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**RACE, CLASS AND EMPIRE**

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Keynote speech to the Society for Socialist Studies  
2011 Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities

## **AMERICAN EMPIRE, CAPITALIST CRISIS AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH**

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### **Keywords**

American empire; capitalist crisis; foreign direct investment; global south;  
underdevelopment

The vital role the Society of Socialist Studies always plays at the annual Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities has been even further enhanced by its “Continental Shifts: Divisions and Solidarities” theme at the 2011 meetings. And insofar as this encourages the rethinking of old paradigms in light of the changing geography of the global political economy, I would like to suggest we start with the way old theories of imperialism and underdevelopment in particular may have occluded more than they clarified about how global capitalism has taken shape, and also how their lingering effects may still be occluding many of the key strategic questions that socialists ought to be addressing today.

The classical theory of inter-imperial rivalry - conceived in the pre-World War One era to understand the export of capital and the rush for colonies amid the emergence of ‘finance capital’ – increasingly got in the way of understanding the role and nature of the American empire in the making of global capitalism. As Sam Gindin and I have developed the argument over the better part of the past decade,<sup>1</sup> the old capitalist empires of Europe and Japan were penetrated and incorporated by the US informal empire after World War Two. This involved a certain ‘imperialism by invitation’ – some called this their ‘Canadianization’ – whereby the linkages among the advanced capitalist states

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<sup>1</sup> See our *The Making of Global Capitalism*, New York: Verso, forthcoming 2012, on which this talk is substantially based.

became denser and stronger than the ties with their (increasingly ex-) colonies in the South. The American state underwrote the industrial reconstruction of Europe and Japan, and became the recipient of their burgeoning manufacturing exports. It also laid the grounds for US multinational corporations expansion and the creation of the Eurodollar markets, so that by the early 1960s twice as much US FDI went to Europe as to Latin America, reversing the historical pattern. Amid the twin pressures of the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates and the domestic class contradictions to which Keynesian policies and near full employment gave rise by the 1970s, expectations of a decline of both the dollar and of US hegemony became widely heard, and this was seen as guaranteeing the reemergence of political rivalry among the advanced capitalist states. But this failed to appreciate the significance of the growing economic interpenetration and the dense networks of institutional collaboration among the advanced capitalist states. Despite the so-called 'varieties of capitalism' that were seen as differentiating these states, there was a common turn by the early 1980s to a more or less gradual embrace of neoliberalism alongside a further spread of American financial, corporate and legal practices.

The American empire's post-war relationship with the global south was very different. The global division of labour coming out of WWII was rigid and clear: manufacturing was largely concentrated in the former imperial countries and resource extraction in their dependencies. The breaking down of the old imperial order and the emergence of new nation states did not in itself overcome but rather continued to reproduce the old global division of labour through more informal means, punctuated by repeated coercive interventions against economic nationalist, let alone explicitly Communist, political forces in the 'third world'. It was in this context that the thesis of the development of underdevelopment caught on. A certain reluctant accommodation by the US in the 1950s to Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) gave way by the 1960s to its promotion of export-oriented capitalist development, but this occurred just as a rising tide of economic nationalism as well as rising commodity prices was emanating from the global south. This culminated in the UN General Assembly's overwhelming vote in 1974 to adopt an Economic Charter which asserted the right of states to "nationalize, expropriate or transfer ownership of foreign property." Yet, as an internal US Treasury document noted in 1975, since developing state representatives were also coming down to Wall Street to either invest or borrow recycled petrodollars, and were anxious to display their 'reasonableness' as they did so, the bankers were already learning to 'discount the rhetoric'.

Long before the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the thesis of the development of underdevelopment had come to look as threadbare as the old theory of inter-imperial rivalry. This was due to the integration, often through the crucible of economic crisis, of so many states in the global south into the circuits of global capitalist production as well as finance over the last quarter of the century. By 2000, manufacturing as a portion of



GDP was actually higher in the developing countries (23 per cent) than in the developed ones (18 per cent). The shift to export-led manufacturing production involved not only a transformation in the international division of labour but also the reconfiguration of social relations in one country after another, as their capitalist classes became more and more linked to international capital accumulation, and the spatial and social effects of the restructuring of production gave rise to a massive expansion of the proletariat. Combined with the growing administrative and technological capacity of the MNCs to take advantage of local conditions like cheaper and abundant labour supplies, this opened the door to significant manufacturing taking place within a great many developing countries, even in such technologically-advanced sectors as electronics, transportation, and machinery. This did not mean, however, that global hierarchies did not persist, as many strategic activities (research and development, engineering, and capital intensive high valued-added production) were still highly concentrated in the advanced capitalist countries. And even at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 90 per cent of all financial assets, 85 per cent of all FDI outflows and two-thirds of inflows, 65 per cent of world GDP, and almost 70 per cent of global exports of manufactured goods was still accounted for by the advanced capitalist countries. But this continued dominance increasingly reflected their active role and growing stake in the capitalist development of the global south.

As MNCs and international bankers picked and chose where to go, some regions, especially large parts of Africa, were left out, even as in other regions more and more states did become more and more integrated into the dynamics of global capitalism. And within each region the process was always uneven, according to the nature of the state and class alignments in individual countries and the way in which the integration was fostered (or occasionally blocked) by the actions of the advanced capitalist states. The recycling of petrodollars had left Latin American states more subject than ever to crises generated in the North American imperial heartland, as was dramatically revealed when they became the unintended casualty of the high interest rates generated by US Federal Reserve's domestic anti-inflation policy. The so-called 'Volcker shock' that spanned the Carter and Reagan administrations not only was the crucial background condition for policies that broke the back of trade unionism at home, it also turned out to have the same effect on economic nationalism abroad. The US Federal Reserve and Treasury developed a comprehensive strategy that radically expanded the superintendence of interbank repayment risk, while at the same time ensuring that the strict lending conditionality the IMF attached to its loans required long-term structural adjustment programs designed to protect and guarantee financial assets through the economic and political liberalization of each recipient state. Latin America's notorious 'lost decade' of the 1980s involved a 9 per cent fall in GDP per capita alongside unprecedented increases in class inequality. But part and parcel of this was the change that domestic capitalist classes were undergoing themselves. Ruling class families embraced the opportunities opened up by neoliberal globalization as they sent their sons off to the Harvard Business

School, and as they shifted away from reliance on domestic markets and turned to foreign contracts, capital and outsourcing, while accepting the loss of the old tariff protections and price supports as the 'bitter medicine' necessary to bring their agricultural and manufacturing sectors into a 'competitive position.'

Similar trends were clearly visible in other former stalwarts of ISI such as India and Turkey where business groups came to see the system of internal controls and artificial monopolies as an obstacle to their own expansion. Hopes began to grow that other states might follow in the tracks of South Korea whose export-led industrialization became the beacon of capitalist developmental success, as measured by the growth of manufacturing products as a proportion of South Korea's exports from 18 per cent in 1962 to 77 percent by 1970 and 90 per cent by 1980. Although the preferences given to South Korea by the American state for geostrategic reasons had been key to this - allowing it both currency undervaluation and asymmetric access to US markets - the so-called 'Korean model' was increasingly emulated through the 1970s by other states in East Asia like Malaysia, Thailand and Philippines, and by the end of the decade by the new Chinese Communist leadership. Meanwhile, the lending strategies of Western banks, which combined with the sclerosis of 'actually existing socialism' had already turned Poland, Yugoslavia and Hungary, among other Communist states, into sizable debtor states during the 1970s, presaged the grand opening to capital accumulation once Gorbachev's 'revolution from above' (naively emulating Western European social democratic 'mixed economies' just as they were themselves engaged in expanding capitalist markets) opened the doors to Eastern Europe's stampede to capitalism by the end of the 1980s. And even in those regions where the political relationship with the American empire became ever more fraught (as in the Middle East with Iran and Iraq) there was still nothing like an economic rupture. Expropriations of foreign capital largely became a thing of the past. Having already declined from a global total of 83 in 1975 to 17 in 1979, they fell to 5 in 1980, 4 in 1981, 1 in 1982, 3 in 1983, one each year from 1984 to 1986 - and zero for the rest of the decade.

The initiation by the US in 1977 of a bilateral investment treaty program was all about firmly establishing in international law "the principle that the expropriation of foreign investment was unlawful unless accompanied by prompt adequate and effective compensation." This program was carefully designed to establish codified state commitments to specific standards of investment protection, and binding 'depoliticized' quasi-judicial dispute resolutions procedures. This became the basis for BITs with ten developing states already strongly tied to the US, but it was only after the central elements of this model were incorporated in the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement that the US BIT program really took off. And by the time NAFTA was in place by mid-decade, no less than 27 more US BITs had been signed with other countries (10 more were signed by 2005). It was the guarantees they provided against expropriation of capital, twenty years after General Assembly's adoption of its Economic Charter of Economic Rights and

Duties of States, which were now ‘greasing the wheels’ of global capitalism, along with the more than 700 regulatory changes states made between 1990 and 1997 that were favourable to foreign investment. It was hardly surprising in this context that US law firms, which tripled their number offices in Europe and Japan between 1985 and 1999, opened new offices in the rest of the world at an even greater rate.

This was part and parcel of a much broader concern with fashioning the political and legal frameworks through which such a diverse array of states could be integrated into international capital accumulation. This was most clearly articulated in the 1997 World Development Report during Joe Stiglitz’s tenure as Chief Economist at the World Bank, which issued a call - much in tune with Tony Blair’s articulation of the ‘third way’ at the time - for transcending ‘the sterile debate of state and market’. This involved a certain social democratization of globalization rhetoric, especially by speaking in terms of ‘state effectiveness’ in developing the kind of public rules and institutions that ‘allow markets to flourish’. What was being recognized here was that far from the globalization of production and finance ‘disembedding’ markets from society, it was the ways in which capitalist ‘laws of value’ were embodied in ‘rules of law’ that made possible the further proliferation and spatial expansion of markets. Yet globalization was all along intimately connected with legislative and administrative changes to deepen and extend market competition, including extensive treaties and coordination among states to this end. The more capital became internationalized, the more states became concerned to fashion regulatory regimes oriented to facilitating the rapid growth of international trade and foreign investment.

All this cannot properly be understood as merely an external imposition of ‘structural adjustment’ on the states of the global south. It was every bit as much the product of powerful domestic actors seeking to take advantage of access to international capital and foreign trade, even as this at the same time intensified the contradictions associated with becoming more and more exposed to the volatility of global finance, as was evidenced in the no less than 72 financial crises in the 1990s. In fact, just as the US Treasury, together with the Federal Reserve, was in the forefront of advancing the rules of law for allowing global financial markets to flourish, so did the constantly chaotic and intermittently crisis-prone nature of these markets increase the scope, and the demand, for global discretionary state intervention. The US Treasury explicitly took the view that its key role was one of ‘failure containment’ rather than ‘failure prevention’. Larry Summers drew an analogy with jet aircraft:

Global financial markets let us go where we want more quickly, more comfortably and most of the time more safely than was possible before. But the crashes, when they occur, are that much more spectacular.... We need systems that can handle failure because until the system is safe for

failure, we will not be able to count on success (*Financial Times* March 11, 1998).

In April 1998, in the wake of the Asian financial crisis, the US Treasury convened a meeting in Washington, D.C. of the finance ministers and central bank governors of what would soon become the G20. The immediate outcome of this was the creation of three working groups of representatives from various states - supported by US Treasury staff - which produced reports on what needed to be done to strengthen the international financial system in terms of 'enhancing transparency and accountability', 'strengthening financial systems' and 'managing international financial crises'. It was taken for granted that all this would be modeled on Anglo-American 'best practice' in regulation and supervision, not least because so much of the world's financial regulatory expertise was concentrated in the US and UK. What was meant by the 'new international financial architecture' was a series of institutional reforms, primarily involving changes to the states and financial systems of 'emerging market' countries, which would allow investors to assess risks more adequately and help the IMF address crises more expeditiously. But by the time the Treasury's reports were ready, the failure of Long Term Capital Management and the near-death crisis it had already sparked on Wall Street in the late summer of 1998 had already shown that Anglo-American 'best practices' were hardly suited to preventing crises. What was especially notable about the 1997-1998 financial crises was the scale of the US Treasury's direct interventions, and their coordination with the other G7 states and financial institutions, that served to contain them.

Most significant for the continued extension of global capitalism was what developing states did *not* do in the wake of the Asian contagion with regard to restricting capital flows. With strong US as well as EU encouragement, the liberalization of capital markets continued into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, so much so that 90 per cent of the almost two thousand changes states made to regulations governing foreign investment in the ten years after 1997 were favourable to it. This further facilitated foreign direct investment, so much so that it reached 32 per cent of global GDP by 2007 (from 6.5 per cent in 1980); and while only one quarter of this flow went to the global south, it was accompanied by a growth of local bond, securities and consumer credit markets that increasingly resembling those in advanced capitalist countries. Apart from strengthening the links between domestic and foreign capitalists, this also involved bringing local middle and even working classes into the financial system as never before. Financialization in the global south also facilitated the outward flow of capital, coming not only from the foreign banks operating there, but also from local capitalists who were expanding their horizons beyond their home base. Of course, the largest capital outflows from the developing world took the form of purchases of US Treasuries. But this was not simply a costly transfer of wealth from the global south to the north; it was a necessary condition of successful export-oriented capitalist development, as central bank reserves served as an

insurance policy against future runs on local currencies, as well as a means of maintaining exchange rates relative to the dollar.

It was now not only South Korea that had manufacturing goods account for over 90 per cent of its exports: so did Mexico, with Turkey (81 per cent), India (78 per cent) and Brazil (60 per cent) not far behind. Moreover, far from the shift of productive activity from the developed core leading to a fragmentation of production, it was part and parcel of a much greater global coordination of production through a broad range of subsidiaries, suppliers and distributors. Nowhere was this clearer than with the integration into global capitalism of China, which even before its accession to the WTO in 2001 had manufacturing goods account for almost 90 per cent of its exports. The crucial lesson the Chinese government drew from the Asian crisis was that in a world of such massive capital mobility, a run on the currency would overwhelm capital controls if the country's central bank was not also holding massive dollar reserves. And especially with China's admission to the WTO in 2001, it was positioned to secure the massive export surpluses that enabled these reserves to be built up. Before it was admitted to the WTO, China's total trade (exports and imports) as a share of GDP was, at 43 per cent, well below the average for low and middle-income countries; by 2007, its 68 per cent trade-to-GDP ratio was well above the average of those other countries. By this time, too, China's average tariffs on industrial products were under 9 per cent, compared with 27 per cent in Brazil, 31 per cent in Argentina, 32 per cent in India and 37 per cent in Indonesia. The surge of capital investment after China's entry to the WTO came from MNCs that wanted to use China as an export platform. But many were also interested in China's domestic market, with multinationals chomping at the bit to invest, not only in the retail trade but also in transportation and telecommunications as well as a variety of business services. That said, even China's rapid capitalist development did not take place at the expense of the American empire as much as reflect the spread and deepening of capitalist social relations on a global scale.

One measure of the American stake in the making of global capitalism was that total US trade (exports plus imports) equalled 30 per cent of GDP in 2007, whereas it had still been under 10 per cent in the 1960s. Despite all the anxiety on the one hand and *schadenfreude* on the other, about the declining productive capacity of American capital, US corporations were able to take special advantage of the open world they had been so central to creating. The measure of this success was not the proportion of global production that took place in the US (this had clearly fallen over time as a by-product of the successful promotion of capitalist social relations abroad), but rather the *strategic* importance of American capital in the global economy. The US accounted for between 60 and 75 per cent of all OECD research and development expenditures in such high tech sectors as aerospace and scientific instruments, and 45 to 50 per cent in electronics and pharmaceuticals. While US manufacturing job losses were indeed heavy after 2001 (especially in auto and electrical appliances as well as the long-suffering textile and

apparel sector), the US was still producing more manufactured goods than all the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China) combined. Rather than taking the US trade deficit as a measure of industrial decline, it is instructive to consider US exports and imports separately. The growth in the volume of US exports in the two decades up to 2007 – even as the trade deficit accumulated - averaged a very robust 6.6 per cent, leaving it only marginally behind Germany and China, the world's largest exporters; it was the relative expansion of US imports that was the source of the growing deficit.

The deficit, in other words, primarily came from increased US consumption, which grew faster than in other advanced capitalist countries. This was partly linked to the very high income growth and conspicuous consumption of the most well-off segments of the US population, but it was also due to much faster population growth than in Europe and Japan, the longer hours worked by much of the US population and, very significantly, their increased consumer debt. It was in good part US consumer spending that maintained effective global demand into the first years of 21<sup>st</sup> century. This was supported by the international flow of funds into the US despite the size of the trade deficit. It was largely the failure to take sufficient account of the dominance and integration of American production and finance that led to the misreading of what US trade deficits might signal by way of undermining the value of the dollar and its place as the world currency. The increasingly integrated manufacturing networks of American MNCs on a global scale certainly accelerated the shift in US employment from manufacturing into lower-paid consumer and business services, but this reflected the strengthening rather than weakening of American capital, while the continued inflow of foreign capital to the US in spite of the trade deficits also confirmed the strength of the dollar. It was the balance of capital flows more than the balance of trade that now determined the dollar's value.

It is in this context that the crisis that began in 2007 needs to be placed. It was a crisis 'made in America' that had global ramifications but it was not the outcome of the declining profitability of manufacturing corporations or the size of the US trade deficit. By 2006, the US economy had experienced three years of over 3 per cent growth in real terms, with exports rising by over 8 per cent, and unemployment falling from 6 to 4.6 per cent. Annual productivity growth had continued to increase right through the first six years of the new millennium: its 2.8 per cent average rate of growth matched US levels during the postwar 'golden age'. Corporate profits were at a peak and corporate balance sheets were exceptionally strong. The American crisis that started in 2007 was not caused by either 'overaccumulation' or 'external imbalances' but rather by the volatility of capitalist finance. It was triggered in the seemingly mundane sector of mortgage credit, where finance mediated working class access to housing, and then quickly spread into the more rarefied world of interbank lending and corporate commercial paper markets. It was because US finance had become so integral to the functioning of 21<sup>st</sup> century global capitalism that the ultimate impact of this crisis throughout the international economy

was so profound. Securitized mortgage credit served to tie together high finance and low finance: it came to play an important role in the super-leveraging and integration of global financial markets, just as it had become a key element in consumer demand and credit.

Constrained in what they could get from their labour, US workers were drawn into the logic of asset inflation not only via the investment of their pension funds, but also via the one major asset they held (or could aspire to hold) in their own hands – their family homes. As wages stagnated and the income gap widened, growing segments of the home-owning working class sustained their consumption through taking out second mortgages on the bubble-inflated values of their homes. The rising demand for home ownership at lower income levels had been encouraged by government support for meeting housing needs through financial markets backed by mortgage tax deductions. Already well under way during the 1990s, the trend was given a great fillip not only by the Fed's low interest rates but also by the Bush administration's determination to expand the scope for 'entrepreneurs' in the business of selling home mortgages, although it was mainly long-established private mortgage companies that benefited from this. How common not just lax lending practices but in fact predatory lending became can be seen from the fact that between 2000 and 2007 in Florida alone 10,500 people were licensed as mortgage brokers who had criminal records (including over 4,000 who had previously been convicted of 'fraud, bank robbery, racketeering and extortion'). But no less responsible than those brokers who were essentially licensed loan sharks were the mainstream financial institutions for which the brokers were the middlemen, and which actually secured the loans for home purchases in areas previously 'redlined' by the banks. The whole edifice was connected to the American state itself via the old federal housing corporations, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which although they had been privatized three decades earlier had remained government-sponsored enterprises (GSEs). Given the implicit guarantee the federal government gave to GSE securities, financial markets regarded them to be virtually as safe as Treasury bonds while yielding a higher return – no small factor at a time when real interest rates on Treasuries were effectively negative.

The extent of the interpenetration of US and foreign financial markets was especially marked in the years leading up to the 2007 financial crisis. Yet, as foreign financial markets became intertwined with US financial markets, so were they subject to their smouldering contradictions. The way the crisis spread showed that predictions that it would lead to delinking from an American-led global capitalism were profoundly mistaken. If anything it sparked concerns that US domestic preoccupations amid the crisis might lead it to neglect the interests of foreign bourgeoisies that had come to rely on the American state. The extent to which capitalists abroad continued to look to the US to help them restructure their own states was seen when Obama visited India in November 2010, accompanied by the largest ever entourage of US businessmen on such a trip, and told an assembly of Mumbai capitalists: "We don't simply welcome your rise, we ardently

support it. We want to invest in it” (*Sunday Hindustan Times*, 7 November 2010). The importance of this to Indian capitalists was made very clear by the co-founder of India’s National Association of Software and Service Companies, who recalled that the US ‘was the one who said to us... “Go for free trade and open markets.”’ This was crucial to his industry’s success in “pushing our government to open our markets for American imports, 100 percent foreign ownership of companies and tough copyright laws when it wasn’t fashionable.” Stressing the continuing importance of the US in overcoming ‘the socialist/protectionists among India’s bureaucrats’, he emphasized that “We don’t want America to lose self-confidence... there is nobody else to take that leadership. Do we want China as the world’s moral leader? No. We desperately want America to succeed” (*New York Times*, 31 October 2010).

That said, the growing difficulties of implementing adequate measures for ‘failure containment’, let alone ‘failure prevention’ became very clear as the global economic crisis spread and persisted. Yet unlike the 1930s this has not been due to a breakdown of cooperation among capitalist states. Although the G20 was born out of the contradictions that produced the crisis at the end the 1990s, it had taken a decade of further global integration of finance and production, and another even more serious global financial crisis before it was given much prominence - beginning with the leaders of the world’s twenty leading capitalist states being called to Washington by George Bush in the ominous autumn of 2008. This facilitated the coordination of a temporary global stimulus in 2009 which put a floor beneath the deepest economic collapse since the 1930s; but more significant was the long-term pledge made by the heads of states to keep globalization going. As the G20 Toronto Summit communiqué of June 2010 proclaimed: “While the global economic crisis led to the sharpest decline of trade in more than seventy years, G20 countries chose to keep markets open to the opportunities that trade and investment offer. It was the right choice.” The leaders renewed their “commitment to refrain from raising barriers or imposing new barriers to investment or trade in goods and services... [and] minimize any negative impact on trade and investment of our domestic policy actions, including fiscal policy and action to support the financial sector.” But capitalist solidarity itself could not resolve the crisis of a finance-led global economy, where the orthodoxy of insisting on austerity - both to ensure that states pay their bond holders and to maintain vigilance against inflation - reinforced the stagnationist tendencies of under-consumption that comes with diminished consumer credit available to sustain effective demand.

The severity and extent of the current crisis has once again exposed how far the world’s states are enveloped in capitalism’s irrationalities. Even when states stimulated their economies in 2009, they felt impelled at the same time to lay off public sector workers or cut back their pay, and to demand that bailed-out companies do the same. And while blaming volatile derivatives market for causing the crisis, states promoted derivative trading in carbon credits in the hope that a ‘green capitalism’ would provide a



two-for-one remedy for the global climate and economic crises. In the context of such readily visible irrationalities, a strong case can be made that to really save jobs and the communities that depend on them in a way that converts production and distribution to conform with ecologically sustainable priorities, there needs to be a break with the logic of capitalist markets rather than the use of state institutions to reinforce them, beginning by finance into a public utility, and then proceeding to restructure its purpose and functioning as part of a system of democratic economic planning. This would itself require profound changes in class and state structures, and new international solidarities would need to be forged to see this through. The new working class struggles that have attended this crisis, from the strike wave by Chinese workers to the rapid growth of the New Trade Union Initiative in India to the mobilizations in defense of public sector unions in Wisconsin and Ohio are only a small foretaste of what would be needed to lay the foundation for this - not least through the development of new socialist political parties that would be oriented to a radical restructuring of states on all continents, so as to really make them substantively democratic in ways that capitalist states can never be.

Interview

## **SUNERA THOBANI: A VERY PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL**

### **Keywords**

colonialism, feminism, imperialism, socialism, war

Sunera Thobani is a formidable activist and scholar. Through decades of activism and scholarship, spanning the globe from East Africa to Canada, via England and the United States, she has developed and applied a critical race feminist and anti-imperialist analysis of world capitalism and colonialism. As an activist, she is probably best known as the former President of the National Action Committee on the Status of Woman, Canada's then largest feminist organization. During her tenure she sought to make anti-racism central to feminist struggles. In her academic work, she has developed critical race theory to cast new light on the dynamics around globalization, violence against women, reproductive technologies, social programmes, immigration and nation-building, and colonialism and war. In her research and teaching, she consistently combines her scholarship with community activism, including through her work at the Centre for Race, Autobiography, Gender and Age (RAGA), which she directs and which features active collaboration among community activists and university scholars and students. She is a founding member of the Canada-wide alliance, Researchers and Academics of Colour for Equity.

Sunera Thobani was educated at universities in England, the United States and received her PhD from Simon Fraser University in Canada. She is the author of numerous articles, both scholarly and for a more general public. Arguably her most well-known intervention is "War Frenzy," a 2001 speech calling on women across Canada to oppose the Canadian support of the American-led invasion into Afghanistan. This intervention is now reproduced in a book of *Great Canadian Speeches* (2004). A frequently invited speaker in both her academic and activist capacities, she has addressed audiences across Canada, as well as in Austria, China, Denmark, England, India, Malaysia, Mexico, the Palestine Occupied Territories, the Philippines, and the United States. Sunera Thobani has co-edited several books on critical race theory and feminism and is the author of the widely-read *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (2007). Her forthcoming Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) supported book is

tentatively titled, *Media Representations of Gender and the War on Terror*.

This interview was conducted by William K. Carroll in Vancouver, British Columbia in February 2012.

**WC:** The first question I have for you, Sunera: You're originally from Tanzania and your post secondary education was in London England, Denver Colorado and Vancouver, British Columbia, covering all three of the anglo-American liberal democracies. How did those cross-cultural passages shape your perspectives as an activist-intellectual?

**ST:** Well, these passages gave me an appreciation for the importance of context, of being very clear about understanding the space that you're in, the environment that you're in and the very different -- even though in fundamental ways, very similar -- social relations in each location and the ways in which they are structured. So they gave me a deep appreciation for context. Moving to all of these places as an immigrant also gave me an appreciation for the importance of communities, of support networks. But the main impact was to give me an international, a global, perspective on issues rather than thinking only within the confines of a narrow nation-state space -- to really appreciate how the commonalities that existed at the international level also existed at the national level, yet had their differences.

I'm very grateful for this internationalist outlook. In many ways of course, it is a very painful experience to be dislocated and to have to relocate so many times and leave members of the family behind at all these various places. So the learning comes with its costs as well. But it gave me this notion of a world much larger than my community, than the country I lived in and my politics were very profoundly shaped by this experience.

**WC:** Is there any sense of the north-south, the contrast, experienced through these cross-cultural passages?

**ST:** Very much so, yes. Moving from East Africa to England, for example, was a huge shock, also very traumatic in different ways, especially coming face to face with the incredible inequalities that exist in both sites. But every time I travel to any country in the global south there is a feeling of being home, of familiarity and recognition, despite all the problems and recognizing the intense inequalities. There is a level at which *that* seems much more real than living in the global north, where certainly, poverty exists -- there is no question about it and it is very wretched kind of poverty -- but it's not quite as intensely visible and localized. So in all the countries in which I have lived have been so different, but the north/south divide is clearly very much there.

At the same time, all these dislocations and relocations gave me an appreciation, even within the north, of the existence of the south, particularly among immigrant

communities, especially undocumented migrants. I have been very closely and personally connected to how they survive in this environment. Of course, coming here to Canada has also meant seeing and experiencing what it means to live in a settler colonial society and learning about the status of Indigenous peoples here.... So, it has given me an understanding of the global divisions between the north and south, while recognizing that the south very much exists in the north. And when I travel to, say, East Africa, I see also how the north exists in the south.

**WC:** You arrived in Canada in 1989. Just four years later, you were elected president of the National Action Committee (NAC) on the Status of Women, the first woman of colour to hold that office. That in itself seems remarkable: to arrive in a country and four years later be elected president of its major feminist movement organization. Looking back on it, how would you tell that story?

**ST:** I would tell it quite differently, actually, because the way that it gets told in Canada, is, “You arrived here, four years later you are a president of this organization....”

**WC:** (laughs). Like I just said.

**ST:** What it erases is my history of being an activist since the ‘80s, for over a decade before I come to Canada: I was an activist in the anti-racist movement, in third world solidarity movements, in the anti-apartheid movement, and in the women’s movement as well, working with South Asian women’s organizations in the U(nited) K(ingdom). In the U(nited) S(tates), when I was a graduate student, I was very much connected to the anti-nuclear, peace, Palestinian solidarity movements...When I was living in England, as a student, I actually went and spent a year working as a volunteer in Palestine. All of the experience and expertise that I had gained in doing this kind of work got erased in Canada when I became the President of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. It was as if suddenly everybody was asking, “Who is this outsider, come from nowhere and wants to be...?” That is one part of my experience as an activist that the question erases. The other part of my experience that it also erases is my activism in Canada: When I came to Vancouver, immediately I joined almost every women’s organization in the city. I wanted to find out what the political environment was like, what women’s movement politics were like here, what issues they focused on, and through that work, of course, I very quickly became aware of NAC. And I started being involved in NAC, very early -- as soon as I came to Canada, in fact. Through that, I became connected to women of colour activists in Ontario, in other parts of the country, in Quebec. So I was already participating in developing those networks before I became President of NAC.

The decision for me to run as the president of NAC was not a personal decision; it was a collective decision that was made by the Women of Colour caucus within NAC. So the existence of that really strong caucus also gets erased in the story of “me arriving and four years later I’m president”, because, of course, the history of women of colour organizing within NAC is much, much older. The Women of Colour caucus made the decision that it was time that we should run a candidate for the president. We looked at all everybody that was there who could carry the position, who could win an election, because all of us were preparing for an election. And even though there were women with much more experience than me in Canada, they were not willing to be nominated. It came down to just a couple of women in the Women of Colour caucus and most of them were hesitant, because they didn’t have a national presence. And through my work, particularly against the opening of the sex selection clinic here in Vancouver and the Royal Commission on Reproductive Technologies, the work I’d done around violence against women when the Blue Ribbon Panel was appointed by the government.... I had somewhat of a national presence because of the media attention that I had received. And as I say, I had built networks across the country, so I knew that if I was to run in an election, I stood a very good chance of winning.

**WC:** As NAC President, you followed Judy Rebick, herself a transformative leader. Judy was well known as an ardent socialist-feminist; you brought a politics of anti-racism to the women’s movement. What was the relation between these two moments of political development, what were the challenges for you and what do you see as the legacy of your time as President of NAC?

**ST:** I think Judy’s socialist-feminist commitments made her aware and open to addressing issues of race, and for me, coming from an anti-racist perspective, I knew that race politics *are* class politics. If we look at the global international division of labour it becomes very hard to make the case that anti-racist struggles are not also class politics, and this is also the case if we look at the class composition of immigrant communities...So for me there never was a contradiction between race politics and class politics. In fact, for me, class politics alone didn’t go far enough and were not adequate to the task of transforming society in the way that they wanted to, if they did not take race politics into consideration. So really there was no disagreement between Judy and myself about the importance of looking at the intersection of gender, race and class. I think Judy had a clear understanding that that was very important and for me, class was very central to my anti-racist politics. One of the things that I am most pleased about was that during my tenure NAC actually organized the cross-Canada Women’s March Against Poverty. I couldn’t see poverty as not being a race issue: it clearly was. So, there really wasn’t much of a contradiction.

The biggest challenges really came from the investments in whiteness that many of the activists inside NAC continued to have. I think I had in some way underestimated the strength of those liberal feminist networks within NAC and in the feminist movement generally. Certainly, Judy was able to articulate a politics that I was much more comfortable with and I did think that she represented, or at least her politics represented, a majority position within NAC -- and I found out that really wasn't the case. So the challenge was the investment in whiteness that was quite deep in the women's movement. Many of the women of colour activists that I was working with at that time, who had been in NAC longer, had also thought that the investments were much lesser than they turned out to be.

I think another big challenge was that with Judy's presidency, NAC came as far as it could go in terms of electoral politics. We organized during the Referendum on the Charlottetown Accords to say 'No' and Judy led that campaign very well, very eloquently, very powerfully and of course, the referendum didn't pass. But in that, NAC came as far as the women's movement could go in terms of electoral politics, especially at a time when social democratic parties were turning to the right much more than anybody had expected. While all social movements were confronting these changed political priorities, inside NAC that became a really big question: so what do you do next? My response was to turn to building the movement from the ground up. There has to be a transformative vision that articulates a politics that goes beyond the issues within the space of electoral politics. Not that electoral politics are not important, they are, and the first campaign we organized was for the upcoming federal election, right after I was elected as president. But, for me, it was very important that we had a longer term vision. And as you know, NAC and the women's movement in Canada has been very state focussed, much more so than women's movements in other parts of the world. I did think that was a mistake.

**WC:** And, at one time, NAC was state funded.

**ST:** Exactly. It was state funded. I came from spaces where women's organizations were not funded by the state, and so the question always for me was: if a movement disappears when the funding disappears, what kind of movement is it anyway? So that was the question I tried to raise and of course, I tried to diversify NAC's fundraising. Not very successfully, I might add, because there was a great deal of resistance from within the organization. And I understood the position that NAC did important political work and that women are a constituency that are not fully represented within society. There is an argument to be made for government funding as a right of citizenship, as a right of participation --of women's participation within the polity. So I certainly recognized that argument and I think it is a very important one to make.

But I also knew that the way things were going, it wasn't going to be enough to keep making that argument. We had to think differently, creatively. For me, building coalitions on the ground, transforming feminist politics so that anti-racism was central, really highlighting the struggles of Indigenous women, doing a lot of alliance building with Indigenous women -- those were the things that I thought *would* bring about the lasting change, *would* actually help the women's movement develop a more transformative, anti-colonial politics in terms of Indigenous women's struggles. That is what I saw as the role that I could play in NAC.

**WC:** Since 1996, you have taught women's studies at Simon Fraser University (SFU) and from the year 2000, at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Yet before your term as NAC president, you taught at Evergreen State College in Washington, a liberal arts institution known for innovative and even radical pedagogy. What was Evergreen like when you were there in comparison with SFU and UBC and were there any things that you took from Evergreen for future reference in your teaching?

**ST:** Evergreen was a very, very different institution from SFU or UBC for that matter. Faculty there, at least the programmes that I was connected to, were very committed to issues of social justice. I must say I haven't found that in any Canadian university department! (Laughs). And the faculty were also committed to doing things differently, in their practice, not only in pedagogy in the classroom, but in terms of hierarchies within programmes, within departments, within the institution. Team-teaching was an important way for them to work. It allowed each faculty to bring their strengths, for faculty to learn from each other even as they were teaching. I miss that focus and that kind of integrative approach to teaching. We all claim to be interdisciplinary, which is important -- I certainly fight (laughs) to make sure that my work is recognized as interdisciplinary (it tends to be treated as 'activism'). But there is not much thinking in terms of, "How do we actually make interdisciplinarity real and how do we build a work environment and a work culture that promotes that kind of intellectual exchange?" So, for me Evergreen was a model where faculty actually engaged with each other intellectually in terms of their political commitments. Through the programmes, you got a sense of, not only are the students learning and benefiting from this process, but faculty are also doing so, and in many of the same ways that the students are. That for me was very exciting.

Overt commitment to social justice and overt commitment to thinking about teaching differently, evaluating students in a different way, in a more collaborative, respectful way... All of those things were important to me. Of course, that was not the case, unfortunately, at either SFU or at UBC. So it really helped me to develop my own ideas about my pedagogical practice and what kind of relationships I wanted to engage in

with students. And then, of course, at SFU my position was an endowed chair so I was a visiting scholar in a women's studies department, and at UBC it's a position in women's and gender studies. But these are both much more hierarchical institutions, much more invested in the elitism that universities tend to be invested in, much less tolerant and much less supportive of public intellectuals. They do not value activist scholarship, defining that as a liability rather than as a real asset and as an important thing for departments to value. So that has been very different to deal with. To be labelled an activist or a public intellectual is treated as a very negative thing, which for me is very hard, even now, to come to terms with.

**WC:** Let me ask you some questions about the 9/11, 2001 attacks on the United States. The cliché about 9/11 is that it changed everything. Yet, in the immediate wake of 9/11, you gave a speech just as the US, with its assembled allies, was beginning its bombing and invasion of Afghanistan. You stated, to quote from that speech: "US foreign policy is soaked in blood and other countries in the West, including, shamefully, Canada, cannot line up fast enough behind it. All want to sign up now as Americans and I think it is the responsibility of the women's movement to stop that, to fight against it". Yours was a brave and prophetic intervention. But that speech became a lightning rod for moral panic. You were widely vilified in the corporate media. My first question is: What did the reaction tell us about the organization of power and knowledge in this era of renewed imperialism? The second is: When you take such a bold, radical stance, speaking truth to power, putting yourself so far out of step with hegemonic politics, how do you cope -- how did you cope -- with the backlash personally?

**ST:** I'll take the first question first: What did it reveal? The first thing it revealed to me was how deeply embedded a kind of racial logic was both within the state and in social movements, including the women's movements, sadly to say. Throughout the 1990s we had struggled very hard against the restructuring of the welfare-state. We had worked to reveal the links between the right-wing anti-woman agenda and the right-wing anti-immigrant agenda. We had highlighted how immigrant women were at the intersection of these really ugly politics, on the basis of which we saw the rise of the Reform Party, for example. There was a public space where those perspectives could be articulated -- even in the corporate media, to some extent. Of course, the corporate media has never been friendly to those kinds of radical politics, but we had managed to shake up some of the discourses around Canadian nationhood, around racial politics, around the anti-immigrant agendas. The aftermath of 9/11 showed how fleeting that moment had been, how precarious that space had been and, more disappointingly, how little we had actually managed to change the women's movement in this country.



The intense Islamophobia that erupted right after the attacks was incredibly difficult to witness, especially the role that women activists played in fuelling that Islamophobia by giving it a gendered legitimacy, by focussing on the quote unquote “oppressed Muslim women” and by resuscitating old, discredited colonial constructs of the veil and of Muslim communities. It was a profound learning lesson for me about how fragile the changes had been that we had made through our anti-racist, feminist, radical politics. 9/11 revealed how quickly the discourse could be changed and how quickly the women’s movement could ally itself with the state and with the nation in global politics. So in a way, yes, 9/11 did change everything. But not quite in the way that the mainstream media presents the case.

The intense Islamophobia which has since then become much more institutionalized, much more integrated into public culture and public spaces, really did change things tremendously, in a profound and destructive way. The response from states, nations, women’s movements -- that has changed everything. The securitization, a racialized form of securitization, of the nation-state that has taken place, the militarization....All of the social justice movements have to think very carefully about the role that they have played in legitimizing some of that discourse and these changes, and they also have to think about where the points are at which they have tried to disrupt this discourse.

**WC:** How did you cope with the backlash, the personal attacks?

**ST:** It was an ugly moment. One of the ugliest in my life. It did take a huge cost both on me, and of course, my family. My mother was with me at that time, it was painful for her, and my daughter was very young at that time. Of course, I also had to deal with the announcement by the RCMP to the media that I was being investigated for a hate crime, I had to make sure that I was not vulnerable to a charge like that legally. I did have some support, which was gratifying and important. Some of my faculty colleagues did stand up clearly for me and they did support me in important ways. There was some level of public support. Not very much from the mainstream... but a lot from immigrant communities. I think it was the letters that many people wrote to the University and the media that saved my job because the corporate media, particularly in this city, was on a campaign to get me fired. When I look at the Vancouver Sun, for example, and their coverage, there was a very clear push to get me fired from my position -- I was untenured at that time. But there were also some journalists in the mainstream media who did try and change the discourse. One important intervention was reframing the issue as a matter of academic freedom. In the long term, it’s not where I would have chosen to take that speech but it was important for the people who did. So I did receive some support from unexpected

quarters, mainstream journalists. But very few. Not the feminist ones -- they wouldn't do anything.

**WC:** In that 9/11 speech and in subsequent writing, you've emphasized the links between racialization, including Islamophobia and imperialism, but also the ways in which liberal feminist discourse -- for instance, the suddenly urgent need to liberate Afghan women from patriarchal traditions through schooling -- can play an important ideological role in recruiting support. Can you speak more broadly about the legacy of liberal feminism for feminist politics in both global north and south?

**ST:** Liberal feminism has been a project of integrating women into global capitalist relations. I can't understand liberal feminism as anything other than that. I see it as very much part of the status quo. I recognize that historically liberal feminists had to struggle to get their own piece of the pie, but they are very happy to hang on to their piece of the pie! (Laughs). So I see liberal feminism as very much an integrative politics, of wanting to discipline women into existing systems and structures, reproduce the status quo. In terms of the other feminist traditions, after 9/11 it really was a shock to see how **much** they were also invested in many of these status quo politics. For example, I don't think that socialist feminists have done anything much to stand up to Islamophobia, I don't think postmodern feminists have done anything to confront Islamophobia. Instead, they have given legitimacy to the notion that this highly militarized, neoliberal state might have some feminist commitments at a global level in fighting Muslim men's alleged misogyny. They have given imperialist politics a feminist face and legitimized the claims that were being made by the state, like, "Canadians are in Afghanistan only so that women and girls can go to school." If every feminist activist in this country had taken a stance against it -- which they didn't --and I'm not saying that it would have stopped the invasion in Afghanistan, that it would have stopped the occupation. Clearly I don't think it would have. But that feminist acquiescence to Islamophobia, and sometimes even active feminist promotion of Islamophobia, managed to give the state legitimacy, give the War credibility, and also helped to mobilize public support for the War. So I do think that the politics of liberal feminisms are very harmful and very damaging, particularly to groups of women who are really marginalized in society and who experience the worse effects of the global capitalist system that we live under. But I think many of the other feminist traditions of whom we might have expected something better have not been much different. 9/11 and the war on terror has dealt anti-imperialism feminist politics a very strong blow -- and I would include anti-racist politics within that larger framework of anti-imperialist feminisms.

**WC:** We've been talking about imperialism, which is a critical concept that figures significantly in your work. This is a term that has borne multiple meanings and one that is sometimes dismissed as empty rhetoric or as having been superseded by post-imperial hybridity or the BRICs, the emergence of Brazil, Russia, India and China as global economic powers. What do you mean by imperialism and how does that understanding contribute to its continuing analytic value?

**ST:** I use both imperialism and colonialism centrally in my work. I use imperialism in the Marxist understanding of that term. It refers to what others call post-colonial societies, third world societies that actually did acquire national independence -- which turned out to be a very limited kind of independence. The global north or the previously colonizing powers continued to dominate their economies and those countries were integrated into a very unequal hierarchy within the global economy. So that's the sense in which I use imperialism. But I'm also very cognizant of how limited the Marxist definition of the term it is when we look at settler societies like Canada and the United States, where colonialism remains ongoing. There has been no process of decolonization of Indigenous peoples in this land, North America. So colonialism remains important to think through for contemporary politics. Of course, colonialism is central to how I think about race as well. The mutual constitution of colonality and racialization is central and I don't see colonialism as having been ended in any sense, even in the countries where national independence was achieved. So I use both colonialism and imperialism in a very unsatisfying and frustrating way.

But I do think that the moment we are living in right now is something different. We are seeing legitimizations of occupations and invasions, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in a way that many activists and intellectuals had thought was over. There was a sort of recognition that yes, the settler settlers were still shaped by ongoing colonialism, but the idea was that in the global south something had changed. The invasions and occupations in Afghanistan and Iraq showed how much colonality still remains a part of the agenda of globalization, of economic restructuring. So, I use both imperialism and colonialism very closely together in my own thinking and I also get frustrated at their inadequacy, really, in terms of capturing what is happening in the early 21st century. The nature of the state is changing and the war of terror has revealed that many, many things that intellectuals and activists had consigned to the past are re-emerging and taking centre stage in global politics...

**WC:** In your speech last September, "Reflections on the Tenth Anniversary of 9/11", you called attention to the complete lack of self-reflexivity on the part of mainstream media and political leaders commemorating 9/11. You also emphasized the emergence of a new imperial model that now includes supporting rebel groups and political forces in Arab

Spring countries that will thwart revolutionary change. You point to a convergence of left movements and parties in the West around a shared Islamophobia, targeting in particular, “bad Muslims” who resist US imperialists. This is all a pretty grim scenario, from a social justice perspective. As you observe and act within the developing situation, do you see any openings for anti-imperialist politics that might be transformative?

**ST:** Yes, I do see a possibility for an anti-imperialist politics that are clearly transformative. I mean if we look at what is happening in the “Arab Spring” clearly these are movements that are committed to a deeply transformative vision. There is no doubt about that. I think that the anti-war movements in the West have some kind of transformative politics. Also, for me however, race is one of the founding blocs of capitalism, of modernity, of the global order as we are experiencing it today, of questions of sovereignty, power, subjectivity and nation-state formation. Race is foundational to all of these phenomena and entities and structures and systems with which we live. If race doesn’t emerge as central in a transformative vision, if race is not addressed, it poses very serious limits to transformative politics. And when I say race, I think that Islamophobia is an articulation of race politics, it is a racialization of Muslims. So that when we talk about Muslims today we know that in practice the category doesn’t only apply to practicing Muslims. Instead, “Muslim” is used to apply to black and brown bodies. The young man who was shot by British security services in London was Brazilian but he was described as ‘Pakistani-looking’. So we know that the ways Islamophobia gets articulated the ways it actually targets black and brown bodies, for surveillance, for the harsh measures of the security state, means that Islamophobia is a discourse of racialization of our times.

If I look at the Middle East, at what is happening right now, if the relations between race and the global order are not addressed front and centre in politics, then I don’t think these movements are adequate to bringing about the transformative politics that people there want to bring about. When I looked at how what is happening in Egypt is being discussed here, a lot of left activists were very determined to label the Arab Spring as a class revolution -- and claim that the Muslim brotherhood might hijack it (laughs). That it *really* is only class politics that were being articulated on the streets. But these activists define the politics as such without engaging with the politics of the Muslim brotherhood, for example, or without understanding where that movement come from, or what was transformative and revolutionary about their vision. Without actually engaging with it, the left analysis becomes yet another moment of mislabelling, a failure to deal with the question of difference, a re-inscription of their Eurocentric politics. .

I think that the struggles in Egypt, in Syria, in Libya, all of them were at heart also about sovereignty. So how do we understand sovereignty in this global order? The occupations and invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq showed very clearly how utterly fragile sovereignty is in what used to be called the third world. It’s a big mistake for

political movements and activists not to understand this relationship between race and sovereignty if they are to have a transformative politics.

**WC:** Let me refocus and bring the discussion closer to home, as it were. In 2007, you published an important book, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada*. In it, you showed how the creation of a white Canada was based both on the colonization of Indigenous peoples and in the active exclusion of non-Indigenous racialized peoples from territory claimed by the Canadian state, at least up until the late 1960s. How do you assess the prospects for and importance of anti-colonial struggles from within Canada today and what are the difficulties facing Indigenous communities and movements as agents of change?

**ST:** In terms of anti-colonial movements in Canada, the Indigenous movements for sovereignty, are clearly that -- for land rights, for cultural integrity, against violence against Indigenous women, for example. I see all of those as part of the anti-colonial politics and anti-racist movements of Indigenous peoples. So, for instance, the disappeared and murdered women on Vancouver's downtown east side, I see that not just as an issue of violence against women. As Indigenous feminists have argued, sexual conquest and sexual violence is at the heart of the colonial project. The violence that is being done to Indigenous women on the downtown east side in Vancouver is part of that project of colonial violence playing itself out. I think coloniality is around us everywhere in Canada, literally on the land that we live and work on.

The biggest challenges to anti-colonial struggles in Canada are the pressures on Indigenous peoples for assimilation, the move to introduce private property, for example, in Indigenous communities, and open up resources that are claimed by Indigenous peoples to corporations -- and to do this in the name of improving the lives of Indigenous peoples. Those are among some of the most serious challenges to anti-colonial politics today, the pressures on Indigenous peoples, the coercion on them to assimilate, to extinguish their inherent title and inherent rights, to integrate into the corporate, neo-conservative led capitalist economy we are living in today. And of course for me, coming here as an immigrant, the questions have always been: What is my place in this space? What is my responsibility? What is my location in this society? Anti-colonial politics for me then means a politics of alliance with Indigenous women...

**WC:** Since 2008, you've been directing the RAGA Centre, the Centre for Race, Autobiography, Gender and Age, which is housed at the UBC. RAGA fosters "interdisciplinary, critical race and feminist scholarship with a focus on auto/biography in its broadest interpretation. RAGA also works collaboratively with community organizations to promote social change, based on principles of equity and social justice"

([www.raga.ubc.ca](http://www.raga.ubc.ca)). My question is: How does this major element of your work life fit with your overall intellectual and political practice?

**ST:** It fits in quite well I think. I've always struggled to maintain a balance between my work in the university, my academic work and then the work that I do in the community outside the academy. I define my scholarship as activist scholarship and it's a struggle to maintain that balance, especially in institutions that do not really reward you for it, that actually punish you for it. So I took on the RAGA centre when a colleague retired. She was very interested in autobiography studies, and so she had set up the SAGA centre with its focus on autobiographical studies. When I took it over, I wanted race to be a central focus. I wanted RAGA to be a place, a centre on the UBC campus, that would put a priority on developing links with the community outside UBC, that would partner with community organizations in all of its activities and events. For me, it was a question of making the university and its resources accessible to communities that don't have access to them otherwise, and at the same time, take the university (or RAGA) into the community. We have organized as many events in the community as we have on campus – so, the idea was to have a two-way exchange and open up the university space for community activists to come and work with us here. In terms of working practice, every event that we organize has community partners and we have developed a really good network of doing work like that. So RAGA was a space where I could carry on with that type of activist scholarship.

It still remains a big challenge to get a centre like that valued. We have to raise money for everything that we do since we don't get any funding from the university. So everything that I do has to be self-sustaining...it takes up a lot more time because the university's resources are not there in terms of facilitating this work. There is also a problem in getting it recognized as legitimate work. Colleagues are often seeing RAGA activities as nothing to do with service to the university, or nothing to do with the department's work, which is much more important. So it has been a real struggle even to keep the RAGA centre going.

But it has given us a space, it has opened up a space. One of things that I wasn't expecting was that graduate students from across the campus wanted RAGA to be a space for them. So we have a graduate student research network because scholars and also students of colour and of Indigenous ancestry are extremely marginalized in their own departments. They are ill-served by these departments, including departments like women's studies, where one would not expect to see the same problems. But even they're deeply embedded in the departmental culture and in the institutional culture of these universities. So, RAGA has created that space not just for faculty like myself who are engaged in activist scholarship but also for graduate students. And it's become a sort of home for them as well.

What has been most important in RAGA for me is to create a space where Indigenous scholars and students and scholars of colour and students actually come together and have an exchange, a dialogue. It's a space where we can hear each other's perspectives and engage in dialogue that I hope will lead to something fruitful in terms of really strong alliances being built across the racial divides that exist between Indigenous peoples and peoples of colour. So for me RAGA has been a very important space for doing that kind of work, alliance building, promoting our scholarship, networking, creating spaces where those of us who find it hard to breathe in our own assigned spaces can come together. RAGA has been important to me for that reason as well.

**WC:** You were professionally trained as a sociologist but your work is highly interdisciplinary -- though clearly in tune with a critical sociological imagination that explores the articulations of history and biography, of the personal and the public and so on. How do you, at mid-career, relate to the division of academe, including social science, into distinct disciplines? Do you see interdisciplinary work as complementary to the disciplines or perhaps as subversive of them?

**ST:** I think it is subversive of them. That's how I experience it. But interdisciplinary work is in the best traditions of scholarship, the best traditions of learning. I clearly fall on that side of the debate. Having said that, though, I think interdisciplinarity has become a fashionable term now. Everybody claims interdisciplinarity without much grounding in it. For me, political economy has to be a central part of that interdisciplinary training. That is what I strive to give my students: an interdisciplinarity that is grounded in a sound political economy. Political economy itself, of course, is an interdisciplinary approach. But I am surprised how many colleagues who do interdisciplinarity do not engage at all with questions of capital, of labour, with the whole political economy framework. I don't know how one understands the global order in the absence of an interdisciplinary approach that integrates political economy into it. I'm a bit old fashioned about that. (laughs)

In women's studies programmes and in women's studies generally, feminist political economy has pretty much disappeared. For me, it remains very disturbing that I can get fourth year students having gone through an interdisciplinary programme of academic and intellectual training, and at the end of it, they are unable to define neoliberalism, or globalization. That becomes a shocking experience. It makes one suspicious of this new fashionable approach to interdisciplinarity that's becoming popular in universities, but it is an approach that remains completely oblivious of the major structures, systems and institutions of power that shape the social world .

**WC:** Let me ask you about another “inter” word: intersectionality. Intersectionality is another very influential approach in feminist theory and practice. What does it mean to you and are there problems with the way that intersectionality is pursued in some academic circles?

**ST:** Yes, there are problems with the term because there’s the same kind of tokenizing that’s happening. Intersectionality can be a powerful articulation of how social relations shape and sustain each other. There is a debate about whether we think about intersectionality as the meeting point for different systems of exploitation and oppression, or whether we think of these as interlocking systems that actually shape and sustain each other. This is a debate where ‘interlocking’ is defined as a more in-depth understanding of how social relations are organized. Then there is also the question of the constitution of subjectivity, and how and whether intersectionality can contribute to an adequate theorization of this. But notwithstanding these debates, clearly intersectionality – developed initially by Black and women of colour feminisms – has made a huge contribution to scholarship. Yet it has become trivialized recently as it has been taken up in Women’s Studies. It doesn’t ground itself in a strong enough appreciation of social relations, particularly those of class and race, in this area of scholarship, which still remains stubbornly white woman oriented.

And we’re living through a very strange moment when we think about intersectionality, because at the same time that intersectionality became very influential, we have also had the emergence of anti-oppression studies. Anti-oppression studies – developed mainly by white feminists and activists – was very popular in women’s studies but I’ve always found the anti-oppression framework to be deeply problematic. Every form of social relationship gets equated with every other, so anti-oppression, every form of oppression and exploitation, --including racial -- comes to stand for everything else. There is then a dilution of the rigour and work that one needs to do to understand the intersectionality of social relations. So I have been very sceptical of anti-oppression studies and when I look at intersectionality today and how it gets used, it comes to stand in for people who do anti-oppression work. So there isn’t a strong theoretical understanding of these different social relations and how they intersect with – and ground – each other.

Intersectionality was something that was forwarded by feminists of colour, black feminists in particular. Anti-imperialist feminists also used intersectionality as an approach. The response to that from a more liberal and white framework was anti-oppression work, which completely diluted the power of intersectionality and the interlocking analysis of social relations. So intersectionality gets invoked as a stand-in for anti-oppression work. But the two are very different: there are very different kinds of



political investments that shape both of those particular concepts and pedagogical practices...

**WC:** What is your take on feminism today?

**ST:** Oh dear! (laughs).

**WC:** It seems that the three genres of second wave of feminism, liberal, social and radical, have either been institutionalized or transformed beyond recognition. What is your take on the challenges and possibilities of feminism? How does the critical feminism you developed with your collaborators, Dr. Sherene Razack and Dr. Malinda Smith, in *States of Race* speak to these challenges and possibilities of feminism?

**ST:** I must make a distinction here. When we talk about second wave feminism, when we talk about liberal feminism, socialist feminism, radical feminism, these are very much strands of Western feminism and Western feminist movements. Critical race feminists have a very different story to tell and it doesn't fall quite so neatly into liberal socialist or radical feminism, or first-wave, second-wave, third wave. The story to be told there is of anti-colonial feminists, black feminists for whom the struggles against slavery and its ongoing legacy and impact in the lives of black communities continues to remain central, and anti-imperialist feminists for whom the, north-south divide and imperialism continues to remain central to their politics. We have a very different story to tell than the advance from "first wave, second wave, third wave feminism." There is a much stronger, a much longer continuity around these strategies, around the alliances that we've tried to build. These are very different from the Western feminist stories, as they get told.

Of course, other social relations are central too, but I do think that race is foundational to the global order, to colonialism. So critical race politics has the capacity to develop a much deeper, more profound analysis of the current social world in which we live -- I see greater potential here. I'm not saying that critical race scholarship and feminism can't also be co-opted, but we are nowhere near that situation right now. Critical race feminist scholarship and anti-colonial scholarship actually disrupts this category of the West. This is absolutely vital and politically urgent in the moment we live in, because the war on terror has tried to suture over the fissures that multicultural politics gestured to: claims of white supremacy that were destabilized by civil rights movements, by the immigrants' rights movements, by third world struggles for independence. These movements actually split apart this whole category of the West and discredited ideas of white supremacy, of Western superiority. In a way, the war on terror is re-stabilizing the global institution of white superiority and Western cultural and economic domination.

The feminist traditions that you've named, liberal, socialist and radical, because they all work within the framework of Western feminism, however much they contest what the meaning of the West is, they haven't broken away from the very category of the West. So they continue to be deeply shaped by that Western worldview and are invested in the paradigm of the West in a way that critical race feminist scholars and activists are not. I see greater potential for radical transformative politics being articulated by those movements than I see coming from Western feminism.

One of the chapters in the book that I am writing right now looks at Western feminist responses to the war on terror. I look at liberal feminist responses, socialist feminist responses and post-structural, post-modernist feminist responses, and truth be told, there is very little that is different about their foundational assumptions. Their political commitments and engagements are different, clearly: some of them opposed the war, others have celebrated it as necessary and even argued for its expansion. But when we look at their foundational assumptions, including their foundational assumptions about gender and gender politics, these are very heavily invested in Western paradigms and Western world views. I don't see signs of them breaking away from that anytime soon.

The political space in which I see transformative politics being articulated is critical race politics, anti-colonial feminist politics and Indigenous women's politics. Because their politics are invested in the transformation of the West, which is arming itself, rebuilding its alliances, rebuilding state-nation relations that were really weakened by the whole restructuring of the welfare state, by the changes that we saw in the 1990s. In the '90s, Western populations were much more dissatisfied, much more against privatization, neoliberalization. Social movements were very clear about opposing that neo-liberalist order. But the Islamophobia that has since reinvigorated this project of the West has derailed these oppositional politics and perspectives.

**WC:** That leads on to the next question about the Occupy movement. This is an example, perhaps, of transnational grassroots politics from Egypt through Spain, last summer, to New York and many cities around the world last fall. Does the Occupy movement represent a new current, a new left? Is there some connection to the destabilizing of the West and to some of the issues raised by critical race feminists?

**ST:** I would not equate what happened in Egypt with the Occupy movement in North America. There is something very different going on in the Middle East and in the Arab Spring -- the next step in the politics of the decolonization movements of the 1940s, '50s and the '60s in those countries. So I would have a different approach to what is happening in the Middle East, and in Egypt, countries like that in the 'South', compared to the priorities of the Occupy movements in the global North and the politics that they

represent. And as many other commentators have noted, I would begin by problematizing the lack of Indigenous participation in these movements, of people of colour and raise the issue of the deeply problematic way we think about “occupy”. This is one of the Occupy movement’s biggest failings, from my perspective, its lack of anti-colonial and anti-racist politics. There was a conflation of all these communities.

But the Occupy movement is nevertheless something new: it is the first time in my activist life in the global north that I have seen a movement emerge and there is no defence made of the system by political elites, by media elites, in short, by the intellectual elites. In fact, you had politicians saying, “Oh yes, I feel my heart is with them, but this is not the right way to go about it.” This was the first time that there was no defence of the system coming from anywhere. That was an important moment of rupture. It represents something really important and powerful that needs to be thought through very carefully by intellectuals and activists who are involved in these movements.

And that wasn’t the case in the 1990s, with the economic restructuring, the cutback of social services, the dismantling of social programmes. There still was a “Pick yourself up by your bootstraps and the system will work for you” ideology that was being articulated strongly in the media. That was not the case this time around. It signifies something different. We need to think through how to make use of that change.

The other thing I noticed about the Occupy movement was when listening to people speaking in the media, in phone-in programmes, etc. I listened to a CBC open line programme when the Occupy movement first started and there was a woman who phoned in and said “I live in Langley. I am a single mother, I have three children. I can’t come to the Occupy movement but those people are there for me, they represent me.” There was even a lawyer who phoned in and said, “I’m not going to be there, but those kids are speaking for me too.” That kind of ownership from a middle-class constituency is also something that happens very rarely. So that was very different in terms of the kinds of political energies that could have been mobilized by this movement. It’s too early to say what will happen. I’m not sure where it will go or where it leads and I’m not sure what role other social movements will play in supporting or containing it, or the ways this politics will get articulated. I’m not sure how the key activists in Occupy Vancouver will articulate their political visions and what they see as transformative in their politics. We’ve yet to see. But immediately, it was clear to me that this was the first time that there was no defence of the system and that was something quite profound that we need to come to terms with.

**WC:** Finally, let me ask about your take on socialism. Many people would say socialism is a dead letter, citing the atrocities of Stalinism, the bankruptcy of social democracy and the atrophy of the new left initiatives such as socialist-feminist. Some academics and activists since the 1970s see the very positing of an alternative to capitalism as a problematic, totalizing move. But there are also indications of renewal, such as in Latin America. It’s a

big question, but what is your view on these issues and the prospects for a 21<sup>st</sup> century socialism?

**ST:** Socialism is on the agenda in a way that it hasn't been in the last decade or so. The movements in Latin American you mentioned have a socialist vision, but this is also a very strong anti-imperialist vision. The changes in Latin America are creating a space for Indigenous politics to be addressed in a way that socialism is not traditionally engaged with. So there is a lot more happening in Latin America than just the resurgence of a socialist politics. I've always seen socialism as the most radical politics coming out of the West. But I've never seen it as completely adequate to being able to respond to the visions of other movements in other parts of the world. Certainly, I've always been interested in the socialist vision and Marxist politics and clearly it's been formative to my own politics. But I've never been convinced that it is enough of a vision; I don't think it is. Unless, again, socialism can come to terms with coloniality, post-coloniality, however we define it, and of course, race... unless it can engage in a critical reassessment and a critical engagement with these issues, I would continue to value it, but also see it as limited in terms of what can be accomplished under socialism. I am very excited by these commitments to socialism that are not emerging, because they have been there, in Latin America for some time. But there are different experiences of the world, there are different ways of being in the world, that the best traditions of the West are unable to understand. It has been outside their experience and without a willingness to acknowledge that and an openness to think through what that might mean, I am always cautious about what this socialist vision might mean for those not of the 'West'.

Remembering

## ERIC HOBSBAWM

By Wade Matthews<sup>1</sup>

Eric Hobsbawm died in London on October 1, 2012. He was among the leading historians of the twentieth-century. Indeed at the time of his death he was almost universally described as “arguably Britain’s most respected historian,” (Kettle and Wedderburn, 2012) and this despite his long-standing commitment to Marxism. It’s not hard to see why. His productivity was extraordinary, stretching from the 1940s to the 2010s, and his intellectual range was immense, moving effortlessly from the Swing Riots and the Industrial Revolution to popular rebellion and global terrorism. In these terms, comparisons don’t come easily to mind.

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Born in Alexandria in the year of the Russian Revolution, Hobsbawm grew up in Vienna, Berlin and London. Of Jewish descent (his mother was Austrian, his father British), his background was cosmopolitan, and he had family, at one time or another, spread over most of Western and Central Europe and Britain. After settling in London with his Uncle in 1933 following his parents’ death, Hobsbawm studied history at King’s College, Cambridge, at which time he became a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), though he’d been a teenage-communist in Berlin. His early years are wonderfully recounted in the first part of *Interesting Times*, his 2002 autobiography, described by Perry Anderson as among “the finest piece(s) of writing this famously accomplished stylist has ever produced” (Anderson 2005, p. 278).

Following an uneventful war, Hobsbawm received his first academic appointment in history at Birkbeck College, London in 1949, denied the post at Cambridge he coveted by an understated British McCarthyism. Hobsbawm was associated with Birkbeck for

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<sup>1</sup> Wade Matthews’ book *International of the Imagination: The New Left, National Identity, and the Break-Up of Britain* will be published early next year in Brill’s Historical Materialism series. He recently finished a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship at York University working on a project called “History and Politics: The Communist Party Historians’ Group.”

more than 50 years, and he taught occasionally at the New School for Social Research in New York in the 1980s and 1990s. After the war, he was a leading member of the Communist Party Historians' Group (founded in 1946), a group of influential Marxist historians who had a profound influence on historiographical developments from the 1950s onwards. Unlike many of his fellow Marxist historians (Christopher Hill, Rodney Hilton, John Saville, Dorothy and Edward Thompson, and Victor Kiernan) he stayed in the CPGB following the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, when the Historians' Group was basically dissolved. He remained a member of the CPGB up until the 1990s, though, paradoxically, he played a more influential role in debates within the Labour Party in the era of Benn and Kinnock.

Indeed it was partly due to his involvement in internal Labour disputes that Hobsbawm was transformed from academic historian to public intellectual during the 1980s. This owed as much to his political writings as it did to the international acclaim that increasingly greeted his historical work. In addition to a series of influential essays on Left politics in *Marxism Today* - later collected as *Politics for a Rational Left* - and *New Left Review*, he wrote extensively for *New Statesman*, the *Guardian*, and *London Review of Books*. In his final years he had become, somewhat improbably, a celebrity, feted not just in Blair's England but also in Lula's Brazil. "His name and work," as Gregory Elliott has commented, "are as familiar in Italy or Brazil, the USA or India, as they are in the UK" (Elliott 2010, p. x).

Whether as a reflection of this celebrity, or part cause of it, Hobsbawm's late writings were decidedly contemporary; this was perhaps even true of *How to Change the World*, a collection of his writings on Marx, which included new essays considering Marxism in light of the 2008 financial crisis. He greeted 'the new century' with a book-length conversation with Antonio Polito (published as *The New Century*) that discussed "problems as they appear today," (Hobsbawm 2000, p. 2) a sort of coda to *Age of Extremes*, his masterly interpretation of the 'short twentieth century'. *Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism* followed in the mid-2000s. Incisive and pungent comment on the contemporary, these books were proof that age in no way diminished his capacities. To reinforce the point: three months before his death he handed his publishers a final manuscript titled *Fractured Spring*, described in the *Guardian* as an "exploration of culture and society in the 20th century" (Flood 2012).

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Hobsbawm's works will be familiar to many readers of this journal. Most will know him as the author of a magnificent four-volume history of modernity. The first volume - *The Age of Revolution* - was published in 1962, the last, perhaps Hobsbawm's most well known book, *Age of Extremes*, was published in 1994. Conceived in grand

nineteenth-century style, Hobsbawm's tetralogy arcs from the French and Industrial Revolutions of the eighteenth-century to the twentieth-century end of communism and rise of capitalist globalization. As a symphony of modernity, Hobsbawm's interpretation is orchestrated - broadly, and without theoretical loud hailing - by a Marxian inspired movement from economics through politics and society to the arts and ideas. Together, these volumes represent the implementation of what, in a famous 1971 programmatic essay, Hobsbawm called "the history of society" (Hobsbawm 1998). As an interpretation of the making of the modern world it is unlikely to be surpassed anytime soon.

Still, acute commentators have drawn attention to the significant break between the first three volumes - originally conceived as an interpretation of the 'long nineteenth century' - and the last. The first three volumes were structured by the "rise of the bourgeoisie"; *Age of Extremes* barely notes its existence. Even the working class - so important to *The Age of Capital* and *The Age of Empire* - is absent from Hobsbawm's account of 'the short twentieth century'. If the continued rise of global capitalism is a feature of the last volume, its ascent now takes place largely without the involvement of classes. Ideas, as well as extended discussion of the US and China, are missing from *Age of Extremes* too. Consideration of these matters now forms a growing literature on Hobsbawm's tetralogy, though even his most incisive critics maintain *Age of Extremes* standing as a 'masterpiece'.

Others will associate Hobsbawm with the mid-twentieth-century rise of social history. He was among those early 'historical modernizers' who moved the discipline away from a narrative history of elites to a 'total history' informed by the social sciences. It is now customary, perhaps even obligatory, for historians to draw on insights from anthropology, demography, economics, and sociology. As one measure of Hobsbawm's merits, this melding of history and the social sciences was already a feature of his early works in the 1950s and 1960s, including *Primitive Rebels*, *Labouring Men*, *Bandits*, *Industry and Empire*, and *Captain Swing*, the last co-authored with George Rudé. If it was a good time to be a social historian, perhaps even a Marxist social historian, by the early 1970s, then Hobsbawm had done much to make it so.

But we should be careful to distinguish Hobsbawm's from other currents of social history. Despite the tenor of *Primitive Rebels*, and some of the essays in *Labouring Men* such as 'The Tramping Artisan' (arguably his finest historical essay), Hobsbawm eschewed much of the 'people's history' or 'history from below' perhaps best associated with the History Workshop movement. His contributions to social and labour history were untiringly unsentimental. This is not to say that he didn't portray the peasant or common labourer of the past with sympathy and imagination, as evidenced by his intervention in 'the standard of living debate' and his sometime-vituperative dismissal of those historians who purveyed an optimistic view of the Industrial Revolution. Still, he could be concisely contemptuous of a people's history that strayed too far from his own

conception of history as a discipline: “The problem about this kind of history...is that it sacrifices analysis and explanation to celebration and identification. It encourages a vogue for antiquarianism...and for a dislike of generalization which in itself is no more satisfactory in red versions than in true-blue ones” (Hobsbawm 1981).

This judgment gives a clue to some of the defining features of Hobsbawm’s histories. He favoured the broad overview and generalization over what Christopher Hill once called “the worm’s eye view” (Hill 1972, p. 14). As suited this preference, his tone was most often Olympian and detached, even if his prose was interspersed with firm likes and dislikes. The basic historical problem for Hobsbawm was explanation of how humanity had moved from the stone age to the nuclear age. From such a perspective, worms were of little consequence. “We all know,” he once wrote, “that the history of railways begins when it is taken out of the hands of train-spotters and historic demography when it emancipates itself from the genealogists” (Hobsbawm 1981).

Hobsbawm also made a series of influential contributions - at once historical and theoretical - to nationalism studies. Both his essays in *The Invention of Tradition* - a book co-edited with Terence Ranger - and *Nation and Nationalism since 1780* are now standard texts of the subject - texts that defend a version of the ‘modernist’ view of the nation-state and nationalism’s origins. No less influential were his contributions to an understanding of his own discipline, many of which were collected in 1997 in *On History*. It was no accident that this volume appeared when postmodernism was affecting its strongest influence on young - and not so young - historical minds. He also wrote a fabulous short book on the historiography of the French Revolution, *Echoes of the Marseillaise*, published shortly after the Revolution’s bi-centenary - a book that defended the ‘social interpretation’ of the Revolution against a growing army of historical revisionists. Sometimes disdainful of the history of ideas, he nonetheless produced a work (in his 93rd year!) on the intellectual history of Marxism that built on an earlier collection of essays, *Revolutionaries*. There will be few who have recently come to Marx who won’t have come to him through the works of Eric Hobsbawm.

Indeed most will recognize, and remember, Hobsbawm as a *Marxist* historian, and it was this association, ironically, which partly lay behind the fame of his later years (the ‘last Marxist’ as he was dubbed by the British press). In a late essay he wrote that most historians who became Marxists “did so because they wanted to change the world in association with the labour and socialist movements which, largely under Marxist inspiration, became mass political forces” (Hobsbawm 2007, p. 180). This was certainly true of Hobsbawm. Initially attracted to literature, a product of his late schooling in England, Hobsbawm became a historian because he was a Marxist. He always considered Marx to be primarily a historical writer, if not a historian, rather than an economist or a sociologist, and he would have agreed with Michel Foucault, if about little else, that in order to be a historian one had in some way to be a Marxist.



There was something decidedly unfashionable about Hobsbawm's Marxism though. He always counted Marx's '1859 Preface' - complete with its sketch of "the general shape of human historical development from primitive communalism to capitalism" - the core of any properly 'materialist conception of history,' though he was careful to designate it a 'guide to history' rather than history itself (Hobsbawm 1984, p. 41). It reinforced, in nonetheless "pregnant form," (Hobsbawm 1964, p. 10) that the mode of production was the fundamental basis of any interpretation of historical development. The '1859 Preface' was also the source of a conception of history as directional - and progressive in the long run - which Hobsbawm insisted was integral to a Marxist interpretation of the past. He wondered once whether it was possible to repudiate the '1859 Preface', as he no doubt believed many other Marxist historians had effectively done, and remain a Marxist (Hobsbawm 1984).

It will take some time to get the proper measure of Hobsbawm's achievement as a historian. The magnificence of his works is unlikely to be challenged, even though he will continue to be summarily dismissed by an inveterate few on account of his political commitments. Yet, if we turn to compare him with his own generation of Marxist historians, some interesting differences arise. He never dominated a century in quite the same way that Christopher Hill did England's seventeenth-century. He never founded a school of international historiography as E.P. Thompson did. Not even his four-volume history of modernity could match *The Making of the English Working Class* in terms of influence exerted on other historians. Nor will he be associated with a particular subject like Dorothy Thompson is with British Chartism, Rodney Hilton with the English middle ages, David Montgomery with Gilded and Progressive Age American labour history, or Albert Soboul with the French Revolution. In some sense, his influence will be felt at a distance, and this because he wrote, particularly after the 1960s, mainly synthetic histories.

Such comparisons are not meant to diminish Hobsbawm's achievement but to point to where that achievement lay. What is remarkable about Hobsbawm's oeuvre - and certainly unmatched by those historians mentioned above (the only one of his cohort which might merit mention here is Victor Kiernan) - was its range. He made an important contribution to multiple fields and historiographies. His first book on 'archaic' social movements virtually established the field. Out of his membership of the Communist Party Historians' Group he launched important interventions into debates over the transition to capitalism, the crisis of the seventeenth-century, and the social effects of the Industrial Revolution which are still referred to. His interpretation of twentieth century history - to say nothing of his account of the 'long nineteenth-century' - has formed and will form the touchstone for all other interpretations. No student of nations and nationalism can avoid his reflections on the origin of national identity and the nation-state. Even his autobiography will constitute a reference point for historians setting out to relate the personal to the public and the political. Historians of the Left in

the twentieth-century will use his numerous political writings as both primary and secondary source. Whatever he wrote, others had and will have to take account.

If this is not enough, there is the written product of his enduring musical passion to consider. From the mid-1950s, Hobsbawm became the Jazz critic for the *New Statesmen* under the name Francis Newton, borrowed from the communist Jazz trumpeter on Billie Holiday's 'Strange Fruit'. He wrote weekly on Jazz for the next decade or so, and a book, *The Jazz Scene*, appeared in 1959 (a revised edition appeared 30 years later). Later writings on the subject appeared in *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz*, published in 1998. First attracted to the form as a teenager, he considered Jazz the "music of protest and rebellion," a "people's music" that had "rescued the qualities of folk-music in a world... designed to extirpate them; and...so far maintained them against the dual blandishments of pop music and art-music" (Elliott 2012, p. 44). A friend, a well-known Canadian historian who holds Hobsbawm's histories in the highest regard, once commented that among Hobsbawm's oeuvre it was his obituary of Billie Holiday that he treasured most. It ends this way:

To be born with both beauty and self-respect in the Negro ghetto of Baltimore in 1915 was too much of a handicap, even without rape at the age of ten and drug-addiction in her teens. But while she destroyed herself, she sang, unmelodious, profound and heartbreaking. It is impossible not to weep for her, or not to hate the world which made her what she was (Hobsbawm 1959, p. 71).

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Hobsbawm once wrote that not only was "it wrong to assume that workers have no country" (Hobsbawm 1988, p. 58) it was also wrong to assume that they only have one and that we know what it is. It would also be wrong to suggest that Hobsbawm had no country, despite his cosmopolitan background and his association with a discipline he once described as necessarily a-national and allergic to 'identity'. But if Hobsbawm did have a country we should nonetheless be careful about identifying what it is. Indeed, it is difficult to get a fix on where Hobsbawm positioned himself - and was involuntarily positioned - in order to write anything at all. But an understanding of that positioning will be essential to any accounting of Hobsbawm. He would have been the first to admit that social being has an important influence - broadly understood - on social consciousness.

Hobsbawm's Jewishness was not unimportant to his intellectual and political development, even though, as an Enlightenment rationalist, he dismissed religion as

myth. Indeed, he once described his Marxism as an effect of his ‘ethnicity’. “As Jews,” in early 1930s Germany he suggested,

we were precluded by definition from supporting parties based on confessional allegiance, or on a nationalism which excluded Jews...We became either communists or some equivalent form of revolutionary marxists (sic), or if we chose our own version of blood-and-soil nationalism, Zionists. But even the great bulk of young intellectual Zionists saw themselves as some sort of revolutionary marxist (sic) nationalists. There was virtually no other choice...We simply chose a future rather than no future, which meant revolution...a new world rather than no world. The great October Revolution and Soviet Russia proved to us that such a new world was possible... (Hobsbawm 1973, p. 62).

In this sense, communism, for Hobsbawm, was a matter of survival rather than an “opiate of the intellectuals” in Raymond Aron’s acerbic phrase.

Jewishness was also arguably one source of Hobsbawm’s consistently tragic vision of the past, and the caution, increasingly evident after the 1950s, that characterized his statements on the present and future. He repeatedly reminded readers that the alternative version of Marx’s ‘end of history’ was ‘mutual ruin’. He rarely harboured illusions about socialism’s prospects. He had an ear for crises and ends and forward march’s halted. Jewishness, rather than a residual Britishness, might also help to explain why he was so concerned to defend the territorial integrity of Britain against those, like Tom Nairn, who would argue for its ‘break-up’ in the 1970s. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was a safer place for Jews than the ethnically-based nation-states which replaced it.

But, as Donald Sassoon has remarked, being Jewish for Hobsbawm “meant cosmopolitanism and anti-nationalism” (Pfeffer 2012). Hobsbawm was perhaps an exemplary of Isaac Deutscher’s ‘non-Jewish Jew’ - an identity which fitted his vision of the historian, a “migrant bird, at home in arctic and tropic, overflying half the globe” (Hobsbawm 2002, p. 415). His identity as a non-Jewish Jew helps account for his attitude to Israel. As he explained in *Interesting Times*: “I have no emotional attachment to the practices of an ancestral religion and even less to the small, militarist, culturally disappointing and politically aggressive nation-state which asks for my solidarity on racial grounds” (Hobsbawm 2002, p. 24). Confirmation of this view came in 2007 when, as a Jew, he founded alongside other influential British Jews, Independent Jewish Voices, an organization designed to take back some part of Jewishness from a Jewish establishment which uncritically supported Israel.

Hobsbawm was undoubtedly cosmopolitan, an effect equally of the involuntary geographical mobility of his early years, his Jewishness, and his commitment to world

revolution. However it is not true to say, as Sassoon does, that Hobsbawm “hated any kind of nationalism” (Pfeffer 2012). World revolution might have been the original ‘homeland’ of Hobsbawm’s political formation in Berlin in 1932, but circumstances not long after impressed upon him the strategic value of the Popular Front. Indeed, the *raison d’être* associated with the Popular Front would continually direct his political thinking after 1945, something evident in his contribution to debates within the Labour Party in the 1980s. It also explains the warmth he felt for ‘citizen nationalism’, particularly in the era of Tudjman and Milosevic, and why he recommended that the Left steal back national flags from the forces of reaction, as he did in relation to the Falklands War.

There is also the matter of Hobsbawm’s relationship to Britain, the country he lived in, but perhaps did not quite call home, for almost 80 years. He never hid his affection for other places - France, Italy, Spain, Latin America - an affection demonstrated in *Interesting Times*. Absent from his autobiography, however, was any reflection on his relationship to Britain. Because of his father he was known as ‘*Der Engländer*’ in his German school-days, and later at Cambridge, according to one contemporary, he affected “a large and vulgar patriotism for England, which he considered in weak moments as his spiritual home” (Keunemann 1982, p. 366). An early love of nature and literature might provide one explanation for this. Early on he was primarily, though never exclusively of course, a British historian. In addition to a PhD on the Fabians (never published) he wrote extensively on British labour and social history in the 1950s and 1960s. He admitted affection for the British working-class, which he first encountered while a member of a sapper regiment in the British Army during the war. There were, too, the ambiguities associated with his conception of ‘socialist patriotism’, a patriotism which always had Britain as its object.

If there are ambiguities surrounding his relationship to Britain, there was no ambiguity about his relationship to major metropolitan centers. Hobsbawm was a thoroughly metropolitan thinker. Indeed, he never hid his preference for the city over the country. “I am a megalopolitan who has never lived in a city of less than a million...I really have no organic connection with the country as a place where they produce things, or for that matter with rural pastoral. I can’t even say that I go overboard for literary graves” (Miller 2012). His preference for cities is no doubt reflected in his interpretation of nationalism and his consistent dislike of separatist nationalisms which, as Tom Nairn has suggested, always had rural roots.

Whatever the residual effects of his Jewishness and his Britishness on his intellectual output, his primary homeland was socialist internationalism - variously, world revolution, Popular-Front communism, and the Soviet Union. It was his more obvious allegiance to communism, particularly after 1956, that has invited most subsequent comment. Hobsbawm has often felt the need to defend this allegiance. In

*Interesting Times* he explained that, given his political formation in the shadow of Weimar Germany's collapse, it was simply more difficult for him to leave. He remained in the CPGB, he said elsewhere, "out of loyalty to a great cause and to all those who had sacrificed their lives for it" (Hobsbawm 2000, p. 159).

Why Hobsbawm remained in the CPGB after 1956 is an interesting question - and one that has been explored *ad infinitum* - but what affect this had on his historical work is more vexed. Three affects might be briefly mentioned. First, there was his uncritical reverence for the Popular Front, a reverence which affected not just his understanding of socialist strategy but also his understanding of the course of twentieth-century history. This was certainly the case in *Age of Extremes*. But his decision to remain in the CPGB also prevented the kind of accounting with historical Stalinism that was a feature of other Marxist historians' work such as E.P. Thompson and John Saville. This lack affected, most obviously, his understanding of twentieth-century communism. Finally, it might be noted that his communist allegiance consistently precipitated unnecessarily, and sometimes erroneous, negative and ungenerous judgments on other movements of the Left, whether the socialist humanism of Britain's New Left, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, or the student radicalism of the 1960s.

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Hobsbawm was among the most influential historians of the twentieth century, and he was certainly unique in that his influence crossed oceans and continents (his work has been translated into around forty languages). He was among the few historians to exert a political influence (and once again not in just one country), and among an even smaller few to have exerted this influence from the Left. For those on the Left, and I suspect for others beside, his voice will be missed.

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Article

## **TOWARDS AN AKAIROLOGICAL POLITICS: REREADING NEGRI ON THE BIBLICAL BOOK OF JOB**

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### **Abstract**

This essay engages with an unfamiliar Antonio Negri, one who engages in biblical interpretation in *The Labor of Job* (2009). The analysis focuses on two key themes: *kairós* and measure/immeasure. Concerning *kairós* I critique Negri's relatively conventional approach - creative and opportune time - by identifying its inescapable moral and class associations with ruling ideology in ancient Greece, where it designates, through its basic sense of measure, the right time and right place. In response, I pursue an akairological position, one that draws upon Negri's complex treatment of measure and immeasure. While Negri seeks a reshaped and creative measure, I suggest we tarry with immeasure, for it overlaps with what is opposed to *kairós*. The article closes by asking why Negri should be interested in the Bible. The answer: he is able to do so, as his studies of Spinoza show, through a radical relativising of the absolute truth claims of theology.

### **Keywords**

Antonio Negri, immeasure, *kairós*, Labour of Job, measure

### **Mots-clés**

Antonio Negri, imméure, *kairós*, mesure, Travail de Job,

“What a sublime and, at the same time, sordid vocation this theological discipline has”  
(Negri 2009, 29).

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My major concern is an unfamiliar Antonio Negri, one who engages in some biblical criticism in his recently translated *The Labor of Job* (2009), which is a detailed philosophical exegesis of the ‘marvellous’ biblical book of Job (Negri and Defourmantelle 2004, 157).<sup>2</sup> Two features of Negri’s analysis stand out: the oppositions of *kairós* and *ákairos*, and measure and immeasure. However, before I explore those oppositions in some detail, two preliminary comments are needed. At the heart of the book is what I would like to call a radical homiletics. A discipline much neglected these days, homiletics is really the art of connecting a text like the Bible with the realities of everyday life, moving from the intricacies of textual analysis to the application to life. Negri’s homiletics is radical for two reasons, one political, resting on Marx, and the other textual, reading Job as a pre-eminent document for our time. Job both describes our time and offers a way through the impasse of Left action. Further, the commentary on Job is a philosophical commentary. Caught in the rough ground between two camps – radical philosophy and biblical criticism – it is not conventional biblical criticism, if such a thing actually exists. Negri does not come to the text with all of those unquestioned assumptions, methods and skills that characterise all too many of your garden variety biblical critics. Is he then a lone philosopher making a foray into biblical analysis? Without a sense of what may be called the ‘mega-text’ of biblical criticism, is he bound to trip up? Not quite, for there is another patchwork tradition of what may be called philosophical exegesis or commentary. Some texts of the Bible – Genesis 1-11, the letters of Paul, Job – continue to call forth commentary from philosophers and sundry Marxist critics (for example, Badiou 2003, 1997; Agamben 2005). Negri’s text falls in with this group.

### **Kairós and ákairos**

*Religion is a big rip-off in itself, but it can also be a great instrument of liberation* (Negri and Scelsi 2008, 205).

What does this philosophical commentary find in Job? I focus on two key features: the opposition between measure (*misura*) and immeasure (*dismisura*) and the question of *kairós*. Briefly put, for Negri (im)measure is the thread – much like a necklace – that strings together value, labour, pain, ontology, time, power, evil, theodicy, creation and

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<sup>2</sup> The secondary literature on Negri is, as one would expect, immense. For more general philosophical engagements with Negri, one cannot go past the two volume collection, *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri*, edited by Murphy and Mustapha (2005 and 2007). For a useful, albeit preliminary, engagement with Negri’s reading of the book of Job, see the essay by Stolze in the second volume, although he does not engage with the matters of measure and *kairós* in any substantial fashion. An unpublished article by Barber and Smith draws in part upon Negri’s analysis of Job in order to explore his reclamation of the idea of poverty from its theological background (Barber and Smith unpublished).

cosmogony. It is a complex opposition that has both positive and negative registers for each term, with Negri searching for a way beyond the negative senses of measure and immeasure – as oppressive order and unending evil – to find more positive senses. As for *kairós*, it falls into a rather conventional sense of the opportune time and thereby, via the New Testament, the time of crisis, the end times with their trials and hopes. Or in Negri's words, *kairós* is a time of rupture, an 'exemplary temporal point' (Negri and Defourmantelle 2004, 104-6). Immediately we face a problem, for Negri does not overtly connect (im)measure and *kairós*. Nevertheless, they are, as will become clear, involved in an intimate embrace. In what follows, I begin with *kairós*, exploring what Negri both does and does not say about the term, before offering a rereading of *kairós* that will bring it into the arms of (im)measure.

For Negri's most compelling statement concerning *kairós* we need to turn for a moment to another study, the extraordinary *Kairós, Alma Venus, Multitudo* (2003, 139-261), as well as his comments in the conversation with Anne Defourmantelle (2004). Here two comments capture Negri's effort to reshape time as *kairós*: it is the 'moment when the arrow of Being is shot' and it is 'the immeasurability of production between the eternal and the *to-come* (Negri 2003, 180; see also Negri and Defourmantelle 2004, 104; Hardt and Negri 2004, 357). The first picks up the sense of the 'exemplary temporal point'. *Kairós* is an opening up in time that is eminently creative; it is the edge of time when Being is created. Two brief comments in Negri's conversations with Anne Defourmantelle reveal the obvious theological connection: we are always at the point of creativity; it is the moment each day when, 'one creates God': everything one does is a creation of God, since 'to create new Being is to create something that, unlike us, will never die' (Negri and Defourmantelle 2004, 146-7). Further, this process of creativity is marked by naming, especially the common name. In *Kairós, Alma Venus, Multitudo* Negri observes without comment, 'Whatever thing I name exists' (Negri 2003, 147). In case we missed the gloss on Genesis 1, when God names the items of creation, and Genesis 2, when Adam names the animals, Negri makes it explicit in his discussion with Defourmantelle: 'Naming is at once the Bible and what makes epistemology possible' (2004, 119).

The second comment I quoted above – between the eternal and the *to-come* – constitutes Negri's challenge to the measurable piling up of time as past, present and future, in which our present is a moving point between the fixed detritus of the past (to be collated, measured and studied by historiography, to be celebrated in triumph or mourned as disaster) and the future (as a repeat performance of the past). Instead he proposes that the 'before' should be understood as the sign of eternity – time rests in the eternal – and that the 'after' must be recast as the 'to-come'. Once again, it is not difficult to pick up a theological undertone: *kairós* operates not merely *sub specie aeternitatis*, for it is part of eternity; from that context *kairós*, as a perpetual moment of creativity, looks

towards an eschatological 'to-come'. In its passage, *kairós* gathers more and more features: it is immeasurably productive, the home of living labour, restlessly in motion, multiple, common, the source of joy, corporeal and material, and thereby resists domination and oppression.

Despite all this compelling energy, Negri still rests with a very temporal *kairós*, opposing it to chronological time and then attempting to reshape it in terms of revolutionary creativity and desire. Indeed, his book on Job shows how regular Negri's approach to *kairós* really is. For Negri, Job provides an energetic counter to the idea that time is empty, static and measured. This sense of time came into its own only with Neo-Platonic thought, when time became abstract, a form of being, transcendent and dominating – precisely when Christianity became the dominant ideological force of empire. What does Negri find in Job? Here time is concrete, lived, painful, common, immanent and even filled with theophany; it is a stark contrast with abstract and dominating time. In particular, the time of Job is characterised by rhythm, movement and event (what Negri calls time-movement). In short, it is ontological time. Is this notion of time really in Job? It is when you take pain and death – and here Negri is able to deal with death in a way that few materialists are able to do – as the basis for understanding time as the common reality of our existence and as the source of the desire and power to eliminate such suffering. More specifically, Negri argues that in Job time is both a being towards death (he quotes Job 7: 4, 6-8 and 9: 25-6) and a fullness and state of happiness (now it is 29: 2-6). As content and part of existence, this time in Job is the point of contact between lived, concrete time and the linear movement of divine epiphany – here earth and heaven touch. This is of course *kairós*, which now becomes the point of contact between Job's lived time of pain and divine epiphany, the creative labour of suffering opening out to liberation. This ontology of time is nothing less than the 'immeasurable opening of *kairós*'.

These arguments are variations on a persistent motif, *kairós* as the time of crisis and as a period of what can only be described as opportune, revolutionary time. With some modifications, we find comparable arguments in Walter Benjamin (blast and flash), Giorgio Agamben (time that remains), Alain Badiou (event and laicised grace), Ernst Bloch (*Novum* and *Ultimum*), apocalypse and rupture (Fredric Jameson). However, on this score the New Testament bears heavy responsibility (Kittel, Friedrich, and Bromiley 1985, 389-90; Barr 1969). In that collection of texts *kairós* may mean the period when fruit becomes ripe, a season (spring, autumn and so on), the time of birth or death, the present, a designated period that is more often signalled by the plural, *kairoí*. But the term also identifies a specific moment, often in the dative 'at the right time', which may be opportune or favourable, or it may be dire and risky. However, increasingly the word takes the definite article, 'the time' (*ho kairós*), and in this form its sense is the time of crisis or the last times. So it becomes one of the New Testament's major eschatological

terms, specifying the longed-for, albeit troubled, time of final conflict, the end of history, the reign of the Evil One and Christ's return to vindicate the faithful. These senses dominate, for good or ill, our sense of *kairós*, holding up and restricting *kairós* as a term devoted to time and gathering the semantic field around that point.

However, in order to undermine the surreptitious dominance of the New Testament on our perceptions of *kairós*, I would like to move back to classical Greece. And there a few surprises await us. To begin with, *kairós* is not only a term of time but also of *place*. The temporal sense is largely the same as the one I have explored above – the right, critical and proper time or season. For a largely agricultural economy, *kairós* indicates the right season for planting or reaping, with a particular emphasis on the time the fruit is ripe, so much so that *kairós* also bore the sense of fruitfulness and advantage. But in its spatial sense, *kairós* designates what is in or at the right place, especially in terms of the body. *Kairós* and especially its adjective, *kairios*, designate a vital part of the body. For example in Homer's *Iliad*, the adjective is used to mark the right place on the body for an arrow to find its mark. And in the works of Pindar, Aeschylus and Euripides the word means a target, especially on the body in battle: it the point where a weapon can inflict the most damage (see especially Onians 1973, 343-7; Rickert 2007, 72).

What are we to make of this extended sense of *kairós*, one that goes well beyond time? To begin with, both temporal and spatial senses of the term find their basis in the meaning of measure, proportion or fitness. As time, *kairós* is then a distinct measure or the appropriateness of time – the exact, critical and opportune time. As place, it becomes measured space, as well as the way space is proportioned, preferably 'correctly' when one refers to the body where everything is in its right place. It takes little imagination to see that a kairological, that is, properly proportioned body would be a male body, athletic, warlike and virile. There is a distinct sense that *kairós* actually refers to what is in its right place and time, duly measured, appropriate and opportune. Indeed, although *kairós* takes on a range of meanings – convenience, decorum, due measure, fitness, fruit, occasion, profit, proportion, propriety, symmetry, tact, wise moderation, as well as opportunity, balance, harmony, right and/or proper time, opening, timeliness – the semantic cluster coalesces around the idea of what is duly measured and proportional, in short, the right time and right place. As Hesiod puts it in *Works and Days*: 'Observe due measure, and proportion (*kairós*) is best in all things' (Hesiod 1973, 81; translation follows Rickert 2007, 72).<sup>3</sup>

Not quite the sense of *kairós* to which we have become accustomed – due measure and proportion. Yet, given this fuller meaning of *kairós*, a question lurks in the shadows of this classical *kairós*: what is its opposite? Not *kronos*, and thereby chronological time – the standard line in most philosophies of time (including Negri's) that seek to oppose

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<sup>3</sup> On *kairós* see further Rickert (2007), Carter (1988); Untersteiner (1954), Kinneavy (1983), and Sipiora and Baumlin (2002).

*kairós* and *kronos*, for *kronos* became a byword for an old fool or dotard, especially in the comedies of Aristophanes. As a proper name, Kronos is, as is well known, the father of Zeus; but he also designates that period before our era, the distant past which may be either a golden age or the dark ages, depending on one's perspective.

Instead of *kronos*, the opposite of *kairós* is determined by a series of prepositions: *apó kairoû*, away or far from *kairós*; *parà kairón*, to the side of or contrary to *kairós*; *pró kairoû*, before *kairós* or prematurely; *kairoû péra*, beyond measure, out of proportion and unfit. These senses all bear the weight of what is outside the zone of *kairós*, untimely and out of place. And all of them may be gathered under the term *ákairos*. If *kairós* designates the well-timed, opportune and well-placed, then *ákairos* means the ill-timed, inopportune and displaced. I cannot emphasise enough how important this opposite of *kairós* is: over against measure we have beyond measure; timely versus untimely; in the right place versus the wrong place. One who is *ákairos* is in the wrong place at the wrong time. This opposition will become vitally important soon enough when I return to Negri.

Before I do, a couple of further points demand attention. Too often commentators neglect the unavoidable economic dimensions of *kairós*, especially with its agricultural flavour. In this case, as the quote above from that agricultural text par excellence, Hesiod's *Works and Days*, indicates, *kairós* means the right season of the year for planting, cultivating and harvesting crops and fruit. But it also indicates the right place, due to soil, landform and amount of moisture, for planting a particular crop or orchard. But now the economic sense explodes well beyond these agricultural references. I would suggest it beats a path to a collection of terms in Greek that have simultaneous moral, class and economic dimensions. *Kairós* and *ákairos* join words like *agathos* and *kakos*, good and bad, as well as a host of related terms, in which moral and class status, as well as physical appearance are closely interwoven – good vs. bad, wealthy vs. poor, noble vs. ignoble, brave vs. cowardly, well-born vs. ill-born, blessed vs. cursed, lucky vs. unlucky, upright vs. lowly, elite vs. masses, pillars of society vs. dregs, beautiful vs. ugly (Ste. Croix 2006, 338-9; see also Ste. Croix 1972, 371-6).<sup>4</sup> It soon becomes apparent how the spatial sense of *kairós*, with a focus on the human body as one that is appropriately proportioned with every item in its 'proper' place, also has a class sense. The (male) body out of proportion, one that is 'ugly' and out of proportion, is also the body of the poor, exploited majority of Greek society – what, following Negri, we might call the monstrous (Negri and Casarino 2008, 193-218). From here *kairós* may also, in connection with this cluster of other terms, apply to social measure and order. A kairological social order has everything in its proper place – aristocratic elites, exploited peasants, driven slaves,

<sup>4</sup> Ste. Croix provides a host of related terms: *hoi tas ousias echontes, plousioi, pacheis, eudaimones, gnōrimoi, eugeneis, dunatoi, dunatōtatoi, kaloi kagathoi, chrēstoi, esthloi, aristoi, beltistoi, dexiōtatoi, charientes, epieikeis* – all for the 'good' propertied classes; for the 'bad' unpropertied classes we have *hoi penētes, aporoi, ptōchoi, hoi polloi, to plēthos, ho ochlos, ho dēmos, hoi dēmotikoi, mochthēroi, ponēroi, deiloi, to kakiston*.

women, and so on. It goes without saying that such a proportioned and fit society, one characterised by *eugenia*, ensures the ruling elite remain precisely where they are. Disorder and immeasure, what is contrary to *kairós* and thereby *ákairos*, designate an unfit society, one in turmoil and on the rocks, when time is out of joint and events take place outside their proper time and season.

*Kairós* has turned out to be far more multifaceted than we might have expected. Not content to be restricted to a temporal register, it has now spilled out to include agricultural and bodily spaces, the sense of measure and then blurted out its sinister class allegiances. In this light, any alignment with or appropriation of *kairós* is a risky move to make. For the invocation of *kairós* runs the danger of siding unwittingly with the well-proportioned over against ill-fashioned bodies, ruling elites rather than downtrodden peasants and slaves; in short, with the interweaving of moral, economic and biological factors, *kairós* sides the good, beautiful, well-born, wealthy and educated aristocrats. In this wider context, my own political options are clear: rather than the carefully ordered world of *kairós* with its moral and class associations, I would rather join the bad boys and girls, ugly bodies, poor peasants, cowardly slaves, ill-born labourers, cursed, unlucky and lowly masses, in short, the dregs of society. And this means that I side with what is contrary to and beyond *kairós*, with *ákairos*, with what is untimely and out of place. Does not every revolution have its moment of akairological anarchy, out of which new, more socialist possibilities emerge?

Now that we thrown in our lot with *ákairos*, what are the implications for Negri's use of *kairós*? Should we dispense with it as weighed down too heavily with a theological heritage of opportune or exemplary time, at the edge of creation? Or should we rough it up – shirt torn, pants filthy, black market cigarette scrounged from a passer-by – and cross to the wrong side of the tracks, taking *kairós* into the zones of *ákairos*? I prefer the latter, but in order to do so I need to set the scene by returning to the heavy influence of the New Testament on the subsequent philosophical and Marxist use of the term *kairós*. As we saw earlier, the New Testament limits *kairós* to a temporal register, offering two overlapping senses: as the right time and a risky, even unexpected time of crisis. However, what has happened is that the biblical notion of *kairós* emphasises the temporal at the expense of the spatial sense, buried the moral and class associations, and domesticated *ákairos* in the name of *kairós*. How so? It has enhanced the unexpected nature of the final days, while at the same time defanging the revolutionary elements of *ákairos* and calling on *kairós* seems to speak in its name. By contrast, what I propose to do is move in the other direction, allowing *ákairos* to set the agenda and transform *kairós*. So I draw upon the opposition between measure and immeasure (*misura* and *dismisura*) that is central to his exegesis of the book of Job. But I am intrigued: measure-immeasure immediately connects with my earlier discussion of the base sense of *kairós-ákairos*; yet Negri makes

nothing of the link (I can only assume he is not aware of it). So let us see what happens when we bring the two together.

### Measure and Immeasure

However, before I make the connection, I need ask what Negri does with measure and immeasure. This opposition may be regarded as a substantial realignment of some old philosophical distinctions, especially those between eternity and contingency, universal and particular and, on a theological or mythical register, of chaos and order – a basic motif of myths of creation and one that both is central to the book of Job and has significant political ramifications. And in the commentary on the book of Job, measure-immeasure also becomes the means of reorganising an impressive string of topics: value, labour, pain, ontology, time, power, evil, theodicy, creation and cosmogony. I would like to focus on three items in relation to measure and immeasure: their changing values in Negri's interpretation; their intersection with the themes of chaos and creative order; and their overlap (unbeknownst to Negri) with *kairós*. Let us explore each point in some more detail.

To begin with, Negri (through Job) dismisses all forms of measure and comes out as a champion of immeasure. However, this is only the beginning; although Negri wants to dispense with a negative, retributive measure in favour of a creative immeasure, that chaotic moment is only a transition to a new, positive form of measure. That is to say, by the time Negri draws near to the end of his commentary on Job the valuation of measure and immeasure shifts: at first measure is negative and immeasure positive, but when we encounter a negative immeasure, a new, creative measure begins to appear.

As for measure, it affects the crucial categories of value, labour, time, ethics, justice, good and evil. And it does so through the filter of retribution, which turns up in the mouths of Job's erstwhile legal friends, Eliphaz and Zophar. The logic of retribution goes something as follows: if I perform an evil act I will be punished for it; so also with a good act. Balance is the key: evil at one moment will find an equal measure (now as retribution) at another moment; so also will good eventually produce a balance of good in the moment of reward. Ergo, if Job is suffering he must have done something evil to deserve it, even if he doesn't know what that evil act is. In other words, one can measure evil and good in neat quantities.<sup>5</sup> So also with justice it becomes a simple formula that matches the correct measure of reward or punishment with the act in question. Or ethics, which becomes a calculation of the balance of good and evil as well as role of justice

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<sup>5</sup> Although Elihu, the fourth interlocutor, is not part of the original circle of three, his argument for transcendent providence and Job's pride is for Negri the last possible moment of rationalisation (Negri 2009, 107-8).

within that calculation so that we can gain that vital advice as to how we should live our lives. In our own day we can add labour and time: our economic system relies on the ability to calculate how much labour is spent on a job, how overtime is to be calculated, what the right wage is for the labour-time given over, with heavy emphasis at the moment on the measurement of immaterial labour, and so on (see further Brouillette 2009). It is all so simple – even the eternal conundrum of theodicy ceases to be a problem at all, for it is merely a question of calculated and quantifiable measure. The operation of retributive measure seems so common sense, working its way into the smallest mundane acts: the cost of a loaf of bread, whether I should reciprocate that invitation from people I can't stand, the grades a child receives at school – the *lex talionis* of everyday life.

Job's response is simply to dismiss any form of measure in these situations. So we find the third friend, Bildad, who tries to compensate for the loss of measure. Bildad advocates an over-charged and extra-transcendent God (Negri calls it the 'mystical deception' and over-determination) who comes in as an enticement to and guarantee for worthiness. All one can do before such a God is surrender and offer devotion and adoration. Or, as Negri points out, it is a craven apologia for dictatorial power. Job's perpetual refusal to acknowledge either a system of retribution or an over-charged deity who commands devotion simply does not compute for his friends: 'When Job decisively rejects the transcendent motif as well, his lawyers – who are on the brink of becoming his ideological enemies – accuse him of titanic *hybris*' (Negri 2009, 38).

One term from my original list of items which are strung together under the theme of measure-immeasure is left: value. Superficially, Negri is after another theory of value, especially since he is scathing about the Marxist labour theory of value. One can no longer measure labour power (x hours in the working day), surplus value (x+ hours and greater efficiency within those hours, i.e. absolute and relative surplus value), or indeed exchange and use values. They are all so much scrap iron – a position Negri would continue to hold in his well-known collaboration with Michael Hardt in the trilogy, *Empire*, *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*. Already in his commentary on Job, one of Negri's tasks is to find a completely new theory of value and Job is enlisted to help him do it. Quite straightforward, it would seem: a recovery of value without measure. The catch is that this is not the only sense of value operating in Negri's text. Alongside the economic one there is also an ethical one: the labour theory of value slips into an ethical code of value and back again.

On this ethical calculus, what is the value of labour? It is evil, argues Negri. And it is evil precisely because labour is subject to immeasurable exploitation. Now we need to pay very close attention, for the argument has some sharp turns and we need to choose our path with care. Negri wishes to recover value, to rescue it from its subservience to measure, control or limit. He proposes to do so via the theological narrative of 'of an immensely powerful, creative ontology that emerges from chaos' (Negri 2009, 73). This



slow process involves Job gaining power in his stand against God, which involves, as it were, a return to the chaos that precedes creation and a re-creation of the world from the ground up. A tall order, perhaps, but Negri sees it in Job and wants it for his own time.

However, in the process of making this argument, the opposition between measure and immeasure begins to shift. It happens first with immeasure. One's initial impression is that Negri attaches a positive value to immeasure and a negative one to measure, a value we can trace in the affirmation of the immeasurable multitude of his later work with Hardt, in the criticism of quantification and exchange over against the endless creativity of social, common knowledge and its irreducibility to exchange relations (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004, 2009). Chaos, in other words, is good and order not so much. But when Negri mentions in his book on Job that exploitation itself is immeasurable, this all too convenient opposition starts to break down. Add to this the immeasurable nature of evil (Negri 2009, 8-9), which in itself questions the realms of reason and measure, and we have a different ball game entirely.

The more conventional track from this point is to attribute this immeasurable exploitation and evil to the unsettling realm of chaos and then seek out order in response as some way of controlling such evil. Social sanctions, the law, police and army all play this role, attempting to keep a lid on the riotous riff-raff on the streets. But Negri is not interested in that path – he has suffered too much at the hands of the forces of order. Instead, he fixes on the immeasurable nature of pain and suffering – the central topic of Job – and argues that the only way to overcome the immensity of evil is through the immeasurability of pain. Only when we have descended into the depths of immeasurable, undeserved and guiltless pain are we able to get anywhere at all. From the midst of this undeserved suffering power first emerges, a power that is creative. In short, one immeasurable responds to and is greater than another; endless suffering and pain overcomes immeasurable evil and exploitation.

Even more, pain leads to the creative power of labour. So the opposition shifts again: the immeasurableness of evil now finds itself face to face with the immeasurable creative power of labour. The stakes are high, for on the one side we find God. In a move reminiscent of Ernst Bloch, God becomes the name for all that is oppressive. So, even though the book is set up as a struggle between God and man, it is a very unequal struggle. God, it would seem, is far too powerful, or as Negri puts it, immeasurable, imbalanced, disproportionate (Negri 2009, 28-9). Since God's plays the role of both judge and an adversary who laughs sarcastically at an increasing rebellious Job, God actually takes the side of oppression: '*God is the seal of the clearest, fiercest, deepest of social injustices* (chapter 24 screams forth human anger and desperation in this regard – from within the darkness, the misery and the most terrible unhappiness)' (Negri 2009, 43). In other words, in contrast to the measured God of the Scholastic theologians for whom God was an ordered being with fixed characteristics (Negri and Defourmantelle 2004, 80), this God of Job is the site of immeasurable evil. A quick survey of Christian or indeed

Jewish or Islamic history (the three religions that claim Job as a sacred text) leads to quick agreement with such an observation: persecutions, Inquisitions, Crusades, jihads, genocides, wars on terror, and dispossessions in the name of God only begin the list.

In response to the firepower of evil, Negri piles up as many desirable terms as he can on the side of immeasurable pain: power, creation, love, labour, democracy (pain is democratic over against fear which is dictatorial), community, time (as a concrete, lived and common reality which can lead to a time for liberation), and even value. In a sentence: the value of labour may be found in democratic pain and suffering which produces the power of creative labour. This lived experience is quite literally *ontology*. So it not merely immeasurable that has value over against measure, but rather two types of immeasurable, the one evil, oppressive and divine and the other chaotic, creative, powerful, and ... good. Soon enough I will stitch this sense of immeasurable in with what I have called *akairós*, but note what has happened: measure has been revalued. Not restricted to the dreadful patterns of payback, in which reward and punishment are appropriate to the initial act, measure has been dismantled and reshaped for a new task. This powerful and creative ontology that emerges from chaos is comparable to the chaotic immeasurable that precedes creation so that the world may be re-created from the beginning. In other words, through the two types of immeasurable, one evil and oppressive and the other creative and powerful, a new measure emerges, the creation of a very different and just order.

Let me summarise the moves as follows: negative measure -> negative immeasurable -> positive immeasurable -> positive measure. If we thought that a retributive system of carefully measured patterns of labour, time and value were bad enough, then we were in for a shock; immeasurable labour and exploitation are far worse. Yet, in the midst of this untold pain and suffering, a new creative power emerged, one that would lead to a thoroughly new measure, a new order that has nothing to do with the old.

That is all very well, but is not the far more interesting moment that of immeasurable? I must confess to being drawn to immeasurability rather than some search for a new measure, particularly because Negri's terminology overlaps significantly with that old mythological (and biblical) pattern of chaos and created order. The bare narrative sequence of the story of creation is deceptively simple and perhaps too well known: out of chaos comes the careful ordering of creation in which every thing finds its place. We might fill out this bare structure with all manner of detail – chaos may be the destructive force of older, cranky gods, as in the Mesopotamian creation myth, *Enuma Elish*, or it may be the formless and void state of the 'deep', the *tehom*, in the account of Genesis 1, or it may be the pure absence of apparent form and clear demarcation, the proverbial primeval swamp. In response to such chaos, creation involves victory over chaos (variously a monster, the sea, a serpent, an older opponent from an earlier generation of the gods), the demarcation of heaven and earth, planets in their paths, seasons at the right time, and the careful ordering of created life, usually in some form of hierarchy that

places humans at the top or, as is more often the case, subordinates human beings to the gods. Or we might turn to the Flood narrative of Genesis 6-9 for another version of the same story: the initial creation (measure) has turned out to be flawed, characterised by extraordinary evil and exploitation. In order to begin again, God makes use of a beneficial chaos (the flood) to wipe out the old and begin again with a new, created order. Or, in Negri's own take on this narrative, when 'measure fades into the disorder of the universe and evil is reflected in chaos, in the immeasurable' (2009, 49, in relation to Job 28:23-7), we need 'the collective creation of a new world' that 'is able to reconstitute a world of values' (2009, 14).

Negri is not shy about these cosmological connections, evoking the creative power of labour, the bringing into being of which human beings are capable, and above all – for my purposes at least – 'a great chaos, a great immeasurableness' (2009, 52) that makes it clear enough that the connection is not all that forced. As I argued earlier, this immeasurable chaos may be one of endless exploitation or it may be the highly productive one of depthless pain and suffering.

One feature of this cosmological chaos is worth emphasising, for too often it slips by without notice, camouflaged behind the screen of natural chaos: it is also, if not primarily, a political chaos. Once again Negri unwittingly brings the connection to the fore (Negri and Casarino 2008, 193-218), although now in his opposition between eugenics and the monster, the one a favoured theme from the Greeks onwards (meaning to be well-born, good and beautiful – note the connections with *kairós*) and the other a marker of what resists. In the creation myths, the monster is of course the one that must be overcome through the creation of order. These stories of creation are usually depicted as cosmogonic (creation of the natural world), theogonic (creation of the gods), and anthropogenic (human beings come into the picture). Nice and neat, but far too limited, for they are also what should be called poligonic (see further Boer 2005-6). They deal with the origins of, and thereby provide ideological justification for, the current political and social order. For instance, the Mesopotamian myth *Enuma Elish* is keen to point out that the Babylonian king is a direct descendent of Marduk, the warrior and creator god, and the myth spends a good deal of time with the ordering of society, the construction of Babylon and the establishment of the state. Similarly, the creation story in the Bible does not end with the seven days of Genesis 1 or indeed the alternative story of Genesis 2 with its more earthy narrative of the garden. It runs all the way through the stories of the patriarchs and matriarchs (Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah and Rachel, and then the twelve sons and one daughter, Dinah), the migration to Egypt, Moses and the Exodus, wilderness wandering and formation of a state in waiting, and then ends with the conquest of the Promised Land. In other words, it is primarily a political myth of creation. So if created order means political order, then the chaos against which that order continually struggles is as much political as it is natural. Primeval abyss and catastrophic flood are inseparable from disobedience regarding the tree of good and

evil in the garden, from murmuring and insurrection in the wilderness, from the perpetual challenges to the divinely-given power of Moses, and so on.

Now at last I can come back to the matter of *kairós*, which begins to look rather different from my initial foray into Negri's treatment of that theme. Two lines intersect at this point: the extraordinary way measure slots into *kairós*, immeasure into *ákairos*; and the way in which chaos and order have an inescapably political dimension. As for the first line, recall that the base sense of *kairós* is indeed measure, and that the temporal and spatial senses of the term are modifications on this basic sense. *Kairós* is both the properly proportioned body (physical, political and social) and the right or opportune time. It takes little imagination to see that the myths of creation – especially in their poligononic dimension – express this double sense of *kairós*: they provide narratives as to how everything finds its spatial (from the heavenly bodies through the creation of human beings to seat of power in the city) and its temporal (days, months, seasons and their proper relations) order.

What then is contrary to *kairós*, is outside it or far away from it, or indeed beyond *kairós*? Immeasure, obviously, or as I have called it earlier, *ákairos* – the ill-timed, unseasonable, and out of place. Negri of course wants to find a retooled measure and indeed *kairós*, but he tarries long with immeasure, with the monstrous, and thereby with *ákairos*. In fact, I would suggest that Negri himself unwittingly recognises the possibilities of *ákairos* through his invocation of the monstrous (Negri and Casarino 2008, 193-218), as also in his efforts to recover the ideal of poverty from its revolutionary theological heritage for a common political agenda (see Barber and Smith unpublished). Here too the very political nature of chaos comes into play, for if chaos marks the constitutive resistance to oppressive power, then we need to dwell in the midst of that chaos. Among others in the innovative *operaismo* movement in Italy, Negri should be the one to identify most closely with such resistance; as he has argued repeatedly, state and economic power are not givens to which people resist; no, that resistance is primary and to it oppressive political and economic power must constantly respond and adapt. So it is with the narratives of chaos, which has already been joined by our comrades, immeasure and *ákairos* – the fathomless, ill-timed and displaced. We see it again and again in those creation myths where chaos – disobedience, murmuring, insurrection, challenges to divinely appointed leaders, and simple refusal – is the constitutive force that must be countered in ever new ways. But we also see it in our own day with the running riots in Paris in 2006 or Greece in 2008-9, even in the hooligans who burn cars and smash shop fronts, the brazen disregard for police by gangs of youths, the massed protests in Seattle, Genoa and countless other moments of anti-capitalist protest. All of these are dubbed as chaotic and monstrous, threats to social order and the state, the work of thugs and criminals. They are, I would suggest, manifestations of *ákairos*.

It is time to review my argument concerning *kairós* and (im)measure. We began by exploring what turned out to be a rather conventional and biblical understanding of *kairós* – as the right season and opportune moment – only to raise questions about its moral and class allegiances in classical Greek thought. After siding with *ákairos* we turned to investigate the organising role of (im)imeasure in Negri's commentary on Job. But as we did so, the close interweaving with *kairós* and *ákairos* began to emerge, so much so that we sought the political connections between immeasure and *ákairos*. It has been a creative engagement with Negri's commentary on Job, an effort to take a productive argument a few steps further – all by means of a book of the Bible. Here the various lines came together, especially in the immense possibilities of immeasure, which is not only cognate with *ákairos* but also intersects with the theme of chaos as a distinctly political motif. In short, I have sided quite clearly with those who are untimely, not in the right place, chaotic and beyond measure.

## Conclusion

I close with a slightly different question, one that emerges from the preceding engagement: why on earth is Negri, the avowed atheist and frequent critic of the brutality sanctioned by religion, reading the Bible? One reason is that it provides him with a way to think through the brutal defeat of the Left in Italy in the 1970s – the police roundup, court cases, prison terms and exile. Another is that for this atheist Job enables Negri to make some sense of Judaism and Christianity, if not his brief time with Catholic Action in the 1950s where theology and politics came into contact with one another and where the central problem of the common – community, giving a hand, love of others – first arose (Negri and Casarino 2008, 41, 44). As he points out, he has nothing against religion, admits to an omnipresence of a pagan 'religiosity of doing' in his work, finds the ascetic tradition immensely appealing, calls for a thorough rethinking of communism comparable to the way the church fathers reshaped Christianity in the first few centuries, admits somewhat tongue-in-cheek to having offered the smallest of prayers to his mother when in prison awaiting word on his petition for parole, and goes so far as to say that the only definition of God he is prepared to admit is one of 'overabundance, excess, and joy' – these are the 'only forms through which God can be defined' (Negri and Defourmantelle 2004, 101, 106-7, 134; Negri and Casarino 2008, 179, 181). These are some of the reasons why Job draws him in, for Job is in fact a figure of the new militant, like Francis of Assisi (Hardt and Negri 2000, 413), one who brings transcendence to account through a sheer act of desire.

Yet a far deeper reason informs Negri's reading of the Bible; or rather, this reason enables him to read the Bible and indeed deal with theology without succumbing to secularised theology or being trapped by the absolute truth claims of theology. The key is

that Negri enacts the relativising of theology which negates its claims to both absolute truth and to the origins of much (if not all) contemporary thought. In a crucial footnote to the essay ‘Reliqua Desiderantur’ in *Subversive Spinoza* (2004, 54, n. 4), Negri deals with the arguments for the continuity of theological concerns in Spinoza’s secularisation of political concepts. It may be the unfolding of a theological nucleus, the internal logic of secularisation within theology, or the argument that Spinozian democracy was a result of a specific form of religious alliance and civic association. In reply, Negri initially questions whether one can guarantee continuity across the treacherous bridge of secularisation; he suspects not. But then he takes a much stronger position, arguing that Spinoza, like Marx and Machiavelli, brings about a profound rupture with any process of secularisation or laicisation, offering a materialist and atheist break with any theological continuity. Elsewhere he identifies this break in terms of the refusal to rely on transcendence that bedevils Western political thought, for which transcendence is manifested in hierarchy and legitimacy. He calls this refusal of obnoxious transcendence as an ‘operational materialism’ and ‘wholehearted atheism’ (Negri 2004, 24; Negri and Defourmantelle 2004, 158).

However, I suggest that Negri is pushing towards is what may be called a relativisation of theology. By questioning the continuity of theology in secularisation and especially by arguing for the profound rupture of a materialist approach, he effectively negates the claims made on behalf of theology to be the *fons et origo* of all (political) thought. And by arguing for the brand new beginnings of Spinoza, Machiavelli<sup>6</sup> and Marx, he puts theology in its place as one possible mode of thinking politics, or indeed culture, economics, society, and so on. Or rather, this is how I read what he is doing, even if he pushes the argument for a profound rupture a little too hard at times. This process of relativising theology shows up time and again in his detailed engagements with Spinoza, the comrade of Job (Negri 2009, 16-17; 2004, 51). Thus, in both *The Savage Anomaly* (itself a brilliant materialist reading of the Dutch and Spinozian anomalies) and *Subversive Spinoza*, Negri constantly interprets Spinoza’s engagements with theology – the proofs of God’s existence, prophecy, miracles, pietas, love, salvation and the Bible – in terms of other substantive issues – Power and power,<sup>7</sup> imagination, liberation, freedom, democracy, collectivity, the body, hermeneutics and so on. In other words, Negri enacts the relativisation of theology by reading Spinoza in a materialist register, or as he puts it, Spinoza’s ostensibly theological concerns, such as theism and pantheism, are ‘dissolved’ in his materialism (Negri 2004, 94). But that also means that theology does not need to be cast out into the outer darkness, there to gnash its teeth in the company of other superstitions; it becomes part of a much wider intellectual and political programme, as

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<sup>6</sup> For Machiavelli religious allegiance is subservient to the political pact (Negri 2004, 54, n. 15).

<sup>7</sup> Following Michael Hardt’s decision in translating *The Savage Anomaly*, the Latin *potestas* becomes Power and *potentia* power – the key issue in Negri’s reading of Spinoza.

Negri finds with Spinoza's *Ethics*. Spinoza does so with his radical synthesis of reason and religion, materialism and religiosity (*pietas*), but only when he has made his own exodus from the strictures of religion (for Spinoza it was his Jewish heritage) and created his own new philosophical universe (Negri 1991, 10-15). Thus, theology and materialism become two possible codes, often at loggerheads, two ways to approach the same problems. So too with Negri's commentary on the book of Job.

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Article

## MARXISM, FEMINISM, AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISSONANCE

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### Abstract

The analytical relationship between Marxism and feminism has engaged critical scholarship and leftist practice since the time of the foundational contributions of Marx and Engels. Socialist feminist analysis has profoundly advanced contemporary Marxism. However, some strands in Marxist theory and left practice continue to be resistant to feminist contributions. It is this resistance that animates this paper, which is theorized as *epistemological dissonance*. While not in any way universal, such dissonance is pervasive and suggests an epistemological framing. This is suggested to include four dimensions, regarding: (i) temporality; (ii) idealized masculinities; (iii) specific views of totality in relation to class, race and gender; and (iv) the relationship between activism and the academy. Collectively, these elements maintain and advance not only certain tenets understood as “knowledge”, but also generate a kind of problematic left common sense that can inhibit constructive Marxist and socialist feminist investigation.

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**Introduction: Framing and Naming the Problem**

The analytical relationship between Marxism and feminism – the latter sometimes referred to in early iterations as ‘the woman question’ – has engaged critical scholarship and leftist practice since the time of the foundational contributions of Marx and Engels. August Bebel’s *Woman Under Socialism* (1971 [1883]) and Frederick Engels’ *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1973 [1884]) continue to be considered classic texts of the Marxist canon. The conversation has proven to have considerable longevity, and with good reason. Socialist feminist analysis has profoundly advanced contemporary Marxism, developing our understanding of core concepts and pivotal issues. These include, for example, the role of social reproduction (Ferguson, 1999; Bezanson and Luxton, 2006); domestic labour (Benston, 1969; Hensman, 2011); the relationship between the private and public spheres (Young, 1990); the nature of the working class (Armstrong and Armstrong, 2010 [1993]); and the role of gender and sexuality in shaping state ideology and hegemony (Hennessy, 2000; Kinsman and Gentile, 2010).

However, some strands in Marxist theory, and some currents of left practice inspired by or crediting Marxist analysis, continue to be resistant to feminist contributions. The question that animates this article is, what is the nature of this resistance, and, relatedly why has it proven to be so difficult to address? The resistance takes various forms, from expressions of caution to overt hostility. In activist circles and progressive social movement settings, the manifestations are widespread, and increasingly well documented. Sheila Rowbotham, in *Woman’s Consciousness, Man’s World*, written in 1973, summarizes such an experiential moment in the context of the British left: “Men will often admit other women are oppressed but not you. Well it was true in the past but not now, well yes they are in Liverpool but not in London or wherever you live” (Rowbotham, 1973: 38). The continued relevance of Rowbotham’s analytical narrative is indicated in findings reported in a recent work, “Deconstructing Militant Manhood”, by

Lara Montesinos Coleman and Serena A. Bassi. These authors, citing the relevance of Rowbotham's earlier contribution, identify patterns of gendered hierarchical performance in contemporary social movement case studies in Britain (Coleman and Bassi, 2011: 211). Feminist theorists have identified similar patterns in other regional settings, though the context varies and issues are articulated in a variety of ways (Conway, 2011)

The resistance of some strands of Marxism to feminism also finds theoretical expression. This can, again, take a number of forms, and is not always explicit. For example, the resistance may include casual dismissal or absence of engagement. The construction of such an "epistemology of ignorance" has been identified regarding the erasure of the contributions of scholars of colour and associated anti-racist scholarship (Mills, 1997; Sullivan and Tuana, 2007). Alternatively, the resistance may involve a type of selective recognition, with a failure to see the feminist contributions of Marxist scholars. Rosa Luxemburg, for example, while commonly recognized for her contributions on issues such as the mass strike or her challenges to reformist practices of the German left in the early 1900s, is rarely noted for her contributions to Marxist feminism and the significance of her close collaboration with Clara Zetkin (see Rich, 1991; Dunayevskaya, 1991). The same pattern can be skewed in the opposite direction, where Marxists are identified as feminists, but their contributions to political economy or socialist theory are neglected. If Rosa Luxemburg has been read as a Marxist and not a feminist, Clara Zetkin's contributions to Marxist theory, for example, have commonly been read as addressing only 'the woman question'. Zetkin's original contributions to concepts of the working class, the united front, or internationalism are often unseen (for a corrective, see John Riddell, 2010). Other Marxist anti-feminist theorizations may be more explicit. Tony Cliff, for example, in *Class Struggle and Women's Liberation* (1984), offers a particularly sharp formulation.

Feminism sees the basic division in the world as that between men and women....For Marxism, however, the fundamental antagonism in society is that between classes, not sexes....There can be no compromise between these two views, even though some 'socialist feminists' have in recent years tried to bridge the gap (Cliff, 1984: 7).

How do we explain a notable continued intransigence within the left, specifically the Marxist left, to feminist critique, despite the overwhelming impact of this advance in critical scholarship and its rich lessons for activist and socialist practice? In this article, I argue that this resistance is rooted in a problematic epistemological framing, resulting in a dichotomous relationship between a narrowly constructed 'Marxism' and a similarly constructed 'feminism'. I term this resistance *epistemological dissonance*, which can be understood as the friction resulting from an encounter with what is perceived as a

competitive, and discordant, way of knowing; a certain strand of Marxism encounters feminist critique and analysis in such a way. Such an epistemological stance is challenged by a range of alternative approaches that see feminism, or feminisms, as helpful in advancing Marxist theory and practice. These Marxist approaches, however, which strive for a unitary theory to identify capitalism as both an exploitive and an oppressive system, are not the focus of this discussion. Such unitary approaches are considered only insofar as they serve as a counterfactual, to highlight a distinctive but apparently fairly widespread interpretation of Marxism that encounters feminism with epistemological dissonance.

The effort here, then, is simply to identify the elements of what, *in toto*, would appear to be an epistemological stance that is resistant to feminism in the name of advanced Marxist theory and practice. To this end, I identify four elements, or dimensions, that collectively comprise epistemological parameters in a constructed Marxism that express dissonance when encountered by alternative assumptions and approaches that have tended to ground feminist analysis and critique. These four dimensions are in regard to: (i) temporality; (ii) idealized masculinities; (iii) specific views of totality in relation to class, race and gender; and (iv) the relationship between activism and the academy. Each of these elements serves to reinforce the others. Collectively, they maintain and advance not only certain tenets understood as “knowledge”, but also generate a certain left common sense that operates as a kind of cultural closure, excluding other lines of investigation that might threaten to dislodge naturalized assumptions.

In what follows I attempt to explain this epistemological dissonance, and elaborate upon each of the characteristic four dimensions in turn. My aim is neither to revisit earlier debates, nor to attempt to move intransigent Marxist perspectives towards greater accommodation to feminism. Rather, I suggest that naming the dissonance could be helpful in advancing and reviving the dialogue in constructive ways.

### **Epistemological Dissonance**

Epistemology is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “the study or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity.” Explaining the resistance of a current of Marxism to feminism demands consideration of epistemological parameters in part because it is a phenomenon not readily reducible to any single theoretical, methodological or analytical premise. Nor is it defined by any particular current. Indeed, some Marxist feminists who insist on the intersectionality of Marxism and feminism ground their approach in the same Marxist premises that compel others to reject feminism. For example, Raya Dunayevskaya – who, with CLR James originally developed the theory of Russia under Stalin as state capitalist (Rein, S., 2007) – identifies the contemporary women’s movement as an extension of the

emancipatory movement originally theorized as central to Marx's foundational method. She sees this emancipatory urge to have been carried forward particularly by Rosa Luxemburg, and taken up by feminist resistance in the US in the 1960s (Dunayevskaya, 1991). Alternatively, Tony Cliff, also grounding his Marxist method in the theory of state capitalism as applied to the Stalinist period in Russia, and also a student of Rosa Luxemburg, draws the opposite conclusion regarding the women's movement. For Cliff, the 1960s women's liberation movement was a challenge and threat to the movement for working class self-emancipation (Cliff, 1984).

In another example, Lindsey German makes the case for a Marxist analysis against feminism, largely on the basis of feminism's ascribed universal embrace of the role of patriarchy rather than capitalism. However, German draws on the work of Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas to support this case, developed in *Sex, Class and Socialism* (German, 1994: 74). The argument is continued in *Material Girls*, with German noting her debt, again, especially to Brenner (German, 2007: 154-7). But this is a theoretical cul-de-sac, as Johanna Brenner has herself advanced the case for a unitary Marxist, and socialist, feminism (Brenner, 2000). The case for a Marxist opposition to feminism, in other words, is presented by German in large measure by reliance on the Marxist feminist perspective. Other Marxist feminists, such as Nancy Holmstrom (2011: 254) explicitly root their analyses in Marx's understanding of the centrality of working class self-emancipation – though it is precisely this premise that a Marxist challenge to feminism asserts to preserve.

Grounding the resistance of certain Marxist framings toward feminism in terms of theoretical premises is therefore at the least inconclusive; moreover, it is unsatisfying. A common argument presented among anti-feminist Marxists is that feminism is not intrinsically anti-capitalist. This is certainly a valid assertion. Indeed, the existence, and even dominance, of a bourgeois, or liberal, feminist current that is compatible with capitalism and imperialism is well recognized, not least among socialist and anti-racist feminists (Cudd and Holmstrom, 2011; Eisenstein, 2009; Fraser, 2009). Another argument is that some anti-capitalist feminisms demonstrate the incoherence of the project, moving beyond Marx in ways that embrace autonomism (for example, Federici, 2004). But recognition of multiple feminisms does not support a theoretical rejection of feminism generally, at least from a Marxist perspective. The history of Marxism after Marx is, after all, one of many Marxisms. And even Karl Marx identified the challenge of uniformity, when he famously asserted that if contemporary interpretations of his work constituted "Marxism", he himself was not an advocate (McLellan, 1973: 443). A reductive view of a singular Marxism – identified as bureaucratic, state-centric, etc. – has long been challenged by the most creative Marxists as an inappropriate method to justify dismissal. A similar method – one which first reduces feminism to its most conservative iterations, and then rejects its radical iterations as not really 'feminist' – suggests that something more deeply epistemological is involved in the construction.

An identification of an epistemological basis to explain the dissonance with which feminism meets a type or strand of Marxism allows us to seek beyond analytical debates that have, in fact, spanned several decades. For the resistant strand of Marxism, these theoretical innovations seem to have generated little relevance. While epistemological parameters are inherently difficult to define precisely, such an exercise is helpful in explaining not only persistent ideas, but common feelings and patterns of exclusion. The epistemological dissonance is not only intellectual, therefore, but also affective (Ahmed, 2004). Marxist feminist Dorothy Smith, for example, a “world-renowned Marxist feminist scholar and activist and a formidable intellect” (Carroll, 2010: 9), in a 2005 publication (originally presented as a 1973 conference paper), notes such an encounter. She describes her experience on the left in Canada:

...[B]ecoming a Marxist has been an enterprise in trying to discover and trying to understand the objective social, economic, and political relations which shape and determine women’s oppression in this kind of society. ... But trying to become engaged politically in other ways on the ‘left’ and in relation to Marxists has been an extremely painful and difficult experience. ...How Marxists, whether Social Democrats or Marxist-Leninists, responded to us as feminists does not differ from how we are responded to by the ruling class – the ‘upstairs’ people (Smith, 2005: 226-7).

The political cultures among even some of the most creative and innovative arenas of Marxist theory and history have proven remarkably resistant to one of the most basic contributions of feminism – recognition of the necessity of involvement of women in traditionally male-dominated discursive spaces. For example, John Riddell noted, in summarizing a series of talks at the Historical Materialism conference in London, UK, in November, 2011, dedicated to his recent translation of the proceedings of the Communist International, that despite numerous notable strengths, “The gender balance among presenters, like that in the field of Communist history studies generally, anachronistically reproduced that of workers’ congresses a century ago” (Riddell, 2011). Another example is the Greater Toronto Workers’ Assembly (GTWA), formed in October 2009 in response particularly to conditions of economic crisis. The GTWA has raised hopes of providing a refreshing experiment in a new anti-capitalist politics, with a formal commitment to “feminist, queer-positive, and anti-oppression politics,” as well as anti-racist politics, as part of its foundational *Vision Statement* (GTWA, Jan. 2010). However, the organization’s early years have been haunted by challenges in attracting and retaining, and advancing the development of, women and visible minorities – challenges readily recognized among activists, though having proven tenaciously difficult to redress (GTWA, July 2010).

At issue, then, are not merely questions of theoretical analysis, but patterns of practical organizing which have damaging consequences in advancing a unified and effective, radical, socialist alternative to capital and empire. An extreme example of a failure to redress sexist practices has been cited in instances of sexual assault against women in the context of World Social Forum planning and events (Freudenshuss, 2007; Roskos and Willis, 2007). These instances are sufficiently notable that a substantive literature is emerging (see Conway, 2011: 226).

Naming such an epistemological dissonance is not to suggest, however, that a Marxist framework is any more generative of such resistance than other approaches, including liberalism or anarchism (Sullivan, 2004; Sullivan, 2005). Nor is this to suggest that all Marxists, or leftists generally, are collectively implicated. A corollary of this argument is in fact to emphasize that an integrated Marxist feminist analysis can be uniquely helpful in overcoming divisions that are inevitable in movements that emerge in the context of capitalist and imperialist hegemony. Naming an epistemology that meets feminism as dissonant, then, is not only about identifying specific issues in need of debate. It also, and perhaps more significantly, describes the boundaries of what *questions* are considered to be worthy of asking, a precondition to seriously and constructively entertain such debate. Generic dismissal of feminist critique renders engagement with socialist feminist contributions to Marxism to be uninteresting or unimportant. Feminist analytical or practical concerns can be considered to be the select purview of those with a 'special interest' rather than central to the totalizing and comprehensive frame that renders historical materialism so compelling a method. Epistemological dissonance tends to render central features of the ubiquitous impact of forms of hegemonic regulation, and effective forms of resistance, unknowable within a certain constructed Marxist terminology. Grounded in patterns of gendered practice and experiences, this resistance can be very difficult to challenge from the left. The dissonance is expressed across a spectrum of responses, from an attitude of affective tolerance, where there is verbal acceptance despite patterns of dissonance, to overt rejectionism, where feminist critique and methods are dismissed in both theory and practice. For example, lessons from indigenous, Third World, or anti-racist feminists that have direct bearing on socialist politics commonly fail to enter into the lexicon of what is defined as "Marxist political economy", but are instead seen as issues associated "identity".

I suggest a typology of various distinct elements, or dimensions, that describe the epistemological dissonance of a current of Marxism regarding feminist critique and analysis. Collectively these elements are self-reinforcing, and comprise an epistemological framing of a kind of Marxism that finds feminism to be outside of itself. For this kind of Marxism, feminism is not only unknowable, but suggests lines of inquiry where the questions posed are themselves unaskable.



## Elements of Epistemological Dissonance

### *(i) Temporality*

The Marxist tradition is closely associated with specific historical moments, often traced through the writings of individual theorists and events. This temporality register is commonly both nostalgic, and anticipatory. Regarding the nostalgic frame, notable are the writings and contributions of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, and Vladimir Lenin. The Russian Revolution of 1917 is seen as a formative moment, when the abstract critique of capitalism developed by Marx and Engels moved from theory to practice, and influence mass political events locally and globally. Marxism emerged as a recognized guiding approach for working class revolutionary transformation in a major country. The intense conflict between Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin that followed the Russian Revolution divided the movement, and the “lineage” split into various camps by the late 1920s. The Communist International is also seen as pivotal, with those following the emancipatory emphasis of Trotsky focusing on the first four congresses (see Riddell, 2012). There is a sense that there were higher points of success in the past than in the present in terms of revolutionary theory and practice. The nostalgia can be transferred to more modern periods, and can move in moments of both time and space, such as the 1930s in Europe or the 1960s in the US.

Historical memory is constructed, therefore, with a sense of longing, and a desire for repetition. Here the nostalgic and the anticipatory combine. There is a desire to see moment of an idealized history repeated in the future. Revolutionary moments in contemporary analysis, for example, are commonly presented with breathless anticipation that a “February” – referring to a democratic challenge to autocratic rule similar to the February, 1917 moment in the revolution against Tsarist Russia – might just become a new “October” – where a repetition of the successful Russian revolution might again occur. This temporal moment is not only a place in time, but also a geographic space. The specificities of the Russian context are often elided in a universalized sense of the Russian Revolution as an example of radical transformation that can be abstracted to apply to any country or region internationally. Similarly, in this epistemological parameter, other geopolitical specificities can be removed from the field of enquiry. For example, the settler colonial context of North American capitalism, a central element of feminist anti-racist analyses and some socialist feminist studies, disappears in the assumption of similitudes associated with a universalize, and often European, past (Razack, Smith and Thobani, 2010; Altamirano-Jiménez, 2010).

Other moments of transformation that do not fit the model are, simultaneously, minimized. This contrasts with what can be considered to be feminist view of history, which is commonly not grounded in the work or writings of individuals, or specific singular events, but on collective actions that constitute social “waves”. This metaphor is

associated with narrating the history and development of the women's movement. It is subject to significant critique among "many feminist scholars, particularly over the last decade and a half" who have challenged "its reductive effects on chronicling feminism's history"; but it has nonetheless become "entrenched in feminism's lexicon" (Henry, 2012: 102). It is also seen as problematic in presuming that anti-racist and intersectional feminism is a recent addition to feminist movement, minimizing the role of early contributors such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, indigenous women, etc. (see for example Painter, 1996; Mohanty, 2003).

The 'wave' framing (sometimes attributed originally to Julia Kristeva's 1979 essay, "Women's Time"), does, however, contribute to a basic understanding that movements for emancipation change over time. In this sense, the temporality register is very different from the nostalgic/anticipatory one characteristic of some Marxist approaches. Specifically, the wave periodization, with all its limitations, enables a conversation that emphasizes how what appears radical in one context in time and place, can develop conservative impulses that demand challenges in another context (Mann and Huffman, 2005; Brown et al., 2011). The broad elements of this general periodization of the women's movement incorporates the suggestion of: a first wave movement associated with liberal democratic political rights, from the mid-1840s in Europe to women's universal suffrage, (circa 1920); a second wave movement for women's reproductive rights and equality of opportunity in education and employment, associated particularly with the US and the period from 1968 through the 1970s (Lear, 1968); and a third wave associated with intersectionality, that incorporates a broad understanding of gendered identities with race, class, sexual orientation, age, ability and national positioning, often associated with a generational challenge of radical feminist youth to a perceived constrained legacy of the second wave (Walker, 1992; Henry, 2012: 102-105; Gillis et al., 2007).

The notable feature of the waves metaphor, for the purposes of exploring a particular strand of Marxism's epistemological dissonance regarding feminism, is that it is a temporal frame grounded neither in the contributions of ascribed great individuals, nor to universally recognized events or institutions. Moreover, the wave temporal register reconfigures the present, as one that is the product of past struggles but does not romanticize the past. Its appeal is precisely in its unboundedness. This includes both a celebration of third wave 'presentness', as well as recognition of backlash, allowing capacity to look back at headier times of protest. As Astrid Henry notes, the wave metaphor is inherently paradoxical (Henry, 2012: 114). She suggests that it both opens up possibilities and limits them at the same time, as a singular wave model:

makes it difficult to trace out other activist and intellectual precursors – as well as contemporary influences on – its development, including the Civil Rights Movement and critical race studies, the gay and lesbian movement

and queer studies, and the numerous disciplinary traditions that have shaped the 'interdiscipline' of WGS [Women's and Gender Studies] (Henry, 2012:113).

Regardless of limitations, however, the metaphor has considerable theoretical utility, precisely in its suggestion of flexibility. Ednie Kaeh Garrison has suggested, for example, that a wave frame can be move beyond the 'oceanographic' notion of ebb and flow along a beach, to consider instead 'electromagnetic wavelengths', or radio waves, which travel cyclically (Garrison, 2005: 239; cited in Henry, 2012: 115).

The challenge of temporal framing, of relating history to the present, has certainly been addressed by Marxist scholars (Bensaïd, 2002; Tomba, 2009; Murphy, 2007). However, the wave metaphor can be read as emblematic of particular advances in feminist theorizations of history, historical memory, and periodizations of moments of social change that a tenacious Marxist nostalgia, combined with a desire to repeat historical moments in the future, encounters with epistemological dissonance.

#### *(ii) Idealized Masculinities*

A separate but not unrelated dimension of epistemological dissonance arises in the way a current of Marxism idealizes certain individuals, or ascribed characteristics of idealized individuals who may or may not have any similarity to real historical figures. In the 1970s, when political badges were common among student activists, one commonly sported slogan expressed the norm: "We'll all get along just fine as long as you know I'm Lenin". In a more contemporary and considerably more sophisticated contribution, Coleman and Bassi note certain types of masculinized personalities that are idealized as models of stature and authority in activist left circles, drawing on two case studies in the UK. The authors articulate two ideal types in particular: "Man with Analysis" and "Anarchist Action Man".

The former is described in the context of a Latin America solidarity organization. The hegemonic structure is common, expressing a certain type of masculine performance, "characterized by 'black and white' (sic) reasoning about objective matters, with little room for self-doubt in claims to knowledge, or for reason to be coloured by emotion." Argument was constructed as competition, where one analysis could only be credibly challenged if an alternative Man with Analysis entered the ring (Coleman and Bassi, 2011: 211-212). The authors identify how the hegemonic masculinity of the Man with Analysis led to exclusions of other forms of knowledge, including among those with experience in the Latin American region, women, and men with alternative masculinities who did not want to compete "with the alpha males" (Coleman and Bassi, 2011: 213).

The second masculine personality, Anarchist Action Man, appears to be quite different from Man with Analysis. The outcome of producing patterns of gendered exclusion, however, is similar. The case study here is a direct action planning meeting

associated with anti-globalization politics.

It is informal, even chaotic, with people sitting around a rickety coffee table on reclaimed sofas, in a colourful room littered with flyers bearing angry slogans. ... However, the impression of chaos is only apparent. ... The people in the space all look very similar to each other. They are mostly male, white and under forty....The men, as well as some women with a more masculine gender performance, are all wearing practical, outdoorsy, sometimes military, clothing, much of which is black (Coleman and Bassi, 2011: 215).

It is in this space that Anarchist Action Man takes on specific recognition, to the exclusion of other forms of ‘action’ that are more inclusive. The outcome of this culture is such that “within the action-planning process, the assumption is that strong, able, masculine bodies will, for example, be ‘locking on’ to one another to blockade a factory” (Coleman and Bassi, 2011: 217).

While the Man with Analysis is more standardized in Marxist circles than the Anarchist Action Man, a variant that could be suggested that is particularly common in activist circles is what could be termed “Communist Urgent Man”. The nostalgia for historic moments of mass conflict runs parallel with a sense of extreme urgency when potential confrontations arise in the present. Communist Urgent Man is perennially impatient. This persona often displays little interest in collective process development, where questions or challenges that are not universally obvious could be addressed. Certain discussions are seen to risk wasting precious time, distracting from the task considered by Communist Urgent Man to be particularly pressing. In fact, those who do not share the same singular priority, or affective sense of immediacy in the task, are considered as potentially obstructionist. Communist Urgent Man understands the moment, and the dire consequences of missing it, even if others fail to perceive the immediacy of the situation and the opportunities it offers.

Notably, moving beyond Coleman and Bassi, who consider these hegemonic masculinities in the context of case studies, in explaining the epistemology of dissonance Man with Analysis, Anarchist Action Man, and Communist Urgent Man, are considered to be gendered personae rather than lived personalities; women can and do take on these personae, and sometimes with added vigour. Moreover, taken as personae rather than personalities, the same individual can move from one to another. Man with Analysis can assume the persona of Communist Urgent Man, though the transition may be unclear to the outside observer. Similarly, Man with Analysis can morph into Anarchist Action Man, shifting from an emphasis on speech and argument to a ‘time for action’ where conversation is seen as irrelevant. While Anarchist Action Man and Communist Urgent Man often see one another as the subjects of polemic and distrust, these two personae can

become oddly similar in particular contexts where a singular next step or next action is treated with extreme impatience. However, all of these personae tend to be imbued with a sense of entitlement that is attractive to certain personalities, and are commonly white, heteronormative and driven by a sense of individual competition. Alternatively, those who are the most marginalized by capitalist economic and social relations do not easily perform or embody Man with Analysis, Anarchist Action Man or Communist Urgent Man personae.

In all these idealized personae, epistemological dissonance becomes embedded in organizational patterns where hegemonic masculinities are naturalized. Those informed by, or claiming to advance, a Marxist framework can and do embody these various masculinized ideal types. Feminist challenges may be tolerated, but in a moment of extreme urgency there is little time for reflection or changing course. And in the discursive space of individualized and often competitive “analysis”, there is in fact little room for collective processes or common strategic planning. Compressed time and artificially imposed urgency, combined with highly abstract commentary, tend to discourage new relationships of trust to develop; those who feel unsure or unsafe will often draw back from participation, either in organizational planning or in specific activities. Feminist concerns for alteration of patterns of exclusive conversation, planning or process, or other types of masculinities that reject competitive or individualistic models, may be overtly rejected, or only conditionally tolerated. The epistemological dissonance remains unabated and is highly prone to reproduction.

### *(iii) Totality and Class, Race and Gender*

The strand of Marxism that is epistemologically dissonant in its encounter with feminism commonly frames “class” as its most totalizing category. Indeed a “class analysis” is often presented as the corrective or alternative to a “feminist analysis”. Feminism may be rejected or tolerated on grounds that it is a narrow framing, whereas class is considered to name the totality, embracing numerous distinctions but appropriately structured in relation to the productive process.

There are several elements to this construction. The dissonance, at least in part, follows from a temporality, as described above, which is largely nostalgic, where both elite and subaltern classes are considered to be more or less similar over time and place. An understanding of the rule of the capitalist class, for example, in conditions of 21<sup>st</sup> century globalization, is compared discursively to periods including the Russian Tsarist state of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or of the United States in the 1930s or 1960s, without reflection. It is the sameness of these periods, and particularly of the class structures of these various cases, which are assumed, rather than the differences.

“Class” is thus asserted as a totalizing category both in terms of the ruling class

and the working class, and over time and place.<sup>2</sup> Some contributions in the ‘class versus race’ debates (Bakan, 2007) parallel this epistemological framing, where race, like gender, is seen as a narrow or limiting category, whereas class is identified as comprehensive. Within this strand of Marxism, issues of difference within the working class along lines of gender or race, as well as difference more widely, and questions of gendered or racialized privilege, identity or voice, are not central to the emancipatory project. Such questions are either openly rejected as divisive, or tolerated but considered marginal, of interest only as special topics. The particular way in which this assertion of class is epistemologically asserted may see women workers and workers of colour as important, but it is their role as waged workers in empirically defined cases and contexts which is emphasized. Contrary to the abstract and universalized understanding of time and space associated with Marxist history, sex and race are considered to be relevant insofar as they arise as examples in specific conditions. Constructions of gender and racialization are not, therefore, accepted as categories of analysis through which to explain the workings of capitalism and imperialism. The suggestion of the adoption of race and gender as methodological rather than as descriptive tools, encounters this strand of Marxism as epistemologically dissonant.

It is useful to explain this particular element in epistemological dissonance by considering examples of feminist anti-racist contributions that fall outside this particular understanding of “class”, as cases of the counterfactual. For example, a classic text in the Marxist canon, as mentioned earlier, is Frederick Engels’ *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. The subtitle of the book explains the focus: “In Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan” (Engels, 1973). Morgan published a major study of the life and social organization of the Iroquois of northern New York State in 1877, titled *Ancient Society* (2004). Considered a founder of modern anthropology, Morgan offered an original and detailed account of an indigenous population to the settler audiences of colonial North America and Europe. Against the tide of Victorian morality, Morgan noted particularly that women were not subjugated by patriarchal oppression.

There is, of course, an extensive body of literature considering the contributions of Morgan and Engels in Marxist feminist analysis (Vogel, 1983; Bezanson and Luxton, 2006); this material need not be revisited here. What is salient, however, is that a distinct, and similarly extensive, body of literature written by indigenous feminists falls outside the epistemological frame of the normalized Marxist canon. While these authors identify with longstanding struggles against colonialism, imperialism and capitalism, and many explicitly rely on an historical materialist analysis, the lack of engagement of these contributions from what could be considered ‘mainstream’ Marxist thinking is striking.

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<sup>2</sup> This summary is recognized to be a rather crude and incomplete consideration of a Marxist understanding of class. However, a more nuanced discussion, where the category of middle class is addressed, for example, would take us beyond the scope of the current discussion.

In *States of Race*, for example, the editors pose a radical challenge to capitalism through a focus on the experiences of racialized, immigrant and indigenous women (2010). As the editors note:

The feminist, anti-racist intellectual tradition of which the contributors of this anthology are a part emerges out of a long history. Indigenous women were the first to powerfully critique Canada as a white settler society and to analyze its ongoing colonial practices.... Colonialism has always operated *through* gender.... Today, with hundreds of 'missing' Indigenous women, women who are presumed murdered, we confront daily what Indigenous scholars mean when they write that sexual violence is how you 'do' colonialism (Razack, Smith and Thobani, 2010: 1-2).

Aboriginal feminists confirm the early observations in Morgan's work (minus the racialized and Eurocentric articulations) (Morgan, 2004). Verna St. Denis, for example, summarizes the case in Joyce Green's edited collection, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*: "[A]boriginal women claim that Aboriginal cultures do not have a history of unequal gender relations; in fact...Aboriginal women occupied positions of authority, autonomy and high status in their communities" (St. Denis, 2007: 37).

Another example is indicated in Leith Mullings' study of race and gender in the making of the US working class (Mullings, 1997). As a feminist, anti-racist anthropologist, she foregrounds her work in questions regarding women's participation in production originally identified in Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. She identifies the contributions of Leacock (1981) and Sacks (1979), both of whom extend Engels' formative contribution to feminist anthropology based on contemporary findings. Mullings' series of studies of the US working class notes the formative impacts of racism and sexism in the capitalist accumulation process. She identifies how racism in the post-emancipation period meant that African American men were unable to earn a 'family wage', compelling African American married women to participate in the paid labour force in far greater proportions than Euro-American, or white, married women (Mullings, 1997: 45). Mullings is part of a tradition of anti-racist feminism, including those ranging from Angela Davis to bell hooks, which has challenged the claims of white, middle class feminism to universalize a limited racial and gendered view of the American working class family in such a way as to exclude black and minority experiences (Davis, 1983; Guy-Sheftell, 1995). Mullings' adoption of race and gender as methodologically inherent to class analysis indicates an intersectional approach, but it is one that suggests epistemological dissonance in some canonical Marxist readings (see German, 1994: vii).

Another factor that demonstrates this element in the epistemological dissonance is the way that a strand of Marxism tends to conflate the notional totalizing concept of

class with a particular understanding of ‘work’. Here, the contributions of socialist feminist theorists are notably dissonant. There is an extensive body of socialist feminist literature which has addressed the significance of domestic labour and social reproduction in reframing Marx’s original analysis of capitalism (Benston, 1969; Vogel, 1983; Floyd, 2009). A notion of the working class that extends beyond the workplace, however, not only addresses the vast amounts of work performed largely by women in the home. It also considers the role of the ruling class in regulating this sphere, as well as the personal and emotional relations between and among individuals. As Rosemary Hennessey has suggested, if we understand “desire as a class act” (Hennessey, 2000: 175), the concept of ‘class’ itself demands reformulation. Such a reformulation, however, is a source of epistemological dissonance to a Marxism grounded in a very different framing of totality in relation to class, race and gender.

*(iv) Activism and the Academy*

The final element in the epistemological dissonance involves the relationship between activism and the university, or what could be called ‘the academy’. Marxism has generally emerged outside of mainstream intellectual life in capitalist societies, marginalized by the bourgeois institutions that support advanced research and scholarship. However, the New Left of the 1960s and ‘70s was deeply rooted in post-secondary student politics, and challenged earlier limitations and boundaries that defined the elite ‘ivory tower’. Second wave feminism, which emerged as part of this period of radicalization, has similarly involved an ambivalent relationship to the academy. There is now a substantive experience, associated with an expanding literature, that addresses the role of “Women and Gender Studies” (WGS) in complex interaction with various ‘waves’ of feminist organizing.

However, WGS and self-identified Marxist currents commonly exist in parallel spaces in the fragmented world of the academy. One element of the distance, arguably, is the epistemological resistance to feminist analysis from a particular strand of Marxism. While WGS programs are not uncommonly the home to socialist feminist theorists, a particular kind of Marxist theorization meets feminist studies in the academy with extreme suspicion. Certainly, the Man with Analysis persona often rests comfortably within the halls of university scholarship as well as in activist circles, but is rarely found in the offices or classrooms of Women and Gender Studies programs. Moreover, where universities have been sites of feminist policy challenges, it is not unusual for self-identified Marxist professors to be demonstrably resistant, or even antagonistic. This dimension of epistemological dissonance is notable, not merely in its articulation of a defensive posture regarding the language and practice of anti-oppression politics on the university as a site of employment, but also in the challenge of advancing conversations among scholar-activists regarding wider projects. While Marxism and feminism might reasonably be considered natural allies in a university setting threatened by neoliberal and



corporate policies – led by state, private, administrative and conservative interests – in fact the epistemological dissonance on the part of Marxist scholars when faced with feminist initiatives can be extreme.

The issue of backlash against feminism is significant in considering the university as a site of neoliberal capitalism (Faludi, 1991). This is in part because WGS departments have been particularly vulnerable to cutbacks, and managing defenses of feminist curriculum has depended upon considerable organizational efforts (Piepmeier, 2012). Moreover, universities have generally been reluctant to welcome women and minority scholars as permanent faculty, even in the face of liberal ‘equal opportunity’ guidelines. The attacks on gains won by women and visible minorities in accessing educational and employment opportunities from which they have been historically excluded have come principally from the state and the right. Conservative challenges to affirmative action, often referred to in Canada as employment equity, have been widespread (Faludi, 1991; Bakan and Kobayashi, 2004).

Unfortunately, the left has been an unreliable ally on this front. Research has indicated how the Ontario New Democratic Party under the leadership of Bob Rae<sup>3</sup> stalled in implementing employment equity policy during the five years of its majority government (1990-95) (Bakan and Kobayashi, 2007). An explicit and aggressive backlash against employment equity followed, and became identified as a hallmark of the Conservative government of Mike Harris (Bakan and Kobayashi, 2000). Though an alliance of feminists, anti-racists and labour advocates united in an effort to defend the interests of equity-seeking groups in Ontario (Bakan and Kobayashi, 2003), the role of Marxists in such a movement has been notably uneven. A wing of Marxist and progressive thinking has either stood silent, or campaigned to challenge efforts to sustain employment equity principals (see Whitaker, 2002: 7-8).

One way of understanding this element in the epistemological dissonance is to consider the potential that an alternative approach could offer. Marxism, arguably, has yet to fully explore the tension inherent in the project’s relationship between activism and academic institutionalization. Herbert Marcuse, who identified this tension, warned of what he considered the “rampant anti-intellectualism” of New Left radicalism, which he saw posing as a critique of “academicism” (Marcuse, 2007: 176). Others in the Marxist tradition, however, have rejected the limited post-1960s successes of Marxist studies in university curricula, challenging “academic Marxism” as dangerously co-optive (Rees, 1998). Gramsci’s concept of the “organic intellectual”, while widely cited, remains unclearly situated in the modern university setting in liberal democracies (see McKay, 2000). The concept has been adjusted by Edward Said, who identified the specific responsibility of the ‘public intellectual’ in linking advanced academic scholarship with social organizing (Said, 1996), but there remains little in terms of more general

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<sup>3</sup> This same Bob Rae is serving in 2012 as leader of the Federal Liberal Party.

theorization. And Isaac Deutscher exemplified the retreat of the Marxist intellectual absent any form of institutionalized support, as he adopted a metaphor drawn from Leon Trotsky's last "hell-black night" before his assassination at the hands of Stalin's agent. Trotsky, refusing to wear a bulletproof vest, "suggested that it would best be worn by the sentry on duty at the watch tower" (Deutscher, 1970: 401). In different circumstances, Deutscher 'retired' from political engagement to a metaphorical "watch tower", to "watch with detachment and alertness this heaving chaos of a world" (Deutscher, 1984: 57).

Arguably, feminist theorizations on the relationship between academic scholarship and activism have something useful to offer Marxists in this regard. Alison Piepmeier, for example, challenges the construction of a "besiegement" narrative in Women's and Gender Studies programs. She unpacks the emergence of a generational investment in intellectual claims, that serves to alienate young scholars and activists and meets new intellectual advances with a sense of extreme threat (Piepmeier, 2012: 127-8). Martha McCaughey addresses the mythologization of "community" in WGS programs, and attempts to explain its various meanings within and beyond the walls of the university setting (McCaughey, 2012). The point here is not to implore the construction of a healthy dialogue between Marxists and feminist scholars in the academy; rather it is to draw attention to the epistemological dissonance that renders such a consistent dialogue nearly unimaginable. The challenge of even finding a common entry point among activists and scholars, arguably addressing very similar relational challenges, speaks to the epistemological dissonance with which the feminist encounter is met by a certain 'type' of Marxism. Put differently, the Man with Analysis has little interest in WGS programs, discourse, or feminist analysis; and Communist Urgent Man, well, has very little time.

### **Conclusion: Reclaiming Marxism and Feminism**

The aim in the preceding discussion has been a modest one, simply to name a palpable resistance to feminism identifiable in recurrent locations of Marxist theory and practice as deeply grounded, suggesting epistemological parameters. Epistemological dissonance is apparently widespread, at least within the framework of the English speaking Euro-American left, and has tended to reproduce itself across geographic, ideological and generational spaces. This is not to suggest that it is, however, merely or only epistemological, as there are certainly political, embodied, and varying degrees of this resistance. Indeed some of us have lived in and with ambivalences regarding the relationship between Marxism and feminism for sustained periods. I suggest naming this phenomenon epistemological dissonance. To be clear, this is not an issue reducible to particular theoretical positions or group practices; it is not merely about "debates". Rather, epistemological dissonance is expressed intellectually and affectively to shape historic,

present and future *questions* pertaining to feminist analysis – shaping what may or may not be considered relevant for serious scholarly or strategic enquiry.

It is important to stress, further, that this is not an argument regarding Marxism per se, but only a particular, admittedly ill-defined, strand of Marxism, a Marxism that does not know its own name. There is some cost to this dissonant encounter. Indeed, arguably, the voices of indigenous feminists provide the most enduring appeal for a different way of knowing, one that begins with an intersectional analysis that incorporates feminism, anti-racism, and historical materialism. The same indigenous women, men and children who were the objects of study for Lewis Henry Morgan, and in turn Marx and Engels, have come to claim a place as subjects of their own history, as well as their present and future (Mann, 2011).

Evidence suggests then, that the epistemological resistance of a specific wing of Marxist theory and practice has shared space on the left with radical actors, not least Marxist radical actors, deeply influenced by feminism. The epistemological dissonance therefore, perhaps, indicates a positive friction, and the possibility of a creative dialectic and constructive movement towards a better world. Perhaps, then, a better left is possible.

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Article

## **FINANCIAL CRISIS, FINANCIAL FIRMS... AND FINANCIAL FEMINISM? THE RISE OF 'TRANSNATIONAL BUSINESS FEMINISM' AND THE NECESSITY OF MARXIST-FEMINIST IPE<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This paper documents the rise of a politico-economic project of what I have termed 'transnational business feminism', focused on the need to promote women's empowerment, particularly in the wake of the most recent global financial crisis. Here, liberal feminists have joined with states, funding institutions, NGOs and MNCs in constructing women as 'untapped resources' capable of delivering a high return on (Western) investment. This project has also generated new knowledges regarding both gender and finance, as the 'excesses' that led to the 2008 crisis have been linked to an errant masculinity that can be adjusted by incorporating women (and feminine values) into the finance realm. However, a feminist historical materialist reading of this project reveals that gender is used as part of a narrative that seeks to naturalize and depoliticize capitalist crises. Gender also becomes the basis for the re-embedding of capitalist relations that reproduce the exploitation of men and women while creating new markets and sources of profit for capital. While transnational business feminism is rooted in a particular version of Western liberal feminism that seeks empowerment via integration into the market economy, this paper argues that the contemporary moment

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offers an opportunity for a renewed emphasis on feminist scholarship that is firmly wedded to anti-capitalism, as well as a Marxism that takes gender seriously.

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### **Keywords**

transnational business feminism; feminist historical materialism; feminist political economy, gender and finance; primitive accumulation

## **Introduction**

- *Gender is a business issue, not a 'women's issue'.*

- *It's time to place renewed emphasis on women as a resource to move businesses and economies ahead. The learning that comes from a crisis is a terrible thing to waste.*

As has occurred in the wake of past crises, in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, there has been an abundance of Marxist IPE scholarship that seeks to explain the structural roots of capitalist crises, much of which has been tied to a critical politics that seeks to articulate possible futures beyond capitalism (Harvey 2010; McNally 2011; Albo, Gindin and Panitch 2010; Callinicos 2010; Gill 2011; Duménil and Lévy 2011). However, much of this work has failed to adequately theorize the gendered dimensions of finance and financial crises, despite several decades of feminist IPE scholarship that has drawn attention to the andocentric nature of finance (van Staveren 2001; Elson 2002; Young, Bakker and Elson 2011; De Goede 2005), documented the differential impacts of financial crises on men and women (Floro and Dymski 2000; Seguino 2009; Elson 2010) and outlined the ways in which financial crises render social reproduction increasingly insecure for much of the world's population (Young 2003; Gill and Roberts 2011). While some of these theorists are quite well-known for developing analytical frameworks that create a space for gender analysis (see for instance McNally 2002; Bakker and Gill 2003b), looking at Marxist IPE as a whole, gender seems to have faded even further into the background in the post-crisis moment. The *Socialist Register*, for instance, though never being a panacea for feminist scholarship, recently published two back-to-back editions on

the global crisis (Panitch, Albo and Chibber 2011; 2012), which consisted of a total of thirty chapters, only one of which was explicitly focused on gender relations.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, while Marxist IPE accounts of the global financial crisis have remained largely silent on questions of gender, gender has become an important terrain of mainstream debate regarding the causes of and ways out of the crisis. These explanations, which are being advanced by a growing coalition of liberal feminists, states, corporations and others, approach gender in a way that empties its meaning of politics, power and history. At the same time, women and gender equality are presented as key to the reproduction of capitalism post-2008 crisis (Prügl 2012).

The two quotations above, the first of which appears in a book entitled *Why Women Mean Business* (Wittenberg-Cox and Maitland 2008: 5) and the second of which appears in a document published by Ernst & Young (2010), one of the world's largest professional service and accounting firms, neatly capture the problematic with which this paper is concerned: namely, the growth of a pro-capitalist and business-oriented feminism over the past several years. I have elsewhere referred to this emerging politico-economic project as 'transnational business feminism' (TBF), by which is meant an increasingly large coalition of feminist organizations, capitalist states, regional and international funding institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and transnational corporations (TNCs) that converge on the need to promote women's equality, particularly in the Global South (Roberts forthcoming 2013). This coalition finds its ideological basis in what has been termed 'the business case for gender equality' (World Bank 2006). The argument here is that investing in women – by which is generally meant increasing women's access to jobs in the formal sector, improving the availability of credit for women entrepreneurs and investing in women's human capital (i.e. education and health initiatives) – is not just good for women, but it is ultimately good business. It is also particularly necessary in order to promote economic development in the wake of the 2008 crisis (Roberts and Soederberg 2012; Elias 2013). As World Bank president Robert Zoellick explained in 2010: “[a]t this time of economic turmoil, investing in women is critical” and a “host of studies suggest that putting earning in women's hands is the intelligent thing to do to aid recovery and long-term development.”<sup>4</sup>

The first section of this paper documents the rise of TBF and argues that this coalition of private and public forces has increasingly sought to generate new knowledges about the social relations of gender and the gendered dimensions of markets and economics. It is argued that these knowledges provide an epistemological underpinning

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<sup>3</sup> The chapter by Johanna Brenner, 'Caught in the Whirlwind: Working-Class Families Face the Economic Crisis', is the only chapter to centralize gender, though Frances Fox Piven does highlight the gendered nature of poverty in 'The new American Poor Law' and other references to gender are made elsewhere in the volumes.

<sup>4</sup> World Bank Group Private Sector Leaders Forum Announces New Measures to Improve Women's Economic Opportunities. Press Release No: 2010/084/PREM

for the politico-economic project of TBF, which has sought to extend and deepen capitalism, especially financially driven forms of capitalist accumulation, over the past decade and particularly since 2008. It is argued TBF has used gender as part of a narrative that seeks to naturalize and depoliticize capitalist crises as it is presented as both the *cause of* and *way out of* the current crisis (Prügl 2012). The second section outlines a feminist historical materialist approach, rooted in a critical feminist epistemology, that allows us to develop an account of the gendered nature of capitalism that is re-politicized and re-historicized. The third section uses this approach to argue that TBF is part of the ongoing primitive accumulation of capital that is driven forward by states and corporations that seek to draw women, as ‘the world’s most under-utilized resource’, into capitalist relations of production and social reproduction. It is argued that TBF naturalizes women’s historically specific positioning at the crossroads of production and social reproduction, reproduces the devaluation of women’s non-commodified labour, deepens the exploitation of men and women through commodified wage labour and creates new forms of exploitation and dispossession through financial relations (Soederberg 2012a; Soederberg 2012b). This paper concludes by arguing that insofar as Marxist IPE explanations for the global financial crisis have remained largely silent on questions of gender, gender has become an important terrain of mainstream debate regarding the future of capitalism. This context provides an important opportunity to develop an historical materialism that takes gender seriously *and* a feminism that is wedded to a materialist analysis that disrupts ahistorical and depoliticized approaches to gender.

### **The Rise of Transnational Business Feminism**

In the post-2008 economic climate, the politico-economic project of what I have labelled ‘transnational business feminism’ (TBF), has been proclaimed to be the cure for the problems associated with ‘transnational business masculinity’ in the financial and other spheres. As Connell (1998; 2001) and other theorists of masculinity explain, with the transition to neoliberalism, the idealized post-War male-breadwinner model of gender relations has been undermined as forms of production and labour relations have changed, jobs have been rendered more precarious, manufacturing has moved overseas and the family wage has all but disappeared. These changes, in combination with challenges posed by the feminist movement, the growing labour market participation of women, weakened dependence of women on men for income and other trends, have helped bring about a crisis of the industrial-era breadwinner masculinity. For much of the male population that has been downwardly mobile, this crisis has manifested itself in forms that include the growing violence against women, the rise of social conservatism and religious fundamentalism (i.e. Evangelicalism). It has been argued that for those few who have benefitted from the rise of neoliberalism and become upwardly mobile – such

as many lawyers, bankers, financiers, entrepreneurs and upper level managers in emerging sectors – a new form of 'transnational business masculinity' (TBM) has emerged as the hegemonic form of masculinity.

According to Connell, hegemonic masculinity is “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (2001: 38-9; see also Ikeda 2007: 114). TBM, as a hegemonic practice, is characterized by egoism, conditional loyalties, the exploitation and subordination of working-class men in the Global North and most of the population in the Global South. It is also characterized by gender discrimination that is justified as being the outcome of the invisible hand of the market. In other words, men’s exploitation of women and their superior positions relative to women are explained as the result of market forces that are gender neutral, efficient, just (Ikeda 2007: 114). As such, gendered hierarchies and gendered forms of exploitation are emptied of history, politics and power.

Prior to the 2008 crisis, a number of feminists had noted the prevalence of this sort of masculinity in the financial sphere. For instance, in her work on the ‘City’ of London, Linda McDowell (1997) documented the gendered performances of workers in the financial services industry and found that a particular masculinized set of performances were more highly valorized in the workplace. She identified two iconic figures in the banking industry, the first of whom are the patriarchs; the “sober-suited bourgeois men” who fit the “traditional image of the merchant banker as sober, rational and powerful, with the levers of the world financial system secure in his careful hands” (1997: 182). The second figure is better represented by the youth on the trading floor, who embodied masculine and exuberant energy rather than rationality, were loud and aggressive, engaged in sexualized banter and displayed a hetero-sexualized male confidence. These are the traits associated with TBM that feed into the discrimination against women at every level (see also McDowell 2010).<sup>5</sup>

As the 2008 global financial crisis unfolded, the mainstream media began to pay attention to this increasingly pervasive form of masculinity. Whereas much of the

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it has been well documented that women face multiple forms of discrimination in the financial sector. In the US, where women make up six of ten employees in the banking and finance industry, they are significantly underrepresented among the highest earners. Women working full-time, year-round in private banking and finance constitute 79 percent of those earning below \$35,000 per year and only 26 percent of those earning above \$100,000 per year (IWPR 2011). In the UK, women in some of the top finance companies received around 80 percent less performance-related pay than their male counterparts (cited in Prügl 2012: 52). Sexual harassment is also widespread and observers have closely identified TBM with the commodification of women’s bodies through pornography, prostitution and the frequenting of strip clubs. The Fawcett society has identified a ‘lap dance ethos’ at the heart of the City (London) (Fawcett Society 2008) and documentary films such as the *Inside Job* have revealed similar trends prevailing within Wall Street culture.

feminist and gender studies literature rooted such expressions of masculinity in historical changes taking place in capitalism, mainstream commentators tended to eschew such critical approaches in favour of behavioural analyses. They drew on various studies published over the past decade that have claimed to show that women tend to take fewer risks than men, which may actually help to improve (or at least not negatively affect) their financial performance (for an overview see Prügl 2012; McDowell 2010). Increasingly, media pundits, as well as some liberal academics and government officials in several Western countries, began to argue that the greater presence of women in the top ranks of the financial sector would have helped to constrain the highly masculinised, risky and speculative behaviour of financial traders and firms that ultimately brought about the 2008 global financial crisis. In other words, the cure for the errant masculinity that rendered the global financial system vulnerable to crisis was projected to be a healthy dose of femininity, which could then re-establish a rational and sustainable global financial system. In this framework, women are central to re-establishing the legitimacy of global finance while gender, framed as a predominantly cultural system that is related to yet separate from markets, becomes an explanation for their improper functioning.

It is in this context that transnational business feminism has emerged as part of the cure for the ails (i.e. crises) of transnational business masculinity. While many Marxist and other critical IPE scholars have argued that the crisis revealed deep structural contradictions and tensions in contemporary capitalism, transnational business feminists claim to have discovered an easy fix: a healthy dose of estrogen. According to Claire Shipman and Katty Kay, who have articulated a version of the business case for gender equality that they call 'womenomics', "[a] whole host of business brains, from Michigan to Norway, have uncovered an 'asset-to-estrogen' ratio", which suggests that greater numbers of women employed by companies leads to greater profits, or to what they call 'pink profits' (Shipman and Kay 2010: 1). There are various explanations for these 'pink profits' but many of them come down to a combination of women's supposedly inherent, if not biologically determined, aversion to risk.

Building on arguments made in their womenomics book, Shipman and Kay began an article in the *Washington Post* by noting that:

While the pinstripe crowd fixates on troubled assets, a stalled stimulus and mortgage remedies, it turns out that a more sure-fire financial fix is within our grasp -- and has been for years. New research says a healthy dose of estrogen may be the key not only to our fiscal recovery, but also to economic strength worldwide.

They go on to argue that "[g]ender stereotypes aren't politically correct, but the research broadly finds that testosterone can make men more prone to competition and risk-taking.



Women, on the other hand, seem to be wired for collaboration, caution and long-term results.”<sup>6</sup>

Part of what informs the business case for gender equality then, is the argument is that in addition to inherently possessing feminine character traits, women’s unique biology brings a unique influence on corporations that may actually increase profits. This line of argument underpinned the positioning of women in Iceland’s major banks after their collective failure, gave rise to debates over the potential outcome that would have resulted if ‘Lehman Brothers had been Lehman Sisters’ and thrust people like Halla Tómasdóttir and Kristin Petursdóttir (founders of an Icelandic financial firm based on ‘feminine values’ that fared relatively well in the crisis) into the global spotlight as financial visionaries and liberal feminist icons (Prügl 2012).

Private corporations have also latched on to this line of argument. Goldman Sachs, for instance, has been developing its own line of womenomics research over the past decade (Goldman Sachs 2005; Goldman Sachs 2009; Goldman Sachs 2010; for a critical overview, see Roberts and Soederberg 2012). In a slightly different variation than that of Shipman and Kay, Goldman’s womenomics framework is part of its global investment strategy whereby it seeks to identify those corporations that are best positioned to gain from women’s rising rates of employment and their growing purchasing power (such as companies catering to daycare, nursing care, beauty services, real estate for single homeowners, financial services, etc). A key dimension of womenomics is the growing importance of women as investors and consumers of financial services and credit (Roberts and Soederberg 2012). In the words of Goldman Sachs (2009), in much of the world, women are the world’s most “under-utilised resource.”

In addition to Goldman, many of the world’s largest financial and accounting firms, including Deloitte, PricewaterhouseCoopers and Ernst & Young, have developed similar women-centred lines of research. Deloitte, for instance, has published research documenting the ‘Gender Dividend’ that can be gained from investing in women. The Gender Dividend (which has also been used by Goldman Sachs and UN Women) refers to the “steady benefit that is earned by making wise, balanced investments in developing women as workers and potential leaders as well as understanding women as consumers and their impact on the economy and the bottom line” (Pellegrino, D’Amato and Weisberg 2011: 4). Here again the 2008 crisis is a pivotal moment. According to Ernst & Young’s series entitled *Groundbreakers: Using the Strength of Women to rebuild the World Economy*:

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<sup>6</sup> Katty Kay and Claire Shipman, Sunday, July 12, 2009, *The Washington Post* (available on-line at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/10/AR2009071002358.html>, accessed 27 May 2012).

The financial crisis jolting the world's economies only highlights the missing voices and lacking presence of women. While many countries and businesses have made strides toward narrowing the gender gap, the vast potential of women to contribute to business and economic growth has yet to be realized. A crisis presents an opportunity for change. Now is the time in history to realize and harness the powerful and positive effect that women's empowerment and leadership can have on the global economy (Ernst & Young 2010).

International financial institutions (IFIs) such as the IMF and World Bank, intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations, NGOs and a number of states are also key partners in promoting TBF. This tends to be framed via a development discourse that argues that the investment of Western governments, individuals and private corporations in developing the 'human capital' of poor women in the Global South is essential to reducing poverty levels overall (World Bank 2012). This is the case because women are more likely than men to reinvest their earnings into improving the wellbeing of their children and their communities. As they invest in their families, women's improved access to income and credit will also help to stimulate the national economy more broadly (Roberts and Soederberg 2012). While this approach to development is part of a longer historical trajectory of neoliberal-led development theory and practice (for overviews see for instance Benería 2003; Bergeron 2003), its importance has been reaffirmed since the 2008 crisis.

As a politico-economic project, TBF is also concerned with 'tapping into' women in the Global South who, as the result of their relatively few connections to global markets, remain a 'vast untapped resource'. It is partly this unproblematic linking of women's interests, development and corporate profitability that makes the business case for gender equality so appealing to such a wide range of social forces. Universities must also be included here as they are deeply embedded in the construction of this framework, especially through their business school divisions but also via some political science departments.<sup>7</sup>

However, interrogating the discourses and the particular initiatives that are being promoted by the new coalition of social forces aligned in favour of TBF reveals an increasingly powerful and pervasive project that helps to legitimize capitalism and the broader neoliberal macroeconomic framework that has created and sustained gender-

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Goldman Sachs' corporate philanthropy initiative, *10,000 Women*, is linked to over 50 academic institutions. These include many of the Ivy League universities and leading business schools associated with Columbia, Harvard, Stanford, Oxford, Cambridge and Yale. Another leading corporate advocate of TBF, Nike, recently donated \$700,000 to the political science department at MIT in order to establish the Jill Ker Conway Fellowship Fund, which is designed to support doctoral students 'as a way to help spotlight women's rights in the globalized workplace' (see <http://nikeinc.com/news/nike-helps-establish-jill-ker-conway-fellowship-fund-in-mit-political-science-department>)

based inequality and oppression. It does so, in part, by using gender as an ahistorical and depoliticized explanation for capitalist crises. It further does so by proposing that greater levels of gender equality will help to usher in a more equitable, socially just and sustainable capitalism that benefits women and capitalists alike. This then helps to legitimize capitalist relations of domination and exploitation. This is particularly important in the wake of a global financial and economic crisis that may have only temporarily threatened the profitability of most corporations (many of which were bailed out by the public), but which has generated a longer lasting threat to the legitimacy of contemporary forms of capitalism.

### **A Feminist Historical Materialist Critique of TBF**

#### *The Social Construction of Gender*

Feminist historical materialism offers a framework that fundamentally challenges the ahistorical and depoliticized framings of gender and gender-based inequality that underpin the politico-economic project of TBF. In terms of the social meaning of gender, TBF assumes that women are naturally inclined to spend their earnings on the social reproduction of their families and communities, and by extension, improve national economies. They are similarly conceptualized as more risk averse, which may be rooted in biological explanations (i.e. in the lack of testosterone) and/or in the assumption that women, as mothers and nurturers, are naturally concerned with long-term goals rather than short-term profits. In contrast, feminist historical materialists have argued that rather than being naturally inclined to be more caring (and careful) and to take on the work of social reproduction, this occurred as the result of a historical process associated with the transition to capitalism. As men (and some women) entered the wage-labour force to participate in relations of capitalist production, processes of social reproduction remained within the household, becoming predominantly the work of women. Though women and children have long engaged in wage labour, especially during the early years of the industrial revolution, with the development of capitalism, an *idealized* gender division of labour was created whereby men were expected to engage in paid wage labour and women in unpaid domestic labour. This led to the material and ideological devaluation of the work performed by women in households, which is often not considered to be work at all, while also subordinating women and helping justify men's higher wages in the paid labour force (Picchio 1992; Mies 1988; Federici 2004).

Insofar as the social meanings that are attributed to gender are rooted in a particular social, political and economic context, so too are the social meanings of what constitutes gender inequality and oppression. For feminist historical materialists, under capitalism, the material basis of gendered oppression and exploitation is rooted in the ways in which men and women contribute to relations of production *and* social

reproduction. Thus, while TBF tends to reduce gender-based inequalities to barriers that limit women's ability to *empower themselves* through the capitalist market, a feminist historical materialist perspective further allows us to agree, *first*, that labour markets are highly gendered structures that may reproduce gender-based forms of exploitation and oppression; and *second*, that the roots of gender inequality are not found in the 'inefficient' use of women's labour *per se*, but rather in the systemic devaluation of women's work, a devaluation that is reproduced through the practices and discourses of TBF.

### *Gendered Labour Markets*

The labour economist Guy Standing provides a useful framework for understanding the former in his writings on the global feminization of labour (1989; 1999). In these highly influential pieces, Standing draws attention to the paradox that insofar as gender inequalities have been eroded in labour markets, this has largely happened as the result of the convergence of men and women at the lower rungs of the labour market (see also Vosko 2002). The hypothesis that Standing verified at the end of the 1980s and again at the end of the 1990s was that it was the growing flexibility of labour markets and the proliferation of diverse forms of insecurity that were driving greater numbers of women to increase their participation in the paid labour force. In other words, changes taking place at the macroeconomic level were creating a compulsion for more and more women to enter the paid labour force. This occurred at precisely the same time as labour markets were becoming increasingly precarious and structural changes were creating an incentive for companies to hire female workers who would accept lower wages and more precarious conditions than men. Among the macroeconomic changes that Standing identified as bringing about these shifts include: the growth of international trade in goods and services as a portion of national incomes; the liberalization and concentration of trade and investment in those countries with the lowest labour costs; growing competition among firms to reduce the cost of labour (i.e. wages) rather than to improve levels of productivity (partly related to a technological stalemate); structural adjustment and other neoliberal economic policies that have liberalized labour markets and ultimately led to the erosion of labour legislation, the undermining of unions and the erosion of employment security; the erosion of the legitimacy of welfare systems; and the privatization of social security.

Whereas TBF tends to view labour markets as the key to women's liberation, from a critical feminist perspective, labour markets are themselves constituted by unequal power relations between capitalists and labour, as well as between men and women. As Hester Eisenstein (2005; 2009) points out, these changes in the structure of labour markets – which were propelled by the need to increase profitability (see also Harvey 2003a) and which entailed the expanded use of women's labour – were taking place at

precisely the same time as a particular Western version of liberal feminism that framed empowerment in terms of the right to participate in the market economy, was becoming increasingly powerful in the US and other liberal capitalist states. That is, whereas the second wave women's movement produced many strands of feminism, including a strong socialist feminist movement, black feminist movement, and various Third World feminist movements, the dominant form of feminism in the US and many other Western countries came to see women as self-sufficient and rational actors needing liberation from patriarchal oppression and financial dependence on men (see also Fraser 2009). Ultimately, this proved to be deeply useful to capital – forming what she terms a 'dangerous liaison' with capital – as “women, especially women in the middle class, could escape from the category of 'only' wife and mother into the world of the competitive, individualistic market” (Eisenstein 2005: 498). TBF continues this 'dangerous liaison', though here, the project also has imperialist underpinnings as it seeks to draw not just, nor even primarily, middle class women into the competitive, individualistic market economy. Rather, the project is largely aimed at poor women at Global South who have not yet been fully incorporated into the capitalist market (though it is important to stress that nor do they stand on the 'outside' of capitalism (Soederberg 2012a)).

#### *The Devaluation of Women's Work*

In addition to helping elucidate the gendered nature of labour markets, a feminist historical materialist perspective emphasizes that the roots of gender inequality are not found in the 'inefficient' use of women's labour *per se*, but rather in the systemic devaluation of women's work. Indeed, the framing of women as 'untapped' or 'under-utilized' resources who, by virtue of (Western) investments in their human capital, can be transformed into 'productive' workers and consumers obscures the various forms of non-commodified and quasi-commodified work performed by women (Roberts and Soederberg 2012). In other words, this framing ignores the important fact that, while there may be a substantial number of women who remain outside of the formal labour force due to social and economic barriers to entry, these women continue to be heavily engaged in household work that continues to be classified as 'non-economic activity', as well as various forms of 'informal' labour (ILO 2010: 4).

Yet, as feminist historical materialists have argued for decades (particularly in the 1980s and 1990s when socialist feminism was especially vibrant), the roots of gender inequality are not found in the 'inefficient' use of women's labour but rather in the systemic devaluation of women's work. It was on this basis that many feminists launched 'wages for housework' campaigns as a means of both subverting so-called 'domestic slavery' as well as the labour hierarchies created through the wage relation (Federici 2012). The point is not to suggest that all forms of unpaid labour are necessarily exploitative, nor is it to suggest that households are purely functional units for capitalism. Rather, a central claim of feminist historical materialists is that the historically specific

delineation of what constitutes the economy and productive labour has concealed a whole host of social relations and forms of work that are essential to the social reproduction of people and communities (Ferguson 1999; Bakker and Gill 2003a). With this theoretical framing in mind, the following section argues that the politic-economic project of TBF naturalizes women's historically specific positioning at the crossroads of production and social reproduction. It is further argued that given this context, and recalling the inherently gendered nature of labour markets themselves, the TBF agenda of integrating women into the market economy will not automatically translate into the empowerment of women but may rather deepen the exploitation of growing numbers of women and men.

### **Transnational Business Feminism and the On-Going Gendered Primitive Accumulation of Capital**

The TBF project is diverse and multi-faceted and it consists of a wide range of partners, ranging from governments to NGOs, from academics and universities to the popular news media, from the international development institutions to private corporations. As such, the specific projects promoted by this broad coalition of forces are diverse and wide-ranging. However, much of the discourse in relation to women and gender equality is focused on the need to improve women's access to finance and credit. While this includes the need to extend credit to greater numbers of women in the US, the most profitable countries are predicted to be those where women have relatively lower levels of labour market participation and therefore remain a relatively untapped market.<sup>8</sup> For instance, in its womenomics research, Goldman Sachs, points out that while it was not long ago that single women were unable to obtain mortgage loans in Japan, "financial institutions are now crawling over one another to sell mortgages and loans to females" (Goldman Sachs 2005: 17).

However, in framing this trend in terms of the mutual benefits offered to women and financial institutions alike, womenomics depoliticizes the power relations that imbue financial and credit markets. Rather than representing an abstract 'new market opportunity', it has now been well documented in the US, for instance, that women's relatively smaller incomes and greater care responsibilities has meant that they have been unable to use mortgages in order to build up assets to the same extent as most men (Roberts 2012; Montgomerie and Young 2011). Yet, this 'underserved' population was also overrepresented among subprime mortgage borrowers who, along with other members of the working class and disproportionate numbers of African Americans and Latinos, also represented a major source of profit for financial firms such as Goldman Sachs (Brenner 2009). Thus, insofar as Goldman Sachs and other financial firms have

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<sup>8</sup> "A Guide to Womenomics", *The Economist*, 12 April 2006.

identified single women as a key new market for mortgage loans, this may have the affect of reproducing new forms of gender discrimination. As barriers that have prevented women's participation in financial markets (such as credit markets) are removed, this may not lead to greater empowerment but rather to new forms of gender-based inequalities through the market itself (Gill and Roberts 2011).

In the Global South, TBF is helping to draw the poor, and particularly poor women, into capitalist financial relations via the extension of microfinance and more recently, via the extension of microinsurance (Soederberg 2012a; Taylor 2011; Roy 2010; Rankin 2001). Beginning with microcredit, a number of public-private initiatives have been put forth the by major players in the TBF project. For example as part of its philanthropic *10,000 Women* initiative, Goldman Sachs has teamed up with the Multilateral Investment Fund of the Inter-American Development Bank (MIF/IDB), *Universidad del Pacifico* (in Ecuador) and Thunderbird School of Global Management (based in Arizona) to train women entrepreneurs in Peru. In addition to receiving 'business-skills training', women are also provided with access to capital through Mibanco, which is one of the largest private microfinance institutions in Latin America. Nike's Girl Effect project makes a similar case for the benefits of (private) microfinance. As an example of the ways in which economic assets can be extended to poor girls, the Nike Foundation points to the success of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) – one of the largest private microfinance corporations in the world – in extending microfinance to hundreds of thousands of girls to start small businesses.

Though it has received relatively less attention than microcredit, microinsurance has recently emerged as the newest trend in 'socially responsible' investment, particularly since the global financial crisis, which led to some increases in default from poor borrowers. Here again, major banks, financial and insurance firms such as JP Morgan, AIG and Delta Life have teamed up with some of the leading institutions associated with global development such as the IFC (the private sector lending arm of the International Monetary Fund), the International Labour Organization and the Soros Economic Development Fund, to market and sell a new service to the global poor. A number of private companies are also involved in these partnerships, ranging from private, for-profit microinsurance providers to cell phone companies, which have offered microinsurance coverage to their customers in an effort to foster loyalty and stop people from using multiple sim cards.<sup>9</sup>

In both instances, the justification for targeting women in particular is rooted in the naturalization of their roles in social reproduction, as mothers and carers. For microcredit, this is framed in terms of the tendency for women to be less risky borrowers.

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<sup>9</sup> Annie Kelly, "Can Microinsurance Protect the Poor?", *The Guardian* ('Poverty Matters' blog, available online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/feb/21/micro-insurance-protect-poor>) 21 February 2011.

At the same time, giving credit to women is assumed to have greater effect on reducing poverty overall as women are more likely to invest their earnings into their families than men, who are viewed as being at risk of spending the money on drinking, gambling and other forms of self-satisfaction (Rankin 2001; Bedford 2009). In the case of insurance, the reason for targeting women is also rooted in a gendered conception of risk, though in this case, the argument is that women are at greater risk than men and therefore in greater need of insurance. Yet, as with microcredit, this gendered conceptualization of risk is deeply connected to women's specific relation to social reproduction:

Women comprise 70 per cent of the world's poor. They earn less than men, have less control of property, and face higher levels of physical vulnerability and violence. They are often caregivers, homemakers, and, increasingly, household resource managers and income earners. Considering this combination of vulnerability and responsibility for the welfare of their families, women have a unique and pressing need to manage risk (International Labour Organization 2010).

Consistent with the broader TBF goal of benefiting corporations and the poor alike, microfinance and microinsurance are also upheld as safe and profitable investments, particularly in the wake of the 2008 crisis.

Indeed, while microfinance institutions (MFIs) receive the majority of their funding from the development finance institutions (DFIs) (which are considered to be public investors), institutional investors such as international banks, private equity funds, pension funds and insurance companies, provide 30 percent of the stock of foreign investment. They are also the fastest growing investor group, with their outstanding investment in microfinance having grown from US \$1.2 billion to US \$3.5 billion between 2006 and 2010 (CGAP 2011: 3). These private investors are attracted by three features of microfinance: (1) its perceived social value which enhance a company's image and appeal to socially conscious investors; (2) the relatively low level of risk; and (3) the potential de-correlation of investment in MFIs from other classes of assets (i.e. it helps to diversify risk).

According to a recent report by Lloyd's bank, the potential market for microinsurance is \$40 billion as between 1.5 billion and 3 billion people are 'underserved' by insurance (Lloyd's 2011). As with projections for microcredit, industry advocates project that the market for microinsurance will grow in the wake of the crisis as (1) people are more financially insecure than they were prior to the crisis, (2) the sector is relatively protected from the contagion effect of global crises, (3) it offers investors a new and class of asset that will help to diversify risk and (4) it offers a more socially just and therefore legitimate form of investment in the contemporary politico-economic climate. In a spotlight piece done by the Clinton Global Initiative on LeapFrog, one of the largest



microinsurance companies, the president and co-founder Andrew Kuper highlighted the industry's potential for growth:

Some poor households may have less income or refrain from spending it during this crisis; on the other hand, people with less income may be concerned [with] losing the assets they do have. Hence, the demand for microinsurance products may increase. In any case, given the size of this market and the intensity of demand, the microinsurance sector is well-positioned to endure financial storms. Microinsurance can protect and enable the poor while offering non-market-tracking returns to those who invest in this exciting new alternative asset class.<sup>10</sup>

As with microcredit, microinsurance is primarily directed at those sectors of the global population who are 'financially excluded'. The implication here is that it is the *exclusion* from financial markets causes insecurity. This then obscures the role of the major financial institutions such as JP Morgan, Goldman Sachs, AIG and other partners in these initiatives in bringing about the global crisis. At the same time, gendered formulations of risk are used to mobilize women to support market-led paths to development.

In these ways, TFB is helping to create new capitalist relations of accumulation in spaces and relations that were previously shielded from the market. Historical materialists have referred to this process as part of the 'on-going primitive accumulation of capital'. To briefly elaborate, contrary to the liberal narrative that views the onset of capitalism as the result of a quantitative change in the amount of money available for investment, Marx argued that capitalism would never have developed without a *qualitative* transformation in social forms. In order to provide a more historical account of the rise of capitalism, Marx attempted to demonstrate the ways in which the transition to capitalism in England would have been impossible without the expropriation of direct producers, the destruction of individual and collective forms of property, and ultimately the creation of free labourers who had "nothing left to sell but their skins". Rather than occurring naturally, Marx believed that "it is a notorious fact that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, plays the greatest part" (Marx 1976 [1867]: 874). For Marx, these were the historical processes of 'primitive accumulation', often facilitated by the English state, which contributed to the production of hierarchical and exploitative and class relations and which were the prerequisite for the subsequent process of 'capitalist accumulation proper', i.e. accumulation through economic means.

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<sup>10</sup> "Leapfrog Investments: The World's First Microinsurance Fund – Pursuing Profit with Purpose" (available online at [http://www.clintonglobalinitiative.org/commitments/commitments\\_feature\\_leapFrog.asp](http://www.clintonglobalinitiative.org/commitments/commitments_feature_leapFrog.asp))

More recently, a number of Marxists have elaborated this line of argument, pointing to the on-going forms of violence and coercion that have been used to support the expansion of existing markets and the creation of new ones (Harvey 2003b; De Angelis 2001; De Angelis 2004; Glassman 2006; Perelman 2000; Shilliam 2004). Massimo De Angelis, for instance, has written extensively on the subject, arguing that primitive accumulation is a continuous process whose manifestation is observable in *ex-novo* separations between producers and means of production. He argues that such *ex-novo* separations occur in two instances: one, when capital “identifies new spheres of life that it may colonise with its priorities” and the other, when it devises strategies to enclose social spaces that were formerly identified as commons and protected as such. In both cases, the separation is *ex novo* as it is a relation that has not yet been ‘normalized’ but rather appears as a ‘crystal-clear relation of expropriation’ (2004:67–68). The identification of women as new and ‘untapped’ resources who, by way of (largely Western) investment, can yield a significant return – i.e., the Gender Dividend – is a clear representation of DeAngelis’ first scenario.

Feminist historical materialists have elaborated theorizations of primitive accumulation (Federici 2004; Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen and von Werlhof 1988; Von Werlhof 2000; Roberts 2008), by emphasizing the enclosure and disciplining of women and gender relations, the subjugation of women to the reproduction of the work force and the perpetuation of differences and divisions within the working class throughout the history of capitalism. Building on these insights, TBF can be understood as *both* creating new sources of capitalist profit while *simultaneously* colonizing new spaces with capitalist priorities by, for instance, the characterization of women’s uncommodified labour as unproductive. As growing numbers of women are drawn into capitalist relations in ways that are highly inequitable, TBF also helps to perpetuate differences and divisions within the working classes, which then help to reproduce class rule.

## Conclusion

For some, the rise of TBF might signal emergence of a post-feminist moment (Elias 2013), as many claim that feminism, to use Fukuyama’s notorious phrase, has reached “the end of history”. Indeed, gender mainstreaming, gender budgets and women’s empowerment have become key policy goals in the United Nations (UN), the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and various regional and local quasi-constitutional agreements (Daly 2005; Rubery 2002). The *Financial Times* has dedicated an entire section to spotlighting women who have managed to become successful business leaders in a competitive international environment. According to the (notoriously anti-feminist) Canadian journalist Margaret Wente, “[t]he war for women’s

rights is over, and we won".<sup>11</sup> Harvard Law Professor Janet Halley has echoed this sentiment by suggesting that it might now be time to "take a break from feminism" (Halley 2006).

However, this paper has argued that the pervasive presence and ideological power of the business case for gender equality and the TBF project can more accurately be described as rooted in the dominance of capitalism as the best, if not the only, way of organizing society. It is further linked to the dominance of a Western version of liberal feminism that frames empowerment in terms of the right to participate in the market economy. The point is *not* to blame feminists for the current state of things, but rather to promote an 'historical self-awareness' (Fraser 2009: 114) and to emphasize the necessity of anti-capitalist (as well as an anti-racist and anti-imperialist) feminism. As Nancy Fraser (2009) has pointed out, in the 1970s and 80s, many feminist struggles were waged against what were viewed as interconnected forms of economic, cultural and political injustice and rooted in critiques of capitalism. However, while second wave feminism brought about a number of important cultural changes, in ensuing decades, feminist movements began to separate struggles against these forms of injustice from each other, as well as from a larger critique of capitalism. This splintering of the feminist critique created the space for the "selective incorporation and partial recuperation of some of its strands" (Fraser 2009: 99). This has then served to "legitimate a structural transformation of capitalist society that runs directly counter to feminist visions of a just society" (2009: 99).

To return to the quotes that opened this paper, while many critical and Marxist IPE scholars have preferred to ignore gender, viewing these relations as somehow existing outside of the economic sphere, as related to but not constitutive of capitalism and/or as something largely of concern to women and 'feminists', businesses have not been nearly so cavalier. Rather, gender has become an important terrain of mainstream debate regarding the future of capitalism. This context provides an important opportunity to develop an historical materialism that takes gender seriously *and* a feminism that is weeded to a materialist analysis that disrupts ahistorical and depoliticized approaches to gender. After all, as Ernst & Young so aptly argue, "[t]he learning that comes from a crisis is a terrible thing to waste".

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Article

## **THE REMAKING OF LEVIATHAN: THE STATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM IN ADVANCED CAPITALIST COUNTRIES**

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### **Abstract**

This article argues that recent comparative literatures on the welfare state have yet to adequately consider the public sector and how governments have reshaped their public services. Drawing on macro-level data from the OECD, qualitative studies, and trade union research, it is claimed that governments have substantially remade their administrative and financial procedures in order to cut expenditures and lower labour costs. It is also contended that because of financial globalization and rising debt, states have made a series of reforms to public sector industrial relations. These have worsened wages, working conditions, and jobs throughout the public sector. It is concluded that such developments are central to reforming the nature of state functioning across North America and Western Europe. This is the first study to report on government reforms to fiscal policies, public sector services, and public sector labour forces in 13 OECD countries between 1980-2005.

### **Résumé**

Cet article avance que les récentes recherches comparatives sur l'État-providence ne considèrent pas encore de manière adéquate le secteur public et comment les gouvernements ont restructuré les services

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publics. A partir de données macro de l'OCDE, d'études qualitatives et de recherches faites par des syndicats, cet article explique que les gouvernements ont revu de façon substantielle leurs procédures administratives et financières afin de couper leurs dépenses et de réduire les coûts du travail. Il est aussi avancé qu'à cause de la globalisation financière et de l'augmentation de la dette, les États ont engagé une série de réformes dans les relations de travail du secteur public. Ceci a aggravé les salaires, les conditions de travail et les emplois à travers le secteur public. L'article conclue que de tels développements sont centraux à la réforme de la nature du fonctionnement de l'État en Amérique du Nord et en Europe de l'Ouest. C'est la première étude qui analyse les réformes gouvernementales dans les politiques fiscales, les services publics et les employés du secteur public dans 13 pays de l'OCDE entre 1980 et 2005.

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### **Keywords**

labour policy, public administration, labour unions, public welfare, inequality

### **Mots-clés**

politique du travail, administration publique, syndicats, bien-être public, inégalités.

To many, the recent global crisis has been the midwife for the return of 'Leviathan' - of 'big government' that interferes with markets and economic efficiency. Government public spending is up, in some cases by more than 7 percent of GDP, and now most government's total spending exceeds 40 percent of GDP. Governments have bailed out banks on an unprecedented scale, while injecting trillions of dollars of liquidity into their economies. In the United States, the American government is largely in charge of General Motors; in Britain, government is overseeing high street banks. On top of this, governments threaten to take more action to regulate their banks, while also making noise to regulate carbon emissions from factories and introduce greater energy efficiency. For Nicholas Sarkozy, who has tried to take a leadership role and seriously consider alternatives, what all this has meant is the 'return of the state'. For business publications

such as the economist, these are ominous signs of a foreboding new era of 'big government' (Economist 2010).

But a question little asked is 'what kind of 'big government'? Because throughout the past twenty five years, advanced industrial governments have made substantive reforms. Today, the private sector – because of privatisation and contracting out – provides more than 40 percent of public goods (OECD 2009). Public sector reforms have led to the widespread introduction of market competition throughout departments and agencies. There has also been a major shift away from public forms of social protection to new privately-financed and privately-provided social insurance. Tax cuts have been deep. Tax subsidies – to business as well as to the wealthy and middle classes for capital investment and private purchase of insurance and services – have been just as extensive. In a longer-term perspective, this seems less a return of 'big' government than a return to older liberal models of capitalism – state support for business, free trade, open finance, ever greater restrictions on social and labour rights, and at the same time the a multi-trillion dollar bailout of finance paid for by workers and citizens.

Over the past ten years, many scholarly studies have overlooked these rapid transformations and instead emphasised the slow changing nature of states – how welfare states are resilient, how institutions create rules that regularise behaviour, and how domestic interests defend existing institutions in the face of global economic pressures (Castles 2004; Martin and Thelen 2007; Pontusson 2005). One of the key suppositions is that left political parties, unions, and the depth of corporatist and collective bargaining systems, influence economic and social policy reform, and that governments respond to public demand for compensatory social policies (Huber and Stephens 2001; Swank 2002). Also widely held is the notion that levels of public consumption are likely to be determined less by the extent of need and available resources than by popular views of what is considered appropriate, and by how political parties look to support core constituencies with appropriate social policies (Beramendi and Cusack 2008; Cusack, Iverson, and Rehm 2008; Pierson 2001; Garrett 1998). In these literatures, only in periods of crisis does change take place, and it does so in ways moulded by existing institutions, politics, and organized interests demands for security and state support.

However, if scholars have paid close attention to the effects of economic change on welfare states as well as at how states have reshaped economic environments to promote globalization (Schmidt 2008; Levy 2006), the issues of public sector restructuring and the political consequences of public policy reform have received relatively little attention from social scientists. This relative lack of attention by comparative scholars to the questions of public services and the recent impacts of public service reform on labour markets and politics is surprising given the importance governments have attached to 'modernizing' government and reshaping public services over the last twenty years (OECD 2009; OECD 2008; OECD 2003). The inattention is also surprising as governments have long been the single largest employer in all countries, and public

service employment has been a key means for stabilizing jobs and incomes as well as ensuring equality (Schulten, Brandt, and Hermann 2008; Lee 2005; OECD 2008). The changes in public sectors have also been profound, and have often converged around common supply-side and market oriented measures of new public management and privatization.

In Great Britain, Gerry Mooney and Alex Law (2007) have begun to undertake some of this research, demonstrating the impacts of public service change on British workers involved in service delivery, showing how wages have fallen, workloads increased, and job quality worsened. Other critical scholars in Great Britain have examined the negative impacts of privatization and marketization on service quality, employment, collective bargaining, and costs to citizens (Hall 2005; Hall and Lethbridge 2006; Pollock and Leys 2004; Whitfield 2011). However, if British literatures have begun to move these debates forward, existing comparative welfare research has not yet analyzed these reversals in public sector services and employment, instead focusing primarily on spending, governance, and policy reform. The most recent current of welfare state research on 'Dualisation' has added to our knowledge about public policy changes and their political causes and political impacts by exploring how mean-testing and private provision arrangements are institutionalizing economic inequality throughout Western Europe (Davidsson and Naczyk 2009; Palier and Thelen 2010;). But it too says little about how public employment and public sector collective bargaining arrangements have themselves been overhauled and reworked as part of broader trends intended to lower labour costs.

Looking to develop a better understanding of what has happened to states and the public sector, the goal of this article is to go beyond conventional institutional perspectives on the static nature of states and instead provide an assessment of what has happened to fiscal policy and public administration since the early 1980s and then examine their impacts on organized labour and labour markets. Drawing on recent case study and trade union research, it is argued that over the past two decades, states have taken active roles in remaking their public sectors either directly through outsourcing or more generally by modeling them along the lines of private business throughout North America and Western Europe (Bordogna 2008; Brandt and Schulten 2009; Flecker et al. 2009; Leys 2003; Pedersini 1999; Whitfield 2001).

Contrary to standard comparative literatures, I argue that major changes have indeed taken place to public sector management and operation in many countries regardless of political and institutional setup, corporatism, or higher levels of public sector spending. Even if there are powerful political forces that stabilize welfare states and public expenditures, I claim that the pressures of debt and finance, along with significant shifts in domestic politics to the right have led states to lower labour costs and shift their public sectors away from considerations of need and towards priorities that are set by economics and market models. These shifts in politics and policy have had a negative

impact on the public service for one primary reason – states as employers have changed. Consequently, it has become much more common for governments to pursue eliminating deficits and redesigning their public services as key means to reduce spending and lowering labour costs.

Based on macro-level data collected from thirteen OECD countries that are most representative of Nordic and continental European ‘social market economies’ (SMEs) as well as the Anglo-American ‘liberal market economies’ (LMEs), (and are conventionally believed to respond to economic and social pressure through dramatically different public policies), this article looks to assess the extent of convergence of public policy reforms around a common set of austerity measures and new public management programmes, and whether they have had common consequences on public sector jobs and incomes. The paper concludes by suggesting that even if there still are wide variations in public sector spending, public sector size, and public service/transfer programmes, the keys to understanding recent changes to these lie less in the impacts of stable institutions and powerful organized constituencies in deflecting economic pressures, and more with states steering among the conflicting pressures of finance, debt, rising inequality, and the declining support for redistribution.

### **Debt and Public Sector Restructuring**

Over the past decade, a sizable literature has investigated the link between policymaking and business demand for better conditions of profitability and productivity (Dumenil and Levy 2004; Glyn 2006; Harvey 2006). As this work has shown, in the wake of economic slowdown in the 1970s and 1980s, capital sought low inflation, wage restraint and wage flexibility to improve economic growth. Governments sought to facilitate conditions for profitable capital accumulation on the part of both domestic and foreign capital by tightening fiscal policy, reducing taxes, and balancing budgets. Spending cuts were chosen over tax increases as such austerity measures were seen to boost the confidence of business and increase employment. Tax cuts were to spur new investment and in turn provide the economic growth that would underpin government revenue. Reductions in public sector spending were to weaken labour’s bargaining power and encourage people to work harder (Whitfield 2001; Panitch and Swartz 2003).

Table 1 Debt and Reductions in Government Spending

	Gross Public Debt (as % of GDP)					General Expenditure (as a % of GDP)			Public Services	Social Protection
	1980	1990	1995	2000	2005	1995	2005 Change	1995-2005	1995-2005	
Austria	36	57.0	69.0	71.0	71.0	56.3	49.3	-7	-2	-3
Belgium	75	125.5	135.0	113.0	96.0	52.1	48.4	-3.7	-3.8	-0.8
Canada	46	75.0	101.0	82.0	71.0	48.5	39.2	-9.3	-5.1	-2
Germany	31	45.5	55.6	60.0	71.0	59.2	51.2	-8	-4.3	-2.7
Denmark	44	66.0	79.0	57.0	42.0	61.6	48.9	-12.7	-1.3	-5.4
Finland	14	16.0	65.0	52.0	49.0	54.4	52.7	-1.7	-1.2	-1.7
France	30	38.5	62.5	65.5	75.6	54.8	45.4	-9.3	-0.7	-0.5
Italy	89	97.5	112.5	121.0	123.5	52.5	49.9	-2.6	-5.4	-0.1
Netherlands	59	87.5	89.5	64.0	71.5	56.4	45.6	-10.8	-3	-4
Norway	40	29.3	41.0	34.0	49.0	50.9	41.7	-9.5	-2.2	-1.8
Sweden	47	46.0	81.0	65.0	60.0	65.1	54.3	-10.8	-3	-3.8
United Kingdom	49	32.0	51.5	45.1	46.0	44.7	44.3	-0.3	-1	-1.5
United States	41	63.0	70.5	54.5	61.0	37	36.7	-0.3	-1.8	-0.4
Mean	46.2	60	78	68.0	68	54.4	48.4	-8	-2.2	-1.8

Sources: OECD Economic Outlook Annual and Quarterly data (Online);  
 OECD Stat National Accounts; OECD 2009 General Government Expenditures  
 by Function

As table 1 confirms, debt rose substantially over the period 1990-2005 for the majority of countries, and rather than increase taxes, governments cut expenditures. Government debt levels rose on average from 44 percent of GDP across these thirteen countries to 60 percent from 1980 to 1990 as economic growth slowed, competition increased, and tax regimes were shifted. Debt then became substantial rising on average another 18 percent to 78 percent of GDP by 1995 with the global recession of the early 1990s. Debt ratios climbed most quickly in Canada, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, and Finland, but also rose substantially in the Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United States, and Sweden. In the UK, debt followed counter-cyclical swings in the economy, rising quickly in the early 1990s recession. Only Norway, with its expanding oil revenues and oil royalties saw continuing swings in its debt-to-GDP ratios, as resource prices contributed to boom-bust cycles of economic growth.

But the turn to fiscal orthodoxy became much more pronounced over the period 1995-2005, when all governments reduced general spending on average by 8 percent of GDP, and cut expenditures on general public services, social protection, and housing and community programs by 2.2 percent, 1.8 percent, and .1 percent of GDP respectively. Countries as varied as Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Canada, Denmark, and Austria made the most substantive cuts to both general spending and spending on public services and social protection. France and Germany undertook more modest reductions. While contrary to expectations, Great Britain and the United States saw the smallest reductions



in general expenditure, and modest cuts to public service and social protection spending over the period 1995-2005.

The priority given to eliminating deficits was highest in countries with high to medium increases in debt (rises of more than 29 percent of GDP) and medium to high inflows and outflows of capital (of more than 46 of GDP) – Finland, Sweden, Canada, Italy, Austria, Germany, Sweden, and Denmark. In these countries, governments cut public service expenditure by 2.7 percent of GDP and overall general spending by 9 percent of GDP. But others such as France and Belgium also enacted austerity measures, either to meet the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact for a maximum overall public debt of 60 percent of GDP, or to maintain a budget surplus and meet the monetary goals set by the European Central Bank, which was concerned with the rising debt levels of individual countries fuelling inflation.

But also common to countries with rising debts and deficits was a concern to redesign their public services and public industries. Governments believed that reshaping their ‘micro-economic’ contexts – their wage bargaining systems, their public sectors, and their utilities – would impose wage restraint and boost economic growth (OECD 2003, 2005; 2009). Adopting a classic liberal view that expenditure on public services was a burden on the productive sectors of the economy, governments sought to make reforms that ensured market forms of coordination would be substituted for public ones wherever possible (OECD 2005; Hall 2003). Only with market competition, it was claimed, would elected officials be able to reign in self-interested administrators and public sector workers and would governments make their public sectors accountable to bottom-lines and their public services more efficient.

Table 2 Public Sector Modernization 1990-2007

	Performance Budgeting		Scope of Reform		Timing	
	Budgeting	Auditing	Comprehensive	Partial	Big Bang'	Incremental
Austria	✓		✓			✓
Belgium	✓	✓	✓ -a	✓	✓	
Canada	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Germany				✓		✓
Denmark	✓	✓	✓		✓ - b	
Finland	✓	✓	✓			✓
France	✓	✓		✓		✓
Italy	✓	✓	✓			✓
Netherlands	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Norway	✓			✓		
Sweden	✓	✓	✓			✓
United Kingdom	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
United States	✓	✓	✓			✓

Sources: Pollit and Bouckaert 2004; OECD Performance Budgeting 2007; OECD Modernising Government 2003; EIRO 2006 Industrial Relations in the Public Sector  
a - Belgian reforms were partial until 'Copernican'  
b - Danish reform programme introduced 2007

The first step governments took in enacting changes to reshape the size, functioning, and ownership of their public sectors was in budgeting and administration (Pollit and Bouckaert 2004: 56-102). In countries such as Canada, the United States, Finland, and Belgium, governments declared that reducing or reallocating public expenditure was a 'national' priority, and with central financial officials implemented a top-down expenditure cutting process that continued until the target was met (OECD 2005; Pollit and Bouckaert 2004: 68). Other countries introduced "Top-down" budgeting in order to withdraw or allocate funds to specific activities. And even in countries with very fragmented administrative systems, which were commonly assumed to take longer to enact administrative and financial change, finance ministries and treasury departments were given new roles as the chief overseers for government strategic management in order to enact cuts (OECD 2005: 121).

The next step public officials took to reign in spending was to tie budgeting with planning and output measurement (OECD 2007; OECD 2005). Promising to 'do more with less', governments established performance goals and benchmarks for agencies and sub-national governments. They also transformed programme budgets into block funding, and directed lower level elected officials and managers to 'get results'. In the final stage, most governments instituted compulsory auditing and instructed auditors to find 'waste'. Now, over the past ten years, three-quarters of OECD countries use performance

budgeting techniques as means of evaluating programs and implementing budgetary decisions and cutbacks (OECD 2005: 18).

Table 2 provides a summary overview of how many countries enacted budgeting, performance, auditing, and major overhauls of their public services and public administration. Until 2005, only France and Norway had yet to undertake major reforms. Belgium and Denmark were slower to reform their public sectors, but by 2007-2008 both countries enacted major administrative and financial overhauls. But with these exceptions, governments had enacted public sector reforms intended to cut costs, overhaul the financial operations, and reform the labour relations of their public sectors.

The priority given to fiscal discipline and budget management was complemented by attempts to reduce government intervention in the economy. Across the OECD, governments restructured their public sector operation through privatization, public-private-partnerships (P-3s), and outsourcing (table 3). Whether in North America with market-oriented conservative governments or Western Europe with highly unionized workforces and social democratic governments, state officials sold nationalized industries and utilities. In France in the 1990s, the Socialist government of Lionel Jospin made major changes to France's 'state-led capitalism' by selling government holdings in banking, insurance, electronics, airlines (Levy 2006). Austria sold off banks, oil and gas companies, rail and electricity. Rail and telecommunications operations were privatized in Finland, Denmark, and Sweden. The Scandinavian countries also changed the public ownership of companies with share offerings in everything from postal services to airport traffic management (Pedersini 1999; Hall et al. 2006). As table 3 demonstrates, some of the largest transformations came in the 'state-led' capitalist countries of France, Italy, and Austria. But privatizations were also significant in the liberal market economies of Great Britain and Canada, as well as the coordinated market economies of Sweden and the Netherlands.

Table 3 Privatisation, PPPs, Outsourcing 1990-2007

	Privatisation (US Millions)		P-3s (US Millions)		Outsourcing
	1990-5	1996-00	2001-04	2005-07	(Percentage of Government Purchases) 2003
Austria	2,006	8,400	51.45	1097	33
Belgium	4,186	4,251	1365	1006	28
Canada	10,583 -a	na	3200	705	42
Denmark	1,005	4,913	406	31	40
Finland	1,758	12,301	1061	903	45
France	21,775	36,005	5828	21,674	na
Germany	1,000	14,717	462	1898	43
Italy	15,870	47,603	934.5	3448	25
Netherlands	9,434	2,405	1367	556	45
Norway	712	723	na	na	60
Sweden	3,795	11,984	880	252	55
United Kingdom	51,890	12,154	22941	40114	78
United States	6780 - b	na	3129	na	62

\* Provisional.

Sources: Financial Market Trends no. 72, OECD, February 1999, pp. 129-145;  
International financial services london, 2009. PFI in the UK and PPP in Europe  
Privatization Barometer, Database 1977 to Present available at: <http://www.privatizationbarometer.net/database.php>  
OECD 2003

a- Canada 1990- 2000

b - United States 1990-2000

An equally widespread measure states used to reform their public services were public-private partnerships (P3s) – arrangements whereby the private sector finances, designs, builds, maintains, and operates infrastructure assets traditionally provided by the public sector. Over the past two decade, these were introduced in all OECD countries, and their value has risen sharply since 2000 (table 3). Once commonly used for the financing and maintenance of transportation infrastructure, by the early 2000s, P3s and private financing were used in everything from electrical utilities to schools, hospitals, water and sewage, and local public transport (OECD 2003). With EU support, the number of P3 projects in Western Europe grew from 12,000 in 1987 to 200,000 in 1999 (Shaoul 2003: 156). Available survey evidence indicates that P3s have only grown over the past few years. By 2006 there were over 1,100 projects worth \$509 billion worldwide, with Europe accounting for 43 percent and nearly half of their dollar value (Hall 2008).

Governments also introduced a number of market structures into the delivery, operation, and management of public services through implementing competitive bidding structures, outsourcing and 'purchaser-provider' splits in order to have employers seek short-term and long-term cost reductions in capital and labour (Table 3) (for overviews see Whitfield 2001; Pollit and Bouckaert 2004). The intent of such

liberalisation measures was to force providers – whether public or private – to compete with each other for government funding and customers and subsequently increase efficiencies through reductions in labour costs (Flecker et al. 2009; OECD 2005: 132). As table 3 reveals, competitive bidding and outsourcing became widely used practices, as governments introduced competitive tendering and contracting out not only for major utilities such as electricity, telecommunications, and waste collection but for a range of services from blue collar support services (maintenance, cleaning, laundry, food preparation and catering), to professional services such as information technology, to core government functions such as prisons (OECD 2003; 2009).

### **The Reform of Public Sector Labour Relations**

International literatures have often emphasised that despite the pressures of globalization, differences in welfare state's distributive patterns have remained. Welfare policies have not converged, as increases in inequality continue to be notably larger in the inegalitarian liberal economies than in Northern Europe. Tax and benefit systems, it is also argued, continue to show varying degrees of effectiveness in reducing poverty and redistributing income. But in looking at the effects of fiscal austerity and government reform on public sector labour relations, work, and employment, the impacts were much more uniformly negative.

Price and budget-oriented management led to public officials laying off workers, introducing wage freezes, and increasing job responsibilities. Privatization and marketization gave states and service-employers new levers to enforce wage moderation (Brandt and Schulten 2009; Flecker et al 2009; Whitfield 2001). Across the advanced industrial economies over the last twenty years, what austerity and public sector restructuring have provided for governments was a policy framework to eliminate obstacles in labour market flexibility posed by public sector unions and collective bargaining structures

One of the most significant ways governments attempted to redesign their traditional public sector labour relations was through 'New Public Management', emphasising the decentralisation of public sector bargaining structures, the expansion of individualised pay through bonuses and performance related pay, and the growth of temporary, part-time, and contracted employment (OECD 2008a). Such measures were proposed as a means of making pay and employment conditions more responsive to variations in local market conditions, organisational requirements, and individual employee performance. But their most common results have been the lowering of public sector wages, the extension of working hours, and the institutionalization of cheaper forms of employment throughout the public sector (Bordogna 2008).

'Flexible' bargaining and new corporatist arrangements were key to 'New Public Management', and governments used these to restructure labour relations and weaken

public sector labour power throughout North America and Western Europe. In Austria, Germany, and Italy, for example, where public employees were long excluded from the right to conclude collective agreements but were protected through legislation, governments rewrote public sector labour relations acts in order to make labour more 'flexible' and deregulate hiring, fire, and pay systems (Bordogna 2008). In these countries, the rewriting of labour legislation allowed governments to employ public sector workers on a private law basis and then subsequently introduce contracting-out, temporary contracts, and more part-time jobs (Brandt and Schulten 2009; Flecker et al 2009).

In contrast, in Canada, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden – where public sector bargaining has long been institutionalized – rather than re-craft public sector labour legislation, governments instead decentralised budgets and re-amalgamated regions and municipalities in order to give officials more leeway in contracting out, and to force officials to bargain greater managerial authority over performance-related pay, as well as the hiring and termination of employees (OECD 2005: 167-69). The expectation in these countries was that allowing public managers more control over their own staffing establishment (size, grading and qualifications of workforce), while limiting their budgets, would lead to lower staffing, fewer full-time jobs, and lower labour costs over time. In these ways, governments sought to lower labour costs and reduce benefits through introducing more 'flexible' pay and working conditions.

Governments also sought to lessen public sector bargaining power by decentralising and splitting collective agreements among a number of employers – both private and between public and quasi-public employers. Traditionally, public sector collective bargaining was done in more centralized and coordinated frameworks. This was done to stabilize jobs and wages and ensure continuity in services, and in part to draw workers into labour-intensive jobs.

But as governments have taken on the task of restructuring their public sectors, and bring labour costs in line with those in the private sector, public officials sought to rework their labour relations and collective bargaining systems in a number of ways (Brandt and Schulten 2009: 2-3). Although there are significant national variations in timing and extent, bargaining reforms have often included 'two-tiered' agreements that protect remaining incumbents with good jobs, while allowing newcomers to be employed at poorer wages and working conditions (Bordogna 2008). Also common were new agreements that in the aftermath of privatisation allowed companies to withdraw from central public sector collective agreements, and then either establish their own company agreements, or – in several cases – simply hire workers on an individual contract basis. A further measure that reshaped public sector labour relations was local workplace administrators adopting outsourcing or 'contracting out' as the primary way of lowering public sector labour and benefit costs. In these ways, authorities made it much more

difficult for unions to ‘compress’ wages and maintain wages and work conditions that benefitted all workers.

A final approach that governments regularly used to attenuate public sector collective bargaining was by making changes in financial arrangements and to the final employer. In Britain and Canada, for example, both budget and bargaining processes were often separated through ‘purchaser-provider’ splits that forced local service providers to enact the cuts and restructuring that upper levels of government wanted but were not interested in having to directly bear the political costs. This has led hospitals and regional hospital authorities in both countries to act more like independent businesses and contract out many of their ancillary services, such as laundry, cleaning, and food preparation (Hellowell and Pollock 2007; Lethbridge 2007a). In Sweden, Germany, and Austria, two-level collective bargaining was implemented to allow budget cuts to be negotiated centrally, while private hospitals, private corporations, or regional councils were given the autonomy to cut labour costs by managing hours and introducing more ‘flexible’ pay and working conditions.

In comparative political economy literature, organized labour in the public sector is commonly considered to wield political clout and maintain standardized wage and work conditions (Beramendi and Cusack 2008; Hou 2009; Mares 2003). But over the past twenty years, the evidence suggests this is no longer the case. Public sector unions have resisted many restructuring measures, sometimes vigorously. But the far more common trend was widening differentiation in bargaining and the growth of low-wage employment.

**Table 4 Public Sector Part-Time and Temporary Employment**

(As a Percentage of Total Employment in Sector)

	Public Admin (including mil and defense)			Health and Social Work		
	1995	2000	2005	1995	2000	2005
Austria	14	16	21	25	35	39
Belgium	18	25	28	37	47	47
Canada	36	37	34	39	52	53
Denmark	24	20	18	35	47	42
Finland	17	16	17	31	30	30
France	29	30	29	34	38	38
Germany	24	25	28	34	39	46
Italy	6	16	14	10	15	23
Netherlands	30	31	39	68	76	78
Norway	22	21	20	43	53	52
Sweden	22	22	27	57	50	55
United Kingdom	18	20	21	46	47	40
United States*	27	23	24	50	42	43
<i>Mean</i>	22	22	24	37	47	43

Sources: Eurostat; Statistics Canada, CANSIM Database; Bureau of Labour Statistics, United States.

\* US Figures for Public Administration exclude military and defense; US figures for Health and Social Work include education, and are based on private, public, and not-for profit providers.

As table 4 shows, one of the results of privatization and public sector restructuring was the growth in part-time and temporary public sector employment, which rose in both general public administration and health and social work from 1995-2005. The largest increases in part-time and temporary health and social work came in Austria, Germany, Italy the Netherlands, and Belgium, where private hospitals and hospital networks, and purchaser-provider splits in insurance based systems sought to lower costs. But significant increases in flexible public sector employment were also seen in countries with coordinated bargaining regimes such as Norway and Denmark. In the Netherlands – where private insurance and private hospitals worked with unions under flexicurity arrangements, part-time and temporary work continued to rise and now makes up over three-quarters of the labour force in health and social services. In Canada, public hospitals and social service agencies dealt with fiscal constraints by layoffs and increasing part-time employment.

Only in Sweden and Finland was there no significant increase in part-time and temporary employment, as unions accepted layoffs and extended unemployment compensation in place of the expansion of flexible employment. But in Sweden, it is important to note such adjustment occurred with more half of all employment in health



care and social services already on a part-time or temporary basis, and has recently expanded again with the growth of private hospitals and purchaser-provider systems (Dahlgren 2008). Overall, part-time and temporary employment in health and social work rose rapidly from 37 percent of the workforce to 47 percent in the late 1990s before declining slightly to 43 percent by 2005.

Fixed-term contacts for manual and blue collar occupations along with upper management contract work also expanded in the late 1990s and early 2000s, reaching 12–13 percent in countries such as France (including education and armed forces) and Spain, and at lower job classifications, involved mostly women and young people. Generally, these contractual public servants enjoyed less favourable labour conditions, and for women in particular, who work the majority of public service jobs in health, services, public administration, and finance, this rise in part-time and fixed term contracts in the public sector has meant worsening job security and declines in benefits and long-term job prospects (Bordogna 2008). For instance, in Germany and Finland almost two out of three of all part-time employees in central government are women (62 percent in Germany in 2004; 64 percent in Finland in 2005). In Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Canada, women represent around 73–80 percent of part-time employees, while the proportion is even higher the UK.

These changes have triggered the rise in low-wage public service work throughout North America and Western Europe. A general trend in many countries was the growth of cleaning, laundry, and food service employees working under part-time, temporary or self-employment contracts. Many of these jobs paid well below employment standards or collective bargained rates, and many of these workers were employed in facilities where staffing levels were between 20 and 30 percent lower (Hall 2008; Hall 2005). Likewise, in the largest public service across all countries – health care – it was common for nurses, nursing assistants, cleaners, and food providers to work for low or inadequate wages. While in long-term care homes, municipal services, and child care, private companies and providers alike attempted to lower costs and prove themselves competitive through worsening contracts, contracting out, and expanding flexible employment (Hellowell and Pollock 2007; Lethbridge 2007). Consequently, the number of low-wage health care workers has grown by more than 50 percent in Germany, Canada, and the United States (Bosch and Kalina 2008; Lethbridge 2007).

Such developments have put the brakes on public sector labour power and undermined the institutional supports for public sector employment. Where once governments used public services and industries alongside regulatory polices to promote income inequality and job security, now public service employment is mirroring trends of private service industries, with rising levels of earnings inequality and volatility, increased part-time and temporary employment, and more low-wage work. Moreover, where in the past unions were able to improve the nature of jobs and the level of wages through collective bargaining, financial globalization and supply side policies have pressured

states to lower costs and to force through change that weakens labour power and lowers labour cost.

Now part-time and temporary workers are not only more likely to be subject to an average wage penalty of 15 percent throughout the EU, and over 45 percent in other OECD countries (OECD 2006: 169). Part-time and temporary employees are also more likely to receive lower benefits, and in many cases receive no benefits at all. In the United States, for example, 66 percent of part-time and temporary workers are not covered by employer-sponsored health insurance. And in many countries, such as Canada, Germany, Norway, and the United Kingdom, part-time and temporary employees do not qualify for occupational pensions (OECD, 2006: 171). While in others, with earnings-related protection and pension programs, part-time and temporary workers are more likely to receive basic public minimums.

**Table 5 Public Sector Employment and Compensation 1980-2005**

	Public Sector Employment					Decline from Peak	Public Sector Compensation		
	Percentage of total civilian labour force						Percentage of GDP		
	1980	1990	2000	2005			1990	1995	2005
<b>Austria</b>	18.93 -b	19.61	13.44	12.60	-6.73	<b>Austria</b>	11.4	12.5	9.3
<b>Belgium</b>	19.17	19.99	18.56 -c	18.5	-2.54	<b>Belgium</b>	10.8	11.9	12.1
<b>Canada</b>	19.97	20.86	19.81	17.50	-2.03	<b>Canada</b>	11.4	13.7	11.4
<b>Denmark</b>	27.98	29.57	30.20	30.90	-1.32	<b>Denmark</b>	17.5	17.1	17
<b>Finland</b>	25.30	23.20	24.38	25.40	-1.48	<b>Finland</b>	13.4	15.1	13.3
<b>France</b>	22.39	25.45	23.45	23.50	-4.24	<b>France</b>	13.2	13.6	13
<b>Germany</b>	14.81	14.93	12.30	11.30	-4.60	<b>Germany</b>	9.7	8.8	7.5
<b>Italy</b>	15.72	17.10	16.38	16.30	-1.72	<b>Italy</b>	11.4	11	7.2
<b>Netherlands</b>	15.11	12.90	11.10	11.40	-5.02	<b>Netherlands</b>	9.8	10.6	9.7
<b>Norway</b>	24.11	28.46	31.75	29.00	-0.64	<b>Norway</b>	14.3	14	12.4
<b>Sweden</b>	35.66	36.83	31.04	29.50	-6.81	<b>Sweden</b>	18.8	16.5	15.6
<b>United Kingdom</b>	21.39	19.66	17.72	19.60	-5.08	<b>United Kingdom</b>	11.6	10.7	11.3
<b>United States</b>	16.49	15.50	15.38	15.40	-1.11	<b>United States</b>	10.5	10.4	10
<i>Mean</i>	21.5	21.9	20.6	20.1	-3.33	<i>Mean</i>	11.4	12.8	11.5

Sources: OECD Stat. National Figures at a Glance 2009  
 Pollit and Bouckaert 2004; OECD 2008a; Bordogna 2008

Table 5 makes clear that such public sector restructuring measures resulted in the decline of public sector employment and public sector compensation in a majority of countries. Over the period 1980-2005, public employment declined from peaks in the mid-1990s, and only in a few countries did public employment subsequently experience low levels of growth, most notably Finland and the UK, where employment growth was in part-time and temporary jobs (Table 5). But these small increases in public employment did not return public sector employment to previous levels.

In contrast to the post-war period where governments expanded public services and industries to boost full-time employment, stabilize earnings, and underwrite national development in the interests of citizens, in the majority of advanced industrial countries examined here, public sector employment went increasingly in reverse as its percentage of total civilian employment fell on average by 3 percent from former peaks. Looking across the period 1980-2005, 8 of the 13 countries saw reductions in public service employment, with only Norway, Denmark, and France seeing increases in the public sector workforce, through primarily part-time and temporary employees. Overall, however, the decline in public sector employment as a percentage of the total civilian labour force was 1.4 percent across the thirteen countries here 1980-2005.

Public sector labour costs were also lowered through privatization, marketization, outsourcing, social pacts, and imposed agreements. As table 5 illustrates, compensation for government employees as a percentage of GDP declined in 9 of thirteen countries 1995-2005. The largest declines came in Austria, Canada, Germany, Italy, and Finland, each with different political economic institutional setups, and there was a 1 percent decline in total compensation in Germany and the Netherlands. Austria reduced public sector wage costs the most, using a combination of privatisation, contracting out, public sector hiring freezes, and the introduction of regularized 'private' collective bargaining, to shrink the public sector work force and enforce wage freezes.

Finland and Norway reduced compensation through coordinated arrangements that froze wages and then tied minimums to the private sector and well below growth and productivity levels. Canada cut employment and compensation through legislated wage freezes, budget reduction, and subsequent provider/employer strategies of layoffs, contracting out, and part-time/flex employment. By contrast, in Great Britain – a 'liberal' regime and the country that has experienced the most widespread attempts at marketization in its public sector – actually saw an increase of .58 percent in compensation 1995-2005 due in part to the increased role of well-paying contracts for consultants and upper management, the increased role of private hospitals, and ongoing attempts to introduce flexible employment in labour markets (Pollock and Leys 2005).

## Conclusion

Over the past ten years, the preponderance of scholarly studies on the welfare state have stressed that there is 'no race to the bottom' – despite globalization and the rise of market oriented politics, it is commonly argued that welfare state retrenchment and public policy reform has been slow and often patterned along partisan and institutional lines. But placing state and public policy reform into a broader political economic context of debt, financialization, and neoliberal shifts in public sector administration and collective bargaining, the evidence strongly supports radical and trade union country

studies that a number of incremental and cumulative changes have indeed taken place to public sector management and operation in many countries and that regardless of political and institutional setup, many of these have had a negative impact – especially on public services, public service employment, and public sector collective bargaining.

Financial globalization alongside debt management led many governments to emphasise business and economic growth, and among New Right and Third Way Social Democratic parties alike, there is now a widespread consensus that expenditures on public services are a burden on the ‘productive’ sectors of the economy and that tax cuts and ‘new public management’ reforms are necessary for growth. Consequently, policies of fiscal austerity, performance budgeting, contracting out, purchaser-provider splits and so on, have been put forward by governments to alter the calculus and priorities of public officials, workers, and interest groups alike. Likewise governments have privatized public assets in order to reduce direct government expenditures, boost financial profits, and lower wage costs.

Government efforts at reforming and restructuring public sector collective bargaining arrangements have similarly enforced wage moderation and worsened jobs, attenuating labour bargaining power through layoffs, early retirement, and the growth of ‘flexible employment’. At the same time, declining worker power, weakening class attachment to left political parties, and the rising influence of business on government has significantly transformed government and domestic policy making. Consequently, states have now taken the lead to transform their public sectors along more market-oriented lines.

The results presented here suggest that a major shift has occurred across advanced industrial states, and these appear to have been the result of explicit political design to lower public labour costs and shift service provision to private benefits and private market providers. To further assess to what extent this convergence is occurring, future comparative research on the state, policy, capitalism, and labour would be well served to explore more deeply the impacts of public sector reform on redistribution, jobs, and income security and examine to what degree debt, finance, and public sector bargaining structures have patterned policy and labour market outcomes.

A second important topic for future research on the state and labour is the politics of public sector reform and the reasons for partisan and country differences in the extent of public sector restructuring. Recent literatures on the ‘dualisation’ of societies have suggested that as the distribution and coverage of social programmes have deteriorated, recent welfare states reforms have perpetuated the structures of advantage and disadvantage in the labour market, and contributed to a politics that enforces divides between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ (Davidsson and Naczyk 2009; Palier and Thelen 2010). The evidence here suggests that public sector ‘modernization’, ‘marketization’, and reform is having similar political consequences.

Policies such as privatization are boosting income inequality through expanding stock markets and financial returns. Likewise, in the case of public sector restructuring, the government introduction of privatization and the restructuring of collective bargaining has given public, private, public-private, and municipal authorities alike the power to pay lower wages and benefits to recent recruits. At the same time, proportional reductions in public employment are lowering the wage share of unskilled workers, and contributing to greater inequality and the expansion of lower-paid private sector jobs. This too is adding to wage and income inequality.

However, rising inequality is known to be a contributing factor to stronger median voter opposition to redistribution (Anderson and Beremendi 2008). Increasing inequality is also associated with lower voter turnouts and to voter demobilization, both of which also are contributing to shifts in party policy preferences.

But to what degree public sector reforms are correlated to recent trends in lower voter turnouts, greater class de- or re-alignment, and the declining support of workers for left and social democratic parties is not known. Over the past decade, across Western Europe, political parties and party systems stopped providing much in the way of support for their public sectors or organized labour in the 1980s and 1990s (Moschonas 2002). Rather Social Democratic parties have regularly resorted as a matter of course to ‘Third Way’ policies that promoted business and the market while pushing labour to become more flexible and the unemployed more ‘active’ (Hou 2009). At the same time, no fewer than nine Centre-Right governments came to power in Western Europe over the last ten years, with the majority having populist, tax-cut-oriented, populist Right coalition partners. Given the impacts of public sector restructuring on employment and wages, future research that carefully considers how public sector reform processes are tied to these partisan shifts, the rise in inequality, and policy outcomes may do much to improve our understanding of recent changes in political economy.

A final area of research required will be on the impacts of the current financial crisis on the public sector. Over the course of 2009-2011, governments brought forward a number of ‘exit’ strategies intended to return the world economy to ‘normal’ and ‘stable’ rates of growth (Albo and Evans 2011). With the average debt burden in OECD countries expected to rise above 100 percent of GDP, every government put forward ‘exit’ strategies that emphasised deficit reduction, tax cuts, and ‘structural’ reforms to labour market and social policy. ‘Fiscal exit strategies’ included cutting public expenditures, public sector wage freezes and layoffs, as well as further corporate tax cuts. ‘Structural adjustments’ central to the governments strategy entailed rolling back public sector pensions, the privatization of further national industries, and further changes to public sector collective bargaining, including withdrawing the right to strike (OECD 2010).

Public sector unions and citizens alike have protested these policies. Around the world, in Britain, France, Greece, Spain, and Wisconsin USA, government austerity policies have brought public sector workers out onto the streets (Evans and Hussey 2011).

However, unions are finding it difficult to win these battles, and the pressure to rationalise the public sector even further is likely to continue in the coming years.

Comparative scholarship has long assumed that public sector unions are able to mobilize public support and that governments respond to the problems that affect broad majorities. But in the most recent events, such assumptions no longer appear to hold. Governments are going forward with major policy initiatives that support financial and bond markets, and that do much less to reduce inequality through public services and employment. Examining the reasons for this 'backlash' against government and the public sector, in the context of ongoing state support for finance and the wealthy, will do much to improve our understanding of the politics of welfare state change. Such research will also do much to enhance our appraisals of state change and the ongoing fundamental conflicts over income, equality, and jobs.

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Article

## **NO RIGHT TO BE SAFE: JUSTIFYING THE EXCLUSION OF ALBERTA FARM WORKERS FROM HEALTH AND SAFETY LEGISLATIONS**

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### **Abstract**

Alberta remains the only Canadian province to exclude agricultural workers from the ambit of its occupational health and safety laws. Consequently, farm workers have no right to know about workplace safety hazards and no right to refuse unsafe work, thereby increasing their risk of a workplace injury. This study uses qualitative content analysis to identify three narratives used by government members of the legislative assembly between 2000 and 2010 to justify the continued exclusion of agricultural workers from basic health and safety rights. These narratives are: (1) education is better than regulation, (2) farms cannot be regulated, and (3) farmers don't want and can't afford regulation. Analysis of these narratives reveals them to be largely invalid, raising the question of why government members rely upon these narratives. The electoral rewards associated with maintaining this exclusion may comprise part of the explanation.

### **Keywords**

agriculture, health, safety, policy, Canada

### **Introduction**

Alberta is the only Canadian province that continues to exclude agricultural workers from the ambit of its occupational health and safety legislation. This exclusion

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deprives farm workers of safety rights that all other workers take for granted—such as the right to know about hazards and the right to refuse unsafe work—and thereby increases their risk of injury. Criticism of this exclusion mounted during the period 2000 to 2010, with the honorable Mr. Justice Peter Barley highlighting the lack of a clear rationale for this exclusion during a 2008 public fatality inquiry into the death of farm worker Kevan Chandler (Alberta 2008a).

This study uses qualitative content analysis to identify how Alberta politicians have justified this exclusion. Review of legislative debates identifies three rationales (or ‘narratives’) used by government members of Alberta’s legislative assembly to justify the continuation of this exclusion. Analysis of these narratives reveals them to be largely invalid. Rather, these narratives appear to serve as rhetorical devices to sustain an electorally advantageous arrangement between rural Albertans and the government as well as legitimate morally questionable behaviour by employers.

## Background

Most Canadian agricultural workers are covered by occupational health and safety laws (Commission of Labour Cooperation n.d). Such coverage provides workers in one of Canada’s most hazardous industries with important safety rights, such as the right to know about the hazards associated with their work. It also gives farm workers the right to refuse unsafe work without fear of job loss. And it empowers the state to monitor occupational hazards and prevent injuries through enforcement activity. This legislative protection has come relatively recently, with British Columbia extending OHS protections to farm workers in 2004, Ontario in 2006 and Prince Edward Island in 2007 (Fairey et al. 2011; Ontario 2011; Prince Edward Island 2007). Elsewhere, Australia and the US include farms within the ambit of OHS legislation, but US standards do not apply to family members and also cannot enforce standards on farms with fewer than 11 employees. In this way, US farm safety regulations apply to only about 10% farms, which employ about half of hired farm workers (Temperley and Fragar 2010; Runyan 2001).

Alberta remains the only province that excludes most agricultural operations from the ambit of its *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (Alberta 2001a). This exclusion affects workers directly or indirectly involved in the production of crops through the cultivation of land, the raising and maintenance of animals and birds, and the keeping of bees. Workers involved the processing of food or other products as well as workers in greenhouses, mushroom farms, nurseries, sod farms, landscaping operations and operation involving the raising and board of pets are subject to the Act. Alberta also excludes farm and ranch workers from many statutory rights under its *Employment Standard Code* and *Labour Relations Code*. Workers’ compensation coverage is not mandatory for farm workers (Barnetson 2009).

Alberta has a long history of excluding resident and migrant farm workers from protective legislation. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, farmers lobbied for the exclusion of farm workers from workers' compensation on the basis of cost as well as for wage ceilings (Thompson 1978). Farm workers were excluded from the ambit of Alberta's 1917 *Factory Act* and the 1922 *Minimum Wage Board Act* (Leadbeater 1984). Farmers also colluded with one another and with provincial labour offices to set wages (Thompson, 1978). During the 1920s, the United Farmers of Alberta avoided legislation and policy that entailed cost increases for farmers (Leadbeater 1984). In this way, Alberta broadly mirrors the pattern found in Ontario by Tucker (2006, 2012). Danysk (1995) notes that provincial and federal government also made significant efforts to disrupt union organization. In the lead-up to and after the Second World War, with the Social Credit government excluding farm workers from legislation addressing male minimum wages, hours of work, collective bargaining rights and wage security acts (Caragata 1979; Finkel 2012), with this pattern of legislative exclusion continuing after the Progressive Conservative party formed government.

A lack of access to statutory protections is one characteristic of precarious work. Precarious workers experience heightened labour insecurity "...characterized by limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low wages and high risks of ill health" (Vosko 2006, 4). Broadly speaking, agricultural workers in Alberta exhibit these features (Barnetson 2009). Further, work precarity may limit the willingness of workers to exercise their workplace rights (Bernstein, Lippel, Tucker and Vosko 2006). Despite the demonstrable ineffectiveness of complaint-driven enforcement schemes (Weil and Pyles 2005; Barnetson 2010, 2012a), Alberta continues to rely on this approach which suggests that the exclusion of farm workers from OHS legislations is not the only barrier facing farm workers who wish to exercise safety rights.

This post-war legislative exceptionalism around farm workers reflects Canada's preference of "cheap food" and policies designed to support that outcome (Skogstad 2007). These policies include efforts to supply cheap labour, such as the historical progression of interned citizens, prisoners of war, refugees, coerced aboriginal labourers and, eventually, migrant foreign workers in southern Alberta's sugar beet fields (Laliberte 2006). Waged agricultural workers comprise one (albeit heterogeneous) element of the structure of Canadian agriculture. John Shields (1992) asserts this structure has three distinct tiers: agribusiness (i.e., the suppliers of machinery and chemicals, and purchasers of products) on the top, waged agricultural workers on the bottom, and farmers in the middle. Within this structure, individual producers compete among themselves as they purchase supplies and sell commodities to quasi-monopolies that set prices and limit farmers' market power. In this dynamic, farmers seek (and are compelled) to minimize labour costs to manage the cost-price squeeze created by capital determining input and product prices. In permitting and facilitating this arrangement, the state subsidizes the capital accumulation process by transferring part of the cost of social reproduction (i.e.,

food) to agricultural workers via low wages and workplace injury (Basran and Hay 1988; Skogstad 1979, 1987, 2007; Kelly 1982).

Since 2000, Alberta's OHS exclusion has been the subject of increasing criticism from farm worker advocates and opposition parties (Alberta Federation of Labour 2005, 2008, 2009, 2011; United Food and Commercial Workers 2010). Criticism of the exclusion dramatically escalated following the death of feedlot worker Kevan Chandler in 2006 and the release of the 2008 public fatality inquiry report into Chandler's death. In this report, Judge Peter Barley recommended "...paid employees on farms should be covered by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, R.S.A. 2000 Ch. 0-2., with the same exemption for family members and other non-paid workers that apply to non-farm employers" (Alberta 2008a, 7). Barley also noted "No logical explanation was given as to why paid employees on a farm are not covered by the same workplace legislation as non-farm employees" (Alberta 2008a, 6). This criticism occurred in the context of increasing in legal, academic and union attention to the position of agricultural workers Canada, including the growing use of migrant and immigrant labour, the inability of these workers to unionize, and the health and safety of these workers (Faraday, Fudge and Tucker 2012; United Food and Commercial Workers 2011; Otero and Preibisch 2010; Basok 2002).

Concern about the health and safety of farm workers reflects the hazardous nature of farm work. The agriculture industry records among the highest fatality rates of any Canadian occupation (Picket et al. 1999). Data on non-fatal injuries is elusive, but American data suggests farm workers have the highest incidence of workplace fatalities and higher rates of many occupational diseases and injuries (Hovey and Magana 2002; Sakala 1987). These injury rates reflect well known agricultural dangers, such as exposure to hazardous chemical and biological agents, long working days, physically demanding and repetitive tasks, hazardous equipment and livestock, unsafe transportation, inadequate housing and sanitation, and working alone (Hennerbry 2010; Otero and Preibisch 2010; Anthony, Williams and Avery 2008; Arcury and Quandt 2007, Hansen and Donahue 2003; Arcury et al. 2001). Exacerbating these hazards are a lack of training and education and the absence (or non-use) of personal protective equipment (Verduzco and Lozano 2003; Quandt et al. 2006; Moore 2004).

During the period 2000-2010, Alberta's political scene was stable. The Progressive Conservative party formed majority governments 12 consecutive times between 1971 and 2012. The opposition was fragmented and had been largely urban-based and centre-left leaning. Rural constituencies usually elect conservative Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) (Alberta 1997, 2001b, 2004, 2008b). Consequently, the real political contest in Alberta often occurs within PC Party leadership races, as varying shades of conservatism compete for support. At the end of this period, the new Wildrose Party created a far-right opposition party with rural support, particularly in southern Alberta. The 2012 election saw a potentially significant re-alignment, with rural southern Alberta

electing Wildrose MLAs and urbanites throwing their support behind the relatively progressive Conservative Party. This change may reduce power of rural Albertans, including the farm lobby.

## Method

This study examines the rationale used by Alberta government MLAs to justify the continued exclusion of most agricultural workers from the ambit of Alberta's *Occupational Health and Safety Act* as well as the validity of this rationale. The research questions are:

1. How have government MLAs justified the continued exclusion of most agricultural workers from the ambit of OHS legislation?
2. Does this justification hold up to close scrutiny?

In answering the first question, this study uses qualitative content analysis to identify the various 'narratives' that comprise the justification of farm workers' regulatory exclusion. Qualitative content analysis focuses on the content and contextual meaning of textual material in order to classify large quantities of text into manageable categories and thereby reveal underlying patterns or themes of a phenomenon (Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Kohlbacher 2006; Krippendorff 2004; Kondracki and Wellman 2002; Morse and Fiel, 1995). The second question is examined through analysis of each narrative with reference to the literature on farm safety and regulation.

The data for this study comprises all statements recorded in transcripts of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta (Hansard) by government MLAs about farm-worker safety between 2000 and 2010. Such data is appropriate for content analysis because it is intended to communicate a message (White and Marsh 2005). This study excludes government policy documents on farm safety. Examples of these documents were reviewed and not found to articulate a policy rationale suitable for analysis. This study also excludes statements by MLAs recorded in print media. A review of such statements revealed they added little new content.

Data collection began with key word searches (farm, agriculture, safety, injury, injured, worker) of Hansard transcripts indices from 2000 to 2010 (inclusive). This yielded 127 potentially relevant passages that subsequent review narrowed to 61 passages containing a statement by a government MLA about farm worker safety. A coding scheme was developed based upon seven explanations for the exclusion evident in the dataset. All passages were thematically coded and sorted by explanation. Synthesizing each category's passages into a coherent narrative resulted in the elimination of one category due to insufficient evidence. Commonalities within the six remaining categories



resulted in these categories being collapsed into the three narratives that are set out below.

The key weakness of conventional content analyses is that an inadequate understanding of the phenomenon can exclude important categories and thus distort the results (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Several strategies based on Guba (1981) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) were used to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, including providing a thick description of findings with numerous exemplars has been presented and having a draft reviewed by two knowledgeable practitioners. As per Melrose (2009), the applicability of the results to other jurisdictions is left for readers to decide based upon context and the documentation set out in the narratives.

### **Narratives Justifying The Agricultural Exclusion**

Between 2000 and 2010, government MLAs used three narratives to justify the exclusion of agricultural workers from OHS legislation:

1. Education is better than regulation.
2. Farms cannot be regulated.
3. Farmers don't want and can't afford regulation.

These narratives are set out below. There is some overlap between the narratives.

#### *Narrative 1: Education Is Better Than Regulation*

One rationale for maintaining the exclusion of agricultural workers from the ambit of the OHS Act centres on the assertion that safety education is preferable to regulation. Throughout the period of study, government members highlighted Department of Agriculture education programs that identified safety hazards and hazard mitigation strategies. Such statements frame the government's role as a provider of information and education rather than as a regulator. As the issue of farm injury became more politically charged after 2005, government members began to explicitly link education with injury reduction. This statement by then-Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development Doug Horner is illustrative:

**Mr. Horner:** ... Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is an education program. We're trying to make sure that farmers have the right information about what is safe practice and what are some of the issues that they should be aware of on-farm so that we don't have this number of fatalities (Alberta

2006a).<sup>2</sup>

In effect, Horner is asserting that making information available will reduce farm injuries. This putative relationship bolsters the notion that the state's role in farm safety should be primarily educative. In 2007, then-Premier Ed Stelmach justified the government's "education" position by asserting that regulation had to be exceptionally intrusive in order to work.

**Mr. Stelmach:** ... just because we have regulations does not mean that somebody is going to follow them. We have many regulations. We have many laws. We have laws that say that people should stop at a stop sign, and they don't. So what is he saying? That we put a policeman at every intersection in this province to prevent people from not following the rules (Alberta 2007a)?

Subsequent statements broadly follow the assertion that that legislation alone cannot eliminate workplace or farm injuries or fatalities. Consequently, the state is left to emphasize education. Over time, this discourse changes. In 2007, the government's position is that "legislation alone cannot eliminate workplace or farm injuries or fatalities", although presumably legislation might contribute to a reduction in injuries or fatalities. By late 2008, the government's assertions are more categorical: "legislation is not the answer". This categorical denial of the value of legislation is then used to justify both the government's reliance on education and its unwillingness to include farm workers under OHS regulations.

During this change, alternate explanations for why the government will not support regulation emerge. Farms are deemed to be unique workplaces and (some) farmers are said to be resistant to farm safety legislation (see below). These narratives provide further political justification for an education-based intervention. At this point, the "education is better than regulation" narrative is fully formed and subsequent government statements focus on defending this position in two ways. On the one hand, then-Minister of Agriculture and Food George Groeneveld implies that regulation would not reduce fatalities:

**Mr. Groeneveld:** ... I think he brought up a figure of 220 the other day. I'd love to sit down with the hon. member, go through them, and have him

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that farm workers are invisible in MLAs' discussion of education. Instead, MLAs assume that various actors (owners, family members, workers) all have the same OHS needs and interests. More broadly speaking, a reviewer (correctly) noted that this study does not address the views of farm workers. These views will be the subject of a planned separate study.

show me where legislation would prevent these accidents. He just has to stop looking at the headlines, and he has to start getting to the facts (Alberta 2009a).

On the other hand, government members such as MLA Robin Campbell suggest that rules can work, but only if those subject to them follow them:

**Mr. Campbell:** ... Mr. Speaker, I want to talk to you also about safety training and about regulations. Again, I can rely on 30 years of experience. You can have all the safety regulations you want in place, you can have all the safety equipment you want in place, but if people do not use common sense and follow those regulations, they're absolutely worthless (Alberta 2009b).

The apparent contradiction between Groeneveld's assertion that regulation will not reduce injuries and Campbell's (perhaps unconscious) assertion that effective regulation can reduce injuries is never unresolved.

#### *Narrative 2: Family Farms Can't Be Regulated*

A second explanation for excluding agricultural workers from OHS legislation centres on the assertion that the unique nature of (at least some) farms makes regulation unworkable. Beginning in 2006, Horner emphasizes that farms are often mixed-use locations (i.e., homes and workplaces) and thus regulation is somehow inappropriate and/or difficult.

**Mr. Horner:** ... Farms are unique in that they are work sites, they're homes, and they're places where families live, work, and play, so they can't be treated the same way as a construction site. ... We don't have any official way of tracking whether the incident occurred while the person was engaged in a competitive or a recreational aspect or whether it was a farm-productivity activity, in other words working on the farm, so we don't always know if the injury or accident occurred when the person might have been out horseback riding or actually involved in a rodeo (Alberta 2006a).

Horner is correct that some farms are both workplaces and homes and that some "farm" injuries are the result of recreational, rather than occupational, activities. That

said, not all agricultural work takes place at mixed-use locations and not all mixed-use farms and equipment have recreational potential.

The “farms are also homes” rationale was tested when the government was questioned about why (relatively safe) greenhouses, mushroom farms and nurseries (which operate on mixed-use properties) were under the ambit of the legislation while farms (including relatively dangerous feedlots, which are usually located on single-use sites) are excluded.

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Well, Mr. Speaker, he understands – I’m certain he understands because I’ve explained it to him so many times – that farms are unique. Farms are where working families live and they play and they work. Consequently, we’ve said all along that education and training is where we have to go. I still maintain that you can’t legislate common sense (Alberta 2008c).

Groeneveld’s inability to explain the discrepancy of regulating relatively safe farms and not regulating relatively dangerous ones casts doubt upon the assertion that farms are not regulated solely because they are mixed-use properties. A variation on this argument is found MLAs’ efforts to distinguish between so-called “family farms” and “corporate farms”. Stelmach first brings this up in 2007:

**Mr. Stelmach:** Mr. Speaker, this matter has come up in the House a number of times with respect to protection that farm workers have. There are, of course, those working on family farms and those working on corporate farms (Alberta 2007a).

The nature of the difference between family farms and corporate farms is unclear. Is a family farm a small farm (whatever small means)? Is it also (or alternately) a farm staffed by a family and/or operated as a sole proprietorship? Is a corporate farm a large farm? Or one that employs waged labour? Or an incorporated operation. This difference is never clarified.

Whatever the actual difference is, this difference appears (in the view of MLAs) to meaningfully impact the appropriateness of safety regulation. Subsequent statements further confuse matters. For example, in resisting a call to regulate “big industrial farms that employ dozens of people”, Groeneveld notes that most corporate or industrial farms are family-managed businesses:

**Mr. Groeneveld:** Mr. Speaker, corporate farms or industrial, whatever the hon. member wants to call them, are still managed pretty much by

families; in fact, in the feedlot industry pretty much entirely. Safety is a personal commitment between employees and employers. They must agree to work together to create a safe workplace. Employees, indeed, are treated like family. That commitment along with education and training makes a huge difference (Alberta 2008d).

In this passage, Groeneveld asserts that, because “(e)mployees... are treated like family”, these large, incorporated farms with “dozens of employees” that are “still managed pretty much by families” need not be regulated. This statement suggests that all of the potential differences between a family farm and a corporate farm are, in fact, not differences. According to Groeneveld, corporate or industrial farms are also family farms, regardless of their size, number of employees or legal constitution.

In subsequent questioning, government members altered the basis of the “family farm” exclusion. Then-Minister of Employment and Immigration Thomas Lukaszuk emphasized the “unique” nature of the agricultural labour force:

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** ... A farming environment is not your regular, standard industrialized environment. You have family members working. You have relatives working. You have neighbours helping neighbours. It is not the standard work environment, so we will be seeking advice from our farming community to tell us what type of assistance they can receive from the Alberta government to make sure that they stay as safe as humanly possible (Alberta 2010a).

This statement asserts regulating a workforce comprising immediate and extended family members and neighbors is inappropriate. Yet, such circumstances exist in many industries subject to Alberta OHS regulation (e.g., restaurants, residential construction, convenience stores) including some forms of regulated agricultural operations (i.e., mushroom farms, greenhouses and nurseries). Furthermore, other jurisdictions (e.g., Australia) successfully regulate farms, some of which have similar labour force characteristics.

Interestingly, only 18 months earlier, Lukaszuk had voted against an opposition motion to introduce amendments to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to protect paid farm workers while continuing to exempt family members and other unpaid labourers. One of the reasons government members gave for not supporting this amendment was because it differentiated workers based upon their family and employment status (Alberta 2009c).

*Narrative 3: Farmers Don't Want And Can't Afford Regulation*

Resistance within the agricultural community to the expected cost of safety regulation is the third narrative government MLAs employ to justify maintaining the agricultural exclusion from the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. This narrative is sometimes discussed in terms of the economic importance of agriculture, the cost of regulation and the specter of farm bankruptcy. In effect, government members assert the government must trade off worker safety to maintain the profitability of farms.

This “farmers can’t afford regulation” portion of this narrative appears three years after a 2003 diagnosis of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE or “mad cow” disease) created significant hardship among cattle producers in Alberta. Consequently, MLAs such as then-Minister of Human Resources and Employment Mike Cardinal were reluctant to impose additional regulations:

**Mr. Cardinal:** ... agriculture continues to face many challenges due to the fact that we have to export most of our agricultural products. Therefore, when it comes to agriculture, agriculture cannot afford at this time, because of the status there, to have too many standards imposed on it (Alberta 2006b).

Indeed, in 2006, Cardinal rejected a recommendation to include farm workers under the ambit of the OHS Act from a provincial committee reviewing OHS. His rationale was that the committee did not include representatives of the agricultural community.

**Mr. Cardinal:** ... if it’s going to impact the farm family in particular, we would have to consult the farm families out there and the farm industry to ensure that whatever is put in place does not impact the farm family negatively because the farm families right now, as you know, are challenged. There are a lot of bankruptcies out there. A lot of farm families are close to bankruptcy right now (Alberta 2006c).

Explicit use of “farmers can’t afford regulation” fell into disuse after 2006, perhaps reflecting a reduction in economic pressure on farms as restrictions on beef exports were relaxed. Yet the putative threat that safety regulations pose to farms remained a reason to reject regulation until the end of the period under study. For example, in 2008, Lukaszuk indicated:

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** ... the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development and I are looking at the (Barley) report, and we will make recommendations

that achieve two things: keep our farmers safe but also keep them in business because the only way to make sure that a farmer doesn't get hurt is just to put him out of business, and we are not willing to do that (Alberta 2010b).

In this passage, we see Lukaszuk asserting a trade off between safety and economic viability of the farm and, therefore, alternatives to regulation are necessary. In this way, this narrative is linked to the "education is better than regulation" narrative.

Government members have also emphasized the "farmers don't want regulation" portion of this narrative. For example, then-Deputy Premier Shirley McClellan (herself a farmer and former Minister of Agriculture) indicated agricultural producers (i.e., farmers) direct government policy on regulation:

**Mrs. McClellan:** ... I know that if the producers, in their wisdom not ours, were to come forward in a majority view to the minister of agriculture, he would bring that forward to this table. He represents them extraordinarily well. But I must inform the hon. member, being a part of the agricultural community myself, that they are very independent thinkers, and they like to make their decisions and ask us to carry out policy they believe is in their best interest (Alberta 2006d).

Towards the end of the period under study, the role of the agricultural industry in this narrative has slightly changed. Rather than the agricultural industry being given an effective veto over safety regulation, government members began positing the agricultural industry should shape any regulation.

**Mr. Lukaszuk:** ... The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview will know that the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development has undertaken an initiative where he will be drawing advice from those they're actually seeking to protect, from farmers, to advise us what is the best kind of coverage that would work for them, whether education would satisfy them (Alberta 2010a).

Again, we see the use of farmers with all agricultural workers, who may have quite different interests than their employers do. To date, such consultations have not resulted in significant change in the government's original position (farmers don't want and can't afford regulation) thus this slight change in emphasis does not fundamentally alter the basic narrative.

## Testing The Narratives

### *“Education Is Preferable To Regulation”*

Government MLAs make two assertions when discussing the “education is preferable to regulation” narrative: (1) education is more effective than regulation at reducing injuries and fatalities on farms, and (2) legislation is not effective at reducing injuries and fatalities on farms. Analysis suggests these assertions are invalid.

No studies directly compare the relative efficacy of education and legislation at reducing agricultural injuries. That said, Hagel et al. (2008) found an education-based farm-safety program in Saskatchewan was not associated with observable improvements in farm safety practices, hazards or injury outcomes. A 2003 evaluation of the Canadian Agricultural Safety Program was also unable to substantiate any impact upon fatality of injury rates (Canada 2003). These findings were mirrored in studies of farmers in Colorado and Iowa as well as a national US youth education program (Beseler and Stallones 2010; Rautlainen et al. 2004; Lee, Westaby and Berg 2004).

The broader literature on the effectiveness of education is mixed. Some studies have found positive associations between training and injury reductions (Burke et al. 2005; Waehrer and Miller 2009). Other studies suggest education alone is not effective at reducing injury rates in health care (Tullar et al. 2010; D’Arcy et al. 2011) or logging (Bell and Grushecky 2006) while others report small reductions in construction worker injuries (Kinn et al. 2000; Xuiwen et al. 2004). Overall, there is no evidence that education is more effective than legislation at reducing injuries and weak support that educational programs reduce occupational injuries, with no evidence of this in agriculture.

A practical approach to assessing the impact of educational programs on injury reduction is to examine agricultural injuries in Alberta over time. Unfortunately, Alberta does not collect comprehensive data. What data there is shows little change in farm injury rates between 1997 and 2006 followed by a sharp decline from 2006 to 2009 (Alberta, 2011).<sup>3</sup> The reliability of this data and the cause of the apparent decline is unclear.

No studies examining the efficacy of OHS legislation at reducing farm injuries were uncovered. Marlenga et al. (2007) suggest that subjecting US family farms to regulation and increasing age restrictions would address most serious injuries experienced by young family farm workers. That said, examinations of OHS compliance on Australian and Irish farms suggests that being subject to legislation does not

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<sup>3</sup> These statistics should be viewed with caution due to the voluntary and partial nature of the data as well as the absence of controls for changes in the farming population (e.g., the concentration of the livestock industry). The relationship between these stats and farm safety education is unclear as no comprehensive explanation of educational programs or changes exist. Interestingly, the virtual elimination of farm safety education in Alberta during the late 1990s was not associated with any change in these injury rates.



necessarily result in compliance: enforcement is required (Lower, Fragar and Temperley 2011; Finnegan 2007). This accords with the broader literature on OHS legislation (Tomba, Treithick and McLeod 2007). Assuming enforcement occurs, there is a wide body of literature demonstrating it possible to “legislate common sense” and that such regulation is effective and reduces injuries, including mandatory bicycle helmet (Macpherson, 2002) and child car seat use (Farmer et al. 2009), and prohibitions on firearms (Ozanne-Smith et al. 2004; Kapusta et al. 2007), domestic violence (Dugan 2006), and impaired driving (Asbridge et al. 2004; Mann et al. 2001).

Adequately enforced legislation does appear to reduce injury. Indeed, for this reason, the government of Alberta has enacted OHS legislation in all other industries. There is no evidence that this dynamic does not operate in agriculture. In fact, the government has subjected portions of the agricultural industry to OHS legislation. Advocating a demonstrably ineffective “education-only” approach to reducing agricultural injuries calls into question the validity of the government’s assertion that “any time we have a farm fatality or a farm accident, it’s one time too many. Our goal is to have zero” (Alberta 2008e).

### *“Farms Cannot Be Regulated”*

Government MLAs make three assertions with respect to regulation when advancing the “farms cannot be regulated” narrative: (1) there is a meaningful difference between “family” and “corporate” farms, (2) the presence of family members and neighbours on the farm prevents regulation, and (3) agricultural operations on mixed-use locations cannot be regulated. Analysis suggests these assertions are invalid.

While government MLA often referred to a putative difference between family farms and corporate farms to explain why regulation is not possible or is difficult, they were unable to establish any criterion upon which family farms could be consistently differentiated from corporate farms.<sup>4</sup> In other instances, MLAs frequently discussed farms in monolithic terms (e.g., “they’re places where families live, work and play”) in order to explain why regulation was difficult. This repeated inconsistency (farms are different vs. farms are the same) suggests that positing a difference between family and

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<sup>4</sup> Data about Alberta’s agricultural industry that bears upon this prevalence of different types of farms is very difficult to find. In 2006, Alberta had 49,431 farms, a 7.9% decline from 2001, with farm size increasing by 8.8%. This continues a long-term trend dating back to at least 1961 (Alberta, 2010d). Of these farms, 13.6% were run as family corporations and 1.4% as non-family corporations comprise. The remainder were sole proprietorships or other farm types (e.g., community pastures or institutional farms). Approximately \$537.1 million in wages and salary payments were reported in 2006. Growth in farm size is largely concentrated in farms over 1600 acres. Growth in farm receipts is almost exclusively in farms with gross income of over \$500,000. Taken together, these changes suggest an increasing numbers of large-scale, capital-intensive farms.

corporate farms is a rhetorical device designed to sidetrack debate, rather than being a real impediment to regulation.

The assertion that the presence of family members and neighbours on farms precludes any regulation is difficult to believe given that every other Canadian jurisdiction as well as other countries (e.g., Australia) regulates farm work. These jurisdictions use several techniques to distinguish family members and neighbours from other workers (although why family members and neighbours do not warrant similar protections is not clear). Ontario, for example, regulates only paid workers (Ontario 2011). While some farms in other jurisdictions may be significantly smaller in area and larger in workforce than an Alberta farm, there is no evidence or logical reason that Alberta's farms are so unique that regulatory approaches from others jurisdictions are completely inapplicable (Veeman and Veeman 2011).

Alberta government MLAs objected to the regulation of only paid farm workers in 2009. The basis of their opposition was the assertion that all workers must have the same rights. Such blanket treatment runs contrary to other Alberta employment legislation which provides different statutory rights to different worker groups. Further, the paradoxical effect of refusing to distinguish among groups of farm workers (in order not to deprive any group of their rights) is that all farm workers are deprived of statutory safety rights because, in 2010, the government claimed that it can't regulate family members and neighbours in the same way as workers.

The assertion that it is not possible to regulate mixed-use farms is not substantiated. Indeed, Alberta does regulate some mixed-used agricultural operations (e.g., greenhouses, nurseries, and sod and mushroom farms) and other jurisdictions regulate all farms. Further, the degree to which Alberta farms are mixed-use sites is unclear.<sup>5</sup>

#### *“Farmers Don't Want And Can't Afford Regulation”*

Government MLAs assert (1) farmers can't afford regulation, and (2) farmers don't want regulation. The cost of compliance with the *Occupational Health and Safety*

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<sup>5</sup> As noted above, there is no reliable source of disaggregated data that clearly indicates the number of industrial-style farms, where the “mixed use” argument might be clearly inapplicable. One former agriculture bureaucrat suggests characterizing the agriculture in monolithic terms (“49,000 farmers”) is an intentional government strategy to avoid regulating industrial-style operations.

Anecdotal evidence of large-scale, industrial-style operations exists. Consider Highland Feeders, a family grain farm incorporated in 1976 east of Edmonton. In 1983, Highland began expanding its cattle operation from 50 head to 36,000 with annual revenue of \$60 million (Highland Feeder, 2011). Such large-scale operations are increasingly common in livestock. Similarly, grain operations have seen significant consolidation.

*Act* is unknown and will vary between farms. The absence of a definitive cost analysis of safety regulations in farming raises questions about the veracity of the claim that "...agriculture cannot afford (safety regulations) at this time..." (Alberta 2006d). It should be noted that farmers in other jurisdictions appear able to bear this cost.

One implication of accepting the assertion that regulation is cost-prohibitive is that we also accept its underlying premise: the state should permit businesses that cannot afford to comply with safety standards to avoid them and, thereby, facilitate the transfer of production costs (in the form of workplace injuries) onto workers, their family and society. Enabling farmers to externalize costs via an exemption seems inconsistent with the injury-prevention purpose of OHS legislation. It is also inconsistent with the government's stated goal of having no agricultural fatalities or injuries (Alberta 2008e).

The notion that workers ought to subsidize business costs is not unique to farm safety. In March 2010, then-Minister Lukaszuk froze a planned minimum wage increase affecting 1.5% of the workforce. "This decision reflects what government feels will both protect jobs during these uncertain economic times and support the economy" (Alberta 2010c, 1). Making low-wage workers absorb inflation-related living costs to protect a few businesses from a \$240 per worker annual cost increase seems inconsistent with the purpose of minimum-wage legislation.

The main effect of the "farmers can't afford regulation" narrative is that it displaces concern about worker safety with concern about farm profitability. In this way, the desire of agricultural producers (i.e., "farmers don't want regulation") is transformed from a bald statement of self-interest into an unverifiable (but plausible) rationale ("they can't afford it") for maintaining the agricultural exclusion. Similarly, casting agricultural producers in the role of deciding whether and what kind of regulation is necessary is premised on the notion that the profitability of farms is the paramount policy concern.<sup>6</sup> Overall, this analysis suggested that the "farms don't want and can't afford regulation" is a policy preference rather than a factual statement.

## Discussion

The narratives MLAs use to justify the regulatory exclusion of farm workers from OHS legislation lack validity. The question this raises is: why does the government continue to resist pressure to extend OHS coverage to farm workers? One explanation is that some government MLAs may believe these narratives are valid, despite the flaws

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<sup>6</sup> It is useful to note concern about farm profitability does not appear to be an impediment in other forms of regulation, such as guidelines about chemical application, handling and disposal, animal health regulations, food safety regulations, water pollution, hazardous waste disposal and the decommissioning of land and surface reclamation of oil and gas sites on farm property.

present in them.<sup>7</sup> A second explanation is that some government MLAs don't believe these narratives, but find them rhetorically useful in resisting pressure to regulate farm safety. Resistance to regulating agriculture may be motivated by a belief that regulation does not improve injury outcomes and/or an ideological commitment to minimizing regulation. It may also be motivated by the electoral rewards that may be attached to advancing these narratives.

Farmers and other residents of rural communities are threatened by the specter of population loss due to urbanization. Mitigating the effect of this loss depends upon the continued presence of government-operated services (e.g., hospitals, schools and senior homes) as well as retaining agricultural operations (Alberta 2004b). Alberta's government has provided significant support to rural communities (Alberta 2009d), including attracting medical personnel (Alberta 2011b), increasing post-secondary access (Alberta, n.d.), providing broadband internet (Alberta 2011c), providing informational and financial support to rural businesses (Alberta 2011d), and providing hundreds of millions of funding to farmers affected by BSE and other cost pressures (Roy, Klein and Klvacek 2006; Urban Renaissance Institute 2002).

Rural constituencies almost always elect Progressive Conservative candidates to the legislature (Alberta 1997, 2001b, 2004a, 2008a). And Conservative governments have ensured electoral boundaries are drawn so there are a disproportionately high number of rural ridings (Archer 1993; Thomson 2008). Opposing additional regulation is consistent with a symbiotic relationship between Conservative MLAs and rural voters. Some indirect support for this conclusion is evident in third narrative: that an employer does not desire to be subject to OHS regulation is hardly surprising but that farmers are able to actualize this desire is unusual. This suggests they are utilizing some lever to maintain their preferred status in the face of regulatory pressure on MLAs.

These narratives provide politicians with some protection from criticism that they are enabling employers to expose workers to hazards that other workers do not face. These narratives also legitimize employer decisions to trade workers' health for profit. Pairing the assertion that farmers can't afford regulation with the assertion that education provides adequate protection erects a rhetorical shield for employers against public wrath over the issue. In this way, the government is legitimizing employer behaviour that might otherwise be considered unacceptable by the public. These findings are important for two reasons. First, they are one of the first efforts to analyze and contextualize how government MLAs justified a controversial policy. Second, they unpack aspects of the state's role in a capitalist economy to legitimate harmful modes of production.

It is unclear whether granting farm workers basic safety rights will make any significant difference in their safety at work. Alberta regulators note that the low probability of inspection means farm operators who are within the ambit of the OHS Act

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<sup>7</sup> Informal discussion with bureaucrats suggests the narratives' flaws are well known.

are not highly motivated to comply (Aitkin 2012), a pervasive issue throughout Alberta's OHS system (Barnetson, 2012b). As identified by Bernstein et al. (2006), the precarious nature of farm work may well create barriers (e.g., limited job security and fear of employer retribution) that prevent workers from exercising any rights they gain via statutory inclusion. Even Canadian workers with secure employment have difficulty refusing unsafe work (Gray 2002; Fidler 1985). Further, there is some evidence that Canadian governments are using worker safety rights as a way to transfer responsibility for workplace safety from employers to workers (Gray 2006a, 2006b, 2009). Blaming workers is evident in Alberta's OHS prevention materials (Barnetson and Foster, 2012).

That said, including farm workers within the ambit of OHS legislation is still useful. Possessing rights is a necessary precondition to exercising them. While the number of farm workers who will exercise them alone is likely to be small, possessing such rights gives worker organizations a place on which to hinge demands for compliance and enforcement. That is to say, rather than fighting for recognition of farm worker safety rights, such campaigns can focus on enforcing farm worker safety rights. To the degree that there is political will to do so, including farm workers within the ambit of the OHS Act also allows the government to inspect farms and penalize employers who violate the rules (although realistically, Alberta inspects fewer than 1 in 14 workplaces a year and only sanctions employers in a small minority of cases of serious injury or worker death). That said, inspection of only industrialized agricultural worksites (e.g., feedlots) would be a huge improvement. There is also a normative dimension to granting farm workers safety rights. Farmers may feel moral and/or reputational pressure (especially over time) to meaningfully consider and accommodate farm worker safety. Those who don't comply can then be subjected to political tactics, such as boycotts or public shaming. This may increase the effectiveness of Alberta's emphasis on safety education.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to ascertain how government MLAs justified maintaining the regulatory exclusion of agricultural workers from the ambit of Alberta's OHS legislation and to examine the validity of the rationale(s) used. Content analysis of legislative debates generated three invalid narratives that are used to justify the exclusion. The question this raises is: why do MLAs support maintaining the regulatory exclusion? One explanation is that MLAs may not accept that these narratives are invalid. An alternate (or complimentary) explanation is that these narratives have utility in maintaining the exclusion and thereby realize electoral rewards. That is to say, the Conservative Party may have developed a symbiotic relationship with rural voters and felt compelled to refrain from regulating agricultural employment. More bluntly, the political

risk associated with regulating farm safety may be seen as higher than the political risk associated with farm worker injury and death.

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Article

## **LABOUR MARKET POLICIES IN DENMARK AND CANADA: COULD FLEXICURITY BE AN ANSWER FOR CANADIAN WORKERS?**

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### **Abstract**

The labour market in Canada is changing. Over the past decades there has been an increase in the number of precarious workers on short-term, part-time, contracts; jobs are created and lost, as employers deem necessary. As a result of these shifts in the organization of work, many workers are now forced to hold multiple jobs in order to make ends meet. This move away from long-term employment has created a situation where the majority of Canadian workers can no longer expect their employer to provide predictable support and security for them. At the same time, under the current Employment Insurance (EI) laws, they cannot expect support from the federal government either. How can workers gain some immediate protection through expanded social welfare programmes? With more and more workers, especially women, racialized workers and lower income people relegated to precarious employment, we must question current social policy. If, as it appears, EI does not work, we must strive to implement a viable alternative. Could an alternative system be modeled on the flexicurity system now in effect in Denmark? This paper draws on Nancy Fraser's criteria for social justice for the globalized worker, to assess the ways that flexicurity could improve the security of the Canadian worker by offering alternatives to participation in the market nexus.

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flexicurity, Nancy Fraser, employment Insurance, labour market policies, Canada

In recent years, significant changes in economic conditions throughout North America and the European Union have precipitated calls for more effective labour market policies (Pillinger 2005; Ibsen and Mailand 2010). These changes are largely due to the processes of globalization and the rapid integration of the international economy, which have resulted in intensified economic competition between nations, larger and more diverse labour markets, and the growing feminization and racialization of those markets (Pillinger 2005, 6; Näswall and De Witte 2003). The global economic crisis, which began in earnest in 2008, has only exacerbated processes of competition, the push toward reducing costs for states and for capital, at the expense of labour, and the better or at least less costly management of production. As companies are under pressure to increase efficiencies, labour markets become steadily more casualized, fragmented, flexible, mobile and internationalized. Nations scramble to encourage economic development and competitiveness, weakening social welfare systems and intensifying support to private interests. Pressures on the workforce have also intensified as a result of these changes; these pressures, including rapid and flexible skills development and fewer job security provisions, have led, in turn, to growing worker demand for a variety of job protections (Jørgensen 2009; Vermeylen 2008; Origo and Pagani 2009).

National forms of labour market policy that respond to the issues raised by these conditions vary, from more traditional approaches seen in many countries, including Canada, to more innovative 'hybrid' approaches. One such hybrid approach, currently in place in Denmark and the Netherlands, is known as 'flexicurity' (Jørgensen 2009; Vermeylen 2008). While Anglo-Saxon countries tend to take a more passive approach to labour market issues, relying mostly on relaxing labour market legislation, the flexicurity system takes a more active approach, which involves both relaxing labour market policies and supplying state worker protections and retraining programs (Solow 2008). This policy is firmly situated within neo-liberal, free-market ideology, as it focuses on adaptation by individual workers rather than systemic or structural sources of labour insecurity, although the most worker-friendly variants of flexicurity do provide workers with an important alternative to participation in the market.

Flexicurity has been referred to as the "new magic word" in Europe (Cuypers and Verhulp 2008). It was initially introduced as a way to address the increasingly flexible

and casualized workforce that resulted from companies streamlining and downsizing their operations; temporary employment contracts created higher profits and fewer losses and helped to sustain competitiveness in the global economy. These changes, however, had a severe impact on workers' rights and living conditions (Näswall and De Witte 2003; Pillinger 2005). Negative health effects related to stress and illness increased, as did rates of absenteeism and a rising sense among workers of a general lack of control over their work and personal life (Lewchuk 2010). It became clear that, while capital is increasingly requiring workers flexibility' throughout their work lives, workers need some degree of predictability over "when and where they work" (Pillinger 2005, 50). From the strict point of view of productivity, without some job security, workers are anxiety-ridden about potential job loss and are, therefore, less productive (Näswall and De Witte 2003). So, while stable forms of employment have been shown to increase job satisfaction and worker retention rates, which in turn translate into higher productivity and profits, the economic pressures of globalization tend to militate against this option (Origo and Pagani 2009).

In practice, European Union (EU) policy makers have actively promoted the relaxation of labour standards, through the Single Market Program and via fiscal pressures created by Monetary Union (Origo and Pagani 2009; Wilthagen 2008). As a policy approach intended to enable employment flexibility while dealing with the negative effects of flexible labour on citizens' working lives, flexicurity has been a central part of these efforts (Pillinger 2005). While admittedly not an unprejudiced source and certainly not representing workers' interests, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), pointing to the success of the Dutch and Danish flexicurity systems, has suggested that active labour market policies with generous unemployment benefits are the best way to protect workers (Lewchuk 2010).

In this paper I assess the feasibility of implementing the flexicurity system in Canada and examine its strengths and weaknesses against current Canadian labour market policy, specifically the Employment Insurance (EI) program. Of course, flexicurity is not a 'one size fits all' solution to labour market issues (Jacobson and Noaksson 2010, 120); it must take different forms in different countries depending on the specific nature of national consultation practices, among many other things (Wilthagen 2008, 256). Here I will be focusing on Denmark's version of flexicurity (Ibsen and Mailand 2010) rather than the Netherlands' approach, as Denmark more closely resembles Canada's socio-economic structure. At the same time, flexicurity is just one possible short and medium term answer to improving workers' security and employment, within what is still a broadly neoliberal framework.

In comparing Denmark to Canada, it is important to signal significant differences across the two countries. As Esping-Anderson argues, Denmark is a social democratic

nation, while Canada is a liberal one (1990).<sup>2</sup> Overall, Denmark is a much more socially progressive nation than Canada; it has a culture of providing more social supports for its citizens via higher taxation and has traditionally been able to avoid high rates of low-wage work, which are quite common in liberal states (Viebrock & Clasen, 2009). Moreover, Denmark is much more ethnically homogenous than Canada, which may have important implications for the social democratic model. In spite of these differences, the comparison of the two's countries' varying kinds and amounts of social expenditures for addressing address labour market problems remains instructive (O'Connor 1993, 502).

### What is Flexicurity?

According to Elke Viebrock and Jochen Clasen, there is no universally accepted definition of flexicurity; some argue that it is a policy designed to create balance between security and flexibility in a labour market, while others believe it is about securing flexible employment (2009). The European Union (EU) Commission defines it as a strategy to enhance flexibility and security in the labour market for, both, employers and workers (Viebrock and Clasen 2009; Jørgensen 2009). As Jørgensen outlines, the EU Commission argues that there are four main dimensions of flexicurity: (1) it entrenches flexible labour market arrangements, (2) it encourages continuous lifelong learning, (3) it embodies active labour market policy and (4) it encourages stable social security systems in order to address a constantly changing labour market (Jørgensen 2009).

In relation to this, labour market analysts identify four different kinds of security that can be provided within a labour market in general: (1) job security, (2) employment security, meaning guaranteed paid employment, (3) income security and (4) combination security (Viebrock and Clasen 2009). Flexicurity strives to provide combination security; if individuals lose their jobs, they are protected by social security systems, can receive some income and are able to access retraining programs (Viebrock and Clasen 2009). So, flexicurity involves a combination of weak national employment legislation, generous replacement income and benefits when unemployed, and worker reactivation or retraining programs (Lewchuk 2010; Lewchuk et al 2011). Flexicurity does not work to recreate the "standard employment model" of forty hours a week with one employer for life - a model upon which most current social security systems are based - rather, it strives to create employable workers and helps them to move between companies

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<sup>2</sup> Canada's 2012 population of 34,670,352 is significantly larger than Denmark's at 5,475,791 (Statistics Canada Dataset 051-0005), but Denmark tends to have a somewhat higher Gross Domestic Product than Canada (OECD Statistics Gross Domestic Product). Both countries, however, have similar rates of unemployment, with 7.5 percent in Canada and 7.6 percent in Denmark according to the OECD (OECD Labour Force Statistics MEI).

(Lewchuk 2010). In this way, flexibility and security are made compatible (Wilthagen 2008; Pedersen et al 2007; Lewchuk et al 2011).

Flexicurity can be seen as a model to reduce uncertainty in the employment relationship and in workers' efforts to deal with this uncertainty (Lewchuk et al 2011). Overall, it demands little overt intervention from the state or government (Solow 2008, 10) and opposes "work-first" strategies, which insist that the unemployed must take work no matter how badly paid or precarious (Lewchuk 2010), in favour of job retraining and social security. At the same time, flexicurity stresses the need to provide hiring flexibility for all employers (Madsen 2006).

Several structural elements need to be in place in order for flexicurity to be implemented; these include: (1) co-ordinated decentralization and (2) flexible multi-level governance, (3) an extended scope for bargaining and (4) "negotiated flexibility" amongst employers and workers (Viebrock and Clasen 2009, 319). During the initial implementation stages of the program, the role of the state in the creation of flexicurity is important as it introduces the required controls and enforcement mechanisms, but, over time, the state's role becomes smaller and smaller (Viebrock and Clasen 2009). In this way, flexicurity echoes neoliberal policies emphasizing a 'smaller' role for government. Vermeulen notes that, "flexicurity has the potential to substantially enhance the competitiveness of the European economy and create higher levels of employment" (2008, 209), but how effective has it been in practice?

### **The Danish Case: Flexicurity**

Like the majority of Western developed countries, Denmark is a "capitalist country with a universal welfare state" (Jørgensen 2009, 15), but it is also distinct from other Western countries in several ways. For example, the service sector in both public and private parts of the economy has been the dominant form of industry for over 30 years (Jørgensen 2009). In addition, Danes have historically addressed labour market regulations in innovative ways (Viebrock and Clasen 2009, 320). Notably, in 1899, the September Compromise created a centralized negotiating body comprised of unions, government, and industry representatives to address and deal with labour market disputes (Larsen 2005). Corporatist solutions among major social partners, rather than state legislation, have remained the defining feature of Danish labour policy ever since. Major social partners in Denmark, such as trade unions and the Danish Employers' Federation (DA) (Westergaard-Nielsen 2008), along with employers and employees, bargain over wages and working hours and set protection regulations for workers, including overtime pay and issues concerning overall work environment (Westergaard – Nielsen 2008). The Danish state has little direct role in such negotiations (Larsen 2005, 8) or in labour market policy more generally. It was these social partners, rather than the

state, who developed 'flexicurity' in the 1990s as they sought to cope with the limitations of an existing work sharing system, which involved generous sabbatical leaves and other rotational schemes (Lewchuk 2010, 50) to resolve persistent unemployment (Madsen 2008, 353; Larsen 2005, 15). The Danish labour market has been very successful ever since (Larsen 2005).

The Danish flexicurity system combines liberal social provisions with minimal legislative restrictions on employers (Cuypers and Verhulp 2008; Madsen 2008); it does not provide high levels of job security but does offer high levels of Unemployment Insurance and access to courses for upgrading skills; these three elements are often termed the "golden triangle" (for instance, Larsen 2005; Vermeylen 2008; Lewchuk et al 2011). Workers are also guaranteed a global package of social rights (Vermeylen 2008). While a private institution runs the provision of unemployment insurance in Denmark, it is mostly state funded (Madsen 2008).

Of course, it is difficult to sort out the specific effects of the flexicurity programme from other structure causes of unemployment. Nonetheless, the Danish form of flexicurity has not been incompatible with reductions in unemployment and in avoiding a large low paid and precarious workforce (Lewchuk 2010, 48). In fact, unemployment fell from 12 percent in 1993 to 5 percent in 2001 (Lewchuk 2010; Jørgensen 2009), the period in which flexicurity has been in place. The length of job tenure has not been affected, as the average tenure for educated Danes, for instance, remains at eight years (Madsen 2006; Lewchuk et al 2011). Most notably, there has been a move from specific job security to overall employment security for lower skilled workers in Denmark (for instance, Origo and Pagani 2009; Lewchuk 2010; Muffels 2008). The central goal of flexicurity, then, was to make Danes more employable (Lewchuk 2010) and overall, it may have been successful in doing so; in fact, it is known as the "Danish Job Miracle", managing to avoid getting in the way of economic policy goals while maintaining the view that "no Dane should suffer economic hardships" (Andersen and Svarer 2007, 390; Jørgensen 2009, 7, 8, 12; Larsen 2005, 5; Solow 2008, 10, 13; van den Berg et al 2008, 330).

### **The Canadian Case: 'Employment Insurance'**

The Keynesian welfare state model, dominant until the mid-70s in Canada, advocated using economic policy to "keep both inflation and unemployment in check" (Finkel 2006, 286). It maintained that citizens should be assured a "modest level of economic security and social support" and was intended to deal with inequalities generated as a result of the capitalist free market system (Mulvale 2001). This notion of the welfare state, however, has been 'restructured' over the past few decades. Now, what were formerly state responsibilities, such as forms of social assistance, for example unemployment insurance, have been downloaded - first to the provincial level, then to

the municipal level, and finally onto the family and the individual (Man 2002; de Wolff 2002). This restructuring began partly as the result of the oil crisis that took place in the 1970s, which led to economic recession and the view that the State could no longer support every one of its citizens (Man 2002). The ‘restructuring’ of the social welfare state model resulted in the rise of a new political-economic ideology called “neo-liberalism”: a perspective that holds that state-run enterprises should be privatized and that capitalist markets should be the central organizational principle of all society. Under neo-liberalism, the responsibility of the individual for their own fate is central and government’s involvement in private issues is avoided (Burke and Silver 2006).

Canada is a vast country with a variable set of economic conditions and industrial sectors (van den Berg 2008). The unemployment rate in Canada also varies from region to region due to high levels of seasonal employment (van den Berg et al 2008). Canada also has a decentralized federal government structure and it is more difficult to modify labour policy as a result of the power of the provinces; this fact alone significantly distinguishes Canada from Denmark (van den Berg et al 2008, 307). In 1996 to 1997, under the influence of neo-liberal ideology, worker’s rights underwent a major change, as the federal government reformed Unemployment Insurance (UI) and renamed it Employment Insurance (EI) (van den Berg et al 2008). This legislation, Bill C-12, initiated a number of changes including hours based eligibility, new requirements for new workers and re-entrants to the labour market, a reduced benefit time period of 45 from 50 weeks, a reduction in the maximum amount of benefits, harsher benefits calculation, and the intensification of benefit repayment once the worker is no longer unemployed (van Den Berg et al 2008).

The motivation behind the change to EI was a desire to reduce individuals’ reliance on the state, while continuing to provide some form of “shock absorber” for times of labour market fluctuation (Battle et al. 2010; Bezanson and Murray 2000). While the UI / EI switch improved the annual deficit and federal public debt, critics point out that these savings were made at the expense of unemployed workers (van den Berg et al 2008, 309). The significance of the policy change is apparent in the change of name from “unemployment” insurance to “employment” insurance, signaling a shift in labour policy from supporting the unemployed to creating employment; strict limits on state support were put in place with the hope that this would effectively force individuals into the labour market (van den Berg et al 2008). While it has been argued that the labour force has adjusted to the new EI eligibility rules, because of the changing and increasingly unstable and precarious labour market, many Canadian workers are currently unable to access the benefits of EI at all. While this may have been a goal of the policy reform, it is difficult to ascertain how, exactly, it reduces individual reliance on state support, as many of those forced off EI simply end up turning to social welfare programs instead (van den Berg et al 2008; Porter 2003). Recently, in May 2012, EI requirements were tightened once again, when Canadians were told they would have to look for a job every day they receive

benefits and should be prepared to take any job on offer within reason. This policy shift suggests that there are no bad jobs, only lazy workers (Coles 2012).

The result of the limited view of employment expressed in Canada's EI policy is that those who have a long term, secure job see this security continue; they can relatively easily access EI should they lose their jobs. Those who must work precarious, low paying or seasonal jobs, however, have no recourse should they lose theirs. With more and more women and lower income people relegated to precarious employment, we must question whether EI policy is actually in touch with the realities of work on the ground. We must ask: does current EI policy work to ameliorate all workers' vulnerability and help to address broader issues of social inequality or does it effectively exacerbate them? If, as it appears, EI does not work either to support Canadian workers or to address broader issues of social inequality, then we must strive to implement a viable alternative. Could an alternative system be modeled on the flexicurity system now in effect in Denmark?

### **Could Flexicurity Help Canadian Workers? Social Justice for the Globalized Worker**

Political philosopher Nancy Fraser contends that we need to adopt "some normative criteria" (1997, 44) in order to propose ways to address the changing needs of the globalized worker. In what follows, I will evaluate and compare the Canadian Employment Insurance program and the Danish flexicurity model against four of Fraser's "seven distinct normative principles": (1) the anti-poverty principle, (2) the anti-exploitation principle, (3) the income-equality principle, (4) the leisure-time-equality principle, (5) the equality-of-respect principle, (6) the anti-marginalization principle and (7) the anti-androcentrism principle (Fraser 1997, 45- 48). Focusing specifically on the ways flexicurity policy and current Canadian EI policy address the anti-poverty, income-equality, anti-exploitation, and anti-marginalization principles, I will attempt to tease out the successes and failures of both systems. This will allow me to evaluate and compare each system and assess the appropriateness of flexicurity for the Canadian context.

#### a) The anti-poverty principle

This principle is concerned with the impoverishment of vulnerable people, most notably workers (Fraser 1997). A successful policy or program should help to avoid the "mitigated exploitable dependency" (Fraser 1997, 46) of workers on the state or any employer for the means to meet their life needs. Elements to consider when assessing whether a program or policy is "anti-poverty" include living standards, the amount of low wage work, the impacts and effects of public spending, the conditions of unemployed workers, and the standard rate of unemployment. The anti-poverty principle is arguably the most important principle for workers, as socio-economic class positions are generally



dictated to a significant degree by the specific labour market conditions of a nation or society.

Under flexicurity in Denmark there have been moderate increases to wages throughout the country, which in turn have led to a rise in the standard of living (Jørgensen 2009). Interestingly, while standards of living are on the rise, Danes work fewer hours a week in comparison to Canadians (Westergaard-Nielsen 2008). One of the ways Denmark achieves this is by requiring that temporary contracts become permanent contracts after 2 years of continuous temporary work (Muffels 2008; Auer 2000). In Canada, there is no such requirement. While most Canadians are employed in permanent full time work, 40 percent of women and 30 percent of men are employed in unstable, short-term forms of non-standard work (Townson and Hayes 2007), and, as a result, more and more Canadian workers are forced to hold multiple jobs in order to make ends meet (Townson and Hayes 2007, 20). Given this instability in the workforce, it is difficult to ascertain the true standard of living in Canada in terms of an individual's ability to maintain a living wage. So, while temporary work exists in both Denmark and Canada, the possibility of achieving a stable living wage is far greater in Denmark than in Canada. By guaranteeing steady employment after two years to all workers, poverty is more easily avoided.

Both countries should be concerned about poverty traps in their economies and within their workforce. Some critics argue that the flexicurity system keeps low-wage workers in poverty (Vermeulen 2008) because employers can hire and fire in relation to the performance of the market (Pedersen et al 2007). Denmark, however, has the lowest rate of low-wage work among countries like France, Germany, and the United States (Solow 2008). While Denmark has a lower average disposal income at \$26,562 (US Dollars) as compared to Canada at \$32,047 (US Dollars) (OECD Statistics Average Annual Wage), in Canada almost half of the workers, 44 percent or 13,821,870 Canadians, earn less than \$25,000 a year, meaning that there is a significantly high proportion of low-wage workers there (Statistics Canada CANSIM 111-0008). Clearly, Canada's "stringent labour market regulations on permanent workers" produces a dual labour market in which there is a segment of permanent, better protected workers and a large segment of unprotected precarious workers (2009, 548). As the persistence of a class of "working poor is not a policy option" (Andersen and Svarer 2007, 393), Robert Solow contends that flexicurity might be the best way out of low wage work in neo-liberal times (2008).

Denmark has high levels of public spending, which is often associated with a large individual tax burden (Lewchuk 2010; Westergaard-Nielsen 2009). Part of this public spending is dedicated to providing Danish unemployed workers with a generous social safety net. But, the entire system is premised on the idea that unemployment can be kept low by improving employers' ability to train employees well (Pedersen et al 2007; Lewchuk 2010; Andersen and Svarer 2007). The question remains as to whether the

system would be able to maintain the social safety net at its current levels if the unemployment rates were to rise. One notable problem with flexicurity, then, is that it may not be able to adapt to major economic shifts or downturns since it is very dependent on high levels of government spending (Viebrock and Clasen 2009).

Canada spends far less on labour market policies and has a far more passive labour market protection system overall (Lewchuk 2010). The “OECD Public Social Expenditure on Labour Market Policies” document notes that Canada spends 0.29 of GDP on active policies, as opposed to 0.56 on passive policies (Lewchuk 2010; OECDStats Extract). On the other hand, Denmark spends 1.51 of the GDP on active policies, as opposed to 1.86 on passive policies (Lewchuk 2010; OECDStats Extract). This illustrates the fact that Denmark is more willing to draw from the overall tax base to invest in its workers and, by extension, its economy. So, interestingly, while both countries are under the influence of neo-liberal ideology, in Canada public spending has been cut and workers must face economic hardship on their own (Burke and Silver 2006), while in Denmark, high levels of public spending go toward supporting workers, and, by extension the Danish economy overall.

Denmark’s high level of social support permits it to offer the lowest level of employment protection in Europe, thus enabling employers to take on more risks (Westergaard-Nielsen 2008; Lewchuk et al. 2011). For example, the system allows for the dismissal of workers on short written notice and does not require third party involvement like other systems in the Anglo-Saxon model (Madsen 2008). This places Denmark low on the OECD rankings of employment protection, in a similar location to Canada (van den berg et al 2008); Canada ranks the 4<sup>th</sup> lowest on employment protection, while Denmark ranks just below the average (Lewchuk 2010). Worker exploitation, however, is greater in Canada; it ranks the 4<sup>th</sup> lowest for the provision of unemployment benefits and, is, overall, the 5<sup>th</sup> lowest active labour market country in the OECD. Denmark, on the other hand, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest for unemployment benefits and ranks the highest for active labour market policies (Lewchuk 2010).<sup>3</sup> Thus, while some on the right might argue that Danish workers are exploited by high levels of taxation, Danish society puts that tax money back into supporting citizens and improving the situation of those citizens who are unemployed (Westergaard – Nielsen 2008). Is the heavy taxation spent to avoid exploitation of workers in Denmark a better alternative to the system now in place in Canada?

There are similarities between Denmark and Canada in terms of their respective social safety nets, however. For instance, all workers are covered by basic health care in both countries (Westergaard-Nielsen 2008). In addition, services, such as education, are

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<sup>3</sup> There are many factors that can be seen to contribute to ‘exploitation’ within the labour market. I include, for instance, low labor market activity and levels of social spending. For an historical account of labour market exploitation, see James W. Renhart (2006).

subsidized by the public purse (Westergaard-Nielsen 2008). Both countries also have state-run unemployment insurance systems, although there are differences between them (Jørgensen 2009). In Denmark all employees receive coverage; even those who do not pay into a benefits system receive cash benefits. Canada, however, is quite different (Lin 1998), as all workers must pay into the unemployment insurance system whether or not they are eligible to receive benefits. Given these numbers, it is no surprise that Danes are less afraid to be unemployed, as Jørgensen notes (2009), but Canadians have good reason to be. In Canada at least, it seems clear that the EI system does not work to address or alleviate poverty.

Denmark, on the other hand, can be seen as a model of a dynamic labour market that can simultaneously help to end economic hardships and support workers, moving them away from poverty (Viebrock and Clasen 2009). Many have noted that moving workers from low levels of industrial production to higher levels of employee output, as flexicurity does in Denmark, creates more jobs (Lewchuk 2010). As short-term contracts produce less concern on the part of employers for the training or health of their employees (Lewchuk 2010), state support in Denmark picks up the slack in contract and employment relationships by providing child care and early retirement schemes, among other resources (Larsen 2005; van den Berg et al 2008; Jørgensen 2009). In Canada, stable, secure jobs are no longer considered “cost-effective” by many businesses, but the state has not stepped in to support workers as they struggle to contend with the increasingly precarious labour market (Scott-Marshall 2007; Gindin and Stanford 2006). Workers in Canada currently experience wage stagnation, job deskilling, fewer full time jobs, the deterioration of opportunities for job advancement, lack of health support from employers and increases in expected overtime hours (Scott-Marshall 2007). All of this has important, negative implications for the Canadian worker.

In Denmark, unemployment has been reduced to levels below France and Germany and labour market participation has increased to 77.4 percent (Solow 2008; Lewchuk 2010). According to Wayne Lewchuk, most unemployed people in Denmark make their own way back to the labour market, with only a few opting for flexicurity retraining programs (2010); the most common form of worker reactivation within Denmark occurs via higher education and vocational training (Lewchuk 2010). While the unemployment rate is currently lower in Canada<sup>4</sup>, the statistics do not include those who have given looking for work or who cannot access job retraining and educational programs due to a lack of resources. The social supports in Denmark, then, help to reduce poverty levels, and entrenched, generational poverty is less of a concern than in Canada.

b) The income-equality principle

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<sup>4</sup> The unemployment rate in 2012 was 8.2 percent (World Bank UEM.TOTL.ZS), while in Canada it was 7.2 percent as of June 2012 (StatsCan Labour Force Survey 2012).

Following many others, Nancy Fraser contends that income equality is essential for both gender equality and worker equality (1997). As Greet Vermeulen (2008) and other scholars, such as Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) argue, income insecurity and large discrepancies in income between rich and poor hurt all citizens. Would a hybrid system like flexicurity, which does not restrict employment practices but provides economic protections for workers, help to achieve more income equality in Canada (Madsen 2006)?

In Denmark, approximately 25 percent of workers change jobs each year, with new workers changing employers frequently as a result of skills development programs (Vermeulen 2008; Madsen 2008; Madsen 2006; Lewchuk 2010; Muffels 2008). However, due to relatively generous social protections, this high level of turnover does not have much impact on workers' socio-economic position (Vermeulen 2008; Lewchuk 2010). Danes receive 90 percent of four weeks work to a maximum of approximately 400 Euros a week while on unemployment, with no waiting period, for a maximum of four years and must take retraining programs after approximately one year of unemployment (Madsen 2008; Madsen 2006). Even workers who are not insured can apply for cash benefits (social assistance) from their local municipality during times of unemployment (Jørgensen 2009; Madsen 2008). Youth workers under 25 have modified coverage; they are only covered for a maximum of 6 months (Westergaard – Nielsen 2008).

This is a large contrast to Canada where, as we've seen, EI reforms have been successful in cutting benefit payouts along with the overall number of EI recipients (van den Berg et al 2008). EI policy has changed the definition of labour market attachment wherein a claimant must have contributed 180 days within the past 2 years. Eligibility is based on a 35 hour week, rather than the number of weeks worked. The overall increase in the amount of time required to work at least doubled with the shift to EI (2007; Finkel 2006); while the UI program required 20 weeks at 15 hours or 300 hours worked, EI requires 20 weeks at 35 hours a week or 700 hours worked (Townson and Hayes 2007; Torjman 2000). In addition, the requirements for new applicants have been standardized across the provinces (Battle 2009; Townson and Hayes 2007). Ken Battle points out that before the transfer to the EI program, the average benefit was 595\$ a week, while in 2009 the coverage was 447\$ weekly or \$22,350 yearly (2009). It is no surprise, then, that the Canadian unemployment benefit payout system is considered one of the most restrictive in the OECD countries, reflecting an entirely different neo-liberal policy approach to that of Denmark (van den Berg et al 2008). Given these facts, it seems clear which system would be most desirable from the point of view of an unemployed worker; even in times of unemployment, Danes are able to maintain up to 90% of their income and, as a result, national levels of income equality are maintained (Madsen 2008).

Although there is no legislated minimum wage in Denmark, there is also less income inequality and poverty (van den Berg et al 2008; Westergaard-Nielson 2008). Through flexicurity, wages and job quality are maintained by an unregulated labour

market, with a standard wage agreed upon by social partners; as of 2005 this wage was 15 US dollars an hour (Solow 2008). So, even though low wage work exists in Denmark, the difference from the Canadian situation is that low wage workers are “jobless but not penniless” (Westergaard-Nielsen 2008, 29). It is clear that those with lower income are better off in Denmark than in Canada (van den Berg et al 2008).

c) The anti-exploitation principle

This strategic principle insists on the prevention of “exploitation of vulnerable people” (Fraser 1997, 46) and involves examining which system best protects workers from employer or state exploitation. The social protections embedded in flexicurity are specifically designed to reduce risks to workers (Van den Berg et al 2008; Vermeylen 2008) and are maintained through heavy taxation (Solow 2008; Jørgensen 2009). But, does this taxation truly help the worker?

When assessing a system like flexicurity in Canada, especially its ability to address exploitation, we must assess the potential social costs of heavy taxation and especially the dominant cultural attitude toward taxation. In 2008, Denmark’s total tax revenue was 48.2 percent of the GDP while Canada’s was 32.3 percent of GDP (OECD DataCode 4672109 Table A). It remains a crucial question whether or not Canadians would accept an increased tax rate in order to implement better protections for workers. After all, Denmark has a well established history of high taxation rates, whereas Canada, arguably influenced by opinion trends in the United States, seems far less tolerant of increasing taxes, no matter how well spent they might be. And, as discussed above, flexicurity depends on very low unemployment levels; it requires almost full employment in order to collect the tax money needed to fund the social safety net (Westergaard – Neilson 2008).

As the standard employment relationship eroded in Denmark throughout the 1990s, it was replaced by long-term temporary contract work, which allowed employers to provide little support for their workers’ health beyond the workplace or proper long term training (Lewchuk et al 2011). Flexicurity was implemented to address these issues of worker health and training, and overall, it has been successful at raising job satisfaction rates (Lewchuk 2010); 90 percent of Danes are currently employed on long-term contracts (Lewchuk 2010; Lewchuk et al 2011). However, for both countries, long term temporary work has consequences, especially in terms of the workers’ physical and mental well being (Näswall and De Witte 2003), and there are limits as to how much government programs can provide. As Greet Vermeylen notes, workers should “be able to plan their lives” (2008, 208), and not fear being dismissed at any time. Without supports from the employer both inside and outside the workplace, temporary workers in both countries are rendered more socially and economically vulnerable.

Since the 1960s, labour markets have been segmented between the primary sector, which includes higher income, skilled and secure employment, the possibility for

promotion, and is characterized by white male privilege (Peck 1997; Krahn et al 2008; Reich 1973), and the secondary sector, which includes less skilled or desirable jobs, poor wages and working conditions, feminization and insecurity (Peck 1997; Reich 1973; Krahn et al 2008). This segmentation has only intensified with the entrenchment of precarious, short-term, and contract work. Indeed, many labour market segmentation theorists highlight the fact that employers divide workers against each other in order to control the mode of production (Peck 1996; Reich 1973), actively contributing to social and class inequalities instead of ameliorating them (Peck 1997; Reich 1973). In Denmark, most individuals remain susceptible to easy dismissal, and must, therefore, still be considered precariously employed, although they have more state protections than Canadians do. In Canada, those individuals within the secondary labour market, between 30-40 percent of all workers, do not qualify for unemployment benefits at all (Townson and Hayes 2007). Given the more highly segmented nature of the Canadian labour market, then, we can assume that patterns of social inequality are more entrenched in Canada than they are in Denmark.

It is clear that Denmark and Canada took different paths through neo-liberalism in the 1980s and 1990s. While private interests seem to have become the primary focus of most state governments and this has resulted in the cutting of social programs, Denmark has managed to hold on to its commitment to care for its citizens (Burke and Silver 2006). While flexicurity is a product of neo-liberal interests and is far from recreating the era of Keynesian economic security and social supports (Mulvale 2001), it does recognize that a state cannot simply abdicate responsibility towards its citizens. Flexicurity actively avoids worker exploitation by encouraging both capitalist-friendly neo-liberal market flexibility and Keynesian social supports for workers, that enable workers to have some alternative to market participation. As Esping-Anderson would emphasize, this means that labour is partly decommodified under the Danish model of flexicurity with important benefits for workers and their relative power to capital.

Denmark's social welfare not only gives the worker benefits but also social duties, however. For example, workers must take work when it is offered or enrol in another form of worker reactivation, such as training or retraining programs (Jørgensen 2009). Job retraining to fit labour market needs improves employability and wages, and therefore leads to a better quality of life. Lewchuk notes that most Danes believe that worker activation has a positive effect; 70 percent indicate a better quality of daily life, 58 percent note better self esteem, and 50 percent have better labour market qualifications. Only 25 percent have a negative view of job training (2010). In contrast, neoliberal policies in Canada have significantly deregulated social programs and services or cut them off from state funding entirely, and labour laws and organizations have been seriously weakened (Pulkingham and Ternowetsky 2006). So, while in Denmark retraining programs and social supports help to ameliorate inequality by training workers and reducing the wage gap, in Canada a lack of social supports and retraining programs

clearly disadvantages the unemployed and further entrenches already existing social and class inequalities.

d) The anti-marginalization principle

Fraser argues that the welfare state satisfied all the principles named above and yet still managed to marginalize women (1997). With Fraser, I would suggest that social policy should encourage the full participation of all society's members (Fraser 1997). So, in order for us to deem a system of worker protections successful, it must be shown to ameliorate the conditions of marginalized workers, especially but not only women.

Many contend that flexicurity aims to create social cohesion while addressing poverty and exclusion (Wilthagen 2008). However, in some ways, workers under the flexicurity regime in Denmark are just as unprotected as American and Canadian workers (Westergaard-Nielsen 2008). For instance, Lewchuk notes that the generous supports provided in Denmark have made immigration popular, among other factors, but that the benefits actually available for immigrants are fewer than those available to Danish citizens (2010). In 2001, the Danish government reduced immigrant access to benefits for the first seven years they are in the country (Brodmann and Polavieja 2011). Stefanie Brodmann and Javier G. Polavieja highlight the wide gap between the employment rates of immigrants and those of native-born Danes, and note that immigrants often suffer from shorter periods of employment and longer periods of unemployment (2011). This situation creates a secondary labour market in Denmark similar to the one in Canada, and marginalization remains a significant concern. Arguably, then, the success of flexicurity is tied to Denmark's strict immigration policies, and Canada's relatively open if increasingly restrictive immigration policies would have to be reconsidered were flexicurity to be applied – with the effects of further entrenching inequalities among citizen and non-citizen workers.

Similar to Denmark, immigrants in Canada have difficulty gaining employment due to the undervaluing of their foreign experience (Knowles 2007). Immigrant women, especially, are marginalized in Canada. As Sedef Art-Koç argues (1999), while new settlement programs assert that they are 'genderless', not biased, and based solely on 'deserving' and 'non-deserving' immigrants, these programs often fail to assess the already entrenched sexism within immigrant communities. Since Canada's immigration point system stresses the ability to contribute economically, it automatically favours male immigrants, as many women coming from other parts of the world do not have the education, freedom, or resources to be able to make a contribution to the Canadian economy when they first arrive (Art-Koç 1999). This bias only continues as female immigrants, in particular, attempt to find work; they are often relegated to precarious, short-term jobs and, as a result, tend to be shut out of the employment insurance benefit program.

Security and flexibility are also lower for women in Denmark (Muffels 2008). Scarce resources for childcare and household work can increase female unemployment and labour inactivity (Muffels 2008) and, conversely, when women do participate in the labour force, their work in the home can be affected (Muffels 2008). In Denmark, jobs have remained very much 'gendered' (Westergaard-Nielsen 2008) even while flexicurity ostensibly addresses the entrenched male breadwinner model (Lewchuk 2010) by emphasizing a universal worker system and dealing with gender differences in life changes. As in Denmark, Ken Battle indicates that the gender gap in the Canadian society overall had risen dramatically from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, when the gap was the smallest (2009); currently one-third more men than women are eligible to receive EI benefits (Battle 2009). Given these facts, then, it does not seem as though either of these nations' employment policies have effectively addressed the issue of gender equality in the workforce. However, flexicurity does, at least theoretically, adopt a universal breadwinner model, which supports the view that both men and women should participate equally at work and in the home.

The issue of job tenure also must be part of any evaluation of worker marginalization. In Denmark, the tenure rates are slightly lower than the rest of Europe and even lower for women (Lewchuk 2010; Madsen 2008); Danish women can expect to keep a job for an average of 8 years. There are few studies on job tenure in Canada (2010), although Lewchuk points out that Canadian tenure rates for all workers increased by ten percent between 1976 and 2006 (Lewchuk 2010), there does not seem to be clear data on the breakdown between genders. All research shows, however, that limited education reduces the chance of a permanent employment (Muffels 2008). It is no surprise, then, that tenure rates increase with education in Denmark (Madsen 2008). Interestingly, the number of welfare recipients in Denmark only marginally decreased in the 1990s as a result of flexicurity (Lewchuk 2010). On this score, it is difficult to evaluate which worker protection system performs better. Suffice it to say that the longer an employee is in a permanent employment relationship, the more the employer would want to invest in them, and hence social and class marginalization would be reduced for the worker.

There also appears to be marginalization of older and disabled workers in Denmark under flexicurity (Lewchuk 2010). Due to the high degree of turnover that occurs in the Danish work world, the system tends to create more advantages and opportunities for young workers and those trying to return to work (Lewchuk 2010 4). Workers over 30 must accept a retraining program after a year of being unemployed, and, as a worker's age increases it becomes more and more difficult for them to qualify for retraining (Lewchuk 2010). Few employment regulations and the fact that workers can be easily dismissed also militate against older or disabled workers (Lewchuk 2010, 51; Westergaard-Nielsen 2008). As Julie Ann McMullin and Kim M. Shuey note "Canadian data shows that labour-force participation rates and employment status are influenced by the intersection of age and disability: older, disabled working-age adults have lower



labour-force participation rates and higher unemployment rates than either younger adults with a disability or older adults without a disability” (2006, 832). So, there is a structural barrier to access to employment for older workers and disabled workers in Canada as well (McMullin and Shuey 2006). Again, in this area, neither system has it right.

**Table 1.** Comparing Denmark and Canada’s Labour Market Policies Against Nancy Fraser’s Four Principles of Justice for the Globalized Worker

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Denmark</b>	<b>Canada</b>
anti-poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- moderate wage increase</li> <li>- improved standards of living</li> <li>- work fewer hours</li> <li>- after 2 year temporary work contract becomes permanent</li> <li>- low- wage work</li> <li>- high tax burden</li> <li>- low level of employment protection</li> <li>- high spending on active and passive labour market policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- improved standards of living require longer work hours</li> <li>- 40 % of women and 30% of men in precarious forms of employment</li> <li>- few unemployment benefits</li> <li>- low spending on active and passive labour market policies</li> <li>- unemployment insurance only for those who pay in</li> </ul>
income equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- high job turn over (25% per year)</li> <li>- significant unemployment benefits for all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- low unemployment benefits for some</li> </ul>
anti-exploitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- high taxation rates</li> <li>- frequent mobility hinders lifelong planning</li> <li>- worker reactivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- temporary contract workers do not qualify for unemployment benefits</li> </ul>
anti-marginalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- immigrants do not receive same employment protections as citizens</li> <li>- tenure rates in Demark increase with education</li> <li>- age discrimination for retraining and reactivation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- foreign diplomas and skills unrecognized</li> <li>- tenure rates increased by 10 percent between 1976 to 2006</li> <li>- older workers in Canada in more precarious employment</li> </ul>

## Conclusions

The principles outlined by Nancy Fraser help illuminate some of the respective problems and strengths of the Danish and Canadian unemployment systems. Neither one seems sufficient to protect the current globalized worker. One must question whether choosing between high taxes or job security is really a fair choice (Madsen 2006), although arguably from a worker perspective clearly job security is most critical. Moreover, in practice, flexicurity seems to depend on making distinctions between citizen and non-citizen workers, with the latter exposed to much more precarious and difficult working conditions. At the same time, however, we must recognize that there are some elements of the flexicurity system that could be good for Canada.

The Danish model of flexicurity has been referred to as “an example of how to achieve high levels of employment and sound public finances in a socially balanced way” (Viebrock and Clasen 2009, 321). It is important to note that it is based on “ambitious equalitarian objectives” (Andersen and Svarer 2007, 393), in the sense of ensuring the unemployment is not automatically synonymous with poverty. It is also important to note that it cannot be simply “cop[ied] and past[ed]” into another national context (Andersen and Svarer 2007, 390); specific economic, political, and cultural factors play into the success of any labour market policy (Jørgensen 2009; Wilthagen 2008).

Improvements and adaptations would certainly have to be made if a version of flexicurity were to be applied to countries with different traditions and population levels. In order to bring flexicurity in line with social democratic goals, improvements would be most definitely need to be made, including equality of treatment for citizens and non-citizens, rights within transitions between jobs, improved insurance periods and improved transferability of rights (Vermeulen 2008).

Moreover, as Joël Decaillon, Deputy General Secretary of European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) states, “flexicurity is a concept that is being used in every possible way.” Too often, it simply means flexibility for the employer, without important protections for workers. And, as Decaillon insists, “Flexibility does not create jobs”. He concludes, “to put it at the core of the remedies to the crisis is a mistake. For the most vulnerable employees, young people for example, this approach boils down to making their jobs precarious” (Grillo, 2011). Clearly, only specific elements of flexicurity should be adopted if the aim is to improve current Canadian labour market policies, so that they are in the interests of workers. These elements focus primarily on increasing support for workers and on providing wide scale social improvements. For instance, in order to reduce poverty, Canada should work to reduce the number of low wage jobs and adopt the requirement to make temporary jobs into permanent jobs after two years at the same temporary position (Muffels 2008; Auer 2000). While taxes are higher in Denmark, the proceeds of these taxes are spent on active labour market policies that support worker

retraining and skill development (Lewchuk 2010). More investment in vocational education and worker training should be adopted in Canada. The generous state support for Danes when unemployed should also be adopted by increasing the rates of unemployment insurance payouts (Larsen 2005; van den Berg et al 2008; Jørgensen 2009). This last is especially important for decreasing worker support on the market nexus, so increasing the workers relative bargaining power vis-à-vis capital -- since this enables workers to refuse badly-paying or dangerous employment.

Flexicurity's focus on a universal breadwinner model should also be adopted in Canada; men and women need to be treated equally when it comes to state support for work in and outside of the home. These social support elements of flexicurity could help to balance out of some of the more pernicious effects of neo-liberal economic and social policies in Canada.

However, we need to be cautious about other elements of flexicurity. For instance, we should carefully examine the implications of continual job turnover that occurs in Denmark (Vermeulen 2008). Workers need to be able to plan their future, which is difficult to do when they change jobs frequently. These kinds of changes would clearly have an impact on broader social cohesion. Also, while flexicurity claims to be universal, we have seen how immigrants receive fewer benefits and younger workers receive more benefits than older and disabled workers (Lewchuk 2010). These inequities would surely have to be addressed before any adaptation of the policy to the Canadian context.

A solution may be to combine some elements of flexicurity with other labour market policies. As Lewchuk notes, there are other ways that security can be increased in Canada, including the project of ensuring a guaranteed annual income (Lewchuk et al 2011). The Canadian labour market likewise must adopt a "global package of social rights" as a way to avoid income insecurity and the poverty trap (see for instance Vermeulen 2008, 206). Arguably, Canada does not need to adopt flexicurity wholesale, as in the Danish model. Rather, it needs better protection for workers, such as increased severance payments for temporary contracts, universal and accessible unemployment insurance for all workers, including precarious short-term contract workers, and a universal income program to ensure a basic minimum wage.

With the increase in the numbers of non-standard and precarious jobs in the Canadian labour market, it is clear we need to entirely re-think the current EI policy and come up with some different social strategies to avoid unemployment. Lewchuk explores work-sharing policies, illustrating how many companies have avoided layoffs through their use (2010). Should the government subsidise paid time-off, such as "family leave, paid sick days, paid vacations, shorter work weeks or some combination" (Lewchuk 2010, 67) in order to encourage these workers to remain employed? These are just a few of the recommendations analysts have made in order to address the problems with current EI

policy that are better alternatives than the wholesale importation of flexicurity into Canada.

Ultimately, flexicurity is a programme that emphasizes individual worker adaptation, not systemic problems. In flexicurity, the assumption is that with properly skilled workers, unemployment will be zero percent; clearly, this is unrealistic and likewise assumes that labour market policies are the sole determinant of employment rates. As a policy position, flexicurity expresses an ideological position that is damaging to workers by assuming that neoliberal labour market deregulation is here to stay and cannot be changed. If we were to consider importing a version of it to Canada, we should see it as a short-term solution, rather than a long-term goal. If we were to get its implementation right, however, it could lead to the creation of a more equitable labour market for all and strengthen workers bargaining power vis-à-vis capital by creating some alternative to market participation.

Finally and more broadly, Guy Standing argues that governments and society as a whole should focus on implementing occupational security for everyone (2002). He defines occupational security as an individual's ability to combine her/his various capabilities in creative ways and to define his/her work for themselves in terms of their own views about intrinsic value (Standing 2002). Standing argues that focusing only on labour market or economic security increases forms of social inequality, puts many workers into harm's way, and results in a generalized social condition of worker alienation and exploitation (2002). This outlook, combined with the positive social supports of flexicurity, points to other concerns around workers and labour markets.

It is clear that the current labour market policies in Canada need to be reformed and new policies put in place, and workers must be actively involved in analyzing and transforming injustice and helping to shape governmental policies. I have argued here that flexicurity, properly implemented, might offer some important, immediate gains for Canadian workers over the current EI labour market model. From a socialist perspective, of course, nothing less than a total transformation in the definitions and meanings of work, unemployment and social responsibility must be undertaken to counteract the effects of the neo-liberal ideology now dominant in Canadian social policy design. Only then can we begin to move not just beyond neo-liberalism but what socialists see as an unjust world capitalist system.

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Research Note

**NEOLIBERALISM, CLASS AND CULTURE:  
THE 2008 FEDERAL ELECTIONS IN CANADA  
AND THE UNITED STATES**

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**Abstract**

In the 2008 federal elections in Canada and The United States, conservative parties used class rhetoric in an attempt to draw votes from the working class. They did so by defining class along narrowly cultural lines, so excluding economic concerns. This research note examines the cases of 'Ordinary Canadians Don't Care About The Arts' and 'Joe the Plumber' to show how conservative parties in Canada and the United States are redefining class as a purely cultural variable. Although the rhetoric was not entirely successful, the cases are instructive about the ways that the understandings and importance of class as an economic relation is suppressed by pro-capitalist parties in political elections.

**Keywords**

class identity, cultural and economic dimensions of class, electoral politics, federal election

For many reasons, a party based in and enjoying the electoral support of the working class has never emerged in Canada nor the United States. Nor have questions of class become major sources of division in electoral politics.<sup>2</sup> In both countries, the

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<sup>2</sup> The literature on why working class parties have not emerged in these two countries is extensive. Interested readers are directed to, for example, Archer (2007) *Why is There No Labor Party In The United States*; Goldner (2003) "On the Non-Formation of a Working-Class Political Party in the United States, 1900 - 45"; Lipset and Marks (2000) *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States*;

electorally viable political parties are bourgeois parties with close ties to the capitalist class. The one possible exception to this is the New Democratic Party (NDP) in Canada, which has historic links with the Canadian labour movement. As with many social democratic labour parties worldwide, however, the NDP has shifted both its rhetoric and appeal to the 'new middle class'<sup>3</sup> rather than the working class.<sup>4</sup> In the absence of working class parties it is perhaps not surprising that class, as such, did not appear to be a major issue in Canadian or American Federal elections of 2008.<sup>5</sup> During the height of what has now been labelled the 'Great Recession,' working class problems were scarce in electoral rhetoric. It is true that bourgeois class privilege, including lowering taxes (especially corporate income tax rates) and decreasing 'regulation' for for-profit business was a major policy plank for many parties in both elections. But, this class privilege was not discussed explicitly in class terms. Instead, bourgeois interests were presented as 'the general interest'.

Yet despite this absence of a discussion of class, as such, working class concerns were not an entirely marginal issue. Rather, both electoral campaigns had conservative political parties using a particular kind of cultural class rhetoric, with a populist touch, in an attempt to gain votes. In the United States, the Republicans emphasized their story of 'Joe the Plumber' and in, Canada, the Conservatives blasted opposition parties for their support of arts funding, claiming that "ordinary Canadians don't support the arts." That the Republicans and Conservatives would use the language of populist working class politics seemed counter-intuitive to some, as these parties are both very closely linked with corporate interests and do not promote the economic interests of the working class. Yet, while the Republicans and Conservatives are bourgeois parties, simple electoral math dictates that they must appeal to the majority of voters in the working and 'new middle'

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Aronowitz (1998) *From The Ashes of the Old: American Labor and America's Future for an Analysis of American Exceptionalism*. For Canada, readers are direct to Brodie and Jenson (1991) *Crisis, Challenge and Change: Party and Class in Canada*; Lambert et. al. (1987) "Social class, left/right political orientations, and subjective class voting in provincial and federal elections"; Pammett (1987) "Class voting and class consciousness in Canada".

<sup>3</sup> The term 'middle class' remains elusive for the study of class relations. In many senses, it is a pure sociological invention: the 'middle class' does not relate class position to the means of production. Nevertheless, the 'middle class' has become important to the study of electoral sociology for social democratic parties. Moschonas (2002, 44) notes that 'middle classes' derive their origin from 'a scalar structure of social stratification.' These 'new middle classes' tend to be salaried professionals, often employed in the public sector.

<sup>4</sup> The issue of social democratic labour parties shifting their rhetoric and appeal away from the working class is certainly not a phenomenon limited to the NDP in Canada. For discussions of this shift within the NDP see, for example, Carroll & Ratner (2005), Janson & Young (2005), and Beaton (2000). The broader context can be found in Moschonas (2002) and Upchurch et. al. (2009), amongst others.

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all further references in this paper to the "American election" refer to the American federal election of 2008, and all references to the "Canadian election" refer to the Canadian federal election of 2008.

class to get elected.

This paper examines how neoliberals, especially conservative political parties, talk about class and how they seek support among the traditional working class, that is, among those who must sell their labour power for a wage or salary in order to survive. In particular, this research note describes how the Republicans in the United States and the Conservative Party in Canada appealed to that segment of the working-class who are either semi-skilled or unskilled by using class as a *cultural* variable.

Although this paper focuses on the 2008 elections, this utilization of class as a cultural variable not as an isolated political incident, but indicative of the mobilization of a broader neoliberal ideology. When small-c conservative parties use the language of class, they are not referring to class as an economic or social variable. Neoliberal conservative parties do not connect ‘class’ to your relationship to the means of production or even to your relative economic standing. Class, to neoliberals, has been redefined as a cultural matter, an expression of values, taste, aesthetics, or anti-elitism. This reconception of class as a purely cultural variable has allowed small-c conservative parties to tap tensions within the working class and appeal to its populist elements, so defusing its potential as a force for genuine working class politics.<sup>6</sup>

### Neoliberalism, Class, and Culture

Neoliberalism is both a theory and a set of policies and practices. As a theory, neoliberalism proposes that human well-being can be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade (Harvey 2005, 2). According to Harvey, neoliberalism is a specific type of class-based rule that has enabled capital to restore its dominant position, eroded during the era of Keynesian Welfare States. In practice, this has entailed the privileging of market relationships, a process that has involved the active re-structuring of many different aspects of social life, from labour relationships through to how people think about those relationships.

Yet, consent to the class based rule of neoliberal capitalism did not spontaneously appear. Neoliberalism has built what Gramsci referred to as hegemonic ‘common sense’, but of a particular kind, emphasizing the supremacy of the individual and individual action. This individualistic ideology was, of course, famously summarized by Thatcher when she claimed that “There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and

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<sup>6</sup> This dynamic may have something in common with extreme right-wing populist efforts, which seek to split the working class along racial fault lines, obscuring class as a political economy fact and focussing on the supposed racial but also cultural ‘otherness’ of elements of the working class. This research note does not explore this potentially parallel dynamic.

women, and there are families.” Indeed, Giroux stresses that neoliberalism rests on “a growing sense in the popular imagination that citizen involvement, social planning and civic engagement are irrelevant” (2008, 131): the individual participates in the world as an individual, not as a citizen participating in a collective, social project.

Like Giroux, Sennett argues that in the ‘new capitalism’ dependency is viewed with disdain and the heroic individual, able to constantly re-invent himself to meet the needs of capital, is celebrated (2006, 4). Yet, Sennett also highlights another dynamic, which he calls *ressentiment*:

the belief that ordinary people who have played by the rules have not been treated fairly. It is a social emotion that strays from economic origins and, in part, explains why so many workers once centre-left have moved far to the right, translating material stress into cultural symbols (ibid, 132 - 133).

In other words, the ‘unfairness’ of daily life experienced by the working class is not analysed on a class basis that might enable this experience of unfairness to become a source of working class solidarity. Instead, working class individuals resent real or imagined others who ‘rip off the system’ while they themselves struggle, as individuals and as families, on an everyday basis. Often those who are resented are racialized others, but they may also be liberal elites, who are resented for acting in concert with racialized others.

Of course, these neoliberal ideas and their use by neoliberal political parties predates the 2008 election. The Republican Party, especially under Reagan, sought an alliance with the Christian Right. It appealed to the cultural nationalism of the white working class, and their “besieged sense of moral righteousness” (Harvey 2005, 49-50). On this basis, the Reagan Republicans were able to build a strong base of working class support, against the working class’ own material interest. The key to this was the construction of a working class identity based on cultural symbolism and morality, not upon the reality of economic conditions. The Republicans became a party that motivated its new working class base via rhetoric that basically amounted to a “defence (of the) sanctity of white suburban family life” (Davis 2007, 170). Widespread support of the Reagan Republicans from blue collar constituencies demonstrated that where *economic conservatives had dismally failed*, social conservatism, racism (and patriotism) provided dramatic success (ibid, italics added).

“Class, conservatives insist, is not really about money or birth or even occupation. It is primarily a matter of authenticity” (Frank 2004, 113). Working class authenticity is rooted in the idea of the working class as hard-working, employed, able bodied men. This conception sees the working class not struggling in an economic sense, but struggling against elites that are critical of a working-class lifestyle. It sees the working class opposed

to liberal elites who “eat imported cheese, drive Volvos, and drink lattes” (Ibid, 17). The economic class position of these ‘elites’ is never clarified: it is purposely left vague. This allows conservative rhetoric to blur the lines between working class and middle class, positioning the ‘authentic’ working class in a *cultural* class war with the ‘inauthentic’ elites. The problem for the working class is neither “capitalism nor the neoliberalization of culture, but the ‘liberals’ who used excessive state power for special groups (blacks, women, environmentalists, etc.)” (Harvey 2005, 50).

The Republican Party in the United States, the Conservative Party in Britain under Thatcher, and in Canada, the Reform Party and the Canadian Alliance, the forerunners to the modern Conservative Party of Canada, have all built a class politics based partly on working class resentment of supposed liberal elites. At the same time, their vision of the ‘emancipation’ of the individual through hard work in ‘free markets’ serves the broader neoliberal economic project by discouraging genuine working class-based identification and solidarity.

### **‘Joe The Plumber’**

Samuel Joseph Wurzelbacher, better known as ‘Joe The Plumber’, became a major Republican symbol of the American working class, as the Republicans defined it, during the American election. Joe The Plumber first appeared on 12 October, 2008 when Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama was campaigning in Ohio. Wurzelbacher confronted Obama over the candidate’s tax plan, accusing him of raising taxes on the working class: “I’m getting ready to buy a company that makes 250 to 280 thousand dollars a year. Your new tax plan’s going to tax me more, isn’t it?” (Rohter 2008). The question, and ensuing exchange with Obama, was captured on tape by ABC News, and propelled Wurzelbacher to national fame. Soon, Joe The Plumber / Wurzelbacher would become a Republican symbol for tax relief. Later, on the 15 October, 2008, the final presidential debate was held. During the debate, Republican candidate John McCain made numerous references to Joe The Plumber, using him an example of a hard working American striving for the American Dream. McCain argued that Obama’s tax plan was not in the economic interests of the American working class, and that it only served to hinder those who were working hard to get ahead. Republicans, on the other hand, championed the economic interests of working class individuals like Joe by promising lower taxes.

A closer examination of Joe The Plumber shows exactly what the Republican definition of ‘working-class America’ is. First, Joe The Plumber is a white male from middle America. Second, while Joe The Plumber was employed as an independent contractor, he had aspirations of owning his own business so that he could “take home \$250 000 - \$280 000” a year. Of course, working-class America is not predominantly

white and male. While white men can certainly be found in the working class, so too can women and racialized workers. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of Americans do not take home \$250 000 - \$280 000 a year. Indeed, 28 million Americans lived below the poverty line in 2007 (United States Census Bureau 2008). Further, Joe The Plumber sought to purchase his own business— an aspiration for accession into the business class that fits with the image of the heroic entrepreneur celebrated by neoliberals, but that is hardly the reality for most working class people in the United States. While Samuel Joseph Wurzelbacher was a real, specific person who asked a pointed question to Obama, Joe The Plumber was a carefully constructed idea - an idea of a working-class America that simply does not exist.

One of the additional, central messages of the trope of Joe the Plumber, as an authentic, working class American, is that his difficulties in amassing personal wealth can be attributed to the high taxes supported by 'liberal elites.' His economic struggles are not symptomatic of the ordinary hardship of contemporary working class lives nor are they a reflection of low levels of class mobility in America -- nor even a consequence of his own failings, which is the usual neoliberal explanation for economic hardship. In this way, class resentment around taxes and a celebration of the heroic individual replaces analysis of working class realities, grounded in the ordinary workings of an unequal capitalist system.<sup>7</sup>

### **'Ordinary Canadians Don't Care About The Arts'**

During the 2008 federal election, the Liberals, NDP and Bloc Québécois attacked Prime Minister Stephen Harper by pointing that during their first term in government, the Harper Conservatives cut \$45 million from arts and cultural spending in Canada. Yet, Harper defended the cuts saying the government was going to stop "funding things the people actually don't want" (Bradshaw 2008). He attempted to paint the three opposition parties as elitist, in their defense of the arts, and out of touch with 'ordinary Canadians':

You know, I think when ordinary, working people come home, turn on the TV and see... a bunch of people at a rich gala all subsidized by the taxpayers, claiming their subsidies aren't high enough when they know the subsidies have actually gone up, I'm not sure that's something that resonates with ordinary people (CBCNews 2008).

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<sup>7</sup> Although Republicans used Joe The Plumber as an example of 'hard-working America', both the Republicans and Democrats shunned explicit references to the 'working class.' In the three presidential debates, the term 'middle class' was used twenty-eight times, while 'working class' was not used at all. The term 'main street America' which has become code for 'middle class' was used in the debates nine times more. In contrast, 'poverty' received nary a mention, and 'low income' and 'the poor' were only used once (Loury 2008).



According to the Conservatives, arts and culture funding was simply not something the working class cared about. Rather, the arts are an activity for elites.<sup>8</sup>

The Conservatives insisted that artists are dependent on the state for funding, unlike everyday working class Canadians. This echoes neoliberal efforts to exploit the tension between private and public sector workers, by portraying public sector workers as parasitic, living off the taxes paid by the more “honest” members of the working class working in the private sector (workers who moreover often lacks the benefits and relative job security of the public sector). At the same time, it builds upon the neoliberal political suspicion of any activity that is not based in the market. Art for the sake of cultural advancement does not contribute to the economy and so is ‘useless’ – and by extension so are publicly funded artists.

Of course, small-c conservatives and neoliberals have employed similar arguments before, arguing that it was “unacceptable for taxpayers’ money to support museum exhibitions that included ‘controversial’, ‘sacrilegious’, ‘blasphemous’ and ‘filthy’ works” (Fox 2001, 46). And indeed, Reagan cut federal arts funding in America by 10% in 1981, and since 1992 the American Congress has made steady cuts to the National Endowment of the Arts (ibid, 43 - 47). In the instance discussed here, the Conservative Party employed a similar logic to suggest that artists and the parties that supported them were out of touch with working class Canadians.

### **Conservative Parties and their Conception of Class**

Both the Conservatives and the Republicans made indirect appeals to the working class in the 2008 elections. In both cases, the appeal to the working class was grounded in materialist issues: taxation as main terrain of struggle for income redistribution. Of course, both parties advocated lowering taxes, which is arguably against the economic interests of the working class, as taxes provide the funding for state provided social programs that benefit the working class. While the campaign issues were materialist, the conception of the working class used by these parties was not. The Republican’s symbol of the American working class was white, male, and made significantly more than the average American worker. The Conservative Party of Canada portrayed the working class as hard-working Canadians who would rather watch TV than see their tax dollars subsidise elite artists. In both these cases, the conception of class that the parties appealed to was cultural, not economic.

Both parties used the ‘logics’ of neoliberalism in their appeal to the working

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<sup>8</sup> Of course, the majority of Canadian artists are themselves working people. Indeed, the average artists in Canada made \$20,000 in 2007 (Maranda 2008).

classes. They emphasised individualism: Joe The Plumber as one individual who was pursuing the American Dream and 'useless' artists who needed to take individual responsibility, rather than relying on state funding. Both the Republicans and the Conservatives positioned themselves as the champions of heroic working class Americans and Canadians who were attempting to get ahead, but could not because of taxation. The parties would emancipate the working classes by lowering taxes, reducing government involvement in the market, and countering liberal elite ideals and taxes that preventing the working class from getting ahead and pursuing their own market activity. The arguments both parties made were very similar: they both wished to reduce state spending in the market, champion individual rights and freedoms, and to act as a counterbalance to liberal 'elitism.'

The goal of the conservative parties here is indicative of a larger phenomena of politics under neoliberalism: depoliticizing class. Neoliberal politics see the individual as paramount; individual action is celebrated while collective action is actively discouraged. Collective economic action is anathema to neoliberal policies like market deregulation, lower corporate taxes, and private property rights (Teepie 2000). Reconstituting class as a cultural variable helps the neoliberal project. Class is no longer a concept relating to one's relationship to the means of production or economic well being but is instead an individual identity. Class is held not collectively, but rather individually. The assault on the working class does not come from capitalists extracting surplus value, but rather from 'liberal elites' (another purposely poorly defined term) who disparage working class culture as 'unsophisticated' and crude.

While right wing parties have reconstituted class as a cultural identity, not a socio-economic one, there has been virtually no response from the electoral left. In the United States the Democrats have long abandoned the economic language of class (Frank 2004, 245-248). Harvey argues that while the Republican Party could mobilize massive financial resources to convince a popular base to vote against its material interests on cultural or religious grounds, the Democrats could not afford to attend to the material needs of its traditional popular base for fear of offending capitalist class interests (2005, 51). During the 2008 campaign Obama made many references to the middle class, but not the working class. The Democrats seem content to accept class as a cultural identity, and use the language of neoliberal economics and politics.

In the Canadian case, neither the Liberals or the NDP attempted to define 'ordinary Canadians' or some variation of working Canadians or the working class, in economic terms. This, however, is not out of step with the politics of either party. The Liberals have always been a bourgeois party which supported big business, and have never supported the class interests of the working class (Brodie & Jenson 1991, 3). While the Liberals often campaign from the left, and govern from the right, this campaigning is often around cultural or social policy, or 'soft' economic issues like supporting public health care. The NDP has been slowly moving away from any pretence of being a

working-class party. The NDP has usually focussed their federal campaigns on various issues including health care, environmental protection, and accountability. The party has shifted in its rhetoric away from the working class, claiming to be a party for “all Canadians” (in 1997), “working families” (in 2000) and recently for “people” (in 2006). During the Great Recession in 2008 and 2009, the NDP called for a roundtable for ‘middle class families.’ The NDP maintains nominal ties with organized labour in Canada, and some unions in Canada encourage members to support the party - this has kept the NDP to the relative left of the other major parties in Canada, and has contributed, in part, to the party being branded as a “socialist” party by the Conservatives, the capitalist class, and the certain segments of the capitalist friendly media. While NDP platforms and policies may be to the left of the other mainstream parties in Canada, the party still ascribes to neoliberal logic, and has long abandoned the language and politics of class.

## Conclusion

Interestingly, in both cases the conservative appeal to working class voters failed: Obama won the Presidential election and the Conservative Party was unable to secure a majority government. The Conservative Party of Canada was unable to secure a majority government in 2008 largely because it was unable to break through into vote and seat rich Ontario and Quebec. The besieged Liberals were able to hold on to enough seats in these two provinces to deny the Conservatives the majority they so dearly sought. While the Canadian election was seen largely as a referendum on both the Harper government, elected in 2006, and on Liberal leader Dion, Christopher Dornan makes the argument that it was indeed Harper’s attempt to cut federal spending to the arts that cost him the election. Dornan suggests that the attempt to cut art funding turned Quebec against the Conservatives, and thus denied them the majority they sought (2009, 13). Indeed, the largest rally of the election was held in Montreal to protest the arts cuts (ibid). This suggests, ironically, that ordinary Canadians *do* care about the arts.<sup>9</sup>

The case of Joe The Plumber is more complex. While a number of factors contributed to Obama’s win over McCain, none did more so than the record numbers of racialized Americans who voted overwhelmingly for Obama: 95% of African-Americans, 66% of Latinos, 61% of Asians and 65% of voters self-identified as “other” voted for Obama (Metzgar 2009). Metzgar estimates that between 83% to 86% of the nonwhite

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<sup>9</sup> Within days of Stephen Harper making the claim about ‘Ordinary Canadians’ a group on Facebook was created entitled “Ordinary Canadians DO SUPPORT the Arts, Mr. Harper. You are dead wrong.” The group has over 61 000 members. Some tens of thousands of individuals, many of whom must be working class Canadians, rejected Harper’s populist appeal, showing the contradictions of working class culture and the limits of such populist politics.

working class in the United States voted for Obama in 2008. This can be contrasted to the between 51% and 56% of the white working class who voted for McCain in 2008. Indeed 55% of whites, regardless of class location, voted for McCain in 2008 (ibid). This suggests that on some level, the appeal by the Republican party to the working class as they defined it - white, male, employed, able-bodied and heterosexual - worked on some level. The Republicans were able to motivate a majority, albeit a slim one, of working class voters to vote against their economic interests in 2008. The extent to which Joe The Plumber contributed to this is uncertain.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, in the 2008 federal elections in the United States and Canada, neoliberal political parties define the working class along cultural lines. The working class is imagined as a group of hard working individuals, earning a middle-class income, who do not ascribe to 'elite' values and lifestyles. Voting for neoliberal parties, then, defends a 'traditional' way of working class life. This vision of class highlights the individual and downplay the real nature of class as a common social experience grounded in unequal relationships that define capitalism. In turn, this neoliberal cultural ideology of class helps build support for neoliberal and small-c conservative political parties and more broadly, creates a new common sense that justifies the class based rule of neoliberalism.

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<sup>10</sup> The ascension of the Tea Party movement in the United States suggests that the Republican party is still attempting to appeal to the working class through both economic and cultural strategies. The effect, or lack of effect, that the Tea Party has on the 2010 midterm elections and 2012 general election in the United States should be of great interest to those concerned with the cultural aspects of neoliberalism and electoral politics.

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Review Essay

**DOVES DEVoured, THE SERPENT REMAINS:  
ON THE NEED FOR A SCIENTIFIC CRITIQUE OF ETHICS**

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Blackledge, Paul. 2012. *Marxism and Ethics: Freedom, Desire, and Revolution*. Albany: State University of New York Press. ISBN 978-1-4384-3991-4. Hardcover. 80.00 CAD. Pages: 249.

Noonan, Jeff. 2012. *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press. ISBN 978-0-7735-3965-5. Paperback. 34.95 CAD. Pages: 256.

“All sciences are born ‘inexact.’”  
Sebastiano Timpanaro (1976, 216)

When it comes to morality, “the silence of Marx, and most *Marxisms*, is so loud as to be deafening.” So said E. P. Thompson (1978, 363). Although he overstated his case, since that time there has emerged a “Marxism and Morality” industry that has nevertheless been met with – outside of certain academic circles – *near total silence*. While this is due in part to the marginalization of workers’ power and socialist critique in recent decades, it is also due to the inadequate character of these interventions. Indeed, the scientific critique of ethics remains in its embryonic form.

In light of this, two new texts offer welcome contributions to the debate. Jeff Noonan’s *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value* is an ambitious post-Marxist attempt to create a socialist ethics based on what he calls the “life-ground of value.” Paul Blackledge’s *Marxism and Ethics* traces the entire history of Marxist interventions in ethical debates in an attempt to counter the former Marxist Alasdair MacIntyre’s assertion that Marxism does not pose a plausible alternative to liberalism because, in the realm of moral theory, Marxists have always resorted to either Benthamite consequentialism or Kantian formalism, and in the realm of practice, Weberian bureaucratism. Blackledge begins his first chapter by quoting one of Hegel’s declarations of method:



The refutation must not come from outside, that is, it must not proceed from assumptions lying outside the system in question and inconsistent with it. The system need only refuse to recognise those assumptions; the defect is a defect only for him who starts from the requirements and demands based on those assumptions (Blackledge 2012, 19).

This “immanent critique” uses historical context to invade the inner logic of an opponent’s theory and demonstrates how, according to its own standards, its self-described universal truth-claims are only a partial, one-sided, and self-contradictory reflection of conflicts inherent to the prevailing social conditions. By identifying suppressed contradictions, immanent critique determines latent social potentials that, if they are realized by a social force uniquely capable of doing so, achieve the universality that the refuted ideology falsely claims to already exist. This interchange between theory and practice is crucial because, unless we distil the particular tendencies and laws of the prevailing social conditions, any attempt to transform them will become dominated by them.

Although Noonan and Blackledge make valuable contributions, they prove inadequate according to these standards of immanent criticism: Noonan poses, in Feuerbachian fashion, a “materialist” ethics that, because it proceeds from assumptions lying outside of capitalist society, is actually a species of idealist utopianism; Blackledge employs overview, commentary, and in the case of Marx, exegesis, but never immanent critique, because he misinterprets what a refutation of MacIntyre necessarily entails. Before these claims can be substantiated, however, we must first explore the significance of these ethical debates for workers’ power and socialist strategy.

There are a number of reasons why engagement with ethics has never been more important for socialist thought and practice. First, socialists must account for the disastrous attempts to create socialism in the twentieth century, and delineating their failures as not only economic and political but also as ethical projects is a crucial dimension of this atonement.

Second, a crucial facet in the redemption of historical materialism is its application to ethics, a form of human activity that is deemed by all variants of positivism as the least susceptible to scientific treatment, an endeavour by which historical materialism can demonstrate its continuing cogency as the science of capitalist society.

Third, as capitalism develops it necessitates socialist practice that is decreasingly insurrectionary and increasingly prefigurative of the post-capitalist society. In the revolutions of 1648 and 1789, the popular classes in London and Paris were politicized by splits in the ruling class; in 1848, revolutionary proletarian clubs inspired pan-European revolts; in 1871, the National Guard elected the Communal Council to fill the political vacuum in war-weary Paris; in 1917, 1949, and elsewhere, well-established parties came to power through the insurrectionary “war of manoeuvre.” It was Gramsci’s great insight

that in the most advanced capitalist conditions the “cultural revolution” must occur in the “trenches and earthworks” of civil society before, during, and after “smashing the state” (Gramsci 2000, 225-30). This prefigurative “war of position” is surely the launching point for all innovations in the project for twenty-first century socialism. Indeed, the critique of ethics is necessary for, on the one hand, moving beyond the vestiges of insurrectionary politics that pervade even the best representatives of the Leninist, Trotskyist, and post-Trotskyist traditions, and on the other hand, for seizing ground from the recently ascendant anarchists who claim to be the only genuinely prefigurative form of radicalism.

Fourth, in comparison to its entire history, ethical activity is in a state of unprecedented degradation under the “impersonal dependence” of capitalist social relations. While its relation to political activity has always been one of opposition as much as of interpenetration, the circumscription of ethics in its relation to the capitalist economy is historically unique. In all precapitalist class societies, rulers and producers were tied together by traditional, paternalistic codes of obligation that normatively regulated material production. Conversely, in capitalism, the totalizing spread of the market and its commodity logic abstracts from the personal characteristics of both producers and rulers, reducing them to mere personifications of wage-labour and capital. This has caused the dissolution of customs incompatible with the maximization of exchange-value, the differentiation of human activities into discrete social spheres that do not admit of any but the most abstract common societal ends, and widespread depictions of the capitalist market as a “non-moral” realm. Far from affirming the irrelevance of ethics for socialist practice, the precise delineation of this circumscription is necessary before we can determine how ethics can become adequate to those forms of human activity that are currently deemed autonomously “economic” and “political.”

Finally, there is a serious lacuna in all socialist theory. Lenin, for example, asserts that –economic preconditions aside – the state will be able to wither away completely “when people have become so accustomed to observing the fundamental rules of social intercourse” that “they will voluntarily work *according to their ability*” (1970, 357). Lenin’s theory, like all socialist theory, envisions the displacement of the state by processes of self-regulation. Nevertheless, that the state and therewith politics can “wither away” provokes skepticism because of the many cases where the “dictatorship of the proletariat” became a dictatorship *over* the proletariat. Speaking on the relation between politics and ethics, Kant once prescribed: “Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” In its current form, the socialist account of a politics that eliminates all politics gives the impression of a snake eating its own tail: no matter how much it devours, the serpent remains. A coherent ethics is necessary if the victorious proletariat is to shed its political skin. With this in mind, we must now turn to Noonan and Blackledge.

The foundation of Noonan’s materialist ethics is the “life-ground of value”, which is the “bond of being” between life and “life-requirements” (Noonan 2012, 23). The life-ground for humans derives from three dimensions of human nature. All humans are

organisms with physical-organic life-requirements for things like food and water; are potentially self-conscious agents with socio-cultural life-requirements for things like familial love and education; and, are finite beings with temporal life-requirements for the free time necessary for the realization of creative human capacities (52). This provides the baseline of “materially rational judgments”. Regardless of whether or not the individual desires it, what is materially rational and therefore good is that which satisfies life-requirements in ways that contribute back to the fields of natural and social life-support; what is materially irrational and therefore not good is that which is deleterious and self-undermining to life-activity (43). By distinguishing between what does and does not sustain life, materially rational evaluations are “objective judgments” about satiable and non-voluntary life-requirements, not “subjective preferences” for mere wants that are insatiable and subject to wilful change (11).

The life-grounded materialist ethics aspires to “a society whose system-requirements prioritize the satisfaction of the shared life-interest of each and all” (106). When the ruling money-value system treats basic life-requirements as instruments of its own growth and objective harm is systematically imposed on certain groups of people because they lack an arbitrary system-requirement like money, “life-grounded materialist ethics concludes not only that the ruling value system is ethically wrong but that it requires systematic transformation” (13).

Noonan articulates his concept of “life-requirement” in opposition to Marx’s concept of “need.” According to Noonan, Marx uncritically adopts Adam Smith’s conception of “use-value” and therefore “conflates human needs with consumer demands, thereby opening the door to ecologically unsustainable conceptions of socialism as unlocking the secret to limitless wealth” (7). According to Noonan, Marxists tend to valorize the development of productive forces as intrinsically good, but if use-values are not grounded in the concept of “life-value,” “there is no internal brake on the possibility that socialism too becomes driven to materially irrational scales of production” (141). Therefore, Noonan posits a non-Marxist socialism whose basis is not the class interests of the proletariat but the internal and external nature shared by all humankind (97). There is much to find at fault with this account.

Noonan misinterprets Marx’s conception of “need” because he attributes qualities to use-value that are only true of exchange-value. For Marx, wage-labour and capital are necessarily opposed because the needs of workers set limits to the valorization of capital and the needs of capitalists set limits to the reduction of labour-time (Heller 1976, 26). Furthermore, whereas the limited nature of needs is an obstacle to the valorization of capital, quantitative measures admit of no principle of self-limitation, and thus measuring need in terms of an abstract standard such as money ensures that enough cannot exist (Gorz 1989, 111-114). Marx envisions a society dedicated solely to the production of use-values because humankind pursues its needs in a human way only when its needs are limited by nothing but other needs (Heller 1976, 43). This means, on the one hand, that

need is not externally limited by the valorization of capital, and on the other, that without a mediating abstract general equivalent like money, needs are pursued in direct, qualitative, incommensurable, and therefore self-limiting ways. Thus, only use-values dominated by exchange-values are “unlimited”. Consequently, Noonan does not provide a compelling reason to abandon Marx’s concept of “need.”

Even if capitalism is “materially irrational” and therefore “unethical” according to the standards of the life-grounded ethics, adherents to the prevailing social conditions can condemn these standards as utopian. This is why Marx critiques political economy from the perspective of capital, demonstrating the contradictions that emerge on its own terms. Marx begins *Capital* with the commodity and the distinction between use-value and exchange-value because everyone under capitalism, including capitalists, experiences capitalism as a world of commodities. He does not begin with and never resorts to an external standard. Marx not only demonstrates the ways in which the dominance of exchange-value gives rise to contradictions such as commodity fetishism, hidden surplus appropriation, and the mechanical degradation of the worker. More importantly, at the projected end of the unfinished volumes of *Capital* when we return to the commodity as the world trade of commodities, the basic contradiction between use-value and exchange-value persists. Only then can Marx prove *scientifically* that, even from the perspective of capital, the revolutionary proletariat is the sole social force capable of transcending exchange-value which, of course, entails socialism. Critiques such as these prove theoretically what the proletariat must prove in the practice of hegemony, namely, that they are the universal class because their particular interests can be the universal interest.

Marx could only come to these conclusions because his conception of “need” is not need in general but need as expressed through specific social relations. Conversely, Noonan’s ethics, like all forms of Natural Law, contends that an unchanging human nature is the basis of a practical rationality that is universally binding. Noonan is a modern-day Feuerbach who reduces the human essence to “an internal, dumb generality which merely *naturally* unites the many individuals” (Marx 1978, 145). Noonan imposes an abstractly universal conception of human nature rather than determining the latent ethical potentials dwelling within the historically specific laws of capitalism and its developing balance of social forces, the full realization of which not only demands the overthrow of capitalism but also develops the capacities necessary to replace it with something viable. Furthermore, Noonan’s ahistorical appeal to the immediate intelligibility of life-requirements (51) neglects the extent to which the division of labour and class stratification mediate social relations, imbuing historically specific forms of human activity with the appearance of immutable laws of nature.

One of the most trenchant analyses of this form of fetishism is Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*. MacIntyre contends that the dominant form of modern morality is not deontology or utilitarianism but “emotivism,” the theory that moral

judgments are not factual claims capable of truth or falsity because moral agreement derives not from rational criteria but from non-rational expressions of personal preference (1984, 12). No matter what their avowed theoretical standpoint, “to a large degree people now think, talk and act *as if* emotivism were true” (22). MacIntyre asserts that this is a uniquely modern sentiment, and yet, by asserting that all moral utterance is a mask for mere personal preference, emotivists take this to be true for every society in human history (23). This abandonment of any substantive universality in ethics has dire consequences. Where there is no longer a shared conception of the human good, there is no coherent concept of what it is to contribute more or less to that good (232). Consequently, there is a dearth of “moral resources” capable of rationally settling moral disagreements (252). This has left local communities helpless in the face of their destruction by the market and the state. Against this trend, MacIntyre attempts to salvage precapitalist forms of virtue ethics, specifically those of Aristotle and Aquinas, to which he attaches his infamous apocalyptic vision: “What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us” (263). It is to these sentiments that Blackledge responds, and thus it is to him we must now turn.

Spurning the deontological emphasis of duty and the utilitarian concern for consequence, modern virtue ethics returns to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, accentuating the character traits, practical wisdom, and forms of community necessary for an objective “human flourishing” that is more substantial than mere subjective contentment. This “aretic turn” inspired a group of what could be called the “Nicomarxian ethicists,” of which Blackledge is a most active member. When his *Marxism and Ethics* makes the aforementioned clarion call to immanent critique, Blackledge has in mind

Alasdair MacIntyre’s claim that no modern moral theory is able to provide a rationally justifiable guide to action, but rather that each approach is best understood as a more or less coherent justification of personal preferences... MacIntyre also claims that Marx’s suggested alternative to this emotivist culture must ultimately be judged a failure. The rest of the book is best read as an extended discussion of and attempted answer to this criticism (15).

Blackledge attempts to demonstrate that Marxism provides the theoretical resources to extricate ourselves from the crisis of modern moral philosophy by showing how collective working class struggle embodies a virtuous alternative to utilitarianism, deontology, and emotivism.

Blackledge’s text is pervaded by a sentiment of “going back to Marx”:

Against the dominant reading of these texts, according to which ‘no interpretation of Marx’s various remarks on justice and rights can make them all consistent with one another,’ I follow those, such as Albert Gilbert and Roy Edgley, who have suggested that a coherent ethics can be reconstructed from [Marx and Engels’] writings once they are adequately contextualized and understood (45).

Poulantzas once argued that the political theories offered by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Gramsci provide important conjunctural analyses, but it remains the task of contemporary Marxists to conduct a strictly political *science* in the manner of Marx’s scientific critique of political economy (1975, 20-23). This is even truer of ethics. Although a theory of ethics is not incompatible with Marxism and what little Marx and Engels say about ethics is not inconsistent, this cannot provide the materials by which to “reconstruct” a coherent ethics because they themselves *did not* construct a coherent ethics.

This is one of the reasons why the Nicomarxian ethicists put such emphasis on Aristotle. To refute MacIntyre’s claim that Marxism does not pose an ethical alternative to liberal morality, Blackledge attempts to prove that Marx is an implicit Aristotelian. Shall we also go back to Aristotle?

Blackledge asserts that Marx sublates idealism and materialism with a Hegelian reading of Aristotle’s essentialism (20). This is dubious: there is nothing in Aristotle’s conception of “essence” that is not improved upon by Hegel. It is really the concept of “virtue” that brings Blackledge back to Aristotle because he interprets immanent critique to mean that proving Marx’s Aristotelianism fills the gaps attributed to Marx by MacIntyre according to MacIntyre’s own Aristotelian standards. But a true immanent critique would demonstrate that MacIntyre’s virtue ethics is inadequate according to its own standards and that Marxism alone can resolve its contradictions. Marxism, such as it exists now, cannot accomplish this because it requires a historical materialist critique of ethics, a task that, to my knowledge, has never been undertaken successfully.

This is why Blackledge reads the concept of “virtue” into Marx’s work:

Marx suggested not only that workers feel compelled to struggle against the power of capital, but that in so doing they begin to create modes of existence which also offer a virtuous alternative to the egoism characteristic not only of capitalist society generally, but also of working-class life within that society more specifically (93).

But Marx does not use the concept “virtue” in any substantive way here or anywhere else. Instead, Marx uses the concept “need” and in particular “new needs.” As if to prove this point, immediately after this statement, Blackledge quotes Marx: “When communist

workmen gather together, their immediate aim is instruction, propaganda, etc. But at the same time, they acquire a new need—the need for society—and what appears as a means had become an end” (93). Here too Marx derives his inspiration not from Aristotle but Hegel, as is evident from, say, MacIntyre’s account of Hegel’s ethical philosophy:

What passions and what ends the individual has and can have are a matter of the kind of social structure in which the individual finds himself. Desires are elicited and specified by the objects presented to them; the objects of desire, and especially of desires to live in one way rather than another, cannot be the same in all societies. But it is not necessarily the case that the desires elicited by a particular form of social life will find satisfaction within that form. The working out of the ends of contemporary practice may, in fact, destroy the very form of life which brought the desire for those ends into being (1966, 200-201).

Marx makes his “wager” on the working class because he deems it to be the only social force that has certain “imperative” needs, the full satisfaction of which demands the transcendence of capitalism (Marx and Engels 1956, 52-3).

A crucial aspect of the hegemonic class-formation of capital was the articulation of an independent ethics, as was the case, for example, with the Puritan movement and the English bourgeoisie (Tawney 1975). This is why MacIntyre’s apt critique of Marxism is so devastating. That the Revisionists and Ethical Socialists adopted a form of Kantian deontology, or that their antagonist, Kautsky, adopted a form of consequentialism, embedded bourgeois antinomies into the workers’ movement and hampered the development of an independent ethics and thus a rival hegemonic class-formation of the working class. It is therefore peculiar that the Nicomaxian ethicists, in their attempt to refute MacIntyre, only confirm his critique by aping his ethical philosophy. Although “virtue” must surely be a crucial aspect of a scientific ethics, it is not the foundational concept. In the same way that the “labour theory of value” and the “class theory of the state” provide the materialist foundations for the sciences of political economy and politics, “need” is the materialist foundation for a scientific ethics. Nevertheless, although “need” is a crucial concept for Marx, it is not sufficiently elaborated. That task falls to us. Only a few cursory propositions can be articulated here.

Ethics is a form of praxis. Raising an image of ourselves and realizing it through our practical activity is how we produce ourselves as ethical beings. Reconciling our needs with the needs of others entails the capacity to displace certain immediate needs for the sake of higher needs possible only through cooperation. Like other forms of praxis, ethical activity can become reified, fetishized, and alienated. This, however, does not necessitate some form of pre-capitalist communitarianism. Devoid of a social force capable of carrying out his virtue ethics, MacIntyre draws only pessimistic conclusions

about modern morality. Nevertheless, while the widespread emotivist belief that ethics is nothing but the expression of personal preferences is certainly debilitating for collective action, the devastation of traditional customs and the proliferation of incommensurable moral standards already presents in germ-form what only the collective action of a universal class can bring out in full relief, namely, that humans engaged in historically specific social relations are the source of all ethical values and therefore these values must be adapted to our current needs.

This is why a scientific ethics must stake its independence from all moral theories that disassociate morality from need by, for example, describing happiness as a “non-moral” good. By disassociating morality from need, these theories can proclaim the adequacy of a universal morality in a class-divided society. Conversely, a materialist ethics that roots ethics in human need must demonstrate the contradictory character of needs in capitalism, expose the abstract character of moralism disassociated from need, and prove that the specific conditions within which needs can be reconciled by a truly universal ethics is the classless society.

MacIntyre asserts that, due to its distinction between the so-called economic “base” and the ideological “superstructure,” Marxism reproduces the academic dualism that separates theory and practice (1984, 61). This common refrain neglects, among other things, how Marx argues that the extension of the working day encounters not only physical but also *moral* obstacles, specifically the need for time to satisfy intellectual and social requirements as conditioned by the general level of civilization: “In contrast, therefore, with the case of other commodities, the determination of the value of labour-power contains a historical and moral element” (1977, 341; 275). Far from a mere superstructural epiphenomenon, Marx embeds morality in the supposedly “non-moral” economic “base.” This has crucial implications for working class hegemony.

When workers have as their main demand the increase of wages, they are but one particular class, wage-labour, against another particular class, capital, and therefore act entirely within the parameters of capitalism. But when workers have as their main demand the need for more free time, they affirm the needs of the human species as a whole (Heller 1976, 91). Sacrificing their immediate needs, class conscious workers orient the particular interests of a strata or class to the universal interests of all humanity and thereby demonstrate their potential as the truly universal class.

All moralism is a species of idealism. We must avoid a “moral economy” approach (Thompson 1993) that unduly imposes moralistic criticisms of “economic agents” in an impersonal market that, abstracting from the personal characteristics of its participants, circumscribes, in specific and variegated ways, the personal freedom necessary for moral responsibility. Nevertheless, collective action by workers militates against competitive imperatives, demonstrating that the extent to which the market is a “non-moral” realm is, even within capitalism, historically determined. In other words, the expansion of collective action *increases* the scope of personal responsibility. This exposes and



undermines the alienation of formerly ethical activities into a purely “economic” practice that is relatively autonomous from normative regulation, and thereby creates, if only in germ-form, the *new* need for the subordination of production and distribution to the ethical self-regulation of free associations, the full realization of which entails socialism. This takes us directly to the question of politics.

Noonan and Blackledge seem to share a belief in the unity of ethics and politics. Noonan asserts that this unity follows from the natural dependence and social interdependence between individuals and the world (192). Blackledge contends that both Aristotle and Marx affirm the unity of ethics and politics: “just as Aristotle posited a natural movement from ethics to politics – ‘The science that studies the supreme Good for man is politics’ – Marx moved from formulating a model of human good to fighting for the political implications of this model” (3). Thus, Marx’s politics is not in crude opposition to morality, but a practice that overcomes the opposition between materialism and idealism (198).

Insofar as Blackledge is demonstrating the ethical dimension of workers’ power in order to rebut claims that Marx affirmed an insurrectionary Blanquism, he is correct. Nevertheless, a scientific ethics must delimit the ways in which, even in the practice of workers’ power, *ethics is necessarily opposed to politics*. Even if Aristotle posits a “natural movement” from ethics to politics, Marxists cannot posit anything but a *historical* movement.

The transitions from the precapitalist to the capitalist market order – wherein the appropriation of surplus labour is separated from the public political functions of the state – have been described as the differentiation of the economic from the political (Wood 1995, 31). This is only a partial explanation. If anything, the impersonal dependence of capitalism inaugurates the differentiation of the economic from the personal-normative, which contains within it the contradiction between ethics and politics. Long before these events, the transitions from hunter-gatherer societies to state societies gave rise to what can be described as the *differentiation of the political from the ethical*. In hunter-gatherer societies, complex networks of customary reciprocity regulated the collection and distribution of resources without a state and its legal edifice. For a substantial portion of human history, this suited the limited development of material production. If ethics is the active reconciliation of needs within and between individuals, then the developing division of labour, the gradual differentiation of society into classes, and the emergence of antagonistic needs undermined the capacity of ethics to maintain order: ethics became inadequate to its changing social conditions. Indeed, the emergence of the state “is the admission that this society has involved itself in insoluble self-contradiction and is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to exorcise” (Engels 1975, 229). Politics is no more capable than ethics of reconciling these necessarily antagonistic needs, but unlike the decentralized self-regulation typical of local

custom, political activity, with its territorial concentration of systematic coercion in the hands of a ruling class, can hold this clash of needs in abeyance. Politics does not eliminate but rather displaces ethics, subordinating it to the state regulation of the social order: “Law and custom both involve the regulation of behaviour but their characters are entirely distinct” (Diamond 2007, 260).

Ethical theory, so often isolated from political concerns, is therefore merely sub-political, incapable of solving the tasks it sets itself, for these dilemmas emerge from structural antagonisms that demand social transformations and thereby an ethical activity that undergoes processes of politicization. The precise relation between ethical and political activities is always a matter of history, but this relation often appears “natural” because its historical differentiation is not immediately intelligible. In politics, ethics must learn to see itself in alienated form.

Far from undermining the Marxist theory of revolution, this opposition is one of its main justifications. In the same way that a scientific ethics must demonstrate how the domination of exchange-value over use-value and the concomitant antagonism between economic and ethical activities give rise to contradictions that are irresolvable from the perspective of capital, it must also demonstrate that the dominance of politics over ethics is similarly irresolvable.

Even the revolutionary proletariat, in the lead up to and taking of state power, cannot resolve the contradiction between ethics and politics because it must use the coercive apparatus of the state to suppress the bourgeoisie and its allies. Nevertheless, the “war of position,” wherein the revolutionary proletariat orients its needs to those of the manifold subaltern strata and raises otherwise partial struggles to a more universal collective will (Gramsci 1970, 137), must prefigure the future self-regulating society by developing the relationships, organizations, and capacities, the *new needs* and “moral resources,” necessary to displace the state. This is the terrain upon which the critique of ethics must obtain its raw data. Lest the revolutionary proletariat turn this coercive apparatus against itself, ethical activity must be made adequate again. Only then can public institutions administer things rather than administering people as if they are things. Ethics is to Marxists what poverty is to Christians: it will always be with us. This is the optimism of politics, which can wither away, and the pessimism of ethics, which is as eternal a human condition as is our metabolism with nature.

An ethics made adequate again would entail processes of self-regulation that subsume the redeemable aspects of those activities presently called “economic” and “political,” such as the production for use-value or public administration, while eliminating those aspects that are incompatible with the reconciliation of ethical, economic, and political activities, such as the dominance of exchange-value or the concentration of the means of coercion in the hands of a ruling class. Actively bridging otherwise separate and often contradictory social spheres by unleashing the latent universal potential in each is how a more universal collective will, embodied by the

revolutionary strata of the working class, can seize ground from the prevailing “emotivist” culture in the struggle for hegemony.

Engagement with ethics has never been more important for socialist thought and practice, and yet the science of ethics remains in its infancy. Shall we go back to Marx? Yes, but the resources Marx provides are not in his few cursory remarks about ethics but in his method, which must now be applied and adapted to ethical activity. We must descend from all royal roads so that we might navigate the trenches and earthworks. If we began with Hegel’s declaration of immanent critique, perhaps it is appropriate to end with one of his most trenchant questions: With what must a science begin? Hegel begins his mature science with Being; Marx with the commodity. With regard to ethics, mired in its embryonic stage, we can only reply, science must begin with the aspiration for scientific enquiry itself.

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Review Essay

## **GOOD MARX FOR STRIKING STUDENTS?**

**ALAN SEARS**

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Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 2010. *The Communist Manifesto Illustrated. Chapter One: Historical Materialism*. Edited, introduced and re-imagined by George S. Rigakos. Illustrated by Red Viktor. Ottawa: Red Quill Books. ISBN 978-0-981280-72-1. Paperback: 12.50 USD. Pages: 32.

Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 2011. *The Communist Manifesto Illustrated. Chapter Two: The Bourgeoisie*. Edited, introduced and re-imagined by George S. Rigakos. Illustrated by Red Viktor. Ottawa: Red Quill Books. ISBN 978-0-981280-77-6. Paperback: 12.50 USD. Pages 34.

The test of the *Communist Manifesto* is whether it provides insights when read against the leading struggles of our times. The strike by Quebec students against the Charest government's 75% tuition increase is still on as I write this review, almost six months after the first students voted to walk out. This has been the largest and longest of the nine strikes waged by Quebec students since 1968.

Quebec students and their allies are waging the most sustained and creative fightback in the Canadian state against the austerity agenda promoting brutal attacks on social programs, wages, pensions, health care, public culture and education. The audacity and innovation of this movement has inspired activists across North America and around the world to wear red squares, organize pot-banging marches, and attempt to build militant and democratic forms of fightback.

The red square worn by Quebec student activists and their allies is a playful and creative symbol, combining the idea of debt ("squarely in the red") with a traditional marker of militancy (red as the colour of insurgency). It takes the red of the old left and recasts it in a new context, linked to an emerging new left with its own questions, roadmaps and icons.

In this review, I will consider whether the graphic novel version of the *Communist Manifesto* from Red Quill Press can do the work of the Quebec students' red square, reclaiming a classic in new terms and bridging between old and new lefts. I am not sure

whether there has been an increased audience for the *Communist Manifesto* in the wake of this struggle in Quebec. There is certainly a substantial radicalization among students and their supporters, as shown by massive demonstrations, at times surpassing 300,000 marchers, as well as the resilience of the movement in the face of the Charest government's repression.

It is the nature of radicalization that it pushes activists to ask new questions about the ways the system works and how to fight it. These questions can lead people to seek out new resources to address these issues. Since it was published in 1848, the *Communist Manifesto* has been one of the resources most sought out by activists at times like this. But is it still? It is certainly my sense that the *Manifesto* has largely fallen into disuse.

This is partly because of the way people sometimes approach the *Communist Manifesto* as an almost sacred text, to swallow whole or to spit out completely. It is cast either as an essential foundation for contemporary activism or as an archeological remnant of flawed and totalitarian communism. This approach to the *Manifesto* also fits with a left that is often impatient with theoretical thinking about our movements, counterposing militant activism to reflection that is seen as "academic".

I think it is a sad loss to casually cast aside the *Communist Manifesto*, just as it is a serious error to look to it as a biblical document with extraordinary powers to guide our struggles. Somewhere between faith-based anti-capitalism and the rejection of serious political analysis that engages with learning from the past 200 years of struggle lies a different approach to the *Manifesto*, rooted in critical engagement.

The *Communist Manifesto* is one of those rare texts that keep being timely. Indeed, the world since the current global slump started in 2008 seems in many ways like the 3D remake of the *Communist Manifesto*. "It is enough to mention the commercial crises that by their periodical return put on its trial, each time more threateningly, the existence of the entire bourgeois [capitalist] society. In these crises a great part not only of the existing products, but also of the previously created productive forces, gets destroyed." The current global slump is one of those moments of "commercial crisis" in which we are seeing a massive destruction of human capacities, in part through an attack on the well-being of the working classes through factory shutdowns, huge reductions in the living standards of those who are employed, a dramatic increase in unemployment, and brutal cuts in social programs.

The brilliant student strike in Quebec this year is one of the emerging anti-austerity resistance movements that is radicalizing new layers of people and reminding us all of the potential power to beat back the incredible attacks being launched by employers and the state; and indeed to build a better world. The *Communist Manifesto* could be of great value to these activists, not so much providing a road map as helping develop a set of navigational tools that can contribute to driving struggles forward over time by clarifying how key power relations actually work.

Despite its potential usefulness, I am not sure the *Communist Manifesto* is getting a lot of attention these days. Of course, like many “great texts” it is fed medicinally to university students in courses, generally in a context that severs its vibrant passages from living activism. This is not what I mean by using the *Manifesto*, which requires critical engagement with the text, generally through group reading and discussion. It is through shared engagement with the text in relation to current struggles that people think seriously about what is there and what is missing, and how it might or might not be relevant for their activism.

In many ways, then, I am more concerned with the ways the *Manifesto* is used than with how it is presented. Yet presentation does matter, and particularly bringing the text into the present in thoughtful ways. The challenge is to present the *Communist Manifesto* so as to highlight the open-ended question of its contemporary relevance, while encouraging critical engagement with both the text itself and the history of its use.

Given this, I was really excited to see the Red Quill Press version of the *Communist Manifesto* drawing on the graphic novel form. Graphic novels are incredibly powerful in their ability to combine rich and suggestive images with stripped down wording to convey both individual character and wider social-political themes. There are some breath-taking moments in the first two volumes of the Red Quill series that completely justify this ambitious project. The illustration on page 16-17 of the first volume brings to life the opening line of the *Manifesto*, “A spectre is haunting Europe...”

This is an admirable project that shows real creativity. I love the graphic novel form in part for its ability to go beyond the linear form of telling associated with most writing by playing off image against word in such a way that the reader must actively pull it together. It can excite emotions and aesthetic senses in a way that formal writing seldom does. The best images in this book really do that, in ways that I think actually suit Marx’s method of investigating social problems by unsettling what we already know to push deeper beneath the surface.

Editor George Rigakos states that the goal of this graphic edition is to “reanimate the text” (2). In general it succeeds admirably in this goal by putting Red Viktor’s amazing images up against key quotes from the *Manifesto*. There is no way I can convey the power of these images here, and rather I simply urge you to get a copy and engage with it.

However, I fear that despite the creative form and powerful graphics, this illustrated *Manifesto* does not reach out to activists newer to politics in ways that it might. The first volume opens, for example, with a scene in which an older man throws books at Marx’s grave. These books are historic titles reflecting the repressive character of so-called “socialist” regimes that ruled in Marx’s name. Marx wakes, reads and weeps. The old man reawakens and the story begins with a clearing sky. It is intriguing, but I fear it still

appeals more to the knowledge base and thoughts of someone like me, who already has a sense of the main players and locations.

Similarly, the short anti-Stalinist fable that begins the second volume is an interesting and valuable attempt to locate the *Manifesto* in relation to the history of so-called “socialism” in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. However, I fear it will not be clear to those who might most need a bridge into the text. A very high proportion of those who are active in the Quebec student strike were born after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. It is my sense through conversations that the question of so-called “socialist” regimes is less immediate for them (though still important) than questions about the relevance of socialist idea and practices given the rapidly changing conditions of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I fear there is a prior question that this version of the *Manifesto* does not address. Thoughtful young activists might ask why they should devote much effort to working through a document crafted by two European guys over 150 years ago. The fact that it was a highly influential document through much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, widely read if not well-understood, might mark it as worthy of historical interest, but not as a living political document. It is completely understandable that some people might think that the *Manifesto* should be left to rot along with the bureaucratic top-down regimes that called themselves “Communist” in Russia and Eastern Europe.

The power of the *Manifesto* lies specifically in its location in time and space. Marx and Engels were investigating the character of capitalism as a social system when it was still in its initial phases of development, and therefore were able to see things that are now less visible. One first entering space, we see, hear, smell, taste and feel things that quickly pass into being taken for granted. You may notice a rank smell in a room, the darkness of a cafe or the inappropriateness of a friend’s new haircut on first encounter. Soon enough, however, you have adjusted and made it part of the background.

Marx and Engels were writing about capitalism at a time when workers were still asking about the rank smell of inequity that hung around their workplaces. When a social system is new, people have not yet formulated their habits and ways of knowing around it. The brilliant historian of working class struggle E.P. Thompson wrote about the way first-generation workers resisted time-discipline, the idea that you should show up at a particular place simply because a bell rang indicating it was a particular hour and therefore the start of shift. At a time when none of this seemed normal yet, Marx and Engels inquired into the essential characteristics of the emergent capitalist system.

They did not do this work alone, but in engagement with the working class movement in Paris, the most militant and activist working class the world had yet seen. The *Manifesto* was written as a call-out to radicals in anticipation of the revolutionary wave of 1848, which turned out to be the largest working class insurgency yet witnessed since the development of capitalism. Marx and Engels wrote attempting to equip workers



to think through political strategies based on the possibility of overthrowing capitalism, rather than simply finding a better deal within the system.

Their keen inquiry into the workings of the system, drawing on the knowledge of capitalism that radical workers were developing through their everyday encounters with the system and their struggles for radical change, helped map key characteristics that mark the system to this day. Their analysis benefitted from first-rate analytical tools they developed through critical engagement with other radical theories, as well as from their interactions with radical workers in Paris, who could pass on the best learning passed between layers of militant activists. The discussion of class struggle, forms of exploitation, the inner workings of the capitalist system, imperialism and the oppressiveness of the family is very powerful.

In short, the *Communist Manifesto* is a product of its location. This is a benefit as it has insights from the establishing period of capitalism, seen through the lens of the militant workers of Paris. But it is also limited by its location, providing only a partial vision of the world at the time, let alone all that has happened since. There is a lot to address about gender, sexuality, racialization, indigeneity, the environment, representative democracy, bureaucratization, trade unions and so much more. In one reading group I was in, one woman started the discussion by asking “Why Europe?” with reference to Marx and Engels’ opening quote “a spectre is haunting Europe.” That question deserves a discussion that might get complicated and rich with disagreements.

I really think Red Quill Books and George Rigakos deserve a lot of credit for a gutsy and creative move. These are not easy times for radical publishing, and this is a very exciting attempt to recast a classic in visionary ways. There are some things I would have done differently, but in saying that I feel like the old fan in the back of a Neil Young concert shouting out for “Ohio,” a song that was politically meaningful in the context of the shooting of students at Kent State University a long time ago. Some of my favourite passages did not get the graphic treatment I hoped for, but others far exceeded my expectations.

The full series of the illustrated manifesto will consist of four volumes, of which two were available when I started this review. Volume 3, *The Proletariat*, has recently been published. The entire series will also be published in French, German and Spanish. The text is abridged and rearranged thematically based on a reinterpretation by editor George Rigakos, though the passages that are included are in the original words. I fear this tends to fracture the *Manifesto* and make it even harder to understand as a whole, even if there are brilliant moments. Of course, I recognize that the graphic novel form requires strict limits on the word count, and that the *Communist Manifesto* in its original form is not well organized for new readers.

There is, however, a clear story line in the early sections of the original *Manifesto*, beginning with the centrality of class struggle in shaping social relations in class societies,

then tracing out the rise of the capitalist class (the bourgeoisie) and the social system they dominate, and subsequently showing how the development of an ever-expanding working class with radical potential is central to the dynamics of capitalism itself. “What the bourgeoisie produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers.”

This story line does get disrupted by the approach in these illustrated versions. I think this is a loss, though I am not sure it could be avoided given the parameters of the project. Readers of this illustrated version would also be advised to read the unabridged *Manifesto*, probably at the same time.

I hope these illustrated versions are widely circulated, and that they contribute to an increased use of the *Communist Manifesto*. There are suggestive readings in the *Manifesto* for turning the student struggle in Quebec into a social struggle, based on the potential solidarities arising from the way capitalism works. We should be creatively engaging with all the resources we can as we try to build a learning left grounded in radical anti-capitalism capable of gaining real social weight in this difficult moment.

## Books Reviewed

Anderson, Mark Cronlund and Carmen L. Robertson. 2011. *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

**Reviewed by Sue Ferguson**

Razack, Sherene; Malinda Smith and Sunera Thobani, eds. 2010. *States of Race: Critical Race Feminism for the 21st Century*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

**Reviewed by Anne O'Connell**

Chazan, May; Lisa Helps, Anna Stanley and Sonali Thakkar, eds. 2011. *Home and Native Land: Unsettling Multiculturalism in Canada*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

**Reviewed by Tania Das Gupta**

Landsberg, Michele. 2011. *Writing the Revolution*. Toronto: Second Story Press.

**Reviewed by Ester Reiter**

Mallea, Paula. 2011. *Fearmonger: Stephen Harper's Tough-on-Crime Agenda*. Toronto: Lorimer.

**Reviewed by Lisa Wright**

Bell, Colleen. 2011. *The Security of Freedom: Governing Canada in the Age of Counter-Terrorism*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Svendsen, Adam. 2010. *Intelligence Cooperation and the War on Terror*. London: Routledge.

**Reviewed by Kevin Walby and Alex Luscombe**

Barry-Shaw, Nikolas and Dru Oja Jay. 2012. *Paved with Good Intentions: Canada's Development NGOs from Idealism to imperialism*. Halifax: Fernwood.

**Reviewed by Evan Johnston**

Farber, Samuel. 2011. *Cuba Since the Revolution of 1959: A Critical Assessment*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

**Reviewed by Neil Burron**

Collins, John. 2011. *Global Palestine*. New York: Columbia University Press.

**Reviewed by Mary-Jo Nadeau**

Malleson, Tom and David Wachsmuth, eds. 2011. *Whose Streets? The Toronto G20 and the Challenges of Summit Protest*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

**Reviewed by Elise Thorburn**

Ross, Stephanie and Larry Savage, eds. 2012. *Rethinking the Politics of Labour in Canada*. Halifax: Fernwood.

**Reviewed by Julie Guard**

Sharzer, Greg. 2012. *No Local: Why Small-Scale Alternatives Won't Change The World*. Winchester: Zero Books.

**Reviewed by Charles Z. Levkoe**

Choudry, Aziz, Jill Hanley, and Eric Shragge, eds. 2012. *Organize! Building from the Local for Global Justice*. Oakland and Toronto: PM Press and Between the Lines.

**Reviewed by Ian Hussey**

McNally, David. 2011. *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism*. Leiden: Brill.

**Reviewed by Mark Neocleous**

Eagleton, Terry. 2011. *Why Marx was Right*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

**Reviewed by Charles Post**

Anderson, Mark Cronlund and Carmen L. Robertson. 2011. *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press. ISBN 978-0-88755-727-9. Paperback: 27.95 CAD. Pages: 362.

**Reviewed by Susan Ferguson**

**Wilfrid Laurier University, Brantford Campus**

When *Globe and Mail* columnist Margaret Wenthe rails against Indigenous peoples, casting them as depraved and over-entitled, and argues for the dismantling of Indian Affairs on the basis that “some cultures are too toxic to save” (273), it’s easy to dismiss her as a right-wing crank, doing the ideological work of Canada’s ruling class.

Whatever the merit of that position, it risks occluding the more systemic forces at play. As Anderson and Robertson illustrate in *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers*, Wente's columns are in fact an (admittedly stark) articulation of an entrenched, settler colonial ideology that has characterized coverage of Indigenous people in the Canadian press since Confederation. The authors detail the ways in which this "thriving colonial imaginary" (18) is articulated within specific historical contexts, making a convincing case for its enduring presence. In so doing, they challenge those who suggest that the modern North American press adopts a more progressive, less racist, approach than it did prior to World War II.

*Seeing Red* is the culmination of an extensive and intensive discursive analysis of Canadian newspapers. It examines local and national coverage of 12 discreet events, beginning with the 1869 sale of Rupert's Land and concluding with Saskatchewan's and Alberta's centennial celebrations in 2005. Chapters focus on key political moments, such as the introduction in 1969 of Trudeau's White Paper and the 1990 Native blockade at Oka, as well as some less obvious episodes, including the 1938 death of Grey Owl (and subsequent revelation of his English ancestry), and the Native-run Canadian Indian Princess contests in the 1980s. In each case, Anderson and Robertson review not only how Indigenous peoples are represented, but more significantly, how these representations are inserted into a hegemonic discourse of settler colonial nation-building, one that ultimately demands either their extinction or assimilation.

The authors establish early on what many others have already noted: newspapers portrayed Indigenous peoples alternately (and often simultaneously) as wild, bloodthirsty savages on the one hand, and compliant, dependent children on the other. More "positive" imaginings saw them as a people beyond history, noble warriors or Indian princesses. But *Seeing Red* quickly moves past mere documentation and lamentation of such racism. Its particular contribution is in situating those stereotypes within a further analysis of the press' prevailing discourse of settlement and nation-building, a discourse that assumes private property in land and asserts the values of "improvement" or cultivation, invariably associating these with whiteness. Anderson and Robertson argue that Indigenous peoples are thus not only stripped of their humanity and agency, but their dehumanization justifies and normalizes the original seizure of their lands, as well as their on-going cultural and legal exclusion from (white) Canadian society.

That this discourse not only dominated, but was virtually unchallenged, across Canada's early newspapers (divided as they were by explicit partisan allegiances) is evidence of the intractability of the settler colonial narrative at that time. More controversially, however, Anderson and Robertson insist little has changed since. Any improved representation in the modern era (of the sort R. Scott Sheffield documents in *The Red Man's on the Warpath* [UBC Press, 2004] during World War II, for example), they suggest, is at best temporary. Despite today's prevailing liberal multiculturalism

ethos, contemporary coverage of Indigenous peoples bears irrefutable traces of a settler colonial mentality. Whereas early pundits predicted their assimilation or extinction, today they signal a different kind of doom: sympathetic stories about unhealthy conditions on reservations cast their communities as hopelessly dependent and moribund. In other news stories celebrating Native culture, Indigenous people appear as inhabiting a space beyond history. And of course, coverage of the Oka or Banded Elbow (1974) standoffs recuperate the well worn savage motif. As in the past, Anderson and Robertson argue, these modern imagined Natives are not “Canadian,” and serve as a powerful affirmation of the desirability and inevitability of (white) Canadian stewardship of the land and its peoples.

*Seeing Red* offers a relatively monolithic account of Canadian newspapers, insisting that, regardless of era, party affiliation, or even ownership models, the press peddles a hegemonic racist ideology. While the evidence clearly supports such a conclusion in general, the authors don't always adequately explore the more subtle tensions in the news accounts. Analyzing the letters to the editor sections in two newspapers during the Oka crisis, Anderson and Robertson identify the emergence of “a sustained counter-narrative” (220): a handful of letters defended the 1990 blockade, and some put forward an explicit anti-colonialist rationale. Yet they dismiss these as broadly inconsequential either because they were penned by an Indigenous person or motivated by anti-Quebec sentiment. Similarly, they dismiss a 1938 *Winnipeg Free Press* editorial describing Grey Owl as an Indian with something to teach Whites, noting that it “voiced an opinion that surely confounded Canada's colonial sense of order” (126). This favourable comparison of Grey Owl to the White man does of course, as the authors argue, depend upon a particular imaginary of a constructed, assimilate-able Native. But could it not also be an attempt to humanize the Native? Otherwise, what's there to confound Canada's colonial sense of order? Or what should one make of a lone 1971 *Toronto Star* editorial criticizing the paternalism of Trudeau's White Paper, and suggesting that Indigenous peoples were understandably angered and moved to protest? The authors duly note it, but don't attempt to make sense of it, or a sprinkling of other passages which are open to contradictory interpretations. True, such counter-narratives are vastly outnumbered by stories framed by the settler colonial narrative. But greater reflection on how and why they appear at all would offer readers a more satisfying understanding of the ideological role and potential of newspaper coverage in general, and deflect potential criticism aimed at the authors' political message.

Nonetheless, *Seeing Red* mounts an important argument about the persistence of a settler colonialist framework through time. And while such a thesis invites repetition (as similar examples of dehumanizing portrayals of Indigenous peoples and Euro-centric assumptions and values are documented in each distinct period), the authors cut against the tedium of their social science by situating their findings in an engaging historical

narrative. In so doing, they add an invaluable critical perspective to the “Indian problem” in the news.

Razack, Sherene; Malinda Smith and Sunera Thobani, eds. 2010. *States of Race: Critical Race Feminism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Toronto: Between the Lines. ISBN 978-1-897071-59-5. Paperback: 29.95 CAD. Pages: 228.

**Reviewed by Anne O’Connell**  
**York University**

Researchers and Academics of Colour for Equality/Equity (RACE) is a national network of Indigenous faculty and faculty of colour committed to anti-colonial and anti-racist feminist research and activism. This edited collection is drawn from scholars associated with this network and coincided with the aims of their tenth anniversary conference – “to draw attention to the ‘wilfull forgetting’ in the majority of Canadian and international studies scholarship, of racial thinking, race-making and racial imaginaries, which have long served the imperial and colonial designs of empires and states alike” (xvi).

*States of Race* examines the complications, nuances and political currency of critical race feminism. The editors’ introduction and the eight chapters argue that two dominant logics drive the focus of critical race feminism – neoliberalism’s attachment to an imagined individualism devoid of a racial, ethnic or gendered self and the collective imaginaries which “make clear that ‘outsider groups’ and the ‘barbarians’ are always shaped by racial and gendered markers” (xvii). This apparent contradiction is enormously productive in shaping the governance of individual freedom for some and the “social death” (90) of others.

Attending to this dual logic makes each chapter a compelling read and speaks to the ways in which justice in Canada (for some) is perpetually deferred. Another main strength of this collection is the urgent and intricate theorization of race, the role of gender, feminism and theories of whiteness. How does feminism and gender rights further racial supremacy? How does the intersection of gender and whiteness embolden racial hierarchies? What is accomplished when feminism is positioned as contrary to Indigenous nationalism? These questions tease out the theoretical intricacies of critical race theory, feminism and whiteness and their application to pressing political issues such as racism and equity policies in universities, the veiled Other, security delayed individuals, Indigenous feminism, on-going colonization, the War on Terror, capitalist globalism and forms of resistance.

The collection begins with a reflective piece by Patricia Monture, the renowned Mohawk lawyer, scholar and activist, who passed away in 2010. Here, she offers powerful insights into how scholars of colour can survive a hostile and unchanging academic world while noting survival is not a very lofty goal. As one of the founders of RACE, her concern builds on a previous statement that “equality is not a high standard in my way of thinking” (3). Her treatise on racial oppression in universities is followed by Malinda Smith’s chapter on how equity policies in academia have translated into equity policies for white women only. The “motivated ignorance” and “hegemonic whiteness” of academic feminism means justice deferred for faculty of colour and Indigenous scholars (42, 49). Similar themes are developed in Gada Mahrouse’s chapter on “racial liberalism” in social justice movements, such as international solidarity projects and socially responsible tourism. Instead of examining the politics and histories of particular regions, western subjects perform a type of temporary solidarity that leaves their implication in colonial and imperial designs unquestioned. Mahrouse argues that privileged students in these programs are further empowered and feelings of “innocence, redemption and benevolence” are secured (181). The theme of “justice deferred” is picked up again in Sherene Razack’s examination of security delayed individuals (refugees granted asylum but not full citizenship on the grounds they are deemed security risks) pre-9/11. Razack details how individuals are left for years without full legal rights on the speculative grounds they *may* engage in terrorism. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben, Razack describes the security delay as a camp, where bureaucratic routines mask racial violence and make individual wrongdoing in institutions impossible to prove. Security delayed individuals have little recourse to information, process, and appeals - an arrangement that will only intensify with the passage of Bill C-31 in 2012, amending Canada’s refugee laws.

If we are witnessing a magnification of the colour line as the introduction suggests, the following three chapters illustrate its troubling intersection with gender, whiteness and varieties of feminism. Yasmin Jiwani explores the racial expression of gender in the representations of Muslim women and the hijab. Depictions of mistreated Muslim women “over there” service the war in Afghanistan, while assimilated women “over here” attempt to “diffuse...the threat of race” (74). She argues, like Thobani, that patriarchy and violence are portrayed as uniquely Islamic, while western gender inequality is uniquely absented. While many scholars lament the declining currency of feminism, Sunera Thobani details its steady rise after 9/11. Many white women actively filled the ranks of journalists, filmmakers, politicians and international development workers who would document gender oppression in Afghanistan. Thobani exposes how feminists depicted the US and Israel as the target of Muslims, legitimizing the invasion of Afghanistan and by extension making any critique of Israel as a new form of anti-Semitism. Judith Butler’s comments about the shared suffering and vulnerability in the world after 9/11 are read by Thobani as yet another example of centering the western subject as the only truly human subject. Feminists must attend to the racial inequities and



imperialist relations within the global economy and consider the political demands of Islamist movements before advocating simplistic calls for gender emancipation. Another layer of complexity to the possibilities and tensions between Indigenous feminism and Indigenous nationalist discourses is explored by Isabel Altamirano-Jimenez. She critiques the discourse of Indigeneity; a political category that paradoxically promotes and limits autonomy and she explores the tensions between gender struggles within Indigenous communities and the struggles for decolonization. Altamirano-Jimenez describes Indigenous women as agents “challenging male-only Indigenous leaderships, gender discrimination, and state intervention that reinforce women’s exclusion. Indigenous women are also defending territorial sovereignty, autonomy, human rights, control over natural resources, health and body, and traditionalism” (120).

A chapter that stands apart from the others in this volume is an exploration of the shifting expressions of race and whiteness in light of a globalized political economy. Sedef Arat-Koç asks if the same racial dynamics apply as the white working class suffers in a faltering economy while non-whites become part of a transnational bourgeoisie? Leaving gender aside in this chapter, Arat-Koç tracks how the racially coded underclass (including whites), the precarious racial status of Eastern Europeans, and non-white elites in a transnational economy reveal some cracks in the colour line, yet one that is still built on the notion of white supremacy as the norm. While openings or cracks in white dominance appear, Arat-Koç argues that new forms of racism and imperialism take hold where racialized people are deemed as disposable and anti-immigrant and anti-refugee laws surface. Unlike the rest of the collection, this work offers a deeper focus on material inequities and their shifting attachments to who is deemed “white.”

After reading through these chapters I am struck by each scholar’s commitment to justice and the careful theorizing required when attending to multiple axes of oppression. In some cases I would have preferred more substantive accounts or evidence to back up claims, and I wondered how insights from queer theory might produce a less flattened articulation of gender. At times neoliberalism (radical individualism) is portrayed in direct opposition to an innocent and noble welfare state, a distinction that does little to ensure a critique of both. Mostly, however, I am reminded of the many rewards of maintaining and reproducing a scholarship of dominance and how easily we are enticed into a wilful forgetting of racial thinking and whiteness in the formation of neoliberal and imperial projects. This may come in many forms, such as the rejection of race in favour of class politics, the addition of “race” while keeping our analysis in place, the advocacy for racial justice while keeping categories of race static, whiteness studies scholarship that over applauds white scholars or is diluted of any emancipatory or disruptive potential, or claims in university departments that there is too much focus on race. We easily occlude and collude in our respective disciplines; this volume goes a long way in countering and de-stabilizing majority scholarship.

Chazan, May; Lisa Helps, Anna Stanley and Sonali Thakkar, eds. 2011. *Home and Native Land: Unsettling Multiculturalism in Canada*. Toronto: Between the Lines. ISBN 978-1-897071-61-8. Paperback: 29.95 CAD. Pages: 243.

**Reviewed by Tania Das Gupta**  
**York University**

This anthology of 11 chapters originates from a 2007 Conference, “From Multicultural Rhetoric to Anti-Racist Action,” held at the University of Toronto. Although contextualized in the post-9-11 attacks, the discussion of multiculturalism is not restricted to that event. The authors contest the discourse of multiculturalism as a failed or dying project.

Their starting point is that state multiculturalism has become “discursively saturated,” or in other words, has seeped into every aspect of political life, including immigration, labour, Aboriginal land claims and poverty. They succeed in unsettling the sedimented policy. This objective is in line with critical scholarship around multiculturalism, pointing to its utility in managing racialized immigrants and maintaining colonialism.

“Unsettling” in the title carries a clever double meaning pointing to the fundamental link between multiculturalism policy and colonial settlement. The exploration of this link is a strength. There are 4 chapters that explicitly address this aspect, those authored by Glen S. Coulthard, Brian Egan, Emilie Cameron and Laurie K. Bertram, while other chapters, such as Nandita Sharma’s, mention it in the context of related subjects such as migration and Canadian nationalism.

Admittedly, the chapters do not provide a “thoroughgoing critique or analysis of Canadian multiculturalism policy” per se. Rather, they show the policy’s influence in the state’s management of Aboriginal land claims discussions, the regulation of migration and immigration policies, concomitant labour policies and the racialization of poverty. Chapters are organized under 4 parts, namely Unsettling Multiculturalism, Labours, Lands and Bodies. A few chapters are mentioned below to give readers a flavour of the interdisciplinary, theoretically and methodologically diverse nature of the volume.

In Part 1 (Unsettling Multiculturalism), Rinaldo Walcott’s chapter continues a tradition of literary critique by focusing on examples of contemporary literature on multiculturalism, such as the works of Janice Stein, Cecil Foster, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and film maker, David Cronenberg. He sees their varied discourses as indicative of the limits of

European modernity, liberal democracies originating in it, and white anxieties in the post-9-11 period and he challenges us “to engage critically with new imaginative worlds...or to imagine worlds other than those we have experienced” (26).

Glen S. Coulthard powerfully demonstrates how Charles Taylor’s “politics of recognition” so fundamental in multiculturalism has seeped into demands for Aboriginal sovereignty. Referring to Aboriginal declarations and statements to this effect, he utilizes Frantz Fanon’s discussion of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic and the need for revolutionary change. He asserts that demands for colonial state recognition develops a dependence on the colonial master for one’s own identity and ultimately does not lead to freedom and liberation of the colonized. He proposes the alternative of self-affirmation and anti-colonial empowerment.

Grace-Edward Galabuzi argues that multiculturalism and the Canadian state are indeed in crisis as white anxieties become reflected in demands against “reasonable accommodations” for religious and cultural minorities, increasing racial profiling due to the “war on terror” and the racialization of poverty. However, he argues that this crisis has opened up the space for counter-hegemonic intervention by progressive forces organizing around the deepening of poverty and the violation of human rights.

In Part 2 (Labours), Nandita Sharma and Margaret Walton-Roberts are thought provoking, throwing new light on the discourse of multiculturalism. Sharma argues that Canadian multiculturalism policy has been influenced by the “we are all immigrants” discourse prevalent in the United States which has served to deny the existence of racism and to develop a divided consciousness. First, it has obfuscated the hierarchical power relations between colonizing immigrants and those who came as a result of forced migration. In this process, racism has been swept under the rug. Secondly, it has developed struggles for rights that is based on citizenship, thus externalizing both migrant workers as well as Aboriginal Peoples. Thirdly, the de-racialized discourse in multiculturalism has even seeped into some claims for Indigenous sovereignty that have bracketed all non-Natives as immigrants and thus colonizers.

Walton-Roberts questions the limited notion of “participation” within national boundaries as an indication of one’s citizenship. Drawing on her research on Sikh Punjabi immigrants in Canada, she argues for an “unbounded” approach to participatory citizenship as well as of multiculturalism through the assertion of rights in the transnational space. This she argues is particularly justified within the context of transnational engagements under globalized economies.

In Part 3 (Lands), Brian Egan and Emilie Cameron discuss how multiculturalism discourse has served to maintain colonial relations in Canada. Cameron suggests that “liberal multicultural understandings of difference, inclusion, and citizenship have come to inform responses to the specific claims of Indigenous Peoples” (143). Furthermore, Indigenous Peoples are reduced to haunting figures from the past in “postcolonial ghost stories.” Referring to the *Recognition and Reconciliation Act* in British Columbia and its

aftermath, Egan argues similarly that projects of recognition and reconciliation do not deal with colonialism and Aboriginal land rights.

In Part 4 (Bodies), Laurie K. Bertram uses historical and archival research to describe the role of migrant European settlers in colonial land encroachment and settlement in North-Western Canada and the displacement, surveillance and deaths of Aboriginal Nations in the process. Migrant narratives have represented Aboriginal presence as racially threatening while depicting themselves as traumatized and in need of protection.

Uzma Shakir's chapter on the Colour of Poverty Campaign is written from the perspective of a front-line community activist. She writes very personally and tongue in cheek about her position as a "native informant" due to her colour and her linguistic skills. She writes about the limitation of community "service" and the need to engage at a more activist level. She makes an appeal for academic support of community campaigns.

Overall, I found this book to be very informative, current and intellectually creative in understanding state multiculturalism and its utility for colonialism and capitalism. I would recommend its use both in graduate and advanced undergraduate classes. The introduction is also an excellent synthesis of all these issues.

Landsberg, Michelle. 2011. *Writing the Revolution*. Toronto: Second Story Press. ISBN 978-1-897187-99-9. Paperback: 24.95 CAD. Pages: 335.

**Reviewed by Ester Reiter**  
**York University**

Michelle Landsberg's book, part of the Feminist History Society series documenting the women's movement in Canada, is a selection of articles from the more than 30,000 she wrote between 1978 and 2003. Many of us were avid readers of Landsberg's columns written for the *Toronto Star*. The articles convey her passion for justice on many fronts – gender discrimination, class issues, racism, international and peace issues. One can't help but be impressed by her journalist's skill in making issues women activists cared about clearly articulated and accessible to a wider public. Because they reflect her response to issues when they were "news," the reader also has a wonderful entrée into the immediacy of her heartfelt response to injustices and sometimes the joy of challenges and victories. Landsberg's columns went beyond writing about issues – she herself was a force to be reckoned with and quite influential in the push for social and legal change.

Landsberg, born in 1939, grew up in a Toronto where anti-Semitism and discrimination were still widespread. As a Jew, and as a woman, she proudly wore her difference. Landsberg recalls an incident from shortly after her husband Stephen Lewis was first elected to the Ontario legislature in 1963 (30). Someone looked up, became alarmed, and raised concerns about this beatnik seated among the audience in the legislature. Stephen, on a point of order responded, “that’s no beatnik, that’s my wife!” Stephen was 26, his wife Michelle 23 years old. Some may recall the 1960s slogan about not trusting anyone over 30.

So what did Michelle Landsberg write about? The book is arranged by theme rather than chronologically with current commentaries providing contextual details, sources and asides. There is no one voice and one view common to all who consider themselves feminists and so occasionally this reader would take issue with some of her positions, but these exceptions are few.

She begins the book with the 1978 strike of the Fleck workers, women who demanded union recognition, decent wages and an end to the sexual harassment they endured. Supported by a women’s movement and a labour movement beginning to take women’s issues seriously, these “girls” as they referred to themselves were tough and brave in the face of unheard of intimidation. Using her interviews with the women themselves, she conveys their spirit and reminds us that actions speak louder than labels or self identification as feminists.

The columns cover more issues than can be described in a short review – women’s health and safety, abortion, rape, equal pay, pornography and more. Landsberg approaches issues with sensitivity – in her outrage over the legalization of lap dancing, she is careful to avoid moralistic judgements about the women doing this work. She points out how the move from elaborate strip shows to lap dancing has deskilled the work and resulted in poorly paid, exploitative work in what she sees as legal support for male sexual entitlement. Violence against women and the men’s rights movement painting men as the victims really get her going. Her response to violence against children is equally indignant and powerful. She also makes clear that racism goes well beyond intent or mean actions, but requires some understanding of how white privilege actually operates. It is, and remains, a structural problem (98).

She tells us about events in Burundi, in Guatemala, in Algeria. She denounces fundamentalist thinking that limits women wherever it occurs, amongst the Taliban in Afghanistan and amongst the Jewish orthodox who wield an inordinate amount of power in Israel. She doesn’t preach on what others should do, but rather, as in the case of Afghanistan, looks to Afghani women to articulate their response. Landsberg is a peacenik. War is never the answer and one has also to look to the role that economic policies such as Structural Adjustment Programs have played in making the lives of the most vulnerable worse and contributing to the rise of religious fundamentalism. She is quite eloquent:

Structural adjustment programs shut down schools and clinics, drove up the child and maternal mortality rates, and condemned entire generations to illiteracy. The reward for religious affiliation began to look tempting as Muslim religious groups offered free schools and clinics...Hopeless economic misery doesn't just happen (242).

Landsberg was in fine form when supporting the position of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and the Advisory Council on the Status of Women in the constitutional conferences making the case for a Charter of Rights which would recognize women, Indigenous women in particular, while keeping Quebec in Canada. The failed Meech Lake deal of 1987 was followed by debates around the Charlottetown Accord when Mulroney was Prime Minister. One article, published in 1992 is entitled "Son of Meech Senate Deal Leaves Women Out in the Cold." Landsberg explains:

Native men were promised the right to self government and the right to opt out of the Charter of Rights. Native women got nothing despite the stark evidence of massive inequality...Provinces got the right to opt out of any new national social programs. Can you think of any possible new social program other than child care? No, neither can I. The new deal then is the final nail in the coffin of a desperately needed national child care plan (280-281).

An earlier article which follows in the anthology (the organization is not chronological) talks about the struggle to have women's equality included in the Charter. It was a coup that occurred after much lobbying and engineered by women members of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Women. Landsberg suggests that "Never before have so few women accomplished so much on behalf of so many" (285). Furthermore, "This whole astounding reversal that had the premiers backpedalling so fast that they nearly fell off their tricycles was engineered by a mere handful of women who took unpaid time off their jobs to do it" (287).

Lines like this had me falling off my chair laughing. In short, this book is a wonderful documentation of the struggles of that period that need to be remembered. It is a book that can be picked up and read in sections. Her writing is delightful, and unfortunately, we wish more of this was history.

Mallea, Paula. 2011. *Fearmonger: Stephen Harper's Tough-on-Crime Agenda*. Toronto: Lorimer. ISBN 978-1-55277-898-2. Paperback: 24.95 CAD. Pages: 229.

**Reviewed by Lisa Wright**  
**Carleton University**

In *Fearmonger*, Paula Mallea seeks to confront the ideologically driven tough-on-crime policies of the Conservative government. Mallea argues that the law reforms ushered in through legislative initiatives are deeply problematic and contradictory to expert findings on how to create safe communities. Fiscal and human costs, as well as high rates of recidivism and the lack of a deterrent effect, are used by Mallea to demonstrate the failure of relying on incarceration as a means of producing safe communities.

Mallea achieves two goals in *Fearmonger*. First is an assessment of the effectiveness of the Conservative government's tough-on-crime approach to crime control, where impact is evaluated in human and fiscal costs. Mallea uses the evidence from her analysis of the costs of the tough-on-crime agenda to create the foundation of her second goal, to contribute to the public debate on how to respond to crime.

In order to achieve these goals, Mallea provides a comprehensive and accessible explanation of many of the Conservative government's crime bills and draws on parliamentary hearings, news articles and academic literature as supportive evidence. The explanations provided by Mallea make the inherent problems (for example a reliance upon incarceration) with these bills obvious by washing away the propaganda the Conservatives have manufactured to justify their legislative changes. The tough-on-crime agenda, according to Mallea, is inherently ineffective.

Harper and the Conservative government, however, as Mallea points out, are not interested in effective responses to crime. She writes, "the Conservative government, in an effort to be seen 'doing something' about crime, prefers a solution based upon a simple network of prisons rather than a more complex network of social services" (11). Mallea explains how the tough-on-crime propaganda accompanying legislative and policy changes works to mislead the public into thinking they are actually doing something about crime. As well as not actually doing anything about crime, Mallea argues that these crime bills are also not encouraging public debate about crime. Mallea believes that in Canada there is not currently an informed public debate about how to respond to crime and argues that such a debate is necessary if we seek to create safe communities.

As a means of moving forward from ineffective tough-on-crime policies, different alternatives to incarceration currently in use in Canada and internationally are continually promoted as evidence of a better way. "There are myriad ways of dealing with

most offenders that do not require imprisonment, and many more ways of preventing crime in the first place” (152). Preventive programs are promoted throughout *Fearmonger* as a means of confronting the reactive legislative changes proposed by the Conservative government. Expert and community sources (such as the Church Council on Justice and Corrections) are used to support the viability of the prevention programs that are recommended.

A key concern with *Fearmonger*, and Mallea’s examples, is that deeply problematic alternative programs are promoted as useful alternatives to incarceration. While Mallea provides a lot of alternatives to incarceration and exposes many holes in the Conservatives crime policies, she does not critically engage with the alternatives provided. A critical engagement with various programs that respond to crime is a necessary part of a public debate on how to produce safe communities. One program that is brought up several times in the book is drug treatment court. The positioning of drug treatment courts as an alternative to incarceration is problematic in and of itself as most participants of drug treatment courts are sentenced to time in prison during the program as punishment (Moore 2007). Drug treatment court programs have also been found by social science researchers to wreak havoc on the lives of their participants in many different ways, for example see Moore, Freeman and Krawczyk (2011) for an analysis of the impact of spatial restrictions placed on drug treatment court participants.

Also missing from *Fearmonger* is a discussion about the goal of these crime bills, if not to effectively respond to crime, as she is silent on possible explanations. Mallea outlines expected populations which will be affected by these legislative changes (this includes youth, the mentally ill, Aboriginal peoples as well as others) without any discussion of why the Conservatives would target these populations. Without a discussion of the reasoning behind these legislative changes, *Fearmonger* misses the connection between these legislative changes and the Conservative government’s anti-expert knowledge stance. Mallea demonstrates, in many different ways, the lack of consideration by the Conservative government for expert research on how to respond to crime but she does not use it to provide a reason for the Conservative position. A discussion of the anti-expert knowledge stance would have provided a useful layer of analysis for those of us seeking to make sense of our government’s actions that go beyond questions of effectiveness.

A final criticism of *Fearmonger*, concerns Mallea’s use of the Conservative strategy of creating panic about crime to discuss responses to crime. Mallea uses fearmongering tactics to scare the reader, for example the use of rare cases as examples makes these cases seem like the norm. “Nothing in the proposed laws would have helped in stopping a Clifford Olson or Willie Pickton before they started to commit their appalling crimes” (65). If the goal is to incite public debate, however, this tactic should be reconsidered, as scare tactics are not enabling of public debate.



Readers interested in questions of effectiveness will find *Fearmonger* a useful resource, as will those looking for an accessible explanation of the Conservative crime bills. Readers who are well versed in criminal justice matters, however, will already know that the Conservative crime bills will not reach their stated goal of producing communities safe from crime, but can make use of the data being set out.

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**Reviewed by Kevin Walby and Alex Luscombe**  
**University of Victoria**

Security and intelligence agencies have expanded rapidly since September 11, 2001. Given the consequences for social justice in Canada and the rest of the world, studying this expanding security and intelligence community has never been so important. Two significant contributions in this area are *The Freedom of Security* and *Intelligence Cooperation and the War on Terror*.

*The Freedom of Security* explores how security and freedom have become entwined in Canada since September 11, 2001. Specifically, Bell investigates the practices of Canadian government agencies like the Canada Border Services Agency and Department of National Defence, with the rationale of drawing attention to Canadian federal government agencies as key actors in the War on Terror (2). The purpose of the book is not to demonstrate that there has been a reduction in rights since the events of

September 11, 2001, but rather to show how security and freedom have become interwoven. As Bell puts it, the “main problem explored is how logics and practices of security are embedded within and harness politics of freedom” (7). Freedom is not simply the antidote to security but a means through which security is mobilized, legitimated and reconstituted.

For conceptual guidance, Bell draws from governmentality studies. The governmentality literature provides a useful orientation for tracing how discourses of security and freedom are invoked and tethered to governance practices. Bell is thus critical of the idea of security. *The Freedom of Security* in no way can be construed as calling for more security (see pg. 14) as in the human security literature. Nor is Bell arguing for a reconfiguration of Canada’s security apparatus. Instead, Bell traces how certain claims about threat, terrorism and risk result in the creation of security problems. To trace these claims, Bell examines publicly available government documents, speeches, and the results of interviews with policy specialists.

In the first chapter, Bell notes that a precautionary logic has moved to the centre of national security policy in Canada during the last decade. Increasing the demand for “risk management,” this precautionary logic manifests itself in several ways. First, there is more funding for longstanding security agencies. Second, there has been the creation of new security and intelligence agencies. Third, there has been the emergence of a broader security network at the federal level, characterized by increased surveillance and information sharing. Sticking with her main argument, Bell’s claim here is not simply that this padding of the security apparatus has resulted in decreased liberal rights. Instead, she draws our attention to initiatives that now try to enlist citizens in security projects and to keep watch for risk under the rubric of responsibility. In this sense, these initiatives are about fostering a participatory security apparatus, or at least one that tries to stimulate “groups within the population to enlist in the management of security risks” (53). This focus on participatory security is one way that Bell attempts to demonstrate the interconnectedness of security and freedom in contemporary government discourse, though more empirical details here would have been useful.

Next, Bell argues that liberal freedom and national security are mutually reinforcing in the context of government practices and court rulings. Here Bell focuses on the issue of national security certificates in Canada. Canada’s security certificate program allows for people to be detained on secret evidence, without recourse to regular criminal trial proceedings. Security certificates have existed in Canada for decades but were only used after September 11, 2001, when five men of Arab and South Asian descent were indefinitely detained at the Kingston Immigration Holding Centre. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled security certificates to be in violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in February 2007, but the federal government was given a year to reform the program. The legal modification of the security certificate program, Bell argues, shows how fluid the idea of freedom can be, insofar as national security practices and

laws such as the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* that are declared unconstitutional can be revived under the aegis of the liberal notion of rights. When such exceptional practices are normalized, freedom is construed as state protection (85) and resistance to national security is likened to terrorism.

Next, Bell examines how the relationship between security and development in Afghanistan is framed in terms of security and freedom. Canada is a participant in the armed occupation, simultaneously employing other agencies on the ground to develop and therefore westernize local infrastructure and trade. This is what Bell calls the liberal way of war, which tethers the idea of humanitarianism and human rights to security, state violence and occupation. An instance of what Bell calls “humanitarian securitization,” the liberal way of war is about withholding freedom from the subject population until they until they have been “developed” in accordance with the desires of the West. The final chapter explores what Bell calls the “simultaneous denial and defence of freedom” (146). Canada has been implicated in torture during the last decade while at the same time proclaiming to spread freedom. Citizenship is the modality of this simultaneous denial and defence. For instance, Canadian security officials facilitated the torture of Abdullah Almalki in Syria, not through rendition but through sharing intelligence that enabled Syrian officials to detain Almalki when he travelled there to visit family. The argument here is that citizenship is a technology that enables this tethering of security and freedom, the sharing of intelligence, and also the coordination of security practices between states. Again, some readers may be searching for more empirical details to support the argument.

*Intelligence Cooperation and the War on Terror* is also about the coordination of security practices between states, but adopts a very different political and normative posture. Svendsen explores the connections between UK and US security intelligence agencies. He argues that intelligence sharing between the UK and the US is the norm rather than the exception, although there are different styles of producing and acting on security intelligence in the respective countries. The relationship between UK and US security intelligence agencies stems back to strategic alliances forged during World War II, although Svendsen focuses primarily on September 11, 2001 to the present. An idea that Svendsen raises is that some US security intelligence agencies have better relationships with UK agencies than some of their own domestic counterparts, indicative of what Svendsen calls the “globalization of intelligence.” However, one of the main findings in this book is that “the relationship does not always flow smoothly” (7) insofar as the different styles of producing and acting on security intelligence in the different countries are at odds. For example, while the UK has traditionally preferred a “softer” approach to intelligence work, characterized by passive monitoring and reactive intervention, the US has increasingly adopted an aggressive approach characterized by pre-emption and disruption. This is what Svendsen refers to as a “wait and see” versus a “see and strike” method of counter-terrorism.

Svendsen's book is based on analysis of newspaper reports, government documents, and interviews with intelligence officers in the UK and USA. First, Svendsen reviews existing materials on UK-US signals intelligence, human intelligence, and open source intelligence. And as Svendsen points out, "the vast majority of UK-US intelligence information comes from open source intelligence" (19), which might be an interesting finding for those who do not know much about how security intelligence works. Svendsen raises further questions about how a kind of "groupthink" can emerge in intelligence circles that become incestuous with information sharing. This phenomenon may have been accelerated by the creation of the US Department of Homeland Security in 2002 and UK Serious Organized Crime Agency in 2004, having further enhanced information sharing between the two countries. There are also domestic factors that influence intelligence work. For instance, Svendsen notes that in the USA there has been a drift away from civilian agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency toward the Pentagon and military agencies (32).

Svendsen offers two major case studies. The first regards counter-terrorism efforts in the UK and the USA. As noted in the book, "bilateral UK-US intelligence liaison" for counter-terrorism efforts has a long history that predates September 11 2001. Svendsen argues that the British had a great deal of experience applying counter-terrorism security intelligence to the Irish Republican Army, but US intelligence agencies failed to take advice from the UK about tactics. Interestingly, in a "series of high-level meetings" between US and UK intelligence officials in 2002, the US considered remodelling the FBI based on its UK counterpart, MI5. This reform was never made, however, with US officials allegedly concluding that no such changes would be made until "another 'spectacular' attack on US soil, akin to 9/11" (56). The more aggressive US style of using torture, extraordinary renditions, and secret prisons continued to take precedent, despite being "far from helpful" (96).

The second case study focuses on UK-US intelligence relations regarding weapons of mass destruction and nuclear proliferation. Svendsen details the UK and US intelligence liaison and joint operations that formed as it regards weapons of mass destruction, which facilitated the invasion of Iraq based on false intelligence. "Intelligence resources in both the United Kingdom and United States were becoming overburdened" (126) and subsequent intelligence failures became politically hijacked to legitimize the attack on Iraq in lieu of credible information. Once again, the US style of "see and strike" led to crises of legitimacy, and Svendsen hints that the "wait and see" approach of UK security intelligence might have provided more credible intelligence.

This focus on "credible intelligence" evinces a significant difference between Bell and Svendsen. Bell critiques the ideas of risk and security, while Svendsen simply describes issues related to security and intelligence in the last decade. Without a critical standpoint or conceptual stance, Svendsen's text glosses over the social justice elements of security and intelligence, leaving readers to draw their own connections and conclusions.

Svendsen is careful to hide his normative position that security intelligence regarding weapons of mass destruction and counter-terrorism efforts in the UK and USA should be enhanced. This pro-intelligence position puts Svendsen again at odds with Bell, who is explicitly anti-security in her normative and political posture. At the same time, neither Bell nor Svendsen chronicle the massive demonstrations against issues related to security and intelligence in the last decade, an addition that would have greatly enhanced their accounts.

We also note some conceptual as well as methodological issues in both texts. First, both books are vague when it comes to the notion of risk management. Neither really defines this term or practice, which leaves readers guessing at the meaning. Second, both are a bit murky on what counter-terrorism actually entails. Svendsen does differentiate between counter-terrorism and anti-terrorism and ties this to different styles of security intelligence in the UK and the USA, but more conceptual framing would have been useful. Third, both authors ignore key works in their areas. For instance, Bell ignores the article on security certificates by Mike Larsen and Justin Piché (2009), which covers many of the same arguments and substantiates them with data. Meanwhile, Svendsen ignores the conceptual framework provided in the writings of Peter Gill, which would have enhanced what is a predominantly descriptive account. Fifth, both authors base their accounts on newspaper material, publicly accessible reports, and interviews. These books would have benefited from incorporating data based on access to information requests. Access to information requests allow researchers to get at data that is not otherwise publically accessible, such as the internal policies and threat assessments of security intelligence agencies. When scholars simply draw from newspaper material and publically accessible reports, they run the risk of merely reproducing the details provided in officially sanctioned government discourse rather than getting at what is actually written down within these agencies as it regards organizing governance practices. Empirical details from this register of insiders' texts would have enhanced the credibility of both authors' claims.

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Barry-Shaw, Nikolas and Dru Oja Jay. 2012. *Paved with Good Intentions: Canada's Development NGOs from Idealism to Imperialism*. Halifax: Fernwood. ISBN 978-1-55266-399-8. Paperback: 24.95 CAD. Pages: 320.

**Reviewed by Evan Johnston**  
**McMaster University**

There are few institutions that remain as idealized and venerated in the public sphere as development NGOs. For many Canadians, the perceived role that NGOs play overseas is ranked up there with the long-cherished myth of Canadian peacekeeping as the most defining features of Canada's benevolent foreign policy. While years of diligent ideological struggle on the part of the Canadian Left may have made the myth of Canadian peacekeeping harder to sell, the myth of benevolent development NGOs remains firmly intact.

Nikolas Barry-Shaw and Dru Oja Jay's book *Paved with Good Intentions: Canada's Development NGOs from Idealism to Imperialism* seeks to dispel this powerful myth, arguing that Canadian NGOs have been partners in the implementation and enforcement of the most destructive neoliberal policies in the Global South. "Contrary to their image as free-floating atoms of altruism," they write, "NGOs are actually tightly intertwined with the state" (2) and have "become increasingly integrated into the foreign policy apparatus" (6).

This has not always been the case, with NGOs understood to be only marginal actors in the development world up until the 1980s. However, after what the authors call the "NGO boom" of the 1980s – driven by the needs of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank – NGOs became crucial political actors in the project of neoliberalism. As Barry-Shaw and Jay put it, "NGOs helped secure the continued implementation of 'market reforms' by diverting the energies of the poor away from political protest and into ways of coping with deepened poverty that did not challenge its root causes" (17). That is, NGOs played a key role in pacifying and deflating protest movements in the Global South, serving in many instances to soften the blow of harsh policies of privatization that would otherwise provoke fierce resistance. Development NGOs function – to paraphrase the title of Chapter 2 – as a "spoonful of sugar" to help the neoliberal medicine go down, and in Chapter 6 the authors show how this is particularly true in the case of Haiti after the flood of 2004.

Development NGOs have been able to obfuscate their role as a "soft power" in imperial conquest by positioning themselves as autonomous from any particular state or corporation, which Barry-Shaw and Jay refer to as their "legitimizing myth" (55). One of the most valuable features of this book is the great lengths the authors go to emphasize the extent to which NGOs are dependent upon, and would collapse very quickly without,

large amounts of state funding every year. For example, the authors show that Canada World Youth depends on the Canadian government for 81.1 per cent of their yearly budget (as of 2011), with Oxfam Canada sitting at 44.5 per cent (as of 2010). Social justice and anti-imperialist activists in Canada owe Barry-Shaw and Jay a great deal of thanks for making this data clear and accessible, as the mythology of NGO altruism is sustained in large part by the belief that NGOs are driven by moral, rather than economic, considerations.

In many ways, Barry-Shaw and Jay's book explores issues similar to those discussed in INCITE!'s important 2007 anthology *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* (South End Press), where the editors introduce the concept of the "non-profit industrial complex." *Paved with Good Intentions* is a much-needed intervention into the study of Canada's own non-profit industrial complex, owing largely to the book's emphasis on the politics of NGO finances. As Barry-Shaw and Jay themselves point out, "the consequences of NGOs' dependence on government funding are rarely discussed...Most studies of development NGOs dismiss the issue as irrelevant to understanding these organizations" (3).

Absent from the book is any explicit consideration of the relationship between development policies and imperialism, which one might expect given the presence of the latter term in the book's title. Did the "NGO boom" of the 1980s signal a change to a qualitatively different form of imperialism? Is this form of imperialism more difficult to resist due to the prevalence of NGO "soft power"? How does this overlap with or compliment the traditional understanding of imperialism as a tendency toward monopolies? The lack of theorizing imperialism also goes hand in hand with an overemphasis on neoliberalism at the expense of saying much about capitalism itself, though the book actually succeeds at making quite compelling critiques development policies under capitalism without having to name it directly. In order to get a full picture of both the theoretical project of Canadian imperialism, and to contextualize the activities of Canadian development NGOs within a larger framework of Canadian foreign policy, *Paved with Good Intentions* should be read alongside Todd Gordon's *Imperialist Canada* (Arbeiter Ring, 2010) and Yves Engler's *The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy* (Fernwood, 2009). Taken together, these three books represent an important step in Canadian studies, and signal a crucial shift away from the left nationalist thesis that has long dominated the Canadian left by illustrating beyond any doubt the Canadian state's own imperial aims.

*Paved with Good Intentions* is not, however, a book of political theory, and it would be pointless to fault it for not being what it never claimed to be. Barry-Shaw and Jay have put together a groundbreaking exposé that will be of enormous significance for Canadian activists and scholars in the years to come, thanks to the book's wide scope and impeccable research. As *Paved with Good Intentions* makes clear, solidarity from below –

rather than neoliberal pseudo-empowerment handed down from above – is not only the most desirable way forward, but is the only way to break the NGOization that Canada and other imperial powers have imposed on the Global South.

Farber, Samuel. 2011. *Cuba Since the Revolution of 1959: A Critical Assessment*. Chicago: Haymarket Books. ISBN 978-1-60846-139-4. Paperback: 24.00 USD. Pages: 369.

**Reviewed by Neil A. Burrton**  
**Independent Scholar, Ottawa**

Samuel Farber's *Cuba Since the Revolution of 1959: A Critical Assessment* is bound to change the way we think about Latin America's most important socialist experiment. Farber, a US-based academic who left Cuba in the 1950s, focuses on the politics and ideology of the revolutionary leadership – its ideas. "The single most important factor that explains the uniqueness of Cuba's development," Farber writes, "was the political leadership of Fidel Castro, which made a major difference in the triumph against Batista and in determining the course taken by the Cuban Revolution after it came to power" (10). While acknowledging the challenges the Revolution faced and the unrelenting character of US imperial aggression, he sets out to demonstrate that the repressive nature of the Cuban government is general and systemic and not merely a justified response to specific security threats. Farber thus seeks to debunk the myths, fallacies and misunderstandings perpetuated by the revolutionary leadership and its apologists in a wide-ranging work that focuses on the social, cultural, political and economic dimensions of the Revolution from its early days to the present.

Farber does not deny the popularity of the Cuban Revolution among wide segments of the masses prior to the mass apathy of the 1990s. Drawing upon the "classical Marxist tradition," however, he puts forward a simple criterion in a detailed introduction that sets the tone for the rest of the book: "to be a fully participatory democracy," Farber writes, "it must be based on the self-mobilization and organization of the people, and the rule of the majority has to be complemented by minority rights and civil liberties" (4). In this sense, the Cuban Revolution never empowered its supporters to develop their "own autonomous political consciousness so that they could cease being the objects, and become the subjects, of history" (39).

In Chapter One, we are given an account of the decision-making style of the government that emerged following the revolution, its tendency to announce major



policy shifts without discussion or consultation beyond the revolutionary inner-circle and the drive to subordinate all aspects of social, political and cultural life to the state under the Cuban Communist Party (which absorbed all the main revolutionary parties and movements in 1965). The mass organizations that were established by the government such as the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDS) were intended primarily to serve as transmission belts to implement party policy (and spy on the population). One-party rule and the government's complete monopoly of the media cemented the ability of the revolutionary leadership to enforce a monolithic vision of society. Despite some important democratic reforms in the 1970s and 1980s, candidates are still prevented from presenting and campaigning on political platforms or points of view in provincial and national elections, and the assemblies are given very little input into the formulation of policy. All this, Farber argues, amounts to a radical departure from the vision of revolutionary democracy and socialism from below envisioned by the classical Marxist tradition and practiced by the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Russian Revolution of 1917 in its initial days.

Farber meticulously documents the government's suppression of any opposition through draconian laws, such as the outlawing of "contempt" for authority and provisions that allow the government to punish without trial citizens engaged in "pre-criminal" behaviour. Without diminishing the many attempts staged by the United States to undermine the Revolution and personally assassinate Castro, Farber argues that there was no reason why revolutionary unity could not have been achieved through discussion and debate in genuinely democratic institutions. After the defeat of the right-wing guerrilla campaign from the Escambray Mountains in 1965, moreover, counter-revolutionary forces were all but vanquished from the island.

In Chapter Two, Farber rehashes a familiar critique in detailing the waste and inefficiencies of Cuba's command economy, where – until recently – even the smallest "hole in the wall" was owned by the state and subject to centralized planning. Cuba's health and education accomplishments, however, are put into perspective; while the country has scored high when it comes to the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index, the measure fails to take into consideration important factors determining the quality of life, such as the complete inadequacy of food rations. Similarly, in Chapter Three on Cuba's foreign policy, Farber argues that some of the government's more progressive campaigns – such as its extraordinary contribution to the South African liberation movements of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in Angola – were compromised by its support for the communist dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia, which responded to reasons of state and the need to manage the relationship with the Soviet Union.

Chapter Four explores the government's labour laws and its relationship to workers, demonstrating that it has never attempted to establish genuine worker's control of the means of production. Instead, the government has used trade unions to discipline

workers while morally exhorting them to increase productivity. Chapters Five and Six on Blacks Cubans and gender, respectively, debunk claims made by the revolutionary leadership that it has eradicated racism and sexism. Although the position of Black Cubans and women may have improved in some respects, both are underrepresented in the most prestigious occupations and at the highest echelons of government and the party, and both have been prohibited from organizing independently to advance their interests. The discussion on homosexuality in Chapter Six is particularly devastating given that the government has never taken responsibility for its campaigns against gays in the 1960s and 1970s prior to the partial cultural and social liberalization of the following decades.

The more recent economic reforms of Raul Castro's government – most of which have been decreed with no participation from below – are largely viewed critically. With Cuba gradually moving towards a capitalist economy, Farber fears that military hardliners in the government will eventually preside over a protracted transition to capitalism along the lines of the Sino-Vietnamese model (possibly with the support of the US and Miami's reactionary Cuban right). Chapter Seven provides an interesting account of the different dissident tendencies, most of which are individual-based and none of which has coalesced around an alternative socialist vision. Perhaps to avoid succumbing to despair, Farber puts his faith in the burgeoning youth movement, which by his own account lacks consciousness and direction.

*Cuba since the Revolution* provides a devastating critique of the Castro government in an historical synthesis rich in theoretical and empirical detail. Most importantly, Farber's account provides a revolutionary theory of democracy demonstrating that the practices and institutions of "formal democracy" must form the basis of any form of socialism worthy of the name. Perhaps the main weakness of the book is that it avoids relating the Cuban experience to Latin America's current Left, its transformational potential, and the current prospects to create democratic socialism from below. This would have provided the work with a wider contemporary relevance, as its discussion on revolutionary dilemmas is confined almost exclusively to the distant past. But this hardly diminishes the importance of a provocative work full of historical insight that transcends both the narrow dogmatism of the anti-Castro right and Cuba's apologists on the left.

Collins, John. 2011. *Global Palestine*. New York: Columbia University Press. ISBN 978-0-231-70310-9. Cloth: 30.00 USD. Pages: 219.

**Reviewed by Mary-Jo Nadeau**  
**Independent Scholar, Toronto**

In 2005, over 170 Palestinian civil society organizations launched the campaign for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), calling for international solidarity in the struggle to end Israel's violations of international law and Palestinian human rights. The BDS movement's rapid growth and global reach during its first seven years has made it the most widely recognized global struggle against apartheid since the South African anti-apartheid movement. BDS has reshaped and enlarged both the existing Palestine solidarity movement and the broader transnational global justice movement.

A measure of its impact has been the proliferation of new books examining the political framework and dynamics of BDS, and providing historical analysis for understanding the origins and growth of Israeli apartheid. This burgeoning literature now circulates widely and includes such books as: *The Case for Sanctions Against Israel* edited by Audrea Lim (Verso, 2012), *The Palestine Nakba* by Nur Masalha (Zed Books, 2012), *BDS: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights* by Omar Barghouti (Haymarket Books, 2011), *Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel's War Against the Palestinians* edited by Frank Barat (Haymarket Books, 2011), and *Israeli Apartheid: A Beginner's Guide* by Ben White (Pluto, 2009).

John Collins' *Global Palestine* is a must-read addition to this list. Aptly self-described as "grounded in a sense of solidarity with the Palestinian people," Collins rightly situates the book within the "exciting and inspiring new wave of Palestine-focused writing and activism" (x). Like others in this emerging genre, the book functions simultaneously as activist handbook and thorough scholarly interrogation. This is recognized by its reviewers (on the back cover) who have described the book as "theoretically sophisticated" (Laleh Khalili), "a fine example of intellectual precision and political commitment" (Saree Makdisi), and informed by a "deep knowledge of local struggles and transnational solidarity movements" (Lisa Hajjar).

*Global Palestine* engages with an impressive range of critical academic scholarship in an accessible style while also drawing widely on references to films, artists, poetry, journalism, social movements and influential writers from many global and historical contexts. Importantly, Palestinian knowledge production figures substantially throughout (from the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, to the "Gaza Mom" blog of Laila El-Haddad, the writing of Ghassan Kanafani, and the academic work of Edward Said and Joseph Massad).

The title succinctly reflects the author's main claim that "the same forces operating to produce Palestine's troubling realities are also operating globally in ways that

have implications for all of us” (ix). This argument is explained and elaborated across four substantial chapters (Colonization, Securitization, Acceleration and Occupation) and a conclusion (Decolonization).

Treating “Palestine as an entry point” (22) for analysis, each chapter illustrates and elaborates the main forces that Collins argues are driving “the deep structures of global politics” (xi). In “Colonization,” he situates Israel/Palestine as “the site of an ongoing project of settler colonialism” (20). Usefully for global solidarity movements, this framing locates Israel as part of an “undeclared ‘settler international’” (30) which is described as a “robust strategic partnership amongst settler states” (60). “Securitization” extends this analysis to illustrate the emergence of a “generalized process of social militarization” (51), demonstrating how the “structural violence of Israel’s domination of the West Bank and Gaza” is linked to longer histories of domination and resistance of all settler states. In “Acceleration,” Collins introduces his analysis of “dromocolonization”, highlighting Palestine as “a kind of laboratory” for the application of speed and “technologic” (81) in Israel’s assertion of ongoing colonial violence. Finally, the analysis of “Occupation” is framed around a dual meaning. Here he focuses not only on Israel’s “settler colonial occupation of Palestine”, but also on “the Palestinian Occupation” which he describes as “the stubborn, everyday habitation of the land by Palestinians...Zionism’s most fundamental obstacle” (113).

This critical intellectual mapping shows how these four interlinked processes are constituted through a highly unequal yet contested arena of “struggle between the ‘settler international’ and the resistance movements” (72). It is not surprising then that Collins turns to *Decolonization* in the final chapter. Here he provides closing reflections on the current state and possible futures of resisting settler colonialism in Palestine and globally by building “transnational solidarity in the pursuit of global justice” (146).

As a whole, these chapters offer a detailed historical and political excavation of the cultural and institutional racial logics and dynamics of Zionist settler colonialism. They also assemble a rich vocabulary for ongoing critical analysis, and provide a compelling and coherent history of the colonial present in Palestine/Israel which links this context to neoliberal capitalism as it is shaped through “global colonization” (23).

I read this book with great interest, both as a scholar of white settler colonization and the racial politics of the colonial present in Canada, and as an activist in the global BDS movement (with the Toronto-based Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid and Faculty for Palestine). The book makes a clear contribution to these academic and political sites of engagement.

At the same time, I think it is crucial to read this book alongside more BDS-specific literature. While Collins has much of relevance to say about the International Solidarity Movement that emerged during the 1990s and its relationship to the local resistance movements in Palestine, the book remained vague in extending this analysis to

the current BDS movement. There are only two or three explicit references to BDS in the text, and equally few materials referenced throughout.

With the BDS movement having emerged as the key catalyst in shifting global attention to Israel as an apartheid state, discussion of it is both timely and necessary in this context. In a recent statement (2012), the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) has highlighted that amongst the “three-tiers of Israeli oppression: occupation, settler-colonialism and apartheid” it is the “apartheid paradigm” which is “the least understood or recognized, despite the mounting international studies that have shown beyond doubt that Israel is guilty of the crime of apartheid.” Given the significant contribution of Collins’ book, a more systematic discussion of Israeli apartheid would certainly have proven insightful. While references to apartheid are present, a more sustained interrogation of apartheid and BDS would have been a most welcome addition to this important text.

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Malleson, Tom and David Wachsmuth, ed. 2011. *Whose Streets? The Toronto G20 and the Challenges of Summit Protest*. Toronto: Between the Lines. ISBN 978-1-92666-279-4. Paperback: 24.95 CAD. Pages 230.

**Reviewed by Elise Thorburn**  
**University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**

Published in the year after the G20 was held in Toronto and the downtown core of the city was turned into a veritable militarised zone, Tom Malleson and David Wachsmuth’s *Whose Streets?* has three self-proclaimed goals: to forefront the efforts of grassroots organizers, to provide space for diverse and debating voices, and finally to be, itself, a political act that would spur political discussions about left politics in Canada. The first two goals were easily met. The final goal was worked towards, but never completely fulfilled.

Divided into three sections, the chapters focus on many different aspects of the convergence. The structure of *Whose Streets?* is innovative and important because it

places on equal footing the voices of labour and social movement organizers who experienced traumatic brutality at the G20, and activists and thinkers who were able to reflect and reconsider the organizing of recent years in light of the G20 mobilisations. The first section, “Before the G20,” focuses on the thoughts of some key organizers of the demonstrations. It includes activists who did structural protest organizing, worked on legal support, organized with migrant justice and indigenous solidarity contingents, participated in activist media collectives, and those who stood on either side of the – let’s be honest – labour/social movement divide. The central debates culminate around disagreement between labour and social movements on the use of “diversity of tactics” – a debate that has been around for a long time and doesn’t look, unfortunately, to be going anywhere.

The second section, “During the G20,” offers more narrative responses to the events of June 2010, giving voice to the broad swaths of people arrested, harassed, assaulted, and/or threatened by police over the course of that long weekend. A powerful collection of first hand accounts, this section tells the stories of those present for the G20 weekend, and makes clear the levels of physical violence used by police to crush protestors but, more importantly, it explicitly catalogues the tactics of degradation, humiliation, and terror employed by the state to make arrestees obedient and compliant. The stories told in this section recount how the state uses threats of sexual violence, intimidation, and shame around sexual orientation or perceived aberrations from the status quo to strip political prisoners of their sense of self, to dehumanize them as additional punishment. The frequency of these narratives – the repetition of such stories with such similar details – makes clear to whomever may have still possessed some doubt that what happened in those cells was not due to a few “bad apples” or the aberrant behaviour of officers caught up in a moment, but rather a calculated decision carried out by the state to strip human beings of their dignity and humanity because they are deemed a threat to state power. That this happened to such a wide swathe of the population in downtown Toronto on a summer weekend should erase any doubt, as well, that police violence in neighbourhoods not nearly so middle-class or white is likely far worse than many have ever imagined.

The final section, “After the G20,” returns to a less anecdotal, more theoretical, style. Writers here, a mix of activists and academics – and of course, activist academics – reflect on the weekend of the G20, what mass convergences or summit demos tell us about the state of left organizing and about our power, how and where state violence can be challenged, and again, some authors return to the debate about “violence,” the black bloc, and diversity of tactics.

This fixation on “diversity of tactics” and questions of violence are where my problems with this collection lie, and it is this fixation that, despite the best efforts of the editors and the writers, leads to the third goal of the book being left incomplete. What this means is that, although many different perspectives were raised on particular issues,

the book never really gets to the core of what the G20 organizing – and in fact a long history of organizing in Canada – can tell us about the problems on the left in Canada and how we can begin to reinvigorate a movement that will not just wage defensive battles against neoliberal incursions and austerity politics but will be able to begin the task of prefiguring and reconstructing the social, political and economic realms. To illustrate what I mean here I will mention three specific articles, and through them briefly construct a counter-narrative for how I see the lessons of the G20 guiding left organizing today.

The first two pieces I want to examine look at organizing for and during the G20 from the – currently – opposing perspectives of labour and social movements. The first, “Labour’s Role in Opposing the G20” by Archana Rampure, defends the role of the labour movement leadership. Rampure highlights the important role that labour plays in mass mobilizations and states that “the labour movement is the bedrock of progressive politics in this country” (49). She claims that “union leaders are generally more progressive than their membership” and that rank and file workers simply aren’t politicized – they are not “invested in the movement” (51). Rampure centres most of this – labour’s decision to abandon social movement activists both physically, by walking away from the G20 fence, and politically, by issuing statements condemning property damage and trumpeting their cooperation with the security forces of the state – on clashes between labour and social movement activists over diversity of tactics.

Jeff Shantz’s contribution, “Unions, Direct Action, and the G20 Protests,” offers a counterpoint to Rampure’s position, noting that both in its decision to march away from the fence and in the issuing of letters of condemnation, the union leadership “made a public commitment to state capitalist order, the restricted terrain of legality that serves such an important role in the neoliberal legitimization of anti-working class politics” (59). But the focus of both of these pieces on the debate between labour and social movements centring on “diversity of tactics” is problematic because it misses the much bigger point about the problem with the contemporary labour movement and left politics in general, and that is one of organizational structure.

It is this tension in structure that Clarice Kuhling in “Forms of Protest Reflect Our Power” attempts to draw out, but also ultimately does not go far enough in directing criticisms where they belong – at the structure of organized labour. Breeding and building traditions of democratic engagement within workplaces is the only way forward but this means union leaders must replace themselves. The primary work of an organizer is to build more organizers. Maintaining the hierarchical structures and leadership positions – so far removed from the base – will never accomplish this, and it will only continue the rifts that exist between social movements and organized labour, eventually making both irrelevant because both will ultimately lose.

Both Shantz and Kuhling attempt to grapple with this by bringing in the example of the Greater Toronto Workers’ Assembly. This is an important contribution, as it

begins to open up the discussion about solidarity between labour and social movements, and also considers new ways of organizing. But neither Kuhling nor Shantz are able to contend with the inherent structure of contemporary unions which makes them an impediment to struggle rather than a motor of it.

The focus of these central articles on labour's recalcitrance to engage in more militant actions seems to be a case of putting the cart before the horse. Labour cannot be radical because labour isn't structured in a radical way. It needs an internal revolution before it can participate meaningfully in an external one. *Whose Streets?* would benefit from taking this lesson of the G20 and giving it a thorough consideration in this text.

Ross, Stephanie and Larry Savage, eds. 2012. *Rethinking the Politics of Labour in Canada*. Halifax: Fernwood. ISBN 978-1-55266-478-0. Paperback: 29.95 CAD. Pages: 224.

**Reviewed by Julie Guard**  
**University of Manitoba**

This is a thoughtfully conceived and carefully structured collection of essays that coheres exceptionally well to present a timely account of the state of organized labour in contemporary Canada. In just over 200 pages, this slim volume covers a lot of ground with remarkable efficiency, analysing the current and historical state of the labour movement with sufficient clarity to make it suitable for classroom use. But it does more: defining politics more broadly than most enables the collection to deliver more than the title suggests, combining an overview of the current state of labour in politics with analyses of political alternatives and case studies of initiatives toward union renewal, mostly through community unionism. As a whole, the book draws an instructive contrast between labour's long-standing efforts to make gains within electoral politics and what the contributors, in various ways, argue are the more fruitful possibilities of alliances between labour and community organizations. Several chapters provide insightful perspectives on organized labour and political parties, but the primary emphasis is on labour's varied relationships with community-based organizations, grassroots movements, and equity-seeking groups, and in particular, how political activism within unions creates possibilities for a reinvigorated, renewed, and revitalized labour movement.

This tension within the labour movement between electoral and extra-parliamentary politics is the book's central preoccupation, and the contrast between



labour's traditional approach to politics and the more generative potential of a return to grassroots labour politics is established in a thoughtful and very useful chapter by Donald Swartz and Rosemary Warskett. Their overview of the history of labour in Canadian politics offers an important discussion of the evolution of solidarity, and argues for a broad understanding of collective struggle that recognizes the interpenetration of economic and political rights and challenges the neoliberal individualist culture with a culture of broadly based solidarity. Amanda Cole and Charlotte Yates' chapter interrogates the possibilities of the kind of broad-based labour solidarity Swartz and Warskett advocate, and offers concrete evidence that supports and complicates that position. Surveying the various ways collective solidarity has benefitted unions by mobilizing workers in support of women's rights, they observe that, while solidaristic struggle has improved women's status in their workplaces and unions, union men's support has not always been as wholehearted or undivided as women workers have quite rightly demanded.

Several of the contributors assess organized labour's engagement in electoral politics, including its relations with political parties, but as the chapters by Bryan Evans, Larry Savage, and Peter Graefe demonstrate persuasively, even when labour has maintained close and friendly relations with the NDP or has attempted to work with the Liberals or the PQ, the viability of these alliances has depended on unionists' unilateral compromises. Yet, as they show, despite labour's concessions, its political allies have been unreliable friends and the incremental advances achieved through those collaborations have been inadequate and temporary. The courts, as Charles Smith demonstrates in a valuable summary of charter challenges, have similarly failed to protect, much less advance, union rights, despite the statutory provisions in the Charter ostensibly guaranteeing rights of association that unionists hoped would secure the courts' defence of collective bargaining.

These and other chapters raise the timely question, why do unions continue to support alliances with political parties and judicial challenges, which provide such poor returns on their considerable investments, especially in the current climate of austerity and declining membership? A number of the contributors provide evidence of labour's engagement in extra-parliamentary political activities, reflecting an implicit consensus among them that these alternatives to electoral politics offer far more promise. Their collective argument for community or social unionism, which involves community alliances with labour, and proceeds from the kind of broadly based solidarity advocated by Swartz and Warskett, is strong. Chapters by Stephanie Ross and Simon Black highlight the diversity of community-labour coalitions and caution us against facile judgements that, as Ross in particular points out, overlook the complexities of real-world trade-offs in a context of hard choices and difficult compromises. Several chapters offer insight into the opportunities and challenges such collaborations present, as well as suggesting something of the range of community unionism. All offer valuable perspectives on the

potential, and pitfalls, of community unionism. In their contribution, for instance, Suzanne Mills and Tyler McCreary offer surprising and encouraging evidence of over three decades of union collaborations with Aboriginal organizations. Yet these collaborations, they observe, face significant obstacles, including unions' tendency to prioritize economic issues over social justice or anti-colonial struggles, and First Nations' own struggles for sovereignty, which can complicate or undermine their relationships with unions. In their chapter on migrant workers, unions and workers' centres, Aziz Choudry and Mark Thomas demonstrate that social unionism that links genuine grassroots mobilization at the local level with international solidarity networks and encourages workers' self-organization can help overcome some of the daunting challenges facing these vulnerable and marginalized workers, and at the same time, strengthen and energize the labour movement. Kendra Coulter's case study of union cooperation with anti-poverty organizations offers an important reminder that, when unions overcome their long-standing aversion to working to advance the interests of the poor, they stand not only to recover their moral compass, but by publicly opposing the backlash against the poor, they do what we hope unions will always do: unite us, as working people, in the creation of a better world for all.

This linking of community unionism and labour politics, and the multiple examples of broadly based solidarity in practice, moves the conversation well beyond the usual frame of labour in politics and in this way, the book makes an unexpected and innovative contribution to the growing literature on union renewal. The many case studies that illuminate praxis – theory embodied in action – make that contribution especially valuable. The collection as a whole is an important resource that I predict will be used by unionists, labour scholars, and students, and indeed, it should be recommended to anyone seeking insight into the world today.

Sharzer, Greg. 2012. *No Local: Why Small-Scale Alternatives Won't Change the World*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books. ISBN 978-1-84694-671-4. Paperback: 21.95 CAD. Pages: 178.

**Reviewed by Charles Z. Levkoe**  
**University of Toronto**

It appears that the honeymoon with the locavore has come to an end, that is, if it ever began. Over the past decade, a renewed embrace of localism has been heralded as a way to engage in ethical consumption, build communities, strengthen economies, protect

the environment and, at times, transform society. Local food initiatives have been central to this trend, with an explosion of research studies, popular literature, documentary films, policies, community-based initiatives, entrepreneurial activities, and, of course, an abundance of new purchasing opportunities. In recent years, however, the popularity of local initiatives has come under intense scrutiny from both pro- and anti-capitalist critiques, and important questions have been raised about the validity of localist claims. Greg Sharzer's *No Local: Why Small Scale Alternatives Won't Change the World* joins this cadre of voices to bring a decidedly Marxist perspective to the ongoing debate.

*No Local* is a short but dense book, written in accessible prose and aimed at a wide range of readers. Its self-proclaimed task is to help proponents of localism realize the folly of their ways. The book's argument is that local initiatives - from urban agriculture and farmers' markets to alternative currencies and cooperatives - do little or nothing to change systemic inequalities. While Sharzer admits that some of these initiatives make slight improvements for a specific class of consumer (i.e. those that can afford the time and money required to participate), he attempts to show that these well-meaning alternatives are bound by the same economic rules as the large corporations they oppose. For example, a small, locally owned business may produce a niche product of superior quality, but its capacity to survive in a capitalist market is still dependent on externalizing costs, exploiting labour and destroying the environment. The take home message for localists is that individual choice, lifestyle activism, and micro-alternatives do not have the power to transform capitalism. While Sharzer's argument reinforces the importance of addressing the core problem of social and ecological injustice, *No Local* may be a missed opportunity to have a broader impact on movement building and social change efforts.

Moving beyond critiquing specific local initiatives, *No Local* attempts to take on the concept of localism as a whole. The challenge, however, is that Sharzer constructs his critique in meticulous detail without clearly defining his target. The result is a series of assumptions about a wide range of initiatives that lack an empirical foundation. Localism is presented as a concept that begins with a criticism of size but becomes a pessimistic and naïve utopian ideology embraced and fostered by the petite bourgeoisie. In constructing his adversary, Sharzer argues that the localist do-it-yourself attitude abandons the root causes of social and economic inequality and environmental degradation. Instead, proponents attempt to escape capitalist social relations by creating "pockets of equitable cooperation" (146), abandoning hope and awaiting social breakdown (i.e. climate change and peak oil). Far from contributing to any significant change, the individual choice and personal responsibility purported by localists serves to maintain the structures of inequality and oppression, accommodating and even facilitating neoliberalism. Sharzer argues that all local initiatives can be categorized as either directly challenging capitalism, and thus worthy of our efforts, or part of the problem. Thus, if localists understood the

internal drives of capitalism, they would cease to be localists and begin to engage in actual systemic transformation (i.e. collective resistance through democratic class struggle) that confronts and disrupts capitalist social relations.

Assuming we accept Sharzer's prefiguration, his binary classification of pro-market (i.e. the belief in a fair and ethical capitalism) and anti-market (i.e. the critique of capitalism) "localists" groups together a wide diversity of people and initiatives while ignoring their differences. For example, it is true that some urban agriculture initiatives are led by profit seeking entrepreneurs or otherwise exemplify the localist ideology that Sharzer targets. But many more initiatives are initiated by neighbourhood residents and activists (from across classes) as a way to empower individuals, build collective consciousness and develop capacity for broader action. Thus, it is not clear that there is one localist movement with a common ideology. A number of writers have wrestled with these issues as part of a critical dialogue around the politics of scale (e.g. Swyngedouw 1997; Dupuis and Goodman 2005). Failing to identify the nuanced realities of the case studies results in constructing a "straw man" argument with which many localists will have trouble relating.

In the book's final chapter, we are promised that our newfound knowledge of the inner workings of capitalism will lead us in the right direction. Sharzer provides hints at his vision for a different kind of society with brief mention of ideas such as democratic social planning, workers running society themselves, and socialism. Only then is the local "no longer outside, beyond an alternative to capitalism but a site of struggle against it" (141). But Sharzer ignores the way that many local initiatives are already building coalitions and networks at regional, national and global levels and collectively developing more nuanced critiques of social, economic and political systems. For example, Canada's People's Food Policy Project recently brought together thousands of individuals and local initiatives to collaboratively propose and prioritize a food policy platform based on the concept of food sovereignty – where food systems are controlled by those who produce and consume food as opposed to corporate interests and global financial institutions and food is understood to be the foundation for healthy lives, communities and eco-systems. These kinds of linkages between local initiatives and collective movements illustrate how people and ideas can connect across scales, and also to more radical political agendas. *No Local* spends little time addressing the ways that local initiatives may be an entry point for engaging individuals in broader collective struggles and the effects of trans-local networking on movement building.

Sharzer is extremely well versed in his subject matter and his writing style is clear and straightforward. However, *No Local* reads like a theoretical debate between a particular reading of Marx and an abstracted ideology of "localism" constructed through a selection of specific writers (i.e. Barbara Kingsolver, Bill McKibben, Carlo Petrini, E.F. Schumacher). Sharzer spends far too much time summarizing Marx and too little time

applying his ideas to the empirical evidence. *No Local's* strongest contribution to both the theory and practice of social change is through its, unfortunately limited, engagement with the case studies. Through *No Local*, Sharzer reminds us to think carefully about the unintended consequences of our efforts at the local level, but in the process risks making invisible the actual and existing complexity of local initiatives.

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Choudry, Aziz; Jill Hanley and Eric Shragge, eds. 2012. *Organize! Building from the Local for Global Justice*. Toronto and Oakland: Between the Lines and PM Press. ISBN 978-1-77113-004-2. Paperback: 24.95 CAD. Pages: 313.

**Reviewed by Ian Hussey**  
**York University**

This exciting new edited volume contains over twenty essays on building power, mass movements and critical analysis around working-class, anti-racist, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggles. The chapters are written in accessible language by a wide array of activists, organizers, lawyers, artists and academics, and draw lessons from struggles in Canada, the United States, Palestine, and Aotearoa/New Zealand in an effort to link local organizing work with global struggles and transnational activist networks and to place these struggles in historical context. From art and activism for Palestine to immigrant workers' community-based labour organizing to organizing in support of Indigenous Peoples to the struggles of queer people of colour and of the psychiatric survivor movement, this book contains critical commentary on many of the most pressing and creative struggles happening today. The authors are not, however, simply cheerleading their various causes; rather, they illuminate and engage with the tensions, limits, problems and gains of a wide range of organizing practices and contexts.

Part of my own work falls within the category of political activist ethnography and I was happy to discover that this text also engages with that tradition of critical scholarship as a means of producing analyses of the everyday work of organizing for social and economic justice. In addition to the many chapters on various struggles, the book contains essays on activist research on mapping power relations, reflections on research partnerships and local community organizing, and practical issues, such as fundraising and the law and organizing. The book also includes an introductory chapter by the editors that serves to provide historical context, pull out key themes and synthesize the contributions of the chapters to come. The book has three themes: 1) the limits of local work and activism, 2) organizing in context: theory and analysis, and 3) practices to move us forward. This is not a book that reviews theoretical frameworks in an academic way. This is a book about learning the limits of reform through struggle and how we can go further. When the authors in this text talk about going further, they do not do so in an abstract or utopian fashion. Rather, they base their insights in the actual practices and processes of organizing, including the limitations and contradictions we face in trying to build power and make change. This book is therefore of interest to organizers, but it will also work well in undergraduate classes on social movements, labour studies, socio-legal studies, indigenous studies, immigration, and urban studies.

Most of the book's chapters are about building an inclusive base and about articulating strategies of social change. The authors fall in the tradition of the likes of Andrea Smith and Saul Alinsky who have taught many of us that in organizing we must start where people are at, with the problems they are facing and with everyday language, not buzzwords and jargon that may not be known to people and therefore may serve to alienate and exclude them. The authors in this book are putting forward a vision of building community organizations that go beyond particular goals and that contribute to building a wider culture of opposition. The idea is that in building democratic alternatives to either state or capital, rooted in anarchism and in community organizing, more people will see and begin to believe in forms of local production and services that exist without the need for a hierarchy of management, that provide political education and that add to a wider culture of opposition through naming the fundamental problem, global capitalism. This type of organizing requires a longer-term strategy to which the various authors in this book make a significant contribution. So while the book's chapters are grounded in specific struggles, all of the authors place their local work in the context of wider issues. The authors recognize that there are limits to local work and they seek to define those limits and ways of moving beyond them.

With the space I have left in this review I'd like to highlight the chapter by Harsha Walia, "Moving Beyond a Politics of Solidarity toward a Practice of Decolonization." Walia argues that those of us that are non-Native must come to view ourselves as active and important participants in decolonization movements and that Indigenous self-determination should be the foundation for all social justice struggles. This means

moving beyond an intersectional approach to engage with Indigenous struggles on their own terms. This is, of course, by no means easy, but Walia offers us some ideas about the messy practice of solidarity, the contradictions she has come across in her organizing work with No One is Illegal and ways to think about and deal with the various contradictions and challenges. She encourages non-Natives to both decentre themselves/ourselves so as to learn and to engage from a place of responsibility, rather than a feeling of guilt, but at the same time to recognize our own part in colonial processes and hence our responsibility to participate in processes of decolonization. She ends the chapter with an argument that the process of decolonization requires a move beyond solidarity activism to “a radical terrain of struggle where our common visions for justice do not erase our different social locations, and similarly, that our differing identities do not prevent us from walking together toward transformation and mutual respect” (252). This is but one of the critical lessons this substantial collection of essays has to offer.

McNally, David. 2011. *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism*. Leiden: Brill. ISBN 978-9-00420-157-6. Cloth: 136.00 USD. Pages: 296. [Paperback published in 2012 by Haymarket Books. ISBN 978-1-60846-233-9. 28.00 USD.]

**Reviewed by Mark Neocleous**  
**Brunel University**

Capitalist society overflows with monsters. The two that most occupy the cultural and political imagination are the vampire and the zombie. David McNally’s book explores these and related figures in the dialectic of modernity.

The strengths of the book lie in the way it moves easily across the history of ideas, the critique of political economy, social theory, literary criticism and critical anthropology, and does so in a way which takes in early capitalist formation and the enclosures movement, agrarian riots, industrialization, colonial violence and postcolonial formations. In so doing it does a good job of showing why any analysis of capital really does need to take into account capital’s monsters and, conversely, why the analysis of monstrosity really does need to take into account capital. It is insightful, well-written, and for the most part powerfully argued across three core chapters: on *Frankenstein*, political anatomy and the rise of capitalism; on the vampire-capital; and on African vampires in the age of globalisation.

Yet the broad historical scope and the fascinating moves across disciplines generate tensions which run through the central argument of the book.

McNally claims that we must move from the corporeal to the political register of monstrosity, on the grounds that secularization and science brought about a shift away from “corporeal distortion and abnormality” as indicators of monstrosity to other indicators: social behaviour of greed and enclosure on one side and riot and treason on the other. Yet this historical thesis is somewhat undermined by the centrality of the corporeal to the text. For the book is as much about the body politic and its anatomy than anything else: from the body of the hanged, the buying and selling of body parts, through to the discussion of Marx’s “persistent use of body-imagery” – “body of value,” the “body of iron,” the “body of the coat,” and so on. Thus although the monsters of global capitalism might no longer be the deformed bodies of pre-modernity, they are nonetheless still very corporeal in their monstrosity. When one writes about monstrosity it is almost impossible not to write about the body.

Likewise, when one writes about monstrosity it is almost impossible not to sound like one is writing cultural studies. That in itself is a problem as McNally seeks to distance his argument from “postmodern cultural” accounts of monstrosity which “lack a critical theory of capitalism” and which tend to simply be on the side of the monstrous “Other.” Yet despite McNally’s own powerfully argued insistence that we must root the monstrous in the political economy of capital, he nonetheless sometimes sounds as though he wants to be writing “postmodern cultural” analyses. Thus, for example, the view of *Frankenstein* as a warning to the ruling class of the monster it has created – “the Luddite revolts and the repression they induced are pivotal to the context in which *Frankenstein* took shape;” Shelly drew upon a “rich tradition of popular rebellion,” etc – is surely in tension with the claim that “Victor Frankenstein’s troubles originate with the death of his mother,” and it is a tension that is never worked out. The strong reading of the Frankenstein monster as a *monster of the market* is somewhat undermined by veering into the very ritual codes of the cultural studies industry from which McNally seeks to simultaneously distance himself. This tension is even more pronounced in the chapter on African vampires.

This in turn generates an additional problem. The book is a strong statement of Marxist categories and their applicability to the study of the monsters of capital and, likewise, an equally strong account of why Marx himself was interested in the monstrous, especially the vampire-capital. McNally is surely right to suggest that “part of the genuine radicalism of Marx’s critical theory resides in its insistence on tracking and naming the monsters of modernity,” and cites Franco Moretti’s suggestion that “the literature of terror is born out of terror of a split society and out of the desire to heal it.” But is “healing” really the communist project as envisaged by Marx? Similarly, the “subjugation and exploitation” imposed on human beings by capital are described here as “genuinely traumatic.” But surely the problem of capital is not that it *traumatizes* us. Such claims



sound more like “postmodern cultural” studies than Marxism. For Marxism, the problem of exploitation is the problem of exploitation; it is not the *trauma* of exploitation or alienation that is the issue. (For, otherwise, there is a very easy capitalist and therapeutic solution: let’s ensure that people have the chance to work through their traumas).

Early in the book McNally suggests that not all monsters are equal, and that we need to differentiate distinct forms of monstrosity. The intention is to distinguish between the zombie as a beast of burden, crushed by work, mercilessly exploited and thus a life destroyed, and the vampire, constantly sucking the blood of the living and thus destroying lives. Yet this distinction is sometimes confused by the fact that McNally keeps getting attracted by other forms of monstrosity or cognate issues which don’t easily fit into this frame. Thus the monster motif is meant to “equip us with a form of night-vision that illuminates the neoliberal world of wild money.” But is “wildness” the same as monstrosity? This problem is skirted over, but wildness is then used as an opening for a discussion of the shift from the gold standard to derivatives and forms the basis of a discussion of Enron as a case-study in the “occult economy of late capitalism.” But is the occult the same as the wild? Likewise, “occult economy” includes not just Enron’s derivatives but also the recent genre of urban African witchcraft-tales and an analysis of beliefs in “economic witchcraft.” “Occult economy” and “economic witchcraft” are being made to do rather a lot of work as categories and do not fit easily into the zombie versus vampire frame. Moreover, the African peoples discussed here believe in the occult economy in a way in which the subjects of the western world don’t, at least as far as their own conscious and deliberate practices would suggest. Hence the attempt to locate the vampire within the African witchcraft genre more widely does not really succeed; one senses the monstrous motifs getting out of McNally’s own control.

There is also a noticeable absence of an engagement with the concept of the undead. Only when he introduces the zombie does McNally get around to addressing the fact that one of the underlying facts about the monstrous is that they are the “living dead.” McNally deals with this in relation to the zombie yet never addresses this in relation to the vampire. Yet the whole point of the vampire is that it is an undead creature. Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* was published with that title in June 1897, but even as late as the end of May that year he was still using his working title for the novel: *The Un-Dead*. And this undead nature of the vampire is crucial to Marx’s use of the vampire to understand capital as (un)dead labour. This is never explored by McNally, and hence an opportunity to pursue the contrasting nature of these monsters is rather lost.

One might note this loss of opportunity in another way. Edmund Burke’s use of the monstrous is said to be “significant for mobilising plebeian anxieties about grave-robbing and dissection,” and “mobilising popular idioms.” The justification provided for this is Burke’s occasional reference to tombs. But there is a far more likely source of Burke’s imagery, lying in Burke’s own politics of the dead. Burke famously argued that if society is a contract then the contract must in part be with the dead as well as those yet to

be born. The monster of revolution might be a problem for Burke, then, because the monster is undead and thus somehow breaks what is implicit in our contract with the dead: that the dead do live on, but only as national tradition and not as revolution.

This mention of Burke points to a more general problem. McNally suggests that Mary Shelly recoiled from the ugliness of the monster, but that working-class radicals would come to *affirm* proletarian monstrosity in a way that would be claimed by Marx. “Part of the genuine radicalism of Marx’s critical theory resides in its insistence on tracking and naming the monsters of modernity.” That might be true, but Marxism is hardly the only politics to try and track and name the monsters of modernity (see my own *The Monstrous and the Dead*, University of Wales Press, 2005). Burke’s work is replete with monsters – far more than is alluded to by McNally and possibly far more even than Marx. And it might equally be said that fascism also seeks to track and name what it sees as the monsters of modernity. Marx was far from alone in thinking politically about the monstrous.

Eagleton, Terry. 2011. *Why Marx Was Right*. New Haven: Yale University Press. ISBN 978-0-300-18153-1. Paperback: 16.00 USD. Pages: 258.

**Reviewed by Charles Post**

**Borough of Manhattan Community College, City University of New York**

During the years of “high neo-liberalism” – from approximately 1979 to the early years of the twenty-first century – capitalism seemed politically and ideologically unassailable. Under the banner “There is No Alternative,” pro-capitalist politicians and “public intellectuals” (or more accurately apologists) proclaimed that the “free market system” was not only the best of all possible worlds, but the inevitable outcome of all of human history. In this period, no thinker was subject to more vilification, falsification or condescending disregard than Karl Marx. Marxism was dismissed as “outdated” and “naive” at best, if not a nefarious theory that had only produced tyranny, poverty and human misery on a mass scale. Even on the left, Marx’s theories were rejected as variants of Enlightenment thinking with its totalitarian “grand narrative,” in favour of new variants of idealism and causal pluralism – post-structuralism and post-modernism.

The neo-liberal consensus began to unravel in the mid and late 1990s as the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico against the North American Free Trade Agreement, the mass strikes in defence of public pensions in France and the rise of the global justice

movement challenged “free market” orthodoxy in practice. However, it was the beginnings of a long-period of capitalist economic stagnation, marked by the global financial meltdown of 2007-2008, that opened the flood gates to the revival of anti-capitalist criticisms. In the past few years, establishment publications from the *Harvard Business Review* to the *Wall Street Journal* have all run essays asking whether Marx was, after all, right. Clearly rejecting Marx’s politics – working class struggle for socialism – mainstream academics and journalists have been forced to admit that Marx’s predictions that capitalist growth was necessarily crisis-ridden may, in fact, be true.

Terry Eagleton, perhaps the most prominent Marxist literary theorist writing in English, has entered this discussion with a zealous defence of Marx, *Why Marx Was Right*. With his characteristic clarity and humour, Eagleton demolishes ten of the most common anti-Marxist myths. Eagleton gleefully dissects claims that Marxism is outdated in today’s classless “post-modern” world; notions that Marxism’s naïve notion of human nature have led to horrendous violence and the establishment of brutal, repressive anti-democratic regimes; and the all-too familiar assertions that Marxism is a form of economic reductionism and determinism that ignores human spirituality and non-class forms of oppression. While none of his arguments are original – all have been made by critical Marxist thinkers over the past eighty years – few have been able to muster their arguments with such wit, passion and insight.

Eagleton is at his best in answering the hoary assertion that Marxism inevitably led to the repressive, bureaucratic regimes that masqueraded as socialism in the twentieth century. He effectively demolishes the notion that Marxism advocates an undemocratic, minoritarian and violent social transformation. Eagleton defends Marx (and the Marxist tradition, including Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg) as advocates of a more radical democracy in which working people do not get to periodically choose which of their oppressors will rule, but actually decide the use of society’s productive resources. In terms of violence, Eagleton points to how:

the reluctance of working people to shed blood has contrasted tellingly with the readiness of their masters to wield the lash and the gun... If socialist revolutions have generally involved violence, it is largely because propertied classes will rarely surrender their privileges without a struggle (187).

Synthesizing the arguments of Trotsky, Deutscher, Mandel and Callinicos, Eagleton demolishes the notion that Marxism was responsible for the horrors of Stalinism, pointing to its material roots. The tiny size of the working class in pre-revolutionary Russia and the creation of a capitalist world economy in the late nineteenth century made “socialism in one country” a reactionary utopia. While the isolation of the Soviet regime with the failure of revolutions in the industrialized west was primarily responsible for the

rise of the bureaucratic post-capitalist dictatorships, Eagleton also recognizes the Bolsheviks' tendency to underestimate the importance of safe-guarding democratic rights and institutions.

Eagleton is also extremely effective in demolishing the common-sense of the academic left – in particular in cultural studies – that Marxism is a form of class and economic reductionism that is teleological and unable to account for gender or racial oppression or the degradation of the natural environment. He defends class struggle as “*fundamental* to human history,” (34) not in the sense that that without class exploitation “Buddhism, astrophysics and the Miss World contest would come tumbling down,” but that class “shapes events, institutions and forms of thought which seem at first glance to be innocent of it; and it plays a decisive role in the turbulent transition from one epoch of human history to another” (35). Eagleton goes on to summarize the rich, but incomplete Marxist discussions of gender and national, racial and colonial oppression and environmental degradation – and the track-record of revolutionary socialism in fighting sexism, racism, colonialism and environment destruction. For Eagleton, Marxism has made “issues of culture, gender, language, otherness, difference, identity and ethnicity...inseparable from questions of state power, material inequality, the exploitation of labour, imperial plunder, mass political resistance and revolutionary transformation” (221-222).

One could make a number of minor criticisms of Eagleton's defence of Marx. I am much more cynical than Eagleton about the possibilities that market mechanisms and democratic planning (“market socialism”) can stably coexist for prolonged periods in post-capitalist societies. His attempt to avoid the issue of whether class struggle or an independent development of the productive forces drives historical change – which may reflect his reliance on two of the most sophisticated advocates of these divergent views, Alex Callinicos and Ellen Meiksins Wood, for input on this book – is disappointing. The largest absence is a discussion of why capitalism cannot produce economic stability – why capitalist crises are *inevitable* – is especially regrettable as we are in the midst of the most severe global economic downturn since the mid-1970s. However, all of these shortcomings pale in comparison to the wit, passion and clarity of Eagleton's defence of Marx. *Why Marx Was Right* is an accessible and sophisticated introduction to modern Marxist thought.

## **Instructions to Authors**

*Socialist Studies: the Journal of the Society for Socialist Studies* is an interdisciplinary journal with a focus on describing and analyzing social, economic or political injustice, and practices of struggle, transformation, and liberation across the world. The Journal seeks to make a major contribution to scholarly and political debates among the progressive left in academic, policy and movement circles by publishing original research of high standards.

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If considered suitable by the editors, the manuscript will be refereed by two anonymous referees. The review process is 'blind': authors and referees do not know the identities of the others. In the event of disagreement amongst referees, the manuscript will be sent to a third referee. As a result of the peer review process, the editors may recommend revisions.

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