Racialized capitalism: An account of its contested origins and consolidation

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Abstract

Undergirded by the perspective of historical materialism in dialogue with black Marxism and Marxist feminism, this article constructs an account demonstrating the significance of racism to the making of modernity. The analytic returns of unthinking Eurocentric sociologies in favour of a more unified historical social scientific approach include the unmasking of the intimate relationship between capitalism, class struggles and racism, particularly how capitalist rule advanced through a process of differentiation and hierarchical re-ordering of the global proletariat. From the 17th-century colonization of Virginia to Victorian Britain and beyond, racism formed an indispensable weapon in the armoury of the state elites, used to contain the class struggles waged by subaltern populations with a view to making the system safe for capital accumulation. Additionally, situating an account of racism within the unfolding story of historical capitalism as against the postcolonial tendency to locate it within the civilizational encounter between the West and the Rest helps make transparent the plurality of racisms, including the racialization of parts of the European proletariat. This explanation of the structuring force of racism and the differentiated ways in which the proletariat has been incorporated into capitalist relations of domination has important implications for emancipatory politics. A race-blind politics risks leaving untouched the injustices produced by historic and contemporaneous racisms. Instead, an alternative approach is proposed, one that invites movements to wilfully entangle demands for economic justice with anti-racism and thereby embrace and demystify the differences inscribed into the collective body of the proletariat by capitalism.

Keywords

class, Marxism, postcolonial, racialized capitalism, racism, struggles

Sociology: Partitioning knowledge, occluding racism

There is a powerful origin myth produced by, and on behalf of, sociologists which tells a rather comforting story about the discipline's inherent radicalism and critical outlook. We are all familiar with Becker's (1967) refrain 'whose side are we on?', which long ago suggested sociologists instinctively take the side of the underdog, while in a recent edited

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collection on public sociology Alain Touraine (2007) claimed sociology is about 'resistance to all forms of power'. When Margaret Archer became a founding member of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences she claimed Catholic teaching is sociological because it is left-wing (Dawson, 2015, p. 110). Despite temporarily veering off track in its embrace of postmodernism in the 1980s, the belief has remained strong among its practitioners that sociology is a discipline that can contribute to the project of emancipation (Feagin & Vera, 2011). Set against this backdrop, Michael Burawoy's 2004 Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association seems to be just another incarnation of this origin myth, a metaphorical call to arms inviting sociologists to rediscover their radical edge and return to the early promise of sociology as 'the angel of history' aiming to 'salvage the promise of progress' (2005, p. 260).

When viewed from the margins of the discipline, in this instance, the hinterland of racism studies, such a narrative appears complacent, arguably disingenuous. Without any public reckoning, it conceals from the historical record the dominant Social Darwinian, cultural evolutionary and eugenicist perspectives of founding US sociologists like William Sumner, Lester Ward and Edward Ross, which contributed not an emancipatory understanding on matters of race but further layers of obfuscating knowledge that helped only to reinforce ongoing racist discriminatory practices against African Americans as well as other so-called 'lesser races'. Further, such a self-confident origin myth neatly erases the dispiriting manner in which the liberal white gatekeepers of the discipline actively marginalized that contraflow of emancipatory African American thought emergent within the discipline, particularly that of W. E. B. Du Bois (Morris, 2016) and Oliver Cromwell Cox (Hier, 2001), leading one theorist to analytically distinguish between 'two traditions' in sociology – one black, the other white (Bhambra, 2014).[1]

The reverberations from the social struggles that comprised the world revolution of 1968 (Wallerstein & Zukin 1989) were instrumental in the belated democratization of Anglo-American sociology and in their slipstream we saw not only the blossoming of a significant body of critical scholarship on racism (see for example Blauner, 1969; Bonacich, 1972; Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies [CCCS], 1982; Gilroy, 1987; Hall, 1980, 1986; Hill-Collins, 1990; Miles, 1982, 1989; Omi & Winant, 1986/1995; Wilson, 1978) but also the belated recognition of the intellectual achievements of Du Bois, Cox as well as others. Taken together, these foundational texts undergirded the institutionalization of the area of race and racism studies within the discipline.

It remains a striking fact, however, that for much of the subsequent period, this body of work along with the ongoing production of critical scholarship on racism with its innovative analytic efforts to think racism in articulation to class, gender, nation and the state has remained firmly contained within the sociological box marked 'race'. As a result, its relative influence in informing and shaping conceptual and empirical research agendas in other core areas of sociology has remained minimal. Take for example what is widely regarded as British sociology's definitive contribution to the discipline, the study of social class, where at least two generations of sociologists seem to have demonstrated a wilful indifference towards coming to terms with the theoretical and conceptual implications of thinking race and class together generated by four decades of scholarship and debate within racism studies (Bhattacharyya, 2015; Hall, 1980; Miles, 1982; Virdee, 2014). Arguably, this divergence seems to be deepening today, with many sociologists

shifting from indifference to questioning the historic and contemporaneous significance of racism in shaping social relations beyond the United States while others within migration studies seem to have hermetically sealed themselves off from racism studies precluding any fundamental reckoning with the racializing logics that continue to determine migrant reception in the West (Erel, Murji, & Nahaboo, 2016).

Why is there such neglect and arguably wilful marginalization of the intellectual contribution from racism studies within Anglo-American sociology? It seems to me that this failing is partly structural and can be traced to the spatial bifurcation introduced in the moment of sociology's institutional birth in the late 19th century when the knowledge domain we call social sciences was divided into separate disciplines in Western universities (Wallerstein, 1998). This cleavage directed the emergent discipline's gaze towards the West leaving anthropology and 'Oriental studies' to focus on the rest of the world. This partition occluded many fundamental processes and mechanisms such as colonialism responsible for generating and reproducing racism, leaving subsequent generations of sociologists ill-equipped to come to terms with the full consequences of such erasure. In fact, this expunction explains why sociological theories ended up adding further layers of obfuscating knowledge about the rest of the world in relational opposition to the West over the course of the 20th century. From stadial to modernization theories, history was understood as proceeding in stages with each new stage a progression over the previous, with the West representing the highest point of development (Bhambra, 2007a, p. 34). What made these theories Eurocentric was that social change was understood as driven by factors endogenous to Europe (Bhambra, 2007a, p. 5) with the rest of the world only resuscitated from its state of living death when the fruits of European culture, politics and economy began to diffuse across the world. The deleterious effects of this spatial bifurcation can be illuminated with reference to Habermas's (1990) account of modernity in which the key historical events identified as necessary for the development of modern subjectivity include the Italian Renaissance, the English Parliament, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Like Weber a century before, Habermas remains resolutely fixated on intra-European phenomena such that the foundation of modernity is explained without any meaningful interrogation of the processes and mechanisms associated with 'the underside of modernity' (Dussel, 1996).

Postcolonial sociology: Its contribution and limitations

So, how might sociologists today overcome such a foundational knowledge partition within the discipline and move towards making theoretical sense of the relationship between racism and modernity? Postcolonial theory offers one possible pathway; after all, Gurminder Bhambra – one of its leading exponents in British sociology – insists its aim is nothing less than 'reconstructing modernity's past(s)' by drawing attention 'to what is missing in sociology: an engagement with difference that makes a difference to what was originally thought' (Bhambra, 2007b, pp. 878, 880). Intrinsic to this project has been the task of making transparent the colonial underside – a key determinant for the production of racism – through a 'systematic consideration of the world-historical processes of dispossession, appropriation, genocide and enslavement' (Bhambra, 2016, p. 962). And there is no doubt that the analytic returns from this intervention have been

significant, contributing to a fuller account of the constitutive role played by the non-European world in the formation of modernity. In particular, informed by the 'connected histories' perspective of Indian historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam and traversing fluently across the disciplinary fields of politics and international relations as well as sociology, Bhambra debunks orthodox understandings of 'the European ownership of modernity' demonstrating both the culturally syncretic roots of the Renaissance and opening up promising lines of enquiry about the significance of dispossession and enslavement of peoples from 'the world beyond Europe' in 'contributing to the commercial growth that stimulated the development of the West' (Bhambra, 2007a, p. 137).

At the same time, postcolonial sociology has its own analytic blind spots which mitigate against it developing a fuller account of racism and its relationship to modernity. Most importantly, in the process of theoretically reconnecting the colonial underside to accounts of modernity's making, there is a disposition to impose an artificial homogeneity on Europe, effectively reducing it to a monolithic bloc. The result is a flattening of history where Europe comes to be shorn of the conflicts that are ongoing within that space alongside those occurring beyond it. In part, this difficulty arises because the theoretical approach pivots primarily around a single binary axis of power, of colonized versus colonizer with colonialism itself understood as the master thread of the civilizational encounter between East and West (McClintock, 1992).

This understanding generates conceptual difficulties in our efforts to construct a more comprehensive account of the relationship between racism and modernity because colonialism did not just occur beyond Europe's imagined boundaries but within them. There was always an East within the West and a South within the North. From Ireland in the north-west to Cyprus in the south-east, there have been regions of Europe that were colonized in the making of other nation-states. As the literary critic Neil Lazarus (2011) has pointed out, unique languages were lost, ancient cultures destroyed, populations remade – all features that one usually associates with the West in the East (see also Kelley, 2017). In fact, the black Marxist Cedric Robinson (1983) claimed that the first modern racial subjects were not of African or Asian descent but European, including most notably the Catholic Irish, Slavs, Jews as well as countless others.[2] Significantly, anti-Semitism along with anti-Roma racism encourages us to think of the prevalence of multiple modalities of racism – not all of which were colour-coded or reducible to colonialism (Miles, 1993). This tendency within postcolonial sociology towards homogenizing Europe (and whiteness) obscures a consideration of the multiple routes through which racism was made, carrying with it the danger that we continue to underestimate racism's full significance and material force in the making of the modern world.

I contend that analytically capturing the related but distinctive pathways through which racism consolidated its hold over the course of modernity's history requires further thinking on two fronts. First, conceptually, it requires confronting what Neil Lazarus (2011) has aptly termed the 'postcolonial unconscious' by denaturalizing capitalism to bring into sharper focus the part it played in racism's genesis and reproduction. This means moving beyond the singular axis of power of colonized/colonizer that philosophically undergirds so much of postcolonial theory in the Western academy to one which locates colonization and racism within the unfolding story of historical capitalism over the past half a millennium. Significantly, this has the added potential of entangling

racism more explicitly with questions of class, gender and national belonging and opening up new vistas on:

> Social change and power relations; restoring agency to sociological analysis; to 'denaturalizing' social conditions by seeing paths that shaped them and the ways in which they might have been otherwise. (Calhoun, 1998, p. 849)

Second, to fully grasp the significance of racism to the formation and reproduction of the modern world requires that we deepen further postcolonial sociology's efforts to move beyond the discipline's commonly understood boundaries. Specifically, this requires not only overcoming the spatial cleavage already outlined but the equally constitutive and debilitating temporal bifurcation through a wilful entanglement of sociology with history because it is the latter that allows us to fix causation more precisely in time (and space). It is through such concretization that we can demonstrate 'the interplay among causal mechanisms, idiosyncratic events and powerful contingencies' (Tilly, 2008, p. 124) and illuminate what work racism accomplishes across time and space, as well as for whom and why. Periodization and attentiveness to the complexity of the historical archive is essential to the lines of argumentation presented here because, as I will demonstrate, racism's rise was incremental yet relentless over the course of modernity's unfolding. Such a 'historical turn' requires removing our 'collective blinkers', particularly in British sociology, to 'unthink' the usual ways of doing sociology and roam more freely across so-called disciplinary divides in search of answers to fundamental questions. In essence this entails a commitment to nothing less than re-unifying the domain of knowledge we call social sciences, including history, because:

> … all useful descriptions of social reality are necessarily simultaneously historical (that is, they take into account not only the specificity of the situation but the continual and endless changes in the structures under study as well as in their environing structures) and 'social scientific' (that is, they search for structural explanations of the longue durée, the explanations for which however are not and cannot be eternal). (Wallerstein, 2000, p. 34)

Thinking racialized capitalism, or, the valorization of capital and the racialization of labour

One of Marx's definitive contributions to social thought is to demonstrate that 'what makes modernity modern is, first and foremost capitalism itself' (Sayer, 1991, p. 12). And capitalism for Marx is not just another type of commercial society but a revolutionary mode of production distinguished first and foremost by the valorization of capital, that 'restless movement of more and more accumulation' (Heinrich, 2012, p. 16). Unlike pre-capitalist formations, then, where a commodity was sold for money to enable the purchase of another commodity (C-M-C), under capitalism, the purchase of commodities becomes a means to realize more money (M-C-M). Significantly, in Marx's theoretical frame, competition between individual capitalists is built into the system, or, as Marx put it, competition is 'nothing but the inner nature of capital, its essential character, manifested in and realised as the reciprocal action of many capitals upon each other' (cited in

Sayer, 1991, p. 29). And it is because 'capital exists and can only exist as many capitals' (Sayer, 1991, p. 29) that gives the emergent system its unprecedented dynamism and capacity for growth such that eventually these many capitals break free from the boundaries of their respective Western European absolutist states to scour the world in an endless quest for markets and raw materials. The outcome of such a process is that capitalism gathers within its orbit ever more parts of the world, locking them into place in a network of uneven material exchanges (Hoogvelt, 2001, p. 14) that eventually gives rise to a capitalist world-economy (Wallerstein, 1979).

Accompanying the dynamism and growth capacity of the new social system are the unprecedented levels of turbulence it generates arising from the fact that capital must combine with labour to realize surplus value and which compels it to wrench this labour from long-established local moral economies and drag it, often violently, from countryside to town and from one region of the world to another in its ceaseless quest for capital accumulation. Existing social relations are torn apart while naturalized hierarchies no longer fix people in place due to the unprecedented levels of labour mobility. Capitalism then is the quintessential disrupter, dismantling and unravelling the social relations of everyday life and endlessly generating new antagonisms, as this famous passage from the *Manifesto* outlines:

> … uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air … (Marx & Engels, 2010, pp. 24–25).

Now of course for the Marx of the *Manifesto*, the principal antagonism of the capitalist age would be that between two ever more unified class subjects – bourgeois and proletarian – the latter also increasingly homogenized in a world where 'national differences and antagonism between peoples are daily more and more vanishing' (Marx & Engels, 2010, p. 32). It is a compelling and elegantly crafted account but it is also one curiously unencumbered by questions of racism, sexism and the consequences of the uneven development of the capitalist world-economy and how such processes might complicate the coming clash of the classes. However, Marx cannot simply be dismissed as an orientalist as so many within postcolonial theory have done since Edward Said (1978). He was one of only a handful of 19th-century European social theorists who grasped the centrality of colonialism to the genesis of industrial capitalism, along with the genocidal treatment of non-Europeans that accompanied it:

> The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterise the dawn of the era of capitalist production. (Marx, 1976, p. 915)

It was why he claimed so forthrightly that 'capital, comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt' (Marx, 1976, p. 926). Accompanying this account of original accumulation were suggestive commentaries on racist bifurcations within the

proletariat and their implications for political practice – 'Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin when in the black it is branded' (Marx, 1976) – combined with calls for decolonization in Ireland – the latter understood as an essential precondition for socialism in Britain (Anderson, 2016). Significantly, however, such powerful insights about racism and colonization were never incorporated into his theoretical account of industrial capitalism, which remained philosophically undergirded by a stages theory of progress. The significance of this failing was that Marx continued to understand such conflicts and differences as remnants of a dying feudal order – conflicts that capitalist development would overcome by performing its historically progressive function of homogenizing the global subaltern.

What Marx was insufficiently attentive to was the fact that '[c]apitalist modernity has always advanced as much by way of the production and negotiation of difference as it has through enforcing sameness, standardization and homogenization' (Hall, 2017, pp. 118–119). To redress Marx's one-sided and therefore incomplete account of capitalist modernity requires bringing him into dialogue with the intellectual traditions of black Marxism (Robinson, 1983) and Marxist feminism (Federici, 2004; Lowe, 1996) to explore how his conceptual framework might be stretched to encompass capitalism's inherently racializing capacities.

What can be gleaned from this body of work is that the very processes that give capitalism its dynamism and capacity for expansion simultaneously destabilize the old order and the moral economies and hierarchies that undergird it. Such instability, particularly when combined with subaltern resistance to structural and symbolic capitalist violence, can profoundly obstruct the smooth accumulation of capital – the raison d'etre of capitalist modernity. It is here that the state intervenes and comes to serve as stabilizer and enforcer of the capitalist order and the new God of money (Jessop, 2015). And it restores social order and equilibrium not just through the deployment of its repressive state apparatuses but also ideologically through 'the production of social difference' including racialized difference (Lowe, 1996). Capitalist states and classes come to understand that the maximization of profits is most effectively secured not by 'rendering labour abstract' but by wilfully entangling the objective of profit maximization with 'the social production of difference, of restrictive particularity and illegitimacy marked by race, nation, geographical origins, and gender' (Lowe, 1996, p. 27).

What this process of differentiation achieves is a new hierarchical ordering of the subaltern population – of labour power – with some parts revalued, endowing them with a more enhanced status relative to others who are simultaneously devalued thus legitimizing their further degradation through processes of super-exploitation. The manufacture of such a structural and symbolic chasm between the global proletariat secures a degree of stability for the capitalist world-system, particularly in its core areas by giving some subalterns in those regions an affective and material stake in that system, preventing the working class as a whole from coming to a consciousness of itself as a social class (Leibowitz, 2003):

> In short, they are practices which secure the hegemony of a dominant group … in such a way as to dominate the whole social formation in a form favourable to the long-term development of the economic productive base. (Hall, 1980, p. 338)

Hence, wherever in the world capitalism set root, it 'sought, exploited, needed and created difference' (Roediger, 2017, p. 26), such that according to Federici (2004, p. 17):

> … capitalism, as a social-economic system, is necessarily committed to racism and sexism. For capitalism must justify and mystify the contradictions built into its social relations. … If capitalism has been able to reproduce itself it is only because of the web of inequalities that it has built into the body of the world proletariat.

Theorizing subaltern resistance and the question of agency

The historians Barbara and Karen Fields (2012, p. 123) once remarked that 'the only check upon oppression is the strength and effectiveness of resistance to it'. It is a timely reminder that our conceptualization of the relationship between racism and capitalist modernity must always integrate accounts of the multifarious ways in which racialized subalterns as well as the emergent working class more broadly responded to the consolidation of racism and capitalist domination. As E. P. Thompson (1991, p. 8) once put it: '[t]he working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making.' Consequently, my understanding of class owes as much to agency as it does to conventional sociological conceptions rooted in objectivist criteria. And it will therefore focus as much on those structures of feeling and consciousness that help workers to understand they are a class, and how those feelings might translate into that class becoming the basis for social action, a collective social force.

This of course raises the old question of when does class as social force happen? Certainly grievances are an important determinant, but groups also need to 'fashion shared understandings of the world … that [help] legitimate and motivate collective action' (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996, p. 6) because common 'material interests … are not escalators which automatically deliver people to their appointed destinations' (Hall, 1987: 33). Further, collective action is dependent on the scale of the organizational infrastructure that can be drawn upon to facilitate mobilization. Even then, it is only in periods of system-wide crisis that opportunities to extract concessions present themselves because these 'intervals of indeterminacy are [the] times when the boundary conditions of politics are renegotiated and reset' (Katznelson, 1997, p. 51).

While my understanding of the making of capitalist modernity is one that recentres the innovative strategies and visions that subaltern classes concocted to resist the destruction and violence heaped on them by capitalism and state oppression, this is not an account of modernity that can be written in the literary genre of romance like the *Communist Manifesto* – parts of which read like a love letter to capitalism; instead, when evaluated over time, the history is a tragedy of epic proportions. Federici (2004) reminds us of the consequences of subaltern defeat and how it paves the way for the further consolidation of capitalist rule, including through racism. We must break from the fallacy that capitalism represents progress and instead understand it as 'counter-revolution' (Federici, 2004, p. 21) whose expansion and continuation have rested on the extinguishing of the emancipatory visions of subaltern populations actualized episodically by transformative social movements.

To demonstrate the work racism accomplishes across time and place requires moving from the abstraction of the current discussion to the historically concrete and I do this by interrogating three distinctive moments in racism's incremental but relentless rise. This development of a thoroughly historicized explanation of racialization and its connectivity to capitalism and processes of class-making is imperative because only by mapping the convoluted ways in which racism became entangled with the rising forces associated with capitalism can we more fully understand why racism is a constitutive feature of the modern world.

Colonialism, containment and the genesis of racialized capitalism

The principal driver of English colonization was the crisis of accumulation arising from the long-term economic decline of feudalism. As early as the 14th century, the feudal order – resting on the extra-economic extraction of rents and services from a class of subsistence producers – was irreparably damaged by catastrophic population loss from the Black Death, recurrent famine and the Hundred Years' War with France (Heller, 2011, p. 25). With labour scarce, wave after wave of explosive class struggles ensued between peasants and lords undermining the system's legitimacy including its political structures over the course of two centuries (Wallerstein, 1979, p. 42). With the moral economy of feudalism broken and 'things falling apart', the elites gambled on an 'an alternative mode of surplus appropriation, that of the market, to see whether it might serve to restore the declining real income of the ruling groups' (Wallerstein, 1979, p. 161). It was an informed wager insofar as the absolutist Tudor state had long looked on enviously as Spanish galleons returned from the Americas laden with looted gold and silver. And so it redoubled its efforts to promote the establishment of free trade zones for its merchants and manufacturers through colonization.

Crucially, racism emerged hand in hand with such colonization, particularly in the Americas. Developments in Virginia, the first English colony to be established in the region in 1607, capture in microcosm many of the key processes that contributed to the entanglement of colonization, class struggles and racism within the emergent capitalist order across the US as well as the Caribbean (Allen, 1997; Billings, 1991). The earliest English settlers in Virginia comprised a small band of wealthy capitalists along with a large workforce of indentured servants contracted to a so-called master for between five and seven years (Billings, 1991). The first group of 20 Africans were brought to Virginia in 1619 – the same year that tobacco farming was established in the colony.

However, securing appropriate levels of financial return from the establishment of tobacco plantations that would satisfy the London backers of the venture was no easy matter for the colonial elite. Alongside the regular bouts of conflict with the Algonquian peoples whose land they had expropriated, the colonists suffered badly from famine and disease in the swamp-ridden landscape. And in a forewarning of the slavery to come, African and English indentured labourers were subject to unprecedented forms of exploitation where they could be 'beaten, maimed, and even killed with impunity' (Fields & Fields, 2012, p. 122).

It is little wonder then that in this early period of colonization, English and African labourers regularly conjoined to escape the Jamestown compound, often to link up with the Algonquian peoples who offered them a glimpse of a more alluring way of life, perhaps one that reminded them of a past that had been snatched from them as self-sufficient producers. And these emergent affective ties forged from an elementary understanding of shared exploitation were often cemented through sex, marriage and the children that resulted. But 'flight and fornication' as the colonial elites termed it (Allen, 1997, pp. 153–161) were acts of transgression because the political economy of plantation labour was designed to maximize 'employer's access to the labourer's time' thereby legally preventing labourers from entering into 'family connections and obligations' (Allen, 1997, p. 128).

With the surplus threatened by a persistently non-compliant multi-ethnic labour force, the apparatuses of the colonial state set about finding mechanisms that would restore social order and facilitate the smoother accumulation of surplus. Court records from the 1640s reveal how members of the Virginia legislative assembly turned to sifting the workforce using the relational categorization of English and 'Negro' – denoting black in Spanish (Allen, 1997). That is, they pulled from the feudal regime in England the already existing racialized representation of the African as 'Negro' (Robinson, 1983) and gave it a legal status that allowed the colonial state to structurally and symbolically position labourers of African descent below those of English descent in a reconstituted hierarchical division of labour. And these legal measures were subsequently deployed to enforce differential punishments against runaways, with Africans invariably sentenced to servitude for life while English runaways tended to have their time extended (Vaughn, 1989).

The accompanying legislation against 'fornication' reveals that the racialization of labour was simultaneously a gendered process. While the penalty for marriage between labourers was an additional year of servitude, the heaviest punishments were reserved for English women who bore children of an African father, with service being extended by as much as seven years and accompanied by a public whipping (Allen, 1997). Such a decision cannot be detached from the colonists' objective of safeguarding their property rights. A law was passed in the early 1660s against a child inheriting their father's status, as English common law had long dictated, to ensure that the children fathered by English men with African women would be born unfree. By implication, children born of an English mother and an African father would be technically free, so the legislation also came laced with a warning to English women who chose to marry Africans that they 'were forgetting their free condition and disgracing their nation' (Fields & Fields, 2012, p. 130). It was to deter such relationships that the punishment meted out to such women was so severe.

While the legislation clearly aimed at policing English women's sexuality and domesticity, its effects on African women were nothing short of catastrophic: already effectively enslaved, this legislation opened them up to all manner of abominable sexual behaviour from English men, effectively reducing them to breeding machines of unfree labour for the plantation economy (Federici, 2004, p. 61). By 1667, even baptism into the Christian faith could not save the African from such inhuman bondage (Billings, 1973, p. 470). Within half a century of the English colonization of Virginia, a comprehensive legal infrastructure had been put in place which not only regulated relations between

African and English-descended populations but institutionalized discriminatory treatment against the African labourer. The latter's status as slave was formally codified into law by 1682 when they still constituted barely 5% of the Virginian population (Vaughn, 1989, p. 354).

What this episode demonstrates is the wilful invention of racism by the colonial arm of the English state. The encoding of the category 'Negro' in law was a formative moment in this racialization process because a darker skin complexion was explicitly used to distinguish labourers of African descent from those of English descent. This categorization was but a prelude to institutionalizing systematic forms of discrimination against African labourers which would ultimately reduce their legal status to that of a slave. And it is deserving of the classification racism because in this new hierarchical order of labour any possibility of the African changing their status was made impossible because difference had become essentialized through the racialization of ancestry.

In the brutal working conditions of colonial English America, already existing regimes of racialized representation acquired a material force that they had hitherto lacked in world history because they were wilfully entangled with the central objectives of plantation society – commodity production and profit maximization. The genesis of structural racism, then, was first and foremost a class project of the English colonial state, and unlike some of the other modalities of racism we will encounter in this essay, this colonial racism developed in the absence of the idea of race as type; in fact, it was an institutional racism that would eventually help birth the idea of race as type.

How Virginia's English labourers became white

Remaining attentive to class divisions within the English-descended population reveals that while the colonial elite were sifting and hierarchically re-ordering the multi-ethnic labour force from as early as the 1640s, it was not until the 1680s that English labourers as a social group came to fully embrace such a racialized order. Significantly, this self-actualized break within the labouring class occurs in the aftermath of the defeat of Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 when 1000 English and African labourers rose up in armed rebellion against the Governor William Berkeley demanding nothing less than the end of 'chattel bond-servitude' (Allen, 1997, p. 239).

Horrified by the fact that more than three decades since their institutionalization of racism they had failed to fully break the affective ties forged by subaltern groups who shared neither ancestry nor faith but class position, the Virginian elite turned towards the explicit use of the language of whiteness. From the 1680s, racism not only did its work through the signification of the categories 'English' and 'Negro' but the related categorizations of 'white' and 'black'. That is, legislators began to differentiate the labouring population using colour as a sorting mechanism, and because chromatic differences laid seamlessly on top of already existing racialized ancestral differences, the unequal treatment of African and English labour based on descent morphed easily into one informed by absolutist colour differences. Terms like 'Christian woman' and 'Christian indentured servants' were now prefixed with 'white' and used to regulate everything from intimate relations to the granting of land to English labourers (Allen, 1997; Billings, 1991; Vaughn, 1989). Within the space of three generations, the vocabulary of difference

shifted decisively from that based on religion (e.g. Christian and heathen) and racialized ancestry (e.g. English and 'Negro' where the African's blackness was used as a marker of ancestry) to one informed by an explicit colour-coded racism (e.g. White and Black).

While this clarifies the motivation of elites in the production of racism, why did it draw English labourers to a more conciliatory stance towards those same elites in a way that attempts to signify a shared commitment to Christianity and English ancestry had not? The success of white supremacy in affectively attaching the English labourer to the colonial elite was bound up with the imperialist expansion of the plantation economy westwards (Roediger, 2017), such that accompanying the invention of a 'screen of racial contempt' were material advantages such as the ownership of land, the freedom to move freely without a pass, and, to marry without upper class consent (Allen, 1997, p. 17).

But the wages of whiteness extended well beyond the material. In the same moment that English labourers were acquiring an enhanced status in colonial society, the humanity of African labourers was annihilated as they found themselves reduced to a commodity to be bought and sold in market squares. Over the course of the 18th century, the consolidation of capitalism secured through the exponential growth in procurement of labour from West Africa meant that such labour found itself entering an American arena where their denuded slave status was already codified in law and where 'the trace of colour' denoted 'the trace of slavery' (Vaughn, 1989, p. 318). The recalibration of the moral worth of English and African labouring lives generated a structural and symbolic chasm that could no longer be bridged. Having witnessed this tragedy unfold in real time, perhaps English labourers determined they would embrace their newly-conferred whiteness fearful that relinquishing it might mean being reduced to the status of a slave, of becoming 'Negro'. This certainly seems to be the threat contained in a 1691 law on suppressing slaves, which promised:

> … to banish: whatsoever English or other white man or woman being free shall intermarry with a Negro, mulatto, or Indian man or woman bond or free. (cited in Billings, 1991, p. 58)

Within a few years, the Virginian elites were convinced that 'no white servant … no matter how poor, how badly treated could identify with frightened Africans' (cited in Vaughn, 1989, p. 335). But in choosing to become white, these English subalterns also became complicit in the catastrophe that was visited upon the African. While racism was a class project of the English colonial state, its ultimate success rested on subaltern assent. From this moment on, the expansion of rights and liberties for white labourers in the colonies was made dependent on the confirmation of the hereditary slave status of the African. Over the course of the 18th century, the descendants of the original English subalterns began to understand themselves not only as English and Protestant but white. They remained a white person of a qualitatively different kind to that of the plantation elite but they could now own their own plot of land, practise their Protestant faith and live a life relatively unhindered by the inhumane degradations that were visited upon labour with a black skin.

These developments had they occurred in Virginia alone might be understood as some sort of historical aberration marking the original moment of capitalist modernity.

But the real significance of these events lies in the fact that the social processes and mechanisms which helped birth racism in Virginia were reproduced across the 13 colonies of colonial English America and the Caribbean, as well as in South Asia and Africa. In fact, given the competitive nature of predatory state building among Western European nations, the French quickly followed suit with the introduction of a *Code Noir* in 1685, versions of which were adopted throughout the colonial French Americas (Virdee, 2012). This process of elite European 'learning', of coming to an understanding that commodity production and capitalist accumulation would proceed more efficiently by producing a heightened sense of essentialized difference among the global labouring class, is what makes racism such a central 'cultural pillar of historical capitalism' (Wallerstein, 1979, p. 80).

Industrial capitalism, class struggles and the racialization of the British interior

The racialization of the European-descended subaltern in the British interior is a theme rarely broached in postcolonial sociological accounts. Locating an understanding of racism within the unfolding story of historical capitalism allows us to prise apart the artificial cross-class homogeneity that the former approach sometimes imposes and create a conceptual space to investigate the significance of internal class struggles in stimulating elite efforts into racializing parts of the subaltern within the British interior as a means of stabilizing the ascending social relations of industrial capitalism.

The foundations of this industrial capitalism lay not only in slavery and colonialism abroad but enclosure at home – that is, the forcible appropriation of communal lands for the development of capitalist agriculture. As fences and hedges rose up across the countryside, whole villages disappeared with peasants expropriated of their small holdings and reduced to a state of market dependence (Heller, 2011). Over the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, social property relations were transformed throughout much of rural England, with many of the former peasants reduced to the status of abject proletarians (Thompson, 1991, p. 218). Significantly, this process of divorcing peasants from the means of production was compounded by a war on women, most strikingly manifested in the ruthless extermination of witches, that transformed the status of women from co-producers of the common wealth to reproducers of the capitalist workforce (Federici, 2004, p. 63). And when they fought to maintain control over reproduction, the apparatuses of the state instituted 'severe penalties against contraception, abortion and infanticide' (Federici, 2004, p. 88) because increasing labour power had become integral to the success of capitalist development.

While many of these displaced peasants found work as agricultural labourers, others were forced to migrate to nearby towns in search of work. The English state was not used to such levels of mobility and these proletarians found themselves subject to unprecedented levels of surveillance and stigmatization as the state tried to retain aspects of the traditional caste-like character of the decaying feudal order. Terms like vagrant and vagabond entered popular parlance as bill after bill was passed to police and punish the poor for being poor. Even in this original moment of capitalism within Europe one can detect 'the accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class' that would later

'become constitutive of class rule and the formation of the modern proletariat' (Federici, 2004, pp. 63–64).

The elites considered this English poor to be a disposable population. In 1606, just prior to the first departure to Virginia, leading statesman Francis Bacon had written to James I making the case for colonization on the grounds that sending the English poor abroad would gain 'a double commodity, in the avoidance of people here, and in making use of them there' (cited in Williams, 1940, p. 10). And so, many of these so-called vaga-bonds and vagrants along with others found themselves snatched and transported across the Atlantic to be put to work as indentured servants in the colonies of the Chesapeake region of the US as well as the Caribbean. We have already seen how, by the late 17th century, the descendants of this English poor partially overcame their stigmatized status by embracing the ideology of white supremacy which helped enhance their symbolic standing within the settler society but only at the expense of the African labourer who was simultaneously reduced to the status of a sub-human.

Yet, an attentiveness to time and space reveals that no such option presented itself to the subaltern within Britain itself for well over a century after the British-descended labourer abroad had become white. In fact, the returns from agricultural capitalism within Britain combined with those from slavery and colonialism abroad were decisive in kickstarting the Industrial Revolution which only added to the misery and stigmatiza-tion of Britain's poor. Against a backdrop of long-standing structural and symbolic vio-lence involving dispossession, proletarianization and stigmatization, this subaltern class were now pulled from the countryside to work in the engine-room of the new industrial capitalism in what William Blake so aptly described as the 'dark satanic mills' where they found themselves 'more exploited, more insecure and more miserable than before' (Heller, 2011, pp. 197–198).

It was amid such deteriorating conditions in the factories as well as residential slums of the new urban centres that this class came face to face with the racialized subaltern from Britain's colonies. The demand for labour had been such that 750,000 migrants from the colony of Ireland had been pulled across the Irish Sea by 1847 (Hobsbawm, 1990). And from further afield came a smaller population of people of African descent, including former slaves from the US and Caribbean (Fryer, 1984). The industrial work-ing class of Britain was a multi-ethnic proletariat from its inception. Further, this work-ing class was not some inanimate object pulled from pillar to post by an all-powerful and anonymous law of capitalist accumulation, it had agency to resist the chaos and disrup-tion caused by capitalism.

The Industrial Revolution had coincided with revolutions in France in 1789 and Haiti in 1791 – the latter demonstrating that it was the self-activity of African slaves which forced the revolutionary regime in France into issuing a decree abolishing slavery prem-ised on the 'aristocracy of the skin' (James, 2001) thereby actualizing the promise of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' to everyone. The corresponding societies, established in Britain in the wake of these revolutions, aimed at forging 'a new democratic conscious-ness' (Thompson, 1991, p. 80) by drawing together advocates of multiple radical causes, including opposition to the aristocracy, slavery and an extension of rights and freedoms for working people. Their objective was nothing less than to transform 'the mob' 'by education and agitation' from 'followers of the camp' to followers of 'the standard of

liberty' (Thompson, 1991, p. 109). In this way, the aspirations of the Haitian Revolution, as well as other lesser known revolts in the Americas (James, 2001), came to be entangled with the emancipatory hopes of the subaltern class within Britain itself with the transnational racialized outsider playing the part of indispensable linchpin (Linebaugh & Rediker, 2001).

It was a freed slave, Olaudah Equiano, who brought first-hand experience of slavery to the attention of the British public with his remarkable autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789). Equiano was a member of the London Corresponding Society and a friend of its founder Thomas Hardy. And through these networks, ideas of black freedom circulated and entwined with those other causes expanding the democratic imaginary of all, such that Thomas Hardy could assert that the liberty of blacks and whites was indivisible (Fryer, 1984, p. 210), while leading abolitionist John Thelwall actively fused the struggles against slavery abroad with class exploitation at home with his incendiary statement that 'The seed, the root of the oppression is here, and here the cure must begin' (Fryer, 1984, p. 212).

For more than half a century, this multi-ethnic proletariat refused to bend to the will of capitalist discipline. It established a powerful organizational infrastructure ranging from combination societies in the workplace to the political movement Chartism; it invented innovative action repertoires from the strike to the mass petition that served as transmission belts of political radicalism into the wider working class inculcating visions of a society differently organized in which all men – although only occasionally women (Taylor, 1983) – might play a full part. Here too, it was the racialized outsider – this time of Irish Catholic descent – who played a formative role in the insurgency, leading one irate employer to claim:

> … where there is discontent or a disposition to combine or turn-out among the work-people, the Irish are the leaders. They are the most difficult to reason with and convince on the subject of wages and regulations. (O'Higgins cited in Virdee, 2014, p. 15)

The imperial British state found itself confronted with a similar dilemma to their colonial arm in Virginia more than a century earlier, namely, how to contain an insurgent multi-ethnic working class that was posing a serious threat to social order and disrupting the smooth accumulation of capital. The potent cocktail of class struggles combined with the circulation of radical ideas from the French Revolution and universalized through the presence of the racialized outsider had prised open a Pandora's box stimulating an array of democratic demands which were incompatible with the interests of the rising forces of industrial capitalism. While the principal response from the state remained that of repression with workers jailed, deported to the colonies while their organizations were outlawed (Virdee, 2014), also discernible was the deployment of a class racism (Balibar, 1988) which categorized the proletariat as 'a distinct physical type', a race defined by its alleged 'savagery' and 'barbarian' nature (Miles, 1993, p. 93).

This racism draws our attention to one of the aftershocks of colonialism within Europe itself, namely the increasing racialization of intellectual thought. The aim of the early Enlightenment thinkers had been nothing less than to sweep away the idea that the world was ordered according to God's will and craft a new moral and philosophical attitude

informed by a secular outlook and reasoned judgement based on observation. However, because this project grew within a system in which Western European states were engaged in capitalist expansion involving the colonial subjugation of Asian, African and American peoples, intellectual thought emerged contaminated with racism. For the intellectual elites of Western Europe, the ongoing project of colonial conquest became a live data-set, a human zoo from which they distilled their magical theories of scientific racism. That is, the ongoing reverberations of colonialism had made it possible for European intellectuals to think in new and disturbing ways about humanity – including how they might be sifted, grouped and evaluated – that had simply been impossible before the advent of Enlightenment modes of thinking (Goldberg, 1993).

What these theories of scientific racism shared in common was an understanding that: (1) humans could be sorted into a finite number of racial groups using a limited set of physical markers; (2) these groups were endowed with differing capacities for cultural development with Whites ranked at the top of this racial order and sub-Saharan Africans at the bottom; (3) each group's capacity for civilization was fixed and immutable over time and space such that African and Asian societies were effectively imagined as lying in a state of arrested development akin to European societies at an earlier stage in their civilization (Virdee, 2014). Less well known is that accompanying this racialization of peoples outwith Europe was the simultaneous racialization of the European interior with its population divided variously into Nordic, Roman, Gallic, Slavic and Semitic races each one constructed as a distinct physical type with varying levels of capacity for civilization (Balibar, 1988; Polikiav, 1996). All European nations were held to be a composite of such races and the 'proportion of the mix of superior and inferior races was said to determine the position of the nation on the scale of superiority and inferiority' (Miles, 1989, p. 114).[3]

During the middle decades of the 19th century, these theories were increasingly pressed into service by the ideological apparatuses of the state to defuse the working class insurgency at home. The long association of Britishness with Protestantism was now overdetermined by the racializing signifier Anglo-Saxon. Those of Irish Catholic descent found themselves doubly excluded from the imagined national community as Catholics and as members of a so-called inferior race of Celts. Visually, a persistent caricature of the Irish man and woman developed in mid-Victorian Britain which

> … emphasise[d] the prognathous features of the Irish labouring class: a bulge in the lower part of the face, the chin prominent, the mouth big, the forehead receding, a short nose, often upturned and with yawning nostrils: the simianising of the Irish. (Saville, 1987, p. 38)

And accompanying the generation of the racialized categories of Anglo-Saxon and Irish Celt were a series of immutable cultural differences with the former imputed as being masculine, freedom-loving and capable of self-government while the latter were understood as feminine, childish, addicted to violence and authoritarian control (Curtis, 1968). These racist regimes of representation were further articulated to gender (Hall, McClelland, & Rendell, 2000) as well as a discourse of respectability to ensure that only Anglo-Saxon working men of good standing could lay claim to being British. In this way, the elites aimed at separating these respectable working men from the so-called

'residuum', that layer of 'dangerous and ragged masses' whom the elites were determined to exclude (Hobsbawm, 1997, p. 263).

The defeat of Chartism in 1848 ended a cycle of protest that had lasted more than half a century and it is amid the accompanying loss of its spirit and combativity that such understandings of immutable racialized difference consolidated themselves within the cultural and political life of the working class. For the respectable Anglo-Saxon working man, the returns from embracing such racializing nationalism were unprecedented and included the incremental acquisition of the franchise and trade union rights. Laying claim to membership of the ruling race of the nation also served as a form of symbolic capital that could be instrumentally deployed to exclude the Irish and other racialized workers from 'good jobs' because they were not 'racially' British (Kirk, 1985).

Through the transformation of an understanding of social difference as racialized and therefore immutable, the British elites were learning to rule in a more consensual manner at home, one which was in keeping with the maintenance of social order and the more serene accumulation of capital. Racism rapidly became one of the principal mechanisms through which inequality and hierarchy could be intellectually legitimized in an age which had proclaimed its belief in human equality. It was a mechanism which helped to re-legitimize the hierarchical order that had once been sanctioned by divine right under feudalism. The one notable concession of course was that scientific racism was entangled right from the outset with processes of partial democratization of the internal national polity and it helped determine (along with sexism) who from within the subaltern class would be remade as active citizens of the imperial state – in the colony of Virginia, we saw that privileged stratum was white men while in Victorian Britain itself it became Anglo-Saxon men.

Socialist nationalism as racialized identity politics

Despite Marx and Engels' (2010) call for proletarians of all countries to unite, large parts of the European socialist movement, including within Britain, spent much of the 20th century repudiating such advice. Another critical determinative mechanism through which racism consolidated its hold, in this instance over much of Europe's subaltern population, was the project of socialist nationalism. In particular, socialist institutions established to advance the cause of social justice for the working class simultaneously became self-actualizing agents in the production of racialized difference, helping to reinforce the bifurcation of the working class of each Western European state through the consolidation of new hierarchies of labour (McGeever & Virdee, 2017).

If we take the case of Britain, by the time socialism established roots within the working class in the late 19th century, a political route to secure social and economic justice was already well established which directed the proletariat to situate their claims for inclusion on the ideological terrain of the nation. While the mid-Victorian state had manufactured this pathway to allow a small layer of working men to be included in the nation as a means of defusing and containing an emergent industrial working class that refused to bend to the tyrannical discipline imposed upon it by capitalism, socialist activists determined to further prise open this pathway by situating their demands for social justice for the still excluded parts of the working class on this ground.

While these socialist conceptions of national belonging were undoubtedly more expansive than those of the state project of imperial nationalism, encompassing as they did the descendants of long-established migrant communities such as the Irish Catholics, this more democratic vision remained incapable of including the most recent migrants and refugees. When thousands of Jews escaping the racist pogroms in the Russian Empire arrived in Britain, socialist nationalists were instrumental in their racialization and exclusion. Ben Tillet – leading socialist and himself of Irish and English heritage – actively drew on nationalist conceptions of 'us' and 'them' to mark the Jew as foreign:

> The influx of continental pauperism aggravates and multiplies the number of ills which press so heavily on us. … Foreigners come to London in large numbers, herd together in habitations unfit for beasts, the sweating system allowing the more grasping and shrewd a life of comparative ease in superintending their work. (cited in Fishman, 2004, p. 77)

In this imaginary, Jewish workers were understood not as a super-exploited fraction of the working class, but an alien body, antithetical to British working class interests and responsible for undermining its conditions of living. Further, this positioning of the Jew as an anti-working-class figure was reinforced when it came to entwine with another set of representations of the Jew – as the quintessential embodiment of capitalism. This trope, consistently drawn on by Henry Hyndman – founder and leader of the Social Democratic Foundation (SDF) – saw the capitalist Jew in almost demonic terms, lying at the centre of 'a sinister "gold international" destined one day to be locked in mortal conflict with the "red international" of socialism' (Hirshfield, 1981, p. 97). Taken together, these socialist visions trapped Jews in a double-bind as capitalist parasite and sweated labour opposed to working class interests and the socialist nationalist project of democratic change (Virdee, 2017b).

Additionally, the differing objectives of the twin projects of imperial and socialist nationalism converged in the opening decade of the 20th century as a result of elite anxiety about the physical decline of the working class, and its capacity to defend the Empire. Many of the leaders of the newly-established Labour Party seized this opportunity to reinterpret their objective of upliftment of the British working class as not an end in itself, but rather a means to maintain Britain's imperialist ambitions abroad. The Fabians – who provided much of the intellectual stimulus for the newly-founded Labour Party – were particularly forthright in ensuring that a hitherto largely indifferent working class became more conscious of the Empire as *their* Empire as well as the role they needed to play in its defence (Virdee, 2017a).

Just as in the colony of Virginia from the late 17th century, there occurs in this conjuncture a multiplication of racial projects on different sites involving 'simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganise and redistribute resources along particular racial lines' (Omi & Winant, 1995, p. 56). The instigators of racism within imperial Britain became no longer just the state, the capitalist elite and the middle classes but also socialist institutions who solidified racialized and hierarchical conceptions of difference within the working class such that racism became one of the principal means through which parts of that class came 'to live in an imaginary way, their relations to the real, material conditions of their existence' (Hall, 1980, p. 334).

By the time more than 400,000 individuals from the Indian sub-continent and the Caribbean arrived between 1948 and 1962, a century of incremental democratizing reforms had helped secure the mental as well as material integration of much of the working class into the imagined British nation. Many contemporary socialists and sociologists interpret this period defined by its bipartisan commitment to a common citizenship and the welfare settlement as a model of the ethical society we ought to aspire to today. However, when interrogated through the eyes of Caribbean and Asian workers this period leaves little room for such nostalgia. Attachment to the twin racializing projects of imperial and socialist nationalism was so comprehensive in this moment that there was simply no institutional space in British political culture to make sense of the migrant presence from a progressive standpoint. Consequently, what these social groups faced was an unrelenting and sometimes violent racism from all social classes. Alongside party political and state racism, Caribbean and Asian workers were confronted with practices of social closure from parts of the organized working class, who in opposition to their presence had come to re-imagine themselves as white. While racism was not new in Britain as we have already seen, what distinguished this period was the extent to which the British state, employers and workers had come to internalize a common British nationalism underpinned by a shared allegiance to whiteness (Virdee, 2014).

I want to suggest that this dimension of socialist nationalism should be understood as a form of racialized identity politics, a politics that even to this day refuses to be named as such because it comes pristinely enveloped in the universalist category of class. The insistence of socialist institutions and activists in locating their demands for working class justice on the ideological terrain of the nation effectively made them complicit in the production of racism. The idea of the nation operated as a power container (Giddens, 1987), limiting the political imagination of these representatives of the exploited and oppressed. While their conceptions of national belonging were undoubtedly broader than those forged by the elites, and in that sense sought to democratize society, they nevertheless did so by identifying racialized others within the working class. In the first half of the 20th century, it was Jews who could not be imagined as British while in the second half of the century it was people of Caribbean and Asian descent. Indeed, this expansive but still nationally bounded understanding of belonging acquired its legitimacy among parts of the working class precisely because it was able to portray elite conceptions of national belonging as unjust due to the exclusion of those like themselves who were also 'racially British'.

In this sense, the racialized other played the role of unwitting foil against which to legitimize efforts to include the majority of the working class. And each time the boundary of the nation was stretched to encompass more members of the working class it was simultaneously accompanied and legitimized by a racializing nationalism that excluded more recent arrivals. What gave this racializing nationalism its power to reach deep into the working class was that it emanated from political organizations and leaderships that had emerged out of the organic class struggles of the proletariat itself. It gave these leaders and the positions they adopted a degree of authenticity and helped consolidate the parallel efforts of the imperialist state to integrate workers through relentless propaganda drives and invention of national traditions.

Conclusion

Undergirded by the perspective of historical materialism in dialogue with black Marxism and Marxist feminism, this article compiles an account demonstrating the significance of racism to the making of modernity. The analytic returns of unthinking Eurocentric sociologies in favour of a more unified historical social scientific approach include the unmasking of the intimate relationship between capitalism, class struggles and racism, particularly how capitalist rule advanced through a process of differentiation and hierarchical re-ordering of the global proletariat, including within Europe itself. From the colonization of 17th-century Virginia to the solidification of industrial capitalism in Victorian Britain and beyond, this article demonstrates how racism formed an indispensable weapon in the armoury of the state elites, used to limit multi-ethnic cooperation and contain the class struggles waged by subaltern populations with a view to restoring social order and making the system safe for capitalist accumulation. Of central importance to the 'success' of such racism is the extent to which it can secure the acquiescence of parts of the subaltern class. In symbolically and materially revaluing some parts of the subaltern population while simultaneously devaluing others, elite deployment of racism aims at engineering a chasm in identification such that those who have been revalued become indifferent to, even complicit in, the suffering and degradation of those subalterns marked as 'racially inferior', including within the same geographical space.

A further virtue of situating an account of racism within the unfolding story of historical capitalism as against the postcolonial tendency to ground it within the civilizational encounter between the West and the Rest is that it helps make transparent the plurality of racisms, including the racialization (and later de-racialization) of parts of the European-descended proletariat. Unlike settler societies like in the US where the descendants of the English poor were incorporated into the idea of the white race in relational opposition to the enslaved African proletarian marked as black, in 19th-century Britain, the multi-ethnic proletariat was principally differentiated and hierarchically re-ordered through an articulation between an imperial British nationalism and the racialized signifiers of Anglo-Saxon and Irish Celt.

This greater attentiveness to history confirms there was no simultaneous incorporation of the European-descended subaltern into whiteness across time and space. At the same time, it also reveals that unlike the non-European subaltern, the subaltern within Western Europe itself had available to it institutional structures and narratives which eventually secured its inclusion as active citizens of imperial nation-states. Of central importance in Britain was the dominant tendency of the socialist movement to legitimize their demands for working class inclusion on the terrain of the already racialized nation. While these socialist visions of the national were more expansive (e.g. they included those racialized as Irish Catholics), they derived their authority from their capacity to generate new racialized outsiders who could not be imagined as 'racially British' (e.g. those of Jewish, Caribbean and Asian descent). In this sense, socialist nationalism was, and remains, a contradictory phenomenon simultaneously accompanying its mission of democratization with the consolidation of new racisms.

This explanation of the structuring force of racism in the history of capitalist modernity, encompassing the indifference and sometimes complicity of parts of the exploited

class marked as white and European in enforcing racism, has important implications for emancipatory politics. A race-blind counter-hegemonic politics risks leaving untouched the deeply embedded injustices of historic and contemporaneous racisms. To fundamentally challenge the ways in which the global proletariat has been differentiated and incorporated into capitalist relations of domination over more than four centuries requires a different approach, one which invites the social movements to wilfully entangle demands for economic justice with explicit anti-racist demands.

British history can help illuminate the formative role played in such transformative politics by those parts of the working class deemed 'racially' incompatible with both elite and socialist conceptions of British nationalism. It was these racialized outsiders – Irish Catholic, Jewish, Asian, African and Caribbean depending on the historical conjuncture – who helped universalize the militant, yet often particularistic, fights of the working class precisely because they were better able to see through the fog of blood, soil and belonging. This capacity for second sight (Du Bois, 1999) made racialized outsiders the linchpin, the catalytic agent that helped align struggles against racism with those against class exploitation leading to a partial process of multi-ethnic class formation.

Such anti-racist class currents no doubt represent a marginal accretion to working class politics, their utopian envisioning of a transnational subaltern solidarity usually drowned out by the hegemonic voices of socialist nationalism. Nevertheless, because capitalism as a social system is inherently prone to periodic crises (Harvey, 1993; Marx, 1976), cross-class coalitions secured in part through racism can only ever be temporary when viewed over the *longue durée*. And it is particularly amid the interregna that separate two hegemonic phases of history that we discover the full emancipatory potential of such currents. We last discerned the unfolding of such a process during the 1970s, when between a welfare settlement that was in terminal crisis and a neoliberalism whose victory was not yet assured, history and hope seemed to chime as the long-standing collective action against racism waged by Caribbean and Asian workers (Ashe, Virdee, & Brown, 2016) helped stretch dominant conceptions of class informed by socialist nationalism to encompass the working class in all its ethnic diversity.

At the same time, we must remind ourselves how each new chapter in the unfolding story of historical capitalism has been consolidated by extinguishing the emancipatory visions of these currents of subaltern resistance. Thatcherism therefore was only the latest reincarnation of the capitalist counter-revolution, which in this instance helped secure the hegemony of neoliberalism by defeating the increasingly entangled social movements against racism (and sexism) and for working class justice that were hinting at a different way of arranging social relations. Through the deployment of its ideological and repressive apparatuses, the state and its emergent neoliberal elites secured both the technical and political decomposition of class. Deindustrialization and the defeat of once powerful cultures of solidarity and socialist infrastructure built up over the course of the welfare settlement destroyed the spirit and combativity of large sections of the working class such that today the socialist language of class has virtually disappeared, replaced by a strong sense of class disassociation, if not disidentification (Skeggs, 1997, 2004).

Any attempt to make sense of the politics of race and class today must reckon first with the fact that we live in the slipstream of the defeat of those projects of educated hope. In the aftermath of the 2008 recession and the resulting imposition of austerity,

Britain is a state in which a brutal class war is being waged against ever more strata of the working class (Tyler, 2013). The long-term absence of collective working class agency combined with a coalescing of the political elites around neoliberalism has given reactionary populists an opportunity to prise open an institutional space and recast the real injuries of class through the politics of racist resentment. But these are the politics of hopelessness, which will only exacerbate divisions within the working class reinforcing capitalist rule over all.

Raymond Williams (1989, p. 118) once remarked that 'to be truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing'. And there is hope. If one fraction of the working class has shifted towards the populist right as part of a long-term process of class decomposition, what has been striking is how another element has remained largely unmoved by such politics. Part of this working class was birthed under neoliberalism – a process of technical class recomposition which saw many of the children of the manual working class acquire increasing levels of certified cultural capital yet be ruthlessly pushed into precarious forms of employment. What is significant about these populations is that they reside predominantly in locations which were at the epicentre of the last cycle of anti-racist protest. While that wave subsided, it left its traces such that the generations who came later encountered cities that were transformed by the real gains of the anti-racist movement. While many of these returns are being rolled back by austerity and new racisms, their imprint is still traceable in the ease with which many young people handle the lived realities of multi-ethnic life in urban Britain. At the same time, unless this everyday multiculture, painted in all its complexity by Emma Jackson (2018) and Sivamohan Valluvan (2016), finds a more organized political form it will not save us from the reactionary forces gathering at the door. That is, class will have to happen in the Thompsonian sense of social force, and it will have to happen in such a way that it consciously absorbs and demystifies the differences inscribed into its collective body by historical capitalism.

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Notes

1. Also, of relevance here are the biological roots of British sociology (Renwick, 2012) and the part played by British sociologists as imperial educators (Steinmetz, 2013).
2. I will address Robinson's thesis, reinforced recently from a different perspective by Meer (2018) in an article currently under preparation.

3. By drawing attention to the racialization of the subaltern population within Europe my aim is not to construct an equivalence with the racialization of the populations of the European exterior. The opportunity to escape a racialized proletarian status in Europe through migration to settler colonies undergirded by white supremacy became increasingly available over time as capitalism consolidated its hold across the world. In this way, racialized outsiders within the British interior like the Scottish highlanders and Irish Catholics became part of the ruling bloc of racializing oppressors in settler societies like Canada and the US (Ignatiev, 1995).

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