

Racial Capital from Pan-Africanism and Coloniality to Epistemic Rupture

New Directions in a Life with Marxism

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The history and nature of racial capitalism remain primary questions of our times. Its true significance and gravity threaten to reveal everything about our contemporary world, from our immediate social arrangements to the global system. Within this, corporate power and the hegemonic culture shape the world at the limits of our perceptions. As a result, it is not enough to approach the history of racial capital solely from the perspective of critical historiography, though salient ongoing efforts to decolonize our understandings of its specificities and intricacies are absolutely vital.¹ It is also insufficient simply to investigate how inherently intertwined the categories and processes of race and class have always been, in both real-world practice (especially at the point of production) and also epistemically in terms of Western categories of cognition and cognitive organization, even though this too is absolutely critical. We must also simultaneously engage the contemporary politics of knowledge production around these issues, both within the academy and in popular culture.

Across the twentieth century, the devastating accuracy of political-economic and class analyses led to their widening acceptance, even consecration, as a fundamental point of critical analysis in many disciplines. Race and other so-called “identity” issues essentially arrived on campuses very differently in the United States, in comparison to other nations where this has only recently happened, if at all. Around 1968, in the United States, Black Power and Black Studies made race a major issue on campuses. This helped create space for women, Latinx, Muslims, Native

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Americans, LGBTQ members, disability activists, and many other communities to follow suit in subsequent years – though these people and areas of study tended to be relegated to peripheral or lesser status in terms of both scholarship and the unfolding institutional and disciplinary structures. They have also been subject to massive retrenchment since the 1980s. All of these perspectives are necessary, and together they help us ground our contemporary discussions in their full context.

It is impossible to separate the important decolonial quest for historiographic specificity of race/class entanglements from the politics of the academy and the wider hegemonic Western society in which these questions are engaged, and the ongoing racial politics in which knowledge is actively produced. It is at these two levels that I engage the question of racial capital. I offer an analysis of my own experiences within the historical spaces that I study, in order to consider how my life and knowledge have been shaped by local and imperial historical contexts. In this, my own thinking reflects specific insights about the times in which it was produced. Ultimately, my investigations of racial capital stem from a lifelong need to understand and explain the world around me, to better comprehend these dynamics, and to work to facilitate revolutionary social change to make a better world.

Brooklyn in the 1980s: Contradictions of White Supremacy over Class Solidarity

Long before this became a serious intellectual problem that I personally and professionally investigated, questions of class and race emerged as contradictions in and around my life. In the early 1980s, at the age of 13, I moved to Crown Heights, Brooklyn. I was immediately confronted with more overt anti-Black racism that went well beyond what had previously been limited to the liberal strictures of polite denial, performances and displays of colorblindness, and steady erasure of actual racial specifics or details. I witnessed extreme daily anti-Black racism among most neighborhood adherents of orthodox and Hassidic Jewish sects living in that area, which was rooted in the broader white racism of New York at that time.² The rhetorical violence in my schools and among people I knew sometimes broke out into physical violence in the streets.

These were the years of Ronald Reagan's pre-crash yuppie bubble, epitomized for many in my generation by the cocky swagger and entitlement of Tom Cruise's lead character in *Top Gun*. In 1984, a racist vigilante on the subways was being widely celebrated by what seemed like half the city. A few years later, Donald Trump publicly called for executions of eventually exonerated teenage suspects in the famous Central Park rape case. George H. W. Bush chillingly declared "death to drug dealers" at his nom-

inating convention in 1988. The prison-industrial complex was the fastest growing and newest industrial complex. For a period of admittedly high colorblindness, racial tension and even seething racism were everywhere in New York City. It permeated the wider popular culture. Racist teen gangs and wannabe vigilantes with guns were present in my neighborhood, and more ominous armed gangs roamed as self-appointed security forces. At the time, Howard Stern's radio show featured overtly racist jokes every day, which kids at school would repeat and perform at lunch.

At the age of 15, I was suspended for a week from my religious high school in Washington Heights for refusing to recant a paper I had written in admiration of the principles of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, at least as I understood them upon this first encounter, which was mostly based on encyclopedia entries and the opening pages of the *Communist Manifesto*. In the coming years, in my quest for critical theory to explain the world, I first encountered class analyses, but these were unable to explain properly the more overt racism and potential violence in school and on the streets near Eastern Parkway that I was confronting. I therefore never really had much latitude to sustain a purist attitude privileging class over race, even though I first learned more about the former than the latter and probably initially harbored some of my own class biases because of the overwhelming accuracy and profundity of Marx and his work.

Throughout the 1980s, '90s, and into the 2000s, in the academy, left organizations, and activist spaces, I encountered this tension over and over. There was a consistent and resolute orientation toward class. Often there was an overt class reductionism over and against race or any other forms of "identity" such as gender, sexuality, or disability. There were of course exceptions, which I began actively seeking out, but this orientation has been and remains the rule. We live in a world in which many Marxists of various kinds have, with the highest of intentions, long upheld a notion of class as *the* primary or fundamental unit of analysis from which all others emerge or descend, or emanate from secondarily, appendage-like; the only potential universal identity that can unite a sufficient portion of the masses to effectuate revolutionary change.

Bedouin Intifadas and Cross-Occupation Labor Flows in Occupied Palestine: Between the First and Second Intifadas

In spring 1987, I arrived in Jerusalem, less than a year before the first Palestinian Intifada would explode into history, shaking the complacency of perpetual occupation. Unmoored from inherited secular Western and newer religious ideologies, I was primed to go deeper into Marxist and other radical explanations for the state of the world. At the Jerusa-

lem Center of Friends World College, I studied anthropology, philosophy, and Marxism under a number of progressive and occasionally radical professors steeped in the thought of the 1960s and '70s. I read Edward Said's devastating book, *The Question of Palestine*, which details the deeply colonial, European racial tenor of Israeli nationalism. His work clarified irrevocably a whole series of myths encoded in my de facto U.S. imperial subjectivity, which I had unknowingly trafficked in until then. I also read Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, a book of essays by Che Guevara, and other foundational classics of Marxist, revolutionary, and canonic Western thought, all of which helped orient my studies and understanding of racial capitalism.

Over the next few years, I conducted ethnographic and political-economic investigations of forced resettlement struggles faced by half the Bedouin communities in Israel, with comparative cases in Egypt and occupied Palestine. The fundamentals of political economy were central at every turn, but never remotely extricable from race. British and Israeli colonial governments successively refused to recognize Ottoman-era land records showing Bedouins as the fully complex human beings they of course are. The Bedouin have long practiced grazing of specific parcels annually, and farmed *wadis* and fields.³ They have built homes and communities as well as mosques, tending to ancestral grounds, wells and water catchment basins, cemeteries, and even antiquities. However, the colonial governments, with their shared Eurocentric thinking, deem the predominantly pastoralist Bedouin near the bottom of their (imaginary) evolutionary ladder of cultural forms.

Bedouin peoples are forced into militarized resettlement programs, which are couched in modernizing and missionizing terms, and end up in planned cities. Through this process, they have to sign away all legal claims to their lands and are socially turned into proletarians, living in nuclear family-oriented apartment blocks rather than their traditional extended family structures on the land.⁴ Seven planned Bedouin cities are strategically positioned right next to Israel's most toxic, remote industrial sites, including nuclear and other heavy industries. Roughly half the Bedouin population has been forcibly removed, with great pressure and violence, into these planned ghettos.

The other half resists, decade after decade, holding onto their lands any way they can. The state's plan to recondition them as a new rural-proletariat living in massive apartment complexes in remote parts of the desert grows more violent every year, with West Bank-style home demolitions. The state has razed whole Bedouin villages, such as Al-Araqib, which has now famously been demolished and rebuilt more than 175 times by its com-

mitted residents. Since the 1980s, this half of the growing Bedouin population of southern Israel has steadfastly refused to give up their traditional lands and cultural ways, as well as their land-based modes of production. It is a common experience today for land-based societies to be ruled legally landless, as capitalism feeds on a constant expansion zone of incorporation. Only the resistance of increasingly isolated people limits this robbery.

Among Jews in Israel, there were deep and intense class hierarchies, constructed largely around latent European notions of race that put Ashkenazim (European, ostensibly culturally whiter Jews) always on top, Sephardim (Spanish or Mediterranean or southern Jews) always a step below in terms of power at all levels of society, and then Mizrahim (Arab Jews) at the bottom of the hierarchy – that is until even more racialized Yemeni and Ethiopian Jews arrived in numbers to occupy the bottom position. Bedouin, as Palestinians subject to their own internal hierarchies in which urbanites and peasant farmers often felt superior, were not even considered part of the Israeli class grid. Their racial location as “tribal” in their primary mode of subsistence (pastoralism) placed them outside society in many ways, or at its very lowest tier, a peripheral part of the systemically occupied and oppressed Palestinians as a whole.

Thus, the Bedouin were not the only ones racialized, as the Israelis were also racially involved, not simply neutral class actors and exploiters.⁵ This point was very clear to me from working with Israeli scientists at the Sde Boker Desert Research Institute. Most of the scientists lived at great remove from their immediate Bedouin neighbors, who were often the explicit focus of their research. This was also evident in the stark contrast between the suburban Jewish residents of Be’er Sheva (Bir Saba) who had subsidized middle-class sprinklered lawns compared to whole Bedouin communities on the other side of the chain-linked and razor-wired fences who relied on a single water spigot for more than one hundred people and three hundred livestock.

Bedouin communities were all labeled illegal by Israel, so they received little to no services such as schools and clinics. They did not receive infrastructural allocations for water, roads, electricity, broadband, fire, police, and so on. These ugly manifestations of racial capital, which I first encountered by working with Bedouin community leaders and activists, remain volatile and difficult to discuss, even today. As a teenager doing this work, Zionist racism and whiteness in Israel had come into clear ethnographic view, but all of this was a topic beyond most academic acceptability. This remains somewhat of a constant, even if important new critical ground has begun to open in some U.S. and Jewish communal discussions of Israel, which focus on its alarming racist and fascist ten-

dencies. When briefly covered at all in Western outlets, the oppression and struggles of the Bedouin are referred to in simple ahistorical terms, usually with a romanticized Abrahamic projection based on allochronic assumptions that animal herders represent a literal glimpse back in time. Hardly anyone engages the primarily racial component of the dynamics of oppression of the Palestinians in general, let alone the specific case of the Negev/Naqab Bedouin, who are now counted as a third- or fourth-class racial minority within Israel.

Colonialism, Underdevelopment, and Entrenched Racial Capitalism on the Kenyan Coast

In summer 1990, at the start of my senior year, I arrived in Kenya thinking of myself as a Marxist social scientist specializing in ethnography. I had just written my first full-fledged ethnographic work, a two-hundred-page study of the Sinai town of Dahab, providing a thick description of budget/hippie tourism, land and labor analyses of Bedouin marginalization at the hands of Cairo and Nile valley entrepreneurs, and a world historical analysis of economic change across three centuries. Now, I needed to understand the political-economic history of Kenya, one of the handful of white settler colonies in Africa. I engaged three of the most sophisticated and critical studies regarding colonialism in Kenya that were then available: Richard D. Wolff's *The Economics of Colonialism: Britain and Kenya, 1870–1930*; Roger van Zwanenberg's *Colonial Capitalism and Labour in Kenya, 1919–1939*; and Gavin Kitching's materialist tome, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya: The Making of an African Petite-Bourgeoisie*. These equally brilliant political-economic treatises brought academic rigor and provided overwhelming accuracy in describing brutal colonial systems of exploitation, the vestiges of which surrounded me. It was very real and powerful, but what was striking was also that these political economies were written almost purely at the infrastructural level, looking at production, labor, forced taxation, the export biases of plantations, and economic development. Only at the very end did they so much as venture a brief glance at cultural realms and variables, which were clearly considered to be of a far lesser, derivative status. These studies became my infrastructures, I adopted them, as they were wholly correct in what they laid down, and I could apply them with specificity and updated detail in my own sphere of experience and study at the Kenyan coast. But I was also acutely aware that half the story at least was missing.

Culture, identity, and race, generally seen as part of the superstructure, were shaping and determining many of the critical social dynamics I was observing and experiencing. These factors operated in tension with and

sometimes counter-determined the fundamental structural material forces. Based on my fieldwork, they were sometimes even operatively predominant. David Parkin, an anthropologist, had noticed this relationship in his work among Mijikenda communities on the coast. Fred Cooper, in *From Slaves to Squatters*, highlighted these cultural issues in his history of coastal communities. This almost perfectly mirrored the historical context of my ethnographic work in Shariani, a village of four thousand people about twenty-two miles north of Mombasa.

Based on my open-ended ethnographic fieldwork, I wrote a 550-page thesis, *Processes of Change in Shariani, Kenya: Ideological, Institutional and Infrastructural Levels*. This work reflected the mechanistic Marxist thinking of the period, and the influence of the Israeli, Palestinian, and British Marxist scholars I had encountered. I divided my study into major sections: (1) a decolonized history; (2) superstructure: ethnicity, race, and identity; (3) social structure: geography, education, religion, and law; and (4) infrastructure: household labor, the gender division of labor, and a land analysis tracing all known land parcels back to slavery and its 1922–24 colonial codification as private property. While land alienation and the resulting increase in need for wage labor to survive were primary driving forces, there was an important multidirectional determination regarding every issue examined. For example, as I was writing, a Mosque split along race/class lines, erupting into occasional violence as a major landowning descendant of a former major slave holder in the area was directly challenged for his racism. Racism was layered in as a primary discursive and explanatory vehicle everywhere power was expressed, and it often determined and shaped access to capital, resources, and many forms of labor.

While I was doing fieldwork in Israel, Egypt, and Kenya in the late 1980s, the academic debates at the time still reflected the 1970s, with concerns regarding dependency theory and whether an updated Asiatic mode of production approach could be taken toward non-Western regions, such as Africa. Through the works of Claude Meillassoux, Jean Suret-Canale, Georges Balandier, Antonio Gramsci, Amílcar Cabral, and Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, I pursued numerous ways of exploring culture more deeply within Marxism. I began to question Western modes of thinking and writing about Africa and the rest of the world. The intellectual lens through which entirely separate “African modes of production” could possibly try to make sense narrowed and collapsed under the weight of its own Eurocentric, evolutionist assumptions.

An important part of this shift was serious consideration of Walter Rodney’s *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. He irrevocably defined the relational nature of international political economy, the connection between

underdevelopment and overdevelopment. The effects of his work were not registered right away by many in the academy who were resistant to its decolonial politics. Nevertheless, its implications were more seismically, or temporally disruptive, as its reverberations continue even today. The core truths it elucidated grow ever more concrete and visible. It is one of those uncomfortable facts that once named and seen becomes no longer deniable by the honest, whereas for many it remains a nightmare of self-awareness and political responsibility avoided by whatever artifice, bourgeois sophistry or self-deceit. Europe and Africa, the West and its former (or current) colonies and neocolonies, are fundamentally relational rather than separate units of analysis.

With these insights, it was still necessary to find in-depth analyses of race and colonialism, or of racial capital in this context, as well as work focused on African socialism. I engaged theories within the Pan-African tradition to address some of the primary dynamics I was finding in the field.⁶ This work helped understand how colonially rooted discourses of respectability were encoded in the Western-style racial chattel plantation slavery in Zanzibar and the Kenyan coast, which carried all its epistemic and racial baggage. This was followed by a period of intense colonial rule that largely deepened and solidified what was already a minefield of emergent race/class identity dynamics, purposely leveraging and even sometimes completely inventing local cleavages around which to bifurcate loyal proteges based on their willingness to exploit their neighbors.

While Cooper offered a masterful materialist historiography that chronicled the continuity of wealth and power between major historical periods on the coast of East Africa, he only cursorily engaged the pivotal and decisive dynamics of identity. My research indicated that post-1830s racial identities and their schematic historically determined relations to power to be the most determinative vector for predicting social outcomes along the Kenyan coast. Rooted in layers of slavery-based respectability language and culture, things such as who was considered Arab or Muslim or Swahili versus who was considered Giriama, Kauma, Digo, or generally members of the Mijikenda and therefore African (that is, "Reservation Africans" who require pass cards to travel or work under colonial rule) determined who lived where, what jobs were available, who could and did own land and where. More ambiguously and somewhat surreptitiously located were the many descendants of those who had been enslaved (until 1907), mostly in the nineteenth century, and those who were largely now acculturated into the mostly Muslim Mijikenda/Swahili communities stretching from rural to urban extremes, but usually outside or peripheral to the more elite urban Islamic centers in the larger historic cities.

Culture Wars and Resistance to Intersectionality Since the 1990s

By the time I got to grad school in the 1990s, the issue of class reductionism and resistance to the growing identity politics movements seemed to openly afflict many of the leading voices of the left, from Noam Chomsky and Ralph Nader to veterans of the civil rights movements. Many argued that too many identity issues or differences were dividing the movement, insisting that only class could unite it. Some Marxists went to great pains to delegitimize or disprove Said, which seemed to miss the point entirely, and awkwardly aligned them with conservative and even colonial adherents of Orientalism. A similar disruption happened around Cheikh Anta Diop's earlier argument that European civilization was influenced by Africans and Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*, which highlighted that Aegean civilization was influenced by Egyptian and Phoenician culture. An uproar ensued against the radical and discipline-shaking implications of these debates. We also had the Philip Curtin "Ghettoization Debate" in African and Africana Studies, clearly demarcating and making visible the racial and power fault lines within a field that had directly experienced the Black Power and Black Studies interventions of the late 1960s and early '70s.

Despite the powerful and the regressive retrenchments within some left circles and spaces, the epistemic and intersectional shifts and openings of the 1960s rupture have become manifested in thought and practices present in some of our institutions. New generations of students are steeped not just in the multiculturalism or tolerance of the 1990s, but in difference, difference as positive, and intersectionality. This advance, guided by love, is a creeping, difficult effort, constantly facing repression and co-optation, institutionalization and elimination.

In the 1990s, as the "culture wars" were emerging and hardening, many of us in social movements on campuses and in communities were speaking a language of radical multiculturalism. We were articulating ALANA (African, Latin American, Native, and Asian) and other radical gender and sexuality formulations of complex inclusivity. In our praxis, we were codifying and enacting language and practices around the category of underrepresentation, which therefore could encompass multiple axes of difference in our mobilizations. In graduate school at the State University of New York in Binghamton, we inherited the collective knowledge and institutionalized manifestations of prior struggles, starting in 1968 with the rise of the Black Student Union and the Latin American Student Union in 1969, followed by a Woman's Center, Muslim Student's Association, various formulations of queer or LGBTQ space, and a fight that had secured a new Vice President for Multicultural Affairs to represent all underrepresented communities and groups on campus at the executive level of student gov-

ernment. We fought for a more diverse curriculum, against the arming of police with guns and pepper spray on campus, to keep our cooperative student-owned bus service, and against racism and white supremacy. We took over buildings and got pepper sprayed and brutalized by hired security. These movements were led by working-class undergraduate students of color, largely women. Faculty of color, such as Carole Boyce Davies and Maria Lugones, worked with and mentored us. Activist leaders took classes from radical professors. We used the most critical ideas we learned as a roadmap for our praxis, so we were field testing radical positions on a daily basis, in college governance battles, mobilizations, organizational structures, membership policies, and styles of leadership.

From this experience, *students* started two research groups, which eventually attracted top professors from campus and leading thinkers from all over the world. The Coloniality Working Group was started by three students (one being me) closely connected to campus social movements. It maintained radical internal politics, pursued new and sometimes boundary-crossing theoretical formulations, and culminated in a series of major conferences attracting brilliant guests including Aníbal Quijano and Sylvia Wynter several times, as well as Enrique Dussel, Walter Dignolo, Ifi Amadiume, and Fernando Coronil. In its early years, it was more independent and free-floating than its later iteration at the Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems and Civilizations.

The Walter Rodney Committee was a little smaller. It emerged out of discussions from a class, "Africa in the World System," that I was teaching, in which we were reading *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. We were taking turns reading paragraphs in a circle (during a student building takeover), as I had learned in practice from my Marxist mentor Ewan MacColl, and also from Freire. We noted that Binghamton had been one of Rodney's annual destinations as he traveled to pay bills and maintain his presence in Guyana against the dictatorship's hopes that preventing him from working in the country would force him to abandon his national political leadership in the Working Peoples Alliance and leave. From 1996 to 1999, we met regularly to study and discuss his work more deeply. We built campaigns to raise awareness and historical memories of him on campus as some kind of a fitting or proportional tribute, including a scholarship for underrepresented students. We pushed to name the Student Union after him. In 1998, students organized a three-day international conference called "Engaging Walter Rodney's Legacies." Wynter and George Lamming gave brilliant, personal, and profound keynotes. Patricia and Asha Rodney attended and participated actively throughout. Major scholars participated, including Vincent Thompson, Joseph Inikori,

J. F. Ade Ajayi, Ambassador Dudley Thompson, James Turner, Rupert Lewis, Ed Ferguson, Rupert Roopnarine, Michael West, Cecil Gutzmore, Davies, Immanuel Wallerstein, Ali Mazrui, Nkiru Nzegwu, and many more. There were two student research and activism panels and a book launch session. Each day we provided incredible home-cooked meals by African, Caribbean, and South Asian student groups for hundreds of guests. These meals were part of a brazen resistance to the mediocre and expensive offerings of Sodexho-Marriott, which had an expensive catering monopoly on campus. We worked hard to provide this alternative food option, given the company's proapartheid past and their opposition to antiapartheid student movements in the 1970s and '80s.⁷

Both these groups' meetings, intragroup work, and conferences during the latter 1990s were part of something significant and trailblazing. They were precursors, like what was happening elsewhere, to genealogies of coloniality and decolonial theory, grounded in Quijano's earlier works and our social movements, before the wider growth of this field in the early 2000s. Wynter's presence and active participation in both projects was very important. She helped fully bridge the Spanish and English spheres of culture and language, and the movements of Pan-Africanism and coloniality that we had mobilized to bring her to campus for further engagement. Her approach and synthesis accounted for Marxism, Pan-Africanism, anticolonialism, race and racism, gender, colonialism, sexuality, the nation-state, family structures, environmental destruction, and much more. During this time, my understanding of racial capital was enriched through deeply engaging the work of Black and transnational radical feminists such as Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Barbara Smith, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, as well as other revolutionaries like Cabral, Stokely Carmichael, Fanon, Huey Newton, Yuri Kochiyama, Fred Hampton, and Malcolm X.

Discursive and epistemic shifts in the academy and their equivalents in popular discourse often seem slow, but tectonic in effect. In Binghamton, like elsewhere at that time, whole departments of and scholarly debates around labor history had unfolded for decades as though labor was only white, or as though nonwhite labor could be bracketed as a special side category. I remember realizing that Dr. Davies was in the English Department but was also among those in the Comparative Literature Program fighting for recognition and equal resources, even though it represented all of the people and cultures of the world and not just a single nation or language. Recently, sociology is having a potential racial reckoning as a discipline, thanks to Aldon Morris's *The Scholar Denied*, which highlights the long suppressed foundational contributions of W. E. B. Du Bois to the field of study.

More broadly, the argument that racial chattel slavery (and sometimes by extension racial colonial and neocolonial labor after that) was always central to capitalism is finally gaining some serious attention. It is no longer a completely fugitive and unwelcome perspective, which automatically unsettles colleagues and gets you branded an ideologue. Interestingly enough, to the extent that this elephant in the room of U.S. history is now becoming slightly more visible in mainstream discourse, it is usually via newer works by mostly white scholars in Ivy League schools without much, if any, reference to the whole school of Pan-African progenitors of these issues.⁸ A great example is the excellent work of Edward Baptist on the centrality of slavery to U.S. capitalism, which despite being groundbreaking in its title and a great deal of its evidence, nonetheless fails to engage the vast and tortured literature that made these arguments before him.⁹ The brilliant *New York Times* 1619 Project has also forced an almost *Roots*-like reckoning with its past on much of mainstream U.S. society, which usually remains deeply insulated from such connections. Though here too, this effort is somewhat disconnected from the scholarship and radical agitation that made it possible and is grounded in the wider Atlantic (and Indian Ocean) world systems from as early as the late fifteenth century.

Generally, it seems we have yet to build sustained academic investigations of these fundamental questions that are fully embedded in their Black radical and anticolonial revolutionary roots. Or, more accurately, these groundings remain rare throughout our contemporary world system, even though they are worth searching for and excavating, and equally worth fighting for. I can also say that the organizational style and complexity, and the centering of queer Black women and women of color in Black Lives Matter movements, rather than the hetero-masculinist tendencies usually found in such spaces, felt familiar and made sense to me. It is logical and representative of shifts we have continued to solidify since the ruptures of cultural and epistemic categories in the 1960s, as Wynter and others explain.

Ultimately, class-reductionist approaches are trapped in the violent coloniality, chronicity, and epistemology of the Western structures against which they are arrayed. Stern and brilliantly undeniable condemnations of the dangers of (especially petty-bourgeois) co-optation, which lead to the ultimate reproduction of the very systems against which rebellions are intended, may be seen in texts from George Orwell's *Animal Farm* to almost any of the works of Walter Rodney, as well as in so many political instances.¹⁰ Critiques of this sort are often focused on the class manifestations of these repeating epistemic processes, but these processes cluster around all the axes of socially constructed difference. Systems of power

under this order (what Wynter calls the Era of Man) repeat these co-optative processes across each of the forms of difference and proliferate especially at their intersections. Individuals, institutions, discourses, and whole epistemological systems at times are subject to, the product of, or participant in these forces and dynamics. Seeing beyond class amplifies, rather than diminishes, the accuracy of the class aspects of this critique. Wynter provides language that helps pull all this together. She explains that the “bourgeois mode of being” is always fundamentally racial, always all about class relations in their deepest sense, always gendered and sexualized, and always subject to the complexities of citizenship and nation-state relations, disability status, age, and the full complexities of our actual lives, including our transracial subversions and our trans identities that threaten the binaries that make Self/Other relationalities possible.

We must acknowledge that a large swath of the left in the United States and globally (particularly in Europe), including many Marxists, labor activists, and scholars among them, have joined the Western right in condemning identity politics and its multicultural visions of complexity and representation. Similarly, it is interesting that Said’s *Orientalism* was the text that forced open so many issues in the knowledge/power nexus and caused so much consternation to this day in both Orientalist and Classicist circles and in some Marxist circles. This distress is largely divorced from the author’s Palestinian specificity, and largely without reference to the Pan-African traditions, which prefigured most of this debate in profound detail, and which Said, to his credit, incorporated into his later work. Certainly, there were great differences in tone, style, intent, and effect, and it is a comparison that can only be made with nuance, but it is an association that should be uncomfortable and deserves much closer analysis. It is the kind of thing too often attributed to “oversight” and “accident” when an institutional lack of diversity prevails and a monoculture fails to recognize itself as monocultural, or fails to recognize its own monocultural lapses.¹¹

But most pointedly in response, why should Marxism – which at its best identifies so transfiguratively with the human being, the human and our rapidly diminishing spheres of family and community and love, struggling to survive under the various systems of oppression we are born into or find ourselves subjected to – circumscribe the constitution of its human subjects, rather than embracing and grounding in the historical-cultural specificities of the actual human beings liberating themselves? Alternatively, what kinds of Marxism allow us to center the primary historical axes of identity that scaffold modernity, still including class fundamentally, but also race, gender, sexuality, ableism, nationalism, citizenship status, religion, age, and so on, however these specific-

ities present themselves, however people articulate their embodiments at particular places and times?

Expanding the Place of Culture and Superstructure in the Dialectics of Revolution

My current research situates the origins of capitalism and racism within their North African and Atlantic contexts, following Ella Shohat in linking the Reconquista and the Conquista. Reading the early explorers, it is clear that most emergent forms of class, labor, and resource exploitation were already deeply racially encoded and legitimized by new fixed conceptualizations of the human and nonhuman. Without emerging notions of racial superiority, the Papal Bulls directing Portuguese and Spanish conquistadors to take their respective halves of the (already inhabited) world would not have made much sense. Portuguese kings seem to have funded boats, crews, and especially captains with the most bloodthirsty records and highest likelihood of returning with plundered wealth.

A key determinant for me of our modern world is the Spanish and wider European theological juridical rendering of what are really, in its distinct modern senses, the first *nonhuman humans*, delineated clearly at the very outset in the Bartolomé de las Casas/Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda debates about the status—human and reformable, or not—of the “Indians,” the roughly one hundred million people, maybe more, living for millennia in connected civilizations across all of the Americas. Once rendered nonhuman or less than human, by the Reconquista/Conquista that encompassed all non-Christians as a form of the ultimate and original “Other,” they could be expropriated, exsanguinated, delimbed, or otherwise deprived of life. This was done under the supposedly just persecution of the broad category of “Agents of Satan,” a ready theological construct of the “Other” now encoded onto newly fixed and frozen identities, especially those of First Nation peoples in the “Americas.” Wynter makes it clear that this freezing of identities within a new rigid epistemic grid, which holds sway even today in its various primary forms, was located even more particularly in regard to the bodies of Africans and Black people everywhere. It was employed to justify racial transatlantic chattel slavery. It has been a central component in the devastating logic of capital.¹²

Within this account, it is necessary to delineate the complexity and subsequent widespread erasure of world systems, empires, and civilizations that preceded our modernity, driven as it is by European/Western capitalism, which apparently cannot structurally abide this information, making its reclamation especially volatile and important.¹³ The new violent-crusader epistemology of genocide, mass crucifixions, and holy

conquest emerged in direct contradistinction to what Janet Abu-Lughod brilliantly described as the thirteenth-century world system, or the Old World systems that persisted across millennia until the rise of the successive capitalist world systems.¹⁴ While this is one of my favorite radical works of history in its methodology and its nuance, scope, brilliance, and precision, it nonetheless inadvertently, but inexcusably, leaves Africa almost entirely out of its vast reconstructions, almost to the extent of the colonial narratives from which she was openly trying to break. This problem is mainly a matter of specific expertise, a wider lack of information, and the fact that Middle East, Indian Ocean, and Asian histories have been so effectively cut off from their (often overlapping) African counterparts. Rather than contend with her underlying suppositions, which themselves are profound and worthy of engagement in their full spectrum, instead I prefer to add back in the African half that she left out, so that the great West African, North African, East African, Central and Southern African kingdoms, megastates, and empires are all brought back to the center of these ancient systems. From my reading of the revolutionary intentions in her work, I assume she would have embraced my additions to her powerful counterbalancing model.

More work needs to be done on the entirely unacceptable evolutionist conceptualization that lies at both the core of most reactionary colonial thinking but also, more concerningly, at the center of some of the most revolutionary insurgencies against that order. Notions of singular, unilinear, and universal evolutionary cultural and political-economic stages have unfortunately become embedded in many left critiques and understandings of history. Such thinking masks something much more cataclysmic in reality, the violent rending of a new episteme in the fifteenth century that legitimized and was based on relational biocentric Self/Other identifications now frozen in rigid hierarchical manifestations and structures of power. We need work to further deconstruct the place of residual (and even sometimes overt) evolutionism in left thought.

Let us recognize Lorde as a critical Marxist thinker, though she is almost always relegated to other realms, such as poetry, activism, and feminism. She offered a deep and direct critique of capitalism, from her and her family's own lives within it, to the epistemology of negation capitalism necessitates. She insightfully mapped difference in our discourse and praxis. She put forward a profound and clear inversion of the core negational location of difference in Western thought – from the locus of capitalist exploitation or rejection of difference, to its complete opposite: the recognition, amplification, acceptance, and celebration of difference as positive, generative, and central. All of this aligns

tightly with and embodies Wynter's concept of a rupture of the primary normative axes of power and identity under modernity since the late 1960s. Lorde had a deep capacity to think and live intersectionally, before that was yet named fully into existence. She sought to discern how oppression and therefore liberation worked under capitalism. Importantly, she did not abandon class, Marxism, and a radical critique of capitalism in order to bring forth her intersectional analysis of additional layers of identity and their geometrically complex intersections under the aegis of imperial transnational capitalism.

Lorde's battle was different than Cabral's, less obvious or direct in the military guerrilla sense, but equally sociological and cultural in its effort to better know the enemy against which we struggle so as to outmaneuver, reincorporate, and defeat them. Unfortunately, I do not usually hear her included in the pantheon of Marxist thinkers, nor do we hear frequently enough about her Marxist colleagues, such as Barbara Smith. To a large extent, this falls under the very Lordian category of not using bourgeois measures of scientific validity or theoretical citability to dismantle the academy, in her sense of not using the master's tools (uncritically, because that is a lot of what is left now) to dismantle his house. We can and should draw our revolutionary theory from whomever and wherever it emerges in struggle, whether recognized in the academy or not as scholarly or worthy of engagement.

Conclusions

Living within the orbit and epistemology of the core hegemonic liberal-normative bourgeois imperial order of our times, I was a trination-al child of parents from New York raised mostly between Toronto and Brooklyn. In my early teens, I was fortunate to have several opportunities to leave the dominant Western liberal epistemic frame of reference, as part of a non-Western theological community and through attending a radical experiential college. At the latter, I lived and conducted fieldwork in remote non-Western Palestinian and Mijikenda cultural spaces of acute colonial and neocolonial oppression and resistance. Through this experience, I share with many of those who have come from outside the West a certain extreme skepticism about the potential of the West, specifically its most bourgeois core, to ever see itself critically from an outside perspective. In fact, the inability of the bourgeois culture critically to assess itself and others has helped create the most compromised, ideologically captured and conditioned, deeply miseducated and industrial mass media-flooded population in the world, given its proximity to the apex of imperial and cultural power. This condition is true of both the extreme right

and much of the center mainstream. If the left continues to be anchored in unspoken primarily white, Western bourgeois, ableist, heteronormative, patriarchal frameworks, then we must acknowledge the extent to which its thinking and potential are deeply compromised out of the gate.

When we take Marxism outside of its Western framework, we find we are less encumbered by its attendant Eurocentric or Western epistemic assumptions. Rodney's newly edited book, *The Russian Revolution: A View from the Third World*, showcases some of these issues, in a time capsule from almost a half-century ago, and shows how deeply rooted some of these questions are. In our introduction to the book, Robin D. G. Kelley and I argue that Rodney's initial "Two World Views" conception for the title proffers a powerful discursive and even epistemic interventionary model that challenges some of the primary genealogies of our contemporary order of critical knowledge and suggests pathways to further decolonizing it. Outside the West, and in parallel form inside the colonized or nonwhite West, race and class questions often become looser, more fluid and complex, more open to investigation, acknowledgment, and centering. Race cannot so easily be suppressed, nor should it be, though there are valiant efforts made to do so everywhere. In the hands of Wynter, can we really say that her work fits within Marxist thought, as some would like it to do, or must we acknowledge the inverse, the almost heretical, that the epistemology of Marxism, along with the rest of bourgeois and radical Western thought, is encompassed within her framework of the epochal epistemes of Man and its hegemonically produced modes of being?

More speculatively, what does it mean to trace alternative genealogies of knowledge about racial capital? What would it mean to advance an Ida B. Wells/Claudia Jones/Lorde/Davis/Wynter axis grounded in a kind of specificity that Marxism and material analyses take as a foundational strength. It is a specificity in which class never appears separate from race, racial caste, gender, sexuality, language, and other innumerable axes of difference constructed by materially real points of individual and social articulation and reproduction. This is a very specific kind of Marxism and materialism. It is a political-economy embedded already in racial and colonial specificities of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, age, nationality, citizenship status, language, accent, religion, potentially neuro-continuum and mental health positive, and adept at border complexities/hybridities/interracialities. In a Jones/Lorde/Wynter axis we also find many others, like Barbara Smith, Leslie Feinberg, Kathleen Cleaver, Elaine Brown, as well as men like Rodney, Cabral, Che, Freire, and all deeply humanistic thinkers. All guided by the kind of revolutionary humanism that at its

end entails the rethinking and regrounding of conceptions of what we are as human beings who are always already fundamentally social beings. Wynter shows the clearest visions of what a future might begin to look like, which she calls an Era of the Human, beyond the current Era of Man.

Health care, community, land, housing, safety, and food were largely treated as social guarantees and rights provided by society, the village, the realm, the nation, and/or the divine order before capitalism. We cannot overaccentuate or overcenter the importance of the unique and aberrational nature of the phenomenon of denying human beings en masse, as a majority across the globe, the basic human rights of survival in the commons: housing, sociality, food, and access to work or production, the absence of which capitalism disciplines us to atemporally now consider the true state of nature, thereby rendering it largely invisible, outside most fields of consideration. From *The Walking Dead* to *Westworld*, this is cemented and amplified, in the starkest social Darwinian self-destructive terms, in pop culture metanarratives on human nature, and repeated rather unartfully across the entire medium as a stand-in for the trope of evil motivation.

Blackness as a signifier in Western thought and science has always been and remains a complex, generally problematic, inherently relational and politicized subject. The history of racialized capital is therefore doubly difficult to discern, because the history and sociology of race, racism, and the Black/White symbolic and epistemic order themselves are all yet to be substantively decolonized, and are in fact still usually clear functional extensions of colonial and neocolonial dynamics and systems. This is so widely true that this is even so, though hopefully in more subtle and more inadvertent or reparable ways, within many Marxist and radical circles. The lateness of many Marxist and progressive white scholars and activists to engage deeply with racial analyses, and to deal appropriately and collaboratively with nonwhite communities and potential allies across all forms of difference, as a primary part of their commitment to work on class, was perhaps the most serious failing of the majority of twentieth-century left movements. It continues to be a major challenge, flagrantly exploited on an ongoing basis.

Notes

1. My own work contributes to decolonial corrective historiographies, especially in regard to research focused on culture and history on the East African coast, forced Bedouin resettlement, and Kurdish displacements in the contemporary Middle East, as well as issues of race and racism in North America.
2. Even today, this remains a sensitive thing to write about, so touchy, complex, and volatile are the vicissitudes of race and class in their real-world particulars. In the 1980s, this was exponentially harder to broach as a topic almost anywhere, though I know a few of us did in our different ways. I have found that
- there is always dissent in unequal communities if you know how to look for it.
3. Wadis are fertile riverbeds that retain water to support trees, shrubs, grains, and wildlife; however, they are dry most of the year, only occasionally flooding, sometimes violently, when rains fall upstream a few times a year.

4. The singular *Bedu* means “of the land,” *Bedouin* means “people of the land.”

5. Racialized marginalization was a key part of Bedouin oppression under British colonialism and then the emergent Israeli state, which expelled approximately 90 percent of the southern Naqab (Negev) Desert’s Bedouin population in 1948–49, then subjected those remaining to forced relocation in closed military reservations, and subsequent dispossession from most of their ancestral lands. As a consequence of Western categories of race being introduced more institutionally and consequentially by the early twentieth century (but not earlier, in my research), many Bedouin began to internally adopt wider anti-Black racial attitudes and categories against members of their own community who had more direct or visible linkages to Black or African ancestors, now often oversimplified as a referent for slavery or enslave-ability.

6. I am thinking especially here of Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Walter Rodney, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Okot p’Bitek, all of whom became central to the theory of my work, though the list is truly a long one; and Kenya is also

where a fellow student introduced me to Audre Lorde, a major event.

7. See, for example: “Committee on Southern Africa: Photographs,” African Activist Archive, accessed May 18, 2020, available at africanactivist.msu.edu.

8. In particular, I am thinking of Eric Williams, C. L. R. James, W. E. B. Du Bois, Oliver Cromwell Cox, Claudia Jones, Walter Rodney, and many others.

9. Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic, 2016).

10. In particular, see Walter Rodney, *The Groundings with My Brothers* (New York: Verso, 2019); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (New York: Verso, 2018); and Walter Rodney, *Walter Rodney Speaks* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Institute of the Black World, 1990).

11. This example comes from a specific situation with Dean Don Blake and a spectacular failure with a nondiverse Diversity Committee in Binghamton that set off a major wave of actions and organizing.

12. Blackness can then be variously extended to Muslim, Jewish, indigenous,

or any other “Brown” people as needed, since it is a fundamentally invented and amorphous concept anyway. But it remains a model based on Black people who then cannot as easily try to navigate out of such apportionments and ascriptions as many of those in more ambiguous locations within the now logonormative epistemic framework of the White/Black dichotomy. Wynter was always clear when we talked that she was skeptical of Las Casas because of his work on Africans. He is perhaps partly to blame for the cementing of the shift to the anti-African, specifically anti-Black racial chattel slavery that then came to predominate in the Atlantic system.

13. For my current book project on decolonial time, I am elaborating a temporal theory that accounts for the origin myths of Western self-conception and names this phenomenon a kind of immaculate conception, a repeated theme or process of relational formative dehistoricization that carries degrees of necessity within the logic of the colonizing system.

14. Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

MONTHLY REVIEW *Fifty Years Ago*

A reader writes to correct a statement in Bobbye Ortiz’s piece “On the Nuclear Family” in the May issue of MR. Mrs. Ortiz quotes a statement from Engels’s *Anti-Dühring* which reads in the English translation: “In the division of labor, man is also divided,” and she adds in a footnote: “Both Marx and Engels followed the prevailing custom of casually subsuming half of the world into the category of the other half.” Our correspondent points out that in the German original, Engels used the word *Mensch* which means “human being,” adding: “It may be debatable whether the English usage of the word ‘man’ as synonymous with ‘human being’ reflects male chauvinism; but in German these words are not synonymous, and Marx and Engels could not have ‘casually subsumed half the world into the other half,’ even if they had been so inclined.”

—HARRY MAGDOFF AND PAUL M. SWEETZ,
“Notes from the Editors,” *Monthly Review*, July–August 1970.