

Reviews & Debates

**CANADA AS CHURKENDOOSE:
A RESPONSE TO PAUL KELLOGG, ESCAPE FROM THE STAPLE TRAP**

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I'd like to begin by thanking Paul Kellogg, tongue-in-cheek, for destroying so many tenets of my intellectual history. *Escape's* wrecking job is admirable! It contributes to a larger trend that may rival the former ascendancy of the "New Canadian Political Economy's" (NCPE), while also rejecting the mainstream critiques of NCPE.¹ I retain some doubts: perhaps Paul can set me straight on them. However, I deeply value this book and the conversation and I happily anticipate the promised companion volume. I thank fellow panelists for their own engagement, as we advance historical materialist scholarship together.

Escape has notable virtues:

- Discerning use of evidence and definitions. Kellogg makes his case. But he also shows the benefits and limitations of existing statistics and labels for the Left. Unpacking, re-packing, and choosing available data is acutely needed among Left scholars: most available statistics were gathered without critical scholarship in mind.
- Linking winning arguments to theoretical advancement. For decades, for instance, scholars have produced evidence against careless accounts of Canadian staples dominance. We knew, for instance, that direct staples workers are few (e.g., Howlett 1996). Kellogg goes further, linking these workforce figures to capitalists' successful quest for relative surplus value, to high Global-North pay rates, and to the analytical centrality of a robust home market.
- Linking Canadian capital's internal sovereignty to imperialism abroad (compare Deneault and Sacher 2012; Klassen 2014).

¹ Two other works in this movement have recently impressed me: Greg McCormack and Thomas Workman's *Servant State*, and Jerome Klassen's *Joining Empire*.

- A call to responsibility. Left-nationalism has too often treated this country's capitalists and political elites, quite capable of autonomous action, as victims, puppets, or side stories. But notwithstanding real limitations on their actions, the latter bespeak the Global North's imperialist capitalism; the Left should make them answer for it.
- Recognition of his adversaries' contributions to the Canadian and international Left.

Canada as Churkendoose: Something like a Simile

My more critical reflections begin with an old children's book (Berenberg and Cunningham 1946). In somebody's barnyard, a bird hatches from an odd-looking egg. Its various body parts suggest a chicken, turkey, duck, or goose: "it depends on how you look at things." The "churkendoose" is an awkward little thing, a bit lame with just one ear. For its sheer weirdness, the other animals argue over it, then ostracize it. But the churkendoose knows what it is, and it wants out of perspectivism and out of the category game:

Must I be a chicken or a goose?
Can't I be a churkendoose?

When the other animals discover that his appearance scares off predators, they welcome him back. (That is an odd life lesson for a bed-time story, but the ending might save parents from a child's sleepless night. So we will let it pass for now.)

But metaphorically speaking, must *Canada* be "a chicken or a goose"? Kellogg has convinced me that the Global South "chicken" mostly won't do. But is the "goose" category (top-tier status in the Global North) sufficient for the "churkendoose" at hand? Doesn't this itself risk one-sidedness, an abstraction that becomes misleading? Kellogg rightly remarked at the panel that while Canada does have unique features, having unique features is not unique. Still, if the unique features become politically salient in this top-tier country, can *Escape* address them?

My discomfort is partly about the categories used and partly about categorization as such. Here, I have debts to history and the humanities. We social scientists often turn irony, paradox, and catachresis in everyday labels into self-consistent (ideally, testable) categories. But many humanists use such labels directly as learning tools, and allow their meanings to shift according to context. Historians are famously cautious about abstract theorization in general, preferring to work the case more than the categories. I sit mostly on the social-scientific side, but I often worry we overlook the fundamental slipperiness and internal contradictions of the realities we study.

This has consequences that are not always welcome. For instance, facing a paradoxical category like “rich dependency,” Kellogg (2015) objects: Canada’s wealth, class structure, and stability are too unlike the Global South to mark a dependency (23-56). He also shows this matters, politically and analytically. But a “churkendoose” category is not overcome by stressing one half of the paradox against the other (“Canada cannot be x, because we associate x with y, and Canada is not y”). Left-nationalists did say “rich dependency,” after all.

Not all paradoxical categories work -- and indeed “rich dependency” might not -- but their strength lies *in the space between their parts*. For instance, I’m still partial to Harold Innis’ “margin of western civilization” ((1930) 1970, 385). Later left-nationalists re-read this as “world periphery” or “semi-periphery.” But read the original again. Canada is part of the *West*, wealthy and high-ranking in racialized and imperial world hierarchies. But still at the *margin*: not one of the “big boys” who call the shots. Increasingly at the top meetings, but typically still “holding the bully’s coat” there (McQuaig 2007), Canada’s elites usually contribute to empire, assuming they benefit from it. But Canada was never the *centre* of a world empire – and is not today. Toronto has grown in world importance, and the relationship has changed in character, but the Canadian equivalents of Washington, New York, and London are still Washington, New York, and London.

Kellogg also notes the shifting categories that Left-nationalists have used. What to make of the shifting? Kellogg seems to suggest this is desperate and loose thinking. But what about experimental or rhetorical thinking -- way-stations through shifting case evidence and historical-geographic contexts, or political stakes? I can’t reject that out of hand: even historical-materialist theoretical concepts are tools of praxis, with intentionally demarcated shelf-lives.

Furthering the point about time-bound concepts, two cases could be made against Left-nationalist claims. I am unsure which one Kellogg supports. One is that Left-nationalists never had the right questions or the right answers. The second is that they recognized something real in the 1960s, but that the facts later changed. Kellogg’s book and his panel presentation generally favour the former, but sometimes favour the latter. Thus, he says several Left-nationalist bugbears, such as high US Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), were empirically plausible when Left-nationalism took off in the late 1960s (121-122). Does his approach explain why, more robustly than Left-nationalists did?

We could read these concepts more strategically and situationally. If one is comparing how capital accumulates and what Canadian and American capitalists will do to workers, focussing on “the colour of the cats” (Gillis and Douglas 1961) is indeed unhelpful: the trouble really is that they are “cats.” But perhaps the issue is Canada’s malingering on climate change mitigation; the recent RCMP and CRA surveillance of

Indigenous people and environmentalists, or Canada weathering the 2007-2008 crisis relatively well, but falling back later. Can Canada's G7 membership or comparisons with Germany, Japan, or the UK address these problems alone? Wouldn't comparisons with Australia serve us better?

Spectral Remnants?

Some elements of the staples Left-nationalist line seem to retain a ghostly presence in Kellogg's arguments. I would like to hear more about the rationale. First, as a critic of Innis's "staples mentality" Kellogg nonetheless argues that "Canada is addicted to the only somewhat less wasteful economy of non-renewable extractivism" (20, cf. 226). Kellogg could now show more clearly how a staples "addiction" differs from a staples "trap." Further, if staples-based Left-nationalist arguments are ideological, a historical-materialist reading of ideology should include the identification of the material bases for recurring commitment to them.

Second, some parts of Kellogg's argument still suggest some kind of Canadian "dependence." Kellogg plans to argue that Canada's imperial privilege includes its "military parasitism" on other countries (19-21). But parasitism only works as privilege if the results reliably favour the parasite, *and* if the host would have things otherwise. But when Canada has wandered militarily while upping arms spending (Avro Arrow, toying with the idea of robust Arctic patrols, non-US military contracts), the big boys grumbled. Privileged military free-ridership can look a lot like "doing what you are told" and "being quiet while at the table", not least when one's free-ridership is called out: Canadian veterans from Vimy Ridge (including Innis) to Afghanistan paid for this in a hard coin.

For a Fractal Geography of Exploitation and National Identity

Escape shows many Left-nationalist categories are unwise. This is amply worth reading. The original "comprador capitalist" category does not apply (Kellogg 2015, 169-175). Canada is not semi-peripheral, at least not like Mexico, Nigeria, or Indonesia (Kellogg 2015, 38).² Kellogg convinces me, with Klassen (2014), that the Canadian capitalist class has become relatively autonomous and self-sustaining (Kellogg 2015, 175-85).

But then I wish that Kellogg had explored categories such "new country" (Innis), "white settler colony," or "white dominions." The countries involved – Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay – stimulated comparative historical research during Canadian Left-nationalist ascendancy (Abele and Stasiulus 1989, esp. 243-45).

² Whether they are all "petro-state" may be a more complicated case: Karl's original work, while restricted to developing countries, was partly a most-different small-n case study (Karl 1997, 17, 19, Chapter 9).

They also informed a research tradition allied with the left-nationalist configuration that Kellogg contests.

I say this, convinced the critiques of these racializing and colonizing labels make essential reading (e.g., Abele and Stasiulus 1989). But reading those labels in inverted commas, alongside that critical scholarship, speaks to key political-economic patterns in these countries, including systemic violence towards Indigenous peoples and settlers of colour. Canada and the others certainly organized themselves *as if* starting from scratch, *as if* only whites and their institutions mattered.

Whether or not these are the right names, that “sin” of race-based colonial settlement and its consequences need a name and good theoretical backing. Certainly, they are modes of imperialism, in venality or severity no different from what (say) the French did on either French *or* Algerian soil. But what settlers in “white settler colonies” did – those whose ancestors stayed and dominated, but did not found a world empire -- does stand apart in kind, in particular consequence, and in necessary restitution.

Escape comes close to this in portraying Canada as a settlement colony with an internal empire attached: “a hybrid, but not in the way much of Canadian political economy suggests” (Kellogg 2015, 165). I like this. *Pace* Obama and Bono, some places have had quite enough “Canada,” and these include large swathes of Turtle Island. Kellogg concludes that subjected collectivities within Canada -- Québécois, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (one might add Newfoundlanders and Acadians) -- can be Left-nationalist with moral and analytical integrity. “Canadians” as such cannot (Kellogg 2015, 10-11).

Any progressive politics in Canada must not miss these internal realities, and they do go to Canadian national identity. A falsely monolithic, benevolent national image has provided ideological cover for myriad oppressions. But in the first place, the Eeyou and Inuit within Québec and the Beothuk’s memory within Newfoundland might cause us to pause. Haven’t subordinated settler nations -- whose Left-nationalism Kellogg respects – also operated imperially? This question might undermine the case for making Left-nationalist exceptions. Or it might undermine Kellogg’s case that Canadian Left-nationalism stands apart from them.

At least two more questions follow. First, which Left-nationalists actually missed internal colonialism? Some have – Kellogg (2015) often stresses the Liberal Party’s role (e.g., 223-227). But as Kellogg knows and honours, Left-nationalist Mel Watkins (1977) headed up anti-colonial research for the Dené Nation. Naylor (1972) considered Confederation the “Third Empire of the St. Lawrence” -- no compliment. And alongside their flaws, the precursor staple classics and *dependentista* traditions certainly understood multi-layered exploitation (Fowke 1946; Frank 1969).

Second, does the bare category of Global North nationalism *logically* require blindness to internal oppression? Sometimes Kellogg appears to think so. But when

Maude Barlow works more on transnational issues, for instance, is her remaining Left-nationalism untidy left-over thinking (one way of reading Kellogg's remarks on page 213) or an integral feature of a maturing position? Kellogg also emphasizes that David Orchard's nationalism went rightward just as Barlow's views were changing. But Orchard's Tory manoeuvrings also failed badly.

So, I hesitate at Kellogg being this categorical:

Progressive resistance to neoliberalism and globalization will take many forms in the states that provide the frameworks in which principal economies develop. Nationalism – whether German, French, or Canadian – *will not be one of those forms* (Kellogg 2015, 166, emphasis added)

Systematic anti-nationalism has honourable roots on Canada's radical Left (e.g., Bakan and Murton 2006). But there is at least an analytical question here. When Kellogg (2015, 8) opens his remarks, arguing that even progressive Global North national resistance *must* "open the door to the political right" and that we need only look to the twentieth century record, I felt that Norwegian, Dutch, Danish (*and* French) resistance to fascism deserved some mention. Similarly, while making excuses for the ruling classes is a key problem with some nationalisms, can we then be silent theoretically (as *Escape* seems to be) about Gramsci's counter-hegemonic national-popular, which addresses this problem with some sophistication?

Collective identities can go toxic. But consider some of the other collective identities. Socialist David McNally has nothing to answer for regarding Stalin. In my books, Christian Cornell West similarly owes us no apologies for the so-called Christian Coalition, let alone the Westboro Baptist Church. A non-rhetorical question for advancing Left research and politics, then: does Global North left-national identity present dangers that differ in kind from those of other Left collective identities. If so, what are they?

Amidst the thuggishness of xenophobic nationalisms today, caution about nationalism is understandable. But caution about abandoning it to the right is understandable, too. Progressives should certainly insist that any Global North collective identity incorporate a multi-layered understanding of internal oppression, responsibility, and solidarity. But precisely such a fractal sense of identity could knead a powerful leaven of maturity -- and responsibility -- into otherwise flat-bread, white-bread nationalism. Canadians desperately need to reckon collectively with their unearned structural privilege, with its roots in oppression and dispossession. As with whiteness, I'd suggest individuals' attempts to renounce their Canadian settler identity removes nothing of its privilege from the bearers. So: "I am Canadian," but this is no beer ad. What prevents the deep-set limitations, crimes, and failings of a nation from becoming core obligations of a

chastened, forward-looking, and open national citizenship to address? Perhaps something does. But in any case, socialists need to work, either on such a project, or on a more explicit case for its impossibility.

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