IDENTIFYING CLASS,
CLASSIFYING DIFFERENCE

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There are more things between heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Ms. Marxist and Mr. Socialist. It’s a critique we hear often these days from the principled spokespersons of anarchism, identity politics, oppositional post-modernism and ‘radical democracy’, and of course there’s something in it. The unduly heroic claims that some Marxists have sometimes made for the ontologically prior determinacy of ‘the material’, for the centrality of the realm of the ‘economic’ and the priority of class-based exploitation in explaining the oppressive workings of ‘capitalist society’ and the unnuanced manner in which some socialists have argued the privileged role of ‘the working class’ (or, perhaps, ‘the workers and peasants’) in resistance have rendered the Marxist/socialist tradition vulnerable to criticism – if also to quite a bit of caricature – in recent years. In such an intellectual environment, it behoves Marxists and socialists who do prioritize political economy, the centrality of class struggle, and the realization of socialism, and who choose in one way or another to wrap themselves in the mantle of the Grand Narratives of Emancipation, Universalism and quasi-Enlightenment values (even when abjuring anything that smacks of ‘Essentialism’, ‘Economism’, and ‘Eurocentrism’) to think ever more clearly and carefully about the premises of our work, both analytical and practical.

To begin with, it is by now impossible to ignore the fact that gender is more central to how society functions – its oppressions and its resistances – than most Marxists acknowledged not so very long ago. But even as regards race, nationalism and religion we know – more graphically than ever in the wake of September 11 – that there are religions that move some people to sacrifice their own lives (and those of others) in the name of social claims said to be rooted in the imperatives of those religions; that there are nationalisms, supra- and sub-,
that can drive some people even to genocide and ethnic-cleansings in their name, or feed the orgy of national self-righteousness that currently underpins U.S. claims to determine which regimes will survive and which are to be overthrown throughout the world; and that there are racist imaginings that, as in South Africa or indeed in the global capitalist economy more generally, can so interpenetrate with class structures of oppression as to make it often difficult to say with any great confidence which variable is driving which.

Moreover, anyone who has spent his life, as I have, studying – while also trying to help build – a political project around southern Africa and its liberation is aware of the possible flip-side of these variables, when the consciousness of racial identity and racial oppression can interact positively with the mobilizing and framing of class consciousness and class struggle; when, as in Mozambique, the emotive force of national liberation can provide the seed-bed for radicalization and ultimately, in however flawed and transitory a form, socialist endeavour; and when, as in South Africa itself, a religious/theological impulse towards liberation can be a key force behind radical undertakings. Of course, each of these realities is, up to a point, subject to a ‘material explanation’. Nonetheless, there is also something here that can fall below the radar of the too easy reductionism of some kinds of Marxist/socialist endeavour. It is this something else, these provocative ‘disturbances to the field’ of Marxism/socialism, that forces us to scan carefully the work of those who argue for the claims to our attention of the variables just mentioned – as well as the additional claims to our attention to be made in the name of gender, diverse sexual orientations, and even environmental concerns.

The aim of this essay is to register claims rooted in the lived saliency of ‘identity’ and ‘difference’ and, in doing so, contribute to striking a more useful analytical balance between political economy (focused principally on the structures of capitalist exploitation that frame our world) and the parallel examination of other structures and other discourses that help define the realities of oppression. The essay will also suggest the circumstances under which class struggle can intersect more positively and self-consciously with those racial (read, at least in part, ‘anti-racist’), national and religious impulses that, in some circumstances, speak to our common humanity and our common struggle.


Let’s begin at the beginning. Why would anybody want to identify themselves as a Marxist or a socialist in the first place? The simple answer is that we see capitalism as an inhuman and inequalitarian system of exploitation that needs to be overthrown. And what if we privilege this entry-point into social analysis in order to place at the centre of our concerns both the nature of the capitalist economic structure itself and the struggle of exploited classes to challenge that system? Need we apologize for the fact that this represents at least as much an ‘arbitrary’ value judgment as a strictly ‘scientific’ procedure? For we don’t need
post-modernists to remind us that there are limits to the scientificity of the social science that we practice and apply. In fact, we don’t need to dig very deep beneath the surface of ‘common sense’ to realize that the most efficacious social science doesn’t merely drive itself but is framed by the questions that social scientists choose to ask. Recall, for example, that primary text of hard-headed procedural common sense, E. H. Carr’s *What is History?: ‘Study the historian before you begin to study the facts’, he counsels, for

... the necessity to establish these basic facts rests not on any quality of the facts themselves, but on an a priori decision of the historian .... It used to be said that the facts speak for themselves. This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context .... By and large the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation.2

And where do such choices come from? Not primarily, I would suggest, from some evolving and shifting consensus as to what is pertinent to the best ‘scientific’ explanations emerging within social science disciplines (even if that can have a certain weight). In another fine old book of clear-sighted common sense, Hugh Stretton canvases diverse approaches to the question of what caused late nineteenth century imperialism, concluding that even if his wide range of authors had all agreed to explain the same events and had made no mistakes of fact ... it should still be clear that they would have continued to differ from each other. It should also be clear that their diverse purposes – to reform or conserve societies, to condemn or justify past policies, to reinforce theoretical structures – might well have been served by a stricter regard for truth, but could scarcely be replaced by it .... However desirable as qualities of observation, ‘objectivity’ and its last-ditch rearguard ‘intersubjectivity’ still seem unable to organize an explanation or to bring men of different faith to agree about the parts or the shape, the length or breadth or depth or pattern, that an explanation should have.3

Indeed, Stretton concludes that ‘neutral scientific rules’ cannot ‘replace valuation as selectors’ and that the ‘scientistic’ dream of developing an internally coherent, self-sustaining and (potentially) exhaustive model of society is not only misguided but dangerous – dangerous in the sense of encouraging a blunting of debate about the ‘political and moral valuations’ that necessarily help shape both the questions posed of society and the explanations that contest for our attention regarding social phenomena. Hence his argument for the self-conscious embrace of what he terms a (necessarily) ‘moralizing [social] science’. We might wish to add that, once the questions themselves have been posed, the social scientist can still be judged by his or her peers in terms of the evidence discovered and adduced in the attempt to answer them, and in terms of the logic and coherence of the arguments presented. There are scientific canons of evidence and argument
in terms of which explanations can, up to a point, be judged ‘intersubjectively’. But the questions themselves quite simply do not emerge unprompted from such concerns.

Although not always acknowledged, this seems straightforward enough. But even if some social scientists are uncomfortable with this notion of an inevitably ‘moralizing social science’, the Marxist/socialist social scientist has no reason not to embrace it. After all, is this not what the unity of theory and practice is all about? This is the argument of Gavin Kitching, for example, who writes (affirmatively) that Marxism is much less a science than a ‘point of view’, and, more specifically, a point of view ‘on or about the form of society that it calls capitalism’. For Kitching, ‘the Marxist point of view (which Kitching himself adopts) turns out to be a “rationally motivated willingness to act to transform capitalism”. It has been, Kitching argues, “the objectively best point of view to take on capitalism … in order to change it into a better form of society” – and hence also the basis for the kind of politics of persuasion and mobilization of interests that could alone make the struggle for socialism viable.

I find this convincing – even though Kitching himself seems to take his own argument much too far when he suggests that, whatever may be its positive moral-cum-political value, the Marxist point of view does not provide any ‘privileged means’ of understanding the workings of capitalist society and its contradictions. The truth is, of course, that Marxists and socialists seek not only to change the world but also to interpret it – and their central concerns have indeed given them tools with which to do so. Still, it is appropriate to ask just what, more broadly, is the kind of knowledge these concerns can produce. One well-known answer to this was articulated by Lucio Colletti in his widely-read essay ‘Marxism: Science or Revolution?’ Colletti focused on the wage relationship within capitalism and conceded that ‘bourgeois social science’ (as viewed from ‘the point of view of the capitalist’, as Colletti put it) offers an understanding of that relationship as a free exchange that is quite plausible (and, we might add, fits neatly into the ‘scientific’ undertakings of neoclassical economics). But, Colletti insisted, equally plausible (and even more pertinent to the cause of socialist revolution) is an understanding of this relationship – ‘from the viewpoint of the working class’ – as one of exploitation, and this angle of vision can also offer a revealing (but very different) analysis of the workings of capitalism.

‘The worker’s point of view’? It is tempting to put it like this, (not least for purposes of political mobilization) but we can actually advance the case for the prioritizing of a class analysis grounded in Marxist/socialist premises somewhat more modestly, albeit with equal effect. Indeed, Resnick and Wolff have done so convincingly in their volume, Knowledge and Class, rejecting both ‘empiricist’ and ‘rationalist’ epistemologies while announcing, unapologetically, that, as Marxists, they choose class analysis as their preferred ‘entry point’ into social enquiry. Interestingly, they make no claim that this is the only useful approach to society for purposes of theory or practice but assert merely that it is the one they find most illuminating to build out from, both analytically and politically:
'Class then is [the] one process among the many different processes of life chosen by Marxists to their theoretical entry point so as to make a particular sense of and a particular change in this life’. But ‘why choose class as an entry-point rather than, say, racial or sexual oppression?’:

Our answer may serve to clarify our relations both to Marx and to those people today (including friends) whose entry points and hence theories differ more or less from ours. What Marx sought and we continue to seek to contribute to struggles for social change are not only our practical energies but also certain distinctive theoretical insights. The most important of these for us concerns class. Marx discovered, we think, a specific social process that his allies in social struggle had missed. The process in question is the production and distribution of surplus labour in society. Marx’s contribution lay in defining, locating and connecting the class process to all other processes comprising the social totality they all sought to change. Marx’s presumption was that programs for social change had less chance of success to the degree that their grasp of social structure was deficient.9

Note, in addition, that Resnick and Wolff see this way of expressing things as avoiding any kind of reductionism and instead as defining a Marxism that is open, precisely, to ‘the mutual overdetermination of both class and nonclass’ dimensions, and thus to ‘the complex interdependencies of class and nonclass aspects of social life … that neither Marx nor we reduce to cause-effect or determining-determined essentialisms’.10 This latter point is crucial and we will return to it in the next section. But what, first, of the core argument I have presented regarding Marxism’s scientific-cum-political standing – as ‘moralizing science’, as ‘point of view’, as ‘entry-point’ – to our analytical understandings? No doubt philosophers, including Marxist philosophers, may wish to go further than this, but I’m not sure that the rest of us can’t get on with our own work while they’re doing so. Isn’t this approach, in any case, the best way to stake our claim to be heard, to mobilize and expand our constituency for class analysis and class struggle, while also listening carefully to what others struggling alongside us have to say?

As for the post-Marxist and post-modernist sages, can we not safely leave them to recycling such assertions as that of Ernesto Laclau to the effect that ‘class struggle is just one species of identity politics, and one which is becoming less and less important in the world in which we live’. No doubt Laclau’s attendant claim that class struggle is hopelessly ‘old fashioned’ will be good news to the transnational corporations and the international financial institutions and the US State Department that drive the global economy – although they might be inclined to see this more as a whimper of defeat than a theoretical breakthrough. For Laclau’s statement is linked in his text to a broader approach that characterizes ‘anti-capitalism’ as ‘mere empty talk’, the goal of socializing the means of production as a ‘rather peculiar aim’, and the height of left aspiration as just enough reform of the economy so that ‘the worst effects of globalization are avoided’.11 As Slavoj Zizek suggests (in critiquing Laclau), such a refusal to ‘even imagine a viable alternative to global capitalism’ inevitably produces the
conclusion that ‘the only option for the Left is … palliative measures which, while resigning themselves to the course of events, restrict themselves to limiting the damaging effects of the inevitable’.12

But let us be generous and also say to the ‘posties’: go ahead, ‘deconstruct’ us to your heart’s content, expose our premises (our Eurocentrism, essentialisms and the like) and we’re prepared to learn from you just where we may have occluded things, thereby bettering both our science (our ‘moralizing science’) and our politics. At the end of the day, however, Marxists and socialists will also continue to insist that capitalism be taken seriously in its fundamentally oppressive reality – and to insist as well that, like all human constructs, it is not destined to last forever but can and must be replaced as soon as possible. And to assert that mobilizing people who are victims of that system around anti-capitalist themes and projects is essential to liberation. And to ask of others why they would want, in all conscience, to blunt that ‘point-of-view’.

II MARXISM: ANTI-REDUCTIONIST AND NON-ESSENTIALIST

This, then, is our entry-point: we begin as Marxists with capitalism itself because we consider an understanding of its logic to be the crucial first step in our understanding of the world and we begin as socialists with the struggle to overthrow capitalism because we consider that overthrow to be a necessary (if not sufficient) condition of human emancipation. From this affirmation we can now return to the issues raised in our introductory paragraphs: following Resnick and Wolff, I will argue that there is simply no need, either theoretically or politically, for Marxists/socialists to downplay the importance of other kinds of oppression or other kinds of meaningful resistance to such oppressions.

For despite all the huffing and puffing over the past couple of decades by so many post-Marxists, post-structuralists and post-modernists, Marxism has the resources to deal with a complete plate-full of ‘differences’ and to keep its honour bright. Once again, Kitching has effectively phrased the point:

Marx simply was not an economic reductionist. He did not believe that all forms of politics, or culture, or social conflict were simply expressions of underlying economic or class interests, and it would be extremely difficult to find any evidence in his writing that he did …. Marx was often concerned with those aspects of politics, or culture, or social conflict that had class or economic dimensions. But he certainly would not have thought that, for example, all classical Greek culture (which he loved) or all the politics of the French Second Empire (by which he was fascinated) could be explained by or reduced to economic or class factors.13

Of course, there are tensions within Marx’s work (and also within the tradition he spawned): he did want to say that the production process – and the capitalist production process in particular – was a (sometimes, ‘the’) crucial variable for framing both social analysis and political practice. And there are those
who will continue to argue, albeit in subtle ways, the case for the primacy of the ‘economic’ and of class struggle. Take, for example, the position asserted some years ago by Erik Olin Wright. He sought to sustain such a claim on the grounds that a tendency towards transformation of the class struggle is inherent in the very process of economic development (in the development of the productive forces), providing class relations with an ‘internal logic of development’ denied to other forms of domination: ‘the apparent symmetry in the relationship between class and gender or class and race, therefore, is disrupted by the developmental tendencies of class relations. No such developmental trajectory has been persuasively argued for other forms of domination’, Wright asserted. Suggestive, but even then probably more reductionist than it need be. Not that ‘suggestive’ is a bad thing: the pull towards economic-cum-class reductionism within Marxism can be illuminating, even if also dangerous.

But dangerous? This need prove to be the case only if we fail to hold onto the expansive implications of the simultaneous pull towards ‘agency’ within Marxism. ‘Man [sic] makes his own history but he does not do so under conditions of his own choosing’: a phrase from Marx that is often quoted but perhaps too easily forgotten. For if we take this (usefully contradictory) phrase seriously, we are acknowledging that there do exist tensions within our approach: tensions between structure and agency, tensions between the attractions of economic-cum-class reductionism (in both analysis and politics) on the one hand and the legitimate claims of a multi-variate analysis and a politically inclusive approach to struggle on the other. What we are then claiming is that it is precisely on the cusp of these tensions that the Marxist chooses, as creatively and self-consciously as possible, to think and to act.

In fact, we need only build on the possibilities (tensions) inherent in one of Marx’s own most tantalizing formulations:

It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers – a relationship always naturally corresponding to the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity – which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state. This does not prevent the same economic basis – the same from the standpoint of its main conditions – due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, race relations, external historical influences, etc., from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances.

The absence of any mention of gender on Marx’s list (or, one might add, of sexual orientation, religion or ethno-nationalism) is troubling, to be sure, and there is the word ‘appearance’ to be dealt with. And yet, merely expand the content of that ‘etc.’ and of those phrases ‘empirical circumstances’ and ‘external historical influences’, while also interpreting ‘appearance’ in the strongest
possible sense (as capable of housing pertinent effects in its own right), and you have pretty much all that Marxists require: the ability to emphasize the production process as our chosen entry-point into social analysis and political practice while also taking seriously the concerns of those who wish to highlight, alternatively or simultaneously, the claims to our attention of other nodes of oppression and resistance. This done, all that Marxists need ask of those who speak out analytically and politically from the vantage-point of concern about these is that, whatever else they do, they take seriously the goal of overthrowing, sooner or later (but preferably sooner rather than later), the capitalist system.

Although their efforts are not the immediate focus of this essay, it bears emphasizing that it has been those engaged in gender-sensitive analysis and feminist struggles who have had most to contribute to the development of Marxist analysis along these expansive lines. This can be seen firstly with reference to the very notion of class itself. Himani Bannerji has underscored the ‘absurdity’ of attempting to see ‘identity and difference as historical forms of consciousness unconnected to class formation, development of capital and class politics’. But in doing so she also emphasizes the impossibility of considering class itself outside the gendering (and ‘race-ing’) that so often significantly characterize it in the concrete.¹⁷ Not that there need be anything so very startling in this. Katha Pollitt makes the relevant point about the United States (but the point is true more generally) in answering her own question: ‘Are race and gender and sexual orientation distractions from basic issues of economic inequality and social class?’

All you have to do is look squarely at the world you live in and it is perfectly obvious that … race and gender are crucial means through which class is structured. These are not side issues that can be resolved by raising the minimum wage, although that is important, or even by unionizing more workplaces, although that is important too. Inequality in America is too solidly based on racism and sexism for it be altered without acknowledging race, and sex and sexuality.¹⁸

But this point can also be turned around, underscoring the extent to which gender oppression is also classed and the extent to which feminist assertions must interpenetrate with socialist ones in order to be pertinent to the life-conditions of most women. As Lynn Segal argued a decade ago, ‘at a time when the advances made by some women are so clearly overshadowed by the increasing poverty experienced so acutely by others (alongside the unemployment of men of their class and group) it seems perverse to pose women’s specific interests against rather than alongside more traditional socialist goals’.¹⁹ Consider, too, Nancy Fraser’s twin framing of the conditions of women’s oppression (and a number of other oppressions as well) within the spheres of both distribution and difference: ‘Demands for “recognition of difference” fuel struggles of groups mobilized under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, “race,” gender, and sexuality. In these “post-socialist” conflicts, group identity supplants class interest as the chief medium of political mobilization. And cultural recognition displaces
socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle’. And yet, she then argues, it seems extremely unlikely that tensions rooted in struggles for ‘recognition’ can be resolved, in the long-term, in any very effective and healing manner unless tensions rooted in struggles for ‘redistribution’ (broadly defined) are also being addressed. Her own aim, she suggests, is precisely ‘to connect two political problematics that are currently dissociated from one another’.

True, Fraser casts her concern for the economic in narrowly redistributional terms rather than in terms of overcoming capitalism’s class oppressions more radically. Nonetheless, her refusal to let feminist scholarship and practice merely disappear into the morass of ‘difference’ and discourse theory is a bracing one. Moreover, other, more Marxist feminists have been prepared to take the point much further in viewing ‘feminist struggle’ as ‘fundamentally a class war over resources, knowledge and power’ and in seeking to ‘reclaim anticapitalist feminism’. Thus Hennessy and Ingraham bemoan the fact that ‘debate among first-world socialist and marxist feminists has drifted so far into theorizing women’s oppression in terms of culture, consciousness and ideology that concerns over how to explain the connection between patriarchy and capitalism, or the links between women’s domestic labour and ideology, have been all but abandoned’. In contrast, as they and their co-authors have demonstrated in their work, a preoccupation with the mode of production and with the realities of wage labour, commodity production and consumption is crucial both to ‘the scientific understanding of sexual inequality’ and to feminists gaining ‘a sound basis for the evaluation of short- and long-term political and economic objectives’.

Such a position is, of course, not seen as pre-empting the claims of anti-patriarchal struggle as carried out ‘in its own right’. It is a commonplace, albeit a crucial one, that a ‘mere’ overthrow of capitalism will not, in and of itself, resolve the issues of oppressive sexism and gender emancipation (issues that have continued to haunt all previous experiments in socialist construction). As Hennessy and Ingraham are quick to acknowledge, ‘violations of women’s needs and rights as human beings by patriarchal practices like rape, battering, clitoridectomy and other forms of sexual violence, as well as the neglect and infanticide of girls, are not exclusively bound by or peculiar to capitalism’. But they do assert that ‘the historical forms these practices take and their use against many women in the world are not independent of capitalism either’, concluding that ‘because marxist feminists see the continuous historical connections between women’s oppression and capitalism, theirs is a politics of social transformation that ultimately looks to the elimination of class’. Indeed as Hennessy – in articulating her own commitment, as socialist, feminist and lesbian activist, to Marxist analysis and politics – concludes another recent study: ‘Full democracy [deemed by her to be essential to, amongst many other things, sexual emancipation of all kinds] cannot be achieved within capitalism’. The inextricable links between capitalism and patriarchy, between class and feminist struggles, that Hennessy and others identify: we can learn from this model (and
also from certain recent writings on ecological politics as we turn to an examination of other forms of identity politics.

There is one final preliminary point to be made, however. This concerns the complexity of grounding morally the resistance to oppression that might link feminist and other movements for equality and justice closely to socialist ones. Just what are we ‘moralizing’ about in our science, after all? Those on the Left have sometimes shown unease with any such question, preferring instead the assumption of an (at best) tacitly shared hunch as to what positive values might ultimately find expression if ‘the workers of the world’ really were to unite to build a new society. The challenge of post-modernist deconstruction has made it more difficult to let the matter rest there, however. Significantly, some feminist thinkers – Sabina Lovibond, writing against the grain of post-modernist feminism, for example – have confronted the issue head-on. Advocating the ‘global’ agenda of an ‘abolition of the sex class system, and the forms of inner life that belong to it’, she defined this programme as being global ‘not just in the sense that it addresses itself to every corner of the planet, but also in the sense that it aims eventually to converge with those of all other egalitarian or liberationist movements’. And the basis of such ‘convergence’? ‘The movement should persist in seeing itself as a component or offshoot of Enlightenment modernism, rather than one more “exciting” feature (or cluster of features) in a postmodern social landscape’.

Whether, in seeking to resist both relativism on the one hand and liberal/neoliberal universalism on the other, ‘the Enlightenment’ is the best point of reference for the Left may be open to question, of course. Nonetheless, as Lovibond senses, the problem will not simply disappear. We may find it easier to know what we are against (capitalism and its multiple alienations and oppressions, for example) than to clearly state just what it is that we are for and just what ‘spaces of hope’ we divine – even if concepts like emancipation from oppression and the freedom for self-expression and self-realization, community and equality can be expected to help us define our counter-hegemonic universalism more specifically as we proceed. Perhaps, too, we can affirm that any such ‘universalism’ as we may come to embrace will have to be global in its referent and democratic in the modalities of its emergence. These are, in any case, issues to which we will have to return.

III MARXISM: CLASS AND IDENTITY

We can now turn to a brief survey of issues raised for Marxists and socialists by the ‘identities’ highlighted in this volume of the Register. In doing so, we find ourselves confronted by variables even more difficult to pin down than are those of class and gender, although they are variables with a wide and undeniable range of pertinent effects. We will suggest that none of them can be reduced to mere reflexes of the economic, the material or the class-determined, either for purposes of analyzing oppression or for mobilizing resistance. However, we will see, once again, that Marxists and non-Marxist socialists have every reason to argue that
these variables are best treated in close relation to an analysis and a politics of anti-capitalist class struggle. Finally, since the questions broached here are so far-reaching, I will approach them principally on the terrain of global development theory and ‘third world’ struggles that I know best.

(1) Race … and (post-)colonialism

If it is indeed ‘absurd’, as we have seen Bannerji to argue, to ignore the intersection of class not only with gender hierarchies but also with racial discriminations in advanced capitalist settings, then it would be even more foolish to do so when we focus on capitalism as a global system. As Oliver Cox and others have demonstrated, many of the central features we think of as constituting modern racism in the cultural sphere were, in the first instance, shaped in close interaction with the expansion of global capitalism.27 For this ‘cultural variable’ served both as rationale and booster rocket for ‘the European consumption of tribal society’ which ‘when viewed as a single process … could be said to represent the greatest, most persistent act of human destructiveness ever recorded’.28 Such a meshing of ‘race and class’ had numerous faces: in driving American imperialism, for example, the vigorous seed of racism planted by the slave trade was complemented fatefully by what Drinnon calls the ideology of ‘Indian-hating’. This, he continues,

… reduced native peoples to the level of the rest of the fauna and flora to be ‘rooted out.’ It reduced all the diverse Native American peoples to a single despised nonwhite group and, where they did survive, into an hereditary caste. In its more inclusive form, Western racism is another name for native-hating – in North America, of ‘niggers,’ ‘Chinks,’ ‘Japs,’ ‘greasers,’ ‘dagoes,’ etc.; in the Philippines of ‘goo-goos’; and in Indochina of ‘gooks.’ … Racism defined natives as non-persons within the settlement culture and was in a real sense the enabling experience of the rising American empire.29

Drinnon goes so far as to argue that ‘in the [American] experience race has always been of greater importance than class, the corner-stone of European property based politics’. We may think the dialectic of class and race is rather more complicated than that, but of the impact of ‘race’ per se we can have no doubt. Thus, even when the most overtly racist canons of imperial ideology have been self-consciously modified by the Western powers (in order to rationalize the decolonization process of the post-war years, for example), that ideology’s central premise of (racial) superiority has tended to be only lightly recast in ‘moral’ terms for both elite and popular consumption. As Furedi notes:

Increasingly the vocabulary that is applied to the South is morally different from that which is used in relation to the North. Many societies in the South, especially those in Africa, are treated in pathological terms. Africans are routinely represented as devoid of moral qualities …. The new moral equation between a superior North and an inferior South helps
legitimize a two-tiered international system …. Race no longer has a
formal role to play since the new global hierarchy is represented through
a two-tier moral system. Gradually, the old silent race war has been
replaced by moral crusades and by ‘clashes of civilization’.30

The latter is, of course, the nether-world of ideology-making inhabited by the
Samuel Huntingtons and the Bernard Lewises of the academy. But its public
credibility in Western circles can be best gauged by the extraordinary success of
Robert Kaplan’s recent writings, in which the grimmest possible evocation – a
crypto-racist tone, substituting for any real analysis of the structures of global
inequality, is central to his work – of Africa’s problems (‘criminal anarchy’,
‘nature unchecked’) is said to capture the essence of today’s ‘bifurcated world’.
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The sordid reality of global inequality has certainly reshaped the advanced
capitalist centres themselves, the impoverished empire having ‘struck back’
(through migration to the metropole) to produce general populations of diverse
ethnic and racial composition.32 Writers like Bonacich and others more recently
have explored the split labour markets that this process has produced, and their
implications for divided working-class responses to capital.33 And Stuart Hall and
his colleagues have presented, in rich detail, an understanding of some of the
cultural/ideological and political effects of such ‘racial’ diversity and the
complexity of developing counter-hegemonic strategies in advanced capitalist
countries that acknowledge this diversity while seeking to encompass and trans-
cend it.34 My own work, both scholarly and political, on South Africa has also
 schooled me here. The semi-autonomous but always tightly linked (and shifting)
imperatives of class exploitation and racial oppression that have produced both
apartheid and a distinctive form of ‘racial capitalism’ there have proven chal-
lenging to disentangle analytically. Similarly, consciousness of nation, race and
citizenship has often been even more crucial than class consciousness in driving
South African resistance. Perhaps the fact that, ultimately, the pull towards
(somewhat) colour-blind class relations has produced a grim post-apartheid ‘false
decolonization’ along neoliberal lines may seem like a retrospective vindication
of class analysis. But the situation has never been that simple, nor has the poli-
tics it demands.35 In fact, once taken seriously, the irreducible simultaneity of class
and race can be seen everywhere to warrant ‘the forging of alliances between the
democratic movement and the labour and socialist movements for multi-racial
organization and solidarity rather than sectarianism and chauvinism, and finally
… a strategy that links the struggle for reforms within capitalism with the struggle
for its transformation’.36

However, for the purposes of the present essay let us narrow the focus here
(while simultaneously expanding it!) by returning to the wider world and the
intersection of class and race in the relationship between the capitalist centre and
its periphery. As Biel has argued, ‘Dependency theory uncovered part of this rela-
tionship, essentially the racial capitalism that exists between the North and the
South’.37 Of course, we know that the geography of global exploitation has
become ever more complicated, the ‘Third World’ now to be found within the

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First and the First within the Third such that Hoogevelt can even suggest that ‘the familiar pyramid of the core-periphery hierarchy is no longer a geographical but a social division of the world economy’. And yet things are not yet quite as simple as that either. As Giovanni Arrighi pointed out some years ago (and has reaffirmed in more recent work), the global hierarchy of national economies remains remarkably stable, whatever may be happening to class relationships within those economies: ‘... the nations of the world’, he writes, ‘are not all walking along the same road to high mass consumption. Rather they are differentially situated in a rigid hierarchy of wealth in which the occasional ascent of a nation or two leaves all the others more firmly entrenched than ever they were before’. There is, in short, plenty of evidence for the existence of a global imperial hierarchy, both geographically and socially-defined, that is also ‘raced’ – a kind of ‘global apartheid’, as the point has recently been put.

It is this phenomenon that lies at the heart of recent work carried out under the rubric of ‘post-colonialism’, much of it done in the name of cultural recovery as part of a challenge to the Eurocentric premises of both mainstream and Marxist studies of development and literature. The post-colonial school aims not merely to expose such Eurocentric biases within the global centres of cultural production, but also to listen afresh to those diverse voices of the South that otherwise would be squeezed out of ‘the canon’ and out of global public discourse. Nor is this done principally in the name of ‘tradition’. Acknowledging the impact that Western imperialism and colonialism have had on peoples on the receiving end of that system – whether currently resident in the South or now in one or another diaspora – they speak in terms of ‘hybridities’ and ‘syncreticisms’ that articulate their presence around the world in voices that are complex and multi-layered, local yet global, and that must be heard.

There have also, however, been numerous critics of such preoccupations who attack the tendency of this work to merely celebrate diversity (of ‘identity’ or of literary and artistic production) at the expense of saying nearly enough about how the world actually works for the vast majority of those who live at capitalism’s periphery (whether in the North or the South). Amongst the most perceptive of such critics has been Ella Shohat:

The circulation of ‘post-colonial’ as a theoretical framework tends to suggest a supercession of neo-colonialism and the Third World and Fourth World as unfashionable, even irrelevant categories. Yet, with all its problems, the term ‘Third World’ does still retain heuristic value as a convenient label for the imperialized formations, including those within the First World.... At this point in time, replacing the term ‘Third World’ with the ‘post-colonial’ is a liability. Despite differences and contradictions among and within Third World countries, the term ‘Third World’ contains a common project of (linked) resistances to neo-colonialisms [and] implies a belief that the shared history of neo-colonialism and internal racism form sufficient common ground for alliances among such diverse peoples.
While she acknowledges that the use of the term ‘Third World’ risks blurring ‘the differently modulated politics in the realm of culture, the overlapping spaces of inter-mingling identities’ in diverse settings around the world, she nonetheless affirms that ‘the cultural inquiry generated by the hybridity/syncreticism discourse needs re-linking to geopolitical macro-level analysis’.42

Shohat thus seeks to bring the cultural realities of global diversity into a strong interface with the realities of global capitalism and the need to resist it. More recently, Robert Young has attempted to defend post-colonial theory against such criticisms by asserting that ‘many of the problems raised can be resolved if the postcolonial is defined as coming after colonialism and imperialism, in their original meaning of direct-rule domination, but still positioned within imperialism in its later sense of the global system of hegemonic economic power’.43 This may be somewhat disingenuous, however. As Arif Dirlik argues, ‘post-colonial critics have been largely silent on the relationship of the idea of post-colonialism to its context in contemporary capitalism; indeed, they have suppressed the necessity of considering such a possible relationship by repudiating a possible “foundational” role for capitalism in history’.44 Moreover, even Young himself professes unease with the term ‘post-colonial’, suggesting his actual preference for the notion of ‘tricontinentalism’ to capture even more directly ‘a theoretical and political position which embodies an active concept of intervention within such oppressive circumstances’. Nonetheless, he claims that ‘post-colonialism’ (as he defines it) can still serve the purposes he has in mind, capturing the ‘tricontinental’ nature of Southern resistance to imperialism while remaining sensitive to the sheer diversity of the settings in which such resistance occurs. Indeed this latter sensitivity is presented as being amongst ‘the fundamental lessons of the Marxism of the liberation movements’: ‘The foundational concept here is the critique of eurocentrism and unreflective eurocentric assumptions, and the need to radicalize any politics or economics through constructive dialogue to accommodate the particularities of local cultural conditions’.

Are we not here, with Shohat, Young and others, gaining some ground, finding the terms in which we can acknowledge global cultural diversity and the quasi-racial structuring of the present global system (and of resistance to it), while also focusing on the simultaneous centrality of capitalism in driving the latter system’s inequities and contradictions? There are two potential problems, however. One is the danger that both Shohat’s retrieval of ‘neo-colonialism’ and Young’s ‘tricontinentalism’ can produce a too simplistic ‘Third-Worldism’, blurring, in the interests of an anti-imperialist focus, the manner in which class divisions within the Third World must themselves be challenged by progressive forces. Such certainly is the fear of another critic of post-colonial theory, Aijaz Ahmad, who has challenged, in the name of a ‘One World’ anti-capitalist focus, the very concept of a Third World and who might well be equally uneasy about ‘tricontinentalism’.45 But this is merely to suggest that the task is an unfinished one: to develop a sensitivity to the realities of ‘difference’ and of race within the
global system that can be linked creatively with a class-defined analysis of the
capitalist workings of that system.

There is a second ambiguity. Young’s formulations tend to paper over a
tension amongst the various ‘tricontinental’ theorists he evokes, between those
who resist the ‘modernity’ that the global system seems to thrust upon them and
others who wish to seize hold of that very modernity, albeit on their own terms,
in order to transform their material condition. There is a wide gap in this respect
between a Gandhi and an Amilcar Cabral, although from a reading of Young you
might not know it. What, then, would be the nature of the one world we might
seek to build? Surely Marxists (of both Third and First Worlds) would not wish
to dismiss altogether the promise of ‘modernity’, even though much of the
currently fashionable postmodernist/post-colonial anti-developmental literature
invites them to do so. As Sutcliffe – who finds real value in the analytical turn
towards ‘culture’ and diversity – nonetheless argues: ‘The criticism of the stan-
dard development model seems at times too total. Because the old destination,
which in the West we experience every day, seems so unsatisfactory, all aspects
of it are often rejected as a whole. Along with consumerism out goes science,
technology, urbanization, modern medicine and so on. And in sometimes comes
a nostalgic, conservative postdevelopmentalism’.

In all projects, there is a danger of losing the baby when we throw out the
old bath water. In this case the baby is the material, economic, produc-
tive basis of whatever satisfactory utopia can be, to echo Vincent Tucker’s
suggestive words, imagined and democratically negotiated among the
inhabitants of earth …. One way of rephrasing all these concerns would
be to say that development and globalization are experienced in practice
in conditions of profound inequality of wealth and power between nations
(imperialism) as well as between classes and sexes (capitalist class exploita-
tion and patriarchy). It is necessary to distinguish which of the rejected
aspects of development and globalization are inherent in these concepts
and which come about because of the unequal circumstances in which we
experience them. If we reject them completely because of the form in
which they arrive we will always be struggling against the wrong enemy.

One world out of two, three or four, and not the world of capitalist global-
ization: here we are clearly being drawn back to the question of universalism that
was posed in the previous section. Can there be any doubt that the ‘race-ing’ of
the actually-existing world presents a reality autonomous enough in its workings
(if also one rooted in material realities) to be a focus of political work in its own
right? From this point of view, ‘anti-racist’ consciousness-raising must surely
complement anti-capitalist mobilization. But, beyond that, what is to be said
about the mobilization of ‘positive’ racial consciousness as part and parcel of a
progressive movement?

This is clearly delicate ground, and it is to the credit of writers like Paul Gilroy
that they have sought to negotiate it. Gilroy is well aware of the liberatory poten-
tial of some degree of racial self-identification in helping overcome the
psychological and material scars inflicted upon ‘people of colour’ by the malign-
nant workings of racism.48 He is also a fierce critic of any too easy evocation of
universalism – as his crisp exposé of the racist stereotypes underlying Kant’s own
‘Enlightenment values’ eloquently demonstrates.49 And yet Gilroy also identifies
the dangers of a black ‘raciology’ that, in the name of identity and ‘the disabling
assumption of automatic solidarity based on either blood or land’, risks merely a
narrow inversion of white and racist definitions of ‘difference’ by black ‘victims’
that liberates no one. Instead he urges, in the name of a ‘resolutely nonracial
humanism’, a ‘fundamental change of mood upon what used to be called “anti-
racism”’ by asking it ‘in an explicitly utopian spirit to terminate its ambivalent
relationship to the idea of “race” in the interest of a heterocultural, postanthro-
pological and cosmopolitan yet-to-come’.50

Not all militants, black or white, will agree with this way of posing things.
Many Marxists, for example, will wish to ground their pursuit of ‘utopian’ goals
more firmly in terms of class struggle than Gilroy’s brand of ‘humanistic volun-
tarism’ seems to promise.51 Following Sutcliffe’s distinctions, they may also want
to qualify Gilroy’s premise that, for victims of capitalism, ‘corrective or compens-
tory inclusion in modernity should no longer supply the dominant theme’.52
And yet, at the same time, race does matter: Marxists must seek to avoid all traces
of smugness as we accept the assistance of Gilroy and others across the racial
divide. For his attempt to ‘imagine political culture beyond the colour line’ does
help stake out terrain upon which the continuing effort to synthesize diverse
resistances to oppression can occur.

(2) Ethno-nationalism and religion

Another challenging front for Marxists is that of ‘ethno-nationalism’. Attempts to define precisely the attributes, shared and distinctive, of
nation/nationalism, ethnic group/ethnicity, tribe/tribalism, and other related
terms have filled hundreds of combative volumes. For present analytical
purposes, the term ‘ethnie’ may help us to link all these notions: as defined by
Anthony Smith, ‘ethnie’ refers to a community ‘which unites an emphasis upon
cultural difference with the sense of an historical community. It is this sense of
history and the perception of cultural uniqueness and individuality which differ-
etiates populations from each other and which endows a given population with
a definite identity, both in their eyes and in those of outsiders’.53 It has become
a commonplace to recognize that such ‘communities’ are imagined, and even
willed into active existence by class-defined protagonists and political actors, but
that does not make the often long-lived histories and cultural attributes thus
evoked entirely arbitrary. Nor does it make irrelevant the variable circumstances
under which a sense of difference cast in such terms can become politicized, nor
make less real the effects of actions taken by people (often in large numbers) in
terms of such identities, as the last several centuries of history have made
perfectly apparent. Marxists have been understandably troubled by this phenom-
enon, as ethno-national claims have cut across class identities and
consciousnesses in wildly varying ways, so much so that Tom Nairn once
famously argued that ‘the theory of nationalism represents Marxism’s great historical failure’.54

Not that Marxists need apologize for their profound suspicions of ethno-nationalism: an emphasis on ‘internationalism as the expression of a revolutionary humanist viewpoint’ and on ‘socialist, democratic and emancipatory alternatives to national exclusivism, chauvinism and xenophobia’ is at the core of their perspective.55 We have, in recent months, supped full of the United States’ Great Power chauvinism and Israel’s own brutally self-righteous project (both being defined at the grisly intersection of racism, nationalism and religious pomposity, as these things so often are); and we have scarcely recovered from the ‘ethnic cleansings’ of ex-Yugoslavia and Rwanda (to cite only two of the grimmest recent cases). But, as Ronaldo Munck has asked, is this pull towards ‘the tribe’ always and everywhere to be interpreted by Marxists as a mere ‘problem’, or should it not instead be treated as ‘an integral element of the human condition’56 – as being, quintessentially, one of those ‘different empirical circumstances/historical influences’ referred to by Marx that affect ‘the economic basis’ in ways that can be ‘ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances’? Thus even Lowy, citing the range of manifestations of nationalism, from Nazism to the Vietnamese revolution, is prepared to emphasize ‘the contradictory role of nationalism’; to define it as being, in fact, ‘one of the great paradoxes in the history of the twentieth century’.57

Something similar can also be said of religious identities. Perhaps most Marxists may be atheists, comfortable enough with a materialist perspective on the transcendental and the ‘last things’; this is certainly true of the present writer. They may even edge towards what Bryan Turner has termed ‘reductionist’ approaches to understanding the realm of the religious – tending to see religion ‘as an epiphenomenon, a reflection or expression of more basic and permanent features of human behaviour and society’, with the further implication that ‘religious beliefs are false by reference to certain scientific or positivistic criteria and that the holding of religious beliefs is irrational by reference to criteria of rational thought’.58 But is there any need for Marxists to be so reductionist? Our very silences regarding issues of death, evil and enchantment will seem to many quite one-dimensional. Surely people can be encouraged to find their own workable ‘truths’, spiritual or otherwise, regarding such issues. In sum, there seems no reason for Marxists to feel they must advocate ‘existential materialism’ to others, and, quite apart from the unlikelihood of succeeding in doing so,59 there are many reasons not to even attempt it.60

Once again, then, it is not religious belief, but the way in which religion is institutionalized, politicized or ‘classed’, that should concern Marxists. And here there are good reasons to be suspicious. Once again, Michael Lowy asks the most pertinent of questions: ‘Is religion still, as Marx and Engels saw it in the nineteenth century, a bulwark of reaction, obscurantism and conservatism? Is it a sort of narcotic, intoxicating the masses and preventing them from clear-sighted thought and action in their own interests?’ To which he replies: ‘To a large
extent, the answer is yes’.61 And yet Lowy, in the very book in which he writes these words, is primarily concerned to evoke the reality of ‘liberation theology’ (which he terms ‘liberationist Christianity’) and the positive ways in which it has come to frame certain contestations for radical space in Latin America, including, most recently, in Chiapas. This reality, too, suggests that there is work to be done by Marxists and socialists in better comprehending and acting upon the world’s complexities.

Note that Lowy then proceeds to document the extent to which a significant tradition within Marxist theory has actually been alert to such issues. Both Marx and Engels, he argues, acknowledged the role that religion could play both in defining political hegemony and in inspiring political protest.62 And Lowy also praises the efforts of Rosa Luxemburg ‘to rescue the social dimension of the Christian tradition for the labour movement … [i]nstead of waging a philosophical battle in the name of materialism’. True, ‘Luxemburg’s insight, that one could fight for socialism in the name of the true values of original Christianity, was lost in [the] rather crude and somewhat intolerant “materialist” perspective’63 prevalent in the Marxist circles of the time. But he can also cite Gramsci, Bloch and Goldmann as Marxist writers who countenanced the possibility of a creative (if contested) interface between the utopianism and faith principles in both Marxism and religious belief.64 For Lowy, the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariategui is particularly central in this respect65 – not least in influencing directly the work of his fellow Peruvian, the founder of liberation theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez. For, as noted above, it is in the emergence of liberation theology that Lowy identifies most clearly ‘the appearance of religious thinking using Marxist concepts and inspiring struggles for social liberation [and] the creation of a new religious culture, expressing the specific conditions of Latin America: dependent capitalism, massive poverty, institutionalized violence, popular religiosity’.66

Of course, Lowy is well aware that this is contested terrain in Latin America as elsewhere; his analysis of the virulent reaction against liberation theology by the established Catholic church in Latin America (and in Rome) and the interests clustered behind it, as well as the American-sponsored offensive of evangelical Protestant missionaries on that continent, is usefully sobering, as is his discussion of tensions within the camp of the liberationists themselves (with some, not surprisingly, being much more Romantic and/or populist than Marxist). Still, it is the possibility of a progressive articulation between religion and popular-cum-class struggle that bears primary emphasis here. As Dwight Hopkins also concludes, ‘religions embodied in disparate human cultures have served as the foundations for national differences, racial conflicts, class exploitation, and gender discrimination, on the one hand, as well as for the resolution of hostility and the achievement of full humanity for those at the bottom of all societies, on the other’.67

Cannot something similar be said for ‘ethno-nationalism’? The initial prognosis is not promising, as noted above: ethno-nationalist perspectives easily lend themselves to the purposes of great power chauvinism and the rationalization of
bourgeois interests for popular consumption in wealthy countries. Moreover, ‘the pitfalls of national consciousness’ (in Fanon’s phrase) are familiar in poorer countries where they often mask petty-bourgeois in-fighting over power and serve to ‘divide and rule’ popular forces in the interests of elites, warlords and their sponsors. But even as we move to re- pose the next obvious question – why do large numbers of ordinary people, especially in impoverished circumstances, become available for the narrowest, most combative kind of mobilization in such terms? – we must pause. For, as Munck writes, ‘the critique of nationalist discourse should not blind us to the popular struggles it has fostered and animated’. The struggles of the subaltern may take many forms – nationalist, ethnic, regional and religious amongst others – and a Marxism that seeks to have global influence needs to understand these and not just struggle to “demystify” them and reassert a “true” class struggle.

For the Marxist there will be two key foci here, the claims of universalism/internationalism on the one hand and the diverse modalities of ‘articulation’ between ethnie and class (just as between religion and class) on the other. Once again, the Marxist tradition does have helpful contributions to draw on, an internationalism that has been open to a diversity of struggles (including those cast in national terms) while also emphasizing their ‘indivisible interdependence’, in Trotsky’s phrase. Munck, like Lowy, cites Otto Bauer for his rich and subtle ‘conception of the nation as historical process’, and they acknowledge the contributions of Gramsci as well in this regard. In my own work I have found the early formulations of Laclau – written before his post-Marxist turn – to be particularly helpful. For here one finds a non-reductionist model that rejects the notion that nationalism belongs to any class and insists instead (through the deployment of case-studies of 1930s’ Germany and Peron’s Argentina) that it can be articulated with quite diverse class projects. More work certainly needs to be done along these lines – not least in light of the argument of Ahmad, Panitch and others that, despite globalization, the nation-state will remain crucial to the struggle for radical outcomes. For if the latter point is true, the challenge to the left of imagining a nationalism that is at once inclusive (with reference to difference), expansive (with reference to internationalism) and progressive (with reference to class) will persist.

It should be apparent from our earlier argument that a similar approach can also illuminate the political economy of religion. As noted, some Marxists may wish merely to challenge religion’s ‘irrational’ claims root and branch (as the Frelimo leadership chose to do in Mozambique) or, faced with religion’s often negative articulation with class and power, merely to urge an assertive commitment to secularism and to ‘tolerance’ as being the Left’s optimal programme. And yet even this latter approach, if pushed too smugly, can easily overlook the kind of potentially positive articulations between religion and class that many situations may actually demand and that ‘liberation theology’ exemplifies. Certainly, making links with those who are moved by the universally humane themes in the world’s religious traditions must often be the correct approach by the Left.
to such a powerful, virtually inevitable, form of identity. In short, religion must not be abandoned to the Right. Here we can take our lead from Dussel’s sense that liberation theology ‘will be practiced in other parts of the Christian world, such as Africa and Asia [beyond Latin America], and by theologians of other world religions … This theological perspective emerges from a commitment to the poor of the South, that is, those who have been excluded from the present globalization modernizing process’. It is in this spirit, too, that Radhika Coomaraswamy, writing on recent developments in Sri Lanka, refuses to elide the distinction between Buddhist humanism and Buddhist chauvinism and then argues more generally (she comments on Hinduism, Islam and Christianity in addition to Buddhism) that ‘all religions have this contradiction between orthodox doctrine and the humane heterodox traditions’. Herself a secularist, she nonetheless suggests that ‘to collapse humanism and orthodoxy at this historical juncture would be a major setback’.

And yet we must also face the fact that it will be uphill work to claim the high ground here. Recent studies have recognized not merely the vested interests that can benefit from stoking the fires of various fundamentalisms (cf. the political economy of contemporary Iran) but also the morbid global conditions that can make ordinary people see such identities as weapons in their hands. In this sense, Dussel’s phrase ‘globalization modernizing process’ as a touchstone for progress suggests problems. For many students of the religious Right have found the latter’s main roots to lie not so much in exclusion from modernity as in resistance to it. Thus, Karen Armstrong, a particularly subtle and sensitive writer on world religions, can underscore the extent to which the fundamentalist version of religious activism is an unsurprising effect of the disruptions that ‘modernity’ brings, and of the fact that ‘in the developing world … modern Western culture [is experienced as] invasive, imperialistic and alien’. Similarly, Mark Jurgensmeyer writes that ‘in many cases, especially in the areas of the world where modernization is a synonym for Westernization, movements of religious nationalism have served as liberation struggles against what their supporters perceive to be alien ideologies and foreign powers’. Faith and fundamentalism, humanism and secularism, universalism and modernity: self-evidently, the complexities evoked by engaging such expansive terms out-run the limits of these pages. What can be insisted upon here, however, is that ‘modernity’ must not be identified as readily with capitalism as Armstrong and Jurgensmeyer (however tacitly) both seem prone to do. Contemporary socialists must insist (once again, with Sutcliffe) that the promise of the modern can be blended with the integrity of the local and the sacred in much more meaningful and efficacious ways than the ‘universalism’ of capitalist modernity (Benjamin Barber’s ‘McWorld’) can ever hope to allow.

The question therefore returns: is not socialist advance a key piece of the puzzle of building a different, more positive kind of universalism? I would suggest that this is the way the issue should now be framed, with Marxists forced to see the fever so often attendant upon rabid ethno-nationalisms and religions-
fundamentalist as a reflection not merely of the victory of capitalism but also the failure, at least for the moment, of ‘progressive nationalism and revolutionary socialism throughout the globe’. As Panitch elaborates the latter point, ‘Opposition to capitalism and imperialism is inevitable, but the atavistic form it took on 11 September can only be understood in terms of what, on that day, tragically filled the vacuum of the 20th century Left’s historic defeat’.80 And what, in addition, can be said of the nature of capitalism’s ‘victory’? As Arrighi reminds us, it has primarily been a victory for the continuing hegemony of capitalism’s vicious irrationality – a victory scarred by inequality and the dramatic failure to realize the ‘developmentalism’ that that system has so often promised.

Indeed, it is the latter failure that has sown so many of the seeds of contemporary decay, producing ‘a crisis which is most clearly visible in the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East and North Africa but is apparent in one form or another throughout the South’.81 For capitalism’s grossly uneven development across the world has produced, as Ralph Miliband once put it, ‘extremely fertile terrain’ for the kind of ‘pathological deformations’ – predatory authoritanisms and those ‘demagogues and charlatans peddling their poisonous wares ... of ethnic and religious exclusion and hatred’ – that now scar the global landscape.82 Losing confidence in socialist and other humanely modern, humanly cooperative, projects, people turn for social meaning to more ready-to-hand identities, often with fundamentalist fervour.83 Despite this, progressives committed to class struggle should continue to view the identities we have been exploring as contingent in their socio-political implications and, in many cases, as not being in contradiction with socialist purposes. And we should continue, when possible, to invite the bearers of such identities to be partners – alongside feminists, environmentalists, anti-racists, activists around issues of sexual orientation, and the like – within a broader community-in-the-making and within a universalizing democratic project of global, anti-capitalist transformation.

* * *

This remains the bottom-line. Yes, Marxists and other socialists are themselves ensnared in discourse; but it is a discourse – a ‘moralizing science’, a ‘point of view’, an ‘entry-point’ – of class analysis and class struggle that is user-friendly, meaningful and important to us, and one that, politically, can be rendered important to many others. And not, I would suggest, as folded into the melting pot of diverse oppressions, diverse resistances, diverse movements, under such rubrics as ‘radical democracy’, but as articulated – non-reductively, non-economistically, non-Eurocentrically, but centrally – with them. For Marxist and other socialist discourses imply a crucial demand, a demand to transcend the structural and cultural limits of capitalism that is too easily lost to view, not only by postmodernists but also within the commonsensical hegemonies and glib universalisms that currently haunt us. It is a discourse that is both central to human emancipation and essentially non-cooptable by either liberalism or
reformism. Of course, the demands Marxist/socialist discourse encompasses are corruptible, as history has demonstrated, but that is another, if by no means irrelevant, story. Here let us merely affirm that, at bottom, class-based politics and anti-capitalism are too central to the cause of human emancipation to be drowned in ‘difference’, however sensitive we must be to the latter’s claims. Struggle along such lines – at once methodological and practical – must continue.

NOTES

1 For ease of argument in the present essay I have tended to elide the terms ‘Marxist’ and ‘socialist’ throughout; however, I am aware that not all socialists will consider themselves to be Marxists, even if it is likely that all Marxists will (like myself) consider themselves to be socialists.


7 ‘I would say’, Colletti (‘Marxism: Science or Revolution’, p. 375) argues in this respect, ‘that there are two realities in capitalism: the reality expressed by Marx and the reality expressed by the authors he criticizes’.

8 Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff, *Knowledge and Class: A Marxian Critique of Political Economy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987: ‘By entry point we mean that particular concept a theory uses to enter into its formulation, its particular construction of the entities and relations that comprise the social totality’ (p. 25).


10 Ibid., p. 281. That this approach can also lead to very soft definitions of capitalism and of anti-capitalist struggle – see J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)*, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996 – is worth noting but does not undermine its merits.


12 Equally important to our purposes here is Zizek’s further elaboration of this point (in Butler, Laclau and Zizek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, p. 321): ‘The much–praised postmodern “proliferation of new political subjectivities,” the demise of every “essentialist” fixation, the assertion of full contingency, occur against the background of a certain silent
renunciation and acceptance: the renunciation of the idea of a global change in the fundamental relations in our society (who still seriously questions capitalism, state and political democracy?) and, consequently, the acceptance of the liberal democratic capitalist framework which remains the same, the unquestioned background, in all the dynamic proliferation of the multitude of new subjectivities’.

13 Kitching, *Marxism and Science*, p. 68. As Kitching further explains, “The reason is that Marx was, if nothing else, an extremely intelligent man, and economic reductionism is an extremely silly, not to say incoherent, idea in which to believe.”


15 See, for example, Nicos Mouzelis (‘Sociology of Development: Reflections on the Present Crisis’, *Sociology*, 22(1) (February), 1988) who argues that ‘the neglect of the political … is the Achilles heel of all development theory’, including Marxist theories of development, but also finds in Marxism’s potential openness to embracing the tension between ‘systemic and agency terms’ the key to its ability to overcome any collapse into economistic reductionism (pp. 39-40).


19 Lynne Segal, ‘Whose Left? Socialism, Feminism and the Future’, *New Left Review*, 185 (January–February), 1991, pp. 87, 90. Segal is here critiquing, in particular, those former socialist-feminists like Zillah Eisenstein who had begun to abandon the link between socialism and feminism in favour (in Segal’s summary) of a feminist politics that seeks to ‘unite all women … in their specific identity as women’.

20 Nancy Fraser, ‘From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice

21 Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham, ‘Introduction: Reclaiming Anticapitalist Feminism’ in their edited volume Materialist Feminism, New York and London: Routledge, 1997; such authors regret that crucial concepts like ‘social structure, production, patriarchy and class … have been dismissed by post-modernist feminists [and by ‘a flourishing postmodern cultural politics’] in favour of analyses that … focus almost exclusively on ideological, state, or cultural practices, anchor meaning in the body and its pleasures, or understand social primarily in terms of the struggle over representation’ (p. 5).

22 See, for example, Carol A. Stabile, ‘Feminism and the Ends of Postmodernism’ and Martha Gimenez, ‘The Oppression of Women: A Structuralist Marxist View’ (p. 82), in Hennessy and Ingraham, eds., Materialist Feminism.

23 Hennessy and Ingraham, eds., Materialist Feminism, p. 11.


25 Thus Bob Sutcliffe (‘Development after Ecology’, in V. Bhaskar and A. Glyn, eds., The North, the South and the Environment: Ecological Constraints and the Global Economy, London: St. Martin’s Press, 1995) demonstrates the necessity of developing a progressive politics that is sensitive simultaneously to ecology and to the imperatives of global redistribution: ‘The only hope for a radical redistribution towards the future is a radical redistribution away from the rich in the present. If greater equality in the present is one of the traditional concerns of red politics, greater equality between generations is an essential characteristic of the new green politics. But not all reds are yet green; nor do all greens look as if they will become reds. The future of sustainable human development depends on a more thorough mixing of the colours’ (p. 255).


31 Robert D. Kaplan, ‘The Coming Anarchy’, The Atlantic Monthly, February, 1994. This seems another paradigmatic example of the ‘Western Us’ being juxtaposed to ‘The Others’ that Howard Zinn has critiqued so effectively in a recent commentary on the bombing of Afghanistan. See his ‘The Others’,
Note, too, the link made by Hannah Arendt (in her *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1951) between the racisms of imperial expansion and that of genocidal anti-semitism (the latter being a racism with a unique historicity of its own, of course) in the German case.

Edna Bonacich, ‘Class Approaches to Ethnicity and Race’, *The Insurgent Sociologist* (Special Issue on ‘Race and Class in Twentieth Century Capitalist Development’), 10(2) (Fall), 1980.


John Gabriel and Gideon Ben-Tovim, ‘Marxism and the concept of racism’, *Economy and Society*, 7(2) (May), 1978, p. 147.


Ella Shohat, ‘Notes on the “Post-Colonial”’, *Social Text*, 31/32, 1992, p. 111. See also, in the same issue of *Social Text*, Anne McClintock, ‘The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term “Post-Colonial”’.

Shohat, ‘Notes on the “Post-Colonial”’, p. 110.


Sutcliffe seeks, however, to incorporate these variables ‘in a way that allows imperialism once again to become an important theoretical concept’. See his ‘The Place of Development in Theories of Imperialism and Globalization’, in Ronaldo Munck and Denis O’Hearn, eds., Critical Development Theory: contributions to a new paradigm, London and New York: Zed, 1999, p. 144.


Gilroy, Against Race, p. 334.

On the pitfalls of “humanistic voluntarism,” see Gabriel and Ben-Tovim, ‘Marxism and the concept of racism’.

Gilroy, Against Race, p. 335.


Michael Lowy, Fatherland or Mother Earth


As Hopkins writes (in the introduction to Dwight N. Hopkins, et. al., eds., Religions/Globalizations: Theories and Cases, Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), ‘For the majority of cultures around the world, religion thoroughly permeates and decisively affects the everyday rituals of survival and hope. Reflected in diverse spiritual customs, sacred symbols and indigenous worship styles, global religions are permanent constituents of human life’.

I say this with some feeling in light of my own experience living and working in Mozambique in the 1970s and 1980s when the ruling liberation movement, Frelimo, paid what seems in retrospect to have been an unnecessarily heavy price in terms of popular legitimacy for eliding a struggle against the overbearing institutional presence of the Catholic Church with an attack on religious sensibility per se.


Lowy (The War of Gods, pp. 6–10) reminds us, for example, of Marx’s pithy
footnote in *Capital* (volume 1, chapter 1) in which he suggests of the Middle Ages and of Antiquity that ‘Catholicism there and politics here played the dominant role’, albeit in interaction with permissive ‘economic conditions’; Lowy’s discussion of Engels’ approach both to Thomas Munzer’s millenarianism and to English Puritanism is also instructive.

63 Ibid., p. 12


65 Interestingly, Mariategui evokes Sorel as the first Marxist thinker who understood the ‘religious, mystical and metaphysical character of socialism’ (Lowy, *The War of Gods*, pp. 18); for Mariategui as post-colonial theorist see Young, *Postcolonialism*, ch. 15, where he is quoted as advocating that ‘we must give birth, through our own reality, our own language, to an Indo-American socialism’.


68 Fanon’s third chapter, so entitled, of his *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 1968) is the crucial text here, and applies to ethnic as well as to national consciousness.

69 Munck, *Marxism @ 2000*, p. 135

70 Lowy, *Fatherland or Mother Earth*, p. 55

71 Munck, *Marxism @ 2000*, p. 133.


73 The dangers to democratic values and practices that the adoption of a hard version of ‘secularism’ represents is argued, albeit somewhat idiosyncratically and not entirely convincingly, in William Connelly, *Why I am not a Secularist*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.


This has not, of course, been the practice of most socialist modernizers of the past; twenty-first century socialists have much to learn from the mistakes of their predecessors in this respect. Moreover, many real complexities will still have to be confronted: for example, indigenous ‘modernizers’ seeking to introduce liberatory themes of women’s emancipation will have their work cut out for them in many cultural contexts, however deftly they proceed.

The failure of the Left or its defeat? Something of both, no doubt, although, as Panitch reminds us (‘The Meaning of 11 September for the Left’, Studies in Political Economy, 67 (Spring), 2002, p. 47), ‘Whatever responsibility the Left must take for this defeat, there can be no doubt about the major role played by American imperium’s world-wide suppression of progressive forces’ — adding that ‘one aspect of this was its cynical sponsoring of reactionary religious fundamentalism as a tool against the secular left in that part of the world on which it has now made war’.


Thus Wole Soyinka, noting the dictatorial turn taken by once promising nationalisms in Africa, suggests that the populace’s retreat to narrower ‘cultural identities … is entirely logical’. See his The Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 139.