

Review Essay

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**Abstract**

Marxists have sought to critically analyze and contribute to (left revolutionary) popular movements. Yet they have not explicitly theorized the term “movement” nor its relationships to other key Marxist concepts, such as class struggle and hegemony. This book seeks to fill that gap in a historical moment when there are worldwide “anti-systemic” movements against austerity, against inequality, against the “democracy deficit,” and to protect hard-won rights for subaltern classes, all within the context of the world’s most important economic crisis since the 1930s. Analysis helpfully moves back and forth between theory and empirical cases, with a view to informing more effective revolutionary political praxis. The empirical scope is deliberately and usefully broad. Cases are drawn from a range of national contexts in the global North and South and concern movements from the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the present. The book’s major shortcoming, however, is its failure to draw upon the whole range of historical materialist theorizing, including work by Black socialists, feminist socialists and Indigenous communists, among others. Nonetheless *Marxism and social movements* makes a useful, if radically incomplete contribution to both social movement theory and historical materialism.

Although Marxism has sought to critically analyze and contribute to (left revolutionary) popular movements, Marxists have not explicitly theorized the term “movement” nor its relationships to other key Marxist concepts, such as class struggle and hegemony (1). This book seeks to fill that gap, especially in a historical moment when, the editors contend, there are what look like worldwide “anti-systemic” movements against austerity, against inequality, against the “democracy deficit,” and to protect hard-won rights for subaltern classes, all within the context of the world’s most important economic crisis since the 1930s (2). Yet despite the relevance of historical materialism today, paradoxically, from the 1980s and through the 1990s there has been a turn away from Marxism and class analysis, including in social movement theory which

now neglects historical materialist insights and, more broadly, political economic analyses.<sup>1</sup> This shift reflects a decline in the importance of organized labour since the 1970s, revealing the material underpinnings of this theoretical turn away from Marxist class analysis. To remedy this, the book re-centres Marxism as a critical theory of social movements understood both in relation to Marxist understandings of capitalism and class struggle and in conversation with mainstream social movement theory, which the editors argue has much to gain from a sustained dialogue with historical materialism. Finally, this book argues that historical materialist analysis has a political vocation, since it may be mobilized in service of contemporary “social movements from below” (65), helping them to more strategically intelligent action, even while theory is vitally informed by social movement praxis (423).

Throughout, the authors emphasize that they seek to develop a nuanced Marxist theorizing about movements. This finely grained approach rejects overdetermined structuralist models, instead emphasizing human agency and therefore historical contingency. Likewise, against variants of Marxism that identify class narrowly, they insist upon class as a “social nexus of relations” necessarily concerned with contingent, but persistent, relations of inequality around gender, race, sexuality, caste and more (53). Indeed, this book might have been stronger had it drawn more consistently upon the whole range of historical materialist theorizing that does just that, including work by Black socialists, feminist socialists, Indigenous communists, and socialist theorists concerned with sexuality and disability. These theorists and actors are present, but unevenly so, tending to be included “topically” and, too often, at the margins. Despite this shortcoming, across eighteen chapters as well as a substantive introduction, *Marxism and social movements* makes many useful, and necessary contributions to both social movement theory and historical materialism. Not least, the authors accomplish this through detailed descriptions and analyses of a range of historical and contemporary emancipatory struggles, from 19<sup>th</sup> century popular insurgencies against British imperialism in India by soldiers, peasants and landlords, to fraternal and gang organizations among newly-urban workers in China from 1900-1950, to Egyptian worker and popular militancy before and during the Arab spring of 2011. The successes and failures of these and other diverse movements are instructive for analytical purposes, suggesting challenges, contradictions, limits and possibilities for current struggles seeking to create spaces for more just human relationships. Finally, the international scope of the cases described follows through on the editors’ own insistence, grounded in Marx, that it

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<sup>1</sup> See especially 84-91, where contributors Gabriel Hetland and Jeff Goodwin document the near-total absence of Marxism from social movement journals, major social movement books and award-winning social movement articles in (American) English-language scholarship since the late 1980s through to the present.

is important to understand apparently isolated struggles as actually or potentially related within the context of capitalism as a *world* system.

### Theorizing Social Movements from Marxism

In their introduction, the four co-editors stress that the Marxist theory they propose is not the straw man often taught by post-structuralists: a rigid, top-down Althusserian Marxism (261-262). Instead, they understand Marxism as a theory “that is resolutely committed to popular emancipation ‘from below’” (12), an approach that emphasizes human agency with respect to the production of both material relationships and the ideological and cultural “superstructure” (18: 261-262). As contributing editor and author Colin Barker observes in his chapter, social movements are carried out by human beings who are active agents who reflect on their actions and who seek to resolve problems engendered by everyday capitalist relations. Often, working class and subaltern people do so in ways that disrupt the routine reproduction of exploitative class relationships, so potentially changing these relationships and themselves in the process (47). In other words, within capitalism, workers produce “things” but also “social relations and symbolic forms” (18). Indeed, they even produce themselves through their struggles and as they labour. This means that workers are, at least potentially, their own salvation <sup>2</sup>—they are capable of bringing about their own liberation from exploitative, alienating capitalist relationships through their “political labour-rebellions” (332).

Yet, workers need not do so in isolation. Rather, they may be informed by organic intellectuals for working class and subaltern movements, including but not limited to Marxist social movement theorists. For editor and contributing author John Krinsky, a distinctive insight of Marxist theory is to contextualize particular moments of protest within the “totality” of capitalist social relationships, including the play of political, economic, and legal actors and institutions, both domestic and foreign (108-9). As an instance of this type of analysis, co-authors Patrick Bond, Ashwin Desai and Trevor Ngwane consider capitalism’s “combined” but “uneven” development, including booming finance alongside manufacturing deindustrialization as manifest in South Africa (235). In their view, such uneven development tends to foster “intensely localized and self-limited” politics in urban centres, as different sectors of urban society react to the specific, local consequences of neoliberal capitalist politics and policies. Notably, they observe that there have been recurrent protests against the cost of medication to treat HIV/AIDS and against cuts to water and electricity services by those unable to pay for (expensive) privatized service provision in the 1990s (238). In contemporary South

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<sup>2</sup> To use a religious vocabulary, about which the chapter on CLR James, by Christian Hogsbjerg, has some suggestive insights: see my discussion below.

Africa, such political-economic struggles are bound up with disappointed hopes in—but nonetheless continued if declining popular engagement with—the Tripartite Alliance.<sup>3</sup> After decades of anti-Apartheid struggles with a strong anti-capitalist element, the Alliance has embraced hegemonic forms of neoliberal capitalism. Yet, neoliberalism is neither simply a local nor national dynamic but a worldwide politics of liberalization, privatization, and deregulation that arguably became hegemonic with the fall of the Soviet bloc beginning in 1989. This neoliberal phase of capitalism is institutionalized legally, for instance, via the “intellectual property” (237) agreements negotiated by the World Trade Organization, or via World Bank “advice” to debtor nations that warns against state provision and subsidies of essential goods like water (239). In short, there is protest and opposition to immediate hardships in “formal townships and shack settlements” (237) in South Africa. These hardships include lack of access to medical treatments, water, electricity and other vital goods and services. But both this austerity-induced privation and the protest that rises to challenge it must be understood within a complex of forces. This requires recognition of the roles of multinational corporations and international financial institutions in producing neoliberal policies that — profitably for multinational corporations — privatize water and electricity provision and define vital medicines as private “intellectual property.” In addition, understanding both austerity and anti-austerity movements requires attentiveness to national and local party and trade union politics, politics increasingly constrained worldwide by a powerful capitalist class.

Relatedly, this “total” approach to understanding social movements requires, too, a resolutely international orientation. This means discerning interconnections across apparently distinct struggles that are often geographically distant. Thus, as David McNally suggests in his concluding chapter, historical materialist theories of social movements make clear the ways that apparently separate protests “from Cochabamba to Cairo” may, in fact, be linked because they challenge worldwide capitalist dynamics and relationships that are manifested locally. Hence, as McNally describes, the so called “water war” in the year 2000 in Cochabamba, Bolivia, mobilized “(a)s many as fifty to seventy thousand” (405) against water privatization. The protests in Cochabamba saw trade union workers join with Indigenous peoples and the popular classes, including “the unemployed, the self-employed, the young, and the women” (406) in struggles that ultimately led to an end to water privatization and were part of the emergence of a new left in Bolivia. Of course, this mobilization likewise recalls the South African urban protests against the attribution of municipal water provision and distribution to the French multinational corporation Suez. These developments were echoed later in Egypt, among other places, as part of the so-called Arab spring. Specifically, in Cairo in January

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<sup>3</sup> The African National Congress, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, and the South African Communist Party (234).

and February 2011, workers' movements that had been engaging in illegal strikes since a neoliberal austerity programme was implemented in 2004 (417) joined with democratic activists demanding regime change. This resulted in escalating protests. Known in Cairo as the 25 January Revolution, this movement, which was also inspired by the Tunisian uprising in December 2010, eventually led to the overthrow of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (418-19). Among other transformations, this regime change opened up, albeit tentatively and contingently, new spaces for worker organization in Egypt.

From a Marxist social movement perspective, these apparently "separate" struggles in Bolivia and Egypt — and in South African urban centres — have, in fact, common dynamics. Not least, workers' struggles played an important role as part of mass popular movements against the routine reproduction of alienating and exploitative class relationships, as well as against authoritarian state regimes. In the cases of Bolivia and Egypt, if not with respect to the so-far more limited South African urban protests, these movements suspended, at least for a time, the "normal" political-economic relations of neoliberalism. They challenged states, seeking to bring about more democratic regime change and protesting state policies in the interests of capital. Sometimes, such events spilled over national boundaries, inspiring struggles at once similar and distinct in other countries. But even when they remain locally and nationally bounded, such struggles imply a *potential* for transnational unity, rooted in a shared political-economic critique of the capitalist dynamics that they arise to combat. For instance, movements against water privatization in Bolivia and South Africa participate in a common struggle against the sale of water as "private property." At the same time, the existence of these movements draws attention to local manifestations of capitalist drives towards the privatization of the global commons and local reactions against such dynamics. There is, in short, a dialectical movement back and forth between social movement practices and Marxist theorizing of them, so that an important role for theorists is to draw attention to links among apparently "distinct" movements while at the same time assessing any given movement's potential, if far from inevitable, revolutionary character (15; 120).

### **Reactionary Class Struggles, Black Liberation and LGBT Movements**

As the authors insist, none of these arguments about the complex nature of working class and subaltern struggles within world capitalism should be taken to suggest uncritical celebration of expressions of popular agency (20; 378). In his chapter, for instance, Marc Blecher observes that worker "self-organization" may mean the creation of patron-client relationships characterized by intense, gendered violence. Blecher acknowledges that in the 1920s in Tianjin, China, mostly young, uneducated, newly-urban workers did organize, sometimes in fraternal and women's organizations that offered mutual support. In other cases, however, workers organized through gangs that exercised monopolies over

whole sectors of the economy, “attributing” workers to contracts gained with capitalist factory owners. In practice, Blecher maintains, many such gangs “did not so much contract female labour to factories as virtually come to own the young women” (152). Working-class agency may include such expressions of gendered violence against other workers. As editor and contributing author Colin Barker starkly observes with respect to working-class actorhood across Europe, subaltern agency, including in the contemporary period, is not necessarily enlightened: “Some (workers) become strike breakers, racists, wife beaters, and homophobes” (57). Working class actors may be reactionary, even fascist, harming other subaltern classes and groups seen as threats rather than potential partners in solidarity against a powerful capitalist class and an exploitative, alienating capitalist system.

Indeed, Neil Davidson’s chapter is devoted to “Right-wing social movements,” many of them movements “from below.” His chapter describes how in the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, most white workers refused to stand in solidarity with freed Black slaves, especially in the South. Instead, many actively participated in the “institutionalized regime of terror” (281) against the Black population, including the torture and murder of at least three thousand Blacks from 1890 to 1930 (281). Likewise, many white South African workers refused to act in solidarity with Black working-class leaders in the 1920s (329-330), although such solidarity would have benefitted both Black and white working-class actors in their struggles against the more powerful capitalist class. Moreover, such racism by white workers is hardly an historical phenomenon, with xenophobia and racism apparent in such contemporary slogans as “British jobs for British workers” (291). Nor is the current conjuncture of worldwide economic crisis under neoliberal capitalism likely to create a more enlightened white working class (296). Rather, a world working class on the defensive may well be attracted to racial scapegoating. The ascendancy of the far-right Front National in the current political landscape of France, especially in historically Communist regions like the North where I live, is suggestive of the ways that working and subaltern classes in crisis may turn towards racism as a “solution” consciously constructed by cynical political party leadership.

Such arguments, foregrounding persistent racisms within actually-existing world capitalism, are symptomatic of the contributors’ efforts to make clear that they reject Marxisms that ignore racism and other unjust inequalities around gender, normative sexualities, ethnicity, and religion. In this vein, specifically, there is Christian Hogsbjerg’s chapter, which insists on the importance of Black liberation theorist CLR James to historical materialist theorizing of social movements. As Hogsbjerg describes, James understood that anti-colonial struggles in Africa in the 1930s were a critical part of anti-capitalist movements, not least because they opposed “forced labour, land alienation and colonial taxation” (329) while asserting Black humanity. Aspects of these movements, especially when religious, were sometimes dismissed as mere superstition (331) by

European analysts, presumably including Marxists who may have argued that religion is an “opiate” for the masses. Yet such interpretations likewise reflect implicit racial judgments, in which African traditions and religious practices are rejected as “irrational” compared with a supposedly reasonable, technically superior Western agency.<sup>4</sup> For his part, James explicitly refused such dismissals of African actorhood. Instead, he insisted that religious language may express as much as it disguises African — and from Africa, universal — working-class and subaltern aspirations. Specifically, James argued that the Zambian (then Rhodesian) Watch Tower Movement of the 1930s, related to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, expressed a powerful anti-imperialist, pan-African liberation ambition in religious language (331-332). Rather than thwarting working-class and anti-colonial revolutionary potential, James insisted such religious movements “represent political realities and...aspirations” (332) and ought to be recognized as potentially emancipatory for that reason. Put another way, Black liberation in all its manifestations, including those expressed in religious, anti-colonial vocabularies, is critical to understanding revolts against a world capitalist system.

In another chapter, although in less detail, Hetland and Goodwin consider lesbian and gay movements against institutionalized heteronormativity. They observe that these struggles represent a potentially “hard” case for supposedly narrow “economic” Marxist understandings of what constitutes politically relevant social movement praxis (92). In making their case, Hetland and Goodwin draw on a range of socialist theorists who have written about lesbian and gay movements, often analyzing from their standpoints as LGBT- (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and transsexual)-identifying individuals. Specifically, they are concerned with the ways that Marxism may offer new insights into LGBT movements. They argue, for instance, that urbanization linked with capitalist development enabled the emergence of lesbian and gay identities (94), as family households were broken up and reconstituted on new bases in cities. Once the “objective possibility” of LGBT identities (94) was realized, many then demanded fulfilment of their rights. In today’s struggles, these demands counter stigmatizing exclusions of LGBT persons and same-gender relationships and families, but likewise make claims for

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<sup>4</sup> A typical, recent example is a *National Geographic* article “explaining” that Ebola has spread in West Africa in part due to the persistence of unhelpful traditional African “cultural beliefs” (Thompson 2014). The article observes, too, that the non-profit Médecins Sans Frontières was forced to withdraw from some Ebola-stricken communities because of a “deep-seated suspicion of outsiders.” It goes without saying that such observations, which emphasize an apparently permanent, insular African character, utterly fail to put in context justified concerns by many Africans of former colonial powers, including medical practitioners. On the latter, recall, for instance, deadly pharmaceutical experiments on African populations. Drug trials conducted by Pfizer killed eleven children in Nigeria in 1996, for instance, leading to a financial settlement with the parents in 2011, although Pfizer admits to no wrong-doing (Smith 2011). Hence, CLR James’ rejection of tendencies that identify African beliefs and actorhood with superstition and irrationality are, unfortunately, still pertinent today.

material welfare rights that become accessible when life partners and families are legally recognized as such. The latter possibility, however, depends upon the existence of a welfare state that is itself a consequence of prior working-class efforts to create alternatives to participation in the “market nexus,” as Gosta Esping-Andersen (1990) might put it. In short, the ground upon which lesbian and gay movements move, and even more fundamentally, the ontological possibility of a LGBT identity, is partly shaped by the sedimented, institutionalized outcomes of prior (class) struggles and capitalist development, including urbanization.

Hetland and Goodwin observe, moreover, that from a Marxist perspective it is clear that lesbian and gay communities are far from homogenous. Although middle-class definitions of LGBT identities and rights prevail, such hegemonic definitions mask but do not resolve persistent class and racial inequalities within LGBT movements. Thus, for instance, the American military’s “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy hurt working-class, racialized lesbian and gays most, since military personnel are disproportionately drawn from among racialized working and subaltern populations (99). An historical materialist recognition of the importance of the “dynamics of capitalism” (99) therefore brings new insights into contemporary gay and lesbian movements. This includes a renewed appreciation for the material struggles of LGBT movements, but at the same time, a concern that their dominant, middle-class character may lead to a turning-away from the militancy that is vital to achieving material gains for all LGBT persons in the workplace (100-101). Presumably, Hetland and Goodwin are advocating for a LGBT movement that is attentive to the working-class and subaltern, often racialized, persons within it. Among other characteristics, this would mean a resolutely counterhegemonic LGBT movement that questions market ideologies that seek to incorporate demands in ways that do not disturb fundamental capitalist relationships that are alienating to working-class and racialized gays and lesbians (102).<sup>5</sup>

Such approaches complement Marx’s own recognition that struggles against capitalism are never “only” economic but necessarily linked to national liberation, anti-slavery and anti-colonial movements (53), among other struggles for emancipation. As Marx put it with respect to slavery: “Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded” (Marx quoted in Barker’s chapter, 53). So conceived, historical materialist theorizing of social movements is *necessarily* concerned with uprisings against multiple forms of oppression, “whether based on nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, skill or sexuality” (53). These movements, as Barker insists, “are not *distinct* from or *opposed* to class struggles but are mutually interdependent parts of the social movement against capitalism as a totality” (53). Historical materialist analyses of

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<sup>5</sup> Hetland and Goodwin use the common LGBT shorthand, but in practice, they do not address the specific struggles of transgender and transsexual working-class movements.

social movements are not only about trade unionism, as the classic institutionalized face of class struggle, but address the many dimensions along which working-class and subaltern peoples struggle in an exploitative and alienating (264) world capitalist system.

### **“A Willingness to Fight and an Energy for New Approaches”**

Taken together, the contributions in *Marxism and social movements* illustrate editor and author Laurence Cox’s argument that the working class demonstrates a persistent, if uneven, “willingness to fight.” In his chapter, Cox writes that at the same time, these subaltern movements innovate “new approaches” in their struggles against a world capitalist system that is itself in movement (145). Innovation is evident at once theoretically and practically; for instance, with the emergence of a Global Justice Movement with aspirations to prefigure a more just world beyond neoliberalism and perhaps beyond capitalism, as Elizabeth Humphrys chronicles. At the same time, innovation is pragmatically evident, too, in the diversity of movement tactics adopted across different local and inevitably changing contexts. In Chris Hesketh’s chapter about anti-capitalist actions in southern Mexican provinces of Oaxaca and Chiapas, for instance, he describes a wide array of movement “tactics,” including armed rebellion, autonomous governments or “communes” outside the state, barricades (210) and blockades (223), public protests in public spaces, mega-marches (218), human circles of state buildings, the take-over of radio and television stations (219), community assemblies (222), the re-possession of privatized land (225) and the creation of alternative schools (227), among other strategies adopted by different parts of the movement at various moments in the movement’s development. Innovation is a necessity as social movements adapt to changing circumstances, which includes finding ways of challenging, or escaping, sometimes-fatal violence by the state and private armies.

Indeed, one of the helpful aspects of this book is the description of the impressive range of counterhegemonic approaches developed by working and subaltern classes in their struggles. In highly unfavourable political contexts like Argentina in the aftermath of the 1976-82 military junta (379), for instance, Heike Schaumberg argues that the dispossessed championed “disorganization” to counter the “organized” disciplining of authoritarian state bureaucracies (379). Ironically, however, such “spontaneous” mobilizations against the state and against the power of “banks, transnational capital, the IMF...” (380) did, in fact, demand organization — but in ways unrecognizable to capitalist logics (380). This unrecognizability may have made such protests difficult for capital and the state to repress. Yet in other national contexts, subaltern classes transformed very established, highly visible symbols and instances of state power. Rather than being “disorganized” they organized to transform the disciplining state. In his chapter, for instance, Alf Gunvald Nilsen describes how Adivasi peasants mobilized

against the Narmada Valley Development Project. In part, they did this by re-appropriating state discourses and official state occasions for their own purposes. On Independence Day in the year 2000, for instance, they turned the annual nationalistic celebration into an expression of “the people’s continued resistance against the injustice and exploitation within a nation” (177). They explicitly and vocally opposed official state versions of “freedom and development” (177), bound up with capitalist profit-making imperatives, with their own alternatives. This included the building of micro-dams against the mass dam of the Narmada Valley project, which has displaced hundreds of thousands while causing irreparable ecological harm. More fundamentally, in so doing, these peasants and their allies participated in struggles that began to transform a distant, unaccountable state into one that had to respond to mobilized citizens, aware of their rights and determined to exercise them (180).

Other forms of worker organization contain contradictory tendencies, so that conscious human choice may play a particularly important role in determining the direction of such movements. For instance, professional trade union officials in the United Kingdom with relatively secure employment and salaries many times that of their rank-and-file workers, as Ralph Darlington documents, inevitably work in “changed social conditions,” relatively distant from those they are supposed to represent (193). At the same time, they may be sincerely committed to improving their members’ lives. Moreover, they are elected to do so. Thus, there are formal pressures on trade union officials that may be harnessed to support worker militancy rather than conciliation with the employer and the state (198-199). In other cases, movements must respond to cynical efforts to co-opt potentially rebellious classes. Hence, as Chik Collins observes in his chapter (347-348), the conciliatory language of community-government “partnership” under the Conservative United Kingdom government of John Major tended to make it difficult to express explicit, vocal opposition. Community organizations representing the poor were encouraged to express frustrations within clearly-defined boundaries, but they were ultimately pressured to “responsibly” buy into partnerships with the state. In other words, “partnership” language was a thin disguise for quiescent participation by the poor in the implementation of neoliberal programmes at their own expense (353). Yet hegemony is never a permanent achievement, and at community meetings of the poor in Scotland, Chik observed eruptions of clear, oppositional rhetoric. This is a reminder that there is always the possibility of protest emerging, even in contexts where there are concerted efforts to contain them.

Even so, working-class struggles as emancipatory struggles are never given, but are always achievements. As Elizabeth Humphrys observes, movement activists may retain a very narrow vision of their “single-issue” engagement (365) and refuse broader coalitions. This is a tendency that Bond, Desai and Ngwane likewise observe among some stubbornly local South African urban movements. Yet, through the everyday practices of struggle, some actors may come to see their own “local” struggles as part of a broader,

sometimes contradictory mosaic of movements (365-366, in Humphrys's chapter). The participation of Australian activists in the Global Justice Movement, which since at least the year 2000 has articulated a transnational, political-economic critique of capitalism, is one such example. Likewise, Bond, Desai and Ngwane observe that capitalism's uneven development tends to foster social antagonisms "among those from whom capital is extracted" (255). Like Humphrys, however, they maintain that this is not a fatality. Rather, insofar as human beings are a "nexus of social relations" rather than single-minded "revolutionary subjects" (255), their experiences of multiple oppressions under capitalism holds out the possibility for new strategies that recognize and reinforce interdependence (255) across multiple locations. In short, there is always the possibility of what David McNally describes as the "deepening" and broadening of organized political action into the revolutionary moment, that is, those times when protests extend to "ever more diverse sections of the working people, from domestic servants and commercial employees to artists, actors and rural workers" (420).

Finally, in Hira Singh's chapter, he reminds social movement actors and analysts that in hindsight, even historic defeats may turn out to be victories. Specifically, Singh suggests that the Indian Revolt of 1857, when the dominant Indian landowning class revolted against the colonial state, meant a short-term loss for merchants and peasants. Yet, in the longer term, he maintains that the short-term "winners," both landlords and colonial British authority (311), actually lost. In particular, landlords were pacified and with that pacification, lost their legitimate function as warriors, becoming "superfluous" (312). This hastened peasant revolts that were the ultimate undoing of colonial authorities. Although this was an unintended consequence of the revolts, it does suggest that subaltern mobilizations may weaken elites, while strengthening the popular classes. Experiences of revolt, even when immediate "failures," may be important to future successes for that reason.

### **"First Liste(n) Closely to What is Said"**

As these detailed analyses of a range of case studies suggest, all the contributors are committed to learning from, as much as expertly "informing," the social movements that they study but also seek to accompany in their efforts to challenge and move beyond an unjust world capitalist system. Laurence Cox expresses this as a commitment to avoid "theoretical imperialism," instead attentively listening to what social movement actors themselves say about their struggles. The aim, he suggests, is not to standardize concepts too quickly in the name of a logical formalism, but to accept nuances and differences as social movement actors struggle with much more powerful opponents (146). With Cox, I agree that it is important to "theorize in ways adequate to this reality — and to do so in dialogue with participants and their own modes of thought" (146). But as many authors

in this book likewise point out, so doing is never a simple task, since hegemonic ideas rooted in unequal material relationships make the interpretation of experience a task that is far from transparent. This is true with respect to an important, systemic shortcoming of this book.

In brief, despite Hojsberg's chapter on Black liberation and Hetland and Goodwin's contribution to thinking about LGBT movements, *Marxism and social movements* only incompletely achieves its stated aim of taking seriously the multiple dimension of class struggle, including those aspects that challenge institutional and "attitudinal" racism, heteronormativity, gender inequalities and more. There is virtually no discussion of disability advocacy from historical materialist perspectives, for instance, even though about 15 percent of the world's population (World Health Organization 2011), the vast majority of them inevitably from the working and subaltern classes, are disabled by social relations, institutions and infrastructures built around normative bodies and minds.<sup>6</sup> In addition, it is not too much to say that nearly the entire canon of historical materialist feminism is absent from this book. There is no mention – never mind serious integration – of the arguments put forward by a wide range of historical materialist feminists, both historical and contemporary. There is literally not a single reference to work by Joan Acker, Abigail Bakan, Radhika Desai, Radha D'Souza, Martha Gimenez, Nancy Hartsock, Frigga Haug, Rosemary Hennessy, Chrys Ingraham, Claudia Jones, Maria Mies, Shahrzad Mojab, or Lise Vogel, among many others. Himani Bannerji, Johanna Brenner, and Dorothy Smith are mentioned – but briefly, without any serious, detailed exploration of their rich work. Similarly, theoretical contributions from the global South and by anti-racist and anti-colonial Marxists are thin, despite the contribution by Hira Singh.

Among others (such as Bakan 2012 and Coburn 2014), Smith (1999) has written incisively about how such exclusions occur. Too often, for instance, women's contributions are marginalized as a "separate" concern from "mainstream" (Marxist) theorizing, so that there is little prestige in incorporating "minor" feminist insights into (historical materialist) theorizing. The fact that the four main editors are men and that the eighteen chapters and introduction feature just two women contributors, neither of whom especially highlights feminist materialist insights, may be a "material" explanation for such silences. Along similar lines and for probably similar institutional reasons, Marxist insights into racism, including by some of the above-mentioned socialist-feminists, are largely minor. Anti-racism is addressed separately, as in Hogsberg's useful chapter on CLR James as an emblematic figure within the Black liberation movement, but this is a separate "topic" rather than being integrated across the book. Lesbian and gay

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<sup>6</sup> For historical materialist insights into disability see, for instance, Erevelles 2011 and for insights not explicitly Marxist but certainly sympathetic to them, see Davidson 2008.

movements are addressed in detail in a few pages, but then forgotten. This means that the accounts we have of Marxist insights into social movements — despite their diversity — are ultimately partial. They objectively centre mostly white, mostly male, mostly British — and mostly able-bodied and straight — perspectives into social movements within world capitalism. Symptomatically, the first page of the bibliography lists 23 separate individuals, for instance, all of whom are men, while the last page lists 20, of whom 14 are men. There are whole chapters, like Nilsen and Cox’s chapter on “What would a Marxist theory of social movements look like?” in which socialist women theorists are virtually absent, as if no Marxist feminist has any insights worth considering with respect to historical materialist theorizing of social movements.

This is not a charge against the identities of the authors, which in any case, none of us chooses. Rather, it is an observation about their social position within unequal gendered, classed, and raced relationships in a capitalist world riddled with heteronormative and disabling institutions. From historical materialist perspectives, the editors’ social location — which is arguably similar — may have contributed to the exclusion of “standpoints” (Harding 2004), like materialist feminisms, that are more likely to emerge from those who experience — for instance — gender and race inequalities as problematic in everyday ways within capitalism. In this, the apparently strong, collegial relationships among the editors<sup>7</sup>, while likely facilitating the editorial work, may ultimately have been a disservice to the intellectual breadth. All this is not to say that the book is not useful. On the contrary, in my review I have sought to highlight the strengths of the book, which merits the serious consideration I have sought to give it. But it seems to me that the book might have been significantly more “open” than it is to insights by Marxist feminists, anti-colonial Marxists, socialist experts on disability and so on. This would have required an explicit effort to move beyond “naturally” collegial circles. We need, as Marxists, to listen closely to what is said by the whole range of historical materialist scholars and activists. But to begin to do this in our scholarly work we need to be reflexive about the limits of our own visions. Indeed, this reflexivity and a willingness to reach beyond our own circles is vital if we really are going to challenge — and one day transcend — the unjust, exploitative, and alienating world capitalist relations that now shape our lives.

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<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, reference to joint work by Cox and Nilsen over more than a decade, in footnote 1, p.63.

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