducted under the ‘antiglobalisation’ tag nor are they conceived of through a critique of neoliberalism. While questions of counter-hegemony remain unexplored, Bond makes a much more serious response by turning to the broader conditions for an alternative to ‘global Apartheid’ centred on curbing the power of finance capital.

7. As in Marks 1986.
The case for capital controls emerged powerfully after the East-Asian Crisis of 1997–8, and Bond takes care to provide a detailed plan for reversing financial liberalisation. This programme includes the case for imposing financial security under the aegis of the Reserve Bank, controlling flows of foreign direct investment, reducing current- and capital-account vulnerabilities (by revisiting import substitution, or raising taxes on luxury imports), lowering interest rates, and shifting finance-capital from speculative and unproductive sectors to meet human needs. This laudable list of suggestions for ‘even development’ returns to the principles of the RDP. Bond now argues for a more thoroughly democratised decommodification and destratification of basic needs goods and services (p. 283), and for an alliance between social-justice movements and left Keynesians, to conceive of effective alternatives to neoliberal globalisation.

Unlike *Elite Transition* and *Against Global Apartheid*, *Talk Left, Walk Right* begins with a more accessible narrative style, with the cartoons of the great public intellectual Jonathan Zapiro providing a parallel conversation with the text. Bond begins by quickly backtracking from his conclusion in *Against Global Apartheid*, in response to activists who take a less compromising position; he now confirms that *Against Global Apartheid* ended in technicism – feasible ‘policy reform options’ – I no longer harbour such pretensions’ (p. x), instead of which he consigns Mbeki and ‘his colleagues . . . [to a] subimperial role which will be much the same as that of Apartheid-era Bantustan leaders’ (p. xi). No small lambaste, that. Bond continues to use the category ‘global Apartheid’ to mean global inequality, produced by overaccumulation crisis and capitalist uneven development (pp. 4–5), but he now more forcefully argues that Pretoria’s failure to reform global apartheid has spurred a ‘new left opposition’ to become ‘an important social force’ (p. 9).

One of Bond’s key cases is the Treatment Access Campaign (TAC), which is probably the key agent in getting the state, after much (and ongoing) foot-dragging, to agree to a roll-out of anti-retroviral therapy (p. 11). It must be said, however, that TAC’s position has been to co-ordinate multiple arenas of activism in the courts, streets, communities, global networks, and within the ruling alliance. *Talk Left, Walk Right* also returns to the metaphor of five great ‘political streams’, elaborated further. Now, each ‘stream’ has its internal contradictions, and a sub-table list of South African ‘institutions’ and ‘internal disputes’ along the five columns.

Interestingly, South-African ‘global-justice movements’ include the more well known post-Apartheid ‘social movements’ as well as the Centre for Civil Society, now headed by Bond, but the ‘right wing’ includes only the Boeremag. While the table is now more provocative and interesting than earlier iterations, what continues to be elided are conflicts and hegemonic projects that bridge the currents. Once again, where would the groundswell of support for Jacob Zuma fit, with its appeals to ‘Zulu masculinity’, sexual violence, struggle fetishism and populist largesse, and its very significant class bases among the rural poor as well as the heights of corporate capital? More importantly, how does support for Zuma challenge how we understand governmental power and its critics in South Africa today? How does this populism make room for fierce critique of certain aspects of post-Apartheid social inequality, while also reproducing multiple conservatisms, not least for black women who face the brunt of the current régime of social domination? What I would

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8. For the argument with reference to East Asia, see Wade 2003.
like to suggest later in this review is that this is precisely where reading Bond and Desai in counterpoint becomes useful.

The bulk of *Talk Left, Walk Right* is an argument about Pretoria’s double-speak as it claims to combat various aspects of ‘global Apartheid’ while achieving the opposite. Bond takes on this argument in relation to racism (the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, WCAR), trade (the 2003 Cancun meeting of the WTO), finance-capital (the 2002 United Nations Finance for Development Conference), G8-Africa relations (the New Partnership for Africa’s Development, NEPAD), sustainable development (the World Summit on Sustainable Development, WSSD), and water (privatisation, damming and other water struggles). I will not rehearse each of these arguments, which Bond takes on with admirable attention to detail. What Bond demonstrates in each case is the thinness of official ANC ‘leftism’, and something more like ‘walking right and talking right’, whether in Mbeki and Mandela refusing support for the court actions for reparations from corporations that profited from Apartheid, or in Trevor Manuel’s stance on privatisation and financial liberalisation, or in Pretoria’s inability to ‘promote democracy’ in Nigeria or Zimbabwe.

In contrast to earlier books, *Talk Left, Walk Right* includes critiques from ANC headquarters aimed at Bond and others on the ‘ultraleft’, variously decried as ‘foreigners’, partisans, or ‘real neoliberal’, followed by a blistering counter-rebuke from key COSATU spokespeople to the effect that the ANC headquarters ought to defend its neoliberalism rather than ‘wrapping up their argument in pseudo-Marxist mumbo jumbo about “revolutionary democracy”, irrelevant passages from Marx and Lenin and wild conspiracy theories’ (p. 187). Once more, Bond arrives at a narrative climax on a concrete terrain of struggle, then abruptly zooms back out to ‘global Apartheid’, now synonymous with imperialism, detouring through Rosa Luxemburg, David Harvey and Samir Amin to a similarly broad argument to the other books I have reviewed, on the contradictions of contemporary imperialism, the case for ‘nixing’ the Bretton-Woods institutions, and for regional strategies of deglobalisation and decommodification compelled by a combination of global-justice movements and Third-World nationalists.

Bond’s last few word on ‘what is to be done’ are important to his conception of post-Apartheid praxis:

>If the bulk of work lies in activism, however, that does not mean the intellectual project can be set aside. Even if the theory of uneven development is explored from many angles, it will still be necessary to expand our case studies of concrete forms of unevenness, and to demonstrate in both intellectual and political terms that the theory can easily jump scale from local to global and back. (p. 236.)

On the one hand, this separation of theory from ‘case studies’, intellectual from political work is consistent with the work Bond classifies as theory: works by Aglietta, Bond himself, and Harvey. On the other hand, it enables collaborative projects like *Unsustainable South Africa*, in which the theory and ‘case studies’ can remain relatively separable.

Collectively written with David Hallowes, Stephen Hosking, George Dor, Becky Himlin, Greg Ruiters, Robyn Stein, Maj Fiel-Flynn, Stephen Greenberg, Michael Dorsey and Thulani Guliwe, *Unsustainable South Africa* begins with a statement from Bond that this is the culmination of his series of eight books. At the heart of this book are very thorough and useful studies of the politics and political economy of Mandela Metropole’s Coega Port
Development and Industrial Development Zone, and the World-Bank-funded Lesotho Highlands Water Project, followed by chapters on the ANC’s use of sustainability discourse as well as community responses in literally bringing ‘power to the people’ as in Soweto’s Operation Khanyisa.

Bond tends to meta-narrativise as he does in all his books considered here, this time through a typology of ‘environment-development discourses’ which he calls neoliberalism, sustainable development and environmental justice (p. 27). In parallel with his other work, Bond sees the ANC-led alliance as putting forth a watered down version of sustainable development consistent with neoliberalism, while brewing red-green contradictions in society add fuel to the radical alternative of environmental justice. There is much more to commend in the grounded studies in the book. For instance, the Coega research is a very powerful indictment that returns to the salience of Fine and Rustomjee’s argument about the enclave nature of development led by the minerals-energy complex. Additionally, the Lesotho highlands project integrates analysis of flawed sustainable development talk with ongoing corruption and parasitism. Unsustainable South Africa makes a persuasive point in reframing the Anti-Privatisation Forum and Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee as new sites of radical environmental justice, but again this opens questions as to what kinds of environmental consciousness actually pervade the body politic in the wake of the many layers of environmental devastation since 1994 documented in this collection.

Bond’s tendency through his body of work has been, steadfastly and relentlessly, to manoeuvre between an abstract theory of overaccumulation crisis and neoliberal imperialism with the nitty-gritty of governmental debate and action, from the perspectives of a Third-Worldist welfarism (the RDP) and an emergent global movement. Situated between global political currents, each book holds to Promethean, world-historical theoretical and political tasks. What falls out of this analysis, however, are the questions of how hegemony and counterhegemony are lived, reproduced, and pulled apart. The evolution of Bond’s grand chart of political streams demonstrates this, as the last table tries to incorporate internal struggles, divergences and recombinations in grappling with emergent politics. Ashwin Desai is the perfect counterpoint to Bond’s strategy of radical critique, as he begins with mundane personalities, politically ambiguous figures and the changing experiential grounds of struggle.

Ashwin Desai: anti-mythology machine

Desai’s early work emerges from a set of critiques of the way the ‘Indian question’ has been used and manipulated by various political constituencies in twentieth-century South Africa. If there is a primary intellectual anchor in Desai’s work, it seems to be the rich tradition of South-African historiography, though he maintains a streetwise scepticism of scholasticism, and a resolutely Gramscian insistence on the inseparability of historical and interpretive dimensions from cold, hard political economy. Ashwin Desai is also a wordsmith, rabble-rouser, preacher man and smooth talker. You can almost hear people listen when you read the words of this agent provocateur, as he was known on his newspaper column. Desai uses social-scientific language sparingly, in clear preference to the art of persuasion, and while he draws from Marxist social history, he departs from the strict conventions of this genre, usually to effect.
Desai's first book, *Arise Ye Coolies*, begins in a youthful first person voice that is poetic, sometimes playful – 'I have been away but now I am Black (well sometimes)' – and also piercingly angry at post-Apartheid mystifications of race, nation and history:

But I am queasy. I have contempt for those who argue that the major racial issues in our country have been settled. I am amazed by the way the new political class talk of Sunsets and Rainbows; for me this is pie in the sky. I can hardly remember a time when there was so much forgetting. Principally what is forgotten is our past dedication to class struggle and the unity of the oppressed. But as much as the new politicos suffer from bouts of amnesia over this, their commissioned intellectuals are actively 'remembering'; constructing a smooth nation that is riven with wealth gaps. And this nation-inventing is done, in academia, with no cutting edge, no sense of advocacy for the marginalised. The space that has opened up for the Indian to move, to be re-defined, to spread out her edges and thrive has been strangled by a stubborn and spiteful kind of theory. It moves in from both the right and the left to centre the Indian as a meaningful category still. But the centre cannot hold the aspirations of the disadvantaged; it cannot house them, it cannot feed them. Instead a bitter and unnourishing medicine is forced down our throats; a profit-growth medicine for our four-nation throats. And I am queasy. (p. i.)

What should immediately be clear is Desai's focus on rhetoric, as he feigns mock frustration with terms like 'Sunsets and Rainbows', referring to the ‘Sunset Clause’ used to secure power-sharing in the Government of National Unity and to ‘Rainbow Nation’ multicultural ideology.

Desai’s stakes are clear: racism and ‘the unity of the oppressed’ are being forgotten just as race and nation are being re-invented through ‘a spiteful kind of theory’. We are not given the structural detail that Bond begins with. No crisis of overaccumulation. No intellectual canon, at least not explicitly. There are indications of poststructuralism in the critique of ‘centreing the Indian’, but the next sentence twists the meaning of ‘centre’ to return to material conditions, and to a crisis of social reproduction as the central government cannot feed or house, let alone ‘hold the aspirations’ of the poor. For the majority, transition from Apartheid is a cultural and political-economic crisis, and post-Apartheid development is just ‘a profit-growth medicine for our four-nation throats’, meaning a society still divided into racial ‘nations’, as is referred to in everyday speech in South Africa.

*Arise Ye Coolies* is no ordinary treatise on ‘the Indian question’, but one that treats Indian affiliation as ‘rejected, contested, shaped’ (p. iii) in relation to the multiculturalism of the Rainbow Nation. Desai will have no truck with any of these mythologies. Instead, he takes the reader on a whirlwind stylised history from indentured labour to the making of the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), to the infamous 1949 riots – to which he opposes the dominant rendition of African-Indian conflict, to call it both an anti-Indian pogrom and resistance to urban segregation. The narrative includes all the important milestones: the emergence of the Congress Alliance and ensuing repression; the consolidation of Apartheid through the Group Areas Act and forced removals; and the making of separate systems of political representation through the South-African Indian Council (SAIC), the Coloured Peoples' Representative Council (CPRC), and homeland tribal authorities for Africans.
Desai explains the NIC and SAIC as not just institutions for exacting concessions from the racial state, but also as hegemonic responses to extra-parliamentary struggle. As the narrative approaches the contradictions of the 1980s, Desai portrays the SAIC and the NIC as terrains of conflict with specific limits and possibilities. Questions of participation recur in the SAIC and the NIC, particularly in the wake of the rise and spread of the Black Consciousness Movement and of independent trade unions in the 1970s. The narrative dwells in the details of organisational and regional politics, as anti-SAIC campaigns fed into the coalition of groups under the United Democratic Front (UDF) formed in 1983 to mobilise against the sham Tricameral Parliament which gave limited political voice to Indians and Coloureds, and not the black majority.

Desai's analysis of activism in 1980s Durban conveys the difficulties of maintaining the UDF-affiliated Durban Housing Action Committee (DHAC), after many of its NIC supporters either went underground or into exile in the late 1980s as part of the banned African National Congress (ANC). Debates within the NIC in this period had to do with whether or not to follow Leninist ‘democratic centralism’, as well as conflicts between lineages in ANC networks. Crucially, *Arise Ye Coolies* closes the analysis of the NIC in the 1980s with a resurgence of violence in the Inanda riots of 1985 in which African-Indian conflict demonstrated vividly that the NIC had not managed to forge ‘nonracialism’ in Durban.

Desai’s real invective is directed at opportunism and co-optation in the Indian ‘House of Delegates’ in the Tricameral system, particularly by a political chameleon called Amichand Rajbansi, the ‘Bengal Tiger’, supporter of P.W. Botha’s State of Emergency between 1985–90 as well as of South-African Defence Force raids on frontline states. Once more, however, he views the failure of the House of Delegates to access Indian consent as a terrain of struggle which served to draw more Indians into politics and, potentially, out of their racialised cocoons. The thwarting of this potential makes Desai pull the break on his historical narrative.

*Arise Ye Coolies* poses a key question to the post-Apartheid moment: why did so many Indian South Africans vote against the black majority? Desai refuses Manichean explanation, and turns instead to sources of hegemony within Indian communities: to separate schools and media and to appeals to ethnicity, tradition, language and culture. Desai goes even farther to hazard that the central dampening agent to nonracial militancy is psychoanalytic: it is sexual repression that serves the crucial social function, and the mythology of the Indian family that keeps the South-African ‘Indian question’ in check. This is a central argument in *Arise Ye Coolies*, and although Desai’s conceptions of gender and sexuality are dated – for instance, in ideas of a patriarchal order or of a relatively unchanging Indian family under Apartheid – the insight that discourses of sexuality can be instrumental to capitalist hegemony remains prescient.

With discourses of sexual propriety bolstering ‘Indian identity’, racialism and conservatism seem to have an immanent logic, so that ‘African’ and ‘Indian’ could be posed as inevitable enemies in the Inanda Riots, or of Zulu nationalism to be seen as anti-Indian. Writing against this myth-making, Desai concludes *Arise Ye Coolies* with a dazzling critique of the ceremony surrounding the inauguration of the first democratically elected president, as he turns directly to the strange rituals on display:
In the persons of the suitably benign, suitably obsequious pundit, moulana, pastor and rabbi – the organizers had assembled the representatives of social and sexual repression *par excellence*. That this foursome of affable hypocrites was given the platform to bless the nation is no small matter, for it signalled clearly into which symbolic order the ANC had inserted itself. (p. 113.)

Desai’s ethnographic vignette of Mandela’s inauguration blends analysis of the aesthetics of hegemony with the emergence of new forms of racialisation. As F.W. de Klerk put it, ‘the “New South Africa” would recognize the reality of the need for people and communities to remain themselves and to be able to preserve the values that are precious to them – so that the Zulus, the Xhosas, the Sothos, and the whites can each feel secure in their own distinctiveness’ (p. 115): in other words, separate development of a new kind.

Like Patrick Bond, Desai sees the emergence of renewed forms of class inequality and state cynicism. However, while Bond tries to link an abstract structuralism to institutions, Desai’s narrative is concretely grounded in an interpretive or constructivist historical materialism. Interpretation and hegemony are central to the bitter irony of the racialised archaism in the title’s imperative, *Arise Ye Coolies!*. Desai clarifies his intentions in his concluding analysis of ‘the official version of Rainbowism . . . a diabolical matter’. Desai sees ‘Rainbowism’ as essentially two-faced: seeming to promote non-racialism, while leaving intact pervasive racial structures in governance and experience. As he puts it:

[T]he purely negative effect of the rainbow philosophy is to make impossible and impolite the language which talks not about representation but direct participation in governance. This change of discourse remains the central feature of the Liberation Movement’s transition to electoral politics. Rainbowism is the ideology that obscures the workings of this transition…. One might ask though why this happens. Is it not perhaps an unintended consequence of an otherwise sincere project? Not really. It seems clear as time goes by that continued racial regimentation suits the new political class all too well. It provides them with the temporal cover to insert themselves into the political-economy before the full effects of South Africa’s entry into the global shark pool are felt. By constantly stressing racial difference the message is given out that Mandela and the [Government of National Unity] alone are symbols powerful enough to negotiate these divides peacefully. Posing class struggle as a threat to ordered race relations as well as ordered economic growth, rainbowism anticipates and cuts off class solidarity. The discourse of rainbowism, despite its moments of hysterical intimacy, functions strictly to codify the outpourings of unity and delivery of reconciliation and strictly delimits the linkages that may occur between groups as they do find new ways of living together. It is nice as far as it goes but like its economic arm, the RDP, the logic of rainbow-racialism ultimately functions to contain and constrain other more revolutionary interventions on the body and body politic. (p. 119–20.)

In other words, ‘Rainbowism’ does many things: it has aided the transition from a many-stranded mass movement and from the idea of ‘people’s power’ to a centralised ANC and a democratic state uncommitted to actual de-racialisation of society. Rainbowism, like other
kinds of multiculturalism, presents an artificial social unity in order to prevent actual solidarities among the oppressed.

*Arise Ye Coolies* ends precisely with a call to this forgotten multitude: not to the proletarian-revolutionary vanguard or the parliamentarian, but ‘a call to support and agitate for rebellion in the family, in the classroom, the squatter camp, the workplace and the streetcorner…. And it is here where we struggle; to shatter the prism of the rainbow’ (p. 126). This is a post-Apartheid clarion that refuses a vanguardist ideology as its driving force.

*We Are the Poors* picks up the challenge of representing this motley crew, and is written as a political intervention to knit together diverse contemporary struggles. While Bond’s tactic in this respect is to link local struggles to an abstract logic of overaccumulation crisis and uneven development, as well as to five global political currents and a brewing global crisis, Desai’s tactic is molecular and involves dwelling in the daily life of ‘the poors’. The word is itself a ‘concrete abstraction’ emerging from a poor old woman under threat of eviction. When an ‘African’ counsellor shouted at the old woman and accused her of being an Indian who refused to give up her privilege of housing because she could not pay her rates, Girlie Amod shouted back ‘We are not Indians! We are the poors!’ *We Are the Poors* is a rewrite and elaboration of the locally published *The Poors of Chatsworth*, from which the analysis abstracts from a history of struggle in one neighbourhood, to a roving ethnography of emergent political activism:

To say that this struggle begins in Chatsworth is a kind of shorthand, which saves the trouble of explaining each time that, like all revolts that grow, it has many beginnings…. When I started writing this story, Chatsworth was both a place and a struggle. It should become apparent as the story unfolds that Chatsworth has also become a politics. Race and class, the old chestnuts, still loom large. But new political variants have emerged, happily immune to infection by Robben Islanders, exiles, and other ethnic entrepreneurs; the ruling post-Apartheid political faction. Unemployed, single mother, community defender, neighbour, factory worker, popular criminal, rap artist and genuine ou (good human being). These constructs have all come to make up the collective identities of ‘the poors’. (p. 7.)

With this, *We Are the Poors* answers the concluding call in *Arise Ye Coolies*, but now its sights are set less on the excesses of the élite populism and recuperations of the past than on emergent struggles. Chatsworth *is* a new politics, replete with ‘old chestnuts’. What is new about this politics is its innovativeness in terms and instruments, in confronting democratic government ‘with force rather than violence’, in using activism in the courts as publicity and inspiration for revolt elsewhere, and in using folk cultural means, like rap or religious tropes, such as a Hindu festival of lights, which Diwali recast as a festival of no lights. What is also new, yet reminiscent of an earlier era of activism, are ways in which the leadership is castigated as ‘agitator, radical and counterrevolutionary, used interchangeably’ but now bereft of ‘the easy moral satisfaction of the anti-Apartheid struggle’ (p. 8).

Desai very rarely enters the text in first person to tell the reader that he is one of this new leadership, negotiating tenuous relations with activists of various class backgrounds. He
does, however, self-consciously pose *We Are the Poors* as different from that of writers like Bond and Hein Marais who have documented various aspects of betrayed revolution: ‘This is a different kind of book. It aims to give some account of the lived experience of both the human cost of the ANC’s capitulation to domestic and international capital and the growing resistance to the ANC’ (p. 12). In appealing to lived experience, Desai makes the case for ethnography and social history. However, departing from strict adherence to these genres, he takes license in reconstructing lives and frustrations of ‘the poors’. Indeed, it must be said that he does not rely much on the intellectual labour of poor people themselves, and in this sense he does not attend to what Jacques Rancière calls the ‘nights of labour’, literally the twilight hours in which nineteenth-century French workers sat and wrote from their critical imaginations.9 Instead, Desai speaks for the lives of the poor in dispassionate terms, saving his silver-tongued sarcasm for political turncoats and purveyors of party lines, in shifting narrative registers that invites the reader to participate in the sharpening class divisions that create the poors as active participants in post-Apartheid history. Rhetoric is key to Desai’s works.

The substance of Desai’s argument in *We Are the Poors* is equally important to think of against Bond’s books. The historical frame is similar, as is a large share of their stance on the ruling alliance. However, Desai begins not with an abstract logic, but with a historically and geographically situated argument about the emergence of post-Apartheid struggles through one neighbourhood in Durban, Chatsworth, in the last decade of Apartheid. A participant of Durban’s political scene in the 1980s, committed to a nonracial and cosmopolitan proletarianism, Desai sifts through Chatsworth’s struggles to find a set of subjects who appear to respond to his provocation at the end of *Arise Ye Coolies*.

The first half of *We Are the Poors* is a sketch of Chatsworth’s racial constitution through the Group Areas Act, forced removals, and the remaking of various colourful aspects of community: gangs, drugs, youth style and anti-Apartheid politics. The climactic moment is the realisation by the ANC that Chatsworth was still largely conservative when it came to the vote, as Desai anticipated in his prior book. Sociologist and Congress stalwart Professor Fatima Meer of the Institute for Black Research, along with Desai and others, began the Concerned Citizens’ Group as a way of contending with this social reality, by turning to the actual social realities of the poor in Chatsworth.

They found that the terrain of struggle had shifted so much that the main concern of flat residents was the threat of eviction by the Durban Metro Council for non-payment of accumulating rental arrears, under conditions of widespread unemployment. The city council was itself shifting to the sale of flats to tenants, under the condition of payment of arrears, after which ‘owners’ would continue to have to pay rents and levies, all under unchanged conditions of minimal waged work. It was in the context of conflict over precisely this issue that the counsellor accused Girlie Amod of protecting racial privilege, prompting the counter-rebuke that is the title of the book. The ‘coolie’ had arisen, refusing her racialisation. What emerges from Desai’s chronicle of the struggle over rates and evictions is the creative use of the legal system, sometimes to keep the council at bay through technicalities (p. 47), sometimes to deconstruct the extra-legal ways in which the

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poor are stigmatised (as addicts, bootleggers or sexual deviants) to prejudice legal outcomes, and always to question institutionalised class privilege in the new nomos.

At the heart of We Are the Poors is a brilliant chapter called ‘Thulisile Manquele’s Water’, in which Desai’s sharp sarcasm – one of his most important traits as a writer – returns to rebuke the council’s active role in reproducing a poor woman’s subjection to the law, and more precisely to the new nomos that attempts to prevent her from accessing her basic right to six kilolitres of water free of charge. Desai brilliantly links the pathos of Thulisile’s persistence and striving with the injustice that ‘reasons to misspend on military hardware and the Apartheid debt are beyond court scrutiny and once there is no money left, the same courts can safely deny citizens their basic human rights’ (p. 70). But Desai also shows how this ‘good governance’, which uses service delivery as a disciplining mechanism to force displacement rather than attend to the structural origins of non-payment in an eroded social wage, only compels the expansion of ‘popular illegalities of water reconnections’, of ‘struggle plumbers’ and a profusion of resistance, while elsewhere the rich fill their swimming pools and water their lawns with their assured six kilolitres (p. 74–6).

The narrative then shifts focus in the subsequent five chapters, to show how similar struggles proliferate across South Africa. Desai follows the course of these struggles, actively constructing links through his narrative of a brewing counter-hegemonic movement. Desai’s voice now becomes more journalistic, as a participant in marches, meetings and rallies. He follows the fault-lines of activism from forced evictions in coastal Isipingo, to the former ANC-IFP battlegrounds of Mpumalanga township, to the Anti-Eviction Campaign in the Cape Flats, to the illegal reconnections of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, to the community-supported labour militancy of petrochemical artisans in Wentworth, adjacent to the Engen oil refinery in Durban. The way to read this narrative now, after these struggles have ebbed and flowed, might be as an invitation to think more deeply about their origins and dynamics, as Desai himself has done of Chatsworth.

Desai’s concluding chapters abstract from the narrative of emerging politics in two ways. First, Desai documents events bringing various groups together under the Durban Social Forum, and along with similar civic groups from across South Africa at the World Conference Against Racism. This is a chapter about friends and comrades; it is fairly uncritical and descriptive, and people are awarded various appellations – ‘radical’, ‘sage-like’ and so on – which mark the community of activists from both poors and sell-outs. In his later writings, such as his Harold Wolpe lecture, nobody is immune to critique, which is a more defensible position.10 Without really getting into activist sectarianism and personal conflicts, We Are the Poors projects an emergent collectivity of ‘community movements, free from the ideological inhibitions of organised labour or the tired dogmas of the Left’ (p. 139). A laudable goal, even when it is at odds with reality.

Secondly, however, Desai concludes by returning to the materiality of the poors and their poverties: to fragile bodies, torn families and abandoned childhoods, but also to a thirsty woman sharing her little water, and to new forms of community activism ‘led mainly by women’ (p. 142). In these final reflections, Desai sees the new politics as not driven by a critique of the hegemony of the Bretton Woods institutions – contra Patrick Bond – nor

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driven to consider reforming existing institutions. Instead, enduring all odds to make a
pitance to secure a modicum of social services, Desai sees people opting out: ‘The majority
just stay put’ (p. 144). Throughout the book, Desai has shown poor people, whose power
is in their physicality in numbers, show up in front of their immediate ‘adversaries’ – the
local police, the mayor, the local big man.

In his conclusion, Desai says this is only the tip of the iceberg; staying put can mean
refusing to work, refusing to pay, and forging new forms of mutuality. Reflecting with
another post-Apartheid critic, Franco Barchiesi, Desai finds what he thinks is at the heart
of ‘the lived environment of the poors’:

That was it: the capacity to sense collective joy (and also misery) seemed
heightened here in comparison to other ‘sites of struggle,’ like the factory,…
The left has been unable to recognise the teeming life in between. Life! This is
not just a theoretical issue. The practice of left organisation in South Africa
had become so disconnected from the dreams, desires and emotions of ourselves
and the people among whom we had moved these last few years as to be completely
ineffective…. There is a rich, complex, imperfect, and sensuous collectivity
existing in the communities I have written about. And the way certain of
these needs are expressed and stubbornly held onto as the basis for action is not
frowned upon by people in the DSF as it is, even if secretly, by many socialists.
(pp. 144–6.)

There is a thread here, between Desai’s discovery of women’s activist labour, the remaking
of mutuality, the re-valuation of ‘life’ beyond its subjugation to capital, and this provocative
discovery of sensuality. Recall that Arise Ye Coolies located the secret lair of the reproduction
of racialised class domination in the ‘Indian family’, and in the ANC’s interpellation
by structures of religion and patriarchy. Desai understood these phenomena through
psychoanalytic and universalist-feminist tools that presume religion and family to be sites
of domination.

Turning now to the origins of resistance rather than social domination, Desai sees the
same arenas of experience of sources of persistence, solidarity and innovation. Rather than
reflecting further on the nature of power and critique, however, Desai returns to the more
secure, historicist position of the political commentator who must say something predictive,
and is not afraid of erring on the side of voluntarism:

They are developing a form of class politics, but imbued with passions beyond
left politics. This movement has a world-historical sense of itself but focuses on
combat with local enemies and thrives on small victories. We are at that precarious
point in South African history where something precious and powerful is coming
into being. (p. 149.)

This is perhaps where Bond and Desai converge once more, in their hope that their work is
part of a brewing global movement. Elsewhere, Desai is more guarded. The collaborative
venture between Desai, Vishnu Padayachee, Krish Reddy and Goolam Vahed in Blacks in
Whites, steps back from this apparent voluntarism and back into the challenges of structural
transformation. Desai et al. (2002) view cricket ‘beyond the boundary’, as C.L.R. James
put it, as a window into broader questions of race, class, anti-Apartheid and post-Apartheid politics, and it is this aspect that I focus on briefly here. Much of *Blacks in Whites* is concerned with documenting the histories of black cricket, with all its internal divisions and racisms, from sources that are few and far between. While documenting struggles to make cricket nonracial, the writers face various rigidities in historiography and contemporary society.

*Blacks in Whites* does not read like a book by Ashwin Desai; his prose has been tempered by more sober writers, and by an incomplete story about transforming cricket into a people’s sport. In contrast to the brewing movement in *We Are the Poors*, the last chapter of *Blacks in Whites* approaches the institutional obstacles to deracialisation, redress, and racial representivity in what continues to be a white-dominated sport. Desai et al. show quite provocatively how as early as 1990 it appeared that the ANC sought to use sport, and the ‘readmission’ of South Africa into international cricket as a way ‘to placate Whites’ in a process parallel to the broader shifts Bond calls ‘elite-pacting’ (p. 365). Actual de-racialisation of the sport would prove to be a long, hard struggle. As the South-African cricket team lost its pariah status in international cricket despite remaining an all-white team, F.W. de Klerk’s telegram to the team captain, Kepler Wessels, is indeed chilling: ‘Your victory is a victory for all of us over years of isolation and rejection’ (p. 375, citing *The Star* 27 February, 1992).

What we glimpse here are the many layers of racialised experience and consciousness – something that Desai was trying to expose in *Arise Ye Coolies!* The last chapter of Desai et al. charts various struggles, including the meagre attempts at cricket ‘development programmes’, at supporting black schools cricket, and at challenging the many barriers to entry into a white-dominated sport. Meetings at the national level addressing racism in cricket in 1997–8 showed that tensions concerning quotas, affirmative action, ‘Africanisation’ and many types of racism continue to dog South African cricket. The authors conclude with the advice of master spin bowler Thopan Parsuramen to pursue and celebrate new arenas for black participation in cricket, and also, they add, the effects of de-racialisation beyond the boundary.

**Conclusion: resistance and the ‘nights of labour’**

I conclude this extended review essay by turning to some general points from reading Bond and Desai in counterpoint. As I have mentioned, there is much to be gained by returning through histories of South Africa’s decade of liberation, 1985–95, to interrogate more carefully its ‘failed revolution’.11 In an important article on what became of radical intellectuals and the ferment of dissent, Desai and Heinrich Bohmke take to task a class of social scientists who, by the mid-1970s, wrote important Marxist analyses of capitalism and Apartheid, built ties with the labour movement, and anticipated the possibility of transition to socialism. Here are Desai and Bohmke’s ‘three discoveries’:

First, the ‘betrayal’ in SA may be theoretical conservatism on our part. In other words, the sense of betrayal might arise from a misplaced expectation that intellectuals continue to perform a role described by one particular theory of the intellectual whereas the rather dramatic and relatively peaceful end to Apartheid foisted upon intellectuals constraints best described by another theory. Second, the effects of configuring oneself to act as a ‘valid’ intellectual within the international knowledge/power system has depoliticised the university-based intellectual in particular ways. And third, the absence of a working-class counterculture as well as the collapse of organs of people’s power, taken together with changes to SA’s class composition have meant that the very process whereby ‘organic’ intellectuals are elaborated has been interrupted.\(^\text{12}\)

While others have reflected on the shift to technicist, depoliticised social science, Desai and Bohmke’s last point is key. They elaborate on the loss of rites of passage, of arrests and bannings, and of a struggle subculture replete with ‘little badges and struggle T-shirts, African art, hedonism, pot, surreptitious visits to the townships, adrenalin rallies, sex, white-guilt and draft-dodging’.\(^\text{13}\) Rather than simply the lure of power, it is the loss of this shared social life – recalling Desai’s discovery of sensuality at the end of We Are the Poors – that has changed the conditions of production of radical critique. This is precisely why both Bond and Desai, albeit differently, turn so optimistically to moments of street protest. But, surely, there is something lacking in this response, if what is necessary are new arenas of popular critique led not by the masculinist Marxists of yesteryear but by the rank and file of today’s struggles, who are equally if not predominantly black and female? Indeed, these latter characters might reveal quite a different and less palatable slant on the libertine sexualities in Desai and Bohmke’s struggle nostalgia.

Secondly, while both Bond and Desai acknowledge with respect, the predominance of black female activists in today’s social-justice struggles, and while both demolish some of the shibboleths of the ruling alliance, neither manages to do what feminists have been doing for the past three decades: to take gender analysis out of the family and into the critique of society at large. This is precisely what the rape trial of the former Deputy President Jacob Zuma forces. As Njabulo Ndebele argues in a pithy commentary, the Zuma affair has brought into public view the way in which the ANC has rested not only on the mythology of a ‘broad church’ but also of a family: ‘intimate and intricate relationships forged out of oppression; out of common dangers faced; joys shared over marriages, births and personal triumphs; and grief over deaths of comrades in combat, assassinations, suicide, sickness or old age. Even gossip about affairs and the anguish of divorce is a string that deepens bonds.’ While Zuma demonstrates his ire with this political family, rhythmically brandishing his machine gun with a struggle song, the phallic metaphor is lost on nobody; neither is the disdain for the many victims of rape and sexual violence on all sides, of which Ndebele pleads: ‘Are their pain and the broad sense of public morality of little consequence in the settling of “family” scores?’ What Ndebele points to is the way in which gender and sexuality attach to a decidedly masculinist notion of anti-Apartheid struggle, as well to

\(^{12}\) Desai and Bohmke 1997, p. 27.
\(^{13}\) Desai and Bohmke 1997, p. 31.
populist largesse today, and the ways in which these mythologies ought to continue to be called into question.4

Bond’s notions of decommodification and destratification in social justice struggles, as well as Desai’s notion of the sensual life of communities who refuse the terms of social domination have both to confront more squarely the way in which people contend with the actual ideologies that surround them. Why and how do people support the ANC, Jacob Zuma, ‘Four Nations’, ‘Two Economies’, or ‘traditional cures for AIDS’? What are the pedagogic challenges in effectively putting forth Bond’s bold list of demands for capital controls and finance for democratic development? Both Bond and Desai point to the importance of attending to how ‘the poors’ stop to think, write, and critically represent social inequality, and to what effect:

[F]or when the proletarians, in granting themselves permission to think, invaded the territory of the literati, the literati answered evasively by celebrating work as the true culture of the poor and the future of the world, and by warning the representatives of that world of the dangers of developing a split personality.5

Here, Rancière does not simply call for ‘giving voice’ to the poor, but for attending to the consequences of critique, for both ‘proletarians’ and ‘literati’. As we witness a popular upsurge of support for Jacob Zuma, it is vital that we can attend to both causes and consequences of this dramatic moment in post-Apartheid politics. To clarify his point, I draw from the work of Geoff Eley, historian of the European Left, who writes of three phases of radical critique: first, the optimistic and then disappointed voices of radical historians between the 1960s and 1990s (the historian E.P. Thompson who sought to explain proletarian ‘experience’, as We Are the Poors aims to do for South African ‘poors’); second, the reflective critiques emerging in the Thatcherite 1980s that turned inward to questions on relations of gender, domesticity and family (sections of Arise Ye Coolies, or Ndebele and others on the Zuma rape trial); and finally new defiant voices adequate to the fragmented devastations of the contemporary world.6

In South Africa, the decade of liberation stretched the first moment beyond its means, for reasons laid out in Desai and Bohmke, while the second moment has emerged in various literary genres and occasionally in reflective pieces in the social sciences on race, land, memory, and urbanism. The third moment lies scattered across South Africa’s ‘nights of labour’, in need of translators who can draw on Bond’s attack against the dizzying heights of finance capital and Desai’s rhetorical brilliance and street-smart engagement with people’s lives.7 Defiant voices for our times, in Eley’s terms, must attend to the broader development trajectory and its structured devastations, while dwelling in the raced and gendered detail

of lived critique, especially when it does not confirm comfortable truisms but instead
provokes uncomfortable questions. The difficult task of the post-Apartheid critic is to allow
readers to forbear on judgement while listening to these substantially-different narratives of
suffering, injustice, and persistence: listening in solidarity with many fronts of militancy.

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After two decades of countless studies on ‘globalisation’, the most recent bout of US imperialism has radically altered debates on world politics. Consequently, the globalisation craze has apparently come to a rest. In light of these developments, one might cringe at the sight of two more books dedicated to the subject. However, Martin Shaw and William I. Robinson’s contributions to the globalisation debate should be taken very seriously by Marxist and non-Marxist scholars alike.

A particularly illuminating aspect of these studies is the way they transcend the false ‘state versus globalisation’ dichotomy plaguing the literature. Globalisation studies have too often attempted to theorise globalisation without the state, obfuscating the role of state power in globalising processes. Yet, as Shaw notes, theorising globalisation without the state is like playing *Hamlet* without the Prince. Indeed, whatever one might say about ‘globalisation’, it has never been nor is it about the eclipse of the state. As Robinson puts it, it is only ‘under globalisation’ and ‘from within’ the nation-states system that a transnational state could ever emerge. Therefore, rather than falling into the ‘end of the nation-state’ trap, both books present the nation-state as being reconstructed and reconstituted via contemporary globalising processes.

Shaw and Robinson’s respective theories of a nascent ‘global’ or ‘transnational’ state are the most original and challenging aspect of their studies. Of course, the subject of a world state is hardly new. As Dostoyevsky remarked:

> Mankind as a whole has always striven to organise a universal state…. The great conquerors, Timours and Genghis-Khan, whirled like hurricanes over the face of the earth striving to subdue its people, and they too were but the unconscious expression of the same craving for universal unity.

Is mankind on the way to finally reaching this universal state?

The following review critically examines Robinson and Shaw’s affirmative answer to this question. It begins by focusing on Shaw’s conceptualisation of the ‘global’ in relation to his theoretical exposition of the emergence of ‘globality’ and the global state. This is followed

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1. I would like to thank Josef Ansorge, Sam Ashman, Tarak Barakwi, Alex Callinicos, Ray Kiely, Luke Williams, the editors of *HM* and, above all, Gonzalo Pozo-Martin for their comments on earlier drafts of this piece.
2. See Rosenberg 2005.
by an examination of Robinson’s strong globalisation thesis and a critique of his problematic conception of a transnational capitalist class-for-itself, the pivot on which his theory of the transnational state rests. The analysis then proceeds through a critical investigation of Robinson’s state theory and his conception of the states-system vis-à-vis global capital. Lastly, it addresses one final point which further problematises Shaw and Robinson’s global/transnational state theories: the absence of any effective state monopolisation of the legitimate use of violence at the global level.

**Conceptualising the global**

Proclaiming that the national-international era of modernity is undergoing a process of profound change, Shaw attempts to reconstitute some of the key concepts of the social sciences in global terms. He identifies three dominant ‘narratives of change’ (postmodernism, post-Cold-War and globalisation) at the heart of contemporary debates about the nature of these world-historical transformations. Criticising these narratives for failing to provide any ‘core meaning’ to the global, Shaw presents three alternative concepts: global revolution, globality, and the global state (see Chapter 1).

The ‘global revolution’ entails the transformation of worldwide social relations, at the core of which lie fundamental changes in relations of political and military power. According to Shaw, the ‘traumatic political upheavals’ in the former Soviet bloc were a defining moment in this global revolution, which ushered in a new era of ‘globality’ and an incipient global state (p. 145). To understand the significance of these concepts we need to examine Shaw’s historical narrative before going on to criticise his account of global state relations.

At the heart of Shaw’s historical account of modernity is a strong emphasis on the dynamics of organised violence in the ‘development of the national-international order, its crisis and hence the emergence of globality’ (pp. 61-2). This is demonstrated, above all, in his examination of the effects of World War II. The post-WWII era signalled a crisis in the national-international system which was only fully realised in the recent ‘global-democratic revolution’ centred in the ex-Soviet bloc. In particular, the fighting, organisation and conclusion of WWII brought about three interconnected changes to world order. Firstly, there was a substantial re-alignment of power relations among the metropoles. This led to significant alterations in the centres of state power, producing two hierarchically defined and mutually opposing ‘state-blocs’: the Western Alliance and the Soviet bloc.

In contrast to the illegitimate and imperial nature of the Soviet bloc, the unity and cohesion of the Western Alliance led to the international integration of previously autonomous centres of state power through the creation of international organisations such as NATO and the European Community. This signalled a ‘profound internationalization of the Western state’ providing the ‘structural precondition’ for all the “globalization” of recent decades’ (p. 87). The emergence of this two state-bloc system, therefore, represented ‘the most important single change in world politics in recent centuries’. The era of ‘nation-state-empires’ was transcended, thus signalling an end to the inter-imperial relations that had once lain at ‘the core of the interstate system’ (p. 119).

Secondly, the conclusion of WWII brought about the creation of ‘legitimate’ world organisations such as the United Nations. The worldwide nature of the war meant that it was experienced ‘as a common calamity – and victory – for the people of the world’ bringing
about ‘an unprecedented sense of common worldwide humanity’ (p. 116). The newly formed international institutions were brought into existence to represent a ‘common authority framework for the entire world’ in response to these shared worldwide experiences (pp. 120–1). This latter point further relates to the third key impact of WWII.

The common traumatic experiences during WWII – for example, the area-bombing of German cities, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Holocaust – are conceived by Shaw as the ‘prime foundation of contemporary global consciousness’. The lessons derived from these experiences, and subsequent events which have compounded these lessons, promoted developments in global law and morality (p. 122). Here, we come to the heart of Shaw’s conceptualisation of the global, defined as a ‘common consciousness of human society on a world scale: an increasing awareness of the totality of human social relations as the largest constitutive framework of all relations’ (p. 19).

The truly revolutionary and progressive potential of WWII in creating a common global society was, however, largely curtailed by the political and ideological system of the Cold War. It was not until the subsequent global-democratic revolution of 1989–91 and after that the era of globality could emerge. Concurrent with these developments, Shaw claims that there have been decisive transformations in state relations and forms. State relations denote the ‘social relations of state power, through which society constitutes state institutions and state forms constitute the framework of society’. State forms indicate the configurations of state institutions and the relations between these institutions within and across state boundaries. Thus, both state relations and forms include state-society and inter-state relations (pp. 16–17).

According to Shaw, in the ‘global’ epoch, state relations have ceased to be ‘national and international in the historic sense’. Instead, they have begun to coalesce around a core of world-state institutions. This signifies an essential transformation ‘in the political structure of social relations on a world scale’, entailing a progression of ‘global’ state forms which represent the institutional expressions of state relations along global lines (p. 17). It is important to note Shaw’s emphasis on differentiating between state forms and state relations. This point ties into his insistence that theorising the state is not only about its internal social relations, but must also be concerned with its interactions with other states. As he claims, the principle of ‘nationality-internationality’ was the ‘prime categoric framework’ accounting for the rise of the ‘pre-global, modern social order’ and, in the current world order, ‘globality’ thus emerges out of global state relations and global state forms (p. 29).

An upshot of this argument for Shaw is that all Marxist attempts to explain state behaviour by ascribing class meaning to it are ‘intrinsically problematic’. While this point is well taken, any sophisticated theory of the state would certainly necessitate some account of the effects of global economic processes on the state and an analysis of the relations between state managers and capitalists. Unfortunately, these subjects remain conspicuously absent in Shaw’s state theory.⁵

Additionally, there is the thorny issue of the states-system in Shaw’s theoretical framework. Shaw places a great deal of explanatory weight on the states-system in contrast to the ‘economisms’ and ‘sociologisms’ of the Marxists he seeks to rebuke (see pp. 80–90). Yet to use the states-system – or, more accurately, inter-state relations – as an explanatory factor

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⁵ See Morton 2004 for a similar critique.
irreducible to any social system (capitalism, for instance), Shaw would need to illustrate the sociological source(s) of its distinct determinations or risk falling back on a reified conception of it. Surprisingly, he does not even address this fundamental issue. The state-system is thus left untheorised in sociological terms and, in this way, we are left with a ‘proto-realist’ conception of the international.6

In addition, there are the difficulties in Shaw’s idealist conceptualisation of the ‘global’ and its relation to the global state. He claims, for instance, that ‘global state relations and forms’ are unevenly developing ‘in ways that correspond to the demands of global consciousness’ (p. 21). Here, and in other places, Shaw implies that global state forms and relations are ultimately driven by the emergence of ‘global consciousness’. Elsewhere, he emphasises the role of state-building and warfare as central globalising forces, as mentioned above. Globality emerges out of and is constituted by global state relations and global state forms (see pp. 220–31). Yet, if globality emerges out of global state relations and forms and ‘the global’ demands these state relations and forms, does this not make for a circular logic? There is an internal incoherence to Shaw’s theoretical framework.

What is more, the status of the determinations Shaw posits in explaining the emergence of globality – cultural, socio-economic, (geo)political, collective consciousness, etc. – are left in disarray. The causes and effects of these determinations and the interconnections among them in the transition to the global epoch remain elusive. One is left wondering: what are the central forces driving this transition? Is it the role of ‘state power in global change’, as he claims in his more materialist moments? Is it the ‘traumatic political upheavals’ of the ‘global democratic revolution’ of the 1989–91 period of Soviet bloc disintegration? Or is it the ‘unprecedented sense of common worldwide humanity’ in the post-WWII era transformed into a ‘global consciousness’ after the fall of the Soviet Empire (p. 90, 145, 116)? These questions are never fully answered. In the end, one is left with a sense that it is all of them and more. But the precise interrelations among these various causes are left relatively unexplored. Thus, Shaw’s theory is marked by a nagging analytical indeterminacy.

This leads us to a final difficulty underlying Shaw’s work: his qualified commitment to a liberal-cosmopolitanism vision of world politics.7 This is exemplified in his treatment of the ‘global democratic revolution’ in 1989–91 and after. Shaw views this as the ‘central causal factor in the transition to the “global state-system”’ and a living testament to the force of universal values such as democracy and human rights (p. 145; see also pp. 160–70). Now, Shaw is certainly correct in claiming that the relationship between democratic revolutions (current and past) and global change cannot be solely explained from an ‘outside-in relationship’; that is, as a result of the imperialist actions of Washington and other Western powers.8 Nonetheless, while one needs to recognise the bottom-up role of ‘people power’ in struggles for human rights and democracy, particularly during the revolutionary upheavals of the 1989–91 period, Shaw fails to appreciate how Western states

6. For this general critique and the term ‘proto-realist’ see Rosenberg 2006, pp. 312–13, 337 fn. 9. See also Allinson and Anievas (forthcoming).
7. See, for example, Gowan’s comments in the roundtable discussion with Leo Panitch and Martin Shaw in Historical Materialism, 9.
have often subsequently instrumentalised these processes for their own interests. Moreover, the manner in which Shaw presents the West as the keeper and defender of these universal ‘global’ values completely ignores the myriad ways in which the Western powers have utilised human-rights discourses as a battering ram to open up reluctant nation-states’ internal markets to the penetration of foreign capital. The European Union’s Eastern enlargement policies have repeatedly demonstrated this point.

These problems are also exemplified in Shaw’s tripartite categorisation of different state forms in contemporary world politics. Firstly, there is the globally-legitimate ‘post-imperial’ form of the ‘global-Western state’. This ‘global layer of state power’ comprises four main elements: (1) global political power and legitimate force; (2) global legal institutions, including means of enforcement; (3) global economic and social institutions; and (4) a global ideological framework (pp. 215–18). It is ‘post-imperial’ because its state power is ‘based on a radical modernisation, in which the imperial character of its old nation-states has been transcended’. If ‘it is any kind of imperialism, it is something like Kautsky’s “ultra-imperialism” with many of the progressive implications of that concept’ (p. 203).9 Secondly, there are the ‘quasi-imperial’ states, approximating something like the classic nineteenth- and twentieth-century imperial state models and exemplified by nation-state empires like contemporary Russia. Finally, there are those ‘new’, ‘proto-’ and ‘quasi-states’, appearing after the Cold War within the various war zones throughout the “Third World”, which have attempted to institute themselves as autonomous state centres.

What emerges from this tripartite conceptualisation of state forms is a more or less qualified liberal explanation of world politics. It is one that ‘others’ the sources of contemporary war to the non-Western world. As Shaw argues: ‘the most acute political conflicts of the global era are’ the result of ‘contradictions in the relations of non-Western state power to society’.10 Yet, since the US-led Western invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the Western powers have more than adequately displayed their own ‘quasi-imperial’ character. While Robinson is more attentive to these imperialist characteristics of the current world order, he nevertheless adheres to a more qualified though equally misguided ‘post-imperialism’ theory of transnational statehood.

**A contribution to the critique of contemporary globalisation**

At the heart of Robinson’s theory of global capitalism are three interconnected claims. First, globalisation is theoretically defined as the near-culmination of a centuries-long process of capitalist production relations spreading and supplanting precapitalist relations around the world. As such, it represents a qualitatively new form of connection among people, marking an ‘epochal shift’ within the capitalist era. A decisive turning point in the development of global capital was the world economic crisis of the early 1970s, which is viewed by Robinson as ushering in ‘a new period of restructuring in the capitalist system’. This crisis led capitalists to seek out new modes of accumulation, exemplified in the emergence of the post-Fordist flexible accumulation régime and the accumulation strategy.

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9. On these points, also see Shaw 2002a and 2002b.
of globalisation (p. 21). In sum, globalisation is conceptualised as a phase in the evolution of the capitalist system that has produced novel socio-political, economic and cultural processes and structures which, in turn, react back upon capitalist development itself.

Second, a defining characteristic of the global capitalist epoch is the emergence of a transnationalised fraction of capital. As circuits of capital become globalised they subsume local circuits. Domestic capitalists who manage these local circuits of capital become 'swept up' in a 'process of transnational class formation' (p. 20). According to Robinson, not only have these objective conditions of global capital engendered the materialisation of a transnational fraction of capital, but this fraction has actually become class-conscious and hegemonic.

With the emergence of a hegemonic transnational class-for-itself is the construction of a new global historic bloc, what Robinson terms the 'globalist bloc'. This new ruling globalist bloc is defined by the fact that it is the logic of global capital accumulation, as opposed to national accumulation, that guides its political and economic behaviour (p. 75). This hegemonic 'globalist bloc' provides the backbone of Robinson's third key claim: the development of a transnational state (TNS) apparatus.

The TNS is conceptualised as a 'multilayered and multicentered' apparatus functionally interconnecting an array of supranational (e.g. UN, WTO, World Bank, etc.), regional (NAFTA, EU, ASEAN, etc.) and national organisations. Hence, Robinson views the transformation of the nation-state and the ascendancy of supra-national institutions as two intricately interconnected dimensions of the process of state transnationalisation. With the shift from world to global economy and the colonisation of national state institutions by the agents of transnational capital, nation-states are transformed into 'neo-liberal nation-states'.

It is important to emphasise that Robinson is not claiming that the functionality of the nation-state to global capitalism has ended.11 While the nation-state 'is in the process of being transcended by capitalist globalisation' it is not simply 'withering away' but becoming a functional component of the TNS 'which has been brought into existence to function as the collective authority for the global ruling class'.12 This continuing functionality of nation-states is exemplified by their implementation of policies conducive to global macroeconomic stability, a secure social order and infrastructures essential for global economic activities (see pp. 102–10 and 124–5). Thus, nation-states have not only become transmission belts for global capital, but its active agents.

We now turn to a critique of Robinson's empirical analysis to demonstrate the insecure grounds upon which he formulates these theoretical claims. Much has been written criticising the novelty of contemporary globalisation in general and in relation to Robinson and others' theories of transnational/global statehood.13 It would be futile to repeat all these arguments here. However, an engagement and further elaboration of these extant critiques of Robinson's thesis is necessary to dislodge the empirical underbelly of his theoretical claims.

11. Some critics have mistakenly accused Robinson of proclaiming the irrelevance of the nation-state. In doing so, they have reiterated many of the same functions of the nation-state vis-à-vis capitalism identified by Robinson. See, for example, Went 2002 and Wood 2002.
To begin, there is Robinson’s spurious conception of the ‘transnational corporation’ (TNC) which directly ties into his thesis about the hegemony of transnational capital. A key issue here is the degree to which ‘transnational corporations’ can be considered transnational at all. While the world’s largest TNCs account for almost four-fifths of total world industrial output, they typically employ two-thirds of their workforce within their host country. Furthermore, if one goes by the UNCTAD’s Transnationality Index of the 100 world largest corporations (a study Robinson frequently cites), we see that most of the largest TNCs are not so transnational after all. For example, less than 60 companies in the Top 100 of 2002 had a transnationality index over 50 per cent and only 18 companies held an average over 75 per cent. Indeed, the overall transnationality index average in 2002 was slightly less than 50 per cent. Yet, we would expect these figures to be substantially higher since what is being measured are the assets, sales and employment that compare home country to all other countries. Moreover, some of the largest and most globally influential US-based corporations on the list are the least transnational – for example, General Electric (40.6 per cent), General Motors (27.9 per cent) and Wal-Mart (23.5 per cent).

These points are further evinced in other empirical studies. A 2004 study of 365 of the largest corporate enterprises (taken from the Fortune 500 list), found that only nine enterprises could be considered ‘unambiguously global’, meaning that at least 20 per cent of their foreign sales went to all three major trade-bloc regions (ASEAN, EU, NAFTA) but less than 50 per cent in any one of these regions. A similar study of the regional sales patterns of the top 20 TNCs (as defined by World Investment Report 2002) concluded that only a single firm could be considered ‘global’. Moreover, the vast majority of TNCs are not pursuing ‘global strategies’, as Robinson suggests. Many TNCs are actually struggling to maintain reasonable profit levels from their foreign operations, pointing towards a trend toward ‘de-globalisation’.

Further problematising Robinson’s global capitalism thesis is his use of the data on the ‘global’ proliferation of foreign direct investment (FDI). For Robinson, the ‘most comprehensive indicator of the growth of transnational production is the global stock of FDI… which was valued at nearly $1.3 trillion in 2000’ (p. 22). This is certainly a development that cannot be denied. However, does it mark the type of ‘epochal shift’ within capitalism that Robinson suggests? This seems unlikely.

As Robinson notes, rising levels of FDI have been overwhelmingly concentrated within the ‘core’ triad of the world economy – North America, Europe and Asia-Pacific – which cumulatively accounted for approximately $1 trillion of the FDI in 2000 (p. 23). Furthermore, a good deal of this FDI and inter-capital penetration remains within these various regional trade blocs, notably the EU. While FDI to ‘developing’ nation-states has somewhat increased in recent years, these levels still remain relatively low and highly concentrated. The Asia-Pacific region alone accounts for 62.2 per cent of the entire share of

FDI flowing to the developing world. And, within this region, just ten economies account for 90 per cent of all FDI inflows. China alone receives $53.5 billion; a figure representing the second largest amount for a single nation-state in the world and approximating half of all inflows to the region.19

Moreover, due to massive population disparities between the developed and developing world, FDI indicators actually over-estimate both the quantity of FDI flowing to the developing world and total investment figures. If one examines FDI inflows per capita, the proportion is actually far more biased towards the developed world. For example, between 1995 and 1999, developed countries received $474 per capita whilst in the same period developing countries received $37.20 While capitalism has undoubtedly spread to the global level, these developments have not been accompanied by a universal economic integration of nation-states and their respective capitalist classes. A process of regionalisation and not globalisation, stricto sensu, has taken place. It therefore seems more appropriate to speak of transnationalisation in a few particular regions, among a few particular states.

None of this is to dispute the importance of increased manufacturing sectors in Third-World states. Nonetheless, taking this into account there remains a continuation, if not acceleration, of the hierarchies of uneven development immanent to the capitalist mode of production. This persistent developmental tendency of capitalism acts as a centrifugal force against the emergence of the type of global capital postulated by Robinson.

A critique of Robinson’s transnational-capitalist class thesis

Robinson certainly demonstrates that TNCs have grown in size and breadth over the past thirty years. Few would deny this fact. This could indicate an amplification of the social power of TNCs over other less monopolised and nationally-embedded capitals. Nevertheless, none of the empirical evidence cited by Robinson, even if taken at face value, would suggest that the growth and expansion of TNCs would automatically result in the emergence of a single fraction of transnational capital self-consciously pursuing a global capitalist project.

Robinson’s analysis of a globally hegemonic transnational-capitalist class-for-itself is the pivot on which his theory of global capitalism and the apparatus of the transnational state rests. This hegemonic fraction ‘imposes the general direction and character on production worldwide and conditions the social, political and cultural character of capitalist society worldwide’. It is ‘represented by a class-conscious transnational elite’ constituted by an inner circle of transnational capitalists, as well as transnational bureaucrats, managers, technicians, and organic intellectuals working ‘in the service’ of transnational capital (p. 48, emphasis mine).

In addition to the critical analysis of economic globalisation provided above, two interconnected points need to be emphasised in casting Robinson’s conception of a TCC into doubt. Firstly, there is the issue over the degree of cohesion in the TCC. Robinson conceptualises the TCC as an over-determining global capital. This tendency towards conceiving transnational capital as a kind of monolithic and relatively homogenous bloc of

19. All the above data is taken from UNCTAD 2004, Chapters 1 and 2.
finance capital is demonstrated when he approvingly quotes Prabhat Patnaik, who avers that 'instead of several contending blocs of finance capital, we have one gigantic entity, of which capitals of specific countries are so many constituent elements' (p. 52).

According to Robinson, the phenomenon of global class formation surpasses classical-Marxist class analysis. Under globalisation, class fractionation cannot be conceived in terms of the functionality of capitals in the overall circuit of capital since transnational capital cuts across the original functional fractions identified by Marx. Thus, the standard interpretation that contrasts a spatially mobile banking capital to a more geographically embedded industrial capital (with commercial capital falling somewhere in between) is no longer tenable. Yet, while specific capitalists or sectors within these fractions of capital might be more transnationally-oriented than others, this would not lead to the conclusion that all transnationally-oriented capitals form a single fraction of capital or even share similar objective interests.

While Robinson emphasises the various tensions and contradictions within the TCC, it seems that any formulation of an 'ideal-type' concept of transnational capital would be necessarily much more heterogeneous and differentiated than he allows. In this way, Robinson repeats the past mistakes of classical-Marxist theorists, such as Hilferding and Lenin, who conceived the emergence of monopoly finance-capital as having subsumed all other fractions of capital. The point is that however illuminating a concept of transnational capital might be about the empirical reality of the evolving structure of globalising capital, it does not eliminate the necessity for distinguishing between the functional fractions of capital. For, as Kees van der Pijl has argued in regards to the classical-Marxist conception of finance-capital,

> even in a situation where the financial oligarchy is no longer effectively challenged by a subordinate, ‘non-monopolistic’ bourgeoisie, certain conflicts within the capitalist class remain traceable to the different fractions persistent in the context of an apparent fusion.21

The same holds true for any concept of transnational capital.

Secondly, the idea that the TCC is a globally hegemonic class-for-itself remains conceptually abstract, with little concrete empirical foundation. What it fails to adequately acknowledge are the objective and multileveled factors conditioning capitalist class relations. Robinson views the TCC as both a relatively self-governing entity free to determine the historical conditions of its own development and interprets contemporary globalisation as a process consciously engineered by it. Robinson thus privileges an overly subjective conceptualisation of capitalist class agency (see Chapter 2). Robinson not only ignores any possibility of a territorialising logic to capital accumulation, but also overlooks the fact that classes are mutually constituted through exploitation processes, often local or regional in scope, which fundamentally affect the global reproduction of class antagonisms.22

State theory and the states-system

Now that we have critically analysed Robinson’s TCC thesis, we may turn to his theory of an incipient TNS apparatus. To begin with, there is the problem of Robinson’s general theory of the state; namely, that he does not allow for any possibility of a non-identity of interests between capitalists and state managers. As Martin Shaw suggests, Robinson’s state theory is marked by a strong sense of ‘sociologism’, a term referring to a one-sidedly “social” account, emphasising social forces such as classes at the expense of, for example, state organization (p. 86). Shaw’s general point that state organisation need be taken into account when conceptualising the state was broadly accepted by many (neo)Marxist scholars in the state debate of the 1970s and early 1980s.

In this debate, various (neo)Marxists examined the potential for a divergence of interests between state managers and capitalists (either as a whole, or in relation to particular factions). If state managers are not necessarily part of the capitalist class, as Marx indicated in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, then one would need to examine the various ‘structural’ and ‘subsidiary’ (and often conjunctural) mechanisms linking capitalists to state managers. These ‘mechanisms’ assist in explaining why state managers so often serve capitalist ends irrespective of whether capitalists directly and consciously intervene in state policy-making.

As mentioned, Robinson conceives nation-state policies as functional to global capital, thereby allowing for a ‘relative autonomy’ of states in relation to particular non-transnationalised capitalist class fractions (p. 97). However, if nation-state policies are conceived as functional to global capitalism then how are we to explain the foreign policies of the current Bush administration? It is unlikely that the invasion and occupation of Iraq was in any way functional to US capital or global capitalism as a whole. Robinson’s own ambiguity over the issue seems to illustrate the more general problem of functionalist analyses of state behaviour: specifically, identifying a function that must be executed for a specific result to be produced does not in itself clarify why the execution of such a function takes any specific form. Nothing in a functionalist analysis of the state can explain why the US chose to invade Iraq.

This ties into a more general point against Robinson’s conceptualisation of the TNS: if the members of the TCC are conceived as the ‘direct agents’ of capitalist globalisation and the TNS, Robinson would need to back these claims up with concrete examinations of the various relations between state managers and the capitalist class, ‘transnational’ or otherwise. Instead, he offers a conceptualisation of the general connection between state and capital, arguing that as the latter transnationalises so too does the former (p. 98). In other words, superstructural processes are reduced to a mere epiphenomenon of the economic base. Such an economically mechanistic analysis of the relationship between state and capital is not only theoretically problematic, but would need to be based on a wealth of empirical data on specific state/capital relations which Robinson fails to provide.

Robinson repeatedly emphasises that the nation-state system is nothing but the historical outcome of capitalist development. It is not immanent to capital. It is doubtful any serious

23. See, inter alia, Barker 1978; Miliband 1983; and Block 1987. Even the Poulantzian-inspired state theory of Bob Jessop, from which Robinson draws, admits this much.
24. See Block 1987, Chapter 3.
historical materialist would ever deny these points. From a historical-materialist perspective, there is no logical reason why capitalism could not theoretically dispense with the national-state form. As Hannes Lacher argues, the ‘interstate-ness of capitalist political space cannot be derived from the nature of the capital relation’. However, while the capital relation may not necessitate the ‘interstate-ness of capital political space’ this does not mean that there is nothing inherent to the capitalist mode of production that would fortify and perpetuate a multiplicity of states (see below).

That Robinson cites Lacher’s point regarding the contingent nature of the territorially-bounded state form vis-à-vis the capital relation only demonstrates an antinomy in his own theoretical rationale for an emerging TNS. For, if Lacher is correct, then Robinson’s cannot claim that the state must necessarily become transnational as capitalist class relations transnationalise, conceiving the former as nothing but the institutionalised political form of the capital relation, since this logic is exactly what Lacher is disputing.

Now, as noted above, Robinson is not arguing that the nation-state system is ending. Instead, he claims that the TNS apparatus is transcending the nation-state system as the ‘organising principal of capitalism’ (p. 40). The central question then is whether there is anything inherent to capitalism which would perpetuate a territorial configuration of class interests and state power and, therefore, a multiplicity of states. I believe the answer lies in what Trotsky termed the ‘law of uneven and combined development’.

Crudely summarised, uneven and combined development under the capitalist production mode can be explained in the following way. The capital relation consists of two mutually constitutive dimensions: the ‘vertical’ antagonisms between capital and labourer and the ‘horizontal’ relations among individual competing capitals. The latter dimension, inter-capitalist rivalry, functions as an in-built mechanism of capitalism which perpetuates and intensifies the tendency towards the universalisation and differentiation of social development.

One the one hand, the competition among capitals leads them to search out new markets and ever greater sources of profit across the globe, thereby producing an inherent tendency to unify the world through the universalisation of specific combinatory mechanisms unique to the capitalist production mode. As the capitalist system matures, more and more societies become locked into processes and structures of interconnection and constitution through the emergence of world economy. In this way, capital creates ‘world-history for the first time’. On the other hand, as capitals are confronted with the necessity to maintain or enhance their position on the marketplace, they attempt to secure profit margins over and above sectoral averages. This implies that the costs of production must somehow be reduced. Such reductions can be achieved through organisational

27. See Robinson 2002.
29. The following argument draws on Callinicos 2007. In addition, I have greatly benefited from our conversations and correspondences on the topic.
restructuring and/or an enlargement of the scale of production, the latter being expressed in capital’s tendency to concentrate and centralise, which leads to monopolisation. Yet, a capitalist may also achieve decreasing production costs through the introduction of technological innovations. Indeed, in those sectors where monopolisation has run its course or the benefits of economies of scale are negligible, technological innovations are the chief source of higher profits. These technological innovations are then generalised throughout the sector, eliminating the market advantage of the original innovating capitalist while also revolutionising the forces of production. This may achieve a moment of developmental ‘equilibrium’. It is, however, only a fleeting moment since capitals’ search for differential profits will necessarily continue, thereby spawning a new cycle of innovations and market disequilibrium. The upshot of this is that capitalist development is inherently uneven.

Another central factor perpetuating this uneven development, manifested in territorialiszd and geographical forms, is the construction of spatially-embedded physical infrastructures (e.g. transport and communication technologies) necessary for the expanded reproduction of capital. Investments in built environments come to define regional spaces for the circulation of capital. Within these spaces, myriad factors – from production, exchange and distribution to culture, consumer-preferences and class struggle – are held together in a kind of ‘structured coherence’, accounting for the propensity of capitals to be attracted to existing areas of accumulation. Capital demonstrates a clear tendency towards concentrating in specific regions at the expense of others, thereby producing a somewhat porous but nevertheless identifiable ‘territorial logic of power’ – regionality – inherently arising out of the processes of capital accumulation in space and time.

This systematic and economically destabilising form of uneven development is unique to the capitalist system. The effect of these tendencies is that they will perpetually act to undermine any unification of ‘many capitals’ into a single fraction of ‘global capital’. Lenin made a very similar case when disputing Kautsky’s theory of ultra-imperialism. Analogous conclusions can be drawn from Marx’s comments on the antagonistic, self-negating nature of inter-capitalist rivalry: ‘Capital exists and can only exist as many capitals and its self-determination therefore appears as the mutual interaction of these upon one another’. It must by necessity ‘repel itself from itself’. This means that a ‘universal capital, one without alien capitals confronting it, with which it exchanges – is therefore a non-thing’. Since Robinson conceptualises transnational capital as a global ruling class, these arguments hold against his concept of the TCC as the agent of global capital. But how do these economic effects of uneven development relate to political processes such as the territorial configuration of the state? How does it provide us with a multiplicity of states?

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32. ‘The battle of competition is fought by cheapening of commodities. The cheapness of commodities depends, all other circumstances remaining the same, on the productiveness of labour, and this depends in turn on the scale of production. Therefore the larger capitals beat the smaller’ (Marx 1992, p. 777).
34. Lenin 1964, pp. 294–5.
As David Harvey has demonstrated, the reproduction and spatial expansion of the capital accumulation process produces and necessitates the creation of relatively immobile and concentrated organised territorial configurations. Dense spatial constellations of capitalist economic relations provide the territorial foundation of states by both commanding and supplying the necessary resources to sustain a functioning state apparatus. Once formed, these territorial states ‘become relatively fixed attributes of capitalism’s geography’, resisting pressures to change through their geopolitical and economic relations with one another. While we should be careful not to make the same mistake as Robinson – who views superstructural processes as the effect of the economic base – it seems that the uneven and combined nature of capitalist development does reinforce and perpetuate territorial fragmentation.

Robinson would likely counter these arguments by claiming that globalisation has fundamentally transformed the spatialising nature of uneven capitalist development. Indeed, a running theme in his work is that there nothing inherent to the nature of capital which obliges it to concentrate spatially and geographically. He claims, for instance, that processes of uneven development are ‘denoted primarily by social group rather than territorial differentiation’. Thus, while we can expect sustained class polarisation and also continued uneven accumulation between regions… there is no theoretical reason to posit any necessary affinity between continued uneven development and the nation-state as the particular territorial expression of uneven development.

One could concede Robinson’s point that the particular territorial expression of uneven development – the national state form – could be overcome by the forces of capital. However, this would say nothing about the persistence of a states-system which could take various scales and forms of territorial configuration (regional, multinational forms, empires, etc.).

If uneven development is continuing between regions, as Robinson admits, does this not act as a centrifugal force against the emergence of a ‘global capital’? More importantly, what

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37. The relationship between capitalism and the persistence of the states-system is, of course, a much more complex issue than this brief analysis can do justice. In particular, the term ‘combined development’ is primarily used here in describing the relations between capitals and states. However, in order to fully account for the perpetuation and effectiveness of the states-system, one would also need to take into account Trotsky’s more restricted conception of ‘combined development’ as the fusion and interpenetration of different modes of production within a single social formation. Further, one needs to be careful not to mistake the question of why there is a states-system in the first place with the distinct, though related, question of why capitalism perpetuates this states-system. Here, it would be necessary to explore, inter alia, the issue of whether uneven and combined development might be a characteristic of social development in general and of the relationship between this social development in general and the modern states-system. See Rosenberg 2006; Allinson and Anievas (forthcoming).
38. Robinson 2003, p. 28.
evidence does Robinson provide in substantiating his claim that uneven development has become decoupled from territorial and geographical articulations? Unfortunately, hardly any. He admits that ‘well known empirical evidence’ indicates a growing gap between states and regions, but adds the caveat that this ‘evidence obscures the parallel widening gap between the rich and the poor within countries’. Nonetheless, a widening gap between rich and poor within states does not negate the same parallel process going on among states and regions. It seems then that capitalist uneven and combined development remains inherently tied to producing a plurality of territorially differentiated states. And, if this true, it seems unlikely that state power and class interests have become decoupled from their long-standing territorial base: the nation-state.

Where is the global military?

One last point can be made regarding the unfeasibility of Robinson and Shaw’s global/transnational state theories: that is, the clear lack of any state monopolisation of the legitimate use of violence at the global level. Robinson attempts to get around this problem by claiming that the US military alone provides such a monopoly. He asserts, for example, that the ‘US military apparatus is the ministry of war in the cabinet of an increasingly globally integrated ruling class.… The empire of capital is headquartered in Washington’ (p. 140). Yet, it is highly unlikely that the US government would ever go to war on the behalf of any capital(s) outside its national domain.

The notion that the US might have intervened in Iraq as ‘the ultimate guarantor of global capitalism and its authority’, as Robinson claims, is theoretically conceivable (p. 138). Nevertheless, it still overlooks, or more precisely excludes, the fact that it is nationally-based US corporations such as Halliburton and Bechtel that are the main beneficiaries of the invasion. If the US could be truly considered the ‘ministry of war’ for a ‘global ruling class’ than certainly the majority of reconstruction contracts in Iraq would have gone to a substantial amount of non-US corporations or predominately transnationalised corporations. Yet, the exact opposite has been the case.

To take one of numerous examples, sectoral programme management in Iraq is headed by all US directors and all prime contractors are administrated by corporations with head offices in the US. Just how overwhelming US corporate and state dominance over the entire Iraqi reconstruction process is demonstrated by the fact that ‘out of 59 prime contracts awarded from US appropriations in the 2004 financial year up to November 2004, 48 (more than 80 per cent) went to US companies’. Therefore, it is hard to observe exactly how the reconstruction of Iraq is benefiting a ‘global ruling class’ free of national ties when such an overwhelming majority of the corporations are the bearers of nationally based US capitals.

40. Robinson 2003, p. 28.
41. See also Callinicos 2002 and Bloc 2001.
Shaw offers a different though no less problematic solution to the issue of a global military. He does so by circumventing Weber's strict definition of a state necessitating a ‘monopoly’ of violence, using instead Michael Mann's more flexible criteria of an ‘authoritative, binding rule making’ backed by ‘organized political force’ (p. 191). From this standpoint, he postulates that the global-Western state constitutes ‘an integrated authoritative organisation of violence which includes a large number of both juridically defined states and international interstate organisations’ (p. 199). He argues that ‘the Western state functions as a single center of military power in relation to other centres’ (p. 200, emphasis mine). And that this ‘single center of military power’ is embodied within NATO. ‘Most member-states of NATO maintain some secondary “national” military capabilities, but alliance roles are the major context in which their military roles are determined’ (p. 201, emphasis mine; see also pp. 240–1). Yet, to say that ‘most’ NATO member-states’ military roles are determined by their alliance role is not nearly the same as saying that all are. There is a crucial exemption to Shaw’s point: the United States, far and away the most militarily dominant nation-state in the world.43 In light of this fact, there appears to be a gaping hole in Shaw’s argument.

In addition, since the Kosovo fiasco, the US has increasingly sought to distance itself from NATO. It must not be forgotten that Washington rejected NATO’s invocation of Article 5 after 9/11 and that this was not, as some argue, the result of a peculiarly unilateralist Bush administration but rather a symptom of more widespread sentiments among US military officials. During the 1990s, US military leaders became exasperated by NATO’s joint decision-making process in pursuing military action in the Balkans. Therefore, after 9/11, when ‘faced with [the] arduous task of hurriedly mounting a military campaign in a remote part of the world, American military leaders viewed the prospect of working with European forces not as a help but as a nuisance’. Hence, the current particularities of US unilateralism did not derive from the Bush administration but grew directly out of the military realities of the 1990s, which witnessed various operational difficulties between the US and allied forces in the Balkans and an overall disparity in military power between America and Europe.44 In sum, it is hardly plausible for Shaw to claim that NATO currently functions as some sort of ‘single centre of military power’ for an emerging global state.

**Conclusion**

What the above analysis seeks to make clear is that the current imperialist actions of the Bush administration must not be seen as either a deviation from the norm, as Shaw does, or as the actions of the most powerful state in the world acting solely in the interests of a consolidated ruling global class, as Robinson claims. The US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq must instead be analysed in the context of a more or less continuous US grand strategy that has been pursued by all White House administrations since the culmination of WWII.45 Furthermore, the disputes between the US-led ‘coalition of the willing’, on the one hand, and Germany, France, Russia and China, on the other, over the use of force in

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43. Turkey and the United Kingdom also generally work outside the sphere of NATO.
45. On the continuities of US grand strategy since WWII, see Callinicos 2003.
Iraq illustrate the continuing persistence of geopolitical rivalries embedded within processes of capital accumulation.

The US-led invasion of Iraq was never merely about the reaping of speculative oil profits and the potential opening of new foreign markets. It was also a show of force to potential US ‘peer-competitors’ (notably China and Russia) and a means to situate the US in a geopolitically vital region of the world. Tying into this, the significance of oil in the rationale for the US invasion of Iraq must be situated within a geopolitical context. It is not only about protecting the future of America’s domestic economic security, but about sustaining US global hegemony in the face of emerging potential threats.46

As a consequence of the various problems with Shaw and Robinson’s global/transnational-state theories demonstrated above, either the idea of an emerging global state needs to be abandoned altogether or it must be reworked along different lines. While both works correctly stress that a conceptualisation of contemporary globalising processes must begin with a theory of the state, these processes can be better understood under the more apposite term ‘imperialism’. In addition, what Shaw’s account lacks and Robinson’s offers in highly flawed terms is a theoretical understanding and empirical demonstration of the relationship between the capitalist logic of accumulation and state interests.

Nonetheless, a point made by Shaw is certainly accurate: social relations within a state cannot alone explain the constitution of its particular form. One must also analyse the interactions amongst states to elucidate the structural specificities of particular state forms over time. The practical significances of these issues could not be of greater concern for those wishing to construct a more just and equal future world order. In order to struggle against the injustices of the powerful, one must first understand where the power lies.

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References


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Henryk Grossman was one of the most original Marxist economists of the first half of the twentieth century. His major work, *The Law of Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System* (henceforth the *Law of Accumulation*) appeared in 1929 on the eve of the Great Depression, which appeared to confirm its central theses. Driven into exile from Nazi Germany in 1933, moving from Paris to London to New York, he struggled to produce further work on such a scale but continued to publish articles on issues of method and the history of economic thought which remain of great interest.

In 1949, Grossman returned to Germany, accepting the offer of a post at the University of Leipzig from the new régime in the East, but died in 1950 at the age of 69. Ironically, given his defence of the USSR in the last phase of his life, his economic theories were then dismissed as deviating from Stalinist orthodoxy and none of his work was ever republished in East Germany. In West Germany, they reappeared only after 1968 and are now once again out of print.

In English, only a few articles which Grossman had published in that language whilst in exile were available until the 1970s. Sadly, the *Law of Accumulation* is still only accessible in the excellent but severely truncated translation by Jairus Banaji finally issued by Pluto Press in 1992. The prevailing impression of his work among English-speaking Marxists was, for many years, derived from Paul Sweezy’s account in his *The Theory of Capitalist Development*, originally published in 1942. Sweezy, whose own theory was a variant on the ‘underconsumptionism’ which Grossman had frequently subjected to critique, provided a short and unsympathetic summary of the *Law of Accumulation* in his chapter on the breakdown controversy. According to Sweezy: ‘Grossman’s theory exhibits in extreme form the dangers of mechanistic thinking in social science’.

Other critical references to Grossman could be found in discussions of the early years of the Institute for Social Research, better known today as the Frankfurt school, with which Grossman was closely associated from 1925 until about 1944. For Martin Jay, for example, Grossman epitomised a tendency towards political quietism, stemming from his belief in the automatic breakdown of capitalism. The accusation of political fatalism echoed the critiques of Grossman made by Social Democrats such as Bauer’s wife Helena Bauer, and council communists such as Pannekoek back in the 1930s (p. 140). Jay counterposed Grossman’s work unfavourably to that of Friedrich Pollock, another affiliate of the Institute for Social Research.

1. Since this review was drafted, this book has been awarded the Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize for 2007, and deservedly so. I must also thank Rick Kuhn for very generously correcting some of the errors and misunderstandings in an earlier draft of this review, although, as will be evident, we still disagree on how to interpret Grossman’s ‘breakdown theory’.
6. Sweezy 1968, p. 211. To be fair, Sweezy also acknowledged in a footnote the distinctive qualities of Grossman’s account of the imperialist strategy of ‘preventive annexation’ (p. 303).
in exile in the USA, whose emphasis on the emergence of new forms of organised capitalism
directed by the state appeared more congenial and relevant in the postwar period of
capitalist revival and sustained expansion.  

For the past decade, Rick Kuhn has been publishing articles in defence of Grossman’s
intellectual legacy against the distortions and misunderstanding of Grossman’s critics. He
has now produced a fascinating biography the scope of which is much wider than the
intellectual debates over economic method and crisis theory which only dominate the
narrative in one chapter of the book. This is a thoroughly researched life and times which
sheds light on a range of historical questions concerning the working-class movements and
Marxist politics in Central Europe in the turbulent epoch from around 1900 to the
aftermath of the Second World War.

Kuhn has assiduously burrowed away in archives in three languages (English, German
and Yiddish) across three continents (Europe, North America and Australia) in order to
track the vicissitudes of Grossman’s life and political engagements. Whilst Kuhn’s own
Marxism is consistently anti-Stalinist, he nevertheless conjures up a surprisingly sympathetic
portrait of Grossman, even in the final phase of his life. Nobody who reads it could honestly
ever again level a charge of political quietism at his hero. Whether Kuhn entirely succeeds
in his defence of Grossman’s theory of capitalist breakdown is more questionable. But his
work should at least ensure that Grossman’s contribution to the ‘recovery of Marxism’ is
taken more seriously than has been the case until now in most of the anglophone
literature.

Grossman’s background

Born and raised as a Jew in the then Austrian-controlled region of Galicia, Grossman
became a political activist at an early age. His role in the foundation in 1905 in Galicia of
a separate party for Jewish workers equivalent to the Bund in Russia and his growing
dissatisfaction with Social-Democratic orthodoxy on the national question, are the main
themes of the first two chapters of the biography. Kuhn’s impressive labours in archives in
Germany and Poland have helped to uncover a vibrant and widely influential culture of
militant but fiercely anti-Zionist Jewish socialism of which tragically few representatives
survived the Holocaust and whose traces have been ignored by Zionist historians. He also
dwells on the centrality of debates over the national question for socialists in the two
‘multinational’ but fast decaying empires of Tsarist Russia and the Hapsburgs of Austria-
Hungary.

9. See, in particular, Kuhn 2004 and Kuhn 2005 in this journal which provides an extended
summary of both Grossman’s political trajectory and the case, also made in the book under
review, for taking Grossman seriously as a Marxist theorist. This review will not attempt to
replicate that argument at any length.
10. More information on the origins of the project and Kuhn’s burrowing in the archives can
be found in his interview with Radical Notes, Kuhn 2007a.
11. Rick Kuhn has commented that most of the German literature is hostile too (personal
communication).
Grossman, Kuhn suggests, echoed Marx and anticipated Lukács in his stress on the ‘mutual transformation of the working class and its circumstances through class struggle’, an emphasis which he contrasts with ‘the mechanical orthodoxies of the Second International’. Here, as later, Kuhn reveals a tendency to assimilate Grossman’s thought to that of his own sources of intellectual inspiration in the Leninist tradition. Yet, he acknowledges that Lenin would have rejected Grossman’s arguments in 1908 for ‘Bundism in Galicia’, whilst his scrupulous and sympathetic exploration of the sources opens up a fresh angle on those much furrowed debates on the national question (p. 64–6).

Kuhn proceeds more briefly to summarise Grossman’s attempts to pursue an academic career, his mobilisation into the army in the First World War and his subsequent enthusiasm for the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Grossman joined the newly formed Communist Party in Poland in 1919 whilst working in Warsaw but, in 1924, state repression of the Party led to his arrest. Released on bail and following a campaign in his defence, he appears to have reached a deal with the nationalist government, agreeing to his first phase as a political exile in 1925. In Germany, he was able to obtain a post with the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt then led by his mentor Carl Grünberg. Henceforth, Grossman concentrated his energies on Marxist research. Kuhn rightly emphasises that his political engagement was nevertheless decisive for his intellectual formation.

Grossman became committed to a version of ‘breakdown theory’, arguing that a capitalist economy would always have a tendency to ‘break down’ as a result of systemic internal contradictions. But crises could, at least for a while, enable capitalism to recover, not least at the expense of the majority. Critically for Kuhn’s thesis, Grossman did not conclude that socialism was the inevitable result of such a breakdown, or that a new social formation could emerge without conscious human agency. In that respect, although not in the details of the economic analysis, his position was close to that of Rosa Luxemburg. As Grossman wrote to Paul Mattick in 1931:

> Obviously the idea that capitalism must break down ‘of itself’ or ‘automatically’... is far from being my position. It can only be overturned through struggles of the working-class. But I wanted to show that the class struggle alone is not sufficient. ... Obviously, as a dialectical Marxist I understand that both sides of the process, the objective and subjective elements influence each other reciprocally. ... One cannot ‘wait’ until the ‘objective’ conditions are there and only then allow the ‘subjective’ factors to come into play. That would be an inadequate, mechanical view, which is alien to me. ... The purpose of my breakdown theory was not to exclude this active intervention, but rather to show when and under what circumstances such an objectively given revolutionary situation can and does arise. (Quoted on p. 144, italics in the original.)

12. Lenin, of course, ferociously denounced national chauvinism but, in terms of revolutionary organisation, had little sympathy with the ‘separatism’ of the Jewish Bund organisation in Russia which influenced Grossman or with the policy of ‘cultural’ separatism advocated by Bauer and the Austro-Marxists, cf. Munck 1986.
The attempt to suggest *when* conditions for revolution would arise was and remains an absurdly Quixotic objective and evidently Grossman failed to achieve it.\(^\text{13}\) Critically, however, this failure should not lead us to dismiss Grossman’s theoretical legacy altogether.

Grossman’s work on economic questions is the central theme of the second half of the book, but Kuhn also provides many fascinating insights into the difficult life of a political exile in the 1930s and 1940s. He attempts, by and large successfully, to weave together a narrative biography with extended discussions of Grossman’s works in chronological order.

One consequence of this, however, is that some of the critiques of Grossman’s work, whilst briefly summarised, are not always adequately contextualised for any reader ignorant of the depth and range of debate over questions of Marxist method and crisis theory in the 1920s, a debate tragically curtailed by the murderous régimes of Hitler and Stalin. At times, Kuhn seems to echo Grossman’s own slightly arrogant tendency to dismiss other Marxist contributions of the period as either simply ignorant or hopelessly reformist. An approach which drew more on Richard Day’s work *The Crisis and the Crash* would have helped clarify where and how Grossman differed from both the neo-Luxemburgists and Bukharinites whose distinct approaches dominated the Soviet debates of the 1920s.\(^\text{14}\) That, in turn, might have helped explain in more depth why Grossman’s work was, for example, so anathema to Varga whose ‘underconsumptionist’ position became the Stalinist orthodoxy after 1929.

However, Kuhn’s approach has the great merit of combining readability and never losing sight of the political context for even the most obscure debates in the pages of the Institute for Social Research’s journal. At one point, Kuhn quotes Grossman’s objections to Adorno’s notorious article on jazz and notes that ‘Work, leisure and politics were intertwined for Grossman’. This is followed by an excerpt from Grossman’s comments on the treatment of slavery in *Gone with the Wind* and, immediately after that, by Grossman’s observations in a letter of 1936 on the English mentality – ‘I haven’t seen anything so narrow minded for ages’ (quoted on pp. 178–9). We also discover that Grossman pursued extended investigations into the work of Descartes on mechanics comparable to the classic work of Boris Hessen on the social and economic roots of Newton’s *Principia*, all for the sake of a critical review of a work by Borkenau on the subject.

In the final two chapters of the book, Kuhn is able to draw on the correspondence and papers of Grossman’s close friends from his time in New York during the Second World War, William Blake, an unusual combination of Marxist and investment banker, and Christina Stead, the Australian novelist, all three being at the time fellow-travellers of the Communist Party. Stead’s archive in Canberra is the surprising source for some delightfully astute and intimate impressions of Grossman’s chaotic lifestyle, romantic adventures and book-collecting habits, as well as his renewed identification with Stalinist Russia from around 1936 in the context of the Spanish Civil War. Even as he suffered from ill-health

\(^{13}\) Kuhn responds by denying that Grossman had a specific date in mind (personal communication), but that is not really the issue. Grossman’s formulation, in the letter to Mattick at least, does suggest a deterministic approach at the level of economic conditions, but not for the outcome of a revolutionary situation. It is the former which is in question here.

\(^{14}\) Day 1981.
which affected his capacity to complete the major projects he still had in mind, Grossman retained a mental and social vitality which impressed all those who knew him.

It was in this period that Grossman produced some of his most interesting work on the history of political economy, and a draft book on *Dynamics* eventually published in a shorter version than originally planned. In this, Grossman anticipates more recent critiques of orthodox economic theory for its assumptions about a tendency towards stable equilibrium – an argument Kuhn summarises with great clarity and which is well worth studying in the English translation published by *Capital and Class* in 1977. As Kuhn observes:

> It was and remains one of the most impressive critiques of the methodological underpinnings of the body of ideas known as economics in most universities and the media. (p. 190.)

Yet Kuhn also deftly exposes what must have been intense sources of strain on Grossman in this period. His moves towards Stalinism exacerbated the mounting difficulties in his relations with the Institute now under the direction of Horkheimer, who was rapidly distancing himself from Marxism by 1943. Kuhn makes a tantalisingly brief reference to the ‘60th birthday incident’ in which Grossman and Pollock had a verbal confrontation at the former’s birthday party in April 1941 (p. 186). Although relations were not finally terminated, with a financial settlement from the Institute, until 1948, Grossman had become more isolated intellectually, if not socially. Sweezy’s book with its sweeping critique of Grossman had appeared in the US in 1942 but, despite Blake’s urging, Grossman failed to produce a detailed response, and the critique may have been more demoralising than Kuhn acknowledges.

Kuhn shows uncharacteristic hesitancy in judging Grossman’s Stalinism in the final period of his life. He earlier stresses Grossman’s close connections with critics of the USSR such as Paul Mattick, the council communist who also fled to the US in the 1930s. In 1933, Grossman even sent Mattick a copy of an article by Trotsky critical of the ‘Third Period’ of Stalinism and the disastrous consequences of sectarianism in the German KPD for the fight against the Nazis. At around the same time he commented that ‘[n]o revolution can be made on command from Moscow’ (quoted on p. 168).

Yet it is indicative of the consequences of exile and persecution for a whole generation of Marxists that, by the late 1930s, when Grossman met Blake and Stead, he was personally and publicly committed to a defence of the USSR. Kuhn is too honest a researcher not to acknowledge the evidence of this but can say very little about the character of this defence or Grossman’s understanding of a socialist economy, given the absence of relevant documentary material. What he does emphasise, with justification, is that Grossman’s political identification with the USSR did not induce him to renounce his own deviations from Stalinist orthodoxy on economic or other scientific questions. For that alone, not least given the craven behaviour of so many intellectuals within the Stalinist milieu, Grossman deserves our respect.

The core of this biography comprises an extended account and defence of Grossman’s breakdown theory, as spelt out in both the *Law of Accumulation* and in the less well-known

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responses by Grossman to his critics. Kuhn’s researches into often obscure sources for the latter, summarised in detail in an earlier article, are of inestimable value in their own right.\textsuperscript{16} As Kuhn rightly emphasises, Grossman’s work is more methodologically complex and sophisticated than the critics recognised. That also means that any summary of the argument is vulnerable to the charge of oversimplification, and the reader is referred to Kuhn’s own wonderfully lucid exposition of Grossman’s main theses in his earlier article in this journal.\textsuperscript{17}

What is clear, even in the truncated English edition of the \textit{Law of Accumulation}, is that Grossman relied critically on the concepts of ‘tendency’ and ‘counter-tendency’. There is a tendency towards ‘breakdown’ and a wide range of counter-tendencies which operate in and through economic crises, to diminish and postpone this basic tendency. This emphasis on the ‘restorative’ function of economic crises can be found in Marx’s account, particularly in Volume III of \textit{Capital}, but had rarely featured in the literature before Grossman. The latter repeatedly insists that:

\begin{quote}
We know that in Marx’s conception crises are simply a healing process of the system, a form in which equilibrium is again re-established, even if forcibly and with huge losses. From the standpoint of capital every crisis is a ‘crisis of purification’. Soon the accumulation process picks up again, on an expanded basis…\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

The counter-tendencies which Grossman proceeds to explore in detail derive from, but also expand on, Marx’s famous list of countervailing factors to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in Volume III of \textit{Capital}.

Therefore, it is understandable that Kuhn, both in the biography and in some of his published articles, assimilates Grossman’s theory of breakdown to Marx’s theory of the falling rate of profit, especially as interpreted by contemporary authors such as Chris Harman and Anwar Shaikh.\textsuperscript{19} But this assimilation appears questionable in the light of Grossman’s own comments. Referring to writers such as Charasoff and Boudin he writes:

\begin{quote}
But they could not demonstrate the necessary breakdown of capitalism because they confined their attention to the fall in the rate of profit. Breakdown cannot be derived from this. How could a percentage, a pure number such as the rate of profit produce the breakdown of a real system?\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

Certainly, Grossman frequently refers to the rate of profit as an index of the health of the system. But he also makes the much more problematic claim that: ‘the falling rate of profit is moreover only important for Marx in so far as it is identical with a relative decline in the mass of surplus-value’.\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{flushleft}
17. Kuhn 2005. \\
18. Grossman 1992, p. 84. \\
\end{flushleft}
This ‘relative decline’ in the mass of surplus-value is critical for Grossman, because he wants to argue that breakdown occurs as a consequence of ‘an absolute shortage of surplus-value’. He reaches this position initially as a result of using a model of capitalist reproduction developed by the Austrian Marxist, Otto Bauer. Bauer had deployed his schema in order to refute Rosa Luxemburg’s breakdown theory which relied on the hypothesis of a problem of ‘realisation’ of the surplus (or a shortage of markets once non-capitalist foreign outlets were exhausted). Grossman agreed with Bauer that Luxemburg’s argument was mistaken and that a theory of breakdown could not be sustained by focusing on the question of ‘realisation’, or the sphere of circulation. But he is also able to establish that if Bauer’s own assumptions are correct, the system will eventually break down because of insufficient surplus-value to sustain the process of accumulation.

As a critique of Bauer’s use of the reproduction schemata this is decisive. The difficult question is to what extent Grossman’s own version of a breakdown theory depends upon the assumptions of Bauer’s model. The critical assumptions are that constant capital grows by 10% per time period whilst variable capital grows by 5%. For Sweezy and other critics, these numbers were both arbitrary and implausible, and the former claims that, if they are dropped, nothing is left of the breakdown theory. Kuhn, however, quotes Grossman as insisting in a letter to Mattick that:

‘...I did not want to give the impression that I derive the breakdown tendency from Bauer’s scheme.... Bauer makes unrealistic false assumptions and I just wanted to pursue his argument ad absurdum.... In reality these assumptions do not apply. There are precisely struggles between workers and capitalists over the distribution of surplus-value.... I do not maintain that surplus-value declines. It can grow. And nevertheless it is insufficient because accumulation (as it requires an ever greater organic composition) swallows a continuously larger part of the surplus-value. (Quoted on p. 143.)’

The quotation continues at length but the essential point is clear: Grossman does not believe that his argument depends on Bauer’s scheme.

Yet the argument evidently does rely on the thesis of an absolute insufficiency of surplus-value to sustain what in the model appears to be a given rate of accumulation. But why cannot the rate of accumulation itself adjust over time? This will certainly not be a smooth process and will involve crises as Grossman insists, but, once Bauer’s assumptions are dropped, it is difficult to see what is left of the ‘inevitability of breakdown’ thesis. Kuhn provides us with a vivid account of the arguments but some of the critical issues are raised only to be left aside as the narrative proceeds. This reviewer, at least, remains unconvinced by Kuhn’s suggestion that Grossman’s breakdown thesis can be sustained independently of Bauer’s model and its assumptions.

Rosdolsky, who refers favourably to Grossman’s critique of Luxemburg and Bauer, suggests that the schemata of reproduction found in Volume II of Capital are an unsuitable vehicle for establishing a theory of crisis precisely because they are designed to show the hypothetical conditions under which ‘equilibrium’ is possible. But it is only in the context

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of Bauer’s reproduction schema that an argument about an absolute insufficiency of surplus-value is meaningful. Rosdolsky helpfully returns us to Marx’s emphasis on the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, but it is misleading to simply assimilate that to Grossman’s distinctive ‘breakdown’ theory.

Paradoxically, perhaps, given his reputation, it is Grossman’s account of the counter-tendencies to the breakdown tendency, neglected or underplayed by both his critics and followers, which should be of most interest today. In the face of the evident capacity of capitalism to renew itself as a global system in the twenty-first century, many have simply abandoned Marx’s categories and crisis theory in particular. Others well-represented in the Brenner debate in the pages of this journal have tried to cling on to the stagnationist theories developed in the 1970s and early 1980s as if little has changed since then. Yet much of the Law of Accumulation is devoted to the extensive variety of mechanisms which capital deploys in response to crises of profitability which serve, if only temporarily, to restore the system to health.

A cursory examination of the German edition reveals that over half of the original text of some six hundred pages is devoted to exploring this theme with a wealth of both historical and contemporary data. This includes extended discussions of issues which remain central to contemporary theoretical debates such as the devaluation of capital and increases in the rate of exploitation. There are also lengthy chapters devoted to ‘Restoring Profitability through World Market Domination’ and ‘The Economic Function of Imperialism’, to quote the subheadings for Part Two of the final section of the work.

Unfortunately, much of Grossman’s material on, in particular, the role of foreign trade and capital export as means of restoring profitability, is missing from the truncated English translation. What survives is sufficient to indicate that for Grossman, as for Marx, the development of capitalism was inseparable from the formation and expansion of a world market. Battles to control that market were at the heart of the imperialist struggles of the first half of the twentieth century. The issue, as he emphasises, was not access to ‘non-capitalist’ markets as Luxemburg had believed, but the scale of production exceeding the scope of national economies in core industries, and the possibilities of increasing surplus-value by employing cheaper labour in colonies or less-developed economies. The pages which follow in the German edition reveal that Grossman had a theory of imperialism which, whilst owing much to Lenin, was better grounded in a thorough study of the economic history of the system. The account may now seem dated and its figures in need of correction given more recent research but its insights are still of great value.

Kuhn provides only a brief summary of this part of Grossman’s argument quoting Grossman to the effect that ‘the growing tendency to breakdown and the strengthening of imperialism are merely two sides of the same empirical complex’ (quoted on p. 133). But the critical reader should not infer that, if Grossman’s breakdown theory is rejected, his research into imperialism should therefore be ignored – on the contrary. For example, as

25. Kuhn 2007b provides a useful, more extended but still quite brief, discussion of Grossman on imperialism as well as some fascinating comments on Grossman’s analysis of early capitalist expansion and the obstacles to it, especially in Poland and the old Hapsburg Empire in central Europe.
Kuhn notes in passing, Grossman provided a rigorous formulation of a theory of unequal exchange long before the idea became fashionable in the 1970s, and this is not dependent upon his breakdown thesis at all.

Kuhn has written a biography that is accessible to a much wider readership than specialists in Marxist crisis theory. He has laboured long and hard in the archives and crafted a sparkling narrative out of some very disparate materials. The downside of that achievement is that a number of the issues raised by the *Law of Accumulation* are touched on far too briefly to convince those sceptical of Grossman’s theoretical achievement.

A more extended treatment of Grossman’s analysis of the world economy and imperialism in the *Law of Accumulation* and of his articles on methodology and the history of economic thought would have been useful, especially to those unable to read the German-language originals. One hopes that Kuhn can return to that material on another occasion. In the meantime, we are treated to an unusual intellectual biography that brings back to life not just Grossman himself but a generation of Central-European Marxist intellectuals whose legacy barely survived the combined onslaught of Nazism and Stalinism. It should help inspire a new generation to pursue further research into both Marxist economic theory and the history of the movement. Perhaps it will even encourage some brave publisher to commission a complete translation both of Grossman’s *Law of Accumulation* and the collection of essays on Marxist method and crisis theory which appeared in West Germany in the early 1970s.26 *Henryk Grossman and the Recovery of Marxism* certainly deserves to have won the Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize for 2007.

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References


—— 1970 [1929], *Das Akkumulations- und Zusammenbruchsgesetz des kapitalischen Systems*, Frankfurt am Mein: Verlag Neue Kritik.

26. Grossman 1971. [Editorial note: the *HM* Book Series is committed to producing a full-length English language edition of Grossman’s work, along with additional material, once funds can be raised for the translation costs.]
The Spirit of Terrorism, Jean Baudrillard, London: Verso, 2002


Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War, Retort, London: Verso, 2005

Portents of the Real: A Primer for Post-9/11 America, Susan Willis, London: Verso, 2005

Terrorism, Inc.

It has become axiomatic across political spectrums to claim that ‘everything has changed’ since 11 September 2001, and to assume that the events of that day inaugurated a new world-historical era. And, indeed, the Bush administration has turned what could have been an empty rhetorical flourish into a stark historical reality. If the so-called ‘War on Terror’ started out as a propagandistic shibboleth to beat the American public into fearful submission to domestic surveillance and foreign invasion, those very policies have now effectively altered the political landscape of both the United States and the rest of the world and, in the process, changed the course of history.

It is therefore convenient and timely that Jeffory Clymer’s America’s Culture of Terrorism: Violence, Capitalism, and the Written Word reminds us that ‘terror’ has a history, and that much of that history is home-grown. Focusing on the volatile period of capitalist expansion and consolidation between the 1886 Haymarket bombing and the 1920 bombing of J.P. Morgan’s offices on Wall Street, America’s Culture of Terrorism aims ‘to uncover a genealogy of modern terrorism’ (p. 5). Ranging widely across genres and events, and deploying a sometimes dizzying variety of theories and methodologies, Clymer’s text is an impressive example of the intellectual dexterity of contemporary cultural studies. His central claim – that industrial capitalism and terrorism emerged simultaneously in the United States – is both critically convincing and politically crucial. Clymer reveals the conditions of possibility of this linkage in the invention of dynamite – which enabled anonymous acts of violence – and the rise of a mass press – which relied on the sensational representation of these acts. In leveraging his discussion around these twin developments, Clymer is able to explore how ‘terrorism’, that ambiguous interpenetration of word and deed, can provide something of an analytical testing ground for the loose combination of materialist and literary analysis which constitutes what we have come to call cultural studies.

America’s Culture of Terrorism is part of a series issued by the University of North Carolina Press called ‘Cultural Studies of the United States’, and I would like to use this review to evaluate the degree to which contemporary cultural studies can provide an institutional and discursive location for a Marxist critique of and intervention in the post-9/11 world. A key instance of the more general ‘cultural turn’ in Western Marxism – originally emerging out of the energy and activism of the New Left – cultural studies is commonly celebrated as one...
of the central locations of leftist political critique in the contemporary university system. On the other hand, cultural studies has frequently been accused of abandoning political economy for more epiphenomenal concerns with consumer products and practices; some would even see it as an academic symptom, rather than a critique, of global capitalism. Thus, Simon During frames cultural studies as an academic instance of ‘enterprise culture’, which he defines in terms of the ‘rapid increase in the social presence of culture, economically, governmentally, and conceptually’.¹ In these terms, cultural studies, whatever its original objectives, has simply become one way in which academic study has adapted to globalisation.

Others argue that the moment of cultural studies has passed. Thus Michael Denning, in his important Culture in the Age of Three Worlds, traces the emergence of cultural studies, and the cultural turn more generally, to the New-Left concern with the postwar expansion of the culture industries up through its tentative replacement of the humanities in the postmodern university. In the process, Denning seeks to establish that ‘the moment of cultural studies is a moment which has in some sense passed’.² Indeed, academic efforts at cultural politics, which could seem at least potentially revolutionary in the age of three worlds (essentially Denning’s more geopolitically expansive term for the Cold-War era), can seem petty and ineffectual in the face of the United States’ post-9/11 militarisation of neoliberal capitalism. Nevertheless, many of the left-leaning scholars who have responded to these developments fall under what Denning calls ‘the slogan of cultural studies’ and reports of its death may be premature.³ This review chronicles some of these responses, and evaluates the degree to which contemporary cultural studies, broadly conceived, is working to keep Marxism relevant for the twenty-first century.

Clymer’s first chapter on the Haymarket bombing opens with a claim that substantiates the methodological mandate of cultural studies: ‘as an event whose outcome is known, but whose orchestration remains obscure, terrorism summons forth narratives to reconstruct and explain it’ (p. 37). Terrorism, in other words, condenses the process whereby discrete historical events solicit, and indeed require, narrative explanations. And these explanations unfold in the new mass press which, as Clymer shows, was able to construct the men put on trial as foreign conspirators who posed a threat to the social order. The anarchists, on the other hand, fought to portray themselves as home-grown revolutionaries in the tradition of Thomas Jefferson. The discrete violent event, then, generates a war of words; a war of words which, Clymer’s study affirms, seems particularly susceptible to the interpretive insights of poststructuralist theory. Thus, in this single chapter, he invokes Mark Seltzer’s Foucault-inflected formulation of America’s ‘wound culture’ (p. 38), Michael Warner’s Habermasian idea of the mass public, and Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive theory of citationality. America’s Culture of Terrorism, like cultural studies more generally, is methodologically omnivorous and theoretically opportunistic, deploying whatever approach seems useful for the substance at hand.

². Denning 2004, p. 3.
The rest of Clymer's chapters are organised around the identities that tend to constitute the social content to which these various methods of cultural studies are conventionally applied, with Haymarket as the recurring point of historical reference. Thus his second chapter, ‘Gendering the Terrorist: Writing, Class Violence, and Gender in Henry James’, and his third, ‘The United States of Terrorism: The Political Economy of Lynching and Citizenship in Thomas Dixon and Ida B. Wells’, work to understand the nexus of capitalism and terrorism in terms of gender and race, respectively. Clymer's insights are almost always convincing and provocative, if occasionally somewhat programmatic.

In his deft analysis of James's 'naturalist' text, *The Princess Casamassima*, he unpacks the cultural contexts within which ‘notions of “manliness” became a crucial trope used in the rhetoric both of the men accused of throwing the Haymarket bomb and their accusers’ (p. 85), and therefore establishes that gender and sexuality are crucial categories in any analysis of the narratives generated by terrorist violence. Similarly, in his discussion of *The Clansman*, Clymer shows how Thomas Dixon works ‘to mobilize the nationalist and xenophobic sentiment that was so critical during the Haymarket era and then redirect that exclusionary energy into the nationalist politics for a new century: white supremacy’ (p. 113). At this point, one cannot help feeling that Clymer has rendered the Haymarket Bombing as the late-nineteenth-century analogue of 9/11, the transformative event around which a series of ancillary cultural shifts can be organised into a coherent explanatory rubric. The range of Clymer's methodologies and the variety of his cultural concerns, in other words, seems to require that his study be anchored, somewhat arbitrarily, in a single historical event.

Clymer focuses on the category of class in his next two chapters, on Jack London and the IWW, respectively. At the turn of the century, London was America's most well-known revolutionary socialist, and Clymer resurrects some of his lesser-known texts to illustrate the ‘fluidity between – and the difficulty of separating – instances of political terrorism directed against the state and violence that is specifically authorized by a nation or government’ (p. 135). It is in these powerful and provocative readings of London's apocalyptic dystopian novel *The Iron Heel*, and his unfinished thought experiment, *The Assassination Bureau, Ltd.*, that Clymer more resolutely turns to a Marxist framework, showing how, in *The Iron Heel*, ‘terror is state policy’ (p. 149). He concludes this valuable chapter by affirming that, ‘for London, terror is a fundamental and constituent element of America's identity at the turn of the century’ (p. 169). A century later, the claim retains its grim ring of truth.

Clymer's final chapter, on sabotage as a tactic of the IWW, explores the political ambiguities of this truth, as he analyses that radical union's attempt to use political slogans to convince workers that certain forms of violence are legitimate responses to state-sponsored terror. It is also in this chapter that Clymer most effectively theorises the relations between rhetoric and action, by affirming that 'slogans create and make visible the links between language and material actions by providing names and ideas about situations that do not necessarily yet exist’ (p. 197). Clymer’s last section on Covington Hall, the neglected ‘Wobbly Poet of Visionary Violence’ (p. 200) reveals, more effectively than the somewhat more strained analyses of James or even London, that literature had a crucial role to play in the ongoing process of linking language to violence. Indeed, in Hall’s ‘surreally violent poetry’ (p. 210), we begin to see how literature is necessary as a way of imagining the ‘transformation of the consciousness of both workers and owners’ which could legitimate a violent response to corporate terror (p. 210).
Clymer’s concluding epilogue on 9/11 has a hasty feel, and he himself concedes that ‘the tragedy and magnitude of the events of 9/11 are vastly different in many significant ways’ from the earlier events he covers (p. 211). The nature of the ‘enemy’ and the spectacular expansion of the media represent two of these differences. In our post-Fordist economy, unions and anarchists no longer pose much of a threat; in our society of the spectacle, images seem to be displacing stories. Nonetheless, Clymer also crucially notes that, in the media maelstrom that attempted to make meaning out of 9/11, ‘terrorism and capitalism are again intertwined in the narratives mobilized to explain mass violence’ (p. 216). America’s Culture of Terrorism provides a powerful reminder of this relationship’s historical pedigree.

It is a reminder well worth repeating and Verso Press, undoubtedly the most significant independent left-wing publisher in the contemporary English-speaking world, has decided to make sure we do not forget. In the immediate wake of 9/11, they issued a glitzy trio of polemics intended ‘to comprehend the philosophical meaning of September 11’ (frontispiece). Paul Virilio’s Ground Zero, Jean Baudrillard’s The Spirit of Terrorism, and Slavoj Žižek’s Welcome to the Desert of the Real, all work to reaffirm the dialectical intimacy of terrorism and capitalism that Clymer details. Virilio avers,

_The business of American being business – and, principally, world business – it is in fact the apparent economy of the planet which finds itself lastingly affected here by the dystopia of its own system._ (p. 82.)

One of Žižek’s many rhetorical questions asks, ‘are not “international terrorist organizations” the obscene double of the big multinational organizations?’ (p. 38). And Baudrillard succinctly claims that we are now witnessing ‘triumphant globalization battling against itself’ (p. 11).

However, in resolutely (and appropriately) locating 9/11 in the context of contemporary globalisation, these texts tend to lose sight of the history Clymer elaborates, instead generating a peculiar mirror-image of the right’s own apocalyptic rhetoric. Virilio’s text has the largest historical frame of reference, ranging as far back as the Protestant Reformation, but only in order to condemn the entire secularising movement of modern history and gloomily conclude that we are witnessing

the rise of a global covert state – of the unknown quantity of a private criminality – that ‘beyond-Good-and-Evil’ which has for centuries been the dream of the high priests of an iconoclastic progress. (p. 82.)

Indeed, capitalism as such recedes in Ground Zero into a mere instrument in the larger march of amoral techno-scientific ‘progress’, which, in its relentless efforts to satisfy our egoistic pleasures, involves a simultaneous regression into ‘the embryonic pre-infantile stage’ (p. 2). The Spirit of Terrorism has less historical sweep, but Baudrillard is equally apocalyptic, opening by proclaiming 9/11 as ‘the absolute event, the “mother” of all events, the pure event uniting within itself’ (p. 4), and later affirming that ‘we are far beyond ideology and politics now’ (p. 9). Žižek is, arguably, the most nuanced, and therefore also more provocative, specifying that ‘we can perceive the collapse of the WTC towers as the climactic conclusion of twentieth-century art’s “passion for the real”’ (p. 11).

These texts are not, strictly speaking, cultural studies, but their enormously prolific authors have long represented key theoretical resources for scholars in the field. Virilio’s
‘dromological’ theory of speed; Baudrillard’s semiotic theory of the simulacrum; Žižek’s canny combination of Lacan and Marx: all three have provided the theoretical arsenal with which scholars of cultural studies engage the contemporary world. And all three have contributed to a recession of ‘history’ as both referent and method in contemporary cultural studies, which tends to focus on the present and tends to be sceptical of empirical analysis. These three particular studies, however, do gesture towards history’s violent return in their deployment of the ambiguous category of the ‘Real’. As his title indicates, Žižek, not surprisingly, relies most heavily on this category, which he has almost single-handedly popularised for his English-speaking audiences. But Baudrillard is equally invested, boldly stating: ‘The question is that of the Real. According to Žižek, the passion of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is the eschatological passion for the Real’ (p. 75).

On the one hand, the ‘Real’ stands for the increasingly aggressive literalism of postmodern culture, a sort of dialectical, and panicky, response to our society of the spectacle. Thus Žižek opens by citing Alain Badiou’s claim that the twentieth century was characterized by a ‘passion for the real’, while the ‘postmodern’ passion for the semblance ends up in a violent return to the passion for the Real’ (p. 10). On the other hand, the ‘Real’ itself (as opposed to the popular passion for it) would seem to stand for the intellectual’s hard-headed acknowledgement of the dark kernel of amorality undergirding all forms of political and legal organisation, as well as the social constitution of the subject, what Žižek calls ‘the dirty obscene underside of power’ (p. 30). Virilio is the least invested in this model, but his opening question – ‘has the prohibition to prohibit – the basic law of technoscientific progress – become the only law of a lawless globalism?’ quite clearly invokes the obscenity of naked power which, for all three men, undergirds the apparatus of the state (p. 25).

This triumvirate of superstar theoretical interventions then affirms a turn in left-intellectual discourse from a willfully optative rhetoric of ideology and utopia to a far more hard-headed and stark confrontation with sovereignty and power. Invocations of Marx have been displaced by references to Carl Schmitt; naïve celebrations of popular subcultures have given way to stark meditations on homo sacer.4 Not surprisingly, then, these are gloomy texts, providing little hope for intellectuals invested in theorising or practising some form of resistance to the developments provoked by the events of 9/11. Virilio simply and succinctly pronounces that we have entered a ‘global suicidal state – a loss of the instinct of self-preservation. Of the self and the species’ (p. 37). Baudrillard somewhat more specifically, though no less pessimistically, proclaims that we are witnessing both ‘the end of the role of the intellectual’ (p. 92) and ‘the end of the role of the activist’ (p. 93).

Only Žižek, whose study, if far more lengthy and nuanced than the other two, maintains a certain cautiously optimistic investment in the possibility of ‘an authentic ethical act’ in response to contemporary developments (p. 116). Celebrating the Israeli reservists who refuse to serve in the Palestinian territories, Žižek offers the gesture of ‘refusal’ as a model for ethical action, concluding that ‘our duty today is to keep track of such acts, of such ethical moments’ (p. 117). Furthermore, Žižek goes so far as to suggest a larger political programme, a sort of geopolitical act of refusal: ‘The Left should unashamedly appropriate the slogan of a unified Europe as a counterweight to Americanised globalism’ (p. 145).

4. For an introduction to the ideas of Carl Schmitt, see Schmitt 1996. For an introduction to the concept of homo sacer, see Agamben 1995.
Apparently aware of a certain European bias in this initial series of polemics, Verso has more recently started to issue some home-grown responses to 9/11. Thus Susan Willis’s *Portents of the Real* (2005) is intended to prove, as its promotional copy states, that ‘behind the official smokescreen, there were those in America who maintained a critical distance from the propaganda and sought to understand the forces at work within American society’. Verso further specifies that ‘Willis uses the tools of contemporary cultural studies to examine a series of phenomena peculiar to post 9/11 America’. Indeed, the text is subtitled *A Primer for Post-9/11 America*, explicitly offering it as an update to Willis’s earlier foundational text, *A Primer for Daily Life*, which remains one of the best introductions to cultural studies in (and of) the United States. And *Portents of the Real* is prominently promoted by both Baudrillard and Žižek, framing it, and contemporary cultural studies more generally, as the application of continental high theory to Anglo-American vernacular practices. In its earlier stages, when the center of gravity was still the Birmingham Centre, cultural studies tended to rely on Western-Marxist theorists such as Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci. More recently, with the dissolution of the Birmingham Centre and the expansion of cultural studies into the United States, Žižek’s powerful combination of Lacan and Marx has tended to be the model.

Willis’s text is not only an excellent example of this theoretical arc, it also embodies cultural studies’ central wish: to have and affect an American audience outside the academy. As Fredric Jameson affirmed more than a decade ago: ‘the desire called the organic intellectual is omnipresent’ in cultural studies.5 Though Willis is more explicitly invested in Baudrillard than Gramsci, we can see this desire expressed in her adoption of an ‘American vernacular’ (p. 7) that captures the cultural moment in its own media-saturated fantasy idiom. Her central thesis is both simple and profound:

As surely as America avoids coming to grips with its history, that history emerges to haunt us, repeated across our culture as a series of figural representations. (p. 9.)

Willis reads these figural representations – the DC snipers, the anthrax hoaxes, the American flag, the Abu Ghraib photos, among others – as portents, and offers her book as ‘a primer for how to read portents as heralds of our reality’ (p. 9). *Portents of the Real* is thus an explicitly paedogogical text, designed to address an audience not fully trained in the methods of contemporary cultural studies.

True to its postmodern (or even post-contemporary) context, *Portents of the Real* must attend at least as much to images as to narratives, and Willis’s opening chapter on the American flag illustrates how economically a single image can condense and obscure multiple contradictory meanings. Arguing that the flag functions as an ‘empty signifier, capable of designating a host of referents without being perceived as contradictory’, she discusses the various locations that Americans chose to display their flags – mailboxes, automobiles, shirts, the space shuttle – as illustrations of these contradictions (p. 16). Some of Willis’s readings are more compelling than others. Thus her contention that flags on mailboxes ‘give symbolic recognition to the dead and endangered postal workers whose exposure to anthrax was belatedly and inadequately addressed by the self-same government

that claims to act in the name of the flag', and therefore 'acknowledge that our country treats its workers unequally' feels a bit forced (p. 19). On the other hand, her claim that flags on automobiles shows 'that we know the war against terrorism is the code term for the preservation of our interstates' performs a shrewd and compelling excavation of the American cultural imaginary (p. 21).

The rest of *Portents of the Real* is equally compelling. Willis's chapter on the anthrax hoaxes reveals the American inability to 'grasp the prank as a symbolic act' (p. 46). Enlisting Debord's theory of the spectacle, Willis argues, '[i]n a surfeit of the real become image, the hoax, as untruth, bursts asunder the complacency of daily life' (p. 43). As Willis reminds us, the truth behind the anthrax scares was very simply that 'the biggest repository of weapons of mass destruction turns out to be the United States' (p. 39). Unable to face the implications of this simple fact, Americans experienced it symptomatically as a series of 'fake' interruptions in our 'commodified time' (p. 44).

In her chapter on the DC snipers, Willis directly sites Baudrillard's earlier intervention, offering John Allen Muhammad and John Lee Malvo's shooting spree as an example of a 'singularity [in] the heart of a system of generalized exchange' (p. 52). Then, turning seamlessly to Marx's *18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, she offers the snipers' exurbanite targets as analogous to the small-holding peasantry of the Second Empire, affirming how, in their lack of common class consciousness or interest, they are susceptible both to the randomized anxiety of the shooting spree, and to the demagogical manipulations of George Bush, whom she affirms as 'our Louis Bonaparte' (p. 58). More concretely, she exposes how 'the sniper delineates the military takeover of everyday life and the spread of the battlefield to the homefront' (p. 67).

Turning to the rumours of a 'shadow government' in the wake of 9/11, and leaning heavily on Žižek and Lacan, Willis figures the many rumours of Vice President Cheney's post-9/11 sequestering as 'the real referent for the symbolic performance of George Bush' (p. 80). Noting the origins of bunkers in the Cold War 1950s, Willis reveals how, across a range of media venues, we continually restage 'the 1950s as our socially centred reality' (p. 78). Looming as a nostalgic historical centre of gravity before the upheavals of Civil Rights and Vietnam, the 50s figure as a fantasy of moral certainty and patriarchal authority. And, concluding with actual 'shadow invasions' in which unscripted locals have been entangled in military war games, Willis reveals how this fantasy leverages the militarisation of everyday life in the contemporary United States (p. 87).

Expanding her focus on pranks and hoaxes, Willis in her next chapter affirms that our 'preoccupation with identity theft articulates the subject's unwillingness to be subsumed as data' (p. 99). In this chapter, Willis examines the variety of spectacular practices that emerge from the developments in information science and biogenetics that have destabilised modern ideas of identity. Her principal figure for these phenomena is the asymmetrical clone, which 'best expresses the simultaneity of metaphoric replication and transformation' that not only represents the 'bad infinity' of identity and difference that constitutes the postmodern subject but also, according to her, symptomatically links First- and Third-World subjects. Thus she argues that the man who sent himself to his mother's house in a cargo crate 'is the asymmetrical clone of the thousands of illegal immigrants shipped overland and overseas in containers' (p. 110).

Finally, Willis concludes with a discussion of the Abu Ghraib photos. Invoking Susan Sontag alongside Žižek and Baudrillard, she begins with an examination of the most
notorious photo of the hooded figure standing on a chair with electrodes attached to his outstretched arms which, in its aestheticisation of pain, becomes a grishly instance of ‘the pornographic sublime’ (p. 118). Furthermore, she carefully dissects the overdetermined iconicity of the figure, linking it in particular to the Ku Klux Klan and America’s shameful history of lynching. Indeed, she argues that, ‘as documents of lynching, the photos suggest that the values of the KKK saturate our military’ (p. 124). However, she also invokes the figure of Lynndie England to remind us of the degree to which such ‘values’ have become more complicated in a purportedly postfeminist and multicultural era. Thus she concludes that

as surely as the Abu Ghraib porn photos humiliate the captives, so too, do they mobilize unintended subtexts wherein white womanhood is tempted by the non-white ‘other’ and the manly military confronts the homoeroticism inherent in its own homosocial environment. (p. 132.)

As Willis’s title indicates, she, like Baudrillard and Žižek, leans heavily on the category of the ‘Real’ as an essential indicator of her contemporary orientation. Indeed, all these studies reveal the degree to which quasi-psychoanalytic methods have come to supplement, and at times threaten to displace, the more traditionally Marxist investments of cultural studies as it originally developed at the Birmingham Centre. In a sense, one can see the ‘Real’ as a residual placeholder, standing in for an earlier materialist confidence in the methodological accessibility of historical experience. Instead of having any concrete access to the material workings of an historical process, in today’s society of the spectacle, as Willis affirms, ‘history emerges to haunt us’, and this haunting can only be interpreted symptomatically, as ‘portents of the real’.

There is a paradoxical, if dialectically intelligible, consequence of this methodological gambit: for all their investment in the Real, these texts operate quite resolutely at the level of the symbolic. There are short, and frequently dazzling, bursts of a more materialist history – such as Willis’s wonderful one-page chronology of anthrax as a ‘return of the repressed’ from Biblical times up through the Cold War (p. 37), or Žižek’s invocation of ‘the Rightist authoritarian regime of Alfredo Stroessner in Paraguay’ as anticipating the post-9/11 ‘state of emergency’ (p. 106). They are, however, more centrally studies of Western culture in crisis, efforts to traverse the first world fantasy that received its spectacular actualisation in 9/11. Žižek is well aware of this liability when he identifies

the dilemma of Cultural Studies: will they stick to the same topics, directly admitting that their fight against oppression is a fight within First World capitalism’s universe – which means that, in the wider conflict between the Western First World and the outside threat to it, one should reassert one’s fidelity to the basic American liberal-democratic framework? Or will they risk taking the step into radicalizing their critical stance; will they problematize this framework itself? (pp. 48–9.)

Indeed, it is worth noting that earlier versions of Žižek, Baudrillard, and Willis’s arguments appeared in the Spring 2002 issue of South Atlantic Quarterly, ‘Dissent from the Homeland: Essays after September 11’, which places their polemics over and against essays by Daniel
Berrigan, Robert Bellah, and Rowan Williams (The Archbishop of Canterbury). The wide array of theologians, peace activists, and liberal intellectuals in 'Dissent from the Homeland' affirms that the collection is proudly invested in 'the basic American liberal-democratic framework'. Marxism here (Fredric Jameson makes a brief appearance) is one voice among many, virtually drowned out by the multifarious 'dissident' perspectives represented in the volume.

The number of religious scholars (as well as priests and rabbis) is particularly noteworthy. It is worth remembering, in this context, that Žižek's 'ethical act' is based in St. Paul and, increasingly, he is turning to the 'perverse core of Christianity' as a model for contemporary political resistance. It is, of course, entirely understandable that thinkers on the Left would want to wrest religion from the Right, but, nevertheless, one cannot help but feel haunted by Marx's most famous, if truncated, characterisation of religion as 'the opium of the people'. Indeed, Marxism was founded on the critique of religion, and it seems to me crucial at this contemporary conjuncture to maintain fidelity in its fundamentally secular orientation. Without the ideological crutch of religion, there would be far less need to remind us of the intimate link between capitalism and terror. The recent theoretical turn to religion, and, in particular, to 'primitive' Christianity, seems politically misguided, implying not only that secular methods of action and analysis are insufficient, but also that the answer to this insufficiency lies with a religious tradition whose hegemony is so closely allied to Euro-American domination of the globe.

The authors of Verso's latest addition to its ongoing intervention, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (2005), provide a refreshing contrast to this dangerous tendency, affirming that 'the opiates of evangelical Christianity, Hinduism, and resurgent Islam are the drugs of choice among the world's labouring poor' (p. 137). Collaboratively composed by Iain Boal, T.J. Clark, Joseph Matthews, and Michael Watts – who collectively speak for Retort, 'a gathering of some thirty to forty antagonists of the present order of things' (p. xi) – *Afflicted Powers* grew out of a pamphlet that was originally distributed at the antiwar demonstrations of spring 2003. It grew into what I would describe as the one indispensable guide to our contemporary conjuncture for anyone hoping to formulate and develop modes of radical resistance. Unlike the other texts reviewed here, *Afflicted Powers* proudly resurrects old-fashioned political economy and in the process reminds us of the radical situationist roots of the very idea of 'spectacle'.

In synthesising these chapters into a coherent (if still provisional) emplotment of an historical process that by most accounts appears profoundly irrational, Retort unapologetically returns to a largely abandoned Marxist concept, primitive accumulation, to ground their analysis of the contemporary moment firmly in the concrete and contradictory logic of global capitalism. Stripping away the layers of ideological alibi for the Bush Administration's current campaign of worldwide military aggression, the authors affirm that 'primitive accumulation is an incomplete and recurring process, essential to capitalism's continuing life' (p. 75).

The authors are well aware that there are unprecedented historical developments that shape contemporary primitive accumulation, and to understand these developments they turn to Guy Debord and his crucial concepts of 'the colonisation of everyday life' and 'the
society of the spectacle’. These concepts, of course, have become veritable catchphrases in the lexicon of contemporary cultural studies, but Retort wants ‘to make them instruments of political analysis again, directed to an understanding of the powers and vulnerabilities of the capitalist state’ (p. 17). The Situationist International provided us with a vocabulary to describe the increasing penetration of the logic of capital into both the deepest reaches of private consciousness and the outer horizons of our lived environment. Retort reminds us, however, that situationism was originally meant to provide a programme of radical response to the conditions it described. Thus their first premise reads: ‘At the level of the image… the state is vulnerable’ (p. 27). This is certainly an indispensable lesson of 9/11.

Retort expands upon this lesson with both intelligible historical explanations and radical theoretical interpretations of 9/11 and its aftermath. With a bracing combination of rage and reason, they establish that the ‘blood for oil’ argument ‘mislables what a single commodity… can actually represent in relation to the larger structural imperatives of the system’ (p. 52). Rather, they understand the invasion of Iraq as ‘less a war for oil than a radical, punitive, extra-economic restructuring of the conditions necessary for expanded profitability’ (p. 72). Retort labels the policies that characterise this restructuring as ‘military neoliberalism’ (p. 72), a perfect description of the increasingly violent means whereby the state seeks to make the world ‘safe’ for global capitalism.

While the scale, scope, and sophistication of these policies have increased and intensified, Retort also makes sure to remind us that the basic process is nothing new. Invoking Randolph Bourne’s classic criticism of the state, they affirm that war ‘is modernity incarnate’ (p. 79). In their chapter on ‘Permanent War’ they chronicle the bloody history of US military adventure from the War of 1812 to the present, concluding that

war’s service to capital is to set the stage for the trinity of crude accumulation: the enclosure and looting of resources; the creation of a cheap and deracinated labour force; and the establishment of captive markets. (p. 100.)

Since, in essence, this ‘service’ trumps any particular set of geopolitical concerns, it explains why, ‘once the critical momentum toward military aggression is reached, the intervention is likely to begin even though the various constituents cannot agree on why’ (p. 105). The ‘obscene’ power which tends to get rhetorically mystified in the earlier Verso texts is here revealed as the fundamental and recurrent role of the state under late capitalism: naked theft.

The Middle East is obviously a flash point in this process, and Retort has a brilliant chapter explaining why the United States insists on supporting Israel, a policy which would seem to contradict the larger needs of global capital. In this profoundly illuminating discussion, they identify Israel as ‘the pernicious double identity of the American state’ (p. 110). And this mirror function is itself double, ‘as exemplar of a society in which total militarization and spectacular modernity were fully compatible’ (p. 110). In their one nod to a more psychoanalytically inflected methodology, they conclude that ‘the US… is in thrall to the image of its body double. It is trapped by the logic of its own image co-dependency’ (p. 130).

The flipside of this co-dependence is the emergence of political Islam, which Retort understands as the inevitable result of a century of failed colonial intervention in the Middle East. It is in this crucial chapter that Retort explains the unanticipated return of
religion in a world which, by Marxist historiographical principles, should be becoming increasingly secular. They provide a succinct and eloquent account of the history of Al Qaeda, and political Islam more generally, that both explains and demystifies the dangerous attraction that many on the Left feel for the perpetrators, as opposed to the victims, of 9/11. First of all, instead of simply stating that global terrorist groups are the double of multinational corporations, Retort shows how this situation has emerged from a century of shattered hopes in the Middle East. Specifically, they claim that ‘Political Islam has fed on the twin crises of (failed) secular nationalism and the (failed) post-colonial state’ (p. 138). Into this political vacuum came Sayyid Qutb, the father of modern revolutionary Islam, and his various acolytes, including Osama Bin Laden. As the authors illustrate, their radical program owed much to twentieth-century Marxism:

the Islamist intelligentsia was most often the product not of religious schools but of universities with a curriculum . . . centred on Marxism, Third Worldism, and the literature of national liberation struggles. (p. 150.)

No wonder contemporary left-leaning intellectuals cannot completely repress a begrudging respect for the theoretical radicalism and practical efficacy of the 9/11 attacks. Retort resists this respect by exposing the Leninist orientation of groups like Al Qaeda, and in turn posing vanguardism as the temptation to be resisted, at all costs, by any intellectuals on the Left. Thus they conclude with a twin call: for a ‘non-orthodox, non-nostalgic, non-rejectionist, non-apocalyptic critique of the modern’ and for a ‘non-vanguardist opposition . . . a movement of movements’ (p. 192). The ‘non’s are noteworthy, and Afflicted Powers is partly a study in the acrobatic feat of walking a rhetorical tightrope between the twin valleys of militant vanguardism and gloomy resignation.

This feat is achieved, I would argue, by precariously balancing an emergent faith in the multitude against a residual faith in the aesthetic. Indeed, Hardt and Negri haunt these texts, insofar as investment in the Deleuzian ‘multitude’ would seem to have replaced both the lost Marxist faith in the proletariat and the more recent romance of contemporary cultural studies with youth and ethnic subcultures. Hardt and Negri have established the multitude, both as a theoretical concept and an historical referent, as the only hope for resistance to Empire, and therefore as the only possible basis for an intellectual optimism of the will. Thus they affirm that ‘the concept of the multitude is meant to repropose Marx’s political project of class struggle’.7 Unfortunately, as Retort affirms, ‘insofar as Hardt and Negri’s “multitude” has constituted itself . . . as an enduring political force, its most visible face is that of Islamic resistance’ (p. 159). How can leftist intellectuals in the West, most of them comfortably sequestered in the entrepreneurial university system, construct a political project on this basis?

In terms of the texts reviewed in this essay, this is partly a question of audience. Guy Debord, writing from his self-imposed exile in Champot, opens his Comments on the Society of the Spectacle (also published by Verso) with the ironic claim that this update of his classic intervention is ‘sure to be welcomed by fifty or sixty people’.8 Indeed, the total number of

people who have read even one of the books discussed in this article probably could not fill a single city block in the slums of Bombay, which is only to affirm that the ‘we’ of Retort and its readers exists in precarious unstable relation to the multitude it names. As they themselves ask, ‘[w]ho are “we”, and where do we stand in relation to the various possible oppositional identities we are constantly conjuring up?’ (p. 13).

Retort concedes that such a relation ‘remains to be made’ (p. 13), but I want to gesture toward one answer to this question by turning from the substance of these texts to their visual appearance. It might seem incongruous, even crass, to conclude with a discussion of jacket design – a signature ‘cultural-studies’ type of move – but the content of this series is crucially supplemented and culturally contextualised by its packaging. In providing highly aestheticised renderings of the exploding buildings and the panicking pedestrians of 9/11, all the jackets in essence invoke Karl-Heinz Stockhausen’s provocative claim that the attack on the World Trade Center was the ultimate work of art.

If the texts struggle to make political sense of the event, the jackets comment on its aesthetic impact. As material objects, then, they would seem to illustrate the claim made by Susan Buck-Morss in yet another Verso intervention, Thinking Past Terror: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left (2003):

> artistic practice might contribute to a general reactivation of social imagination… nothing less than a grass-roots, globally extended, multiply articulated, radically cosmopolitan and critical counter-culture.9

All the positive qualifiers in this phrase counterpoise quite conveniently with Retort’s concluding string of negations. Like the ‘surreally violent poetry’ of Covington Hall, Verso’s jacket designs work aesthetically to reframe the political valences of capitalism’s vast propaganda archive. Any coherent Marxist critique of contemporary capitalism cannot help but be bleak; postmodern political economy demands a pessimism of the intellect. For an optimism of the will, we turn to art.

Or, maybe, to cultural studies. After all, it was contemporary cultural studies that resurrected Gramsci’s optimism of the will. And, as I hope this review has established, its methods have not so much become irrelevant to the current conjuncture as they have shifted in the location of their political investments. Celebrating youth subcultures and popular consumption does seem naïve in the face of military neoliberalism; but the ‘slogan’ of cultural studies, I would argue, still names the search for aesthetic practices that reveal the workings of the multitude in its continuous resistance to Empire.

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References


Reyner Banham once claimed that he had learned to drive in order to read Los Angeles in the original. In 1935, Pravda correspondents Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov drove an almost complete circuit around the United States, in search of the ‘real America’. That this meeting of future irreconcilables should seem unusual is somewhat anachronistic. Consider, for instance, the inception of the very term ‘Leninism’, not to mention its codification into a recognisable doctrine in a series of lectures delivered by the Bolshevik General Secretary in 1924 to the young technocrats brought into the party in the posthumous ‘Lenin Levy’, later published as Foundations of Leninism. In amongst the more expected disquisitions on party practice and morality, or appeals to the saintly leader, is the enshrining of a curious and under-investigated element of the Leninist corpus, namely what was occasionally called Taylorism or Fordism, but more simply Amerikanizm. This was not limited to the ruling clique of the USSR, some sort of statement of intent of the nomenklatura; in his 1926 Culture and Socialism, Trotsky was claiming that the ‘Soviet system shod with American technology will be socialism’ – a conjunction that would define the new society: ‘it will transform our order, liberating it from the heritage of backwardness, primitiveness and barbarism’. It is with this conjunction in mind that we should appraise this republishing of a frequently rapturous travelogue, written from inside a Ford and photographed with a Leica. Indeed, by 1935, it might have seemed like the USSR was the true harbinger of modernisation, with the USA languishing under the Depression and the USSR ‘dizzy with success’ at its forced industrialisation.

A stomach of stone and iron

The accepted view of Bolshevism and ‘Americanism’ as eternal enemies, coloured by the red scares and most obviously by the Cold War – the suicidal race where militarily and economically the USA is the adversary to be ‘overtaken and outstripped’ – is encapsulated by a little book published by Moscow’s Foreign Languages Publishing House in 1949. Wrapped inside a cover which depicts a poker-faced New York City cop, truncheon in hand, grimly defending an elevated railway and the looming Rockefeller Centre while disconsolate proletarians hang their heads in the background, Maxim Gorky’s In America is a reprint of a series of articles written in 1906 on a sojourn in New York by the young Bolshevik playwright and novelist. Gorky was not impressed by New York. The skyscrapers did not move him. In the most memorable of the essays, the apocalyptic maelstrom of ‘The City of the Yellow Devil’, Capital’s inhumanity is underlined by a furious fairytale

1. Stalin 1941, p. 112.
anthropomorphism – high-tech industrial capitalism is personified as a dragon, a dinosaur, or as an exotic and terrifying beast, consuming and spitting out the worker for its own self-perpetuating jouissance. America here is irredeemable, a lesson only in abject mechanised brutality and the depths to which bourgeois society has sunk.

Before we move onto some rather more nuanced American travelogues, it is worth immersing ourselves for a while in Gorky’s corrosive scorn. Here, the ‘ichthyosaurs of capital’\(^3\) preside over a landscape both prehistoric and futuristic: ‘Dark soundless skyscrapers, square, without any desire to be beautiful…’. Here, we have Capital with its mask off, forcing into its maw every level of human life, much as in the personified Moloch of Lang’s *Metropolis*, itself inspired by a trip to New York. The proletariat is ‘nourishment for the city monster’,\(^4\) which harvests it in an enormous mechanisation of the human body:

> thrusts and pushes thousands of sounds into their ears, flings fine biting dust into their ears, blinds them, and deafens them with a long-drawn out, unceasing howl…

There is no emancipatory potential here in advanced technology, merely a mass mechanical slavery. Gorky notes that the American proletariat seem oddly unknowing of how horrible this fate is, going about their daily business unperturbed.

To connect this to proselytising on behalf of ‘Leninist Taylorism’, we could consider how Jean-François Lyotard’s *Libidinal Economy* suggests a kind of assent between the machines and the workers, a co-operation in this remaking of the body that so terrifies Gorky. The Taylor system demonstrates a total and precise remaking, a rationalisation at the level of the minorest bodily functions rather than the excrescences of Gorky’s yellow devil, becoming the ‘object of intelligence and decision-making at the level of the labourer’s “body”’.\(^5\) In this sense, the transition between Bolshevik humanism and futurism can be read in terms of the jouissance of industry suggested by Lyotard with reference to the English proletariat:

> in the foundries, in the factories, in hell, they enjoyed the mad destruction of their inorganic body which was indeed imposed on them, they enjoyed the decomposition of their peasant identity.\(^6\)

When this is taken up by those in mainly rural countries facing a similar confrontation with the machine, the response is not so much resistance as infatuation.

Though Lenin had described Taylorism in 1914 as ‘Man’s Enslavement by the Machine’ in an eponymous *Pravda* article, post-Revolution we find him advocating ‘the study and teaching of the Taylor system and systematically trying it out and adapting it to our own ends’.\(^7\) On the artistic front, in 1921 we have the ‘Manifesto of the Eccentric Actor’, proclaiming not that Soviet Russia turn East, but turn yet further West; Europe was dead, and only a harnessing of the USA to the USSR held out any hope:

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Yesterday: the culture of Europe. Today: the technology of America, industrialisation, production under the Stars & Stripes. Oh Americanisation! Oh undertaker!8

This Americanisation could be summed up in a few proper names (Chaplin, Ford, Griffith, Taylor) and located in mass-produced forms of culture and mass-produced goods: in the democratic veshech [thing] of the new avant-gardes, attempting to create a socialist material culture, as well as in the new state itself, conscious of the theoretical impossibility of an agrarian socialism. The constructivists grouped around LEF (the journal of the Left Front of the Arts) were determined to confront all of this and somehow force it into the frame of an egalitarian project.

Hence, twenty years after Gorky, we find the LEF co-editor and Bolshevik cheerleader Vladimir Mayakovsky, standing atop Brooklyn Bridge proclaiming:

\[
\text{this very mile of steel,} \\
\text{that's where alive} \\
\text{my visions can arise-} \\
\text{a struggle} \\
\text{for constructions} \\
\text{over style,} \\
\text{severe reckonings} \\
\text{of screws} \\
\text{and steel}.9
\]

His 1926 travels around the USA and Mexico (recently collected by Hesperus Press as My Discovery of America), while making reference to his predecessor, provoke a very different response to Gorky's bitterness. Mayakovsky is unashamedly in love with the factories, the elevated railways, the production-lines and all the trappings of ‘Americanisation’ – but this is a tentative balancing act. The old Moscow-export Progress Publishers editions used to define Taylorism in their glossary as a system that ‘under capitalism is used to oppress the worker’ (but is, presumably, emancipatory under socialism), and, accordingly, Mayakovsky’s appreciation of a Ford factory in Detroit comprises two sections.

In the first, he watches, enraptured, the process, coming out of the factory ‘completely stunned’;10 in the second, he reports the travails of its workers, limited to precisely-measured 15-minute lunch-breaks, and spied upon to prevent them organising. For Mayakovsky, this does not make the machine itself into a spluttering satanic Moloch, but shows it is a potential liberator locked into an irrational economic system. He sees much that is absurd and mystificatory in the USA, from its personal morality to its dogged clinging onto religion, all ways in which this irrationalism is able to take hold at an everyday level.

What happens to this Americanism as the USSR – enlisting American technicians for its Five-Year Plan – starts to industrialise is interesting. In the first round of the 1932 Palace of

Soviets competition for an Empire-State-Building-rivalling centre of Communist power, entries by the likes of Melnikov, Moisei Ginzburg, Mendelsohn and Gropius were passed over in favour of a confection by Hector Hamilton, a New York architect otherwise lost to history, captioning his stone monolith with a pidgin Russian ‘Moskva – Niu Lork’. And it was actually this that provided the model for the winning design by Boris Iofan, and by association, the subsequent Stalinist skyscrapers of the late 1940s.

Moscow modernism was passed over in favour of the mystificatory modern of the USA, of which Mayakovsky had already expressed his disapproval

they preposterously decorate their fortieth storeys with some Renaissance piece or other, oblivious to the fact that these curlicues and statuettes are good enough at six storeys, but any higher they are completely unnoticeable. Of course, these high class baubles can’t be placed any lower, or they’ll interfere with advertisements.

Stripped of these objets d’art, technology might be more objective, and more socialist – yet the Soviet state took it on, baubles and all.

Let’s catch up to the American chicken\(^\text{13}\)!

Why did I have to see it, this West. I loved it better without having seen it. Take its technology from it and it remains a rotten pile of manure, hopeless and decrepit.

Alexander Rodchenko (1925, printed in Novyi LEF in 1927)\(^\text{14}\)

All this is an America that one could have learned of from Lev Kuleshov films and imported detective stories, from the skyscraper montages advertising Hollywood blockbusters in the posters of the Stenberg brothers. So the readers of ‘the Soviet Life’ Ogonek may have been somewhat alarmed by what Ilf and Petrov claimed was the photograph that really encapsulated their immersion in the USA in all its vast totality. This is a picture that would be familiar to our current, wholly Americanised culture but still alien to a European of 1935: a desolate traffic intersection, a petrol station, wires criss-crossing overhead and advertising filling in the otherwise utterly blank landscape. ‘This’, write Ilf and Petrov, ‘right here, is America’ (p. 13). Not the ballet mécanique at Ford, not the increasingly modernist New-York skyline, and not the teeming proletariat of Chicago, but, instead, a scene of emptiness and eerie calm, an electrification that seems to have produced a kind of kinetic stasis.

However much this is a repudiation of the avant-garde’s American dreams, Ilf and Petrov’s format here is totally informed by the precedent of LEF, particularly in its late 1920s guise as Novyi LEF, a journal of ‘factography’ agitating at the reader so as they may

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13. This was the title of a Soviet children’s book of the 1920s. See Steiner 1999.
avoid becoming one of the illiterates of the future by documenting their own environment with the new reproductive technologies. So one of our correspondents – popular satirical novelists of the NEP period who had some success in the US with *The Little Golden Calf*—takes decidedly unprofessional photographs which provide the fulcrum for the text, which, in turn, illustrates the documentation rather than vice versa. This provoked an ambiguous response. The photos were significantly altered when the travelogue was written up into the book *One-Storied America*, and the authors were accused, with great irony, by the partisan of LEF Alexander Rodchenko – fresh from proving his recantation by aestheticising forced labour on the White Sea Canal – of an inadvertent ‘formalism’, their raw technique leaving the Empire State Building ‘desperately distorted’ (pp. 151–2). It is this residue of the disavowed avant-garde that makes much of Ilf and Petrov’s travelogue seem something of a remnant of that closed experiment.

What the Stalinised USSR had not quite disavowed was Americanism – after all, the comedies of Alexandrov (some of which Ilf and Petrov had worked on), like Stalin’s favourite *Volga-Volga*, were themselves adaptations of the new forms of the sound film and the manner in which they militarised the freeness of the silents into fixed mechanical ballets. Nonetheless, socialist-realist cinema, with its literary adaptations and nineteenth-century pretensions, could not be seen to be wholly consenting to some Busby Berkeley frivolity. These contradictions are rife as Ilf and Petrov confront California. In an anecdote that would seem rather prescient, they are not allowed to bring fruit into the state in case it carries bacteria – even then, California was unhealthily obsessed with its own health. And, in a touch that Mayakovsky would have appreciated, they are utterly floored by the Golden Gate bridge, being built at the time: ‘engineers should get down on their knees and cry tears of joy at the sight of this brilliant construction’ (p. 78), with Ilf’s accompanying photo looking like a Chernikhov fantasy.

One of the most obviously ‘formalist’ photographs in this volume depicts Hollywood Boulevard tilted at a heavy angle, the better to illustrate the wild irrationalism; a tram breaking out of the frame, with a plastic Christmas tree affixed to a telephone pole at the other end. However the production-line approach to cinema had to be censured. In the silent film ‘there were some clumsy thoughts, but at least they were thoughts’. The sound film, meanwhile, enables a product that is ‘slapped together as easily and quickly as standard little summer cottages – a little Fibrolite, a little plywood, some carpenter’s glue, and three forget-me-nots by the porch’ (p. 89). This mania for churning out product is solemnly contrasted by our correspondents with ‘the Soviet art of film’, then actually being replaced with a more Hollywood-esque conservatism. On both sides of the future divide, the barrier had been raised again between art and production.

Surveying the death-agonies of Stalinism, Boris Groys claimed that ‘the Stalinist ideologists were in fact more radical than the cultural revolutionaries, who were in fact Westernizers aspiring to make Russia a kind of better America’.15 Ilf and Petrov accordingly want to salvage American innovation from its unjust economic system. Mel Brooks, a director not known for his socially wholesome aspirations, would later adapt their novel of low-level NEP criminality *The Twelve Chairs*. Their take on Hollywood was informed more by of a sense of its ridiculousness than by moralising at its ‘nauseating’ industry. Under the

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'sickly aridity' of its eternal sunshine, it stands as an absurd industry mass-producing idiocy, though Ilf and Petrov stop to offer brief praise to All Quiet on the Western Front, and, peculiarly, to the director of over-ripe Stanislavskian costume extravaganzas like Queen Christina and Song of Songs, Rouben Mamoulian. The other city portraits of Ilf and Petrov are tinged with a similar ambiguity. Their appreciation of the 24-hour noise of New York was like an amalgam of Gorky and Mayakovsky, excoriating the 'fearful din' of the elevated railway and standing supine before the 'cold, noble and clean' (p. 128) geometry of the Empire State Building, 'rising up like a beam of artificial ice' – leading them to note the strange pointlessness of these feats of technology. The building was half empty at the time. Ilf and Petrov's digressions into urbanism should not obscure what is the essential originality and value of this book as a document, which is that, in pinpointing the importance of sameness and sprawl, of advertising and the endless highway – rather than celebrating a kinetic mechanisation – they had discovered where the future would actually lie. One particularly instructive photographic juxtaposition shows the Main Street of two 'cities', over a thousand miles apart. In both cases, we see a seemingly endless row of one-storied buildings, a café, a crowd of automobiles, and one or two people looking rather out of place amid the desolation, just enough 'to contradict the impression that the entire population of the city has perished' (p. 16). What life there is comes from advertising. This produces a kind of inadvertent interest, in that distance has added curiosity to these images of identical towns, and there is something intriguing about the figures that do walk through these depopulated townscapes. The fur-coated flapper in high heels turning towards Ilf's camera with an unreadable expression that could be a sneer or surprise, begging the question of what she might be doing on this street corner; the hilariously upright citizen marching forwards, cowboy hat pulled right over the eyes. He looks somewhat piqued, as if perhaps he has figured that his interlocutors are not from round here. But then, somewhat unexpectedly, considering what was to come about fifteen years later, no-one seems remotely interested in knowing whence Ilf and Petrov have come. Throughout their journey, they pick up various hikers, all are willing to talk about themselves at length, but never ask what language our correspondents are speaking to each other. At one point, questioning a Southerner as to why he would not marry a 'Negro', the reply is 'You're from New York, I see' (p. 121). Much is pertinent in this peculiar travelogue: the discovery that, in fact, the massive distances and mass transportation of an advanced technological superpower would create a population so sedentary, and so alike; how it shows a country committed to democracy relying on the subjugation of particular peoples – the shacks they photograph of black Southern workers look not unlike those recently turned inside out by Katrina; the way it contributes to dispelling the myth that the USSR and the USA were ideologically incommensurable, while in fact the latter was an inextricable part of the dream-life of the former. There is a documentation of and a dialogue with the strange thing-world of a truly advanced capitalism. What lingers of Ilf’s photographs are the odd, discrete objects: an artificial wigwam, a sign of art-deco silos (like those reproduced in Moisei Ginzburg’s constructivist tract Style and Epoch ten years earlier) announcing entry into Texas, a fibreglass white horse at the front of a bar proclaiming that whiskey will be sold there. As such, it is at its most pungent in its digressions on the subject of advertising, which suggest that the American colonisation
of the European unconscious noted by Wim Wenders in the 1970s could work with great swiftness, even among two writers as persistently on-message as Ilf and Petrov; most memorably in their struggle with what would at one point go under the slogan of ‘the real thing’:

We withstood it for a month. We avoided Coca-Cola. We even held out for another month. But then the advertising finally got to us. We experienced the drink. We can speak with clear consciences. Yes, Coca-Cola does refresh the throat, stimulate the nerves, and has a salutary effect on the constitution. How could we not say that, when for three months its been drilled into our skulls every day, every hour and every minute? (p. 102.)

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References

Domestic-Labour Debate

A: al-masʾala al-ğauhariya fi al-falsafa. –
G: Hausarbeitsdebatte. – F: débat sur le travail ménager. – R: diskussia o domasney rabote. –
S: debate sobre el trabajo doméstico. –
C: zhexu de genben wenti

The ‘domestic-labour debate’ was one of the important controversies within Second, Wave feminism. In the late 1960s, North-American and British women’s liberationists, mostly socialist-feminist in political perspective, launched an inquiry into ‘domestic labour’. In their usage, the term referred to the unpaid housework and child-care performed in private family households by women family members, especially wives and mothers. Theorising domestic labour and its relationship to the reproduction of labour-power would be key, these feminists thought, to understanding women’s subordination from a simultaneously feminist and Marxist perspective. The voluminous literature produced in this international effort became known as the domestic-labour debate.

1. In pursuit of an analysis of domestic labour and the reproduction of labour-power, feminists studied Marxist texts and wrestled with Marxist concepts. Two passages, written nearly forty years apart, seemed of particular importance. The first, from the never-published German Ideology of 1846, occurred in the course of Marx’s and Engels’s discussion of the family as the site at which individuals are maintained and reproduced. ‘The production of life, both of one’s own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a twofold relation: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relation’ (MECW 5, 37). The second passage was from the preface to Engels’s 1884 Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State. Here, Engels wrote of two kinds of production proceeding in parallel, ‘on the one side, the production of the means of existence… on the other side, the production of human beings themselves (MECW 26, 131). Although the thesis of a two-fold production of things and people was not taken up later by the socialist movement, 1970s socialist feminists found it irresistible. Several factors contributed to the attraction: first, it emphasised the importance of activities for which women held major responsibility; second, it implied that the process of the production of human beings has not only an autonomous character but also a theoretical importance equal to that of the production of things; and third, it seemed to authorise feminist efforts to theorise domestic labour and to build an autonomous women’s movement.

Marx’s Capital also drew the attention of domestic-labour theorists, for it suggested links between wages and domestic labour, the reproduction of labour-power, and household structure. As with every commodity, the price of labour-power fluctuates around its value. At the individual level, ‘the value of labour-power is the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of the labourer’. Uniquely, this value involves ‘a historical and moral element’ so that at any given historical moment there is a socially established normal level of subsistence. Because the worker is mortal, moreover, the means of subsistence that corresponds to labour-power’s value ‘must include the means necessary for the labourer’s substitutes, i.e., his children’ (MECW 35, 180). For example, the introduction of machinery, ‘by throwing every member of the [worker’s] family onto the labour market, spreads the value of the man’s labour-power over his whole
family. It thus depreciates his labour-power’ (MECW 35, 398). Marx’s discussions of ‘relative surplus population’ and the ‘industrial reserve army’ appeared pertinent to the domestic-labour debate as well, for they placed the reproduction of the working class at the centre of overall capitalist social reproduction.

Lenin also had something to say of relevance to the domestic-labour debate. In discussing women’s subordination, he focused on the core role of household labour in perpetuating women’s oppression. Peasant and proletarian women are overwhelmed by ‘domestic slavery’, subjugated ‘by the savage demands of kitchen and nursery drudgery’ (LCW 29, 429).

After 1917, Lenin noted that despite ‘all the laws emancipating woman, she continues to be a domestic slave, because petty housework crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery; and she wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery’ (ibid.). Lenin’s emphasis on the material rather than ideological basis of women’s subordination was highly unusual for the period.

2. Unbeknownst to most, the 1970s domestic-labour debate had a direct predecessor in a controversy within the US Communist Party. In In Woman’s Defense (1940) and subsequent polemics, CPUSA member Mary Inman explored the complexities of women’s oppression under capitalism. For Inman, women’s oppression had multiple aspects, cultural and psychological as well as economic, political, and legal. Most relevant to the domestic-labour debate, Inman asserted that women’s housework and childrearing produces present and future labour-power; that is, she claimed unpaid family labour participates in an independent form of production and, indeed, that it is productive labour for capital. Inman’s arguments were at first favourably reviewed in CPUSA circles, but the CP soon repudiated the analysis and Inman resigned from the Party. According to K. Weigand (2001), her work nonetheless influenced women party members and, eventually, its postwar work with women. Meanwhile, Inman continued to advocate for her positions, writing myriad letters and articles addressed to the Left, privately publishing Two Forms of Production (1964), following the burgeoning women’s liberation movement, and even having some direct contact with young socialist feminists in California. It may be that the domestic-labour debate was somehow directly influenced by Inman and her work. More likely, the influence was indirect, transmitted in some manner through the earlier impact of her ideas within the CP.

The domestic-labour debate took the form of a series of papers, often widely disseminated and discussed long before publication. In the late 1960s, Margaret Benston, a US citizen living in Vancouver, Canada, and Peggy Morton, a Canadian feminist based in Toronto, circulated essays that launched the debate. In many ways echoing Inman, they identified family households as sites of production and housework and childrearing as labour processes. For Benston, women’s secondary status has an ‘economic’ or ‘material’ root in women’s unpaid domestic labour within the family. Women are ‘that group of people who are responsible for the production of simple use-values in those activities associated with the home and family’ (Benston 1969, 16). Hence the family is an economic unit whose primary function is not consumption, as was generally thought at the time, but production. Morton’s article criticised and extended Benston’s analysis. She sees the family ‘as a unit whose function is the maintenance of and reproduction of labor power’ (Morton 1971, 214), meaning that ‘the task of the family is to maintain the present work force and provide the next generation of workers, fitted with the skills and values necessary for them to be productive members of the work force’ (Morton 1971, 215-6) In this way, Morton tied her analysis of the family to the workings of the capitalist mode of production, and focused on the contradictions experienced by working-class women within the family, in the labour force, and between the two roles. Her discussion of the contradictory tendencies in women’s situation introduced a dynamic element that had been missing from Benston’s approach.
An article by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, published simultaneously in Italy and the United States in 1972, took the argument several steps further. Polemicising against both traditional left views and the literature of the women’s liberation movement, Dalla Costa argued that housework only appears to be outside the arena of capitalist production. In reality, it produces not just use-values for direct consumption but also the essential commodity labour-power. Indeed, she claimed, housewives are exploited ‘productive workers’ in the strict sense, for they produce surplus-value. Appropriation of this surplus-value is accomplished by the capitalist’s payment of a wage to the working-class husband, who thereby becomes the instrument of woman’s exploitation. Domestic labour is thus a ‘masked form of productive labour’ (Dalla Costa 1972, 34). Dalla Costa proposed two strategic options: first, mobilise working-class housewives around the wagelessness of housework, the denial of sexuality, the separation of family from outside world, and the like; second, reject work altogether; women have worked enough and they must ‘refuse the myth of liberation through work’ (Dalla Costa 1972, 47). – The polemical energy and political range of Dalla Costa’s article had a substantial impact on the women’s liberation movement on both sides of the Atlantic. Unlike Benston, Morton, and other North-American writers, Dalla Costa seemed to have a sophisticated grasp of Marxist theory and socialist politics. Even more than Benston and Morton, she had situated the question of women’s oppression within an analysis of the role of their unpaid domestic labour in the reproduction of capitalist social relations. Moreover, since her analysis functioned as the theoretical foundation for a small but aggressive movement to demand wages for housework, it offered an attractive connection to political practice.

As the domestic-labour debate developed, discussion centered on three problems: the nature of the product of domestic labour; whether domestic labour is productive or unproductive; and the relationship of domestic labour to capitalist social reproduction and oppositional activism. Two general positions emerged. One claimed that the product of domestic labour is the commodity labour-power, bearing both use-value and exchange-value. This could be taken to imply that domestic labour is productive of surplus-value and that those who do domestic labour – women – are exploited. In this way, sex contradictions acquire a clear material basis and housewives occupy the same strategic position in the class struggle as factory workers. The second position maintained that domestic labour produces only use-values for direct consumption by household members, including the worker, and thereby contributes to the overall maintenance and renewal of the working class. Neither productive nor unproductive, domestic labour had to be theorised as something else, an undertaking few attempted. Likewise, this theoretical position had no obvious direct correlate in oppositional political strategy.

3. The domestic-labour debate was from the beginning an international phenomenon (Hamilton/Barrett 1986 and Armstrong/Armstrong 1990 provide and overview of England and Canada). In France, it was conducted with great vehemence. Already in the narrow circle of theoretical feminist journals there were at least two contrary positions. 1) The work of housewives is unproductive, because it creates no surplus-value and does not occur directly under the command of capital. Precisely because it socialises for the capitalist production process in its backwardness, it should be abolished, socialised. A political strategy had to be developed which would analyse the patriarchal oppression system with its basis, the family, also with the goal of abolishing the family. The representatives of this position referred extensively to Marx and Engels, and also to Lenin. This position in France found itself in opposition to the official politics of the Communist Party, even though it was proposed by women from the Party. Since the argumentation of the French Communist Party resembled that of the other Western-European Communist Parties, there were feminist rebellions in all these parties. 2) In the main currents of the French
Communist Party, domestic labour in its private form was not placed in question in principle. Rather, equal division among the genders of domestic labour and technical alienation was advocated, which would thus make professional activity and family life compatible for women. Danièle Leger (1982) argued that, in this way, the connection of content and form of labour would be broken and the family and its position in the totality of the relations of production would be naturalised.

The idea was also diffused that domestic labour constituted its own mode of production. Christine Delphy (1984), for example, proposed the conception that housewives produce no surplus-value. This did not mean, however, that women were excluded from the overall economy, but rather, that they only had greater difficulties in selling themselves freely (in the sense of the free wage-labourer) on the market. They did not possess their own labour-power, which belonged, rather, to the family. This was, in turn, connected to the capitalist mode of production as an independent mode of production. She thus concluded that women were to be mobilised as a class against men.

In the GDR, there was a much noted discussion with the chief thesis that women create less value as soon as they enter the market because a part of their labour-power is employed for the reproduction of male labour-power, which is thus unnoticeable as capitalist extra surplus-value. This argument was summarized by Sigrid Pohl (1983), not with the strategy, for example, of demanding wages for domestic labour, but of abolishing the sphere of extra profits, since it perpetuated the capitalist system together with its discrimination against female wages.

The domestic-labour debate also reached the countries of the ‘Third World’. Beginning from examples of domestic production in India, Gabrielle Dietrich (1984), for example, rejected arguments from Western feminism as inadequate; despite this, she emphasised that the socialist movements in the entire world would lose female members if they were not capable of taking up the questions thrown up in the domestic-labour debate in a renewed Marxism.

The burgeoning domestic-labour literature seemed initially to confirm, even legitimate, socialist feminists’ double commitment to women’s liberation and socialism. Before long, however, a range of problems surfaced. Concepts and categories that had initially seemed self-evident lost their stability. For example, the meaning of the category ‘domestic labour’ fluctuated. Did it refer simply to housework? Or did it include childbearing and childcare as well? Circular arguments were common, as when domestic labour was identified with women’s work, thereby assuming the sexual division of labour theorists wished to explain. In addition, the debate’s almost exclusive concern with unpaid household labour discounted the importance of women’s paid labour, whether as domestic servants or wage-workers. And its focus on the economic seemed to overlook pressing political, ideological, psychological, and sexual issues. Women’s liberationists also found the abstractness of the domestic-labour literature frustrating. The debate developed in ways that were not only hard to follow but also far from activist concerns. Concepts appeared to interact among themselves without connection to the empirical world.

4. The domestic-labour debate of the 1970s addressed two distinct audiences: feminists, especially socialist feminists, and the Left. By the end of the decade, most feminists concluded that the debate had been a misguided undertaking. Heidi Hartmann captured their disappointment in an immensely influential paper, ‘The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism’, whose first version began circulating in 1975. Noting that ‘the categories of Marxism are sex-blind’, Hartmann proposed that two theoretical paradigms be adopted. ‘Both Marxist analysis, particularly its historical and materialist method, and feminist analysis, especially the identification of patriarchy as a social and historical structure, must be drawn upon’ (Hartmann 1981, 2–3). This ‘dual-systems’ approach postulated a partnership of capitalism and patriarchy, each analysable by a distinct theoretical method.
From this perspective, the domestic-labour debate's effort to bridge the boundary between the two systems made little sense.

The idea of two different systems – capitalism and patriarchy – soon became hegemonic in socialist-feminist theorising. Yet this meant that Marxist theory remained untouched by feminist insight. As Iris Marion Young put it, ‘dual systems theory allows traditional Marxism to maintain its theory of production relations, historical change, and analysis of the structure of capitalism in a basically unchanged form…. Thus, not unlike traditional Marxism [it] tends to see the question of women’s oppression as merely an additive to the main questions of Marxism’ (Young 1981, 49). In any case, women’s movement agendas were bursting with other theoretical and practical matters and interest in socialist feminism, much less domestic-labour theorising, dramatically declined.

In the 1980s, audiences for domestic-labour theorising contracted further. Playing a role in the downturn, certainly, were the increasingly conservative political climate and the decline or destruction of many radical social movements. Feminist intellectual work managed to advance, even prosper, but with far fewer links than earlier to women’s movement activism. Surviving on college and university campuses, its practitioners encountered a range of disciplinary constraints and professional pressures. Younger generations of feminist scholars had missed, moreover, the chance to participate in a radical women’s movement rooted in the upheavals of the 1960s.

Despite the retrenchments of the 1980s and 1990s, a certain level of interest in theorising domestic labour has persisted. Where there are relatively strong traditions of Marxist theory, for one reason or another, small communities of economists, sociologists, and historians, male as well as female, have continued to address questions descended from those posed in the domestic-labour debate literature. Working within a Marxist framework, they offer a range of approaches that resist dual-systems analyses, on the one hand, and class-first theorising, on the other. The tone was perhaps set in Maxine Molyneux’s ‘Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate’, which argues for a redirection of the socialist-feminist discussion along two paths. First, interest in domestic labour should move away from the abstract level of the mode of production towards the more concrete ‘level of determinate social formations and their reproduction’ (Molyneux 1979, 22). Second, theoretical inquiry should enlarge its object of analysis beyond domestic labour, since women’s subordination ‘cannot be reduced to economic or material factors alone’ (Molyneux 1979, 22). A continuing stream of articles and books show that both directions have been pursued.

In England, for example, Miriam Glucksmann undertook the more empirical of the two suggested routes. In Women Assemble, she examines how industrial restructuring between the Wars ultimately impacted upon British women’s postwar position within both household and wage economies. For Glucksmann, ‘structural changes in commodity production … can be explained adequately only by reference to the concomitant changes taking place both within the domestic economy and between the domestic economy and commodity production’ (Glucksmann 1990, 28). More generally, she proposes that her method of analysis could be applied to other historical cases. That is, ‘the abstract question of the relation between gender and class division can be answered in terms of particular cases. An accumulation of these will aid in the formulation of a more general theory’ (Glucksmann 1990, 274).

Two recent studies, both by economists, incorporate discussions of the domestic-labour debate within larger overviews of the literature on women and capitalism. In Women’s Employment and the Capitalist Family (1992), Ben Fine rejects the presumed opposition between Marxism and feminism as well as the analytical schizophrenia of dual-systems theory. He criticises the earlier literature for an Althusserian structuralism that shaped its limitations. Unable to confront its problems, ‘the domestic labour debate simply expired, with a flurry of often unflattering obituary notices’ (17). Fine argues for a renewed Marxist-feminist effort. Jean Gardiner, in Gender, Care, and Economics (1997) is less sanguine about such
an effort, but offers a valuable survey and evaluation of the domestic-labour debate. For Gardiner, the debate was ‘an ambitious project launched from a weak, unresourced and marginalized base of Marxist feminist intellectuals’ (97). It was able to clarify the issues that needed examination but it could not overcome its own failings.

Those who continue into the 1990s and beyond to use concepts associated with the domestic-labour debate often do so without reference to the need to clarify and correct the debate’s earlier weaknesses. Domestic labour, for example, is still taken to be something whose site, agents, and content are self-evident. Reproduction, a concept with meanings within several distinct intellectual traditions that were at first the subject of much discussion (see Edholm, Harris and Young 1977; Beechey 1979; Himmelweit 1983), has acquired a generic significance. Likewise, the notion of reproduction of labour-power has become surprisingly elastic, stretching from biological procreation to any kind of work that contributes to people’s daily maintenance, whether it be paid or unpaid, in private households, in the market, or in the workplace. The new phrase, ‘reproductive labour’, now often covers a wide range of activities contributing to the renewal of people, including emotional and intellectual as well as manual labour, and waged as well as unwaged work. Evelyn Nakano Glenn summarises these developments (Glenn 1992, 4).

Lise Vogel (1983, 2000) attempts to incorporate domestic labour within a significant reconstruction of Marxist political economy. For example, she positions domestic labour as a second, hitherto hidden, component of necessary labour and thus a category specific to capitalism. Alongside the necessary labour discussed by Marx (renamed ‘the social component of necessary labour’) lurks a second, hitherto hidden, ‘domestic component of necessary labour, or domestic labour’ – the unwaged work that contributes to the daily and long-term renewal of bearers of the commodity labour-power and of the working class as a whole (162). Although domestic labour lacks value, it is indispensable, together with the social component of necessary labour, to surplus-value appropriation and capitalist social reproduction.

Brief though it was, the domestic-labour debate had an important and longlasting impact. Its identification of private households as production, not consumption, units, significantly shifted the framework within which women’s activities were analysed. Using categories borrowed or derived from Marxist political economy, domestic-labour theorists began the work of delineating as labour processes the unpaid housework and child-care performed in private households by family members. More broadly, the domestic-labour literature sought to place domestic labour and the reproduction of labour-power in the context of capitalist social reproduction, specifying a range of tendencies and contradictions. And, along with other developments (e.g. women’s rising labour-force participation; the emergence of strong women’s movements; mainstream economists’ interest in households and human capital), it helped to both make domestic labour socially visible as work and put it onto the public policy agenda. The domestic-labour debate sought to move women from the analytical periphery to the heart of Marxist theorising about capitalism. Domestic-labour theorists were thus among the first to begin exploring the limitations of then-current Marxist theory and to intuit the coming crisis of Marxism. Despite the domestic-labour debate literature’s considerable ambiguity and many loose ends, its challenge to feminist theory and to the tradition of Marxist political economy remains an unfinished project.

Lise Vogel


capitalism, classes, crisis of Marxism, division of labour, family labour/ house work, feminisation of wage-labour, feminism, housewife, identity politics, labour, mode of production, patriarchy, production of life, productive/unproductive labour, reproductive labour, reproductive rights, student movement, surplus-value, women’s movement, women’s studies, working class.


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movement, surplus-value, women's movement,
women's studies, working class.

Arbeit, Arbeiterklasse, Arbeitsteilung, Familienar-
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Frauenstudien, Hausfrau, Hausfrauisierung der
Lohnarbeit, Identitätspolitik, Kapitalismus, Klas-
sen, Krise des Marxismus, Mehrwert, Patriarchat,
Produktion des Lebens, Produktionsweise, produkt-
tive/unproduktive Arbeit, Reproduktionsarbeit,
reproduktive Rechte, Studentenbewegung.
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