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Editorial Note

The Special Volume of *Crossings: A Journal of English Studies* on Marx is indeed special. Some of the papers were presented at the two-day international conference that ULAB organized to celebrate Karl Marx's bicentenary on November 30-December 1, 2018. This issue of *Crossings* did not, however, limit itself only to the sixty odd papers that were presented at the conference; but solicited articles from some renowned Marxist critics at home and abroad.

The volume surveys a Marxist tradition of critical thinking by incorporating issues such as political economy, ideology, value theory, crisis theory, systemic analysis of capitalism, eco-criticism, neoliberalism, and aesthetic theory. These articles show how a realistic alternative to the current global marketplace can be deemed through reorganizing our sensibility.

The special issue on Marx begins with Fakrul Alam's paper in which he discusses the German revolutionary's writings on India, originally published in the *New York Tribune*. Alam draws attention to the historical precision and rhetorical force of Marx's essays and his powerful critique of British imperialism. As he argues in his essay, postcolonial critics, especially those whose works pivot on British rule in India, will immensely benefit from Marx's rich prognosis of British imperialism. Alam's reading, on the one hand, draws attention to the astonishing depth of Marx's knowledge about India, and, on the other, locates the history and origin of these ideas, showing how his insights developed and matured with time. He also offers his viewpoints on the controversy created by Edward Said's comments on Marx's views in the Palestinian-American's book *Orientalism*.

Bret Benjamin's essay revisits *Grundrisse* and *Capital* to understand Marx's critique of capitalism's "economic law of motion." In particular, Benjamin highlights how Marx frames capital as the living contradiction to overcome the inherent barriers that capital posits. One such example involves devaluation; that is, the movement of money to commodity. Benjamin recognizes that the globalization and monetization of our time is different from the industrial age that Marx studied. However, that does not exhaust Marx's relevance today. For Benjamin, Marx has offered us a blueprint to negotiate with the new set of social rules that we are experiencing.

In "Not Winnin' Anymore: *Boys from the Blackstuff* and the Literature of Recession," Joseph Brooker examines the reversal of social thought or ideological domain under Thatcherism. Economic recession, unemployment, North/South divide are some of the attributes of Thatcherism. Citing examples from different period dramas and regional dramas featured on British TV, Brooker discusses how deindustrialization has become a reality for contemporary Britain, and how it has atrophied the working class.

Shamsad Mortuza's review of a 2017 Bangla movie marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Naxalite Movement shows the "lapsed Marxism" and Maoist ideologies that led a group of progressive students to use a tribal village in India as the epicenter of a political tremor

that divided the communist party. The movie's leitmotif betrayal is elaborated through a multiplicity of exchanges between the past and the present to highlight the stalemate of left politics.

Khanh Nguyen offers a reading of two short stories by contemporary British sci-fi writer China Miéville. Terming the setting of the stories as the New Weird, Nguyen unpacks the spectacles of violence that Miéville has to offer. For this Marxist academic author, the slow horror of global warming and other environmental threats constitute our dystopian existence. Miéville uses cinematic language to blur the boundary between genres as if to question the sites of production. Using recent theories on eco-criticism and posthumanism, Nguyen shows how the new weirds are becoming the new normal.

Sean O'Brien scrutinizes BBC 2 series *The Fall* to address several questions involving precarity, representation, gender, labor, affect, value, reproduction, and the figure of the child. O'Brien points out several failings of capitalist class relation. For instance, citing the links to reproductive work with the construction of self-identity, O'Brien observes, "in the series, institutions of social reproduction are revealed to be sclerotic, exemplified not only in the austerity policies of fiscally insolvent national governments but also in the family and the couple, social forms integral to a system of crisis management that depends upon feminized reproductive work."

Joel Wendland-Liu's essay employs Aijaz Ahmed's understanding of materialist conception of history to revisit Marx's Writings on the US Civil War. Wendland-Liu reads the slave exploitation as a prototype of exploitation in global capitalism. The US Civil War for him offers a site for political, economic, and cultural struggles. He expounds his argument by mentioning some relevant Asian and African examples.

Finally, in his article "Allegorizing Neoliberalism," Sarker Hasan Al Zayed examines neoliberalism's relationship with capitalism and class. Positioning himself against Foucault who posits a subjectivist theory of neoliberalism, Zayed argues that subjectivism is an insufficient tool for understanding neoliberalism. By using the examples of Samrat Upadhyay's "The Good Shopkeeper" and Amitav Ghosh's the *Ibis* trilogy, Zayed suggests that neoliberalism can be better understood as a phase of capitalism with definitive cultural attributes and historical propensities.

I am sure these snippets will encourage you all to critically engage with the texts assorted in this volume. Enjoy!

On behalf of the Editorial Board,

Shamsad Mortuza, PhD
Editor

From the Conference Convener: Marx at 200

"In accordance with Marx's whole worldview," writes Rosa Luxemburg in her discussion about the second volume of *Capital*, "his magnum opus [*Capital*] is no *Bible* containing ultimate truths that are valid for all time, pronounced by the highest and final authority; instead, it is an inexhaustible stimulus for further intellectual work, further research, and the struggle for truth". Written at the turn of the twentieth-century, Luxemburg's candid estimation of Marx's *chef-d'œuvre* spells out how we should approach the German revolutionary's work as we engage with him. Marx is no prophet; nor is he a source of eternal truths. He is, however, an inexhaustible wellspring of wisdom, who can be summoned into service in our struggles to create a better society. Luxemburg's clearsighted approximations on Marx's legacy leaves it to subsequent generations to figure out what their own relationships with the German philosopher and revolutionary will be like. Two centuries after Marx's birth in 1818, we see ourselves having to grapple with the long and intimidating shadow of Karl Heinrich Marx, either trying to coalesce around him or briskly fending off his troubling specter.

It will not be hyperbolic to describe the twentieth century as the Marxian century, for to do so will be to acknowledge that socialist and pseudo-socialist governments ruled more than half of the world's population in the name of Marx. The Russian Revolution was fought in the name of the German revolutionary and it is through Lenin that Marx reached a large tract of the globe in the first half of the twentieth-century. Mao Zedong, too, drew his inspirations from the life and works of the German revolutionary, organizing Chinese people around the principles of Marx's dictates. In Latin America, revolutionaries such as José Carlos Mariátegui, Che Guevara, and Fidel Castro found the bearded revolutionary's thoughts inspiring, invoking him to fortify their own arguments about politics. They too drew upon the rich fountains of his work and words. Aimé Césaire, George Padmore, and C. L. R. James from the Caribbean, likewise, engaged with Marx in their own creative ways. Their discussions on race relations had the inflections of the Marxian deliberations on class relations. It will not be an error to consider the tricontinental nationalist movements to be Marxian in spirit. Many of the figureheads of Asian, African, and Caribbean anticolonial movements were indeed inheritors of Marxism of one kind or another. The presence of semi-socialist welfare states all around the globe from the 1930s till the 1980s testifies to that reality.

It was in the 1970s, however, when the postwar boom had come to an end and a protracted global economic crisis had hit the world that both democratic socialism and more radical brands of communism began to retreat. As socialist and communist states in Eastern Europe and elsewhere fell in the late-1980s and early 1990s, Marx and Marxism began to appear anemic, unable to offer much to the world in need of an economic solution to the crisis. What also began to become clear was far too many of these socialist states were indeed heavily bureaucratized, entirely uninterested in the immiseration of the ordinary people. Utterly oppressive and violent, many of these governments had no idea about what

they were seeking to establish in the name of revolution. It was, therefore, easy for wave after wave of neoconservative and pseudo-liberal ideologies to bat away the emaciated left whose Soviet Union-infused Marxism was already wavering after the fall of the Eastern Block. In a changed historical reality, neoliberal political views gained traction among people as the narratives of development and progress began to circulate uncontested and corporations took hold of the democratic state.

The neoliberal optimism too has waned. A depleted planet and immiserated "surplus populations" have already exposed the underside of the conservative utopian dream of an eternal capitalist future. What is often erroneously seen as capitalism's excesses – which are indeed as integral for capitalism's survival as are its more humane features – have begun to trouble people. Since there has been no real growth in the global economy since the 1970s, the dominant mode of enrichment has been impoverishment and expropriation of vulnerable groups and classes. This accumulation by dispossession has led to extreme wealth on the one side and extreme poverty of a huge number of people on the other. Arundhati Roy has compellingly explored the relation between poverty and enrichment in *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*, echoing many of the explicit historical documentations of ordinary people's misery in the nineteenth-century in Marx's *Capital Vol. I*. Today, climatologists and natural scientists are overwhelmingly convinced that the process of human extinction has already begun. They have given a fancy name to this era as well: the Anthropocene (although some are more inclined to call this era the Capitalocene because it has been ushered in by capitalism). Its abscess-ridden body now available for close inspection, neoliberal capitalism has begun to show signs of decomposition. Meanwhile, the anachronistic grand-old Marx who had been hastily abandoned by political opportunists and postmodernists has showed up again. Are we witnessing the dawn of a new Marxian era? How are we to account for Marx's work and words two centuries after his birth?

One cannot debate about the importance of Marx so long as one lives through the era of capitalism. He has been, till today, capitalism's most notable critic. Discussions about the capitalist economy, its culture, its subjects, and society are incomplete without Marx and Marxism. How can one discuss a system without considering its most tenacious critic? Likewise, any discussion on democracy needs to incorporate its more radical other (socialism) as well, for not to do so will result in an undialectical and partial study of democracy. Marx did not believe in the separation between thought and action. His effort was to unify and embody them in such a way that one's thought moved one to act upon the world to make it better. So long as Marx was devoted to the task of creating a world better than the one he inhabited, he remained a revolutionary. He was, also, an immensely gifted philosopher and political economist, the like of whom the world has rarely seen. As has been pointed out by Luxemburg, Marx was no prophet and some of his ideas appear dated today. Some of his most prophetic pronouncements have not come into fruition. Yet, there is immense risk in sidestepping Marx. One can only do so at one's own risk, for to do so would sever one from one of the richest sources of knowledge that human beings have ever known. Marx and Marxism have been foundational in many branches of knowledge, especially in the humanities and social sciences, where not being familiar with Marx can

result in lamentable ignorance. The tenacity of Marx and the tradition that he birthed demands that we pay adequate attention to what has transpired since his birth more than two centuries ago, and thumb through the works he and his successors have produced.

This issue of *Crossings*, the journal of the Department of English and Humanities at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), is a step towards that direction. Most of the articles published in this volume have come from a conference that took place on the premises of ULAB on November 30-December 1, 2018. Although more than sixty papers were presented in that international conference, only a selected few have made it to this issue. The paucity of the pages notwithstanding, the efforts to bring the disparate voices together is encouraging and enriching. Hope this will only expand our understanding of Marx, and contribute significantly to our academic growth. I express my deep gratitude to every single person involved in the conference and the publication of this volume.

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Karl Marx on India: A Postcolonial Perspective

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Abstract

This paper focuses on some of the writings of Karl Marx on India in English to indicate something of the extent of his astonishing knowledge of the subcontinent's political and socioeconomic history, and to highlight the incisiveness of his critique of British rule in India. In the process, it attempts to show Marx's (and Friedrich Engels') sensitivity as well as understanding of the plight of Indians under the East India Company's rule, and his quite overt and powerful denunciation of British excesses during the Sepoy Mutiny. In addition, the paper underscores the importance of these writings for us in South Asia, and stresses their continuing relevance in our time. It also emphasizes Marx's mastery of details of Indian history, land laws, and topography. Moreover, it accentuates the rhetorical persuasiveness with which he makes his case against British rule in India and underscores his command over English prose. The paper ends by suggesting that all postcolonial scholars dealing with the subcontinent as well as students of Marxism can benefit by studying Marx's pioneering role in critiquing British colonial rule in India.

Keywords: Marx, British rule, Sepoy Mutiny, South Asia, Said

Introduction

Growing up intellectually in the 1960s and 70s, and becoming increasingly aware of the progressive sides of politics, local and global, as well as its reactionary elements, who could remain unaffected by the extracts from a classic of Karl Marx (and Friedrich Engels') oeuvre, such as "The Communist Manifesto," or the long extracts from *Grundrisse*, or *The German Ideology*, collected in theory anthologies? It was clear to me even then that the Marx I knew had hit at some essential truths about history in his writings. Nevertheless, I am not a Marxist and activism or party politics have never attracted me; nor can I claim that I came to know a lot about Marx as I furthered myself intellectually. If, then, I pen this paper on Marx and British India, it is only because of the conjunction of a visit to a Delhi bookshop when I had already begun to think of a topic for the Marx conference[1] and coming across *Karl Marx on India,* a book edited by Iqbal Husain, former Professor of History at Aligarh Muslim University, and published under the aegis of Aligarh Historians Society by Tulika Books in 2006. The volume seemed even more attractive to me because it contained a long introduction by the eminent historian and Professor Emeritus of the same university, Professor Irfan Habib. There was something else in my mind then too – Edward Said's indictment of Marx for his "orientalist" perspective in

1 The author would like to thank Dr. Sarker Hasan Al Zayed, Assistant Professor at the Department of English and Humanities, ULAB, for inviting me to write this paper, for without it, this paper would never have been written.

Orientalism. Since that book has been seminal for me ever since I first read it in 1980, I thought: why not explore how right or wrong Said was to label Marx thus by gauging the importance of Marx's writings and assessment of India in our time for this conference? But my discovery that Marx had written the essays collected in the book in English and the fact that I was going to read a paper on him in an English department conference added another dimension to it – why not also read the essays to assess Marx as a writer of English prose?

My paper thus has five parts. In the first part, I discuss the genesis and nature of Marx's writings on India. In the second, I attempt to provide an account of his extensive, indeed, astonishing knowledge of Indian affairs of the period he focuses on. I also try to trace the evolution of his thoughts on India during that span of time in this section. In the third, I comment on his English prose style and the rhetorical strategies he adopts in the essays and reports. In the fourth section, I endeavor to highlight the incisiveness of his critique of British rule in India and his indictment of the British for the way they exploited the land and brutalized Indians in the course of their rule. I then offer my viewpoint on Said's evaluation of Marx's "orientalizing" of India and the controversy that ensued when a few leading Marxists assaulted the Palestinian-American critic for being so offensive about the fountainhead of their thought. My conclusion offers my own take on the controversy and shows how we can value Marx's writings on India. It also comes to a perspective on Said's critique of his early writings on British India.

Why, How and What Karl Marx Wrote on India

The 59 articles and pieces collected in *Karl Marx on India* were all originally published in the progressive and popular American newspaper *New York Daily Tribune* from 1853 to 1861. The book also includes a few articles written by Marx's great friend and collaborator Engels as well as excerpts from their letters relating to India. In addition, the volume has a very helpful entry on references to India elsewhere in their works compiled by Professor Habib.

Professor Husain's Prefatory Note indicates that Marx originally contributed to the *Tribune* a few pieces on India that he had written in German in 1852 but that Engels translated for him into English then. However, from 1853 onwards, his writings on India in the newspaper were his own forays into English journalistic prose and thus "constitute a separate genre among his works" (Husain xiii). In other words, they are of interest not only because Marx's writings are not otherwise associated with Indian affairs in a sustained manner as is the case here, but also because they reveal his abilities in writing English pieces for a wide readership year after year. Husain notes though that Marx hated writing them and deemed them distractions from the major works he was engaged in at that time, such as *Grundrisse* (1857), the *Contribution to Critique of Political Economy* (1859) and the first volume of *Capital* (1867), and that would eventually make him famous. But his financial state was such that apart from the money he made from his *Tribune* articles on India and

other contemporary happenings, and the support Engels provided him regularly, he had nothing much to go on that would support him and his family at this time; in other words, he wrote his Indian articles because he had to!

However, it is quite clear from a reading of the 59 pieces collected in *Karl Marx on India* that Marx wrote most of them not merely because he felt that he had to write whatever he could for money, but primarily because he is quite stirred by events unfolding in the subcontinent in the 1850s, and driven to pursue their deeper implications. It even seems likely that these events could be grist for his developing ideas about capitalism and historical change. In particular, he was attracted to the ravages wrought by British rule in India and the simmering discontent that it had caused among the people of the subcontinent until the lid came off completely in the eruption of 1857. Marx subsequently became quite absorbed in reporting and analyzing the causes and consequences of the Sepoy Mutiny and appraising the extent of English culpability in the carnage that had occurred then.

Marx's sources for his Indian articles in the *Tribune* are various. He seemed to have scoured British parliamentary papers, newspaper reports, minutes of the East India Company, historical accounts and travel writings on India. He appeared too to have gone over carefully in his British Library forays over contemporary as well as earlier economic tracts on the trade with India, speeches delivered in the House of Commons, letters he had come across on what was going on in the subcontinent, memoirs of English men who had served there or had written books on the people of India, and even translations of classical Indian texts such as *Manusmriti*. It is obvious that, along with Engels, Marx quickly grew in confidence in mastering the political, social and economic configurations and history, and even the geography and topography of India.

The *Tribune* pieces on India that Marx and Engels contributed and collected in *Karl Marx on India* vary in length and differ in the intensity of their coverage. Some are merely brief notes while others are of considerable length; some are well-written entries content to merely report on current happenings or describe the course of the war succinctly, while others are analytical and draw out the implications of what was going on in the cataclysm scarring the subcontinent. Whenever necessary, Marx provides abundant facts and figures to back up his points or make them. Whether he wants to illustrate the huge revenue earned from India by the East India Company and their expenditure on Indians, or detail the miserly attitude of its administrators who cared not a fig for the welfare of the people of the subcontinent but lived lavish lives, he has facts to back him up. At times Marx offers quite detailed accounts of the extent of the uprisings and their fatalities. On other occasions, he provides abundant statistics on the trade between England and India, or the business transactions involving opium between India and China that were profiting only the English rulers and traders, exploiting the Indian growers and doping the Chinese customers (As an aside here, let me direct your attention to Amitav Ghosh's

excellent 2011 novelistic account of the ravages wrought by the opium trade on the Chinese and the profits made by mostly English merchants in *River of Smoke).* However, to come back to Marx and his reportage on the Sepoy Mutiny in India, he presents the military aspects of the situation expertly. He comments perceptively on the different stages of the campaign and outlines graphically the tactics followed by the English in quelling the rebellion. He underscores the economic aspects of the Mutiny and the financial implications for England of the continuing campaign, probing into all the figures he could hold off. He slices open the claims of the rulers, the better to expose their greed and cruelty. In the articles written as early as 1853, he seems to be hinting at the disruptive and destructive potential of English rule; in his final contributions he appears to be saying that though the mutineers had been subdued and the country pacified, Indians were restive, and there were ample signs of resurgence of Indians fed up with the way the Company had been abusing and exploiting them. For sure, remembering that he had come so late to the subcontinent in his writings and considering that his articles on India are only marginal to his main preoccupations, one can only marvel at Marx's mastery of Indian history, finances, social stratifications and geography, and much else. Such mastery reminds me of Daniel Defoe, admittedly quite unlike Marx in almost every way, who had once boasted about himself in the third person, "He had the world at his fingertips!" However, as will be clear, Marx is tonally more like Jonathan Swift in his mastery of anti-colonial satire than the self-proclaimed projector-propagandist of empire that Defoe was.

Marx as a Writer of English Prose

As I indicated above, one of the pleasures of writing this paper for me was my discovery of the power of Marx's English prose as I kept reading for it. The first thing that can be said about Marx's English prose is the clarity with which he can analyze or describe happenings in the language. But he is also quite expressive and creative in his word usage. For example, he characterizes the Conservative party politician Lord Stanley's parliamentary maneuverings as symptomatic of "these coalescent times" in the way he had "found a formula in which the opposite views are combined together" (19). Isn't that a wonderful phrase and isn't it something we could apply to the Bangladesh we live in and especially our country in election years? This phrase is from his July 1, 1853 piece simply titled "India" which he ends sarcastically by telling his readers that he intends in the next one to expose "the bearing of the Indian Question on different parties in Great Britain, and the benefit, the poor Hindoo may reap from the quarreling of the aristocracy, the moneyocracy, and the millocracy about his amelioration" (20). Now we may not have an aristocracy, but aren't the words "moneyocracy" and "millocracy" so apt for the people who dominate our economy and politics in the time we live in as well?

In fact, the heavy irony we can detect in that quote is one of the dominant notes of Marx's long pieces on India. The relatively long next *Tribune* entry of July 11, 1853, "The East India Company – Its History and Results," is full of such ironic comments

as are many of the other pieces that follow. Marx thus comments acerbically about the "sharp philanthropy" of the Company while exposing what he calls "hypocritical peace-cant" (25). He is actually bent on showing the way Indians were being exploited and the country denuded by self-aggrandizing Company officials with the assistance of their hypocritical backers in English politics. Marx, for sure, can be quite direct and devastating in his characterization of such politicians as in the next piece titled "The Government of India" where he assaults frontally the politicians skirmishing in the House of Commons on Company affairs with a sentence like the following one: "During the discussion all was thistles for the Ministry, and Sir Charles Wood [Anglo-Indian Whig politician and Member of Parliament of the British Empire] was the ass officially put to the task of feeding upon them. In addition, Sir Charles receives the crown of another Menu" [*sic*; he means Manu, the author of the Sanskrit law code] (30). Note too how scathing Marx can be when he castigates the liberal proponents of Free Trade siding with the politicians supporting the company in their aggressive policies on India. He criticizes their collusive practices thus, "The Peace Ministry, at this moment does everything to secure its *entente cordiale* with the Peace Party, Manchester School, who are opposed to any kind of warfare, except by cotton bales and price currents" (42). His characterization on Benjamin Disraeli's slide as an orator and a man of principle by using inversion in "The Indian Question" is similarly quite devastating and unforgettable when he declares with what is almost a chiasmus that as an orator "once he succeeded in giving even commonplaces the pointed appearance of epigrams. Now he contrives to bury even epigrams in the conventional dullness of respectability" (66). Note the use of an actual chiasmus in his contemptuous description of the way the propped up Moghul Emperor was being indulged by the British for their purposes: "The present Great Moghul, even more favored than Napoleon [in captivity], finds himself able to back the disease by his sallies and his sallies by the disease" ("The Revolt in India" 105).

On other occasions, Marx writes English prose that is dispassionate and clear, as when he discusses the course of the mutiny in essay after essay, always making sure that he had data to illustrate his chief points. For his American and English readers, he makes telling comparisons when writing about India so that they can picture its problems easily as when he notes in "The British Rule in India" how "Hindostan is an Italy of Asiatic dimensions" in its varied geography and topography. However, he qualifies the statement a little later by saying "Yet, in a social point of view, Hindostan is not the Italy, but the Ireland of India," clinching this point with an additional sentence where he states: "And this strange combination of Italy and of Ireland, of a world of voluptuousness and of a world of woes" can be traced to the religious traditions the peoples of the country are heir to (11).

In the rhetorical strategy he adopts in his assaults on the East India Company though, Marx seems to be at times in the tradition of another great thinker and fierce critic of the East India Company, Edmund Burke, whom he had quoted approvingly and at length in his critique earlier in describing "the close and abject

spirit of the bureaucracy" (36). To make this particular point, let me quote here at length first Burke describing the perfidious operations of the East India Company in India in parliament on 1 December 1783:

> My … assertion is that the Company never has made a treaty, which they have not broken. … [Let me] recapitulate some heads – the treaty with the Moghul, by which we stipulated to pay him 260,000*l.* annually, was broken. This treaty they have broken and not paid him a shilling … They broke their treaties with Nizam, and with Hyder Ali. (374)

And here is Marx reporting on the Company's usurpation of supremacy in India through treachery in his 1853 article, "The Future Results of British Rule in India":

> How came it that English supremacy was established in India? The paramount power of the great Mogul was broken by the Mogul Viceroys. The power of the Viceroys was broken by the Mahrattas. The power of the Mahrattas was broken by the Afghans … and while all were struggling against all, the Briton rushed in and was enabled to subdue them all. (46)

In other words, to Marx, the British, as Burke had also noted, are like all previous usurpers of India in that they have taken over India through acts of bad faith repeatedly, the only difference being that they have outdone them all.

I would like to provide another example of how Marx's thinking as well as his prose style and rhetorical strategy make his Indian writings sound similar to Burke's great speech on Fox's East India Bill by once again beginning with the great Anglo-Irish writer and statesman's unforgettable lines on the uniquely destructive nature of the British conquest of India

> The several irruptions of Arabs, Tartars, and Persians were, for the greater part, ferocious, bloody, and wasteful in the extreme: our entrance into the dominion of that country was, as generally, with small comparative effusion of blood, being introduced by various frauds and delusions, and by taking advantage of the incurable, blind, and senseless animosity which the several country powers bear towards each other, rather than by open force. But the difference in favor of the first conquerors is this. The Asiatic conquerors very soon abated of their ferocity, because they made the conquered country their own. … But under the English government all this order is reversed. The Tartar invasion was mischievous; but it is our protection that destroys India. (Burke 382)

What follows will show that Marx is clearly echoing Burke's characterization of Company rule and its ill effects in India, but with a crucial distinction:

> Arabs, Turks, Tartars, Moghuls, who had successively overrun India, soon became *Hindooized*, the barbarian conquerors being, by an eternal law of history, conquered themselves by the superior civilization of their subjects.

> The British were the first conquerors superior, and therefore, inaccessible to Hindoo civilization. They destroyed it by breaking up the native communities, by uprooting the native industry, and by levelling all that was great and elevated in the native society. The historic pages of their rule in India report hardly anything beyond that destruction. The work of regeneration hardly transpires through a heap of ruins. Nevertheless, it has begun. ("The Future Results of British Rule in India" 46-47)

In a much later *Tribune* piece published in 1858, while describing caustically the outrages being committed by plundering British soldiers, Marx seems to be intertextually evoking the part of Burke's speech on Fox's East India Bill I have extracted above yet again. This, to me, is evident in the following sentence, "The Calmuck hordes of Genghis Khan and Timur, falling upon a city like a swarm of locusts, and devouring everything that came their way, must have been a blessing to a country, compared with the irruption of these Christian, civilized, chivalrous and gentle British soldiers" (176).

Like Burke, Marx sees Indian history as one where successive invaders took advantage of a divided and weak country to conquer it. The diction, kind of lists used and numbers evoked, and the rhetorical pattern are strikingly similar. One outstanding difference is that Burke is saying that all the conquerors except the English made India their own country, accepting it as their own. However, Marx states unequivocally something else that Burke does not – he sees the English as different from the other conquerors because cruel though they were and as destructive as the others, they became assimilated because they had conquered a superior civilization. In contrast, he felt the English, being superior, had unwittingly taken on a crucial role of "regeneration" of a moribund, atrophying civilization. This is a point that I will take up in discussing Marx's essays on British India *vis-à-vis* Said's critique of him in the penultimate section of my paper. However, now I would like to use these quotes to transit from the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of Marx's English prose to deal fully with something that I have indirectly been hinting at – Burke's sharp and incisive criticism of British colonial policy.

Marx's Critique of Colonial Rule in India

In a sense, I do not need to labor the point I intend to make in this section about Marx as someone who is fiercely critical of colonization, especially of British colonialism. Most of what I commented on a little while back about his style and rhetorical strategy point at that direction as do my comments on his following Burke to a great extent in denouncing the East India Company's continuous pillaging of Indian resources. Nevertheless, a lot more remains to be said about the extent of Marx's censure of colonial rule in the articles Husain collected in *Karl Marx on India*, for there is much that is important there that I have not covered. For example, as early as his first article written in English in 1853, he recommends that all "legislation on

Indian affairs be postponed" until "the voice of the natives shall have been heard" (4), something he feels the present government has not been doing at all. Marx would not have the Company's charter renewed by the government because he is convinced that all they want is "the privilege of plundering India for the space of 20 years" (5). He denounces the Permanent Settlement of 1790 and mentions repeatedly how the *zemindari* and *Ryotwari* systems thus set up are "only so many forms of fiscal exploitation in the hands of the Company" (8). Marx is convinced that even those who criticized government policy and argued for Free Trade, like the Manchester politician John Bright, was as culpable as the government of trying to ruin India because his special perspective is informed by his need to advocate dumping English textiles in a captive market.

Of special note for us here in Bangladesh in this regard is the essay "The British Rule in India." In it Marx sets the British East India Company at par with the Dutch East India Company as far as "colonial rule" is concerned, since both had managed "to break down the entire framework" of countries they had colonized without doing anything to rebuild them (12). As proof of the British Company's destructive policies, he turns to the plight of the weavers of Bengal, where agriculture and textiles have both been devastated by British rule. He gestures at how Europe had once received "the admirable textures of Indian labor" (13) but notes how things have changed ever since "the British intruder … broke up the Indian hand-loom and destroyed the spinning wheel," in the process of driving out "Indian cottons from the European market" (14).

Marx correlates the decrease of Indian textile exports with the monopoly exerted by British muslins to India and the decimation of the population of Dhaka. To quote what he says about the impact of colonization on our city and citizens at one point of history, let me quote at some length to indicate how Marx describes the outcome of the fatal embrace of British colonial policy in our part of India at that time:

> From 1818 to 1836, the export of twist from Great Britain to India rose in proportion of 1 to 5,200. In 1824, the export of British muslins to India hardly amounted to 1,000,000 yards, while in 1837 it surpassed 64,000,000 yards. But at the same time the population of Dacca decreased from 150,000 inhabitants to 20,000. This decline of Indian towns celebrated for their fabrics was by no means the worst consequence. British steam and science uprooted, over the whole surface of Hindostan, the union between agriculture and manufacturing industry (14).

In the same article, Marx goes on in this intensely anti-colonial vein to detail the Company's destruction of the social fabric of India as well as its economic ruin.

In other contributions he made to the *Tribune*, Marx suggests other causes and consequences of the British invasion of India. In the article titled "The East India Company – its History and Results," he emphasizes how the maws of colonialism

must always devour new territories. He shows how the English nation, "having simultaneously lost their colonies in North America," felt "the necessity of elsewhere reigning some great Colonial Empire" (23), surely an insight of great relevance even now in our age of globalization. However, reading Marx on India can be quite revealing to anyone interested in our history also because of the way he highlights the inefficiency of the East India Company's operations. After all, he stresses, it laid waste not only to swathes of territory and not merely pauperized and often decimated the peoples of India; it also bled the British government financially. How then did it survive? For one thing, Marx points out, it did so only through bribing its government and corrupting its politicians. On the one hand, English colonization succeeded, it seems to Marx, "through a frightful system of torture" in India (590) and a successful imitation of the "Roman *divide et imperia* (60) policy in the subcontinent. At home, on the one hand, it depended on buying off politicians and perpetuating lies about their rule and in India, on the other, it expanded and held on to power through its policy of divide and rule, and unrestrained use of force.

In the series of articles he wrote on the Sepoy Mutiny, Marx emphasizes to his English-speaking readers the atrocities committed by the British army and declares unequivocally that the Indian excesses were the inevitable outcome of their colonizers' bloodthirstiness from the beginning of their rule to the present moment. As he puts it in "The Indian Revolt": "however infamous the conduct of the sepoys, it is only the reflex, in a concentrated form, of England's own conduct in India, not only during the epoch of the foundation of her Eastern Empire, but even during the last ten years of a long-settled rule" (89). Marx goes on in this vein for quite a few paragraphs, as if in response to the hue and outcry in Britain to the Indian rebels' brutality during the Mutiny. To him Indian excesses are nothing but a demonstration of the "rule of historical retribution" in which "its instrument" is "forged not by the offended, but by the offender itself" (89).

Surely, very few westerners in his time would have had the courage as well as the conviction to castigate the English as much as Marx did here. He goes on to underscore British distortion of what was going on, caustically pointing out to his readers that "it would be an unmitigated mistake to suppose that all the cruelty is on the side of the sepoys, and all the milk of human kindness flows on the side of the British" (89). Marx is bent on exposing the extent of colonial propaganda and disinformation meted out to the British reading public about Indian excesses circulated by the Company's one-sided broadcasts. His intent is to portray, even within the brief compass of newspaper articles, the real history of British colonial occupation of the subcontinent, and the actual human costs of the war to Indians as well as to the British. He stresses the British forces' disproportionately brutal response to the Indian insurrection, so blatantly concealed by Company-fed journalists and politicians in England, and calls attention to the extent of loot and plunder carried out by the British troops after each victory over the rebels. In a sarcastic comment

on the looting propensities of the British soldiers after their victories, Marx declares, "The Hindoo or Sikh is better disciplined, less thieving, less rapacious than the incomparable model of a warrior, the British soldier" (176).

In the later articles, while detailing the extent of British pillage after their victories over the mutineers, Marx notes the impending signs of yet another famine in Bengal. He declares that while there had been no famines until then in the nineteenth century, "in former times, and even since the English occupation" they have been "the source of terrible sufferings" (174). He even makes the East India Company and English colonization completely responsible for the Great Bengal Famine of 1770.

Marx is relentless in exposing the way the English continued their attempts to cripple India after the Mutiny in fresh ways. In a July 1858 piece on "Taxation in India," he makes a comparative survey on the burden of taxation borne by an individual in Indian provinces with that encountered by European ones. He concludes then that the British claims of "light taxation" in the subcontinent, in actuality "crushes the mass of the Indian people to the dust, and … its extraction necessitates a resort to such infamies as torture, for instance" (186). The bulk of revenue thus gathered, he shows, is spent on the "governing class" of the colony and their backers in England so that they can thrive and indulge themselves there. Marx feels that nothing much would change when Company rule gave way to more direct rule by the British government – one could expect more of the same extortionist, debilitating policies pursued by the colonizers – whether private or public ones.

In a series of features on the British Opium Trade to China (the real subject of Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke*, I would like to add), Marx depicts the manner in which the British Empire was operating so that it could profit from and simultaneously ruin the peoples of two of its colonies, India and China. Exposing the pretensions of the oft-proclaimed civilizing mission of Empire, Marx comes up with data that reveals "the flagrant self-contradiction of the Christianity-canting, and civilization-mongering British government" (201).

In short, Marx saw no respite for Indians or the Chinese, until the British Empire crumbled from the nefarious policies pursued by the imperial forces at work. The post-mutiny situation, in his analysis, indicated a lull before another storm broke out, for to him it was only a matter of time for "anti-British passions to flame again" (205). Thus, and to sum up this section, we can conclude – Marx was consistently anti-colonial in his writings of India. We should have no doubts in our mind on that account.

Was Marx an Orientalist?

At the outset of this part of my paper, let me remind you of the lines from the 1853 article, "The Future Results of British Rule in India" that I had quoted earlier, where Marx had stated that the British, the last of the wave of conquerors of India,

represented the first one superior to the Indians. It was, he implies, because of this reason they had not only resisted being "*Hindooized*" (Marx's emphasis), but had also unwittingly laid the foundation for Indian "regeneration … by breaking up the native industry" (46-7). In the earlier 1853 piece, "The British Rule in India" once again depicting British rapacity, hard-heartedness and destructive actions, he had claimed that the villages thus destroyed, "idyllic" though they may have seemed, "had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism" (16). Marx goes as far as to claim that England had become the "unconscious tool of history in bringing about the revolution" (17). As we saw, while Burke had lamented the solely destructive tendencies of the British, to him they were unlike the earlier conquerors who had embraced a superior civilization and had been assimilated to it, for the British were untouched by India. In contrast to them, Marx felt that surely, albeit unwittingly, Britain had begun the task of recharging a moribund people and uniting a divided subcontinent.

In a piece written at the height of the Mutiny in 1857, even while damning British rapacity and cruelty, he refers to Hindu rituals of torture and self-immolation of the times as acts stemming from "a religion of cruelty" (91). It would also seem from a reading of *Karl Marx on India* that to him "India" and "Indians" could almost always be used synonymously with "Hindoostan" and "Hindu." Witness thus his later 1857 piece on "Investigation of Tortures in India" where he unequivocally sides with the mutinous Indians trying to expel a conqueror who had continuously abused them, wondering out aloud if "the insurgent Hindoos" should be seen as "guilty, in the fury of revolt and conflict, of the crimes and cruelties alleged against them" (96).

One of the two epigraphs with which Edward Said begins *Orientalism* is Marx's comment on the bourgeois and the shopkeeper in his *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented." He reprints the quote in his Introduction to bring up the issue of representation and misrepresentation in the discursive tradition he had categorized through the title of his book. In the text itself, Said associates Marx with writers like Disraeli, Burton and Nerval who use words such as "Orient," "Oriental," "Oriental Despotism" as if intertextually, to "carry on a lengthy discussion between themselves" through the use of such "generalities" (102). Still later in the book, Said takes a more sustained look at Marx's characterization of the nature of "Oriental Despotism" and the belief that England's superior civilization would finally force a moribund society to revive after what had seemed till the Company's conquest of the subcontinent, forever. In other words, Said suggests that even Marx had stereotyped India and Indians, and to put it in terms of the central thesis of his book, had "Orientalized" it, carrying on in the process "a romantic redemptive project" ("they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented") rather than considering the people of the subcontinent as "human material" (154).

Was Marx essentially right in his comments or too Eurocentric and too sweeping, as Said implies? His comments on the reductive nature of Marx's Indian writings have certainly given rise to an ideological storm among Marxists, historians, and postcolonialists. Here I will have space to indicate only briefly the currents and crosscurrents generated by the storm. Committed Marxists like Aijaz Ahmed and Irfan Habib have no doubt that the Palestinian-American had misread Marx's comment. Ahmed's *In Theory* has a long chapter called "Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said" in which he attempts a demolition job of Said's entire critical stance, finding only his commitment to Palestine in his public position and writings on behalf of his people worthy of praise. All else, he tries to prove is methodologically sloppy and theoretically on unsound grounds. In another essay completely focused on the subject that I have been dealing with titled "Marx on India: A Clarification," but carrying forward the argument of "Ambivalence" from the previous chapter, he finds Said is too "summary" in dealing with this specific subject, too "cavalier" and too simplistic in writing about Marx. Or as Ahmed puts it, Said had fashioned "a rhetoric of dismissal" that had "no room for other complexities of Marx's thought" (Ahmed, 224). To Ahmed, Marx occupied a position "independent both of the Orientalist-Romantic and the colonial-modernist" ones (235); he was essentially unassailable at every stage!

As for Irfan Habib, the Internet has his "Critical Notes on Edward Said" where he cites Ahmed approvingly and sets out to further prove as well that, overall, Said's entire argument in Orientalism is too simplistic and sweeping, and methodologically unsound. His use of the quote, "They cannot represent themselves," etc. is, therefore an example to Habib of how Said had de-contextualized and therefore misleadingly reproduced Marx's essential position. Habib also makes a plea for "good robust Orientalism" which he feels will prevail over "present post-modernist fashions" such as postcolonialism. Let me add that in his long Introduction to *Karl Marx on India*, Habib refers to Said's critical position on Marx in a footnote damning it for the moment as an example of his "unhistorical attitude" (l), and directs the reader through a footnote to Ahmed's and his own paper, "In Defence of Orientalism: Critical Notes on Edward Said."

Nevertheless, in his very substantial, detailed and solidly and lucidly argued paper, "Karl Marx, His Theories of Asian Societies, and Colonial Rule," another eminent Indian historian, Bipan Chandra, evaluates Marx's writings on British India closely. He says at the outset that "Marx and Engels neither studied Asian societies for their own sake – nor had adequate knowledge regarding them" (13). He suggests that impressive though they maybe, a balanced view of Marx's developing ideas and final views about India can be arrived at only after reading his later works. Chandra further suggests that the writings of the 1850s reveal the "fragmentary and unformed character" of Marx's views on India then (14). The set notion Marx had at that time of Asian society as "stagnant, changeless" and "incapable of change from within" (17)

led to his "understanding of colonialism as performing a 'revolutionary' role in India and Asia" at that time (17). Marx did mean what he said about "Asiatic despotism" (28), did see Asiatic society as "basically stagnant, stationary, and changeless" (31), and did suggest that it had "no history" and "no social development" (31) in his Indian writings of the early 1850s. He was therefore very much in a western tradition that did believe such things and that had essentialized India. Chandra reminds us too that Marx did quote approvingly of the "regenerating" role of the west in India, although with the caveat that this "destructive" role should be viewed as a positive one (36). However, Chandra also reminds us that this last view was something Marx had totally abandoned later. He also points out that later in the *Grundrisse* and volume three of *Capital*, Marx would write otherwise and gesture at a more flexible, nuanced, and complete concept of Indian history and society.

Nevertheless, it is essential to note that after over 30 pages of analysis, Chandra concludes at the mid-point of his paper that "Marx's basic notions regarding Indian society were essentially incorrect" (47). Chandra singles out Marx's belief that "Indian society had stagnated for millennia ever since its transition from primitive communism to class society and was therefore incapable of change from within" as something "completely untenable" and something that "can no longer be maintained" (47). The remaining 40 plus pages of Chandra's paper basically substantiate his position *vis-à-vis* Marx's with abundant details to prove that Asian society was far from being stymied by "Oriental despotism" or unchanging for centuries. Chandra does say that though "the heart of the matter is that in India, British rule did dissolve the old economy," he feels that it did not make the "resulting social formation … more conducive to development" (72), whether it was the railway network that Marx felt had played a positive role, or other aspects of colonial capital development. Chandra avers that this was because whatever the British did was "guided by the interests not of 'the colony' but of the metropolis." Let me wind up my summary of Chandra's excellent and balanced essay – for he is always respectful of Marx and misses no opportunity to prove that he would have not been so sweeping and essentializing if he had seen the whole picture by shifting to Chandra's concluding lines. He wraps us his discussion there by suggesting that though "Marx's overall analysis of Asian societies and colonialism has proved to be inadequate … some of his individual remarks on Asian societies and colonialism contain deep insights" that still has great relevance to students of colonialism and critics of imperialism (86).

As for my conclusion, I feel that Chandra's essay will help us in taking up a balanced position on Marx *vis-à-vis* Said's critique of him in *Orientalism*. Marx did misrepresent India in the *Tribune* articles he wrote in the first few years of the 1850s; however, as he did more research, he changed his views about an Indian society made moribund by "Oriental despotism" to a great extent. Perhaps he would have revised it completely had he the facts that came to light later about the dynamics of Indian history over time and the limited impact British rule had in changing India.

Said latched on to the reductive Marx he had come across in those early writings on India. He had attacked Marx not pointlessly or completely unfairly but perhaps was overstating the extent of Marx's position in the European Orientalist tradition. However, what is wrong in showing that Marx did have his blind spots in envisioning at one point of his life? And if he did, so what? For what Marx wrote about the British presence in India in the years that he had focused on is truly impressive and surely of lasting value. His indictment of British colonial rule too is total.

On the other hand, Said's scholarship may have its blind spots too and he is perhaps guilty of overstating the case against Marx as an Orientalist. But how can his account of Marx's European misrepresentation and stereotyping be completely overlooked and dismissed? To me, Ahmed and Habib seem to be blinded at times on this issue by their devotion to Marx.

I would like to end by saying that Marx on India is very illuminating and relevant for us, despite the blind spots in his vision. And so is Said on *Orientalism*, despite the blind spots he may have about Marx's position in the Orientalizing tradition. But of course there is no comparing the two. Marx will be celebrated bicentenary after bicentenary for the essential, world-changing truths he has conveyed about history and society. And Said? Hopefully, he will be remembered as the father of postcolonialism for a long, long time. Certainly, he cannot be dismissed easily even if he is no Marx!

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Living Amidst the Catastrophes of "the Living Contradiction": Theses on Marx at 200[1]

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In memory of Kevin Floyd

Abstract

Two hundred years after Marx's birth, we find ourselves living amid the catastrophes of what Marx terms "the living contradiction." I argue here that Marx's immanent critique of capitalist society's "economic law of motion" remains the indispensable basis for any coherent understanding of capital today and, hence, of any revolutionary project to bring about capital's demise and supersession. This essay develops a careful reading of a discrete section from *Grundrisse* where we find key elements of Marx's critique in concentrated form. I focus on the way that Marx consistently frames capital as contradiction – a set of barriers or limits that capital posits, presses past, and in superseding, posits again at a higher level of contradiction – culminating in Marx's formulation of capital as "the living contradiction." In conversation with contemporary value-form theory I consider what makes this contradiction living; in particular I consider the intertwined phenomena of class decomposition and surplus population as the phenomenal expressions of what value-form theorists have termed "asocial sociality," the characteristic condition of commodity-subjects under capital. Ultimately, I contend that Marx remains the seminal theorist of capitalism, and that his immanent critique of the capital-relation and the value-form remains not merely relevant, but necessary and indispensable if we are to understand, and, more important, survive the pervasive crises of the present.

Keywords: Marx, *Grundrisse*, value-form critique, wertkritik, surplus population, class decomposition

"By its nature," Marx writes in the climactic passage of a magnificent, if dense and spiraling section of *Grundrisse*, capital "posits a *barrier* to labor and value-creation in contradiction to its tendency to expand them boundlessly. And in as much as it both posits a barrier *specific* to itself, and on the other side equally drives over and beyond *every* barrier, it is the living contradiction" (421).

There are those who believe that Marx has little relevance for today's world – that globalization, financialization, digitalization, the hyper-mobility of capital,

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class fragmentation, and a host of other features of contemporary capitalism represent fundamental ruptures that separate our age from the epoch of European industrialization and colonial expropriation in which Marx's ideas were forged. In his biography of Marx, for example, Jonathan Sperber advances the thesis that "Marx certainly did understand crucial features of capitalism, but those of the capitalism thatexisted in the early decades of the nineteenth century, which … is distinctly removed from today's circumstances" (xix).

Although I admire the richly textured account of Marx's life that Sperber develops, I find this conclusion both intellectually misguided, and politically disabling. Contra Sperber, I will argue here that Marx remains *the seminal theorist of capitalism*, and that his immanent critique of the capital-relation and the value-form remains not merely relevant, but necessary and indispensable. Marx was no prophet. This we can grant Sperber without reservation. Some of his bolder historical pronouncements have not (yet!) been borne out, most notably his occasional soaring declarations about the apparent inevitability of a proletarian revolution that would usher in a classless society free from not only exploitation and excessive toil, but also from rural parochialism, national chauvinisms, and a range of other fetters on human potential. The key text from which many of these apparently teleological pronouncements originate, of course, is the celebrated *Manifesto*. (As an aside, it is worth pointing out just how prescient and timely the *Manifesto* often is about contemporary global capital, a fact that my students consistently marvel at when they first encounter the text). In any case, I would argue that to cite the *Manifesto* is to invoke the "tactical Marx," the revolutionary Marx, responding to, and intervening in, those radical currents swirling on the eve of the 1848 revolutions soon to sweep across Europe. I believe that there is a great deal to be learned from this "tactical Marx," – a subject to which I will return in my conclusion – but I think it is a mistake to consider the *Manifesto* as a metonym for "Marx."

Marx, in addition to being a revolutionary, was a scholar – an intellectual of the highest order. Indeed, these two facets of his character are inseparable – two aspects of a larger unity, as he might say. To properly honor his legacy in on the occasion of his bicentennial, therefore, we must consider the breadth of his intellectual project, in particular his monumental critique of political economy that culminates in *Grundrisse* and *Capital.* An underpinning premise of this critique, of course, is that ideas as such never exist apart from the historical structures in which they are formed. To return to the ideas of *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, then, is not to assert the primacy of intellectual analysis over revolutionary calls to action. Rather in the pages below I will attempt to demonstrate that Marx's immanent critique of capitalist society's "economic law of motion" (Marx, *Capital* 92), both the categories he establishes and his method of analysis, remains the indispensable basis for any coherent understanding of capital today and, hence, of any revolutionary project to bring about capital's demise and supersession.

But how does one do justice to over 4000 pages of exacting analysis in a single essay? My "solution" to this impossible task will be to focus my efforts on developing a careful reading of a discrete section from *Grundrisse* where we find key elements of Marx's critique in concentrated form (Marx, *Grundrisse* 398-423). In a brief, twenty-five page section Marx introduces the following: contradictions in capitalist *production* that provide the basis of his analysis throughout *Capital*, but notably in Vols. 1 and 3; contradictions within *circulation and exchange* that make up the bulk of Vol. 2; and the ways in which these contradictions press inexorably toward *crisis,* which he develops in Vol. 3 and also foreshadows in his immiseration thesis of Vol. 1. Each of these "moments" functions independently to some degree but, as he ably demonstrates, can only be properly understood from the perspective of totality, or as he describes it in the introduction to *Grundrisse* "the unity of the diverse" (101).

This essay will attend to the argumentative movements in this crystalline section from *Grundrisse*, focusing on the way that Marx consistently *frames capital as contradiction* – a set of *barriers* or *limits* that capital *discovers* or more typically *posits*, *presses past*, and in superseding, posits again at a *higher level of contradiction*. This culminates in Marx's formulation of capital as "the living contradiction." In considering what makes this contradiction *living*, I will try to extrapolate out from key issues raised in this section to discuss how Marx's immanent critique of capital helps us to understand, and hopefully to address, the pervasive crises that characterize our present historical epoch. It is my basic contention that two hundred years after Marx's birth, we find ourselves *living amid the catastrophes of "the living contradiction."*

Marx opens the section by developing a theory of population immanent to the value-form under capital, in other words, a historical theory of population specific to capitalism.[2] To accomplish this, Marx offers an extended analysis of what he arguably considers the defining contradiction of capital's expanded reproduction: its need, on the one hand, to absorb new labor, the source and measure of value, as capital expands, and its need on the other hand to displace or set free labor from production in accordance with the dictates of its drive to maximize relative surplus-value. He writes,

> It is a law of capital … to create surplus labor, disposable time; it can do this only by setting *necessary labor* in motion – i.e., entering into exchange with the worker. It is its tendency, therefore, to create as much labor as possible; just as it is equally its tendency to reduce necessary labor time to a minimum. It is therefore equally a tendency of capital to increase its laboring population, as well as constantly to posit a part of it as surplus population – population which is useless until such time as capital can utilize it. (Marx, *Grundrisse* 399)

2 In parallel form, Marx also begins his section on "The Method of Political Economy" in the Introduction to *Grundrisse* with a consideration of population. He famously argues that political economy treats population ahistorically, producing only a "chaotic conception of the whole." By contrast, when analyzed in its specific historical form under capital, population can more correctly be understood as a "concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse" (Marx, *Grundrisse,* 100-01).

In concrete terms, *population* describes the living, breathing, thinking, creating human beings who reside on this planet. It describes where they live, how they live, and how they reproduce their conditions of existence. Capital, however, abstracts these concrete human beings into a certain quantity of labor-power, and further divides that labor-power into necessary-labor and surplus-labor, the latter being its singular concern. In order to extract an ever-greater mass of surplus-value, however, capital must perpetually set into motion more and more workers, hence more and more necessary labor (the labor time it takes for workers to produce the value equivalent of their own reproduction requirements). The first barrier to capital, then, is that it must perpetually draw new wage workers into the capital relation. As Marx succinctly puts it in *Capital* Vol. 1, "Accumulation of capital is therefore the multiplication of the proletariat" (764).

How is the working population expanded? The classical theories of population, most notably Malthus, are tied to biological reproduction, an explanation that Marx considers deeply flawed (Marx, *Grundrisse* 604-610). Alongside and in relation to procreation, population expansion is typically accomplished (to meet capital's immediate requirements for a ready labor pool) by drawing more people into the wage relation as monetary- and commodity-subjects. This might mean drawing into productive wage-labor women, children or any other populations which for whatever reason had been previously excluded from wage-work. Or it might mean opening new areas of the planet to capitalist exploitation.[3] Marx discusses this expansion of the working population as the prolongation of labor-*time, conceived spatially* (*Grundrisse* 399). Space, under capital, can be made more dense or expanded, given that what matters is labor-time. That is, the addition of new workers, whether they are drawn from latent pools near or far, means that a single working day (understood from the perspective of the total social capital) includes the labor-time of an ever-growing pool of wage laborers working simultaneously, hence the subsumption of an ever greater portion of the world's population into the capital relation.[4]

But it turns out that living populations are not so easily conjured and put to work. There are inevitably frictions, barriers. Wage-laborers may not be concentrated in the areas that capital needs for production. They may lack the requisite skills. There may be difficulty moving people, goods, information over distances. The time of production may not correspond with demands for consumption. Putting more people to work requires more machines, more workshops, more facilities, more raw materials. Moreover, workers, as we know, invariably resist the discipline of capital. They push for shorter working days, safer working conditions, higher wages, and

3 Marx famously develops his category of the reserve army of labor in Chapter 25 of *Capital* Vol. 1, where he further delineates the "floating," "latent," and "stagnant" (along with *lumpen*) segments of this surplus population. In doing so he describes that portion of humanity which has been subsumed into the capital but who are either set free from, or not-yet absorbed into wage-labor. See pages 794-97.

4 I consider the subsumption of workers in the wake of decolonization in my essay, "Developmental Aspiration at the End of Accumulation: The New International Economic Order and the Antinomies of the Bandung Era." *Mediations*, vol. 32, no. 1, Fall 2018, 37-70. www.mediationsjournal.org/articles/developmental-aspiration.

more time and freedom to live their lives as they choose. Capital thus encounters a series of barriers and limits to the continuous expansion of *absolute surplus value*, considered here from the perspective of the totality of capital as the prolongation of labor-time through the subsumption of new pools of wage laborers as capital expands to all parts of the planet.

Faced with the barriers of constantly needing to expand labor-time, capital is spurred to capture *relative surplus value* enhancing productivity by introducing machinery or other efficiencies that reduce necessary labor-time relative to surplus labor-time. Rather than prolonging the duration of labor-time, the application of science shortens that portion of the day in which the laborer produces the value needed to cover her wage and thereby lengthens that portion of the day in which she produces surplus value for the capitalist. The coercive pressure of competition compels individual capitalists to raise productivity and intensity in order to capture temporary gains of surplus for the window of time in which commodities can be produced for less than their social value. Other capitalists, subsequently, are forced to adopt the same (or superior) technologies on pain of being put out of business, creating a constant spiral of capital's expansion under conditions of ever-increasing mechanization. This lowers the value of commodities, including the value of labor-power, which generates relative surplus value for capitalists.

Mechanized efficiency, however, comes at the expense of labor power – the source of new value. Marx calls this the rising "organic composition of capital" (*Capital* Vol. 1, 762), in which each circuit of production contains an increasingly high proportion of constant capital relative to variable capital. This is one of Marx's key arguments in *Capital* Vol. 1 about machinery and accumulation, which in turn becomes the basis for his arguments in Vol. 3 about the falling rate of profit (Marx, *Capital* Vol. 3, 317-375). At the moment, however, we are still talking about population.[5] In contradiction, therefore, to its tendency to increase population in order to expand absolute surplus, then, capital equally has a tendency to eliminate labor from production, creating an ever-growing surplus population of non-laborers. The presence of this surplus population serves to depress workers' wages ever further and to discipline workers into over-work and an ever-greater dependence on the capital relation.[6] It generates a pool of desperate would-be-workers, always at the ready when capital needs it, or as Marx puts it, a population which sits "useless until such time as capital can utilize it" (*Grundrisse* 399).

5 Marx stresses the dialectical relation between population and capital's organic composition in *Capital*, Vol. 1. For instance, he begins his climactic Chapter 25 on the "General Law of Capitalist Accumulation" as follows: "In this chapter we shall consider the influence of the growth of capital on the fate of the working class. *The most important factor* in this investigation is the *composition of capital*, and the changes it undergoes in the course of the process of accumulation" (762, emphasis added).

6 Again in Vol. 1, Marx writes, "The industrial reserve army, during the periods of stagnation and average prosperity, weighs down the active army of workers; during the periods of over-production and feverish activity, it puts a curb on their pretensions" (793).

This contradiction remains with us today, as it must, and indeed has become increasingly visible as a crisis point of the contemporary world. There has been a vast expansion of a global working population since the 1970s, with almost all of this growth taking place in the global South. John Smith, in his significant book *Imperialism in the Twenty-first Century* cites the following figures: the world's "economically active population" (EAP) increased by 63 percent between 1980 and 2006, growing from 1.9 billion in 1980 to 3.1 billion in 2006. Almost all of this growth occurred in the so-called "emerging nations," now home to 84 percent of the global workforce, 1.6 billion of whom worked for wages, the other one billion of whom are small farmers and the multitude of people working in the sprawling "informal economy" (Smith 113). Nowhere is this expanded working and surplus population more evident than in the rift that has been created between rural and urban spaces, in particular the radical acceleration of urbanization without industrialization in the global south, a phenomenon that Mike Davis has darkly chronicled in his book *Planet of Slums*.[7]

The first element of "the living contradiction," as Marx's argument unfolds in the *Grundrisse* section we are examining, has to do with the lives of the workers who create the value upon which capital is based, as well as those who must work – either waged or not – to meet their needs of subsistence. The size, location, movement, and employment of both the productive wage-laboring and surplus population, then, is determined by the capital relation – in particular the contradiction between capital's need to both absorb and displace labor. Population under capital – an abstraction that homogenizes the concrete lives of this planet's human inhabitants – is constituted to meet capital's requirements to valorize value, rather than to meet the human needs of living laborers. But the apparent resolution that capital has at hand to meet these requirements for valorization is unceasing expansion under conditions of ever-rising organic composition; individual crises may be resolved in this manner, but the underlying contradiction remains.

Following this analysis of population Marx introduces a second element of "the living contradiction," which arises from contradictions associated within capital's *circulation*. Marx points to the barriers of what he here calls "devaluation."[8] He shows us that any movement from money to commodity (in the hopes of returning more money, M) entails a number of risks and points of potential breakdown. Value, congealed in its material commodity form, may never become value in the money-form. A warehouse of coats, for instance, may be lost in a flood, eaten by moths,

7 For additional statistical figures on the rise of both proletarian and surplus labor see John Bellamy Foster, Robert W. McChesney and R. Jamil Jonna, "The Global Reserve Army of Labor and the New Imperialism," *Monthly Review,* vol. 63, no. 6, Nov. 2011, 1-31. For a related theoretical account of surplus populations, see Endnotes, "Misery and Debt: On the Logic and History of Surplus Populations and Surplus Capital," Issue 2, April 2010, https://endnotes.org.uk/issues/2/en/endnotes-misery-and-debt.

8 Neil Larsen tells me that "devalorization" might be a better translation – highlighting not only a loss of value but a loss of the capacity to valorize –, but I will continue to use Nicolaus' translation "devaluation," since that is the term which appears in the English edition.

or made unsaleable after an abrupt change in fashion trends. In such examples the concrete qualities of a commodity's use-value reassert themselves, much to the chagrin of a capitalist who cares only about the abstract quantity of value objectified in the coats, a value she presumed would be realized at the moment of their sale.

Moreover, Marx explains that the problems of circulation are not only about the realization of an individual capital – whether our capitalist can sell his coats before the moths eat their fill. More important is to consider consumption at the level of the total social capital. A set of barriers exist here as well. In order to realize the total mass of value congealed in all commodities capital requires, first, sufficient external demand for the commodities as use-values (both qualitative and quantitative demand). Second, it requires the availability of a value equivalent elsewhere within the world market with which to exchange. Such a value equivalent, in turn, assumes both a sufficient quantity of money in circulation, and the requisite distribution of value throughout the system. This knotty passage, in other words, articulates the complex thesis that Marx works out at length in the reproduction schemas of *Capital* Vol. 2, where he details capital's perpetual expansion, coupled with the ratio of value distributed between Departments 1 and 2 needed to maintain expanded reproduction of the total social capital (Marx, *Capital* Vol. 2, 565-600).

In the *Grundrisse* passage, Marx stresses that a worker's consumption can never be adequate to realize the full value of all commodities, which includes both necessary value and surplus value. A worker purchasing an individual commodity – we can continue with our coat example – will pay a sum equivalent to the full value of that coat, a sum that accounts for both necessary value and surplus value. When considered at the level of the total social capital, however, the worker's demand, by definition, cannot be adequate to realize the full value of all commodities. The total sum of wages paid to all workers will be equivalent only to the necessary value objectified in the total mass of commodities. Capital requires demand from somewhere else (the capitalist class) in order to provide equivalent value to cover the surplus-value that those same commodities also contain. A phenomenon that is invisible in the purchase of any individual commodity – a worker can certainly buy a coat, fashionable or not – becomes recognizable as a contradiction when considered from the perspective of total social capital.

Marx astutely observes that individual capitalists want to minimize the wages, and hence purchasing capacity, of their own workers. The less a capitalist must pay his workers, the more surplus value can be extracted. However, those same capitalists see all other workers as potential consumers and hence would love to see their wallets full when they come to market. He writes,

> Every capitalist knows this about his worker, that he does not relate to him as producer to consumer, and [he therefore] wishes to restrict his consumption, i.e., his ability to exchange, his wage, as much as possible. Of course he would like the workers of *other* capitalists to be the greatest consumer possible of *his*

> *own* commodity. But the relation of *every* capitalist to *his own* workers is the *relation as such of capital and labor*, the essential relation. (Marx, *Grundrisse* 419-20)

Two points require emphasis. First, workers' wages, by definition, can never provide an equivalent source value to purchase commodities that include both necessary value and surplus value. This means demand must come from individual and productive consumption by the capitalist class, spurring the development of new branches of industry, seemingly conjured into being by the surfeit of commodities awaiting to have their value realized in consumption. This process is never seamless; it lurches from boom to bubble to crisis. Second, class antagonism is the essential relation of exchange, even as capitalists always imagine a world of potential consumers to be courted rather than coerced. As Marx says, "the relation of *every* capitalist to *his own* workers is the *relation as such of capital and labor*, the essential relation" (*Grundrisse* 419-20). The same class antagonism that issues from the structural exploitation of unpaid surplus labor in production, here makes itself visible as class antagonism in the sphere of circulation and the realization of value.

As with his example of population, then, Marx shows us contradiction manifested through barriers and limits that act as both the spur and bridle for capital. The barriers that hinder the realization of value lead to the creation of new branches of industry, the creation of new needs, new consumer markets, new pools of labor, and new sites for the creation of additional value. Perpetual expansion is required. As Marx writes:

> A precondition of production based on capital is therefore *the production of a constantly widening sphere of circulation*, whether the sphere itself is directly expanded or whether *more points within it are created as points of production*. While circulation appeared at first as a constant magnitude, it here appears as a moving magnitude, being expanded by production itself. Accordingly, it already appears as a moment of production itself. (*Grundrisse* 407)

The circulation of value – value in motion – is the necessary obverse of capitalist production. The capital-relation presupposes both. It requires an ever-expanding magnitude of total value (even as the value of individual commodities are reduced via productivity gains). Inevitably this presses capital to the scale of the world market. Marx puts it succinctly and forcefully in what I consider the third element of "the living contradiction": "[t]he tendency to create a world market is directly given in the concept of capital itself" (Marx, *Grundrisse* 408).

As we consider the relevance of Marx two-hundred years after his birth, it is worth lingering for a moment on this prescient claim that capital's tendency to internalize the entire world is immanent to the value-form. For the process of developing a world market – that is to say, making the entirety of the world into a market, and the entirety of the planet's population into commodity-subjects – has been characterized from its inception by unremitting violence and force. Marx describes

the brutality required to constitute the world market initially in the following blunt terms:

> The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. (Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, 915)

In this passage Marx describes so-called primitive accumulation, the positing on the one hand of *wage-labor*, freed from its land and its ability to independently meet its subsistence needs, and on the other hand *wealth* centralized in pools of sufficient magnitude and fluidity that it might be set into motion *as capital*.[9] The particular geo-political dynamics of colonialism and conquest that Marx depicts at the inception of capitalism have largely persisted into our century as the relations of capitalist imperialism, though under transformed imperatives of valorization and accumulation. The conquest and maintenance of a world market though colonial and imperial violence has been characterized by persistent, spectacular, and horrific forms of violence. At the same time, however, capital's distinctive mode of impersonal domination and dependence, enforced through the social abstraction of value, through the veil of the wage-form, and through the fetish of money, also finds a mode of expression in what Rob Nixon has termed, "slow violence." Nixon's category makes visible, in particular, the uneven planetary ecological violence of life under capital, an analysis that extends Marx's keen awareness that capitalism "simultaneously undermin[es] the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the worker" (Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, 638).

Life within the capital relation, then, is characterized by violence throughout all regions of the planet and against the planet itself. Marx's analysis of value circulation at the level of the social totality reorients our horizon of action to the scale of the world market and the various planetary limits to capital's perpetual expansion. I do not have space in this essay to develop the full implications of this leap. As I imply above, however, at least two important branches of contemporary Marxist thought probe the dynamics of violence at the scale of a world market: first, theories of imperialism, and second, theories of ecological Marxism or the relation to nature. Two important books have been recently published that attempt to update the classical Marxist theories of imperialism (Rosa Luxemburg; Nikolai Bukharin; V.I. Lenin)[10] – along with theories of uneven exchange (Samir Amin;, Arghiri Emmanuel) – John Smith's *Imperialism in the Twenty First Century* (cited above),

9 For a helpful survey of Marxist writing on "primitive accumulation," see Robert Nichols, "Disaggregating Primitive Accumulation," *Radical Philosophy*, 194, Nov/Dec 2015, pp. 18-28.

10 I cite the LeftWord edition of Lenin to highlight the wonderful introduction by Prabhat Patnaik.

and Utsa and Prabhat Patnaik's *A Theory of Imperialism*.[11] Smith attempts to develop a value-theory of imperialism, highlighting super-exploitation and constricted labor mobility in the global south. The Patnaiks emphasize the enormous transfer of wealth from South to North that established the origins of capital accumulation, and the continued coercion required to suppress the value of labor power in the south in order to ensure price stability and the value of money. They also have an important chapter on the structural role of surplus populations. Likewise, there has been a surge of excellent Marxist writing on ecological crises that originate, in large part, from capital's relentless need to exploit an ever-growing magnitude of natural resources in order to meet its demand for valorization. Works by John Bellamy Foster, Paul Burkett, Jason Moore, Kohei Saito, Chris Williams and others are now mandatory reading for Marxist scholars, articulating a powerful case that Marx's critique of capitalism is essential to understanding current ecological crises.

Following Marx, I contend that crises of imperialism and ecology often appear in the sphere of circulation, but, as with the crises of population, ultimately stem from contradictions within the value-form itself. Indeed, this is the larger point that Marx is making in the extended *Grundrisse* passage we have been examining. The contradictions he identifies in population, circulation, and the leap to the world market are intended to show that capital as a system is always a "moving contradiction," with simultaneous pressures towards expansion and concentration, absorption and displacement (Marx, *Grundrisse* 706).[12] Capital posits barriers, but then supersedes those barriers. However, as we have seen, with each apparent obliteration of such a limit, "capital, at the same time, [is] thereby faced with the task of launching its attempt anew from a higher level of the development of productive forces, with each time greater collapse *as capital*" (Marx, *Grundrisse* 416).

Let us pursue still further what "the living contradiction" might mean for our living present. Recall the essential passage, cited in the opening of this essay, in which Marx introduces the concept:

> By its nature, therefore, [capital] posits a *barrier* to labor and value-creation in contradiction to its tendency to expand them boundlessly. And in as much as it both posits a barrier *specific* to itself, and on the other side equally drives over and beyond *every* barrier, it is the living contradiction. (*Grundrisse* 421)

I move from the premise that any immanent critique of capital must issue from the value-form. Capital pulls everyone – whether wage laborers or not – into a social relation where people are inevitably constituted as monetary-subjects and

11 Smith, op. cit., Utsa Patnaik and Prabhat Patnaik, *A Theory of Imperialism*, (New York: Columbian UP, 2016). David Harvey has written a critical commentary of the Patnaiks, to which the authors respond – both pieces are published as the final chapters of *A Theory of Imperialism*. Harvey's critique has sparked a debate with John Smith about the continued salience of imperialism as a conceptual category. See Smith's final response which links to the earlier essays on the Union for Radical Political Economies. https://urpe.wordpress.com/2018/03/20/john-smiths-response-to-david-harvey-on-imperialism/

12 The term "moving contradiction" seems to me roughly synonymous with "living contradiction."

commodity-subjects. The phrase that, in my opinion, most aptly captures the contradictions of the capital's value-form is "asocial sociality," a term I borrow from the theorists of the *Wertkritik* or value-form critique school of thought known primarily in German-speaking audiences. Thankfully, selections of this body of work have been recently translated into English (Larsen et al). On the one hand, the phrase captures the revolutionary sociality that capital simultaneously requires and produces. This encompasses its need to draw populations from all parts of the planet into the capital relation, and to concentrate those populations in locations that make it available for capital's requirement for labor-power, but that in turn open up new horizons for human interaction and development. Its sociality likewise encompasses the unfathomably dense networks of circulation and exchange that define the international division of labor, the world market, including the creation of new wants and needs that are met by new branches of production. Capital socializes labor, putting it to work cooperatively. It socializes production (consider the factory [Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, "Machinery and Large-Scale Industry" 492-642]), and even socializes wealth (consider the banks, the joint-stock company, and the financial system which pools the collective wealth of the entire capitalist class.[13]) Finally – at the level of concept – capital's sociality works through the power of abstraction, as illustrated by Marx's categories "abstract human labor," and the "purely social" character of value (*Capital* Vol. 1, 139). Dehumanizing and despotic under capital's impersonal mode of domination, abstraction also contains a utopian germ within it, both as a method of intellectual critique and as a leveling force that makes possible radical conceptions of equality. Capital's sociality, then, is among its most revolutionary features.

On the other hand, life under capital is defined by universal asociality. This begins with the fetishism of commodities, characterized by "material relations between persons and social relations between things" (Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, 166). From this foundational commodity relation arises a series of separations, alienations and atomizations. An emphasis of the *Grundrisse* section and throughout *Capital*, is capital's tendency to polarize: to separate capitalist from worker, productive work from unproductive work, the product from its direct producer, laboring populations from surplus populations, town from country, imperialist nation from oppressed nation, among others. Although these separations are structural, they are often experienced and understood individually. Working simultaneously through abstraction and individuation (e.g., the mutual, subjective "freedom" of worker and capitalist to enter into a contract), capital produces as its most characteristic form, asociality – *the erosion or decomposition of society as such*.

13 Marx, *Capital* Vol. 3. On banks Marx writes: "[h]ere capital really does emerge, in the pressure of its demand and supply, as *the common capital of the class*" (490). On joint stocks see 567-73, where Marx concludes, "The credit system has a dual character immanent in it: on the one hand it develops the motive of capitalist production, enrichment by the exploitation of others' labor, into the purest and most colossal system of gambling and swindling, and restricts ever more the already small number of the exploiters of social wealth; on the other hand however it constitutes the form of transition towards a new mode of production" (572).

A great deal could be said about the asocial-sociality of capital – volumes in fact. But in the space I have, I would like to focus on the particular issue of *class decomposition* – an acute political problem for Marxist political projects today. The loosely affiliated body of value-form thinkers (e.g., Postone, Kurz, Trenkle, Lohoff, etc.) has tended to argue that today's proletariat no longer functions as a viable social subject (if it ever did), and that our era of value-crisis is defined by class decomposition.[14] This argument rests on the premise that capital has now reached a structural tipping-point where its ability to absorb labor is systemically outweighed by its displacement of labor, in other words, the historical expression of the precise contradiction of population that Marx identifies conceptually in the *Grundrisse* passage examined above. Although the working class may be larger in absolute numbers than ever, the value-form theorists contend that in value-terms it continues to shrink relative to constant capital. This in turn has constrained its social relevance as the proletariat has become more fragmented, contains a smaller ratio of productive workers than ever, and hence can no longer can command the same indispensable position within production, and can no longer realistically aspire to a class consciousness that would allow it to act "for itself" as a universal subject/object of liberation, the gravedigger of capitalism.

Empirically, this is a difficult argument to refute. Divisions within the working class seem to be greater than ever. Under what conditions, for example, might industrial garment workers in Dhaka act with a shared class consciousness in unmediated alignment with industrial micro-chip technicians in New York (where I live)? Spatial distance, of course, is but one aspect of a larger problem. Even within the same city, say Dhaka, what interests bind the professional wage-laborer who has taken on the managerial functions of capital, including the oversight and disciplining of labor (and been relatively well compensated for it) with, for instance, a slum-dweller scratching out a life as a rag-picker, a cleaning woman, a hawker of goods, or in any way she can? With xenophobic nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment on the rise in many parts of the world, a left internationalism, affirmatively struggling to abolish borders and to ensure the free movement of labor as but one means in the fight to establish its fundamental equality (an injury to one is an injury to all!) can often feel both nostalgic and unachievable.

Marx, I contend, offers us a way to approach this problem, if not to entirely resolve it. "Class," for Marx, is the category that names the structural relation arising from capital's foundational site of exploitation: the extraction of surplus value. While capital's value-form relies first and foremost on the exploitation of wage-laborers who produce surplus value, this mode of exploitation, as we have seen, both produces and relies upon a surplus population of non-value-productive wage workers alongside the many who labor with no access, or only indirect access, to a wage of

14 Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*. Cambridge UP, 1993. The other authors are collected in *Marxism and the Critique of Value,* op. cit. See especially Trenkle's essay, "Struggle Without Classes," pp. 201-224.

any sort. Recall Smith's figures for the "economically active population": 1.6 billion wage-workers (many of whom will be unproductive wage-workers), and 1 billion individuals as surplus population. Marxist feminists have made major contributions to our conception of the role and composition of surplus populations by theorizing the feminized sphere of social reproduction, in which a huge portion of the world's population labors without a wage to reproduce capital's most essential commodity, "labor-power" (Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James; Silvia Federici; Lise Vogel; Tithi Bhattacharaya; Kevin Floyd). Marx famously sketches the relationship between work and non-work in his synthesizing chapter on the "General Law of Capitalist Accumulation" in *Capital* Vol. 1. In my reading, Marx articulates an inclusive, but nevertheless objective, conception of the working class, comprised of those who work for a wage (both productive and unproductive) as well as those who have yet to be absorbed into wage-labor, or who have been expelled or set-free by capital.[15] Marx, for instance, describes "the condemnation of *one part of the working class to enforced idleness* by the overwork of the other part, and vice versa" (*Capital* Vol. 1, 789; emphasis added). My key point here is that, whatever its size and composition, capital's surplus population is every bit as much a structural product of capital's requirements for accumulation as is that segment of wage-workers who produce surplus value.

Class, to put this differently, is always a value-form category. Class-struggle names a mode of value-struggle[16] – struggles over the production, circulation, and distribution of value, indeed over the social determination of value itself. Given capital's unceasing requirement to valorize value through the exploitation of labor, class-struggle invariably moves through the antinomies of the value-form. Marx puts it like this: "because *surplus labor* is on one side, therefore not-labor and surplus wealth are posited on the other. In reality the development of wealth exists only in these opposites" (Marx, *Grundrisse* 401). Here, "not-labor" refers to the capitalist, who does no work and whose wealth is entirely the product of unpaid labor. To maintain such wealth, the capitalist requires both a population of exploited labor who work too much, and a surplus population who have been set free from waged work altogether. As the adage goes: the only thing worse than being exploited by capital is not being exploited by capital. "Not-work" in this context means only that a group of people with no access to a wage have to work even more industriously under conditions of even greater precarity to meet their subsistence needs. I find persuasive the thesis advanced by the value-form theorists that capital has entered a phase in which surplus populations continue to expand relative to value-productive labor – that capital has now begun to set free more labor than it can absorb. Even under such conditions, however, the opposition between surplus labor and surplus

15 "'Proletarian' must be understood to mean, economically speaking, nothing other than 'wage laborer,' the man who produces and valorizes 'capital,' and is thrown onto the street as soon as he becomes superfluous to the need for valorization possessed by 'Monsieur Capital,' as Pecqueur calls him" (764, n1). A similarly inclusive conception of the working class can be found throughout the chapter, e.g., pages 789, 793-4, 796, 807-08.

16 This is a term I borrow from Beverley Best, whose influence can be seen throughout this essay.

wealth does not disappear merely because our age has seen the following shifts in its population composition: a) productive laboring populations have decreased relatively while b) one "not-laboring" population – capitalists – has shrunk, but with ever-more concentrated wealth, and c) a second "not-laboring' group, the surplus population, has expanded precipitously.

The opposition between surplus labor and surplus wealth remains, as Marx claimed about the capitalist's orientation to his own workers, "the essential relation" (*Grundrisse* 420).

Returning to the language of limits and barriers in what I will call the fourth element in his unfolding conception of the "living contradiction" in *Grundrisse*, Marx argues that to dispense with contradictions of the value-form is never so simple a matter.

> But from the fact that capital posits every such limit as a barrier and hence gets *ideally* beyond it, it does not by any means follow that it has *really* overcome it, and, since every such barrier contradicts its character, its production moves in contradictions which are constantly overcome but just as constantly posited. (410)

Marx here, as elsewhere, describes capital as a leveling force, obliterating barriers of time, space, the nation, nature, social prejudices, and every other limit it encounters. However, as he argues in this passage, capital only gets beyond these limits *ideally*. Such contradictions are not resolved; rather in moving beyond each limit that it encounters, capital posits its internal contradictions at higher levels of development, and hence intensifies the potential for crisis and catastrophe. Capital, for example, *appears* to overcome national boundaries by accelerating the movement of capital through free trade, but it must simultaneously constrict the movement of labor to do so. It *appears* to overcome the barriers of nature by finding cheap energy to fuel its drive for valorization or new raw materials to meet the needs of expanding production, but in doing so it creates the looming ecological catastrophes of climate change and species extinction. It *appears* to level all concrete forms of work in the category of abstract human labor, only to separate the sphere of value-production from the sphere of social reproduction. It *appears* to level social distinctions, prejudice, and fetters on human development, only to make universal the asociality of the capital relation. It *appears*, even, to level class polarization between capital and labor. However, I am arguing here that capital's requirement for surplus value simply reproduces the oppositional class relation at a higher level of contradiction and crisis. Even as brief a catalog as this gives a glimpse into the devastating consequences of life amidst the catastrophes of "the living contradiction." The crises of the present continue to evolve and mutate in response to the particularities of our moment. But whatever specific phenomenal form they take, the essence of crisis and contradiction remains intrinsic to the value-form of capital itself.

Indeed, what appear to be external limits are in fact only the barriers that capital itself has posited. Marx asserts, "[t]he universality toward which [capital] irresistibly strives encounters barriers in its own nature, which will, at a certain stage of its development, allow it to be recognized as being itself the greatest barrier to this tendency, and hence will drive towards its own suspension" (*Grundrisse* 410). The only barriers that capital cannot overcome are the contradictions within the concept of capital itself. Or more accurately, capital will and must overcome its own internal barriers, just as it pushes past all obstacles, but to do so is to bring about its own supersession.

This supersession of capital, I want to stress, is a *historical* process not a logical process, meaning that it will not happen automatically and of its own accord. Crisis or catastrophe as such cannot resolve capital's contradictions. The abolition of the value-form will require human historical agency, Marx contends, struggle from a class-subject capable of overcoming the systemic requirement for accumulation through exploitation. It is tempting to say, as do both Sperber and the value-form theorists in very different ways, that Marx leaves us at a dead-end here, that his revolutionary class of industrial workers has failed to expropriate the expropriators.

My response is two-fold. The first is theoretical, building from the analysis above. If asociality is the defining characteristic of social relations under capital's value-form, then it should come as no surprise that we find the phenomenal expressions of class-decomposition and fragmentation. However, as we have seen, the capital-relation determines the lived reality of both those who labor for a wage and those who merely labor to survive. All are monetary-subjects and commodity-subjects. In fact, productive wage-labor on the one side, and all the other forms of staying alive on the other side, constitute the obverse expressions of the exploitation and violence of the value-form itself. In the face of its apparent political fracturing, we must reassert the objective theoretical coherence of this class formation.

My second response is that we have something important to learn from what earlier I termed the "tactical Marx." The *Manifesto*, that treasure-trove of revolutionary aphorisms, was a decidedly tactical document. However, in the years following the 1848 revolutions as counter-revolution gained strength and the old regime restored power across Europe Marx's analysis and political organizing shifted in light of what he understood to be politically possible during that decidedly non-revolutionary historical juncture. Notably, he was relentlessly critical of those segments of the communist left that saw revolution as imminent, spontaneous, inevitable. Marx and Engels, by contrast, recognized the enormity of revolutionary transformation. They preached careful, exacting analysis in concert with slow, patient organizing. The idea was not to wait for the next big crisis to deliver the revolution (though they did scour news reports expectantly for news of economic collapse). Rather, they understood that crises create room to maneuver within the contradictory forces

of the day. Revolutionary transformation requires sustained, committed activity pursued in the interests of a collective social actor.

To look, therefore, with clear eyes at the present, marked by catastrophe, including deeply fragmented class formations, is to again attempt to comprehend the enormity of a revolutionary transformation that would move beyond the value-form. Financial crises, climate change, the rise of political fascism, or the coercions of imperialism will not, in and of themselves, supersede capitalism. To do this will require, as Marx teaches us, exacting analysis, the foundations of which, I would argue, can only be found in Marx's immanent critique of the value-form and its contradictions. Likewise, it will require difficult organizing, undertaken over many years. There are no shortcuts. It is up to those of us who continue to work within the Marxist tradition to shoulder this burden. When I consider the daunting magnitude of this task, I am buoyed by David McNally's stirring words on reform *and* revolution:

> Every mass movement to change the world begins with struggles to reform society. No movement for radical change begins by demanding revolution as such. Instead, world-transforming struggles emerge when oppressed people take to the streets and shut down places of work to demand a living wage, civil rights, a shorter working day, housing for all, or an end to war. It is in the course of mobilizing – in the process of reclaiming the streets, creating roadblocks, occupying workplaces, deliberating in mass assemblies, creating new forms of democratic self-rule – that people gain a sense of their own power, expand their horizons, and begin to imagine that another world is truly possible. (175-76)

This, of course, is not a complete answer; it asserts merely that a historical class subject/object will emerge in and through its active opposition to the brutalities of capitalism. McNally, commendably, emphasizes the process of affirmative struggle with an optimism of the will that those who have been exploited and abandoned by capital can press beyond the asociality of the value-form to create a radically new set of social relations of their own making. There is no way out, but through. In order to live, we must push through the living contradiction. We have no blueprints, no ready-made programs for such a transformation. But Marx's immanent critique of capital remains the indispensable starting point.

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Not Winnin' Anymore: *Boys from the Blackstuff* and the Literature of Recession

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Abstract

This article addresses representations of working-class life in Britain during the 1980s; specifically, experiences of recession, unemployment, and difficulty in the workplace. The primary text considered is the television drama series *Boys from the Blackstuff* (1982), written by Alan Bleasdale; more briefly this is linked to James Kelman's novel *The Busconductor Hines* (1984), and to the post-industrial landscape of the poetry of Sean O'Brien. In the wake of the socialist criticism of Raymond Williams, the article explores how the "Industrial Novel" of the 1840s may be succeeded, in the Thatcher years, by the literature of recession and deindustrialization.

Keywords: *Boys from the Blackstuff*, Alan Bleasdale, James Kelman, Raymond Williams, Thatcherism

Unimportant Sunsets

The English poet Sean O'Brien (b.1952) grew up in Hull and later moved to Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The North of England is a significant setting for much of his poetry. His first collection of poems, *The Indoor Park*, was published in 1983. In the memorable poem "The Park by the Railway," the narrative voice asks:

> Where should we meet but in this shabby park
> Where the railings are missing and the branches black?
> Industrial pastoral, our circuit
> Of grass under ash, long-standing water
> And unimportant sunsets flaring up
> Above the half-dismantled fair. Our place
> Of in-betweens, abandoned viaducts
> And modern flowers, dock and willowherb,
> Lost mongrels, birdsong scratching at the soot
> Of the last century. Where should we be
> But here, my industrial girl? Where else
> But in this city beyond conservation?
>
> (O'Brien 3)

The poem announces O'Brien's devotion to a landscape of disused railway lines and overgrown pitheads. It gives us an "industrial pastoral" of the deindustrializing age, as the iconography of the industrial world is mingled with a nature that reclaims it. In this vista of abandoned viaducts, ash and soot, the natural world itself is post-

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industrial. Birdsong sounds in the wake of pollution; "modern flowers" are weeds proper to bombsites and derelict zones. With a characteristic breadth of historical vision, O'Brien in this poem conjures a romance of this transitional landscape.

This fragment of verse offers us a way in to the terrain of this essay, which concerns the depiction of working-class experience in British writing in the 1980s. Primarily, we shall look at the celebrated television drama *Boys from the Blackstuff*, scripted by Alan Bleasdale and first screened in autumn 1982. The five-part series quickly became famous as a response to poverty, recession, and unemployment, and became one of the iconic instances of literary dissidence in the 1980s. As such, it was also viewed as a cultural response to Thatcherism.

Thatcherism is a term that covers much territory. It may be defined as a political movement; a body of ideas; or a process of economic and social change. However it is defined, it was powered by, represented or spearheaded by, Margaret Thatcher, the first woman Prime Minister of the UK, who held that office from 1979 to 1990. Her administrations pursued a range of policies, some of them – such as the exploitation of military adventure overseas – not immediately pertinent to the present inquiry. More evidently pertinent was the running down of traditional industries, primary and secondary, from coal and steel to shipbuilding and car production, often described as the loss of UK's manufacturing base; attacks on trade union rights and aggressive confrontation with trade unions, most extensively in the miners' strike of 1984-5. Thatcherism commenced with economic recession. Jobs were lost, unemployment soared. The government wanted to encourage different kinds of businesses, notably financial services and leisure industries. The North of England, as well as Scotland and Wales, were disproportionately affected, leading to the perception of a North-South divide.

Raymond Williams (1921-1988) was the most eminent socialist cultural thinker in post-war Britain. He gave much attention to the connections between literary history and social history, in a manner on terms with, but also somewhat independent of, the Marxist tradition. Writing about the mid-nineteenth century, Williams influentially identified the Industrial Novel as a subgenre in its own right, a place where social conditions, indeed the condition of England, were discussed. "There are the facts of the new society," Williams wrote, "and there is this structure of feeling" (99). If what Williams was able to perceive in retrospect was the emergence and clustering of the industrial novel, then perhaps some more recent texts can be partly identified as a literature of deindustrialization, or of profound change in the character of industry in Britain. The landscape of Sean O'Brien's poem is a bleak but a lyrical vision of that.

We can also find a historical perspective not from the nineteenth century but from the other end, by registering that Thatcherism was not an isolated, temporary phenomenon but an avatar of a whole new era of global neo-liberal consensus – as traced, for instance, by the Marxist historian Perry Anderson in *New Left Review*.

In 2000, Anderson could assess the world order of the previous decade as "the virtually uncontested consolidation, and universal diffusion, of neo-liberalism." In this context,

> European social-democracy, having taken power across the [European] Union, has responded to continent-wide slow growth and high unemployment by across-the-board moves towards an American model – accelerating deregulation and privatization not only of industries but also social services, often well beyond the limits of previous conservative regimes. Britain had a head-start in deregulation, but Germany and Italy are now bidding to catch up, and France lags more in words than deeds. (Anderson section 3)

In short, American socio-economic models had become increasingly influential even in a Europe typically thought to differ from them, and Thatcher's Britain had been in the vanguard.

More locally, this pattern was traced also by the critic Dominic Head, who in the mid-2000s offered a level-headed assessment of the long-term effects of Thatcherism – or whatever broader force it represents – on class identity in Britain:

> In contemporary Britain, poverty is no longer the province of wage-laborers, whose toil is defended by an effective union, and ameliorated by factory clubs and socials. Changes that have taken place since the rise of Thatcherism – the curbing of union powers, the imposition of strict productivity regimes, and the disappearance of traditional working-class communities – have meant that there is no longer a collective working-class experience with which to identify (as there still was in the 1960s and 1970s). (229-30)

Head does not mean that inequality and poverty do not persist in Britain; on the contrary, he insists that inequality has worsened since 1979. He is pointing to the fact that the structures of such inequality, and the identities and cultures associated with them, have changed in this period. The working-class identities associated with manufacturing industry, he indicates, have been displaced on one hand by the growth of a salaried middle class, whose aspirations and cultural norms have become dominant in British society; and on the other by an underclass, consisting of non-unionized, menial cleaners, service workers and casual laborers. This is the emerging social dispensation of neo-liberalism. *Boys from the Blackstuff* clearly belongs to an earlier point in this process: a moment when shockwaves of high unemployment were hitting areas of Britain during the first Thatcher recession; and in which the resurgent Conservative Party, captured by the New Right, was determined to deal devastating blows to the labor movement which still hoped to stop it in its tracks.

A Realist Intention

It was at this specific juncture that *Boys from the Blackstuff* became an iconic television broadcast and an emblematic text of its moment. The program followed Alan Bleasdale's earlier, longer film, *The Blackstuff* (1978), in which the main characters

were introduced: a group of tarmac layers and builders from Liverpool who travel to undertake a job in Middlesbrough, and wind up losing their life savings as well as their jobs. This pilot set the conditions for the five-part series that followed, which commences with all five main characters queueing to claim benefits in the DHSS office. The opening scene of the series bids to be representative and emblematic, with each character representing themselves in the most typical way. Chrissie Todd is lugubriously humorous, and even his name – Christopher Robin – suggests gentleness. He comes here for the company and the attractive surroundings, he wryly insists later, and next time the dole snoopers come round, he will bake a cake. Yosser Hughes barely contains his aggression, threatening to knock the clerk into the disability department despite the iron grille separating them. The elderly George Malone is eagerly willing to work though he has turned up in the pajamas befitting his invalid state. And the scene culminates in Dixie Dean's laconic assertion to the clerk that "no one on the dole counts, friend" (Bleasdale 10). The drama series here can be seen seeking to establish representative voices for a socially specific situation.

Formally speaking, *Boys from the Blackstuff* was essentially a piece of television realism, with a fairly conventional use of mise-en-scène, camerawork and editing, spiced and heightened with handheld camera, location shooting and point-of-view shots. Nothing demonstrates the conventional character of realism more readily than the unreality of yesterday's realism, and *Boys from the Blackstuff* itself now looks less gritty, more stagey than it did. Yet within the state of genre conventions in its own moment, the program would have been considered uncompromisingly realistic for a realistic television drama series.

That said, how should we situate *Boys from the Blackstuff*, and its supposed realism, historically? For one thing it represents the legacy of a particular age of television drama. Among the exemplars in this story are the editions of the BBC's *Wednesday Play* that ran from 1964 to 1970, most famously and influentially Ken Loach's *Cathy Come Home* in 1966. Loach and his collaborators, including Jim Allen and Tony Garnett, were also responsible for subsequent celebrated television drama, notably *The Big Flame*, a 1969 drama set in the Liverpool docks, and *Days of Hope*, a 1975 mini-series about working-class history culminating in the 1926 general strike. Alan Bleasdale's pilot film *The Blackstuff* was part of a tradition of the quality television film, related to these earlier instances though less obviously political in intent. The series was thus partly a continuation, or a late-flowering fruit, of a particular conjuncture: the admission of writers, actors and directors from the political left to the channels of public service broadcasting, in the 1960s and 1970s. A public-service ethos, and the greater freedom for maneuver then available in the BBC, gave these figures a degree of license to make committed and egalitarian drama.

The idea of realism is a recurrent one in representations of working-class life. But it merits closer consideration. In the 1970s, the avant-garde journal *Screen* promoted an aesthetic of political modernism, in which realism could be presented as a limited

form. For theorists like Colin MacCabe and Stephen Heath, realism appeared a naïve mode in its claims to capture or render the world, even reactionary in its implication of a stable and unchangeably material environment. In a partial replay of the polemics of Bertolt Brecht against Georg Lukàcs – themselves republished by New Left Books in the 1977 collection *Aesthetics and Politics* – realism was associated with the cultivation of a passive audience response; avant-garde techniques and alienation effects with a more productive and energizing reaction.

Into this debate, Raymond Williams made an intervention in a talk given in 1976, later republished as "A Defence of Realism." In boldly defending the realist dramatic project, Williams also provided some historical criteria which help us to situate *Boys from the Blackstuff*. He noted the importance of a contemporary setting, and a deliberate contemporaneity is part of Bleasdale's intent in the series: it is insistently concerned with how conditions are right now, sometimes in contrast with how things were until the day before yesterday. The print edition of Bleasdale's scripts announces on the back cover that "*Boys from the Blackstuff* catches the time. It is a television classic for the 1980s." The program could be juxtaposed, historically, with the Falklands conflict earlier in 1982, which had done more than any other event to improve support for the first Thatcher government, despite the continuation of the conditions depicted in Bleasdale's series. From the Roman poet Juvenal we have inherited the phrase "bread and circuses," signifying the distractions that a government gives to the populace to keep them occupied. Against the bread and circuses of a royal wedding and foreign war, *Boys from the Blackstuff* pitted stale bread and building sites.

Still more relevant here is Williams' observation that realism involved "a conscious movement towards social extension," following

> the need to extend the actions of tragedy from persons of rank, to whom by convention and precept tragedy had hitherto largely been confined, to – as it was put – "your equals, our equals." This movement of social extension – "let not your equals move your pity less" – is a key factor in what we can now identify as a realist intention. (228)

Williams proposed more specifically that television had lately taken on this role. It is still visibly part of the meaning of *Boys from the Blackstuff* that it seeks to extend dramatic space to include figures who are not included in, or do not get a proper hearing in, other accounts of society. This is quite explicit in the text of the program – from Dixie's opening comment that you are nobody if you are on the dole, through Yosser's maniacal obsession with being noticed.

Indeed the extension of, not so much sympathy, as human recognition, was part of Alan Bleasdale's stated intention as far back as November 1978, in a letter to English Regions drama proposing a series to follow up the original one-off TV play:

> I think it very important right now to write about the Dole as seen from the point of view of those who are on it, and to side with them against the people

> and papers who would like us to believe, despite the million and a half out of work and mass redundancies at every opportunity, that the majority of the unemployed are malingerers and rogues. (Millington 121)

That letter was written six months before Margaret Thatcher's first general election victory. As Bob Millington has pointed out, there was a kind of grim fortune in the delay between this proposal and the production and broadcast (122). The program would come to seem far more topical in autumn 1982, when unemployment had passed not one and a half million but three million – a figure widely considered to be politically unsustainable. In that sense the contemporaneity of the program is a happy or unhappy accident.

Tamper and Grit

It is true that some of the program's impact derives from its mimetic power, and this leads to effects worth observing in detail: particularly in the portrayal of the physicality of poverty. We observe sheer material limits being reached when Angie, Chrissie's wife, complains that last night there were three slices of stale bread, and in their absence the children have nothing for breakfast. Or when she wonders whether the young children are going to be "wearing hand-me-downs at eighteen and twenty":

> What are we bringing them up for – and what is the point of livin' our lives when … when ye'get up in the mornin' and it's all downhill from then on … two ounces of spam and a quarter of brawn and any stale … look!
>
> *She grabs a shoe from the side of the bed, turns it so that the sole faces Chrissie, then realizes that it's the wrong one. She hurls it away, and gets the other one. Chrissie laughs. She shows him the shoe. There is a hole in the shoe, temporarily filled with cardboard.*
>
> ANGIE. Look –
>
> CHRISSIE. Yeah, well. Walk on one leg, you'll be alright. (143)

That same sense of the body itself as the first place of suffering or frustration is also visible in the world of work, and would-be work, itself, where Yosser utters some of Bleasdale's most famous lines as he follows a groundsman marking the touchline for a football pitch:

> Gizza job, go on, gizzit … gizza go, go on. I could do that. You only have to walk straight. I can walk straight, go on, gizza job, go on, gizza go. (152)

You only have to walk straight: the work which is unreachable manna to Yosser is a matter of the simplest physical activity, requires the simplest bodily qualification, yet remains tantalizingly unavailable. He says the same to the rent collector's minder, seizing the arm in which he bears a briefcase – "I could do that. I can carry things.

I've had practice" (161) – and even repeats the motif to the men who repossess his house near the end of his episode.

The series repeatedly stages the sheer intransigence of the material world in conditions of extreme poverty. It is not merely social relations that are hard, but their effect on the body and one's relation to the physical environment. Karl Marx wrote in the 1844 Paris Manuscripts of the alchemical powers of money, which could overcome distances or convert personal limitations into advantages:

> The stronger the power of my money, the stronger am I. The properties of money are my, the possessor's, properties and essential powers. … If I desire a meal or want to take the mail coach because I am not strong enough to make the journey on foot, money can procure me both the meal and the mail coach, i.e., it transfers my wishes from the realm of imagination, it translates them from their existence as thought, imagination and desires into their *sensuous*, *real* existence, from imagination into life, and from imagined being into real being. In this mediating role money is the *truly creative* power. (Marx 377-8)

Boys from the Blackstuff is a reminder of the grim opposite of this: the impotence of impoverishment, in which the material world cannot be bent one's own way but appears as a series of local obstacles and wearying barriers. In that sense, the criticism of realism as enshrining the unalterable solidity of the world misses the mark here: the intransigence of the world is part of the political point, the condition that is being exposed – to an audience for whom the world may be, for Marx's reasons, more malleable.

All this gains special pathos from the fact that the central male characters have all been manual laborers, men whose living came from working upon and transforming matter. Chrissie's speech to Angie at the climax of episode 3 voices this very explicitly, perhaps all too explicitly. "I had a job, Angie," he reminds her:

> It wasn't a bad job, and I was good at it. I laid the roads, girl. *I laid the roads*. Motorways, laybys, country lanes. … I could tamper and grit like nobody you ever saw. Nobody put the black stuff down quite like me. (141)

This celebration of skilled labor is more sentimental than most of Bleasdale's writing in this series. But perhaps its hollowness can be viewed as symptomatic: this is the kind of talk that has replaced the action Chrissie describes. In the same scene, following Chrissie's suggestion that she walk on one leg, Angie accuses him of making a joke of everything:

> It's not funny, it's not friggin' funny. I've had enough of that – if you don't laugh, you'll cry – I've heard it for years – this stupid soddin' city's full of it – well, why don't you cry – why don't you scream – why don't you fight back, you bastard. (143)

In fact, Chrissie's humor is lugubrious and sarcastic rather than merely brittle or evasive; and when she repeatedly demands that he "fight back" (136, 143), it is hard to know what she actually wants him to do. His shotgun slaughter of the animals he keeps in the back garden, notionally as a sudden harvest of food for the cupboard, is the unhinged result of her demands.

Yet Angie's accusation carries some power, because it is generalized to *this stupid soddin' city*. She accuses a whole town of taking refuge from oppression in humor, sublimating pain into laughter. She alerts us to the way in which talk can replace action, eloquence displace energy – just as it does in Chrissie's statement about working on the roads, even if this is sentimental rather than comic. As a result, the literature of impoverishment is not necessarily impoverished, at the level of language. On the contrary, Scouse humor here, and the often crackling repartee scripted by Bleasdale, provides an echo of what is a familiar paradox in Irish writing, such as the theater of Synge and O'Casey: a plenitude of linguistic wealth that compensates for material poverty. As Terry Eagleton has written of those dramatists, "verbal profusion" is "a utopian compensation for the barrenness of their reality"; "the more men and women are victimized by history, the more a self-consciously poetic speech freewheels impotently around the action" (313).

The one character in *Boys from the Blackstuff* who unites eloquence and action is Snowy, the revolutionary who features in the first episode. He is given not only to diatribes about police brutality and the potential rise of an English fascism – statements which the other characters mock, as though they must be relativized into their proper dialogic place – but also to perorations about the pride of work, the value of traditional craft and skill in building. He would plaster for nothing if his political principles allowed, he says:

> Y'know, doin' something' y' good at – there's nothin' like it. Standin' there in the mornin' facin' four empty walls – an' then goin' home at night with the plaster all dry and smooth – an' the bit y've just done all wet an' shinin' … That's why I don't mind workin' on me own, if the truth be told, 'cos if there's one thing I can't stand, it's workin' with someone who hasn't got no pride … An' funny enough, they're the kind that never want to come out on strike. (34)

He takes the melancholy Chrissie to see a wall of tiles laid in the late nineteenth century. Snowy insists that "We're all capable of work like that. Craftsmanship doesn't die out in people, Chrissie. We can all do good jobs, but we're not allowed to" (36) – explaining that some bosses do not want to take him on because the high quality of his work makes him slower. We finally see Snowy etching his own name into the corner of a wall he has plastered, on the model of an old master. Snowy is thus probably the one character in the series who manages to engage with the world in a fulfilling way, working on raw material in what he, let alone anyone else, would point to as an example of unalienated labor. But this character, having been given

his say and allowed to set an example, immediately perishes while fleeing the officers of the Fraud Department.

Words to that Effect

This motif of materiality can be seen as an aspect of the theme of realism. Yet Raymond Williams' insistence was also the Brechtian one that realism itself is a diverse, mutable practice. And in fact *Boys from the Blackstuff* deserves to be seen in this way. For it is looser than a slice of dour naturalism; its tones include black comedy and absurdity. This last is most notable in the fraud investigation offices themselves, where in episode three we watch a series of bizarre exchanges between various officers and their administrator. As the main characters present themselves at the office for retribution, she is apt to decide their fates on a whim, suddenly overriding her colleagues, while she assigns another officer, Moss, to various tasks which she knows frustrate him. The effect of these is not documentary realism but satire; or perhaps something odder still, a dislocated world of misdirected energies, random decisions and perverse bureaucracy.

Something equally disturbing is presented in the fourth episode, "Yosser's Story." Yosser is seen to undergo a kind of mental deterioration after the pilot film, *The Blackstuff*, in which it is his money-making scheme that goes wrong. When he arrives on the building site in episode one, it is as a harbinger of trouble. The other men groan at the sight of him swooping down the slope, followed, as ever, by his obedient young children. "Gizza job," he tells the contractor, Malloy, and starts work on a wall which is so slapdash that the builder tells him, "Son, the last time you laid bricks was when you had a Lego set" (43). Malloy is head-butted for his trouble – for Yosser is not only disturbed but dangerous. He is the only one of the men who carries a real threat of violence: he perhaps fulfils Angie's request to Chrissie to "fight back." But fighting in this way cannot ultimately win the day. Yosser's episode traces a downward spiral from an already low point. He has already lost his job; he now loses his wife, and then loses his children to social services while being brutally beaten by police. He descends to the level of a vagrant, and in a tragicomic moment of non-recognition he literally cannot be arrested despite his best efforts at smashing a shop window. Yosser finally attempts to kill himself in a lake, and is ambiguously denied this solace when rescued by police.

Yosser's story is less urban realism pure and simple, rather another strange hybrid of this basic mode with other tones. It is significant for instance that the episode opens with a dream sequence, in which Yosser sees himself and his children drowning in the same lake in which he ultimately makes his suicide bid; other characters, including his destitute contemporaries, float by in punts – dressed, the script tells us, for the Henley Regatta. The episode thus starts in the realm of the surreal, though this is diegetically explained as we see Yosser waking in sweat and panic. But in a sense Yosser brings his own air of unreality to proceedings as a whole, whenever he appears in the series. Other characters have been affected by unemployment –

Chrissie driven to shoot his animals, George Malone rising from his sick bed to arrive at the dole queue in pajamas – but Yosser has been the most deeply warped on the inside. We see this in his technique of bricklaying in the first episode, but we also hear it, increasingly, in his speech. His discourse is driven to repetition – sometimes of the deadpan refrain "Gizza job, I could do that," which became the series' call-sign; still more often a paranoiac reiteration of his own name – "I'm Yosser Hughes" – as though this too is about to be taken away from him. By the end of episode four, he himself has removed it. Sitting in heavy rain in Williamson Square opposite the Liver Building, he again encounters the Glaswegian wino he conversed with earlier. "Don't I know you from somewhere?" asks the vagrant. Yosser has punctuated the entire episode with the phrase "I'm Yosser Hughes": now he only mumbles "I'm … I'm … I'm wet" (183).

Along with this manic assertion of identity, Yosser also brings a strange brand of wordplay: a fantastic and unpredictable humor in the old sense of that noun. In episode three he is called into the fraud office, and lets it rip:

> YOSSER. *And* – on Malloy's site that particular day, the day in question, in fact, no money parted company to or from anyone. Who was there. When I was there. No money came my way. Not to my knowledge. Not when I was there. And I should know. Being there. And being me. (*He laughs, and stops dead.*) Malloy on no occasion never said to me, "Here y'are, touch for that." (*Makes a movement with his hand indicating money being passed.*)
>
> ASSISTANT. That's a double negative.
>
> YOSSER. Yeah well there's two of you isn't there? And, as a matter of fact, I was there on a trial basis, but left after one wobbly wall and a short exchange of words, or words to that effect. (112-3)

Some of Yosser's speech here is a pastiche of bureaucracy, or of the constable with his notebook – "on Malloy's site that particular day, the day in question, in fact" – though it is also marked by oddities, like money "parting company" rather than, more idiomatically, "changing hands." His speech becomes staccato as he jerkily gropes after qualifications and relevant additions – "Who was there. When I was there. No money came my way. Not to my knowledge. Not when I was there." And he also plays on words, with a nervous comedy: "a short exchange of words, or words to that effect," and the terrific illogic, almost worthy of Flann O'Brien, of a double negative to serve two listeners. But we do not read this as the detached wit of a man in control of the discursive situation; rather as the involuntary incoherence of a man whose wits are leaving him, and who is discovering accidental comedy in the ruins of his reason.

Certain Items Transpire

Yosser Hughes plainly dramatizes the connection between social breakdown and personal breakdown. It is here that the series most closely resembles the fiction

of another of the greatest chroniclers of the British working class in the Thatcher era: the Glaswegian novelist James Kelman. His novel *The Busconductor Hines* (1984) outdoes even *Boys from the Blackstuff* in its fixation on material limit, the small comforts and enduring discomforts of relative poverty. Scene after scene describes the maneuvers of Robert Hines, his wife, and their young child around their tiny flat. The novel does not directly concern deindustrialization, in that its characters do not work in the primary or manufacturing industries being run down by the Conservative government; they drive and conduct buses for the Glasgow Corporation. This novel's world is not quite one defined by unemployment, as is Bleasdale's Liverpool, but rather by the difficulty of work, its undesirability and frustrations. Hines' constant risk of losing his job, for poor attendance, tardiness or insubordination, is matched only by his constant desire to be shot of it. He and his wife Sandra discuss whether it would be better for him to be on the "broo" or dole than to keep trying to make the best of this soul-destroying occupation.

Towards the end of the novel Hines becomes the center of a minor industrial dispute over a point of procedure – he refuses to attend a disciplinary hearing in his own time, rather than in working hours – and a strike is called to defend the principle of his stand. Here, briefly, the novel swings closest to the political claims of Snowy Malone in the first episode of *Boys from the Blackstuff*: that it is possible, and more necessary than ever in this historical climate, for working people to stand together and face down employers; that, as Snowy puts it, "if y' give in y' dead" (37). Yet at the climactic moment Hines does, it seems, give in: he abruptly declares to employers and union representatives that we should "call it quits," announcing "I'm away home; that's me resigned" (Kelman 211). There is something about Hines which does not seem to belong to the collectivity of the union, or even the bus garage or canteen. He is a thoroughly working-class character, and sees the world in terms of deprivation and hardship; but he is also a loner, with some of the perversity and inner anger of Alan Sillitoe's Arthur Seaton, or of the existentialists to whom Kelman was soon compared. In a sense, Kelman refuses to give an audience to the working-class protagonist that it might want or expect. He is humorous, gritty, resilient; but he is also stubborn, opaque, thoughtful. And like Yosser, his hardship is not just external, but imprinted on the inside, in the consciousness to which the narrative gives us access. In the course of this novel a good deal of time is spent hearing these circling thoughts, which have nowhere to go and no issue. Here is one instance:

> His goal was twofold: to obtain a PSV licence, to acquire a sum of money – a sum of money which while of unknown extension was nevertheless taken for granted as settled in some unshadowy region as for example consider the striving to a goal where the goal lies in between the lines while the lines themselves are the striving and can produce the goal seemingly in themselves but not really in themselves for the goal lies in between and though some daft cunts have no knowledge of this they assume its existence in accordance

> with the existence of the lines. Now this is fucking nonsense of course because there doesn't have to be any in between at all, there can be nothing whatsoever. …
>
> Now: let us take it slowly, slowly and calmly. One might start off by too late it is too late, too fucking late, it is too fucking late for the shite, for this imbecilic carry on; it is too late. The problem is that it is too late. 5 years is not 10 minutes. This is the problem. Hines really does know it now, at long last, he is in full realization of it, as he has been before right enough it has to be admitted at this stage of the game that eh he has known it before. He used to know it. He gets jolts. Jolts come along. Hines gets jolted. Certain items transpire. (Kelman 97-8)

Swearing is sometimes euphemistically referred to as "industrial language." Writing fiction for a small publishing house, Kelman had more license to use heavy industrial language than did Bleasdale. Otherwise, we notice here the strange mixed voice characteristic of Kelman's protagonists. There is a peculiar formality – "He conducted himself in a manner such that, his method of being, it accorded to certain factors. Certain factors appear to have governed his movements." Yet there is also a halting syntactic uncertainty: short sentence, unfinished sentences, thoughts that stop. In both respects, in fact, the passage is reminiscent of Yosser's speech quoted above. Alternatively, some sentences get much too long: "as for example consider the striving to a goal where the goal lies in between the lines while the lines themselves are the striving and can produce the goal seemingly in themselves but not really in themselves for the goal lies in between," and so on.

In writing like this, Kelman indicates that a working man living a hand to mouth existence in a tenement flat is not necessarily a simple being. He grants this figure a complexity of consciousness and language, and this is a polemical gesture against a literary tradition that Kelman believes has excluded working people or made them figures of fun. To that extent, we are again in the realm of Raymond Williams' historic project of realism: the extension of attention, the insistence on the detail and value of lives further down the class structure.

But in Kelman's hands this is a mixed blessing, a pyrrhic victory. In being granted inner complexity, his protagonist does not gain a capacity for serene contemplation, or a vivid sense of life's richness, as if it was Virginia Woolf without the neurosis. He gains confusion, mental struggle; the internal complexity is not so much rich as tortuous, labyrinthine. To be revealed as fully human is not that much of a blessing, if the conditions in which one lives make it painful to occupy that humanity. In this sense Kelman's figure, like Yosser, perhaps represents a limit to the principle announced by Williams. The franchise of representation has been extended, but the franchise of social equality has not. The project of realism may be to give dignity to characters like this – but perhaps society as a whole makes such dignity unavailable, whatever the intentions of the form.

To watch Yosser Hughes' and Rob Hines' meandering, frustrated monologues is to see a representation of working-class life that is not a worthy naturalism, but closer to the arbitrary, repetitive, self-molesting discourses we encounter in Samuel Beckett. (That *Boys from the Blackstuff* features characters called Malloy and Malone, however, is probably an accident of geography rather than a literary allusion.) It is also to see a connection between social ills and psychic illness. It is significant that these men are not simply presented as hardy fellows, nor as nobly defeated proletarians, but as people whose inner lives have been damaged by their outer existence. Both Bleasdale and Kelman can plausibly be seen to posit blighted mental health as a result of contemporary socio-economic conditions; uniting private and public, inner and outer lives.

These Days

In one sense *Boys from the Blackstuff*'s image of despair and breakdown has lost its immediacy: it has become a television legend, a late nugget in the golden age of BBC drama. In a different sense it is as striking now as it was then, precisely because Thatcherism is now so profoundly part of what shapes our historical horizon. It is not only that Thatcherism would be hard to undo, in any practical sense, but that it is now difficult to imagine the historical trajectory of contemporary Britain without it – to think counterfactually and entertain alternatives to the neo-liberal project with which the British state navigated that epoch of deindustrialization and structural change.

Among the most poignant scenes in Bleasdale's series is a moment not so much of personal trauma, but of broad historical analysis – when the Marxist Snowy passionately explains to his fellows:

> SNOWY. … I mean, it was easy to be a socialist when I was growin' up in the sixties, an' even f'most of the seventies. Everyone was a friggin' socialist then. It was fashionable. But it's not now … Everythin's gone sour, everyone's lockin' the door, turnin' the other cheek, lookin' after number one. *But now's the time when we should all be together*. Now's the time when we *need* to be together, 'cos … 'cos well we're not winnin' anymore. *Don't you see that?* (He pauses.) Like, that's all I'm sayin'.
>
> CHRISSIE. *(Gently.)* Of course we see it.
>
> JIMMY. And the last thing we need is t'be told about it, f'Christ's sake.
>
> CHRISSIE. 'Cos deep down, most of us know it. But y'don't look that far, not these days. Not when y' scared Snowy. (29)

This exchange allows the radical his space, in a brief but serious historical analysis. The replies from the other characters are neither a ringing endorsement of his politics, nor a rejection of them: they accept the analysis – and it is moving to see their grudging, reflexive political solidarity with Snowy, despite the mockery of him – but by that very token identify themselves as victims who are unable to act on it.

Part of the success of *Boys from the Blackstuff* is this readiness to be melancholy; the absence of cheap uplift. And it shares this with Kelman, for whose fraying men there are never easy answers or really any answers at all; and with Sean O'Brien, with whom we started, for whom a deindustrializing landscape might carry romance, but would not promise any victory or necessary bright tomorrow. The texts considered in this essay are not impoverished in a literary sense, but they offer no unreal political riches either; no fool's gold, just the black and blue stuff of a history which may not yet have done its worst.

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Naxalgia and "Madhu Chakra" in *Meghnadhbodh Rohoshya*: A Critical Review

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Abstract

This essay both pits Anik Datta's movie *Meghnadbodh Rohoshyo* against other literary works dealing with the Naxal question and examines its intertextuality to understand the multifaceted theme of political betrayal that subsumes the armed insurgency. On May 25, 1967, a group of tribal sharecroppers in an Indian village called Naxalbari under the state of West Bengal resisted the landowners from getting their yield. The protest got 11 villagers killed, and spun off into a violent insurgency aimed at the annihilation of the people's enemy, and eventually exposed the Marxist/Maoist divide in the Communist Party of India. Released on the fiftieth year of the Naxalbari Movement, Anik Datta's movie tackles some of the unresolved conflicts of the past by giving them human faces. He uses the genre of mystery films to attempt an "objective" analysis of the nuanced truth behind one symbolic betrayal that failed the movement. Datta narrates the story of a defector who left his idealist activism to settle for a comfortable and successful life abroad. The protagonist's defection serves as a parallel to the way the Bengali renaissance figure Michael Madhusudan Dutt left his religion, country, and language for Europe and wrote in English. Anik Datta, however, focuses on Madhusudan's epic *Meghnadbodh Kabya* (*The Slaughter of Meghnadh*), where the heroic code of a warrior clan is betrayed, and uses it as a temporal frame to negotiate with the present. This article critiques the multiplicity of exchanges between Madhusudan's epic and a contemporary tale of betrayal as found in Anik Datta's film to comment on the cultural and political components of the Naxalite movement and the nostalgia associated with it.

Keywords: Naxalite, Naxalgia, Madhusudan Dutt, Maoism, Marxism, Communist Party of India, habitus, cultural capital

From Naxalbari to Naxalgia

Anik Datta's 2017 movie *Meghnadbodh Rohoshyo* recontextualizes the politically charged situations of the Naxalite Movement and gives it a human face by probing into the shifting cultural paradigms of the Marxist-Maoist resurgence in the late sixties, which now resides in the public imagination either as an ideological drift or as an unfinished political business. The youthful exuberance with which progressive students joined the peasant movement to end class struggles was met with heavy-handed resistance by the establishment. Narratives of violence, brutality, extra-judicial killings, and ideological pitfalls still dominate the public imagination either to propagate what the ruling class thinks of the radical movement or what the radical

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activists think of the ruling class. The prevailing discourse veers between the ruthless killing of the innocent citizens by the guerrilla activists and the brute force with which the State placated the rebellions. The investigative strategy of a "whodunnit" structure, however, promises an objective coverage of both sides of the story.

The release of the movie coincides with the fifty years of the beginning of the Naxalite Movement in a tribal village called Naxalbari in Darjeeling district of the state of West Bengal in India. From the beginning, the movement employed Marxist slogans of class war and revolution, aiming at a radical political transformation from a "class-in-itself" into a "class-for-itself." Kanu Sanyal, a field activist of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M); Charu Mazumdar, a supporter of Maoist strategies of armed resistance; and Jangal Santhal, a local tribal leader, were instrumental behind the peasant uprising. While the trio was mobilizing the peasants to protest against low wages, landlessness, bonded labor, high interest rates, caste system, and exploitation, a parallel movement started in Kolkata that had its roots in unemployment, dissatisfaction with party politics, and downward mobility. Aruna Krishnamurthy writes, "Naxalbari marked a crucial shift in goals, strategy, and constituency that sets it apart from a long history of peasant movements based on customary consciousness and economic exigencies" (136).

The Naxalites were inspired by the revolutionary zeal of China and felt that the parliamentary democracy sought by their party CPI was futile. Instead, they adopted Mao's strategy "to lead an armed guerrilla war that, beginning in the countryside, would mobilize the peasantry and eventually encircle the cities in a bid to capture state power in the struggle for a communist society" (Shah and Jain 1166). Naxalbari thus turned out to be the battleground for the ideological struggles in the Indian communist movement and ended up splitting the once united Communist Party of India (CPI). John Harriss sums it up thus:

> Those Marxist intellectuals who led a peasant uprising against landlords in the area of Naxalbari in northern West Bengal in 1967 argued against participation in parliamentary democracy and against mass organization, in favor of armed struggle. They sought to follow the example of the Chinese communists, led by Mao Zedong, in "liberating" rural areas and then encircling and taking the towns. Their actions sometimes degenerated into indiscriminate violence following from the injunction of Charu Mazumdar, who had emerged as the movement's leader, to undertake "annihilation of class enemies." (312-313)

Within two years of the movement, in 1969, the dissidents spread their activities under the banner of CPI (Marxist-Leninist) in the eastern zone (Mohan 1119). Led by the veteran communist party leader KPR Gopalan who left the CPM, the radical politics moved to the southern tip of Kerala, which made one character in the *Meghnadbodh Rohoshyo* claim that Kolkata and Kerala are united by 3 Ms: Marx, Movie and *Maach* (fish).

The offshoot branch stated Marxist-Leninist as its praxis. However, for many, such an ideology was nothing more than a "lapsed Marxism" (Mitra). The stated purpose of the Naxalite was to integrate three struggles against feudalism, imperialism, and comprador-bureaucrat capitalism, while their means to attain such goals remained violent. The red corridor, comprising eastern, central, and southern parts of India, soon became the loci of violence and was considered among the bloodiest of homegrown terrorism in India which led the government of India to outlaw the party.

The state's retaliatory response, the ideologues' failure to agree on their theoretical stance, the death of its main leader Charu Mazumdar inside jail, and the killing, maiming, or jailing of other leaders brought the initial Naxalite Movement to an end in 1972. However, different Maoist factions continued an underground insurgency, known among them as the "people's war," and in 2009, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh termed Naxalism "the greatest internal security threat to our country" (Gaikwad).

Although fallen out of favor, the movement had its bright moments in the early seventies when communism seemed a viable option against feudalism, capitalism, and imperialism. The dominant discourse of such a narrative is to inspire new generations of youth in India with political imaginary – that of a society free of exploitation and injustice – outside the official discourse based on the development trajectory. The Naxalites fought not only for their own control over their means of subsistence but also for the dignity that has been denied to them for generations. Such longing is preserved in the writings of authors who witnessed the movement or by the popular imagination that is available in fiction or media.

A type of nostalgia over the Naxalite Movement, dubbed as Naxalgia, still persists in the memory of the generation that saw the uprising and its aftermath. Naxalgia is therefore characterized by both hope and its disenchantment, by courage and its betrayal. As Nandini Lal puts it, "The Naxalite insurgency that began in 1967 has held a snug purchase over West Bengal's literary psyche. The tragedy of state jackboots crushing idealistic students smitten with communism weighs heavily on the collective imagination."

In 2016, the "West Bengal's literary psyche" was revisited by three prominent writers, all well known for their literary accounts of the Naxalite period, who took part in a discussion titled "Naxalgia" at the Kolkata Literary Meet. Samaresh Majumdar's *Kaalbela* trilogy, Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay's *Brishtir Ghraan* and *Shaola*, and Kunal Basu's *Rabi-Shankar* are some of the significant works in Bangla that keep the collective imagination on Naxalism alive in West Bengal's literary psyche. During the discussion, Samaresh Majumdar pointed out how the failed revolutionaries felt exploited by writers like him who were profiting from writing on the Naxal issue; Shirshendu Mukhopadhayay highlighted the courage and hope that the young revolutionaries instilled in others; while Kunal Basu talked about

the urgency for a new Naxal narrative. Basu mentioned that his research on *Rabi-Shankar* led him to interview many of the surviving police officers who took part in the killing and torturing of the activists as well as talk to several silent supporters who wrote pamphlets or songs, or published in fringe magazines to argue that the Naxal question should be given new currency ("Shirshendu, Samaresh, Swapnamoy, Kunal"). It can be argued that Anik Datta's movie attempts a metanarrative that deals with the issues broached by the panelists. *Meghnadbodh Rohoshya* involves the idea of exploitation and profiteering through writing; it recounts the tales of hope and disenchantment of participants and activists; and it aims at finding a new narrative.[1] Interestingly, the director has consciously distanced himself from sharing any political convictions, resulting in a value-neutral space where mostly the aesthetic side of the Naxalite Movement is foregrounded. At the same time, the movie maintains the disillusionment and trauma of the urban educated class and the familial structure of most of the Naxalite literature. It superficially glosses over the class question or the subaltern group with whom the movement originated. However, before I critically examine *Meghnadbodh Rohoshyo*, let me briefly reflect on the literary tradition against which Anik Datta's work can be judged.

Naxalite Literature

A character in Anik Datta's film asks the protagonist Asimava Bose why he does not write about the Naxalite Movement in which he was involved. Implying that the tales of terror unleashed by the leftists sell well in the West, the character then quips that one such opportunist writer has recently got shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. The reference to Neel Mukherjee's 2014 novel *The Lives of Others* is obvious. Mukherjee weaves a story in which the peasants are reduced to nothing, hope for any societal change is gone, and normal democratic solutions to the moral question is non-existent. The readers are posed with the option of siding with the rebel Supratik who finds enough anomalies in the system to legitimize violence.

This novel is the latest in the books on the Naxalite written in English. Earlier, Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance,* Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* have tried to encapsulate the Naxal issue for an Anglophone audience (Martyris).

Jhumpa Lahiri uses the plot of *The Lowland* (2013) to capture the nationalist/internationalist dimension of the Naxal issue. Udayan, a young man reads about the Naxalbari incident and its Chinese endorsement in the newspaper: "The spark in Darjeeling will start a prairie fire and will certainly set the vast expanses of India ablaze" (23). He argues with his father, who used to be a Marxist, saying, "Your generation didn't solve anything" (23). The novel goes on to show Udayan and his brother bifurcate in their attitudes towards political reforms.

1 I would not be surprised to learn that the filmmaker Kunal Sen in the movie was modeled after Kunal Basu. In his movie review published in *Kaahon*, Samajdar, however, hints at the possibility that the name Kunal Sen could allude to Mrinal Sen's son bearing the same name who is also a filmmaker in real life.

The plot to see the political rift through the two brothers is a reminder of Satyajit Ray's film *The Adversary.* Based on Sunil Gangapadhya's story, "Pratidwandi," Ray uses a family structure where the younger brother chides his older brother for losing his revolutionary path. The older brother, a drop-out medical student, witnesses the moral debauchery of his time, yet does nothing to stem the rot.

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy uses the barbaric killing of the untouchable Naxal sympathizer Velutha to expose the hypocrisy of the Communist leaders in Kerala. Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* reminds readers that the victimization of the subaltern group – the Madari people, the Muslims and the beggars – is not unique; their fate is handcuffed to any other Indian in a state that patronizes violence.

Conversely, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* employs the metaphor of a rooster coop for Indian democracy in which the urge to free oneself is compromised. Balram kills his master and becomes a type of Naxalite knowing very well that his action will cause his family members to be hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the masters. The novels in English try to show the world in monolithic categories or Manichean binaries of right or wrong, big or small, good or evil to make local stories global.

The Naxalite narrative in Bangla does not have the added pressure of explaining the cultural referents. Mahasweta Devi is one of the first to write on this issue. She discussed her artistic duty to respond to the history that she was witnessing in an interview, where she said, "I thought I saw history in the making, and decided that as a writer it would be my mission to document it" ("In Conversation"). The result was a series of short stories: "Jalasatra," "Pindadan," "Kanai Bairagir Ma'in," and "Draupadi." Her novella *Hajar Churashir Ma* (made into a Hindi film titled *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa*) is probably the most famous depiction of the tragic side of this movement. It is about a mother's search for the dead body of her son, a suspected terrorist, who was killed in a police encounter. She wrote this novella upon the request of a young revolutionary who asked her not to talk about the movement as a rural episode, but also as something urban. In response, she ended up writing *Hajar Churashir Ma*. In her interview, Devi said:

> I wrote *Hajar Churasir Ma* in *Prasad*, a film-magazine. I was never associated directly with that movement. So I wrote about an apolitical mother, whose generation was in complete darkness about their next generation. Children of so-called leftist parents also went to the streets, rejecting their parents' leftism as spurious. I found idealism in the selfless sacrifice and absence of greed in them. I was moved. Somehow *Prasad* found its way into the jails. Naxalite prisoners read it, started to consider me as their kin. (167)

One of the most powerful short stories by Mahasweta Devi dealing with the Naxal question is "Draupadi" where the female protagonist Dopdi uses her raped black body to confront the anti-Naxal strategist Senanayak.

Samaresh Basu's *Mahakaler Rather Ghora* is another instance of using a tribal protagonist. Ruhiton returns from his imprisonment for his involvement in the Naxalite Mmovement and finds everything else has returned to its pre-revolutionary normalcy. He carries a fever inside like the nightly stallion of time that represents destruction.

Anik Datta's movie is alive to the subaltern origin of the Naxalite Movement. He brings in the indigenous issue by presenting Janaki as a tribal Naxal with a mythical name. But he does not portray her as defiant as Dopdi or Ruhiton. Even though Janaki wants revenge for the wrong done to her Naxalite father, she does not directly talk about political resistance as she seems too focused on her personal revenge mission. The other tribal members in the movie are the stereotypical Maoist rebels who terrorize the system as arms-carrying masked inhabitants of the jungle. However, they remain as stock characters devoid of any elaboration.

By the same token, the story of Datta lacks the political depth of Samaresh Majumdar who in his Animesh quartet – *Uttoradhikar, Kaalbela, Kaalpurush,* and *Madhabilata* – brilliantly brought out the Naxalite period through human interactions. In the Kolkata Literary Meet, Majumdar, however, recalled his discomfort in meeting a former Naxalite rebel living in the US who accused him of making money out of their ideology. This issue of commodification is also pertinent to Datta's film, and reminds us of the habitus where aesthetic and ideological fields play subservient to financial capital. The movie is released by *Netflix* for a global audience, and is very conscious of representing the urban Kolkata as a westernized city. With this let me now unravel the mystery (Rohoshyo) surrounding a contemporary story and its epic counterpart of betrayal.

The "Madhu Chakra" in *Meghnadbodh Rohoshyo*

To say Anik Datta's *Meghnadbodh Rohoshyo* is a clever movie is an understatement. At times the mystery movie is too clever in playing with words and ideas while presenting them as a jigsaw puzzle to live up to its subgenre claim as a "whodunnit? howdunnit? whydunnit?" The dialogues are replete with various rhetorical devices. For instance, the central character, sci-fi writer Asimava Bose's first name is an unmistakable echo of Isaac Asimov; the mysterious Janaki's name is a pun on *Jano Ki* (Do you know?); and the police officer Sunu Guha Thakurta's name offers a slight twist to the real-life notorious encounter specialist Runu Guha Neogi. If verbal clues are not enough, shots are carefully choreographed to provide visual clues. Asimava's departure from Marxist ideology, for instance, is comically represented through a Marxism poster featuring the American comedian Groucho Marx with a cigar.

The title-cards of the movie run alongside a contemporary dance performance based on Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Meghnadbodh Kabya* (*The Slaughter of Meghnadh*). Lines from the poem are carefully chosen to use the epic invocation as an entry to the "madhu chakra" (the circle based on Madhu – the nickname of the poet) as well as to grasp betrayal as the leitmotif. In his secondary epic, Madhusudan twisted the

plot of *The Ramayana* to glorify Ravana's son Meghnad who was betrayed by his uncle and unceremoniously killed by Lakshman. "Madhu chakra" is a circle that studies the textual intrigue and betrayal. Literally, however, "madhu chakra" refers to a beehive, which stands for the Romantic notion of authorship as a site where bees gather nectar from different flowers to create their honey.[2]

Anik Datta employs frame-narrative to depict "*bibhishan Bibhishan*" – the horrendous treachery of Bibhishan – from a myriad of perspectives. He uses three preambles as a temporal amalgamation to set the narrative tone. The first scene depicts a police raid killing a *swadeshi* activist at Birbhum in 1936. The frame shifts to Oxford, set in 2016, where someone opens a parcel containing a copy of Madhusudan Dutt's *Meghnadbodh Kabya*. Some jump cuts are used in the next few scenes to present the essence of *Meghnadbodh Kabya* dance-drama performed by Gautam Halder in a Kolkata theater. As the movie progresses, these three interludes are woven into an intertwining narrative of betrayal. By the end of the movie, we come full circle as we identify the first scene in colonial India in 1936 as a fictional confession of the protagonist; the second one is a bait to catch the conscience of someone who betrayed his friend in 1970 during the Naxalite insurgence; and the present day performance is an invitation to join the "madhu chakra" to witness the unfolding of the mystery. Such over-determination makes Arup Ratan Samajdar review the movie for *Kaahon* with a damning titular verdict: "Meghnad Badh Rahasya: Buried Beneath its Own Weight."

The apolitical nature of the film is due to the larger popular global audience that the director probably had in mind, and is evident in its availability on the popular streaming service *Netflix*. Hence the director felt obligated to explain every euphemism, allusion, or cultural reference, making some dialogues redundant and pedantic for the local audience. Instead of taking any strong political position, the movie uses symbols and songs to keep the conclusion open-ended. Two dominant narratives on the Naxalite Movement are placed side by side for the viewer's consumption. The state version demonizes the radical activists by focusing on the killing of the innocence and the causing of civil disobedience, while the popular version romanticizes those who dreamt of political reformation and emancipation of the people. The movie, however, ends with the director's alter ego Kunal Sen saying that he will use Asimava's confessional script to make a film set in the 1970s. We therefore come to a full "Madhu Circle" as in the end we have the potential of a new beginning. The movie thus offers many interpretations, without failing to change them (notwithstanding Marx's Eleven Theses on Feuerbach). The futility is symptomatic of the stalemate that left politics is experiencing in a post-Soviet world, and in the film dialectical materialism is reduced to textual dialectics.

2 Andrew Cooper in his essay, "The Apian Way: Virgil's Bees and Keats's Honeyed Verse" traces the idea back to Virgil. The idea that a creative writer is like a bee while the critic is like a spider was expounded by Matthew Arnold in his "Sweetness and Light."

The director of *Meghnadbodh Rohoshyo* is very careful in presenting the dilemma of the plot through a set of binaries. The plot thus assumes a dialectical proportion as everything happens twice in the movie. There are two of everything. The central character Asimava has two wives. He has two children: one biological son Rick from his previous marriage and one step-daughter from his present spouse. The former wife is paralyzed and wheelchair-bound, while the current wife Indrani is a film actress who shot to fame through a film directed by Kunal titled *Shiri* (*The Staircase*); the contrast between the wheelchair and the stairs is obvious.

Asimava is guilty of betraying his comrades in the 1970s to secure safe passage to England. To give his side of the story, he writes his confession (albeit under compulsion) admittedly in an old-fashioned prose that resembles the diction of Bankimchandra Chatterjee, the famed Bengali novelist who served as a civil servant under the British rule. Through his fictional narrative, Asimava explains how in the 1930s, Marx's *Das Kapital* was becoming popular among the young students who sought new modes of engagement with their colonial master. Marx's understanding of history based on class struggles contradicted Asimava's understanding of social reality that he gleaned through the novels of Charles Dickens for that matter. He asked his comrades, "Aren't novels history?" (01:44:52) to echo Georg Lukac's position as stated in *The Historical Novel* to remind us that the novel as a genre could be socially and politically critical as well as psychologically insightful. His comrades dismissed his apolitical assessment, and it became evident that Asimava was a misfit among his peers.

Asimava's involvement in the Naxalite Movement is shown from two stances: the time it actually took place and the retelling of the event while giving an interview to his book's translator, Elena Majumder. In the first instance, we find Asimava's civil servant father using his influence to strike a deal with the police to get him out of the torture cell by forcing him to give away the details of his friend's hideout. In the second instance, we find him trying to avoid the issue altogether in his interview with Elena. He quoted a popular Bangla song "*Amake amar moto thakte dao*" ("Let me be me") to suggest that his presently recomposed life had no room for the revolutionary figure that he used to be. He downplayed his past involvement saying, "At that time everyone got a little involved" (00:18:12).

At present, Asimava Bose resides in Oxford. He is the recipient of the Arthur C. Clarke Award for his novel *The Big Bong Theory* (a title that alludes to Stephen Hawkins while using a derogatory term for the Bengali). Asimava has come to Kolkata to attend the launch of his book's Bangla translation held in Oxford University Press's (OUP) bookstore. The two locations – Oxford and OUP – create a field for the engagement of different classes, entities, tendencies, and propensities. We thereby enter what Pierre Bourdieu would call *habitus*, a coordinated space for both symbolic and cultural capital. Bourdieau in *The Rules of Art* erases the boundary between elite and mass cultures. He is more interested in the field in

which these classes or their agencies operate to secure or maintain their capital (cited in Groden et al. 69).

The book-launch is a polyphonic and polysemic ensemble participated in by different agents. The cultural capital is evident in the sophisticated urban "elite" audience. Members of the audience whisper to compliment the attractive figure of the author's actress wife Indrani. The program moderator uses hyperbole as a sales pitch, turning Asimava into a commodity before the book signing. Indrani is a perfect hostess, managing PR and family alike. Asimava's musician son is running late because he is busy sharing weed with his girlfriend. Asimava's caretaker (who represents the masses alongside the waiters, cameraman, mic-man, and readers) is busy munching free sandwiches, while the star of the show takes his time out to describe mutton chops to a foreign guest. During the Q&A, one old comrade of Asimava shows up with a difficult question much to the chagrin of the author. Sirajul asks why the writer sets his stories in a futuristic Kolkata of 2050 and avoids dealing with the Kolkata he grew up in. Asimava's casual answer that a writer must not differentiate between the past and the future sounded more like a hollow "excuse" to Sirajul (00:12:38).

Sirajul represents a class, an idealist past that Asimava has long left behind. He has moved on to be back to the upper class in which he was born. The secret is revealed by Asimava's caretaker Bulu. While the upper class was drinking at an after party in Asimava's mansion in Kolkata, the working class, comprising the caretaker and the cook, secretly drank stolen whiskey on the roof. A drunk Bulu told Shombhu that Asimava's father had snatched 8 *bighas* of his father's land, which gave the Bose family its landed aristocracy.

Bulu, deprived of his land, is degraded, and even dehumanized as Asimava calls him "bloody parasites." Bulu's degeneration is noticed in his clandestine role as a pimp who rents out the house to secret lovers when Asimava goes back to England every summer. Bulu has also taken an advance from a non-Bengali businessman, promising to arrange a sale of Asimava's property. The other broker in the movie, Nikhilesh, uses his public profile as an art connoisseur to smuggle national treasures out of the country. Both Bulu and Nikhilesh are therefore brokers of different breeds.

There are two types of policemen: the present day detectives are verbose and run around the town in search of a missing Asimava like the comical Thomson twins from *Tintin*. Then there is the action-oriented previous generation of police officers who, we are told, were divided on the Naxalite question. While the popular notion involves police brutality, there were few officers who were sympathetic to the rebels.

Everyone in the movie has secrets. Shombhu and Bulu have a homosexual relationship. Both of Asimava's children want to exploit their father: Rick wants his father's money, while Buli wants Asimava's recommendation to go abroad. Rick has an illicit affair with the married Elena, while Kunal is infatuated with Indrani. Badal

Bose and Janaki live double lives. Then there are the political activists who roam the jungle plotting terrorist attacks and the retired police officers who turned out to be either socialites or Naxal sympathizers.

Only Asimava's secret is developed in the course of action. The transformation of the firebrand "leftist leftie" into an urban socialite is a secret. In his confession, he revealed that the "third degree police torture" had damaged his left arm for good and made him give up his comrade. With his damaged left side, he became a right-handed writer. The intertextuality with Samaresh Majumdar's most popular novel on the Naxalite period, *Kaalbela*, is obvious as Animesh the protagonist too faces a similar fate of being paralyzed. Yet, compared to Animesh, Asimava is a coward. As Sirajul puts it, while talking to Indrani and Kunal, Asimava was nothing more than "a political hobbyist" who had a romantic notion of the Marxist revolution (01:51:50).

The damaged left-side is the political baggage that he carries. Sitting on a park bench, Asimava sees the news of an attack on a police car by Maoist rebels. The fear of his own past gets hold of him. Through the use of pathetic fallacy, the director makes the exterior project the interior. His shame coincided with the loud laughter of a group of old men having their morning therapy. The kitsch is used to slight the political intensity.

Asimava's guilt is carefully brought to the surface by an intricate scheme of Janaki, the daughter of his betrayed comrade. She stalked him on Facebook and sent copies of *Meghnadbodh Kabya* to prick his conscience before finally confronting him. Asimava's ignorance about Indranil's daughter who was born to a Santal mother added to the mystery. Janaki vows to avenge her father's murder after learning about Asimava's betrayal from her foster father. Instead of admitting his guilt, Asimava runs away one more time, and only Janaki holds the key to the Meghnadbodh Rohoshyo, the mystery of the copy of the *Meghnadbodh Kabya*. Janaki in *The Ramayana* is another name given to Sita, who was wronged by the monster Ravana. Anik Datta's reconfiguration of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's epic *Meghnadbodh Kabya* locates the story of betrayal in not only colonial India but also mythical India. The movie poster uses the deconstructive tool of "writing under erasure" (Fr. *sous rature*) to cross out "kabya" in order to replace it with "Rohoshyo." Derrida used this technique of Heidegger's to write over words that are "inadequate yet necessary" (xiv). The title as a signifier therefore illustrates the inadequacy of "narrative," i.e., *Kabya* or epic, as a trope with reference to Michael Madhusudan Dutt's poem, and supplants it with the genre of the mystery novel.

The epic form, by design, is a high art that celebrates the action of a hero with certain moral attributes. Conversely, the "whodunnit? whydunnit? howdunnit?" is a subgenre of detective fiction popularized by Agatha Christie among others. The juxtaposition of high culture and popular culture is done as a postmodern pastiche

where genre categories are eroded. However, the movie did little to address the class categories apart from glossing over them superficially.

The underground rebel figures who blow up the police van remain as shadowy as ever. They are not given any voice in the movie. We see them as masked terrorists in the forests, expressed through mine traps or explosions. They are featured in newspapers for their terroristic action. They are aided by educated intellectuals such as the little magazine editor Badal Bose or a social activist like Janaki who attended Jadavpur University and JNU. We see who they are, but we are not given any reason to understand why and how they are doing the resistance movement. It seems that Anik Datta is careful not to give the violent side of the underground politics any undue attention.

Asimava's terming of the half-Santal Janaki as "Woman Friday," name-calling of Bulu as "bloody parasites," near manhandling of Shombhu, or discomfort at dealing with people like Sirajul or Badal Bose go on to show his superiority complex and class consciousness. Even in his book, *The Big Bong Theory*, he shows disdain for his compatriots. One excerpt read out at the launch parodies Newton's Second Law of Motion to ridicule the laziness of his people. It reads, "Every bong continues in its state of state of rest or uniformed motion unless compelled by some external force to act otherwise" (00:08:30).

Although Asimava's name literally means "the infinite," he remains a narrow human being who has failed to free himself from his own complexities. His involvement in the Naxalite Movement is a historical accident, which can also be deemed as a reason for the failure of the movement in general. Asimava later observes in his confession that true freedom was not attained. Neither he, living in a foreign country, nor his friends, living in an independent country, were free: "We who had united to break the shackles are now living in our own solitudes" (01:13:12).

Conclusion

I started this essay by saying that *Meghnadbodh Rohoshyo* is a clever movie. Perhaps the movie is too clever in its analysis of a historical phenomenon by what K. Balagopal calls "reducing an ideology to its material base" to create a type of "politically debilitating agnosticism" (1727). The movie follows the popular fashionable trend of presenting ideology as a discursive practice that approaches reality from multiple frameworks. Put bluntly, the film-maker's avoidance in dealing with the Marxist issue from a Marxist perspective ends up diluting the value and truth behind the Naxalite Movement. The film-maker fails to uphold his political conviction. To quote Balagopal again, "All frameworks of consciousness are not equally valid, equally honest or equally fruitful. The capacity of a given cognitive structure to reveal the truth depends on which social practice has generated it" (1727). What Balagopal says about the Telegu Film *People's Encounter* is equally valid for Anik Datta's film: "Unless the philosophical project ceases to be purely analytical and actually becomes political, we cannot rid ourselves of this crippling agnosticism that

crops up again and again, in ever new and seemingly radical and intellectually very fashionable forms" (1727).

In the final count, *Meghnadbodh Rohoshyo* is an aesthetic attempt to understand the Naxalite question. It lacks the sincerity to negotiate with the Marxist issues involving class struggles and the historical necessities for adopting to a Maoist proposition. It uses the mystery motif to deal with the conscience of an upper-class elite, Asimava Bose, who has a momentary correspondence with an ideological issue. Asimava's betrayal has been largely forgotten and forgiven, which is symptomatic of agnosticism while Janaki tries to evoke some questions that resonate with the final revolutionary song that asks whether we are asleep or awake.

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The Slow versus the Spectacular: Environment, Violence and Representation in China Miéville's "Polynia" and "Covehithe"

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Abstract

"Polynia" and "Covehithe" are two short stories from China Miéville's 2015 collection *Three Moments of an Explosion*. Present in both is an "ecosystem" of spectacular violence that the author builds through, first, the graphic description of violence, second, the encapsulation of eye-witnessed violence in visual objects that resemble what the Marxist philosopher Guy Debord terms "spectacles" and, third, the manipulation of textual spectatorship. To construct a chilling and eerie atmosphere for his narratives, Miéville can be said to have drawn heavily on HP Lovecraft's weird tales. Nonetheless, behind the spectacles of violence represented in "Polynia" and "Covehithe" is not the cosmic horror typical of Lovecraft but a different kind of horror, heavily anchored in our reality, possessing new and increasing urgency: the horror of global warming and environmental degradation, or, as in the words of Rob Nixon, of "slow violence." Consequently, there happens in "Polynia" and "Covehithe" what is similar to an act of translation, of the slow into the spectacular. I argue that this translation provides a potential answer to Nixon's pressing question about how to surmount the representational challenges created by slow violence in order to render it more urgent and engaging. This argument is furthermore related to broader discussions about the relationship between literature and the media, fiction's engagement with the environmental crisis, as well as the differences between Old Weird and New Weird.

Keywords: slow violence, the spectacle, ecocriticism, weird fiction

> [H]ow can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and that star nobody, disasters that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world? How can we turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention, these emergencies whose repercussions have given rise to some of the most critical challenges of our time? (Nixon 3)

Inherited from late 19th century and early 20th century writers such as Arthur Machen and HP Lovecraft, weird fiction as a literary tradition has taken a new shape in the hands of contemporary authors. In this contemporary guise, it is usually referred to as "the New Weird," a hybrid genre which "seeks to engage with questions of politics and morality" and is "self-reflexive in its awareness that literature and the world of which it is a part are both 'politically constructed'" (Weinstock 184). In this sense, the New Weird is more concerned with the real world than its predecessor, even though its political and moral engagement still relies very much on elements

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of the otherworldly and the fantastic. A Marxist academic and political activist, China Miéville is also considered a central figure in the New Weird whose creative and critical works "have been important in mapping out the terrain encompassed by the movement." In this paper, I will examine two short stories by Miéville that illustrate both what New Weird fiction is and how it enters into conversation with the contemporary world.

Published in his 2015 collection *Three Moments of an Explosion*, "Polynia" and "Covehithe" are very explicit in their environmental concerns. The narrative in "Polynia" follows the massive icebergs which appear mysteriously in the sky of London, causing chaos and even fatalities. "Covehithe" chills the reader with its description of spectral oil rigs coming back to life. In both, Miéville stages a weird encounter between humans and the natural world, in which the latter seems to possess agency, refusing to yield itself to the former's comprehension.

Taking Miéville's obvious engagement with the environment in "Polynia" and "Covehithe" as a point of departure on the one hand and guided by Cheryll Glotfelty's succinct definition of ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the environment" (xviii) on the other, I will attempt at an ecocritical reading of these stories. Human-nature relationship, as will be shown, is dialogic rather than unidirectional, its nuances permeating many aspects of our everyday life. Specifically, my analysis of "Polynia" and "Covehithe" will focus on the author's representation of violence. I argue that while violence in these two stories is depicted in spectacular terms, it is through Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" that its true nature can be properly comprehended. Consequently, there happens in these two stories what is similar to an act of translation, of the slow into the spectacular. I posit furthermore that this translation provides a potential answer to Nixon's question, as quoted above in the epigraph of this paper, about how to render slow violence more urgent and engaging.

Clothed in autobiographical form, "Polynia" can, from a certain angle, be read as a simple story about growing up, about childhood mischief and adventures. "Covehithe" likewise gives the feel of a bedtime diary entry narrating a father-and-daughter picnic in the Eastern coast of England. The presence of the child protagonists brings to these stories a sense of innocent light-heartedness, which on the contrary can call attention to the violent reality where these kids find themselves. Furthermore, the pervasive violence depicted in both texts is of a particular kind: it is dramatic, fearsome, but also awe-inspiring. It is, in a nutshell, spectacular. The child characters are victims of violence, but in immediate terms they are also its consumers, thus a canvas onto which the spectacular effects of violence are projected and highlighted. This "ecosystem" of spectacular violence that Miéville builds in both "Polynia" and "Covehithe" can be understood metaphorically as a three-story construction, each level of which represents a tactic that the author employs to first establish the spectacular effects of violence, then lock them into a

cycle of perpetuation and finally extend them beyond his narrative worlds towards the reader.

The first level consists of the author describing violence in spectacular terms, foregrounding its theatrical and larger-than-life qualities. In "Covehithe," Miéville goes to great lengths to set the stage for the resurrected oil rig's entrance into the narrative: "There was no light but the moon and those occasional sourceless mineral glows. Somewhere some insane bird, not a nightingale, was singing" (340). Sound and light were somehow suspended, and there was a sense of anticipation, not just from the human characters, but also from the whole landscape. When the uncanny tower finally appeared, it did so with awkward but exaggerated gestures. Its immensity was accentuated, so that its capacity for violence, though not yet exercised, was duly acknowledged:

> The metal was twisted. Off-true and angular like a skew-whiff crane, resisting collapse. It did not come steadily but lurched, hauling up and landward in huge jerks. … The sea at its base spread flat and fell away from suddenly rising intricate blockness, black, angled and extrusioned. (Miéville, "Covehithe" 341)

In "Polynia," "hundreds of thousands of people" were "out in the streets and gaping skyward" in startlement at icebergs "the size of cathedrals, looming above the skyline" (Miéville 3). It should be pointed out that while violence is usually understood as acts or agents that cause damage or casualties, another meaning of the word involves "strength of emotion or of a destructive natural force" ("Violence"). One can therefore argue that the Petrobras 36 oil rig in "Covehithe" and the icebergs in "Polynia," by their mere presence and the ferocity that they hint at, qualify as instances of violence.

On the second level, violence is encapsulated in visual objects, where their effects are perpetuated and multiplied. If above, the violence caused by the oil rigs or the icebergs is experienced only by their direct witnesses, on this level its effects go beyond the circle of immediacy to intrude upon those who might not have observed those events in person. These instances of violence, which might well have been spectacular when they took place, are turned into what the Marxist philosopher Guy Debord calls "spectacles." Debord's arguments in his book *Society of the Spectacle* therefore provide useful tools to understand violence in the two stories examined here. According to the French philosopher, "in societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation. ... [I]t [the spectacle] is the focal point of all vision and all consciousness" (Debord 7; emphasis in original). In other words, life is no longer experienced authentically via sensory and intellectual channels but through the spectacle, which is only a poor representation of life itself (Schirato 139). The spectacle becomes the center of attention and is given free rein in people's consciousness.

This vision that Debord sketches out seems to be exemplified in both "Polynia" and "Covehithe," where technologies such as the mobile phone become an indispensable part of the people's life, while the media serve to both satisfy and reinforce their obsession with the spectacle. When the first spectral oil rig made its presence in "the earlyish year of the 21st century," wrecking a fishing boat and washing "two traumatised survivors" ashore, its apparition, though wholly unexpected, was timely recorded and disseminated. This left the authorities at a loss of ways to "suppress civilian footage of what had come back" (Miéville, "Covehithe" 343). The idea of the society of the spectacle is carried to extremes in "Polynia," where the spectacle is not simply "a collection of images" but, as Debord observes, "a social relation between people that is mediated by images" (7). The appearance of the icebergs, despite – or maybe because of – their strangeness and incomprehensibility, seems to be welcomed with excitement by the people. Their whereabouts and movements were carefully observed and reported. Any expeditions to the icebergs, whether conducted with governmental authorization or illegally by urban explorationists, were minutely videotaped or, better yet, livestreamed. These footages were followed with enthusiasm by the Londoners below, though the narrator admits many years later that what they saw was neither extraordinary nor astonishing: it was basically "the sort of thing you'd expect from any arctic adventure. Freezing winds, terrible ice, so on" (Miéville, "Polynia" 7).

Thus, unsurprisingly, when the expeditionist Lund made her catastrophic fall from the iceberg Mass 6 because of its clash with Mass 3, an accident that can rightly be considered the culmination of the story's violent atmosphere, the event was also recorded, ironically by the victim's own helmet camera. Miéville gives an account of the tragedy through a few subjective, unemotional sentences:

> Lund staggered as her nook tilted. Her brace held, the brace cord did not snap, but the ice in which it was tethered crumbled. In seconds she slid down angles it had taken her hours to ascend. We saw the footage from her point of view. She careered down a chasm that now sloped hard and became a funnel. ("Polynia" 9)

Lund came down in front of a supermarket. "Mercifully, the camera gave out before she hit the ground," so the moment of her fatal landing was not recorded in the videotape (Miéville, "Polynia" 9). However, the locals had had enough time to take and upload pictures of her disfigured body before the police arrived at the scene. The kids found the pictures and showed them to each other "with a complex of emotions" that the narrator could not "put into words." Many years later, he confesses to "still have the image somewhere," and that the "hollow feeling" in his stomach "was never mere ghoulishness" (Miéville, "Polynia" 11).

The narrator's peculiar emotive response to the images of Lund's dead body is an example of the "hypnotic behaviour" Debord refers to in arguing that "when the real world is transformed into mere images, mere images become real beings – dynamic

figments that provide the direct motivations for a hypnotic behavior" (11). The physical body, by dint of being captured by the onlookers' mobile phones, was transformed into an image, or *a spectacle* in other words. This spectacle, despite being a mere representation of what happened, does not stop being real. Instead, it is as real as what it represents, still capable of eliciting the viewer' emotional engagement. While in "Covehithe," the footage of the oil rig Ocean Ranger gives a "stomach dropping" feeling to its viewers (Miéville 345), the video of Lund's descent is even more violent in its effects. The narrator recounts: "I watched the file many times, though my parents told me not to. I'd slow it down, feeling sick and adrenalised as Lund descended" (Miéville, "Polynia" 9). As if watching were not enough, he also wanted to be in the video, to be part of the spectacle: when his friends were not watching, the narrator would secretly stretch out his hands into the air, imagining that he had managed to save Lund from her tragedy (Miéville, "Polynia" 11). Here the line between the virtual and the real has been blurred, exemplifying Slavoj Žižek's assertion: "It is not reality that entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality" (16). Perhaps the spectacle of violence is even more real than the violence of which it is a representation, because, as the narrator of "Polynia" attests, its effects are capable of being perpetuated and multiplied.

The third level in the ecosystem of spectacular violence in "Polynia" and "Covehithe" involves what can be called "textual spectatorship," wherein the boundary between the textual and the visual is challenged, and the reader, through the act of reading, comes very close to viewing. Consider the following excerpt from "Polynia," for example:

> The camera pans up. Filling the night sky overhead, astonishingly close, is a jagged field of ice. It looms, and it's approaching. It's so low that the longest extrusions dangling from its underside reach down below the level of the Shard's tower point. On which, the camera briefly shows, two explorers wait. … What we know is that there's a sound of percussion, and shouting, and the footage cuts to that from a helmetcam, and for less than two seconds you can see someone dangling from high-tensile cable. With that literal cliff-hanger, the video pauses for several seconds, entirely dark. To open again on Ryan's face, filling the frame. (Miéville 14-15)

The language used here is very cinematic, conveying both sounds and images. The sentences are constructed to serve an obvious agenda: to show the reader what the characters were watching on a screen, or, better yet, to *become* that very screen. This virtual reality effect is also achieved through the reader's identification with the characters' gaze. We are encouraged to approach the scenes from their perspective, and are allowed to see only what they can see. It therefore feels as if we were among the Londoners gaping skywards at the strange sight of the icebergs, or sitting there together with the daughter and the father watching the fantastical show that the oil rig Petrobras 36 put on for them. In essence, Miéville's manipulation of textual

spectatorship means that violence's spectacular effects are felt not only within the narratives but also beyond.

"There were a few nights in Dunwich, where the owner of the B&B kept telling her guests they were lucky to have found a room," thus goes the opening sentence of "Covehithe" (Miéville 337). In this gesture of intertextuality very typical of weird fiction (Noys and Murphy 128), Miéville is relying on the fictional Dunwich of HP Lovecraft to provide a chilling atmosphere for his non-fictional town of the same name. The monsters in both "Covehithe," "Polynia," and "The Dunwich Horror" are massive, trail-leaving creatures. Their appearance in all three stories summons a team of scientists from various disciplines, who travail in search of answers to the questions that the monsters pose. The similarities, however, do not go far beyond that. Across the Atlantic, the devil of Dunwich is eventually pushed back to where it belongs, but in Miéville's England, the anomalies stay and are somewhat normalized. The spectral oil rigs gradually became almost an attraction to tourists, while BBC announced that "it has commissioned a drama series" about the London icebergs (Miéville, "Polynia" 12). Lovecraft's horror is cosmic in nature, floating in the outer space, only now and then paying us a visit. In contrast, the horror that Miéville hints at is of a different kind: It is heavily anchored in our reality, possessing new and increasing urgency. The horror in "Polynia" and "Covehithe," it could be argued, is the horror of what Rob Nixon calls "slow violence" in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.

In coining the term, Nixon proposes a paradigm shift in how violence should be conceived of and engaged with: we ought to move our focus from the violence that is "immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space," "erupting into instant sensational visibility" to the violence that is "neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (Nixon 2). He thus defines slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2).

The concept was introduced in the hope of providing an innovative analytical tool that can be more effective in dealing with contemporary challenges. Nonetheless, it is inherently related to other sociological and ecological concepts and discussions. Also sharing Nixon's concern about the need to expand the definitional range of violence is Johan Galtung, who half a century before coined the term "structural violence," understood roughly as a form of violence that is hard to get rid of because it is already built into social structures and institutions. Nixon acknowledges the many overlaps between his concept and Galtung's. Nonetheless, he considers slow violence, owing to its ability to "foreground questions of time, movement and change," better equipped to "engage directly with our contemporary politics of speed" than structural violence, limited by its "static connotations" (Nixon 11). Nixon ties his discussion of slow violence to an exploration of what he calls

"the environmentalism of the poor." He argues that "it is those people lacking resources who are the principal casualties of slow violence. Their unseen poverty is compounded by the invisibility of the slow violence that permeates so many of their lives" (Nixon 4). It is easy to see that here he is aligning himself with a broader debate about environmental justice, where the unequal distribution of environmental harms at the expense of citizens of countries from global South and economically disadvantaged people in general is called into question. Another concept which Nixon does not mention in his book but is nonetheless relevant to both slow violence and the argument to be advanced in this essay is "hyperobject," coined by Timothy Morton. While the focus on speed in Nixon's concept is absent from Morton's, both engage with the question of scale. According to Morton, one of the defining attributes of hyperobjects is their nonlocality, meaning that these things are "massively distributed in time and space" (Morton 1). In a similar vein, Nixon sees slow violence as overspilling the "clear boundaries in time and space" (Nixon 7). Most importantly, both hyperobject and slow violence include instances where harmful impacts are caused by man to the natural world.

China Miéville is himself an ardent critic of capitalism who is at the same time very active in green politics ("The Limits of Utopias"). Meanwhile, before published in *Three Moments of an Explosion*, "Covehithe" had been featured in *The Guardian*'s Oil Stories series. Its publication on the magazine's website was hash-tagged, tellingly enough, with keywords such as "oil," "oil spills," "Deepwater Horizon oil spill" (Miéville, "Covehithe by China Miéville"). It is not difficult to see that behind their bizarre and childish veneer, both "Polynia" and "Covehithe" convey serious environmental concerns. The stories engage with two phenomena that can easily fit into the definition of slow violence and that Nixon himself also addresses in his book: the thawing of the Earth's cryosphere and marine pollution from oil spills.

The temporal dissonance, that is to say the *slowness*, in Nixon's definition of slow violence is clearly exemplified in Miéville's stories. A surprise came later in "Polynia" when it was found out that one of the masses above London is identical to an iceberg photographed during "a southern mission" years before the narrator was born. One of the characters thus exclaimed in amazement: "First they melt and now, look, they come back" (Miéville 13). The many years between when the icebergs were documented and the moment of their coming back illustrates the time gap between when slow violence takes place and when its effects begin to manifest. Miéville's narratives also show that slow violence is massive in scale rather than confined to any particular locality. The author carefully weaves into his story of petroleum apparition truthful information about major oil spill disasters from across the globe: Petrobras 36, Rowan Gorilla I, Piper Alpha, Ocean Express, just to name a few. Also mentioned is the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, one of the most notorious marine catastrophes of the 21st century, and one that, as could be inferred from the publication of "Covehithe" in *The Guardian*, Miéville was engaging most directly with when writing the story.

In "Polynia," while massive icebergs showed up in the sky of England – the birthplace of the first industrial revolution and economic liberalism, other strange incidents were taking place elsewhere: "[B]rain coral, pillar coral, and prongs of staghorn coral" appeared on the facades of the European Parliament (Miéville 12). And factories in Japan had to close because they were "filled up with undergrowth from the rain forest" (Miéville 22). Interestingly enough, the narrator grew up to become an import-export officer, managing international supply chains (Miéville 23). Between the lines of these seemingly random details, Miéville appears to be pointing his finger at those complicit in, if not responsible for, the "global weirding" (Friedman) in his story: the free market, our politics, our industries, globalization, all of which are present in Nixon's discussion of slow violence.

In its ecological concern, slow violence begs the question about humans' treatment of nature, which is also engaged with in the two stories. Human-nature relationship in "Covehithe" is characterized by exploitation and subjugation. But the natural world seems to have been pushed to its limits and could not help but strike back. The beach where the father and the daughter stood to wait for the oil rig to show itself was drastically eroded. "The sea's taking it all back, … There used to be a lot more coast here," the father remarked (Miéville, "Covehithe" 339). Simon Estok argues that "[o]ne of the methods of refusing to recognise and accept these [nature's] agencies and of attempting to assert and maintain control over nature is discursive and has to do with naming things" (5). If so, in "Polynia," such a strategy does not work and is even parodied. Naming as a way of subjugating nature under our control becomes a mere children's game: the narrator named his favorite berg "Ice Skull," simply because it looks like one (Miéville 13). Meanwhile, the masses "rocked sedately from side to side" in the sky of London, heedless of whether they are given any name or not (Miéville 4).

But just as harmful as denying nature's agency is prescribing agency to nature in a manner that would serve human interests. This way of looking at the natural world is problematized in Nixon's book. As an example, he gave an account of official responses from the oil industry in the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, which frame the incident not as "an environmental disaster" but "a natural phenomenon" (Nixon 21). From this fallacy, another more erroneous argument was advanced: "Oil has seeped into this ocean for centuries, will continue to do it. … We will lose some birds, we will lose some fixed sea-life, but overall it will recover" because nature "has a way of helping the situation" (Nixon 21-22). This strand of thought, according to Nixon, is dangerous because it taps into the "natural agency" logic as a way of rectifying the harmful impacts we cause to the natural world, while leaving unaddressed the question of "the long-term cascade effect of the slow violence, the mass die-offs, of phytoplankton at the food chain base" (Nixon 22). It is clear from "Covehithe" that nature is not our "volunteer clean up crew" (Nixon 22). When the oil rigs came back out of the water after many years, their body still bore decipherable stenciled markings and pain remnants, dripping "seawater,

chemicals of industrial ruin and long-hoarded oil" (Miéville 343). They conjured up from the depth of the oceans what we humans dumped down, rusted but refusing to simply disappear: "steel containers," "old hoists," "lift shafts," and the list goes on (Miéville 341).

Lovecraft defines weird fiction through, of other things, "a malign and particular suspension" of the laws of nature (446). However, in "Covehithe" and "Polynia", the laws of nature are only extended and intensified. Although the resurrection of the icebergs and the oil rigs is narrated in peculiar terms, these events happened with perfect logic: humans destroyed the oceans and caused the thawing of polar ices. What comes back, though slowly, is nothing but the consequences of our actions. It is almost mockingly that Miéville tells of the government's incomprehension at the return of the oil rigs in "Covehithe": "They tried to figure out what economies of sacrifice were being invoked, for which this was the punishment" (344).

If the phenomena that Miéville engages with in "Covehithe" and "Polynia" could be put under Nixon's label of slow violence, then the writer does something very interesting in writing these stories. In Miéville's words, marine pollution and the loss of cryosphere are no longer attritional and unnoticeable. Rather, they are depicted as shocking, hyper-visible and extraordinary. What the author does is, figuratively speaking, translating slow violence into spectacular violence. In the following section, that act of translation will be examined. So far in this paper I have tried to establish a logical relationship between what Miéville depicts and Nixon's concept. The argument I am going to advance next is not that the author proactively and consciously makes use of spectacular violence as a strategy to represent slow violence, as perceived and defined by Nixon. What I want to posit is that the said relationship could be understood within a broader discussion about the representational obstacles that writers who want to engage with slow violence have to face as a result of the incongruity between its very nature and our visually oriented society.

In the first place, due to our customary conception of violence, which is usually understood as explosive events or actions that are clearly delineated in both time and space, slow violence is often not considered violence at all. Furthermore, the slowness of slow violence seems at odd with our age where the present "feels more abbreviated than it used to" and it is not uncommon for one to always have "the sensation of not having enough time." This results in an incompatibility between our "rapidly eroding attention span" and "the slow erosions of environmental justice" (Nixon 8). As a consequence, slow violence often escapes our attention. To challenge this requires us to bring slow violence to the fore, to make it more visible. But such a task is difficult in itself due to its very nature. Slow violence causes representational obstacles that anyone who wants to engage with it, whether imaginatively or otherwise, has to reckon with. Since it is dispersed in both time and space, the effects of slow violence are hard to capture. If a hyperobject's nonlocal quality means that any of its "'local manifestations' … is not directly the hyperobject" itself (Morton 1), then the same

argument can be made for slow violence: the impact that it creates at one place at a particular point in time is probably only one node in a network of impacts that spreads across both spatial and temporal scales. Nixon also points out in his analysis that the question of representation is related to the politics of memory: "In the long arc between the emergence of slow violence and its delayed effects, both the causes and the memory of catastrophe readily fade from view as the casualties incurred typically pass untallied and unremembered" (8-9). Writing about slow violence is thus complicated by its predisposition towards disremembrance. But at the same time, writing presents itself as an effective tool to lock slow violence into record, to keep it from straying into oblivion.

"How will writers … navigate the possibilities – and possible perils – opened up by a new media culture characterized both by extensive, instant connectivity and by impatient, distractive staccato rhythms?" asks Nixon (276). For him, the relationship between literature and mass media can be supportive and competitive at once. However, he also makes it clear in his book that the media are both poorly equipped and unwilling to engage with slow violence.

On the one hand, slow violence does not constitute a desirable resource that the media can use to compete better in the economy of attention. Through their veneration of the spectacular and the sensational, the media usually exclude slow violence from their coverage (Nixon 6). Furthermore, since the media world is dominated by the rich, poor people, who according to Nixon are the primary victims of slow violence, have to look elsewhere for a platform to voice their problems (Nixon 4).

On the other hand, there is a certain incompatibility between the plotline of slow violence and the narrative conventions of modern visual media, which makes the latter ill equipped to represent the former. Taking as an example the violence done to the body of the poor by chemical and radiological pollution, Nixon argues that "[f]rom a narrative perspective, such invisible, mutagenic theater is slow paced and open ended, eluding the tidy closure, the containment, imposed by the visual orthodoxies of victory and defeat" (6). In other words, the long-running effects of slow violence cannot fit into the typical narrative told by contemporary visual media, with their demands for a neat and contained structure, as well as a clear delineation between those who win and those who lose.

The media's failure to give due attention to slow violence, whether through their unwillingness or inadequacy, leaves a vacuum that, according to Nixon, writers have to fill in. He entrusts these people with the task of bringing representational fairness to slow violence. In poor people's battle against the slow working of environmental injustice, Nixon sees writers as playing "a mediating role in helping counter the layered invisibility that results from insidious threats, from temporal protractedness, and from the fact that the afflicted are people whose quality of life – and often whose very existence – is of indifferent interest to the corporate media" (16). Much like JG Ballard when he argues that in a world where fiction is already everywhere,

"the writer's task is to invent reality" (qtd. in Bukatman 117), Nixon believes writers can challenge the invisibility of what otherwise needs to be seen:

> In a world permeated by insidious, yet unseen or imperceptible violence, imaginative writing can help make the unapparent appear, making it accessible and tangible by humanizing drawn-out threats inaccessible to the immediate senses. Writing can challenge perceptual habits that downplay the damage slow violence inflicts and bring into imaginative focus apprehensions that elude sensory corroboration. The narrative imaginings of writer-activists may thus offer us a different kind of witnessing: of sights unseen. (15)

The challenges posed by slow violence are daunting but not insurmountable. Through a brief analysis of Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, he outlines a set of strategies for engaging imaginatively with slow violence:

> To confront slow violence requires, then, that we plot and give figurative shape to formless threats whose fatal repercussions are dispersed across space and time. The representational challenges are acute, requiring creative ways of drawing public attention to catastrophic acts that are low in instant spectacle but high in long-term effects. To intervene representationally entails devising iconic symbols that embody amorphous calamities as well as narrative forms that infuse those symbols with dramatic urgency. (Nixon 10)

This said, not only do "Polynia" and "Covehithe" engage with slow violence, these two stories fit into the agenda that Nixon sets out for imaginative writings. As argued earlier, they make hyper-visible threats that are "inaccessible to the immediate sense." By bringing into our attention the consequences of our actions from long ago, "Polynia" and "Covehithe" disrupt slow violence's "temporal protractedness." The "formless threats" of polar ice loss and marine pollution are given shape in Miéville's writings, manifesting themselves through the "iconic symbols" of the icebergs and the moving oil rigs. Genre-wise, the New Weird proves itself capable of the task. Continuing the Lovecraftian Old Weird's tradition of undermining the quotidian, this genre provides Miéville with ample space to venture far into both human imagination and the natural environment. But the New Weird is different from its predecessor in its "new sensibility of welcoming the alien and the monstrous as sites of affirmation and becoming" (Noys and Murphy 125). Benjamin Noys and Timothy S. Murphy posit furthermore that "[i]n contradiction to Lovecraft's horror at the alien, … the New Weird adopts a more radical politics that treats the alien, the hybrid, and the chaotic as subversions of the various normalization of power and subjectivity" (125). The uncanny oil rigs and the icebergs depicted by Miéville offer a good illustration for this argument.

In Nixon's discussion, the writer's engagement with slow violence does not stop at making it visible. For him, after the question of representation is the question of activism. As a result, the central figure in his quest for environmental justice is

the writer-activist who is able to mobilize their representational power to engage "nonliterary forces for social change" (Nixon 32). Consequently, he disapproves of the view that "ecocriticism's singular contribution to environmental studies ought to be centered on the aesthetic," arguing instead that the more pressing challenge for the field is "how to articulate these vital aesthetic concerns into socioenvironmental transformation" (Nixon 32). Here Nixon meets with Estok, who believes that engagement per se does not qualify as activism and advocates for a stronger concern from ecocritics about stimulating practical changes in real life (5). In "Polynia" and "Covehithe," the author engages with slow violence and manages to overcome the representational obstacles that it creates. But in response to Nixon's, as well as Estok's, subsequent question about activism, Miéville's answer is vaguer. It is hard to argue, and probably beyond the scope of this paper to do so, whether or not "Polynia" and "Covehithe" carry any activist agenda. Just as difficult to determine is whether their readers are motivated into any practical actions after reading these stories.

Nonetheless, this call for activism brings us back to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, a real-life event that looms large in "Covehithe." In the aftermath of the incident, a lawsuit was filed against the multinational oil and gas company BP. A question thus arose as to the exact amount of oil discharged to the ocean, which would in turn determine the company's financial liabilities. In the face of this legal question, the company demanded access to private email correspondences from scientists who studied the accident. This was after the scientists had provided the company "with more than 50,000 pages of documents, raw data, reports, and algorithms" that they used in their research, in short everything the company would need for its analysis. This absurd request, which represents "not simply invasion of privacy, but the erosion of scientific deliberative process," was eventually yielded to (Keim). As Nixon's analysis of the connection between slow violence and "the environmentalism of the poor" makes clear, much like other forms of violence, slow violence involves asymmetry in power between its victims and perpetrators. The victims are common people whose voices are usually unheard. The perpetrators of slow violence are powerful global corporates and interest groups who have control over what kind of stories are told and, as a result, what liabilities they have towards their actions. In "Covehithe," Miéville engages with sea pollution in general and the Deepwater Horizon incident in particular. Obviously he is not a scientist and no company will demand from him any information related to the story. But thinking about "Covehithe" and Miéville's engagement with marine catastrophes in relation to the BP lawsuit can help us look beyond Nixon and Estok's emphasis on activism to see what fiction writers are capable of doing in this age, where the politics of what is allowed to be visible becomes ever more complicated.

Before the conclusion, I would like to return to Guy Debord's spectacle, of which he wrote: "The tautological character of the spectacle stems from the fact that its means and ends are identical. It is the sun that never sets over the empire of modern

passivity. It covers the entire surface of the globe, endlessly basking in its own glory" (Debord 10). Perhaps no moment in contemporary history illustrates this argument better than 9/11, where the media, through its graphic coverage of the event, turned the spectacle of terrorism into the terrorism of spectacle, perpetuating its traumatizing effects not only within the US but also on a global scale. And much like Nixon in the face of slow violence, the American writer Don DeLillo also saw in the aftermath of this event a representational vacuum that writers have to fill in. For DeLillo, it is through writing that we are able to make sense of 9/11's cruelty and senselessness. In his essay "In the Ruins of the Future," he wrote:

> But living language is not diminished. The writer wants to understand what this day has done to us. … The writer begins in the towers, trying to imagine the moment, desperately. Before politics, before history and religion, there is the primal terror. People falling from the towers hand in hand. This is part of the counter-narrative, hands and spirits joining, human beauty in the crush of meshed steel. In its desertion of every basis for comparison, the event asserts its singularity. There is something empty in the sky. The writer tries to give memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space. (DeLillo 39)

Writing more than a decade apart, both Nixon and DeLillo see language and narratives as tools for meaning-making, and the figure of the writer as someone capable of shedding light on contemporary events and phenomena. However, what they were trying to engage with is different in nature: 9/11 was abrupt and sensational, whereas Nixon's violence is attritional and anonymous. In both cases, the writer is faced with formidable representational obstacles, which are made even more complicated by modern visual media. In response to these obstacles, both DeLillo and Miéville perform an act of conversion, though the two writers were necessarily going in opposite directions. As his words in the quote above and his own works demonstrate, DeLillo engages with 9/11 by slowing down the spectacular: he is interested in looking beyond the event's facade of cruelty to provide it with tenderness and meaning, in exploring the deep wounds it leaves in the American consciousness. Meanwhile, Miéville shows in "Polynia" and "Covehithe" that it is through spectacularization that slow violence's resistance to representation can be tackled effectively.

Due to the many similarities they have in themes and symbols, "Polynia" and "Covehithe" offer themselves as two strong pillars on which the arguments in this essay can be conveniently based. However, it should be noted that many of the points made with regards to these two stories could be made in relation to other texts in the collection as well. In fact, the spectacle of violence is ushered in right at the moment the reader picks up the book and reads its title: *Three Moments of an Explosion*. In "The Condition of New Death," another story in the collection, death itself is spectacularized and rendered weird. Similarly, Miéville's experiment

with textual spectatorship is conducted elsewhere in the collection as well, only more drastically: In "The Crawl" and "Escapee," the narrative takes the form of a 2-minute video trailer, with notes for timing and voiceover, as well as detailed description of what is being shown on the imagined screen. The border between the textual and the visual, which is challenged in "Polynia" and "Covehithe," is almost eradicated in these two stories.

This said, reading not only the two stories examined here but also other texts in the collection with an eye for violence as one of Miéville's primary concerns promises to offer the reader interesting interpretations, as well as a deeper understanding of the author's stylistic and thematic focuses. More importantly, I believe attention paid to how violence is represented in Miéville's fictional worlds will shed light on the nature and logic of the violence that our contemporary society is plagued with: the violence that is real, pervasive, non-textual, caused by, as in the words of the ecocritic Simon Estok, "the tangible reversals that are increasingly becoming the 'new normal' of our sad and diminished lives" (6).

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The Law of Diminishing Returns: Precarity and Nonreproduction in *The Fall*

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Abstract

This essay examines the representation of precarity in the BBC Two series, *The Fall* (2013-), starring Gillian Anderson as Detective Superintendent Stella Gibson and Jamie Dornan as serial killer Paul Spector. In the series, institutions of social reproduction are revealed to be sclerotic, exemplified not only in the austerity policies of fiscally insolvent national governments but also in the family and the couple, social forms integral to a system of crisis management that depends upon feminized reproductive work. Here, precarity emerges as a double bind: a reproductive crisis that would seem to demand a doubling down, a renewed investment in the very systems of accumulation and control that underwrite its proliferation. This essay argues that the representation of such contradictory logic should not be mistaken for some failure of the imagination, but should instead be recognized as an expression of a crisis in the reproduction of the capitalist class relation as it is mediated across the social field.

Keywords: precarity, nonreproduction, austerity, gender, the child

This essay examines the representation of precarity in the BBC Two series, *The Fall* (2013-), starring Gillian Anderson as Detective Superintendent Stella Gibson and Jamie Dornan as serial killer Paul Spector.[1] From its opening scenes, the police procedural appears entirely preoccupied with reproductive crisis, situating the misogynistic violence of the Belfast Strangler at both intimate and world-historical scales. The setting spans several sites of nonreproduction, a concept which in this essay names both the contemporary crisis of futurity and the horizon of a politics of abolition, a contradiction I unpack in my analysis below. In the series, institutions of social reproduction are revealed to be sclerotic, exemplified not only in the austerity policies of fiscally insolvent national governments but also in the family and the couple, social forms integral to a system of crisis management that depends upon feminized reproductive work. Here, precarity emerges as a double bind: a reproductive crisis that would seem to demand a doubling down, a renewed investment in the very systems of accumulation and control that underwrite its proliferation. In other words, if gender names one of the many forms of separation specific to capitalist reproduction, *The Fall* suggests that the contemporary crisis of social reproduction constitutes a mode of continuity and stasis that relies precisely

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©Sean O'Brien. "The Law of Diminishing Returns: Precarity and Nonreproduction in *The Fall*."

on the gendered maintenance of these very forms of separation. What I want to argue here is that the representation of such contradictory logic should not be mistaken for some failure of the imagination, but should instead be recognized as an expression of a crisis in the reproduction of the capitalist class relation as it is mediated across the social field.

My primary claim, then, is that *The Fall* represents rising precarity as reproductive crisis, indexed in the series primarily by the state's off-loading of the costs of social reproduction through austerity measures, but where austerity signals something more akin to a systemic crisis in the reproduction of the totality of capitalist social relations. Broadly conceived, this includes the state apparatus and its various institutions, as well as the multiple sites of feminized reproductive activity particular to the gender division of labor under capitalism. The series quickly establishes its concern with reproductive crises through the primary characters we meet in the pilot, all of whom work in some facet of social reproduction that is in one way or another dealing with financial strain: Paul is a bereavement counselor whose current clients are struggling with their son's death, which should have been prevented but was missed by tired and overworked medical staff; his wife Sally Ann (Bronagh Waugh) is a neonatal nurse working extended hours through the night; his third victim Sarah Kay (Laura Donnelly) is a divorce and custody lawyer whose caseload spills over into the weekend; and Stella is a law enforcement official brought in to assist a financially and politically beleaguered police department. My discussion of *The Fall* begins, then, with representations of gender and austerity in the pilot episode, which I tie to the function of policing and the figure of the child, interrelated lines of inquiry that provide key points of departure for examining precarity as nonreproduction in the series.

Policing the Reproductive Crisis

The opening scene of the pilot, "Dark Descent," casts Stella and Paul as inverted images of each other. The first shot depicts Stella in an image of feminine domesticity, cleaning the bathroom in a red polka-dot hairband reminiscent of a 1950s-era housewife and wearing a facial mask, which she then washes off as she looks at herself in the mirror. In the following scene, Paul breaks into a house by climbing through a window – an image of violent penetration – and cases the joint in a disguise before he also unmasks before the mirror. But while the series examines the violence inherent in the gender-relation, it is quick to complicate conventional oppositions between male and female that might operate in terms of a distinction between, for example, the public and the private, which while not exactly irrelevant nevertheless fails to fully capture the division of gendered labor in the series. After the opening shots, we see Stella looking over case files, indicating she is a professional whose gendered relation to reproductive labor endures with her entry into the formal economy. Indeed, Stella is a successful woman, single and without kids, who takes no shit from men and sleeps with whomever she pleases – what critics might call a "strong female lead" – while Paul targets independent

women with promising careers, acting out his misogynistic fantasies on successful young professionals. Seeming to lead a double life, Paul is also a family man. A series of overhead shots depicting the domestic interior of the Spector home situates the visceral horrors of patriarchy squarely within the familiar space of domestic life, its traditional seat of power, and suggests an affective dimension of gendered violence, too, as his daughter's proximity to Paul's stash of "trophies" hidden above her bed trigger a series of night terrors like a spreading contagion. Housing itself has been emptied of the workers it was built to reproduce: Paul undertakes his ritual preparation before a murder in abandoned tenement housing. Hiding in plain sight, Paul is also part of the same vast state apparatus that is struggling through austerity-era Northern Ireland having seen none of the benefits of the Celtic Tiger, an Irish economic boom that had been established in part through growing geopolitical stability brought about by the Good Friday Agreement.

Set in Belfast, Northern Ireland, the series expectantly evokes "The Troubles" immediately upon Stella's arrival, as Assistant Chief Constable Jim Burns (Jon Lynch) announces that "policing is political here" ("Dark Descent" 00:17:15). Stella has been seconded from The Metropolitan Police Service in London by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to review the high profile murder of Alice Monroe (Gemma McCorry), the daughter of a Unionist Member of Parliament. Setting the scene with images of graffiti for peace and abandoned stately buildings, the PSNI appears as a struggling colonial apparatus, its walls decorated with a memorial plaque dedicated to "Our Murdered Colleagues" and pictures of Queen Elizabeth II. Political tensions are never far from the surface, occasionally bursting into view as when Paul's Protestant patient, in a fit of rage, decries the idea that his dead son's heart is now "beating in some Taig's chest" (00:23:49). Within this political climate, Stella would appear to represent the imperial order, a figure of central authority dispatched to the periphery to reestablish colonial rule in times of economic and political uncertainty. Evan Calder Williams has argued that the police procedural functions to legitimize policing by situating protagonist police officers at a degree of remove from the institution, so that, through those flawed – which is to say, non-normative, and thus *more human* – characters, we come to see cops as subjects, when in fact police are, socially speaking, objects to which we cannot relate and with which we cannot communicate, such that there is a certain incommensurability between the police and all other bodies in space. These are the rogues, traditionally, who flaunt the rules to get the job done, like Detective Jimmy McNulty (Dominic West) in David Simon's *The Wire* or any other of the countless rebel cops of popular representation. But they also, and increasingly, work representationally through the appropriation of feminism and queerness, in a version of "pink-washing" or what Jasbir Puar calls "homonationalism," by which she means to designate the tendency of states to incorporate queer subjects into their nation-building projects through "forms of regulatory queerness" (xxxii). In

this light, Stella's bisexuality functions as a veiled attempt to validate the ongoing colonial imposition of English rule in Northern Ireland.

The second episode of *The Fall*, "Darkness Visible," further explores this crisis of social reproduction – what in this essay I am calling nonreproduction – through the proximal relationship between the figure of the child and death. There's much to be said about nonreproduction in the series, to be sure, but *The Fall* appears immediately concerned with at least three not-easily-disarticulated valences of the concept: crisis, politics and labor. In working through the second episode with these ideas in mind, then, and in the course of making some remarks about the serial form, I want to consider what recent conversations in queer theory, communization theory and Marxist feminism might bring to bear on questions of futurity and negativity in the series. If the pilot episode of *The Fall* indexes a crisis in the reproduction of the capitalist class relation through austerity and social unrest in post-industrial Northern Ireland, the second episode only confirms what the first indicated: the cash-strapped PSNI are struggling to hit "performance targets" in light of "increased economic cutbacks and increased threats against officers" ("Darkness Visible" 00:15:26). A conversation between the emergency operator and Sarah Kay's sister, Marian (Lis Hogg), is telling in this regard: intensely personal for Marion, Sarah's death is, while taxing, a matter of routine for the operator, a government worker whose feminized affective labor is always just-in-time to take the next emergency call. Importantly, the emergency operator's initial concern is with the health of the baby she can hear crying over the phone, drawing a connection between gender, reproduction, and violence that hinges on the life of the child. The figure of the child, though, occupies a contradictory position in this context: on the one hand, as conventional agents of futurity, children in the series appear instead in close proximity to death, while on the other, although they work to facilitate a kind of historical erasure (their own and others), their unwitting concealment of violence infects them affectively, so that they are at once figures both of disappearance and residue.

What I want to suggest, following these associations between austerity, affect, children, and death, is that the labor of the child paradoxically represents the labor of the negative in the series. The concept of nonreproduction is associated most immediately with queer theorist Lee Edelman, for whom the figure of the child represents the conservative tendencies of "reproductive futurism" (3), or the ongoing reproduction of the existing social order, such that the refusal to reproduce constitutes a potentially radical act. Despite Edelman's deep distrust of the political, which he sees as always-already based on a reproductive *telos* of the status quo, the refusal of reproduction here might align the negativity of the anti-social turn in queer theory with a politics of negation as it is outlined in the theory of communization, insofar as the latter defines revolution as "the direct non-reproduction of the class relation" ("Crisis in the Class Relation" 11). Edelman's contention is that "politics, however radical the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a

more desirable social order, remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to affirm a structure" (2-3). But the political, understood broadly, covers an array of possible positions between affirmation and abolition, including the radical negativity epitomized in what Marx and Engels call "the real movement which abolishes the present state of things" (Part 1A). If there is no necessary correlation between the political and affirmation, might a politics of nonreproduction counter-intuitively find its representative in the series in the figure of the child?

I want to pause here and consider the manner in which nonreproduction emerges in the series as a crisis of social reproduction, with the state off-loading reproductive work primarily onto women. Given Jack Halberstam's concerns regarding a queer politics that "always lines up against women, domesticity and reproduction" (154), we might note that a politics of nonreproduction shares certain key contradictions with the more familiar notion of a politics of reproduction advanced by theorists of the reproductive commons such as Sylvia Federici and Peter Linebaugh. As Maya Gonzalez, Marina Vishmidt, and others have pointed out, in positing the self-organization of reproductive activities as a terrain on which to mount a feminist and anti-capitalist politics, a politics of reproduction risks naturalizing the externally imposed relationship between gender and reproductive activities, and therefore also gender itself. *The Fall* poses a similar problem for nonreproductive politics, only inverted: while the concept of nonreproduction might hold open political possibilities, it also names the condition of contemporary immiseration.

To further explore the place of contradiction in a politics of nonreproduction, I want to turn to the opening scene of the second episode, which like the pilot positions Stella and Paul as mirror images of each other, but with important distinctions. "Darkness Visible" opens by juxtaposing Stella and Paul in terms of intimacy, coupling and control: Stella takes the lead throughout the sex scene with Detective Sergeant James Olson (Ben Peel), while Paul enacts his misogynist fantasy in total control of Sarah's lifeless body. And yet we quickly see that the scenes are not simple mirror images of each other. For one, Paul is meticulous in cleaning Sarah's body and her apartment, while Stella asks DS Olson not to shower because she "likes it" (00:04:22), and by the end of the opening scene, Stella is juxtaposed not with Paul but with Sarah, as they both appear lying across the bed before the two men leave their respective settings. And while Paul is able to move relatively freely in the world, Stella faces constant resistance to her agency: sexually, socially, and professionally, men appear threatened by her, and repeatedly question her authority and motivations. We might think here about the implications of Paul's cleanliness in terms of sterility, given the series' concern with nonreproduction. Stella's nonreproductive activities are positioned in terms of empowerment, while Paul's are associated with violence and death. What might this mean for the figure of the child, given the fact that Stella is childless while Paul's children are called into service to provide his cover story? And if nonreproduction paradoxically names both the condition of immiseration under

contemporary capitalism, and the horizon of a feminist, queer and anti-capitalist politics, how might we think about nonreproduction as itself a form of work or labor?

In "the time of the desert of unemployment" (73), Fredric Jameson argues, "the power of the negative turns out to be postmodernity after all: it is not," he suggests,

> the motor power of history Hegel celebrated. Rather, it is history's breakdown, an ominous perpetual present in which no one knows what's coming … and indeed no one knows whether anything is coming at all. This is truly the realization of queer theory's master slogan "no future." (71)

I wonder, then, what it might mean to "fight the future," as Gillian Anderson does in another series, *The X-Files*, as Dana Scully (where she also plays a law enforcement official) while trapped in a perpetual present. This brings me, finally, to the serial form, and the relationship between narrative and futurity. On the one hand, the serial form would seem to inaugurate a developmental narrative *telos*, reminiscent as it is of the assembly line, unfolding with the steady, durational rhythms of Fordist temporality, building toward its climax over a series of episodes that together comprise the finished product. On the other hand, however, in its very seriality, time in *The Fall* seems to stretch out indefinitely to the point of temporal saturation where nothing ever gets resolved, such that temporal progression itself seems to vanish. If a breakdown in the historical reproduction of the class relation prompts a crisis in narrative possibility, might the contradictory presence of the child – as a figure of nonreproduction and the labor of the negative – represent the absent future in the present, and the possibility of a radically different world over the horizon? Or might it simply be the possibility of a renewed cycle of accumulation that remains over the horizon in the current age of finance capital? In order to further explore these questions, I want to address a series of concerns threaded throughout the series, namely the relationship between the figure of the child and the question of labor, the matter of Stella's subjectivity, and a series of the connections between value, crisis and the family form. Like the hitherto adjacent worlds of Stella and Paul – as well as storylines, acoustics, bodies, affects, and sensitive information – these topics bleed across their ostensible boundaries in the series as it continues its own bloody unfolding, but for the sake of clarity I will address them as interrelated but distinct points of inquiry.

The Law of Diminishing Returns

In capitalist societies, children conventionally feature as the labor force of the future (if they are not already conscripted into the work force), but what happens to labor power after labor? What happens to bodies destined for a future of wage-labor when there is no future, or at least no future for labor, which under current conditions amounts to the same thing? Dispossessed of the means of their own reproduction save selling their labor, proletarians – as "a class in transition," in Aaron Benanav and John Clegg's words, "a working class tending to become a class excluded from

work" (593) – tangentially come to face dispossession of even the commodity labor power, as increases in productivity push labor out of production. This process leaves only empty vessels, deprived of their social contents. As such, the children in the series might also index – along with the other logics and concepts they represent – the emergence of a global condition of superfluity: the consolidation of a surplus population exemplary of a form of disposable life particular to capital's current expulsion of living labor on a global scale. Their labor, then, figures at least in part in the negative, as the labor of erasure. Although it might seem a stretch, we might think of the Tyler family's recently deceased son's organs being harvested for transplant as suggestive, at least, of what Melinda Cooper calls "life as surplus," that is, the folding of organic materials of biological reproduction into capital accumulation across geopolitical boundaries, which Kevin Floyd has also identified as part of the vast industry of organ trafficking facilitating the biotechnological transfer of reproductive tissues from the global south to the global north. The Tyler son, terminally ill and thus unsuited for waged work, that is, bereft of the commodity labor power in life, finds his use – assumes social utility, or acquires use-value – only in death. And if the children refuse to disappear entirely, appearing at once as disposable and necessary, they nevertheless often appear through their absence, especially for Liz Tyler who has lost her child but who also used to be a child minder, her backyard – once full of children – now yet another empty container. Indeed, in the final episode of the series, Sally Ann miscarries when she finally learns the truth of Paul's crimes. The signs of nonreproduction loom large here.

This also helps clarify the stakes of form in the series more generally. There is no developmental narrative to be found here, which would suggest that, if post-Fordism retains any use for an analysis of precarity in the post-1973 period, it is only through an emphasis on its status as *post*, that is, as a period of capitalist history that unfolds *after growth* (or post-*bildung*), a condition of generalized stagnation tied to what Brenner calls the long downturn rather than a positive concept naming a new regime of capital accumulation. Post-Fordism is itself a negative term, acquiring meaning in relation to that which it is not – namely Fordism, shorthand for an era of unprecedented capitalist expansion that has long been exhausted – and as a strategy of capitalist innovation, it is perhaps best understood as a part of the scramble for profitability symptomatic of our current era of financialization. Here, I am using financialization in the Arrighian sense as the coming to a close of a cycle of accumulation that has been systemic and global in scope, a leap into liquidity that Stella enacts each morning with her daily dive into the pool, but in the context of a moment in which a renewed cycle of accumulation remains elusive. This is ultimately a question of value, then, insofar as it is also a question about a crisis in the reproduction of the capital-labor relation, and so in order to consider the relationship between futurity and narrative possibility – or better, the possibility of narrative – I want to move from this scale of the world-system to the level of reproduction and the body, or what we might call, following Stella, the level of

intimate detail. As Stella says when briefing her new task force, "the devil – quite literally, ladies and gentlemen – is in the detail. Detail, detail, and detail again" ("Insolence & Wine" 00:18:00). Stella reminds us that it is in the concrete that we can discern the violence of abstraction, for, as she says later, "What could be more intimate than squeezing the life from another human being, having their dead body at your disposal?" (00:55:40).

This brings me to the matter of Stella's subjectivity, since it is in the context of her expanding authority that DCI Eastwood makes a series of comments regarding her sexual activity which occasions her wry remarks on gender and the subject-object relation: "Man fucks woman. Subject man, verb fucks, object woman. That's OK. Woman fucks man. Woman subject, man object. That's not so comfortable for you, is it?" (00:51:27). There is a line of continuity that runs through the series regarding the objectification of women, connecting this exchange between Stella and Eastwood with the male violence against sex workers that occurs under the watch of corrupt police officers running a prostitution ring on the side – one of whom dismisses this violence with the sentiment, typical of men in these situations, that "she must've said something, done something" (00:10:41) – but also with domestic abuse in the Tyler household, and ultimately with Paul's misogynist murder of women – women Stella refuses to qualify using the term "professional," insisting on "something that's less of a value judgment" like "highly qualified" (00:28:35) though the press use the term "professional" anyway – in a logic made explicit by Paul's use of the feminized mannequin in planning his next attack. Indeed, as Stella says, "after they're dead, they're playthings to him, he treats them like objects, paints their nails, uses them like dolls" (00:57:04). This logic remains apparent throughout the mundane operations of the police force, as when a female police officer speculates over dinner break that the killer "hates women who occupy powerful positions," and a male police officer quips, "don't we all" (00:53:18).

Capitalist reproduction, with its regime of differential inclusion, selectively bestows subjectivity through the wage, as it is the social validation of labor that provides the basis for citizenship and participation in the public sphere, those realms of activity vital to liberal subjecthood. This has traditionally, of course, been the purview of masculinity. Stella's position in the PSNI troubles this logic and the male police officers, who are embarrassed talking about sex with Stella and become defensive, smug and condescending (DCI Eastwood sneaks a quick peek at Stella's backside when she's leaning over her desk before chastising her for having a one night stand). Against the repeated attempts to objectify her, Stella asserts herself as a subject with agency: an *agent*, as it were, of the police force. Here I am struck by the resonance of this logical movement with Williams' arguments regarding the police procedural and the subject-object relation. Stella certainly encounters resistance from all angles, which we can think of in relation to the reification of her nonreproductive labor, but how do we reconcile this with a series that distinguishes between corrupt cops and the honorable police agent?

In considering this question, it is important to note that Stella herself demonstrates an explicit concern with the politics of representation, dismissing a series of possible names for the police operation – "Eden," for example – based on how they signify, before deciding on Operation Musicman. She also asks the media liaison officer, and ACC Jim Burns, "not refer to them as innocent":

> What if he kills a prostitute next, or a woman walking home drunk, late at night, in a short skirt? Will they be in some way less innocent, therefore less deserving? Culpable? The media love to divide women into virgins and vamps, angels or whores. Let's not encourage them." (00:29:28)

Stella is acutely aware of the relationship between representation and vulnerability, but her investment in representational politics is a response less to the idea that the police face a legitimacy crisis (although this question will remain an open one for the time being) than to the persistence of patriarchal defamation, both inside the police and without. If the police are ironically recast here as the victims of surveillance, operating "under the glare of media lights" (00:17:45), then Stella lives under a different gaze, a "brighter spotlight," evidenced by the import attached to her "wardrobe malfunction" when she comes under scrutiny after a button of her blouse comes unfastened during a press conference (00:33:31).

This trope of feminine objectification in the show also points to the relationship between value, crisis, and the family form. The place where Paul aims to reconstitute the conditions of his labor, which is to say the foundation on which to continue his misogynist killing spree, is an abandoned home, a former site of domesticity and family life, now empty, forgotten and forlorn, a site of labor and affect after the family form. The building sits in close proximity to Sally's parents' house – a site of lineage, genealogy and reproduction –drawing their affective circuitries together in a further bleeding of bounded worlds. If, following Angela Mitropoulos, the Fordist family wage operated as the contractual organization of gendered reproductive labor – that is, the performative gesture underlying the oikonomic order of reproduction in that period – might Paul's fantasy be the restoration of the patriarchal order of Fordism? I noted above that Paul targets women who upset that order in both their professional ambitions and their nonreproductive status, and how Stella embodies this logic by which Paul chooses his victims. I want to suggest, in relation to crisis, value and the family, that Paul's place in this opposition can be understood as a kind of will to accumulation on the part of capital. As Stella describes Paul's killing spree, "There's a law of diminishing returns" that underwrites any attempt to return to a moment of former glory, an attempt that is inevitably "doomed to fail" (00:15:58). This sounds an awful lot like the current crisis of value playing out on the world stage.

Paul thus figures as a character mask, scrambling to reconstitute the conditions of reproduction – which is to say the conditions of capitalist profitability – in an era of financial crisis. Finance exemplifies the logic of affective circulation, and,

like contagion, liquidates the contractual foundations of cohesive narrative order – which is also to say the *polis* – as Mitropoulos argues, and which I want to read alongside Arrighi's model of periodicity outlined above.[2] Paul has his own take on rupture, narrative and futurity: "I don't subscribe to that model of grief. I don't see bereavement as ever being absolved or accepted. There's no closure, no recovery, but you can learn to live a life without the physical presence of your son" (00:23:10). Paul reproduces the fantasy of finance capital: that its futurity is possible without the reproduction and valorization of labor. And the delay, "the sexual release [that] comes afterwards when he's on his own" and is "all part of the fantasy, the fantasy that sustains him between killings" (00:54:44) is indicative of a temporal drag – formalized in shots throughout this episode – that registers an interruption in the circuit of valorization. When Paul finds out that Sarah Kay was pregnant when he killed her, the fact that he is distraught at the realization he has committed "child destruction" would suggest that his investments, so to speak, are indeed a warped reflection of capital's own. Unable to jumpstart its next period of expansion, to reestablish the organizational forms and foundations upon which to launch a renewed cycle of accumulation, the logic splits in two: children are at once disposable and necessary. The family, then, can never be a refuge, since it names the gendered formation through which capital exerts its force over labor, only to dissolve that relationship according to its own internal laws of motion. Another way to consider the fate of labor power after labor would be to ask what happens to what Sianne Ngai, following Marx, calls the "residue" (42) of abstract labor that is never realized as money capital, but where what remains as residue is the objectivity of the body deprived of the commodity labor power, and what is realized as money capital is always the contractual promise of *future labor*. This is a repeatedly projected image of futurity that stubbornly resists realization, and, with each crash and subsequent "jobless recovery," recedes ever further into the distance.

I want to pause once again here and consider the relationship between gender and maintenance work in the context of nonreproduction. The opening scene of the fourth episode, "My Adventurous Song," continues to play with character doubling, revisiting the crosscutting device used in previous episodes to establish parallel action between Stella and Paul. If episode three saw Stella and Paul reconstituting the conditions of their work – its own peculiar form of reproductive labor – then episode four begins with the two protagonists performing another kind of reproductive labor: maintenance work, made explicit through the daily labor of "keeping fit." "Fitness" seems an apt term for both Stella and Paul: as in "physically fit" – here understood to mean also mentally and emotionally "fit" – and thus able to continue their work, but also "fit for duty" in Stella's case – as one of the few "uncorrupted" police officers in the series – or "fit to kill" in Paul's – literally,

2 Suggestively, as Mitropoulos notes in "Archipelago of Risk," Spinoza develops his theory of affect during the period of financialization that brought the Dutch regime of accumulation to a close and had familial connections to finance capital through a family owned joint-stock company.

as Paul's modus operandi involves an elaborate series of ritualistic violences that require a great deal of brute strength, and in the more figurative sense of an extreme or elaborate example of a more pervasive logic of misogyny in the show.

What I find compelling here is the way in which the reproductive logic of maintenance seems to expand through labor ties and affective attachments throughout the social field, revealing an otherwise hidden series of relations threading the lives of seemingly disparate characters: lineaments of a total system of social reproduction. The connection made in the opening scene between Stella and Paul's respective fitness regimes surfaces a concern with maintenance work that links Stella to Sally in terms of the gendered labor of care. Both women are tasked with managing a crisis involving a death at work: when Rob Breedlove's suicide in DCI Eastwood's office causes panic, Stella takes swift command of the situation, while Sally remains at work after her shift to look after the young mother as the hospital withdraws Baby Girl Mitchell's intensive care. Although Stella's crisis management episode is certainly less routine than Sally's, as Sally does this kind of work for a living in a more explicit sense as a neonatal nurse, the way Stella excels at "handling things so calmly [and] efficiently" – that is, keeps things operating smoothly during times of crisis – codes her as a maternal figure, as her male colleagues continuously remind her afterwards in an attempt to reconstitute their own senses of gendered and professional identities ("My Adventurous Song" 00:23:19). The logic of mothering is here abstracted into a broad institutional structure of gendered social reproduction through the logic of feminized care work as maintenance.

The tragic story arc of Baby Girl Mitchell – a newborn being cared for by Sally Ann who lives only a short while – shares a startling fate with Paul's victims: after death, they are washed, dressed and photographed in life-like poses as part of the reproduction of a fantasy. In his letter to Sarah Kay's father, Ian, Paul says babies are innocent, implying that his victims are guilty of something. Paul, of course, considers himself to be above the law, at least in terms of the "petty rules and regulations" he flouts at work (00:26:23). But in his letter to Ian Kay, Paul makes an appeal to natural law via philosophy, as we learn that he thinks of himself as Nietzsche's "last man," the brute force of history figured as the heroic triumphalism of unfettered masculinity (00:40:20). If the postmortem photography of the deceased registers as a stopgap, on the one hand, it is also – at least for Paul – a return to innocence, on the other. Like gendering, this innocence figures for patriarchy as both natural and something that must be taught, and by force if necessary, in order to restore a "natural balance." Consider the bathroom scene in which ACC Jim Burns assumes the news that Breedlove had been having an affair with DS James Olson's wife would assuage any guilt Stella might be feeling regarding her one-night stand with Jimmy – what she calls a "sweet night" (00:11:03) – only to discover she feels none. Burns loses his composure, blurting out: "Do you realize the effect you have on men?" (00:22:36). Under the pretext of thanking Stella for handling things calmly, Burns instead presents another moment of crisis in which he appeals to Stella for

consolation, and Stella, at once withholding and performing affective labor, tells him coolly, "that would have been a mistake" (00:22:51). Paul also has to manage a crisis while "on the job," so to speak, as his latest victim is not alone when she returns home and Paul is forced to improvise. Tellingly, her home is rendered particularly vulnerable to forced entry because it is undergoing maintenance, and Paul uses the scaffolding surrounding her front terrace to enter her house.

The Fall tracks a persistent sense of ongoingness that never amounts to any sort of actual optimism or renewal: nonreproduction as a structuring contradiction. This "holding pattern" involves the reproduction of a particularly violent patriarchal fantasy alongside the gendered labor of maintenance work.[3] As Jocelyn Cohn and Eve Mitchell argue,

> Patriarchy is a total social relation, meaning it is an amalgamation of many varying social relationships that humans create and recreate on a daily basis. It transcends our current moment, our ways of doing things, to before and beyond where we are now, and what we do as individuals. But patriarchy can only be understood through the form of organization of our labor; it is historically and logically developed, rooted in the capitalist division of labor. As a total social relation, it is a process that contains many elements, moments, and forms, many of which appear to contradict one another. Patriarchy is part of the production and reproduction of current society, and cannot be abolished separate from the abolition of capitalism itself.

If Paul functions as a character mask for Fordist capital scrambling to reconstitute the conditions of its profitability after a fall, he is also therefore a symbol for patriarchy and an *oikos* contractually organized around the Fordist family wage. *The Fall*, with its characters whose lives are thoroughly mediated by violent abstractions, also proposes that these two systems – capital and patriarchy – cannot be approached separately but must be confronted as a unity. What this means for a discussion of precarity in the series thus becomes a question of reproductive futurity, as the emergence of nonreproduction in the class relation confronts a revanchist patriarchy desperate to ensure its own future. The frame of "doubling" in the season finale, "The Vast Abyss," offers one convincing answer to this question, given its centrality to the thematic and formal stakes of *The Fall*, and, as I want to suggest here, to the representational logic of nonreproduction with which the series grapples so explicitly from its pilot episode.

The Double Bind

Doubling is the necessary fiction (which is to say the ideology) of the series. If Dr. Reed Smith's account of self-partitioning casts the base violence of what Gilles

3 "Holding pattern" is a term Endnotes uses to describe the calcification of both class struggle and economic crisis, a form of stasis maintained in the present moment primarily through austerity and quantitative easing on the one hand, and a series of anti-austerity protest movements on the other that in recent years have moved from the squares to the spaces of electoralism.

Deleuze, following James Joyce, calls the "chaosmos" (208) as separate from the affective labor of reproductive care work with all its tenderness and love – which is to say, wants to uphold a distinction between the profane and the sacred – Stella's explanation of "doubling" is a highly dubious one, since what could be more quotidian than the daily work of social reproduction in the household economy. Certainly, Paul wants to believe that existence is fundamentally chaotic – fancying himself the Nietzschean Last Man who forces a society of deluded children to face the "vast abyss" of the Real – as opposed to an ordered world of social reproduction that care work makes possible. But this "half-baked philosophy" simply provides a rationale for his "age old male violence against women," as Stella points out ("The Vast Abyss" 00:53.16). Noting what the truth will do to his family, Stella repositions herself as the agent of the Real, figured here as feminist vengeance in the name of Paul's victims. More to the point, Paul's entire modus operandi admittedly involves the imposition of aesthetic order upon the matter of the world: "a desire to control everything and everyone," whether he is "driven by a will to power," as he would have it, or "a slave to [his] desires" with "no control at all," as Stella says (00:52:58). So if, as he puts it, "art is a lie" that "gives the chaos of the world an order that doesn't exist" (00:53:11), then Paul is by his own account one of those "evil people" that Ian Kay calls "people of the lie" (00:17:51). His appeal to chaos theory is nothing more than a front to conceal his violent desire for order.

But doubling has functioned throughout this series to both connect and separate, drawing relations between characters even as it abstracts and isolates them. I have tracked the way the show works to sketch an image of totality, to insist upon the inseparability of various social phenomena across a field of relations. The logic of doubling constitutes an attempt to maintain a fiction of separation, say between daily life and extreme violence, or between patriarchy and capital, even as the show insists on interconnectivity, placing horror and violence squarely in the realm of the quotidian. The series thus documents a form of what the Endnotes collective call "the unity-in-separation of market society" ("A History of Separation" 85), as characters exist in isolation and depend entirely on market-mediated social institutions for their reproduction and futurity. Take Sally Ann, who is pregnant and feels she has no choice but to participate in the reproduction of the couple form and the nuclear family despite her obvious reticence, as these social forms appear to offer some financial shelter from precarity. Sally Ann makes her "choice" to give Paul another chance *under coercion*, and not only in a direct and personal form from Paul: she is effectively forced to go along with things in order to secure her children's longevity for material reasons – her financial stability depends upon it – and so we are reminded that these characters are "ruled by *abstractions*" (164), as Marx put it in the *Grundrisse*. She knows that Paul is untrustworthy, but this knowledge cannot help her; knowing the difference does not seem to make any. As Stella says to Ian Kay when he does not want to lie to Paul, "That's the way it has to be" (00:19:16). Choice here has little to do with freedom.

This is the terrible truth of doubling: that people must work to maintain these fictions – even as they know them to be false – or risk it all, and who can afford such a risk? As Lauren Berlant writes, "When politics is serious, it risks a loss of the ground of living in which people have come to know their competencies and their desires: fantasy, in contrast, is a zone of stop-loss, a demand for the ongoing present to be the scene of lived fulfillment" (12). The series suggests that, however damaging social systems may be, society depends upon them for its survival, even as these systems appear increasingly hollow, unreliable and ineffectual. This is indeed a matter of maintenance under austerity, which the episode foregrounds from its opening scene: both Paul and Stella are again unable to secure the conditions of their labor, as external forces disrupt their attempts to work. And so the series encourages a critique of reproductive futurity, but it also returns again and again to the contradictions inherent in a politics of nonreproduction as they might unfold within the context of reproductive crises. People may not like the nuclear family, the police, or the colonial state, but, as far as *The Fall* is concerned, if society is to reproduce itself it needs those institutions since they reproduce society. It is tautological. *The Fall* equates capitalist nonreproduction with nonreproduction *tout court* – a notion that the dissolution of these social forms entails social dissolution as such – and suggests that, in order to survive, society must secure its institutional foundations in bourgeois civil society. Reproductive futurism therefore appears as a form of "policing the crisis," to use a phrase from Stuart Hall, which the episode presents in its opening scene as a geopolitical tension between the PSNI and Catholic working class kids that threatens to erupt into chaos.

The series is right to suggest this ultimately shared fate. If it seems that the characters in the series cannot afford to let these forms dissolve – that their reproductive futurity depends upon it – then it truly is all or nothing. And when the direct nonreproduction of the whole is on the line, then Williams' arguments about the rogue officer take on additional significance, as the police procedural in this case inspires sympathy with state violence not simply to legitimize policing but to encourage identification with the given world in all its misery. And so Stella's sex positivism, while biologically nonreproductive, arguably affirms what the anonymous C.E. in "Undoing Sex: Against Sexual Optimism" describes as "the broader production of sex and gender." C.E.'s position, it is worth noting, "is not that optimism is simply ineffective, that it has been appropriated and de-fanged by a system of repression and may thus be saved, but rather that it exists alongside shame and silence, each playing their part." Again, Sally Ann's example is instructive, as she and Paul come to some sort of reconciliation over and through sex. As C.E. says, "it is the optimism that insistently, cruelly returns us to the work of fucking" (16).

The take away for an analysis of precarity is that reproductive futurity and reproductive labor, including the work of sex – especially if, as Federici argues, "for women, *sex is work*" (25) – are entangled not only at the structural level of social institutions but also at the molecular level of the subject. To quote C.E. a final

time, "Non-procreative sex is allowed and fostered not because of society having moved any closer towards freedom, but because the reproductive labor demanded by modern capital is not merely that of population growth, but of the creation of the self, the individual, and consequently the identity" (33). Any attempt to disrupt this process of social reproduction is figured in the series as a sure path to duplicity and death, epitomized in Paul and his apparent lack of social situatedness. As Sally Ann says,

> I look at you and I don't know who you are. When you first meet someone – when you first *get to know them* – there comes a time when you get to know their friends and family, and you get to learn all about them through those others, through their closest relationships: their mother, father, brothers, sisters. With you, there's nothing.
>
> ("The Vast Abyss" 00:37:35)

Paul appears outside social relations here, while we know his misogynistic violence is entirely circumscribed within them. But what this scene also suggests is that Paul in all his horror is a direct product of the failure to maintain the very social structures that the show insists on reproducing. Lacking the conventional frameworks of knowability, Paul-the-monster-child is the result of an absence not simply of care work or networks of support, but of the traditional institutions of the nuclear family and the couple form. In *The Fall*, it seems, to enjoy the former one must secure the latter. Nothing less than the reproduction of the self is at stake. This is why precarity poses a problem for representation: any positive instantiation of a precarious subject appears inexorably as a contradiction, threatened by the very foundations of its social constitution. The precarious subject resists representation because it occupies a position of antagonism with respect to the categories of its own identity.

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"Out of the death of slavery": A Return to Marx's Civil War Writings

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Abstract

The goal of this essay is to offer a return to Marx, specifically to Marx's writings on the US Civil War, in order to consider their role in the development of a Marxian materialist conception of history. To that end, this reading of Marx's writings on the Civil War elicits a definition of class as 1) an objective, dynamic systemic process of exploitation in global capitalism, 2) defined concretely in a given space and time by the content, shape and limits, and necessities of political-economic struggle, and 3) a contested, fluid ideological and cultural structure rooted in (and without) social institutions contrive to reproduce existing social relations of production. In order to establish this multidimensional definition, I contextualize this reading of Marx's Civil War writings within his extensive investigations of events in Asia and Africa.

Keywords: Marx, Marxism, US Civil War, class, racism

> But out of the death of slavery a new life at once rose. (Marx, *Capital* Vol. I, 284)

Introduction: A Return to Marx

The goal of this essay is to offer a return to Marx, in the spirit of Aijaz Ahmed's considerations of some more famous returns to Marx,[1] specifically to Marx's writings on the US Civil War. The goal is to consider their role in the development of a Marxian materialist conception of history. To that end, the reading of Marx's writings on the Civil War presented in this article elicits a definition of class as 1) an objective, dynamic systemic process of exploitation in global capitalism, 2) defined concretely in a given space and time by the content, shape and limits, and necessities of political-economic struggle, and 3) a contested, fluid ideological and cultural structure rooted in (and without) social institutions contrive to reproduce existing social relations of production. In order to establish this multidimensional definition, I contextualize this reading of Marx's Civil War writings within his extensive investigations of global processes.

My reading of Marx's Civil War work combined with a review of recent scholarship on his Asia and Africa writings offers two critical conclusions on the Marxist materialist conception of history: 1) that class struggles and anti-colonial struggles are dialectically inseparable, and 2) that the outcomes of such struggles shape new stages of political struggle and economic development rather than lead ineluctably to a new schematized mode of production or stage of civilization. In addition, I

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critically examine how Marx's works open doors for understanding how non-class social systems (like white supremacy and settler colonialism, for example) operate semi-autonomously from this conceptualization of class, and how the failure to account for those systems leave the revolutionary project short, both in terms of the success of the democratic struggles and the class formations needed to move to a comprehensively democratic stage of political maturity and economic development.

A Review of the Literature: The Civil War Writings in Context

Perhaps for obvious reasons, US-based scholars in the 20th century generally have tended to elevate the importance of the Civil War writings. In so doing, they found as many versions of Marx in his Civil War writings as the different political orientations they held. For example, some have over-emphasized Marx's belief in the Northern workers' support for abolitionist causes; others discovered an endorsement of American "exceptionalism." Still others elucidated Marx's belief in the war as revolutionary and showed how his work foregrounds the issues of slavery, racism, and Black rebellion. Some even demonstrated his affinity for "popular front" politics, and, at least one sectarian American historian found evidence for how the venerable revolutionary slid into retrograde liberalism (Anderson 81-83).

As the 150th anniversary of the Civil War passed just a decade or so ago, radical scholars closely associated with the US have added new commentary about Marx's role in shaping how we view that conflict and its influence on his theory and political strategy. Sociologist Kevin B. Anderson positions that journalism (along with Marx's contemporaneous correspondence) in a decisive place in Marx's intellectual development and the production of Marxism as a body of political strategy, economic analysis, and revolutionary ethics. He highlights Marx's "radical abolitionism" and his "appreciation of African Americans as revolutionary subjects" (83-84). Historian Andrew Zimmerman shares this view, asserting, "The Civil War gave Marx and Engels new hope and models for revolutionary social change and thus contributed to the development of their 1848 revolutionary radicalism into the recognizable Marxism presented in *Capital* and practiced in the First International." Further, he argues, "[Marx and Engels]… understood that the revolution of African Americans against their own enslavement lay at the heart of the Civil War."[2] Nevertheless, he also sees limits to Marx's view of this revolutionary subjectivity that Anderson appears to have overlooked. For example, Zimmerman argues that Marx and Engels "missed" the fact that Black workers struck from the slave system in large numbers. Further, no comment from the theorists seems to recognize that Black people pressured for and won a decisive military role in the war; instead, their emphasis mainly centers on the actions of white politicians and military leaders. For Zimmerman, the evidence suggests that Marx and Engels were, at this stage of their political development, less inclined to recognize the full capacity of Black people to change the course of human events ("Introduction" xvi, xix, xxi).[3]

Despite this limitation, Zimmerman argues, even a partial acknowledgment of Black revolutionary subjectivity and its alignment with what Du Bois called "abolition democracy" places Marx's thought about this conflict in a complex relation to the idea that the wage laborer is the sole revolutionary working-class subject (Zimmerman xxvii).[4] It was a political advance from the *Communist Manifesto*, and it reshaped how Marx thought and wrote about class in *Capital*.[5] The British historian of American slavery Robin Blackburn shows that Marx regarded slavery as the war's central conflict, which as events progressed arranged multiple class and non-class actors (and geographical entities) into key social locations to affect the outcome and ultimate development of capitalism, its situatedness within the global system of capitalism and imperialism, and its own subsequent internal social antagonisms (Blackburn 13).

Marx's concerns in these writings are central to his richer development of a materialist conception of history, reasons political scientist August H. Nimtz. This conception involved recognition and politicization of the "conjuncture of struggles," or the relationship through alliances based in shared intra-class and cross-class interests, as well as connected political-economic determinations across space and time. For example, social forces and class formations such as the groups that would make up the First International Workingmen's Association in America aligned with the Republican Party to endorse Abraham Lincoln's candidacy for president in 1860 because of the shared anti-slavery goal. While Lincoln would not envision a path from that anti-slavery goal to a socialist revolution and remained a liberal, the internationalists favored such an alliance so as to promote the broadest unity against secession, the slaveholder's regime, and "the strongest anti-slavery position" possible in the Republican Party's platform (Nimtz 174). Such a move, for Marx, placed the most revolutionary elements of the socialist cause in an alliance not just with a section of the US capitalist class but also with a variety of local, national, and international forces: from English textile workers to enslaved people across the Global South, or enslaved people planning the next revolt in Missouri, to white farmers and workers in the US South and "border states" who failed to recognize their interest in abolishing slavery.

Nimtz, along with Blackburn, favors a view of Marx's theoretical developments of political strategy within the frame of class struggle as stadial.[6] In this view, Marx views slavery as not only an abhorrent and oppressive social system but also a barrier to the general progress of human liberation. "The fight against slavery…," Nimtz writes, "was part-and-parcel of the democratic revolution and a necessary step in labor's struggle against capital" (174). Blackburn adds, "[d]efeating the slave power and freeing the slaves would not destroy capitalism, but it would create conditions far more favorable to organizing and elevating labor, whether white or black" (13). Zimmerman concurs with this assessment by arguing that their analysis of the Civil War reveals to Marx and Engels that their earlier "model for revolution" based on mechanical notions of social classes and phases of civilizational development needed

re-working. They come to realize that political movements would have to be defined in historically and geographically specific ways, "devising their own strategies and determining their own nature." This perspective adds new recognition of the contingency of revolutionary action and the subjectivity of struggle within objective conditions (Zimmerman, "Introduction" xv).[7]

While this recent scholarship postulates valuable insights into the development of Marx's thought and Marxist thought, it does little in the way of contextualizing Marx's Civil War work. Instead, in reading his Civil War writing and presenting findings on it, scholars tend to extract it from a larger ongoing project in which Marx scrutinizes political-economic processes shaping the entire world, the whole capitalist and imperialist system, even as he tried to understand specific details of localized US events. Thus, historically and geographically specific events hold consequences and ramifications for global processes and dynamics; conversely, events in one part of the world may catalyze crisis or political transformation in another (Pradella 454-467). Understanding these processes and how they align collective revolutionary actors such as classes, class fractions, or anti-colonial movements within the framework of class struggle and socialist transformation, thus becomes a central feature of Marxist revolutionary theory. This internationalist framework drove his intellectual projects and is foundational to the Marxist project of revolutionary change. Accordingly, his writings on Asia and Africa, written at the same time, provide an essential frame for understanding his work on the Civil War.

How does Marx arrive at thinking so concretely about "the world of commerce as one nation and [that] presupposes the full worldwide imposition of the capitalist mode of production" (Pradella 461)? It was his study of a more comprehensive set of events and developments in the US, India, China, the British Isles, Central Asia, and Northern Africa beginning in the 1850s in which Marx's thought must be considered. Indeed, it is worth restating here that Marx's investigations of India and China were published as part of his journalism for a sizeable US readership in the *New York Daily-Tribune* in the years leading up to the Civil War. As the late Indian historian Bipan Chandra, the Chinese scholar Lin Chun, and Germany-based scholars Stefan Kalmring and Andreas Nowak have separately argued, this period of Marx's intellectual development reveals a transition in how he viewed the relations of capitalism in Europe to the non-capitalist and colonized world. In the early 1850s, Marx would speak of the progressive role of capitalism (accompanied by "barbarism" that "goes naked" [Marx, "Future Results" 221]) in transforming colonized regions into an image of itself. Marx had long recognized that global capitalist development, with its core in England and northwestern Europe, had been made possible through the "the extirpation, enslavement, and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins" (Marx, *Capital* 731).

While this three-part prelude to capitalism's world domination tells some critical portions of the story of capitalism's cost and innate brutality, it seems to concede the dominant narrative about the disappearance of American indigenous peoples. Marx's intellectual efforts would ultimately try to reckon with the struggles and potential independence of the latter two world's peoples listed in this narrative. Until, however, the last couple of years of his life and in the privacy of his personal notebooks, he would have little to say about the persistence or struggles for political, economic, or cultural sovereignty of American Indigenous peoples.[8] In addition, in his observations on political changes in the Civil War period, Marx listed the Homestead Act of 1861, which redistributed lands acquired through colonial force and violence from Native peoples to white settlers, as one of several progressive moves that revolutionized the aims of the war against slavery (*MECWUS* 123). If this perspective does not concede moral legitimacy of the role of settler colonialism in the development of capitalism, it does some to regard Native peoples' struggles for their sovereign non-capitalist futures as terminated and fully incorporated into modern capitalist development.

It remains significant, however, that Marx would transform his once progressive model of capitalist development into a colonialist model wherein capitalism functioned to hinder the economic development of the colonized territories. This transition in his thought required a materialist conception of history based on the necessity of independent nationalist movements to sever relations with the colonizer as a necessary precursor to the broader framework of class struggle on an international scale (Chandra 70; Lin 699; Kalmring and Nowak 334-335). This transition enabled Marx to regard "national liberation and class struggles as mutually indispensable" (Lin 700). The anti-colonial struggle now stood in his thought as a direct threat to capitalism's existence and required strategic alliances among the worker's struggle, abolition democracy and slave rebellions, and international freedom movements as the counter-hegemonic conjuncture of forces to the central capitalist classes. This model, however, simply did not include American Native peoples.[9]

Class in the Materialist Conception of History

Before the Civil War writings, Marx regarded class in general as a dynamic relationship of groups formed by the economic and political processes within a social formation. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels, for instance, use terms like "social rank," "orders" and "gradations" to name social classes before capitalism, which were proscribed by non-economic factors such as "divine right" or kinship (14). In capitalism's development, however, class in general as a dynamic relationship of groups formed and shaped primarily in relationship to ownership (bourgeoisie) of means of production and who employ laborers (proletariat) forced to sell themselves. Other classes exist but tend to disappear or are transitional, clearing the way for a final confrontation between the two primary classes, producing a "classical form" of revolution.[10] For example, bourgeois individuals form a class, Marx and Engels

note in *The German Ideology*, only "insofar as they have to carry on a common battle against another class" (82). Once this relationship exists and antagonistic interests form, "[t]he class in its turn achieves an independent existence over against the individuals, so that the latter find their conditions of existence predestined, and hence have their position in life and their personal development assigned to them by their class" (82).

After the collapse of the revolutions in Europe, class in Marxist theory develops a new, historically specific turn. Objective conditions of a productive and economic nature are inflected by subjectivity and political struggles. This dynamic and contingent class formation is subject to intraclass competition, changing interests, conflict, and political struggles. Relationships of groups also create distinct class cultures that are dialectically related to economic dynamics but do not ensure a revolutionary character of that class automatically. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx argues that when conditions shape and "separates" one group's "mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class" (187). Here, Marx defines class as a dynamic process of group formation linked to economic relations and consciousness of the antagonisms in those relations. Marx and Engels emphasize essential group formation and consciousness linked to economic realities over the dynamism and processes inherent in the formulations of these earlier class models.

These early models of social class accompanied, as Lin shows, a model of modes of production that in Marx's Hegelian-influenced mind closely related socio-economic forms to "evolutionary sequences" and historically periodized civilizational forms ethnocentrically imposed as universal concepts. The development of Marx's concept of the Asiatic mode of production, for instance, reinforced this "schematized sequence of modes of production," which centered European capitalist development and inaccurately depicted Asian socio-economic systems as homogeneous and stagnant. At the same time, she argues, it created an opening for Marxists subsequently to observe distinctions between non-capitalist and pre-capitalist systems that disrupt the "schematized sequence" and to think through other models of contingent and non-deterministic models of development or historical change (Lin 699-720).

As Lin and Chandra separately note, Marx offers, in an 1853 article on India, a profound insight about the relation of class struggle to anti-colonial struggle, about capitalist development in relation to colonial rule. For the *New York Daily-Tribune*, and in the context of studying extensively anti-colonial rebellions in China, Marx rejected the positive colonial process of his earlier thought, writing instead, "the [English] bourgeoisie will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social conditions of the masses of people" under colonial rule (qtd. in Lin 702). Indeed, in this article, he expressed a form of international class relations and struggle that would find echoes in his discussions of class relations during the US Civil War.

A proletarian revolution would have to occur in Great Britain, or "the Hindus themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether" (qtd. in Lin 702). Chandra argues that Marx is suggesting that capitalist development (and, thus, a class struggle that leads to socialist transformation) could occur in India only when Indians themselves discard colonial rule (45). Such new articulations of the agency of colonized peoples and their potential for rendering a revolutionary social change in both India and Europe possible and necessary "amounted to a milestone in [Marx's] intellectual trajectory" (Lin 703).

This relation of class forces and struggles, linked by capitalist relations through trade (from the illegal slave trade in Western Africa and the Caribbean to raw cotton production in the US South, opium harvested in India and dumped in Chinese markets) and political forms of control, is strikingly similar to the dynamic of class antagonisms to which Marx referred to, in at least two Civil War articles, as the "economical law." Quoting a Southern slave-owner, Marx writes, "either the slaves must be permitted to flee from the whites, or the whites must flee from the slaves" (*MECWUS* 33).[11] This "economical law" posits revolutionary agency in the specter of slave rebellion and the unplanned mobility of human capital freeing itself. Having studied the ongoing Chinese Taiping rebellion and the 1857-1859 mutiny in India, Marx predicts that without the ability to expand its territory through imperialist acquisitions, the hegemony of the Southern slaveocracy would be threatened by slave rebellions, escapes by the enslaved, and a crisis of its hegemonic leadership over Southern non-slave-holding whites who supported the slave system because of the promise of land and the potentiality of rising into the slaveholding class. Marx's prediction here also requires revolutionary action on the part of the various free progressive social forces and does not leave slavery to vanish or dissolve naturally, as many Northern liberals had naively hoped for more than two generations at the point the war began.

Because of the Southern slaveocracy's relation to the British financial and industrial bourgeoisie through its dominance as a raw cotton supplier and debtor, the US slave system played a pivotal role in capitalist accumulation for commodities moguls in Liverpool, textile manufacturers in Lancashire, and slave traders in Richmond, cotton magnates in Charleston, and shipping tycoons in New England ports.[12] A substantial trade in corn with the North, a shared repulsion to slavery and the slave trade, the intrigues of finance capital that linked northern US industrialists to British imperial interests in India and China, the eventual replacement of US cotton with South Asian cotton, and the opposition of significant portions of the British working class to intervention likely prevented serious endeavors to support the slaveocracy.[13] Thus, the "economical law" as it applied to the US South's slave economy also threatened to demolish the smooth operations of global capitalism and imperialism.

Marx's formulation of the "economical law" not only centers class antagonism as the motor of social change, it positions the enslaved, in this particular context, as a critical agency within capitalist development and a materialist conception of history – by exposing and threatening limits to slaveholder capital and a revolutionary re-ordering of property relations. These US-specific realities also exist within and were determinations of a broader nexus of globalized capitalism through commodities trade. These relations place enslaved Blacks into a potential alliance with Indian and Chinese peasants and workers who struggle for freedom from British colonial rule and subjugation to their oppressive ruling classes, as well as with British industrial workers and (even) white Southern farmers and workers (Lin 699-720).

Marx watches this "economical law" unfold in the Civil War, shaping the direction of the war from a conservative "constitutional" cause to a "revolutionary" struggle for emancipation. In the spring of 1862, Marx and Engels co-write a two-part article for the Vienna *Die Presse* on military developments in the war in which they speak of the danger to the slaveholder territory from "its slave population" a well as its white Unionist elements (*MECWUS* 92). Later in the spring, they restate the "economical law" wherein class antagonisms between propertied, slaveholding whites and poor, property-less whites would emerge as Northern military victories and the dangers from slave escapes and rebellions accumulated. "There can be hardly any doubt, it is true, that the WHITE TRASH, as the planters themselves call the 'poor whites,' will attempt guerrilla warfare and brigandage. Such an attempt, however, will very quickly transform the propertied planters into Unionists" (*MECWUS* 113). Wealthy whites, Marx asserted, will insist on US military protection for their property against the white poor. Still, early on in the war and before major shifts from the constitutional and conciliatory agenda, Marx privately insists to Engels that in the existing social organization of the South a distinct advantage for the Confederacy lay in its ability to leave productive labor to enslaved people while non-productive property-less whites composed its military forces. By contrast, the mass of military personnel in the North were conscripted from Northeastern workers and Northwestern farmers who performed productive labor, suggesting a drain on the North's ability to continue production at the same levels. These differences in the division of labor, Marx argues, puts strong pressure on conservative war aims to metamorphize into more "revolutionary methods" (*MECWUS* 121).

As the summer of 1862 comes to a close, Marx sees the light at the end of the tunnel. He perceives a decline in the slaveholder's power, which, up to that time, retained a strong influence over Union policy by blocking the fullest emancipation goals, insisting on a procedure for returning fugitives to the South, and suppressing Black military support for the North. The slaveholder's power had produced limited war aims and recurring Northern failures on the battlefield. The mass of Northerners, he feels,[14] wanted a strategic policy that weakened the unity of the slaveholders' cause, struck against its power in dominant political and military institutions,

and strategically undermined its ability to make war by drawing enslaved Blacks into rebellion in the South. In other words, the situation had begun to make a "revolutionary turn." Like the turn in the war itself, we can see in Marx's analysis a new recognition of the revolutionary role that Black people could and should have in transforming class relations, the military situation, and the relation of forces that might prompt a deeper revolutionary spirit among the working class as a whole. Marx notes the major political, legal, and ideological shifts toward abolitionist war aims that pre-date Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: the Homestead Bill, the abolition of slavery in Washington, elimination of slavery in new territories of the Union, a scheme for future abolition for Black people born after 1863, the emancipation of rebellious slaves who reached Union military lines, opening of a military role for emancipated Black people, and the international recognition of Haiti and Liberia.[15] The slow pace of this shift in war aims to a revolutionary character created the possibility for demands for more rapid changes, greater democratic control of social and political institutions, and even "some sort of revolution … in the North itself" (*MECWUS* 123).

Ideology and Hegemony

Marx's Civil War writings also create openings for theorizing ideological struggle and hegemony during a revolutionary crisis. Zimmerman argues that it is easy for modern people to look back on the Civil War and forget how truly revolutionary was the emancipation of humans counted as property, which totaled as much as three-fifths of the total GDP. The sanctity of property in the early 19th century was an ideological position held firmly across classes and geographical sections. This ideology had driven passage of fugitive slave laws, underpinned agrarian republicanism, and drove the distribution of expropriated Native lands to whites. Thus, white working-class people with aspirations for landownership and liberal elites who abhorred slavery but feared property expropriation more jointly resisted the fullest abolitionist political positions (Zimmerman, "From the Rhine" 140). For his part, as a revolutionary socialist, Marx holds no qualms about the liberation of the human property of a class of planters.

Marx is also aware of the role of white racism in disrupting political alliances across race and class formations that could have strengthened the revolutionary character of the US working class as a whole. During the 1862 midterm congressional elections, Marx and Engels communicated privately about white racism's role in those elections. For *Die Presse* in late November of 1862, after the Democrats made some gains against the Republican coalition using race-baiting as part of their electoral strategy, Marx writes, "[t]he Irishman sees the Negro as a dangerous competitor. The efficient farmers in Indiana and Ohio hate the Negro almost as much as the slaveholder" (*MECWUS* 142). This racism explains not only the electoral shift to the Democratic Party in 1862 but also, in part, helps to explain growing apathy about the war effort and increasing support for conciliatory gestures toward the slaveholders.

Throughout his writings on the war, Marx references the hegemony of a class of a mere 300,000 slaveholders in the South, which had used its power and Constitutional measures to extend its dominance over the whole country. It used conservative institutions like the Senate, the Supreme Court, and the Electoral College to control the presidency, to shape property law, and to define the meaning of white supremacy in a manner that as Marx writes "usurped the Union" in order to force slavery as a legally protected institution across the land. This slaveocracy had sought to extend slave territory beyond the borders of the US through imperialist ventures. How does a minority of landowners and slaveholders extend this much influence in a society supposedly democratically organized? It had developed mechanisms and instrumentalities of hegemony that relied on the consent of the subaltern classes (a de facto inter-class alliance) to its authority to protect what became ideologically projected as shared racial and national interests. Southern poor and working-class whites, who formed the most substantial fraction of the voting population, had become convinced that their economic, political, and cultural interests aligned with those of the group of 300,000 slaveholders to such an extent that they consistently and solidly voted with them enough to maintain the hegemony of the slaveholding class in federal institutions of power.

The "economical law," which he observes in the particular relations of the slaveholding South discussed above, served as the basis of one of two systems competing for dominance in the US. Free labor and agrarian republicanism served as the basis of the other. The year before Lincoln's election, Marx had published *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In the preface to *A Contribution*, Marx crafted his famous abstract model of base and superstructure, relating the ideological, cultural, and political to the foundational economic relations and processes of a social formation. He wrote, "In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely [the] relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production." This concept of relations "independent" of human will recalls to mind his language about the economic, political, and cultural levels of the category of class. He adds: "The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite *forms of social consciousness*." He adds,

> In studying such transformations, it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic, or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. (Marx, *A Contribution*)

This model identifies the formation of classes, the relations of class in an economic totality, and, thus, relations of social consciousness, mirroring classical type of revolutionary model in his earlier works with Engels. Marx's understanding of events that were taking place during the Civil War helped to re-shape this model.

The "economical law," which hinted at (but left underdeveloped) Black revolutionary subjectivity and rebellion proved to come true. Likewise, Northern whites tended to share this antagonism toward Southern slaveocracy and, along with hundreds of thousands of enslaved Black people, mobilized (with some crucial divisions prompted by white racism[16]) to fight the slaveocracy and to alter existing property relations radically. Southern white working-class consciousness of an economic antagonism with white slaveholders proved to be more elusive. Poor whites had become materially and emotionally dependent on their roles as slavecatchers and the psychological wage of racial superiority. They were firm believers in the racial justification, economic necessity, and cultural right to the territorial expansion that formed the cornerstones of white supremacy in the South and perhaps even on the entire globe (Horne 107; Du Bois 700-701). Indeed, the Reconstruction era, a period of definite social revolution in the US South, saw violent white resistance to changes in a class structure and political system that would have established a more democratic ground on which poor whites, based on alliance with their Black neighbors, could alter their economic relations with the plantation owners (Foner, *Reconstruction* xxiii; Goodwyn xxii). White plantation owners, despite their class antagonisms with poor whites, could almost universally count on their aid and assistance in the post-Reconstruction counter-revolution. Thus, with some notable exceptions in the populist movement, white working-class revolutionary consciousness that should have emerged from a recognition of class antagonism, following the model elucidated in the preface to *A Contribution*, failed to do so. The ideological and material strength of the system of white supremacy had been inadequately theorized in the critique of capitalism.[17] American working-class radicals had failed to organize and mobilize against it in a sustained way.

Marx set aside the classical forms of revolutionary struggle sketched in the *Manifesto* by the end of his career. Instead, he would come to favor more complex systems conceived in stages of political, economic, and cultural development, especially within the totality of global capitalism and its multiple vectors of struggle and resistance. What shapes class, Marx argues in *Capital* Vol. III, is "always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers." This relationship produces antagonism at the point of production and in society in general, transforming individuals, by necessity, into something greater than themselves. This point, Marx calls the "innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure." Marx qualifies this generalization to say that other determinations also condition class and how people experience and deploy it. Marx argues further that class, "due to innumerable different empirical circumstances,

natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc.," could show "infinite variations and gradations in appearance" (Marx, *Capital* Vol. III 791-792).

These relationships produce antagonisms at the point of production and in other vital points of civil society in general, creating a potential for transforming individuals, by necessity, into something greater than themselves. However, these relationships also produce forms of hegemony, consent to the rule of the powerful, and political alliances based in non-class political and cultural forms that prevent subaltern classes from seeing the "innermost secret."[18] Discovery of the hidden truth, the formation of classes, and subsequent political and economic development would depend on radical action, general advocacy of social equality, and socialist revolution. This next stage of struggle would be determined by the forms and content of struggle, the resulting direction of economic development of the social formation, and the continuing process of its ideological and political development of the class.

Conclusion: Class-as-identity is "non-actionable"

This reading of Marx's Civil War writings offers two important theoretical outcomes. First, Marx's attention to the class dynamics of the revolutionary dimensions of the war offers insights into a materialist conception of history that thinks stadially and through collective identities of class beyond the more abstract classical types referred to above by Engels. Second, Marx's observations about the role of white racism, though thin theoretically, create an opening for more politically substantial thought about the inter-relations of racial systems (white supremacy) and its role apart from and within the "totality of relations of production" that condition the processes of class as material process of surplus-value production and appropriation, political hierarchy, and cultural and ideological difference (Chakrabarti and Dhar 104-105).

Fearful of accusations of "class reductionism," many contemporary US academics, in their discussions of capitalism, swing the ideological pendulum fully into the relative intellectual and political safety of culturalist explanations. The thrust of this perspective is to portray the experiences of the poor and working-class people in strictly cultural terms: working-class or poverty cultures are constituted by deleterious experiences that happen unpredictably within otherwise fundamentally just social relations. Those cultures, then, determine cyclical patterns of social difficulties: poverty, deprived educational access, meager healthcare resources, low pay or structural unemployment, or difficult encounters with the legal system. Typically, such cultures are represented as isolated from capitalist production relations and separate from the logic and imperatives of capital accumulation. For example, in a recent widely publicized book on the working class and its supposed affinity for Trump, sociologist Jennifer M. Silva describes "the puzzle of working-class politics" where her definition slips between a combination of lower levels of education and income and more vaguely a culturalist explanation in the generation of shared values among a particular community (Silva 1, 12). Yes, significant structural changes in the economy are to blame for hardships, but no alternative is conceived other than a

more responsive political class to individualized or localized problems. Thus, culture defines the poor and working-class as little more than unfortunate demographic groups marred by their cynicism, apathy, and a luckless distance from the powerful.

A book titled *Class Matters*, written by a handful of *New York Times* journalists and other liberal and social democratic commentators a few years back, cultivates a similar definition of class. The book's editor wonders in the introduction if class remains an issue of status or education, or if it is even relevant. Such questions aim to give some meaning to the experiences of the Great Recession, the crisis of confidence in social institutions, and public doubts about the efficacy of capitalism itself. Even if class itself is no longer a meaningful category of social analysis, the book's editor admits that its social effects continue to shape personal destinies and, perhaps more importantly, the view of and relationship to the dominant social institutions and value systems. It is a concern for the integrity of the latter, expressed in fears about growing "cynicism" among the people that drove the publication of the book. Ideologically, the book positions classes into identitarian camps, driving a liberal or social democratic politics of reform to ease widespread cynicism, to placate the specter of an uprising, and to renew faith in the system as it is. Despite well-written, readable articles that handle a wide range of social problems, the more fundamental question about what class is and how to crack its intrinsic structure of inequality go unanswered (Keller ix-xviii).

Additional recent evidence suggests this identitarian trend has been institutionalized. For example, in polls used widely in the media, non-governmental organizations, and think tanks, categories identified as "social class" reflect this class-and-culture confusion. After the election of Donald Trump, a *New York Times* headline trumpeted, "Why Trump Won: Working-Class Whites," but the article defined class solely as the lack of a college degree, which might, laughably, place billionaire college drop-outs Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg in the working class (Cohn). The inclination to define social class by education level emerges from mythology about white working-class people that uses the level-of-education measure to reduce class to a cultural phenomenon (Walley 231-232).[19]

Another way this class-as-identity is deployed is to explore the racist affiliations and sentiments of white working-class voters. With four hundred years of white supremacy, racial slavery, and racial apartheid behind it, the US capitalist system is constituted by and remains dependent on white racism against Black and many racialized and minoritized communities (and especially of the workers in those communities). Thus, explorations of the relationship of racism to articulations of racial and class formations stand as a worthy theoretical project and political necessity. However, without explaining class as a process interlocking with but also semi-autonomous from the racial formation, scholars slip into explanations or definitions of the white sections of the working class by its racialized and racist anger (Pied 33-50; Smith and Hanley 195-212).

The conceptualization of class-as-identity fails to resolve the definitional issues or to provide a basis for meaningful politics. As scholar John D. Marquez reasons, "[i]dentity is a static concept suggesting a fixed and homogenous social consciousness unable to maneuver through time, circumstance, and discursive schema" (Marquez 11). In other words, it yields an anthropological understanding of a group, in this instance of a poor or working-class demographic. By positioning class as a group with an identity, it strips that group and its individuals of agency and history, and confirms mythologies of social mobility, "the American Dream," and need for the poor to make a break from the culture of poverty (primarily through education), and to join an imagined vast middle of a classless society. Culturalist versions of identity and as primary categories of social experience, Delia D. Aguilar demonstrates, work to move the discussion away from capitalism as a social system defined by processes of exploitation. Contemporary conversations about identities define them as positionings "divested of their structural material ground, resulting in purely discursive analysis." Thus, class as identity turns out to be "non-actionable" except within a frame of top-down political reform that leaves unaddressed systemic of exploitation (Aguilar 211).

If Aijaz Ahmad is correct, and our most important communist philosophers have abandoned revolutionary concepts like class, then a revolutionary return to Marx is more necessary than ever. One corrective to the above theoretical inadequacy of contemporary theories of class in social democratic or liberal intellectual circles is that offered by American Studies scholars Dennis Büscher-Ulbrich and Marlon Lieber, who encourage avoiding "even to try to disentangle race and class relations." They argue thinking about "the interaction of racism and class domination, to think racialization and proletarianization together." This formula places these two determinations – race and class – into simultaneous roles under "the historical dynamic of capitalist accumulation" (Büscher-Ulbrich and Lieber 522). Aguilar concurs, writing, "the capitalist mode of production and the social relations underlying it," which points fundamentally and most significantly to the antagonism between owners of property and sellers of labor power, is the social system in which "these identity markers [of gender, race, and others] are activated as mechanisms to facilitate exploitation" (211).

Marx's project of placing the local and the national within the context of global processes of class formations and antagonisms alongside imperialist projects. As Vijay Prashad argues, "[o]ur political world is impoverished by the lack of the category of 'imperialism'" (2536). The reading offered here of Marx's study of the US Civil War aims to contextualize his work on these specific events within the broader development of capitalism, including the imperialist process of domination in non-capitalist formations. Thus, I read how Marx articulates two semi-autonomous processes: a revolutionary class struggle within one capitalist place alongside anti-colonialist struggles against colonial oppression n multiple geographical sites linked through trade and political relations. Marx initially erred when he imagined

that capitalism projects itself through imperialism in order to foster the identical forms of economic development in places outside its main centers of origin. His theory led to mistaken beliefs in capitalism's inherent progressiveness and the Eurocentric notion that non-capitalist forms of development in Asia, Africa, or the Americas were culturally or politically deficient. By thinking through this error and conceptualizing capitalism and colonialism as distinct systems, Marx empowers a perception of the revolutionary subjectivity of multiple forms of collective agency, both the working-class (and its fractions and alliances) and anti-colonial and national liberation movements (and their alliances). Each he regards as vital to the revolutionary transformation of global economic processes and people-centered forms of economic development.

The evidence suggests that while in his writings on a war launched to preserve racial slavery, Marx does not fully theorize the role of racism, specifically white supremacy, in capitalism and colonialism, he does forge openings for studies of the specificity of white racism in the US founded on white settler colonialism, racialized slavery, and racializing migration regimes. These three cornerstones of white racism operationalize capitalist accumulation, activate colonial forms of oppression, and cultivate white working-class consent to capitalist rule through racist and nationalist notions of identity that sublimate class antagonisms among whites.[20] While such an "array of oppressive or controlling conditions" serves the ends of capitalist accumulation, it is "irreducible to a 'modes of production narrative'" as Marquez argues (12). It calls for simultaneously thinking of regimes of exploitation for purposes of capitalist accumulation and regimes of oppression to underpin white supremacy and the accumulation of racial (and colonial) power. Thinking this way may also serve in what Prashad describes as a "popular front" strategy of linking "all struggles attempting to find breakthroughs of the working class towards greater and greater unity" (2543).

Notes:

1. Ahmed sketches how Derrida jettisons central Marxist categories such as class struggle, internationalism, party, and ideology in favor of "anti-politics" and anarchism. He further decries Zizek's "manic theatricality" in arriving at the same place as Derrida. Moreover, while he lauds Badiou's continued use of Marxist categories, he regrets his propensity for sectarianism and political purity over the exercise of complicated revolutionary power (Ahmed 50, 53).

2. Unlike Anderson who focuses solely on Marx, Zimmerman extends credit for this development in thought to Engels, and also to the transnational community of revolutionaries who settled in North America after the failed revolution of 1848 and continued to share their views of the American situation with Marx.

3. Other scholars attribute to both Marx and Engels a shared belief in "peoples [who] are devoid of all historical power of action." (see Kalmring and Nowak 334, 343).

4. Abolition democracy was W.E.B. Du Bois's term for the multiclass movement of abolitionists who rejected white supremacy as well as slavery and called for social equality and the reorganization of US society on that basis (Du Bois 83).

5. Marx's most famous statements on racial slavery in the US and the divisive role of white racism were made during his discussion of the working day in *Capital* Vol. I, an important piece of the puzzle of class process of exploitation through surplus value extraction in industrial capitalism (284-285).

6. The adjective "stadial" is borrowed from economist David Laibman who uses it to characterize stages of development of political conjunctures and economic conditions differently from the traditional "stages of history" model often attributed to orthodox Marxism (Laibman 285).

7. Marx regarded the extension of Black political and economic rights in the postwar period as a critical component to the political development of the US working class as a whole (Marx and Engels, *Marx and Engels: The Civil War in the United States* 187 [hereafter cited as *MECWUS*]).

8. Marx's late study of Native societies seems to have been dependent primarily on framing Native societies as "pre-capitalist." Marx did begin to imagine a theory of multilinear human development that deviated from the modernist models of development initially elucidated in his earlier work and which served to define much of the Marxian tradition. Krader argues that Marx began to generally assert the agency of the "modern peasant commune" under capitalist and colonialist social formations (Krader, "Introduction" 17, 35).

9. My research on Civil War-era Native peoples in the state of Michigan reveals particular strategies of aligning with the abolitionist movement, with African American people, and conjoined struggles for sovereignty and a revolutionary transformation of American society (Wendland-Liu "Racial Formation").

10. It is this "classical form" to which Engels refers in a letter to Marx discussing his doubts about the revolutionary developments in the US in 1862 after the Democrats seem poised to make gains in the midterm elections, and Engels detects a growing apathy toward the war in the North (*MECWUS* 136). Classical formations that seemed emergent early in the war shifted and dissolved due in no small part to high levels of white racism among Northern workers and poor military leadership of the war aimed at conciliation with slaveholders rather than total victory.

11. Marx repeats his reference to this law as a signifier of the inherent contradiction of a slave system under capitalist conditions that are denied the ability to expand (*MECWUS* 47).

12. As 1861 came to a close, Marx characterizes British financial capital with interests in cotton commodities as "the cotton friends of secession in Liverpool" (Marx, *The Civil War in the United States* 46 [hereafter cited as *CWUS*]). Marx notes, London had recognized the Confederacy as a legitimate belligerent, and many finance capitalists and their friends in the British media pushed for full recognition of it as legitimate government (*CWUS* 49) and military intervention (*CWUS* 52; see also, Horne 33-34).

13. See Marx's comments in various articles in this time period (*CWUS* 52-53; 56; 85-86; 114-117; 119-122). Marx observes a split between British industrial capital and finance capital on how to understand and respond to the Civil War. Finance capitalists favored intervention in order

to manipulate the price of cotton. Meanwhile, Marx reports, textile industrialists in early 1862 expressed opposition to intervention and explained that they held enough cotton in reserve to last for another 12 months. They had ordered lay-offs, wage cuts, and production slow-downs as a response to a two-year period of overproduction that had driven down their rate of profit. In other words, the two sections of capital had divergent interests in terms of policy that derived from a profit-taking imperative related to their distinct positions in the same commodity and trade relations (*CWUS*, 132).

14. At other times, Marx could not help but express pessimism about Northern white racism as a source of apathy toward the war effort (*MECWUS* 141-142).

15. The recognition of Haiti and Liberia, while apparently progressive in the recognition of Black and African self-rule, were also political gestures by the Lincoln administration to retain the fantasy of the forced deportation of African Americans and freed people with colonization schemes (Foner 239-240).

16. For example, see accounts of the role of racism in the Irish-American-led New York City draft riots of 1863 (Harris 279-288).

17. Marx's criticism of white racism and white supremacy has been much remarked upon, but I share Zimmerman's concern that a reliance on earlier classical types of revolutionary patterns reduced Marx's and Engels' interest in understanding more fully role of white supremacy in shaping class struggles, revolutionary transformation, and most importantly counter-revolutionary actions (Zimmerman, "Introduction" xvi-xvii).

18. Such a metaphor of the unseen suggests that working-class people fail to form classes antagonistic to the ruling class when they do not see the truth. In the context of the US, this conceptualization of class consciousness falls short in explaining the role of white racism. White racism allows whites to fully recognize the exploitation they experience, but at the same time believe their idealized white identity is a preferable form of property than the reality of sharing social spaces and political power with Black people and other racialized communities. In other words, whites consciously choose to sublimate class concern in order to preserve white supremacy.

19. Walley offers only rhetorical questions about what class may be, as if she is hesitant to offer a decisive, systemic definition of class processes and the complicated relationship of that process to groups of humans, about the confusion over what class is and how US social institutions mystify that category.

20. It may even cause many white workers, ever conscious of their exploitation, to favor class exploitation by white rulers over sharing the same social spaces or status with non-white people.

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Allegorizing Neoliberalism: Contemporary South Asian Fictions and the Critique of Capitalism

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Abstract

What is neoliberalism? This essay tries to answer this question by drawing upon two sources: theoretical discussions and literary representations. Michel Foucault and Wendy Brown argue that neoliberalism is best understood as a new logic of governmentality which has brought into being a new economic subject, *homo œconomicus*. This article, positioning itself against the main tenets of Foucauldian theories of neoliberalism, argues that a normative logic of governmentality is an inadequate frame for understanding neoliberal capitalism. In order to understand the contemporary moment better, we need to historicize neoliberalism and look carefully into its relationship with capitalism and class. What we also need to factor in is how a monetized consumerist worldview has normalized itself in neoliberal culture. When we read contemporary South Asian fictions allegorically, these normalized worldviews and masked relationships begin to come into view. Allegorical presentations of neoliberalism in fictions, this essay hypothesizes, have often taken two different paths: representation of it as a structure of feeling, and parody and critique. A number of contemporary fictions including Samrat Upadhyay's "The Good Shopkeeper" and Amitav Ghosh's the *Ibis* trilogy can be read as neoliberal allegories thematizing not only the material alterations that neoliberalism has ushered in but also the cultural transformations that have become parts of our everyday life.

Keywords: allegory, capitalism, Foucault, Marx, neoliberalism, South Asian fiction

Introduction

The idea that contemporary South Asian fictions can be read as neoliberal allegories was perhaps first advanced by Betty Joseph, who, in her essay "Neoliberalism and Allegory," argued that Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* (2008) should be read as an allegory of neoliberalism because it satirizes India's neoliberal development by placing the rhetoric of economic development in the mouth of a murderer who attains his entrepreneurial success through violence (72). Since its publication, Joseph's essay has attracted both hostile and favorable responses, exposing, in the process, the difficulty of carrying out an allegorical reading without risking passionate contestation. Both Snehal Shingavi and Swaralipi Nandi, for instance, have questioned Joseph's claims about *TWT*, especially about the efficacy of reading it as a neoliberal allegory (Nandi 278; Shingavi 5), whereas Alexander Adkins and Sundhya Walther are appreciative of Joseph's nuanced reading of Adiga's novel, using

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her work to fortify their own assumptions about it (Adkins 170-71; Walther 597). Responses to Joseph's essay, thus, demonstrate how neoliberalism itself is understood differentially by scholars who remain divided about how best to conceptualize it. But, simultaneously, these responses also signal the risk of engaging in allegorical reading, because what is allegorized in a text remains open to interpretation. Not only is allegory itself deeply dialectical, but also the process of carrying out an allegorical reading is intrinsically ideological. In the words of Marxist thinker and cultural critic Fredric Jameson, "allegory itself is allegorical" (*Allegory and Ideology* 1).

The etymology of the word "allegory" suggests a Greek origin. Conjuncture of two different expressions – "*allos*" (other) and "*agoreuo*" (to speak openly, or to speak in an *agora* or marketplace) – allegory implies the articulation of something "other" than what has been said (Mucci 298). Northrop Frye writes in *Anatomy of Criticism* that allegory is "a structural element in literature" and cannot be added to a work by "critical interpretation" unless it is there (54). Jameson, expanding the horizon of Frye's hypothesis, goes further, suggesting, "everything is allegorical" and "all allegory is utopian" (*Allegory and Ideology* 215). Such a broad understanding of a category, especially when it comes from Jameson, needs to be taken in with a pinch of caution. A relentless dialectician, he also notes how structural relations manifest themselves not in the broad spectrum of philosophical abstraction but in "fragmented social life," for the universal as such is never available in its abstract totality to subjects for cognition and interpretation (*The Political Unconscious* 290). The "Utopian" in the political struggle, therefore, is an expression of the "unity of a collectivity" – inscribed in shared dreams and visions – which allegorical readings often strive to unearth (290).

The proposition that I advance, extrapolating from Jameson who hypothesizes broadly about allegories and their relationships to literature, is less ambitious. This essay advances readings of four contemporary South Asian fictions – a short story and a trilogy – to argue that they symptomatically represent the vicissitudes of neoliberalism, especially the economic worldview's relationship to subjects and objects. Neoliberalism is approached in this work dialectically, as a set of economic policies emerging out of core capitalist beliefs and ideologies, and as a culture that not only imposes normative values on all objects but also produces subjects who internalize such normative worldviews. Neoliberalism's historical emergence has been made possible by a fortuitous (for those who are on the side of capital) historical windfall – the withering away of the Keynesian state because of a tenacious economic crisis in the early 1970s, and the fall of the socialist block in late 1980s and early 1990s. In the absence of any meaningful opposition, either political or cultural, it has established itself as the only possible worldview (*Weltanschauung*), saturating institutions, and impinging on relations and systems that were previously left outside economization's clutch. Therefore, instead of seeing neoliberalism as a new modality of subject production, which many Foucauldians do, this essay, following

David Harvey, Prabhat Patnaik, John Bellamy Foster, and other Marxists, posits it as a dialectical process engaged, on the one hand, in the production of an inherently uneven world (spaces, institutions, policies, and nature) mirroring capitalism's own unevenness, and, on the other, in the reproduction of subjects who see their own interests entangled with the interest of neoliberalism. This essay also contends that as the historical dominant of our era, neoliberalism has given rise to a specific kind of culture whose effects on the polity and the collective imaginary can be traced in the monetization of affect, the fetishistic disavowal of the global ecological crises, a complicit endorsement of uneven development, and the unquestioning acceptance of capitalism as the only possible lifeworld.

Literary apprehension and representation of neoliberal capitalism and its culture has in general taken two different directions that, rather than being two different visions, are indeed two historical modalities appearing in succession: the path of anticipation of it as a structure of feeling, as a precognition of the emergent; and the path of satire and critique of neoliberalism's local/global manifestations. A number of Bangladeshi fictions written in the 1990s – Ahmed Sofa's *Gavi Bittanto* (1995), Akhtaruzzaman Elias' *Khoabnama* (1996), and Shahidul Zahir's *Abu Ibrahimer Mrittu* (written in the mid-1990s but published in 2008), for instance – exhibit prescient alertness about the ascending neoliberal world order, whereas many novels written in the twenty-first century – Aravind Adiga's Booker winning novel *The White Tiger* (2008), Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2014), Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2011), and Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), to name a few – ring a pessimistic alarm about the way neoliberal policies and culture affect the fabric of life. This essay draws upon both forms of representations of the neoliberal to explain how such representations are expressive of something more fundamental and foundational, namely, the struggle of labor against the normative conditioning of the lifeworld by neoliberal capital.

Although this essay predominantly focuses on neoliberal conditioning of life and society, it does so by taking into cognizance the contestations against neoliberalism as well, by advancing the notion that many of the contemporary cultural productions are positioned against it. Indeed, this essay's fundamental premise is built up on the foundation of its conjecture about contemporary South Asian fictions' critical apprehension of neoliberalism. Despite the worldview's dominance in state policies, institutional operations, education, and culture, many of these works remain astutely opposed to the manner in which neoliberalism affects society and the planet. In what follows, this essay offers a theoretical overview of neoliberalism, explaining why the subjectivist descriptions of neoliberalism are deeply flawed and require serious revisions. Then it offers short readings of those fictions that either thematize the neoliberal cultural shift, or critique neoliberalism's oppressive policies. The readings of contemporary literary works as neoliberal allegories afford us vantages into the objective conditions in which the neoliberal subjectivity is

formed, thus implying that a subjectivist theory is inadequate to take account of neoliberalism. Drawing upon contemporary fictions from South Asia, this essay shows how, instead of merely pointing towards the capitulation of the subject to neoliberal conditioning, these works stage allegories of the subject's resistance against neoliberal ideologies and institutions. What this essay also considers is the relative reluctance with which postcolonial academics address the questions of capitalism and class – the fundamental parameters of neoliberal logic of economization. The general tendency of Foucauldian and postcolonial academics to discuss neoliberalism without sincerely engaging with the question of class is, if not a marker of their outright complicity, certainly a symptom of their alienation from the very subjects and sites they claim their familiarity with. This essay, therefore, turns towards the issue obfuscation of class and capital in its concluding section, explaining how such omissions are symptoms of a "cynical reason" marked by defeatism and compromise (Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* 413).

Neoliberalism and its Critics

The origin of the word neoliberalism remains clad in mystery. While most studies point towards the small gathering at the Walter Lippmann Colloquium in 1938 as the place where the term was first used to define a thought collective (Foucault 132; Henry 547), other thinkers place its origin way back in the 1920s when the word's German equivalent began to circulate in Europe (Plehwe 10). There are also a handful of scholars who credit the German Ordoliberal School, specifically Alexander Rüstow, for first using the expression (Chari 21). Not only is the origin of the term relatively vague, its historical emergence likewise is opaque. Although neoliberalism is the historical dominant of our era, very few people, very few academics indeed, seem to have taken proper notice of it. As the effects of neoliberal policies lie in full visibility, to be seen publicly all around the globe, its being and *modus operandi* remain obscure as if its specter-like existence is the only thing that is real about its presence. Noting how the obscurity of its origin as well as its purpose has allowed neoliberalism to silently carry out its business all around the globe, George Monbiot, in *The Guardian*, writes the following:

> Imagine if the people of the Soviet Union had never heard of communism. The ideology that dominates our lives has, for most of us, no name. Mention it in conversation and you'll be rewarded with a shrug. Even if your listeners have heard the term before, they will struggle to define it … Its anonymity is both a symptom and cause of its power. ("Neoliberalism")

Instead of revealing neoliberalism's inconsequentiality, as has been pointed out by Monbiot, its anonymity attests to its power and normalization. The hegemonic, Gramsci made us understand, normalizes itself as common wisdom. That entrepreneurial visions such as privatization, profitability, commoditization, and relentless self-promotion now seem commonsensical and uncontestable, persuasively point towards the direction of neoliberalism's hegemonic presence in the culture

we live in today, lending credibility to Monbiot's observation that neoliberalism's anonymity, instead of gesturing to its weakness, asserts its hegemony.

Part of the anonymity of neoliberal thought can be attributed to its ruling class origin, its curtain walls separating it from public views. As a movement, it has always enjoyed generous support and endowments from the business community, especially large corporations (Plehwe 11). In that sense, it has been the favored child of the prosperous and the wealthy since its emergence. Friedrich von Hayek, the predecessor of today's neoliberals, was the son of a physician father and an aristocratic mother who came from a land-owning family. His Mont Pèlerin Society was mostly comprised of old-school liberals and US academics from prosperous backgrounds, whose views, much like his own, were conservative and anti-working class. Hayek's works in the 1940s and 1950s provided the theoretical foundation for Milton Friedman, George Stigler, and James Buchanan to base their economic research on the former's conjecture about the relation between market economies and personal freedom. Most of these early proponents of neoliberalism vigorously propagated that freedom of the market will warranty freedom of other kinds (Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* 2-4). Friedman, who William Ruger describes as "as a unifying force and leader of economists on the Right" (168), regularly appeared on television and radio programs to disseminate the view that privatization was the only way of ensuring freedom (Friedman, "Free to Choose"). Yet, unlike other libertarians (extreme right wing thinkers) of his era who felt that use of force was tyranny, he argued that it was not morally reprehensible to use brutal force to establish markets and expand the horizon of capitalism ("Take it to the Limits"). That in the 1970s, he and his "Chicago Boys" advised not only General Pinochet, the brutal dictator of Chile, but also dictated some of the most oppressive policies around the world (Sanders, "The Failed Prophet") testifies to his utilitarian and self-serving disregard for other people's freedom to choose.

For more than two decades since the founding of Mont Pèlerin Society in 1947, neoliberalism remained marginal in economic policy making, mostly circulating in some of the most elite universities in the United States, most notably the University of Chicago. It was the economic crisis of the 1972-1973, and the political crises in Latin America and Asia in the 1970s that allowed neoliberalism to gain a foothold in the mainstream policy making (*Duménil and Lévy* 21; Radice 94-95). The restlessness and crises of the 1970s in the United States and the United Kingdom brought Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Regan to power, who, aided by economic advisors, eager themselves to try out the same neoliberal policies that were tested in Latin America, began to liberalize their countries' economy and impose strict control over organized labor (Harvey, *Brief History* 39-49). The fall of the socialist block in 1989-1991, the expansion of US imperialism around the globe in the 1990s, and the implementation of IMF and World Bank market reform policies in the Less Developed Countries (LDCs) allowed neoliberalism to spread across the planet (*Brief History* 48).

Although neoliberal ideologies have gained traction with a large number of people – even among those whose lives have been squashed by neoliberal policies – today it is increasingly critiqued by many who see it as a threat to society and equality. Academic criticism of neoliberalism in recent times have been launched from two camps mainly: Marxists who believe that neoliberalism is predominantly a phase of late capitalism marked by "financialization" (Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* 24), "accumulation by dispossession" (Zamora "When Exclusion Replaces Exploitation"; *Spaces* 43), and naked imperial ambition (Foster, "The New Imperialism of Globalized Monopoly-Finance Capital"); and, Foucauldians who contend that neoliberalism can be best understood by the phenomenon of the arrival of the *homo œconomicus* – the economic subject who declines to submit to the jurisdiction of the sovereignty of the state (Foucault 283) and approaches "everything" in transactional terms, "as a market" (Brown 39).

The governmentalist approach to neoliberalism, where neoliberalism is seen as the moment of arrival of a new economic subject, is culled from Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France in 1978-1979. After long editorial interventions, Foucault's lectures from 1978-1979 were finally published in the original French in 2004 and in English translation in 2006. Its publication in English marked a decisive moment in global literary culture because Foucault's ideas were immediately picked up by a number of academics and intellectuals, most notably by Wendy Brown, who began to argue that neoliberalism is not merely a set of economic policies but also a new governmental logic that seeks to undermine democracy. Brown's arguments were instituted on Foucault's observation that "neo-liberalism" advances a new kind of subject, *homo œconomicus*, who threatens the foundation of juridical power – the power of the sovereign – by negating the sovereign's right to control "the economic field" (Foucault 292). Foucault's discussion of the economic subject's relationship with the juridical system is deeply insightful. That he anticipates the catastrophic outcomes of the introduction of economic logics in other fields governed by their own sets of laws is demonstrative of his grasp of what is at stake in neoliberalism's circulation and proliferation.

Characteristic of his implicit but nevertheless foundational critique of Marxism, Foucault's conjectures about neoliberalism's disinclination to submit to any logic of governmentality other than the one ushered in by the market, however, is devoid of any discussions on class relations. Indeed, right at the beginning of his hypothetical considerations on neoliberalism, where he introduces "German neo-liberalism" (129) or the Ordoliberal School, Foucault dismisses the conventional wisdom about neoliberalism by claiming that those who argue that neoliberalism is a second-hand theory borrowed from classical liberalism, or see it as a set of state policies propelled by the desire to establish a market society, do not at all contribute much to the theoretical understanding of neoliberalism (130). The French post-structuralist's reference to "Book I of *Capital*" (130) leaves little doubt that the hidden object of Foucault's critique is Marx and not neoliberalism. His emphatic proclamation that

"what I would like to show you is precisely that neo-liberalism is really something else," is, in essence, a rejection of conventional left wisdom about neoliberalism that saw it, first of all, as a set of derivative theories borrowed from "laissez-faire" and, secondly, as a "generalized administrative intervention by the state" to ubiquitize "market relations in society" (130). This new interpretation, advanced by Foucault, posits neoliberalism as a new logic of governance, invested in the idea of shaping the state according to the principles of market economy. To put it in Foucault's parlance:

> Neo-liberalism is not Adam Smith; neo-liberalism is not market society; neo-liberalism is not the Gulag on the insidious scale of capitalism … the problem of neo-liberalism was not how to cut out or contrive a free space of the market within an already given political society, as in the liberalism of Adam Smith and the eighteenth century. The problem of neo-liberalism is rather how the overall exercise of political power can be molded on the principles of a market economy. (131)

The French theorist thus situates neoliberalism in the thick of political ontology, suggesting that the real issue surrounding neo-liberalism is not its relation to capital but its disinclination to submit to the juridical right of the sovereign. In other words, what is problematic about neoliberalism is that it seeks to mold the state according to the principles of the market economy, thus subjecting the sovereign state to the mastery of the market. Foucault's observation, it needs to be stressed, appears extremely insightful when one looks at it from the standpoint of governmentality. Neoliberalism does indeed impose on the state the logic of economy. Nevertheless, his tacit criticisms of certain tenets of neoliberal thought notwithstanding, Foucault exhibits little interest in tracking the political and economic consequences of the encroachment of economic reason in every sphere of life; nor does he notice that the desire to expand economic laws beyond the social boundary of the economic is underwritten by the desire for accumulation of capital and political power not simply as individuals but also as a class. What is equally problematic is that he does not even factor in capitalism in his broad consideration of economization, whose sublation of politics he flags as a dangerous propensity. Foucault's reluctance to specify what kind of economic relations feed into the neoliberal desire for the economization of the juridical/political leads him to hold the entire realm of the economic culpable of impinging upon other social/political/cultural/juridical domains, thus erroneously suggesting a separation between economy and other spheres of life. Just as Foucault's general theory of power in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* led him to the amorphous theory of power (Said, "Foucault and the Imagination of Power" 241-42), so his general theory of economization of the juridical lands him on a subjectivist theory of neoliberalism incapable of specifying what kind of relations produce the *homo œconomicus* and why. Foucault's subjectivist theory of neoliberalism, therefore, is established on an undialectical foundation which fails to notice how the birth of the *homo œconomicus* takes place in

an overdetermined but contested universe where the economic subject is not merely a bearer of the neoliberal inscription but also is an active agent struggling against its dictates. That Foucault fails to foresee any resistance against the totalizing will of neoliberalism, that he empties the neoliberal world of any contestation, especially class contestation, speaks volumes about the shortfalls of his subjectivist construct.

Much like Foucault, who shows little interest in the question of class struggle in his cognitive mapping of the neoliberal, so Wendy Brown exhibits little concern for the actual sites of oppression and exploitation in her book *Undoing the Demos* (2015). For Brown, what is most important in the meteoric rise of neoliberalism is the question of the arrival of a "normative reason" that has the potential for becoming a "governing rationality" (30), and not the reorganization of space and society according to the expansionist logic of neoliberal capital. Although, unlike Foucault before him, Brown acknowledges the significance of Marxian critiques of neoliberalism, she nevertheless persists with the idea that the most productive way of understanding it is through the modality of subject formation. Explaining why she prefers the Foucauldian frame over the others, she writes:

> In contrast with an understanding neoliberalism as a set of state policies, a phase of capitalism, or an ideology that set loose the market to restore profitability for a capitalist class, I join Michel Foucault and others in conceiving neoliberalism as an order of normative reason that, when it becomes attendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life. (30)

For Brown, then, what is of importance is the phenomenon that neoliberalism, when it becomes a governing rationality, expands its horizon beyond the economic and exerts its tentacular presence in "every dimension of human life." Both Foucault and Brown, it seems, are particularly alarmed by neoliberalism because it has the ability to spill over to other domains of human life and sublate those into its own expanding horizon. Following Foucault, she too identifies the "*homo oeconomicus*" as the embodied manifestation of neoliberalism. What is novel about our era, she maintains, is that "we are everywhere *homo oeconomicus* and only *homo oeconomicus*" (33). Unlike the figure of the same in the eighteenth century, today's *homo oeconomicus* is distinguishable for its desire to govern "itself [as] a firm" (34), specifically "as human capital across all spheres of life" (35). When "everything is capital," she writes, "labor disappears as a category, as does its collective form, class, taking with it the analytic basis for alienation, exploitation, and association among laborers" (38).

Brown's taxonomy of the human capital, thus, leads her not only to drown out all forms of class solidarity but also dissent. If all of us are indeed living breathing human capitals, solely invested in self-promotion and transactional relationships, there is no

room in our consciousness and society for transgressive and self-negating activities. As capital embodied, our only destiny is to compete with other human capitals, seeking to exert our domination in the mix those who have internalized the same worldviews. Brown's understanding of neoliberal capitalism exclusively through the lens of subjectivity, thus, obliterates the boundary between the dominant and the dominated, proffering a sweeping subjectivist philosophy that flattens out the line of demarcation between labor and capital.

It is easy to notice how figures like Afaz Ali, the protagonist of eminent Bangladeshi writer Akhtaruzzaman Elias' short story "Kanna," undermine the type of subjectivist hermeneutics that Foucault and Brown advance in their works. Although Ali is constantly forced to think of money, to the extent that his efforts to earn money look desperate, his reasons for doing so are not bound to his desire for self-enrichment. As the objective world around him succumbs to the culture of profiteering, his desire remains simple: escaping his entrapment in his workplace – a graveyard located in the city of Dhaka where he is a petty *moulvi* – and returning to his family who reside far away from the capital city, in rural Bakerganj. A subjectivist theory of neoliberalism, the kind that has been advanced by Foucault, Brown, Huehls and Chari, fails to account for Afaz's desperate pursuit of money, for what motivates him to earn money is not his desire to become successful – to become entrepreneurial and advance his knowledge for self-enrichment, thus becoming a human capital – but rather the necessity to escape the trap of debt. In Elias' story, what leads us to neoliberalism is the transformation of the objective conditions of subjection, not mere changes in the protagonist's subjectivity. It is the material relation between labor and capital as well as the emergence of the monetized culture that offers us a better theoretical handle on the effects of neoliberalism.

Likewise, when we read Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* as an allegory, what swims into view is not merely the protagonist's grotesque emergence as an entrepreneurial subject, a human capital, but also a deeply divided India where the structural relations simultaneously produce immiseration of a large number of citizens and the enrichment of the view. If we only factor in Balram's subjective transformation, what we lose sight of is the allegorical representation of the world in which subjectivity is internalized. The grueling poverty of the rural that not only tosses Balram out of the education system but also instills in him the desperate desire to break away from servitude cannot be made sense of if we only engage ourselves in the figuration of his subjective transformation, for the subject only partially and symptomatically represents the broader transformations of the social and non-subjective world. In order to understand how neoliberalism positions itself within the web of life, one needs to carefully note the tension and the transaction between the subjective and the objective world, so as to understand how objects, commodities, institutions and other non-human denominators affect the relations in which the subject takes birth and develops.

It is, therefore, imperative that we take note of the Marxist theories of neoliberalism when we seek to read fictions as neoliberal allegories, for it is in the works of theorists such as Harvey, Patnaik, Zamora, and Foster that we receive a carefully drawn outline of the capitalist universe we live in today. What we also need to remember is that when we discuss the historical emergence of neoliberalism we cannot postulate it as the dawn of an entirely new era marked by the emergence of a new subject. Rather, neoliberalism needs to be understood as a specific moment within the history of capitalism – a moment that is not entirely unique, nor completely like other historical moments either – a moment marked by the temporary victory of capital over labor, ushering in an era characterized by imperialist wars and accelerating refugee populations, massive inequality and proletarization, destruction of ecology and species, and dismantling of democratic and welfare state institutions. David Harvey, in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, describes neoliberalism as a project directed towards the goal of achieving "the restoration of class power" (16). In *Imperialism and Global Political Economy*, Alex Callinicos argues that neoliberalism has given "capitalists and state managers alike the ideological cohesion and self-confidence to force back organized labour" (207). In Daniel Zamora's account, neoliberalism becomes a process of production of the "surplus-population" – the "reserve army" of capital (797) as Karl Marx famously wrote in *Capital Volume I* – which restricts the bargaining power of organized labor and make high profits. John Bellamy Foster, following Samir Amin, has called neoliberalism the "imperialism of monopoly-finance capitalism." In the same spirit, Indian Marxist political economist Prabhat Patnaik describes neoliberalism as "a process of 'primitive accumulation of capital' which accelerates the process of … 'centralisation of capital'" ("Trends of Centre–state Relations in India Under the Neo-liberal Regime" 91). He notes in a separate study that the withdrawal of the state from public procurement, a hallmark of neoliberal policy around the world, has led to the strange phenomenon of an "acceleration of rate in growth" on the one hand and "an increase in the magnitude of absolute poverty" on the other ("Growth and Poverty in the Indian Economy" 19, 25). All of these theorists stress that neoliberalism is best understood as a class project, deeply invested in the process of enriching the few by taking away from those who live at the very bottom of the economy.

These political economic descriptions of neoliberalism, however, discuss little about the ubiquity of a neoliberal culture that has normalized itself in various institutions and aesthetic norms. How economic practices and institutions proffer a particular vision of culture has been brought to our attention by Marxist critic Bret Benjamin who, in his book *Invested Interests: Capital, Culture and the World Bank*, argues that economic institutions like the World Bank not only circulate economic policies but also "traffic in culture" (xiii). The parlaying of a particular vision of the world (culture) to advance a specific notion of development has become the Bank's strategy for expansion. The economic culture advanced by the Bank may appear ununiform from a distance, but, as Benjamin points out, underneath that façade lurks a more

uniform history of playing an "essential role" in aiding "imperial power and global capital" since 1945 (2). The Bank, since its inception, has been parceling out "the capitalist principles of trickle-down economics," thus disseminating a culture that presumes that "the generation of wealth in any sector" will be beneficial to all classes (15). It is not difficult to notice the likeness between the Bank's culture and the kind dispersed by the avatars of neoliberalism. Predominantly introduced as institutional reform, Thatcher-Regan neoliberal policies also circulated particular visions of the world that required corresponding cultural forms. Neoliberalism, advances an acutely capitalist vision of the world that believes in trickle down effects, suggesting that the enrichment of the capitalist class ensures the enrichment of the entire society and the world. By conjoining the market with personal freedom, neoliberalism not only asserts the primacy of the market over all other entities and institutions, it also circulates a specific kind of culture that encourages individualized expressions of freedom and subversive acts but undermines all forms of collective practices that are not in sync with the interest of the market. Any kind of solidarity, any form of non-value producing work, appears threatening to its suspecting eyes. It is no surprise then that monetization and atomization remain two fundamental conduits through which it smuggles out its ideologies. Both are fetishized in neoliberal culture because without them the idea of the free market cannot be legitimized.

Reading South Asian Fictions Allegorically

As this paper has explained earlier, the allegorical presentation of neoliberalism can take two different trajectories: representation and critique. Many of the fictions written in the 1990s can be read as allegorical presentations of neoliberal structure of feeling – anticipations of the ascending neoliberal culture. Bangladeshi novels written in the late 1980s and early 1990s flash the symptoms of anxiety about monetization and corruption – an anxiety that is at once peculiar, pervasive, and profound. The new managerial class, entrepreneurs, and political beneficiaries of military dictatorship appear in these fictions as upstarts who threaten the foundation of Bangladeshi society. The general sense of anxiety observed in Bangladeshi literary representations corresponds to the broader social and cultural reshuffling that was going on in the country in the 1980s and the 1990s. As neoliberalism was yet to become the historical dominant, such representations can be seen as an apprehension of the general structure of feeling that circulated as a hunch or prescience in culture.

Take, for instance, Nepalese fiction writer Samrat Upadhyay's short story "The Good Shopkeeper." On its face, the story seems to have very little to do with neoliberal form or content. A realist short story narrating the crisis of an old-fashioned accountant's life, "The Good Shopkeeper" registers little formal challenge. Its plot also seems far removed from a critical presentation of the neoliberal structure whose effects can be immediately identified. Upadhyay's Kathmandu is not a space of intense capitalist activity marked by rural to urban migration, nor a fast-paced city characterized by postmodernist culture and newly erected malls and apartments. The chaotic madness and greed that characterizes Adiga's *The White Tiger*'s Delhi or Naqvi's *Home Boy*'s

New York City, for instance, are also absent in Upadhyay's narrator's Kathmandu. His tone, throughout the narration, remains subdued, echoing the city's relatively calm and slow-paced life, its unpretentious simplicity, and its feudal culture. Nepal at that time was still formally a monarchy, although its constitutional reform was carried out in 1990. And yet, even here, we detect traces of the manifest features of neoliberalism.

The story's plot moves around the misfortune of an old-school accountant. Having been let go by his firm, Pramod, the protagonist of Upadhyay's story, sees his coherent life fall apart and his hopes dwindle. Unable to find another job – a thing difficult to come by in Kathmandu – he seeks comfort in the temples of the city. What is rendered visible through Pramod's numerous visits to "Shambhu-da," his wife's prosperous cousin, is the structure of favoritism; jobs are only available if one has an influential guardian ready to use his political/financial influence to find one a position. Pramod's recurrent visits to his powerful relative, however, yield nothing substantial and he grows bitter as he struggles to find a job. His wife who also struggles heavily with their seven-month old daughter, advises him to sell a plot of land they own and set up a shop. Pramod, thinking shop-keeping is beneath his social class, rudely declines to do so despite his wife's entreating, and despite his own repeated social humiliation. Deeply frustrated and vegetating in the parks of Kathmandu, he meets a "young woman" at the city park – a woman far below his social rank, who works in an affluent house as a "servant" (10). Pramod's relationship with the "servant woman" can be interpreted in a number of ways, most effectively as his patriarchal revenge on his wife as well as a neurotic reaction against his self-perceived emasculation through joblessness. His relationship with the maid can also be seen as a symbolic prefiguration of being declassed, which takes a fetishistic form expressing itself through the symptom of his ritualistic vegetation at the park and lazy afternoons spent inside her tiny room. Read as such, "The Good Shopkeeper" appears to stage an anachronistic feudal fantasy, mirroring the persistence of the feudal life that the city was still caught up in, the monarchy that was still ornamentally present when the story was written.

Yet, as I would like to argue here, a new schema emerges when this story is read as an allegory of Nepal's inscription in the global capitalist structure. Pramod, we are told, has lost his job to "a young man who knows computers" (5). We are also told about Nepal's new social structure when Pramod, wary of Shambhu-da's avoidance, imagines himself "as a feudal landlord, like one of the men who used to run the farmlands of the country only twenty years earlier," punishing him (8). This moment, which appears as fantasy, is evocative of Pramod's yearning for a long-gone feudal past, when society was hierarchically organized and where people like Shambhu-da had little relevance. It is against this backdrop that Upadhyay's story attains its allegorical relevance. Pramod's acceptance of his future existence as a shopkeeper allegorically represents Nepal's acceptance of its new class and social structure dominated not by landlords who ran the farmlands twenty years

ago but by people like Shambhu-da whose newfound wealth comes from "shady businesses" and construction jobs in the city (2). Likewise, the specter of computer-educated accountants replacing old school clerks also implies the nation's changing technological landscape, moving in synchrony with the global technological changes. Written in the late 1990s when the effects of neoliberal global restructuring in Nepal was still in its nascent stage, Upadhyay's story bears witness to impending social and technological transformations whose contours were still too distant to make out. It is Shambhu-da who mediates that distant horizon symptomatically embodying the emerging class which will accumulate through private trade but is also willing to employ violence, theft and dispossession as a means to secure wealth. What is deeply suggestive here is that the victim of Shambhu-da's violence is a policeman. It is, after all, the body of the semi-feudal welfare state that the country must dump before entering the circuit of late capitalism run by advanced computing machines.

If Upadhyay's story allegorizes neoliberalism by absorbing all the trivialities of a changing culture and by projecting onto the body of the nation the shadow of a distant world whose political and economic transformations are affecting lives in a relatively quiet part of the globe, Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy critiques neoliberalism more overtly, by exposing the vacuousness of the rhetoric of freedom and invisible hand of the market – neoliberalism's ideological foundations. The trilogy does so not by directly engaging with the present moment but by reimagining a turbulent period of the nineteenth century, which, despite its apparent historical remove, functions as a mirror image of the world in which we live today. Ghosh started writing his trilogy in 2004, soon after the beginning of the Iraq war, and finished it in 2014, more than six years after the great financial crisis of 2008. At the center of its narrative stands a ship and its occupants whose lives the trilogy's intricate plot follows. One of the characters that Ghosh's novels closely pursue is the schooner's carpenter from Baltimore, Zachary Reid. It is his remarkable transformation from being a mere carpenter to a partner in the firm that bought that ship that signifies the imperial cooperation in the form of Euro-American co-authorship in the Opium War, thus anticipating the Iraq war in whose aftermath the novel was written. Reid's partnership with the British trader Benjamin Burnham also suggestively points towards the expanding brotherhood of free-trade ideologues who have the power to dictate what course their nations may take and against whom their nation must wage a war. Reid thus holds the key to the novel's allegorical presentation of the pre-Iraq war political climate through the trope of the Opium War, whose re-narration allows us to see the connection between the present and the past.

Ghosh himself was interested in tracking this homology, this correspondence between what happened before the beginning of the Opium War and what happened almost two centuries later. How free trade became the rallying cry for the opium traders has been described by Ghosh in an interview, where he suggests that what inspired him to write the trilogy was the strange semblance between the past and the present. This interview, where Ghosh gestures towards the axis between imperial war and

free trade, clearly lays out the connection between The First Opium war and the second Iraq War. Noting the strange similarity and how it inspired him to write the trilogy, he states:

> I started writing this trilogy in 2004, soon after the start of the Iraq War; and the Iraq War was of course fought in the name of freedom and free trade and so on and so forth. When I looked at the historical material on the Opium War it soon became clear that there were many similarities between that war and the Iraq War of 2003; it extends to the point where it's almost uncanny. ("The Opium Wars, Neoliberalism, and the Anthropocene")

When we read Ghosh's interview, the correspondence between the past and the present, Free Trade imperialism and Neoliberalism, and nineteenth-century primitive accumulation and the twenty-first century accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* 91-92) begins to emerge. If, to travesty Fredric Jameson, the object of allegory is not meaning but structure itself (*Allegory and Ideology* 10), these transhistorical homologies gesture towards a broader structural relation between then and now – a relationship that allows us to see these multiple temporalities as coexisting moments within the broad historical expanse of capitalist modernity, where expropriation, exploitation, imperialism, and war exist as concurrent processes of accumulation.

To understand why I perceive Ghosh's trilogy as a critical presentation of neoliberalism, let us first turn to the most explicit feature of the trilogy's critique – rhetorical similitude. In her recent work *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, Brown shows how the neoliberal discourse on free market is deeply invested in Hayek's insistence on the conjunction between the market and the moral, which now features in most conservative discussions about "God, family, nation and free enterprise" (89). In *River of Smoke* (2011), the second novel of the trilogy, we see similar rhetorical strategies from Benjamin Burnham, the owner of the *Ibis*. When the Chinese, determined to prosecute those Hong merchants who persist with the opium trade, make their intentions public, Burnham, who hears the news from a fellow British trader, is infuriated, calling the Chinese commissioner "a monster" (431). Hearing Burnham's comment, Mr. King, an American businessman, quips whether Burnham sees anything monstrous in his own actions. The latter responds:

> No, sir … [b]ecause it is not my hand that passes sentence upon those who choose the indulgence of opium. It is the work of another, invisible, omnipotent: it is the hand of freedom, of the market, of the spirit of liberty itself, which is none other than the breath of God. (432)

This idea that no mortal has the authority to intervene in the market because its freedom has been warranted by God himself validates Foucault's observation that neo-liberals do not accept the jurisdiction of the sovereign in the matter of trade. To them, the market exists outside political jurisdiction and, therefore, cannot be governed by the same laws that operate in the nation or society.

By invoking the rhetoric of the free hand of the market, Burnham is not indeed leaning towards Adam Smith and classical liberalism, whose worldviews remained more or less secular; he is, rather, aligning himself with the Evangelicals and the moralists like Hayek who sought to connect freedom of the market with Christianity. It is there that the novel's critique of neoliberalism explicitly comes to view. By putting the discourse of neoliberalism in the mouth of Burnham – a conservative British free trader – Ghosh is performing what Adiga does in his first novel: exposing the duplicity of neoliberal discourse by putting it in the mouth of an unworthy practitioner. The difference between the two novels lies in the manner in which these two preachers of neoliberalism practice their own preaching. Whereas Balram, Adiga's quizzical protagonist, practices it to the best of his ability by remaining true to the neoliberal mantra of entrepreneurship which proclaims that our relationships are all transactional, Burnham applies his credo selectively, validating the premises of the Marxist interpreters of neoliberalism who claim that neoliberalism is a rhetorical empty shell underwritten by class interest and imperial ambition. Two examples, I hope, will suffice. In *Sea of Poppies*, we see Burnham quickly and efficiently shelving the costs of economic loss on the shoulders of his local partners (80), thus bending the laws to avoid the cost of his business decisions. In *River of Smoke* (2011), the British traders collectively change the rules of business so they can monopolize the shipbuilding trade (422), putting the gospel of God's free hand to rest in a quiet corner. Both instances attest to how the trilogy effectively sees free market ideology as a discourse underwritten by class and imperial relations of power, as rhetorical exercises they are not only rehearsed sporadically but also applied unevenly, making sure that concentration of capital in the hands of the imperialists accompanied by a surfeit of logic that defends their right to accumulate wealth freely.

Ghosh's trilogy can be approached in another way as well – by way of the object. Once we approach these novels through the trope of opium, which serves as a master metaphor in them, their relationship to capitalist modernity becomes clear, allowing us to read the trilogy as an allegorical exposé not only of the capitalist production process itself which is marked by inequality and decrepitude but also of the risk of commodity circulation. As value in motion, the commodity's exchange and conversion into the money form must be performed without delay in order to avoid crisis. An inability to convert its valorized commodity form into money, we are shown, leads towards calamity and mortal conflict. In *Sea of Poppies*, the crisis ushered in by the deprecation of value of "American bills of exchange," results in the reduction of the price of opium, forcing the Burnham Bros. to face financial loss for the first time in its history (80). It is this loss that sets Benjamin Burnham to encroach on Raja Neel Ratan Halder's estate, driving the latter into exile. In *River of Smoke*, a chain of crises is unleashed when the Chinese government bans the sale of opium, resulting in a log of unsold opium which leads the British opium merchants to wage war on the Chinese. The tragic death of the Bombay merchant Bahram is

the consequence of the loss emanating from unmaterialized surplus value of opium – an economic loss which drives him towards frustration and then addiction, finally causing his death (503-510). *Flood of Fire*, the last novel of the *Ibis* trilogy, can be read as an allegory of overcoming the crisis of conversion by waging war and expanding the market even further. What is laid bare in the process is that war is a necessary strategy for overcoming capitalism's crises. The entire trilogy, thus, can be read as a story of capitalism's crisis of overproduction and price deprecation, and the violent means through which capitalism overcomes its crisis.

In *Capital Volume II*, Karl Marx writes how, once converted into commodity, capital must perform its "commodity functions" before returning to its owner in money form (122). The inability to do so, writes the German revolutionary, leads towards crisis and stagnation. Marx identifies various reasons for capitalism's crises, most notably the delay in moving from one circuit of capital to another. "If capital," he writes,

> comes to a stand still in the first phase, *M-C*, money capital forms into a hoard; if this happens in the production phase, the means of production cease to function and labor-power remains unoccupied; if in the last phase, *C′-M′*, unsaleable stocks of commodities obstruct the flow of circulation. (133)

The crisis that unfolds in the *Ibis* trilogy is the crisis of the third stage, when "unsalable stocks of commodities" begin to pile up because the Chinese decline to allow their markets to be swamped by opium. The question that is raised in the process is not about the essence of opium and its objecthood, but rather how its valorization through production and exchange allows this object to become a commodity. It is here, in its willingness to tell how the commoditization of poppy leads towards crisis and war, the destruction of life as well as the environment, that Ghosh's trilogy's critical tenor is heard most clearly.

Conclusion

Among the many discussions that are available on the trilogy, only a handful pay adequate attention to its representation of capitalism, and none on its relationship to neoliberalism. Only a handful of research works have taken note of the correspondence between past and present in Ghosh's trilogy, especially of its vexed relationship with our own time. Kanika Batra's otherwise excellent ecological reading of the second volume of Ghosh's trilogy in "Reading Urban Ecology through *River of Smoke*," for instance, notices the mirroring of the present onto the past (323), but fails to navigate beyond the hybrid formations and postmodern style when it comes to explaining what that present looks like. Her ecological reading, therefore, goes only as far as pointing towards the novel's deft presentation of city botany, showing no interest in connecting city ecology with capitalism's expansion in the nineteenth century. Instead, her essay remains committed to the process of locating hybridity and postmodern aesthetic forms in the novel, omitting from discussion

the very conditions that facilitate hybrid social transactions through trade and cultural exchange. Binayak Roy's "Exploring the Orient from Within," likewise, characterizes the novel as a "meta-form" traversing disciplinary boundaries and effortlessly navigating the boundaries separating history and fiction (1). In contrast to these readings of the trilogy that extol Ghosh's *River of Smoke* for its exploration of hybridity, Paul Stasi's brilliant essay "Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* and the Question of Postcolonial Modernism" discusses how the first volume of the trilogy allows the capitalist *longue durée* to emerge on the surface by establishing a link between the past and the contemporary moment. He elegantly describes how the neoliberal present casts its shadow on the surface of the past by projecting on the narrative canvas of *Sea of Poppies* the "similarities between our own moment and that of an emergent modernism" (326).

The reluctance of postcolonial academics to address the conjuncture between capital and aesthetic forms can be construed as the discipline's inability to free itself from its liberal bias. The general lack of interest among the practitioners of postcolonial studies to address the question of capital was pointed out by a host of thinkers on the left, most notably by Aijaz Ahmad, Arif Dirlik, and E. San Juan Jr., in the 1990s, during the heydays of postcolonialism, and by Vivek Chibber, more recently. Chibber notes how postcolonialism emerged to become dominant as an academic discipline at a moment when working class politics and socialist states in different parts of the world were being upended by the forces of the market capitalism (2). Despite postcolonialism's pedigree of left politics – Edward Said, the discipline's most eminent figure, mentions in the "Afterword" of *Orientalism* that thinkers such as "Anwar Abdel Malek, Samir Amin, and C. L. R. James" were the forerunners of postcolonialism (349) – it began, at the turn of the century, to quickly shed its radical politics and moved to incorporate the issues that appealed to the *fin de siècle* "cultural turn" of theory (Chibber 1). Sumit Sarker, a prominent member of the Subaltern Studies group, which itself represents one of the most influential voices within the postcolonial tradition, has bewailed the group's gradual move away from its Marxist/Gramscian pedigree to embrace Foucauldian discourse analysis theory (300). To Sarker, such a distancing marks the group's domestication within the metropolitan postmodernist circles (300-301). Gayatri Spivak, the academic movement's other figurehead, categorically points towards what she sees as postcolonial theory's oversight, explaining how the fetishistic retreat into colonial discourse analysis in the era of "financialization of the globe" has been a sign of the diasporic postcolonial academic's complicit participation in the process (3).

Mostly articulated in the late 1990s, when neoliberal economic policies and a monetized culture began to flex muscles in academic institutions, these critiques blurt out deep anxieties about postcolonial studies' capitulation to neoliberal capital. They also point towards the conjuncture between the academic postmodernism and cosmopolitan liberal worldviews. This essay has tried to demonstrate through short textual readings of Upadhyay and Ghosh that radical critique of contemporary

hegemonic practices does not require one to commit to the theories of subjectivity to explain what is wrong about today's world. Nor is there any urgent necessity to sidestep class oppression to draw attention to hybrid formations and postmodern postures. The idea that motivates these readings is that there is a genuine need to re-establish the bond between anti-capitalist politics and aesthetic/critical pursuits. Literary studies' failure to engage theoretically and textually with the struggles of the majority of the people marks its alienation from the ordinary folks it alludes to every now and then. One of the objectives of this paper has been to establish that it is possible to bridge the gap between aesthetic readings and political/economic realities. The aesthetic itself is political. Social, political, ideological, and economic relations are already present in the text because the writer's, the text's, and the critic's worlds are shaped by those relations; however desperate one may be to run away from them, one cannot ignore, let alone escape, the traces of historical conditioning. Indeed, the desire to escape the processes of historical determinations by willfully disengaging from the sites of struggle more forcefully establishes the presence of socio-economic inscription in the author and the text. Hence the usefulness of allegoresis. In a world conditioned by neoliberal policies and capitalist relations, cultural and aesthetic productions are bound to bear the symptoms of these conditionings; it is also only expected that the hegemonic ideas will conceal themselves and erase the trails of their normalization within institutions and epistemological practices. It is here that an allegorical reading proves itself useful, for to do so is to draw out to the surface what the historical dominant tries to inter and conceal.

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