

# Racial Capitalism and Global Labour Studies – a Missed Encounter ?

*Jörg Nowak, University of Brasilia, Brazil*

## ABSTRACT

Despite of the centrality of the topic of labour in the 1983 book by Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism*, global labour studies have devoted little attention to the concept of racial capitalism that became established with Robinson's book. Robinson's main claim is that the first proletariat formed in the plantations in colonized countries from about the 16th century, calling into question the crucial relevance of the industrial proletariat in England (and Europe) for the emergence of the labour movement. In taking up recent debates on racial capitalism that are inspired by Robinson's work, but which also expand and criticize it, this text proposes a more integrated theorization of race and labour. It also takes up debates about the Plantationocene as a complex dispositive which connects ecological rupture, large scale production and racialised labour.

## KEYWORDS

Racial capitalism, global labour studies, race, plantation

“I see race mentioned a lot more than I see class. Racism is a moving concept – it appears when class interests become threatened. That's a really hard thing to grasp for a lot of people – that racism is not about color.”

Elizabeth Robinson (in Camp/Heatherton, 2017: 208)

“The purpose of racism is to control the behavior of white people, not black people. For blacks, guns and tanks are sufficient.”

Otis Madison (1997)

Despite the centrality of the topic of labour in the 1983 book by Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism. The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Global labour studies has devoted little attention to the concept of racial capitalism that became established with Robinson's book. The central claim of Robinson is that the first proletariat formed in the plantations in colonized countries from about the 16<sup>th</sup> century, calling into question the centrality of the industrial proletariat in England (and Europe) for the emergence of the labour movement. Robinson's claim connects and is based on Immanuel Wallerstein's allegation that capitalism is based on a diversity of forms of labour (Wallerstein, 1974; see also van der Linden, 2008).

There are three broader arguments that follow from Robinson's questioning of the conventional story told about labour movements. In this article I will elaborate on the third argument, but will leave the other two arguments mentioned in order to indicate pathways for further research.

First, global labour studies is limited by a marginalization of the historical movements of enslaved workers and their forms of resistance as part of the broader scenery of labour, sharing a consensus with labour studies in general that associates the labour movement with the beginning of a more expansive industrialization in Europe, and especially England, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Earlier forms of industrialization in India and China, and during European mercantilism, are rather seen as irrelevant for the constitution of the working class and the labour movement (see the recent debate on Banaji (2020) in the journal *Storica* 83/84, 2022).

Second, this focus on European industrialization and its path dependent development goes along with a focus on wage labour as the central mechanism for extraction of surplus value. While this is a central argument of Marx in *Capital*, who sees the generality of wage labour as a characteristic of developed pure capitalism, he also concedes that this developed pure capitalism is coming into existence in various phases with back and forth movements. While faced with the more recent wave of a multiplication of forms of micro-entrepreneurialism, one can rightly argue that much self-employment is actually disguised waged work, but there are also widespread phenomena of petty commodity production which go beyond disguised wage work, but which also do not constitute forms of capital (see the work of Harriss-White, 2014, on India). Thus, the question is whether appropriation of surplus value in capitalism actually necessarily has to operate through those forms of wage labour which became universal in Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or are there other options to organise the same capitalist process?

Third, it has often been argued, against broad claims of Eurocentrism in Marx's work, that Marx indeed paid much attention to slavery and colonialism in his work. While this is certainly true, racism and colonialism did not enter into the conceptual framework of *Capital*, something that to some extent was begun by Vladimir Iljitsch Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg in their theories of imperialism, but remained an incomplete project. And while imperialism as an economic mechanism of unequal exchange was theorized to a certain extent, this theorizing remained suspiciously disconnected from labour studies and global labour studies. And more so, racism and nationalism hardly entered into the conceptual apparatus of Marxism, but rather retained the status of empirical history (see Althusser's 2018 remarks on the limits of Marxism in the famous preface to Duménil). The status of theorizing about racism in Marxism is pretty much similar to its status in global labour studies: racism is acknowledged as an important aspect of empirical reality but does not have a place in theorising about labour. It is in this respect that the debate around racial capitalism sets out to formulate a proper theorisation of race and labour. That these attempts did not start with the publication of Robinson's book is obvious, but the intention here is to point to the relevance of recent debates on racial capitalism for a more integrated theoretical debate in global labour studies.

In the following, I will first mention the remit of global labour studies to advance towards a non-eurocentric perspective on labour and mention its shortcomings in dealing with race. Second, I will sketch the central claims of Robinson in *Black Marxism*. In a third part, I will recall some of the debates that emerged around Robinson's book and contemporary debates about racial capitalism and plantations. Fourth, I will point towards directions for a possible research agenda around racial capitalism and global labour studies, and elaborate on how racism can be accorded a place in theorising about labour.

## **Global Labour Studies and Race**

Global labour studies, as an academic and activist project, has the merit of moving away from a perspective in industrial relations which was decidedly centred on first world countries, or the

centre of the world system, to use another parlance. Global labour studies put it centre stage that the majority of industrial workers are located in countries of the Global South since the mid-1970s, and agricultural workers increasingly entered into the area of studies on global labour, a field of study which earlier had often been relegated to agrarian or rural studies. At the same time, one of the key concepts of global labour studies, informal labour, is set to rather block an understanding of the specificities of global labour relations due to its purely negative definition. It is also rather curious that concepts from dependency theory, such as imperialism, dependent capitalism and superexploitation of labour, have only been used very recently in anglophone labour studies, which can partly be explained by delays in translating the major works of Ruy Mauro Marini (2022) – who coined the concept of superexploitation – into English. The special characteristic of race in distinction from other social hierarchies is that it is intimately linked to the global hierarchies that were established with colonialism and imperialism, and therefore theories of both racism and of colonialism and imperialism are key to explore the racialisation of labour. In the following, I will look at a number of key texts of global labour studies and how they deal with race.

Beverly Silver has systematically looked at the North-South division of the global working class, both in her book *Forces of Labour* (2003) and a co-authored text called “Workers North and South” (Silver and Arrighi 2001). She and Arrighi insist, against theories of catching up, that the differences in income and quality of life for workers of the Global North and South have further increased since the 1980s. Therefore, while the dimension of imperialism is well-placed in Silver’s work, race or racism are rather mentioned at the margins. Silver chooses to describe processes of segmentation of workers as “boundary drawing” which can be activated by capital, states or workers. In this way, boundary drawing becomes rather a catch-all concept and Silver denies the existence of structural mechanisms at the base of those boundaries:

Rather than suggest that exclusionary boundary drawing is invariably the act of a specific group, this book works with the premise that historical capitalism is indeed characterised by a system-level problem that gives great salience to the practice of boundary drawing. Who uses boundary drawing (and how) in an attempt to resolve/exploit this system-level problem cannot be determined a priori from theoretical considerations. (Silver, 2003: 24)

The book *Grounding Globalisation*, by Edward Webster, Rob Lambert and Andries Bezuidenhout (2008), engages in a comparative study of the white goods industry in South Africa, Australia and South Korea. In this book, race and racism are very much present in the empirical material but the topic remains undertheorised. Obviously, racial divisions are present in the South Africa case study, but also in the one on Australia, where the Labour Party is introduced by the authors as a political formation that protected workers for a long time against the influx of cheaper immigrant labour (Webster et al., 2008: 181) and where some of the interviewed workers voiced anti-immigrant statements. The authors state: “The most fundamental challenge to a new labour internationalism remains that of bridging the North-South divide” (Webster et al., 2008: 209) and clearly recognise that the global union movement is severely affected by this divide. But this analysis stops before it begins.

Another key text, published by Marissa Brookes and Jamie McCallum (2018) in this journal, does not mention or address imperialism or racism at all, but focuses on transnational labour mobilisation and to some extent on North-South cooperation of unions and workers, but without emphasising the vast difference in social and political conditions between North and South countries. In the book *Global Labour Studies* by Marcus Taylor and Sebastien Rioux (2018), which begins with a reference to plantation work in Sri Lanka, the topic of race is primarily addressed in the chapter on segmentation: “Labour market segments typically coalesce around class, race and gender distinctions, and play a key role in reproducing and entrenching social inequalities within societies” (Taylor and Rioux, 2018: 86). We also hear that the informal sector “provides for the

majority of employment in Asia, Africa and Latin America” (Taylor and Rioux, 2018: 84) without any further exploration why this is the case. The book has separate chapters on “Informal Labour”, “Agrarian Labour”, “Migrant Labour” and “Forced Labour”, and in this way addresses more aspects of racialisation than other accounts of global labour, such as slavery and indentured labour. But there is no separate treatment of racism or imperialism, and the words race or racism are hardly mentioned at all.

Another more recent book, by Ronaldo Munck (2018), *Rethinking Global Labour*, addresses more explicitly the rift between workers in the North and South in its outline and the structure of chapters. The book also provides a more integrated focus on migration, including internal migration in large countries of the Global South, and emphasises the nationalism of Northern labour unions. Race and colonialism already take a prominent place in the introduction of the book, and Eric “Williams’s critique ... as a ... corrective to Eurocentric heroic narratives of the Industrial Revolution” provides the starting point for the first chapter. In the chapter on migrant labour, Munck explicitly addresses racism:

The racial geography of globalisation is, clearly, closely related to the history of colonialism and imperialism, even if this is not usually made explicit in the dominant, and even critical, globalisation theory ... If we accept that there is no such thing yet as a truly global labour market for all the workers of the world, then it is bound to be segmented, even segregated along race/ethnicity lines, among others. (Munck, 2018: 167)

He also emphasises the persistence of unfree labour: “forms of unfree labour not only survive but are reproduced and even expanded when the capitalist mode of production (and thus free wage labour) becomes dominant” (Munck, 2018: 171). To sum up, Munck provides more space to the issues of imperialism, colonialism and racism than other accounts of global labour, and nonetheless race and racism do not have a central position in his book. He also begins the history of labour with Europe in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, which is obviously rather limited.

In contrast, Marcel van der Linden’s recent book *The World Wide Web of Work* (2023) takes a far wider historical view, and explores in a chapter how slavery and convict work figured as important precedents for modern labour management. Van der Linden also demonstrates how the abolition of slave labour was interconnected with the rise of indentured labour, providing a much broader empirical outlook than Munck. But even in this stronger historical focus on global labour and the explicit engagement with forms of forced labour in various chapters of the book, we do not find a comprehensive engagement with race or racism.

One of the very few articles in global labour studies that does engage explicitly with racialisation was published in 2008 and has not seen much reception in the literature so far. The authors define racialisation as “people being cordoned off for distinct, exclusionary treatment” (Bonacich, Alimahomed and Wilson, 2008: 2), and highlight that subordinate racialised groups are often subject to excessive forms of exploitation. Bonacich et al. (2008) distinguish primary racialisation coming from capitalists, and secondary racialisation which arises among white workers. As two central mechanism of racialisation, the authors identify othering (ascribing a lower value to racialised workers’ lives) and the denial of basic citizenship rights.

These examples show that race and racism and their linkage with labour relations are mentioned, but not theorised in central contributions to global labour studies, and often play a marginal role. In the following section, I will discuss how Robinson’s work and the debate it spurred in the past ten years can contribute to an integrated account of racism and labour relations.

## Black Marxism

What is racial capitalism? The emergence of Black radicalism as a historical fact that Robinson traces as a distinct current of social and political protest comes with three central theses:

1. Racial hierarchies did not emerge with the colonial conquest of the Americas and other parts of the world by European powers, but existed before the colonial invasions, inside Europe. Robinson claims that racism was an inter-European phenomenon, based on the long tradition of slavery in Eastern Europe and ethnicised differences between parts of the population that were later externalised with the colonial conquest.
2. The second thesis is that the first labour movements in capitalism were the uprisings of enslaved workers on plantations and the foundations of maroon communities by formerly enslaved workers who fled from forced work, a phenomenon for which Robinson presents examples from all over the Americas. With this claim, Robinson builds on Wallerstein's view that capitalism began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. More important for labour studies is the idea that these powerful protest movements in and against capitalism were then followed by a second wave of workers and artisans in Europe who organised from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards in workshops, manufacturing units and factories, and later in other sections of the economy. This perspective pulls away some of the last remnants of Eurocentrism in labour studies and it is not unlikely that this is one of the motifs for which Robinson's work was staunchly ignored in labour studies until recently.
3. A third thesis is not explicitly elaborated by Robinson, and has also been made by other researchers: the plantation can be regarded as a prototype for the organisation of the factory, and therefore agrarian capitalism set the foundation for industrial capitalism (Mintz 1985). Ellen Meiksins Wood, too, claims that agrarian capitalism preceded industrial capitalism, but she ignores agrarian capitalism outside of England since she believes capitalism originated from the English social formation (Wood, 1995). I will come back to this aspect in a later section.

Regarding the first thesis, of a formation of racism inside of Europe before the colonisation of other continents began, Robinson uses the term "European racialism" to denote this formation which took place in four stages: (1) "the racial ordering of European society from its formative period", (2) "the Islamic domination of Mediterranean civilisation" during the Middle Ages, (3) "the incorporation of African, Asian, and peoples of the New World into the world system" and (4) "the dialectic of colonialism, plantocratic slavery, and resistance from the sixteenth-century forward" (Robinson, 2000: 102). One element of European racialism was the use of slavery: "From the thirteenth to the beginnings of the fifteenth century, the primary function of these predominantly European slaves in the economics of Southern Europe was domestic service. Nevertheless, in Spain (Catalan and Castile), and in the Italian colonies on Cyprus, Crete, and in Asia Minor (Phocaea) and Palestine, Genoese and Venetian masters used both European and African slaves in agriculture on sugar plantations, in industry and for work in mines." (Robinson, 2000: 49). Medieval colonial slavery in the Italian colonies in the Mediterranean therefore "served as a model for Atlantic colonial slavery" (Robinson, 2000: 49). And while white Europeans and Amerindians were enslaved as workers during the early decades of the colonial invasions in the Americas, in a second phase of the colonial invasions, the use of enslaved workers from Africa became a common pattern, emulating the model the Portuguese had used on sugar plantations on the island Madeira.

Robinson's second thesis confronts the Europe-centred focus on the industrial working class as the agent of social and political change. The thesis has at least three angles: first, the pre-existence of black radicalism before the European labour movement is highlighted, and Robinson tends to

see Black radicalism and Third World movements in general as more radical than metropolitan oppositional movements. (Robinson does not underestimate the pre-industrial radicalism in Europe itself, to which he devoted another book (2001)). Second, Marxism and the work of Marx and Engels are appreciated, among other things, because of their lucid view on the linkages among capitalism, colonialism and slavery, but held accountable for their ambivalence regarding racism and nationalism. While both studied the Irish Question, nationalism in the working class did not become a focal point of their analyses, and, more importantly, it did not become a part of their conceptual framework. Third, following from the second point is the fact that European labour movements, and here primarily the English movement, were deeply implicated in nationalism: racialism as an aspect of traditions and ideas of English workers was part of their class consciousness.

From the mid-nineteenth century on, among English workers, the ideology of English nationalism gained ascendancy over the counter-ideology of international class solidarity and socialist hopes. This was a part of a conservative reaction (trade unionism) to political defeat and economic growth, but it also had to do with the radical directions the Irish working classes (and the nationalist Irish middle class) had taken. ... By the end of the nineteenth century, the English people were at one with respect to the Irish Question. (Robinson, 2000: 75)

At least, the nationalism prevalent in many European working classes called into question their role as the exclusive and unmistakable pole of opposition (see a similar argument about “socialist nationalism” in Virdee, 2019). The manifold anti-colonial and anti-imperial movements surged earlier and follow different logics:

Necessarily then, Marx’s and Engels’s theory of revolution was insufficient in scope: the European proletariat and its social allies did not constitute *the* revolutionary subject of history, nor was working-class consciousness necessarily *the* negation of bourgeois culture. Out of what was in reality a rather more complex capitalist world system (and one to which Marx in his last decade paid closer attention), other revolutionary forces emerged as well. Informed as they were by the ideas and cultures drawn from their own historical experiences, these movements assumed forms only vaguely anticipated in the radical traditions of the West. (Robinson 2000: 39)

In what is the core part of Robinson’s book, based on the work of countless historians – the footnotes to the book could have been published as a separate work – Robinson traces how the spread of black slavery in the Americas led to a long series of slave uprisings and maroon communities all over the Americas across a time span of 400 years. Robinson provides ample material about Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Jamaica, Barbados, Suriname, French and British Guiana, Cuba and several states of the US – Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Maryland, Georgia and Louisiana. Special attention is devoted to the revolution in Haiti, in which maroon communities played an important role, and to the Republic of Palmares, a number of maroon settlements that existed in the Northeast of Brazil from 1605 to 1695, with around 15 000 inhabitants. In all these places, the patterns were quite similar: slave uprisings regularly provided new influx into the maroon settlements, which were often in areas that were difficult to access and conquer: Mountain and jungle areas were preferred, and in many countries maroon gangs used to attack settlements of colonisers and appropriate arms, food and other useful items. Robinson concludes that it is significant that the chosen strategy was separation, the foundation of own settlements, frequently together with Amerindian populations.

One of the key points that Robinson stresses is the relevance of a common cultural African heritage as an organisational blueprint and ideology for the insurrectionists. “This was a revolutionary consciousness that proceeded from the whole historical experience of Black people and not merely from the social formations of capitalist slavery or the relations of production” (Robinson, 2000: 207). While Robinson underlines recurrently how the objective conditions of

slavery and colonialism were at the basis of Black radicalism, he hints at a vague sense of a different civilisation implied in black resistance, across the various social backgrounds of Black people in the Americas: “Some knowledge, some aspect of Black consciousness was unaccounted for in the Marxist explication of the historical processes and source of the motives to which were attributed the social formations of the modern world” (Robinson, 2000: 346) Or more to the point: “The outrage, I believe, was most certainly informed by the Africanness of our consciousness – some epistemological measure culturally embedded in our minds that deemed the racial capitalism we have been witness to was an unacceptable standard of human conduct” (Robinson, 2000: 347).

One might ask what exactly constitutes the new aspects added by Robinson, since Third Worldism was well established as a larger current, and the anticolonial tradition was firmly established by thinkers such as Aimé Césaire (1955), Frantz Fanon (1961), Walter Rodney (1972) and Amílcar Cabral (1966). Research into slavery and colonialism had seen core works by Eric Williams (1944) and David Brion Davis (1967) published, and dependency theory had shown how underdevelopment of the global periphery was established with colonialism and had then been reproduced by the world market (Frank, 1969; Marini, 1969). The key issue that Robinson added to the debate was that an oppositional tradition of Black radicalism had emerged since the 16<sup>th</sup> century with a remarkable continuity across centuries, and persisting into the present. Robinson situates Black radicalism as a response to global capitalism, but as an oppositional pole that goes beyond popular control of the economy, equipped with a civilisational alternative to racial capitalism. In the second part of this book, which I will not discuss here at length, Robinson demonstrates how Black intellectuals in the US consolidated Black radicalism as a proper intellectual tradition. In his overview about the thinking of W.E.B. Du Bois, C.L.R. James and Richard Wright, the way those intellectuals approached and appropriated Marxism in order to later develop their specific distances and deviations from Marxist thought reflects the course taken by Black Radicalism towards Marxism: Marxism is able to explain part of the exploitation of Black people in capitalism, but is not able to take account of the full picture.

## **Discussion of the Book and the Concept of Racial Capitalism**

The term racial capitalism has been used before Robinson used it, often in works about South Africa (Nupen 1972; Legassick and Hemson 1976), but rather as a loose term. It has been perceived and debated as a standalone concept since Robinson published *Black Marxism*, although he did not stress the concept extensively in the book. With the book, the term was coined as a vague reference point, and it is only in the past ten years or so that a proper scholarly debate about the concept has been taken up in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Jodi Melamed (2015) establishes a useful recrafting of the meaning of racial capitalism: “people and situations are made incommensurable to one another as a disavowed condition of possibility for world-systems of profit and governance ... separate forms of humanity so that they may be connected in terms that feed capital” (Melamed, 2015: 79). Melamed emphasises, as a second aspect of racial capitalism, the marking of populations who do not adhere to market disciplines, making central reference to Marx’s research on how so-called vagabonds were persecuted in England, and a similar approach was taken towards indigenous populations during colonial invasions: “What is stripped out are other ... relations to land, resources, activity, community, and other possible social wholes that have been broken up for capital” (Melamed, 2015: 81). Melamed sees the failure of Marxism in the urge to take over industrial civilisation instead of constructing alternatives to it, and for her, Indigenous struggles against dispossessions provide a starting point for progressive social action rather than worker-led industrialism.

Nikil Phal Singh (2016) goes back to the way Marx continually compares slavery and wage labour with each other in his work, at times using them as contrasting phenomena, while also pointing out continuities and suggesting that serfdom only found a new form with wage labour.<sup>1</sup>

Marx's analysis can lead to an inattention, even indifference to how capital establishes new lines of social and historical genesis in which the ongoing differentiation between free labor and less than free labor, and the manifestation of that differentiation in racial, ethnic, and gender hierarchies within labouring populations, is retained as an instrument of labor discipline (Singh, 2016: 34).

Singh sees, therefore, the ongoing differentiation between "free" and "unfree" forms of labour as an essential part of capitalism. He concludes that Marx identified two logics of domination: the violent coercive one of slavery, and the impersonal economic one of wage labour – using both as principles of explanation, while in empirical reality we find that both logics are closely intertwined.

Siddhant Issar (2021) addresses the issue that scholarship on racial capitalism makes continual recourse to the notion of an ongoing primitive accumulation, but he warns against overstretching the concept and using it for "any and all forms of racialised violence" (Issar, 2021: 30). But instead of abandoning the concept of primitive accumulation, Issar emphasises that "it is necessary to disaggregate this concept, emphasising the distinct ways capitalist expropriation related to differentially racialised and colonised populations" (Issar, 2021: 30). For example, in the United States, colonisation was mostly focused on seizing land from Indigenous people, and exploiting labour power of Black people. Issar argues that, using the US as an example, the expropriation of Indigenous land and the expropriation of "unfree" Black labour are complementary processes, a point that he sees neglected in Singh's account. Issar tries to show the way in which primitive accumulation and the relations of capital are based on colonialism and racism, establishing expropriation of indigenous territories and operating with a continuum of labour regimes from "unfree" to "free" labour relations. In this way, free and unfree labour constitute each other, locating slavery firmly within capitalism: "the Black slave, by being confined to the 'unfree' end of the labour spectrum, gives stability and meaning to the 'free' white male proletariat" (Issar, 2021: 37). It is this "class collaboration between capitalists and a significant segment of white workers" as "the foundation of the white supremacist racial order" (Issar, 2021: 37) which Robinson sought to problematise – racism is about exploitation and oppression, but also about social control, as stated by Otis Madison (1997). Issar therefore emphasises that it is not just the exploitation of Black labour which is crucial here, but the productive aspect of racism, or rather its importance as an ideological apparatus which maintains the alliance of a part of the white working class with the white middle class and white elites. In this way, there is something about racialism that escapes the logic of capital, while it is at the same time deeply imbricated with it.

Issar highlights three relations as the basis of racial capitalism: the key role of slavery as labour, slavery as a device aligning white labour and capital, and the anti-Black relation itself as violence, denigration and exclusion. These claims form the basis for Issar to name "three enduring structural continuities across the history of racial capitalism" (Issar, 2021: 39): (1) Free wage labour is defined on the basis of the expropriation and exploitation of Black and Indigenous populations; (2) These populations have been and are disproportionately affected by forms of expropriation beyond capitalist exploitation of surplus labour; (3) The reproduction of racial capitalism is based "on a cross-class alliance between capitalists and workers that is forged by a commitment to white supremacy" (Issar, 2021: 39).

The extent to which the relevance of racial capitalism goes beyond Black slavery and the

---

<sup>1</sup> "The starting point of the development that gave rise both to the wage labourer and the capitalist was the enslavement of the worker. The advance made consisted in a change in the form of servitude" (Marx, 1867: 875).



Americas as a continent is demonstrated by the application of the concept of racial capitalism to bonded labour. Mishal Khan (2021) investigates how “Indian labour” as a concept emerged at a time when the slave trade was banned in England in 1833, and then subsequently in other parts of the world. It was exactly the processes of the abolition of slavery that led to the racialisation of Indian labour, which often replaced freed Black workers. Discourses about bonded labour had established that Indian workers would be “free” workers since they entered into contracts of bonded labour on a supposedly voluntary basis. Walter Rodney analyses in detail how Indian bonded labour was used to undercut the wage demands of former enslaved workers on the sugar plantations of British Guyana during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Rodney, 1981). Khan (2021: 87) speaks of “layers of racialisation that undergirded how labour was produced for the global capitalist order”, emphasising that there are distinct but interrelated processes of racialisation at work. The debate amongst business and political elites during the 19<sup>th</sup> century about how supposedly free Indian labour could replace Black slave labour demonstrates how “races” were discursively constructed on a global scale. Khan shows how discourses around Indian slavery declared it “as benign and contractual relations between Indians [and] as reciprocal and paternalistic” (Khan, 2021: 88).

This racialisation and culturalisation of labour relations in India became the basis for “the fiction of the Indian coolie labourer as the ‘free’ self-possessed individual” (Khan, 2021: 88). This ideological perception of bonded labourers from India as “free” workers served as the basis for the coolie trade from India to, for example, Suriname, Guyana, Jamaica, South Africa, Brazil and other parts of the world, and also as the basis for plantation labour in India. Part of this process was the transfer to Asia of violence and discipline as technologies which were used in American plantations (Kolsky, 2010). Debt bondage was based on cash advances to the workers, who then found themselves in a labour contract subject to the laws concerning debt contracts, and were legally obliged to work until the cash advance was evened out, with harsh penalties when they tried to escape or did not turn up for work. Kidnapping was not unusual and became known as “coolie raiding” (Khan, 2021: 95). Khan’s interpretation of the concept of racial capitalism is a succinct demonstration of how different types of racialisation built upon one another, using the discourse of freedom in the process of abolition of Atlantic slavery to legitimate slavery in India as “free labour”, thereby creating a new labour force that partially replaced formerly enslaved workers and whose unfamiliarity with new environments helped to keep the demands of former enslaved workers in check.

Another application of the concept of racial capitalism to Asia comes from the work of Sheetal Chhabria (2023): Dalit activists frequently argue that the caste system should be recognised as racism, while mainstream discourse, such as the Indian government’s, frames it as a unique cultural and religious issue of India. Chhabria (2023: 136) underlines the importance of recognising “‘local’ systems of racialisation like caste” as part of the “history of global racial capitalism”. Her critique of Black Marxism rests on the argument that there are not only European but also South Asian origins of capitalism, and concomitantly, “racial capitalism developed at multiple ‘origin points’, only later subsumed within a European colonial frame” (Chhabria 2023: 137). Rather than a sign of underdevelopment, Chhabria conceives the longevity of the caste system as an aspect of the rule of capital. But in historical terms, she insists on the argument that the caste system and the mass existence of landless laborers preceded colonial invasion, supported by research by Kumar (1965) and Viswanath (2014). She comments on how even W.E.B. Du Bois characterised the caste system in *Black Reconstruction in America* as a relic of the past and how Cedric Robinson ignored non-European forms of racism. As a counter-position, Chhabria argues that racial capitalism emerged from many places, calling into question Wallerstein’s (and Robinson’s) idea that Europe dominated

the world economy already in the 1600s (Frank, 1998; Washbrook, 1990), “or at the least we could safely argue against Wallerstein that commercial capitalism did not originate in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and then incorporated India, but rather had diverse local contexts of origin” (Chhabria, 2023: 155). This large geographical spread of commercial capitalism would then go along with various versions of racial capitalism in different regional variants. With her approach, Chhabria also warns against propping up “Asian capitalists and developers (...) as the vanguard of Asian postcolonial liberation” (Chhabria, 2023: 156), hinting at historical continuities with regard to Asian variants of capitalism and warning against a naïve celebration of national liberation projects.

The most profound reinterpretation of the racial capitalism approach comes from Gargi Bhattacharyya (2018). Her contribution is especially relevant for global labour studies, since she establishes a central relation between racialisation and work/non-work, the forms of social reproduction, and the relation to nature. Bhattacharyya (2018: 19) starts with the assumption that there is an inherent tendency of capitalism “to dehumanise labour in the pursuit of profit. Racial differentiation can be used as an attempted defence against this over-arching tendency”. In order to illustrate this, she uses a thought experiment, distinguishing “extra nasty” capitalism – with intensified exploitation and oppression – which exists within the same system as “cuddlier” capitalism. “The partial benefits of cuddlier capitalism are realised through the subsidy of extra nasty capitalism” (Bhattacharyya, 2018: 22). While the techniques of the racial “serve to create the populations vulnerable to extra nasty capitalism” (Bhattacharyya, 2018: 23), the author sees the danger of a circular argument. Bhattacharyya therefore suggests, similarly to Robinson, that racial capitalism concerns “the manner through which populations are organised in the service of capital” (Bhattacharyya, 2018: 23).

It is in the second chapter that Bhattacharyya adds crucial arguments to the debate. First of all, there is an inherent contradiction between racialisation and capitalism: while racialisation serves as a device to divide populations and groups of workers, racially privileged groups are keen to limit economic expansion in order to maintain their position. In other words, economic expansion of capitalism that could include racially oppressed groups is often questioned for the sake of reproducing group privileges. Second, the invention of “the productive economy” is a central material and ideological device for racialisation. The degree to which families and reproductive work in general are able to produce workers who can join the productive economy corresponds to racialisation. Racialised difference is constructed according to “the degree and character of reproductive work that makes such lives possible” (Bhattacharyya, 2018: 50). We are talking about various degrees of integration into the productive economy, from the fully proletarianised waged worker to casual labourers to people who exist at the edges of the productive economy. “One key lesson, then, is that reproductive labour is the input that enables workers to be highly differentiated and differently constituted as workers, sometime workers and non-workers.” (Bhattacharyya, 2018: 41) Bhattacharyya sees reproductive labour as the basic economic process that is, at times, supplemented by capitalistically productive work. Racialisation of populations occurs to the degree that these populations are assumed to be able to produce productive workers: “The perceived capacity to produce and reproduce productive workers becomes a marker of racial status and temperament.” (Bhattacharyya, 2018: 51). According to this norm, the domestic arrangements of some groups are demonised and specific patterns of reproductive labour are encouraged. This includes also the discrimination of cooperative and subsistence models of social reproduction – “modes of reproductive labour become translated into racialised conceptions of the economy” (Bhattacharyya, 2018: 52). Bhattacharyya emphasises that these ideas are stuck with the assumption that reproductive labour supports waged workers while, in reality, reproductive labour is supporting life. Waged work and productivity become a moral endeavour and a civilisational test. A focus by

communities and families on survival instead of wage work and productivity is seen as a “lesser way of being”. In contradistinction, Bhattacharyya redefines economic activity “as a whole array of ways in which communities organise their collective efforts to stay alive” (Bhattacharyya, 2018: 53).

Racial capitalism, in this way, (1) differentiates the workforce and (2) establishes the boundary of the natural or the not-yet productive. Proletarianisation is usually understood as a transformation of households and communities such that social reproduction becomes functional for the reproduction of waged work. The special contribution of the concept of racial capitalism is then the reminder that this type of proletarianisation has been uneven and unstable across the globe. Being close to nature is a current marker for racialisation: “the allegation of being unfit for productive work, and, by implication, for full humanness relates to the suggestion that these are people who retain modes of social reproduction that do not serve the market” (Bhattacharyya, 2018: 57). This goes so far as to not only attribute a lesser status to nature, but also to collapse some populations into the category of nature. It is the use of the category of reproduction in a wider sense that allows Bhattacharyya to establish these relations between racialisation, work/non-work and the focus on productive work and productivity as key normative practices and concepts.

## **The Plantationocene**

Apart from these more immediate elaborations on the concept of racial capitalism and the work of Robinson, there have been some other elaborations of the concept, one of which is the work on the concept Plantationocene that feminist and biologist Donna Haraway coined in a debate on the concept of the Anthropocene in 2014 (Haraway, 2015). While the Working Group on the Anthropocene recommends “1950 as the birth of the Anthropocene” (Moore et al., 2019), climatologists Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin (2015) propose starting with 1610 as a birth date: they identify a stark reduction in carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere for this time, caused by the death of around 50 million indigenous inhabitants of the Americas who died from war, enslavement, famine and illnesses. The allegation that massive interference with the climate began with the plantation economies continues earlier theses such as that of Sidney Mintz (1985), who calls the plantation a synthesis of field and factory. Central for our discussion is how plantations bring together “land alienation, labour extraction and racialised violence” (Moore et al., 2019; see also Davis et al. 2019; Haraway and Tsing, 2019). In other words, the debate around the Plantationocene opens boundaries between various disciplines – namely labour studies, political ecology, environmental history and studies on racism – and is therefore a fruitful starting point to reconnect labour studies with neighbouring disciplines.

The initial focus on the ecological effects of plantations gave way to a focus on various forms of forced labour and varieties of racialisation as constitutive parts of the Plantationocene (Haraway and Tsing, 2019: 4-8). The labour aspect of the Plantationocene has especially been highlighted in a landmark article by Wendy Wolford (2020), an expert on the landless workers’ movement in Brazil. Without mentioning the work of Robinson, she comes to similar conclusions:

The cradle of modernity is no longer the enclosures, Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution ..., but conquest, colonisation and forced labor in the New World, Asia and Africa. ... centering race means relocating the “classic” case of modernity ... from England to the colonies such that the goal is not the commodification of the factors of production but “slavery by any other name” (Wolford, 2020: 1624).

Wolford argues that the plantation is already a hybrid of agriculture and industry due to the large scale nature and the systematic organisation of agriculture.

Modern labour relations developed together and within plantations; ... laboring bodies and families

were placed in row houses, settlements, villages, reservations, and company towns; factories in the form of mills, distilleries, and processing plants were designed to work in tandem with plantations. (Wolford, 2020: 1626).

For analyses referring to the concept of the Plantationocene, the constellation of plantations, colonialism and racialised labour processes is central. It differs from the concept of Capitalocene established by Jason Moore, in its emphasis on race and colonialism as central elements in the construction of a specific form of large-scale economy. Moore's focus on the separation of nature and society as the basis of the Capitalocene tends to miss this crucial aspect, since he himself emphasises that certain human beings are often classified as Nature (see also Patel and Moore, 2017: 47): "This ideological transition established some humans as Man and most humans as Savage and part of Nature" (Moore, 2022: 418). Therefore racism and colonialism tend to be subordinated to this separation of nature and society in Patel and Moore's (2017) account (see also Murphy and Schroering, 2021). The problem with their account is that it remains somehow obscure how racism and colonialism structure specific relations between society and nature and between classes, beyond its ideological function of legitimating inequality. While Moore criticises the concept of the Plantationocene for its empiricism (because it refers to plantations), he does not succeed in elaborating how his own concept of "geocultural domination" (Moore, 2023: 563)<sup>2</sup> is able to account for the specific hierarchies established during and in the wake of colonialism. Instead, Moore claims that analyses referring to the concept of the Plantationocene would ignore class while they do the work of demonstrating how race, colonialism and class get articulated in specific conjunctures. Ironically, Moore shares with those analyses the emphasis that the first human-induced climate change occurred after the invasion of the Americas: "a dramatic if temporary decarbonisation ... issuing from slaving-induced genocides after 1492" (Moore, 2022: 419). Rather than denying that there were class dynamics at work in this process – an accusation that Moore throws at her – Wolford (2020) shows how class relations became deeply entangled with colonial and racial hierarchies, a point mentioned by Moore, but left unexamined in his recourse to Nature<sup>3</sup>.

It turns out to be more productive to look at the processes of how the plantation as a form of "agricultural racial capitalism" became established in various world regions after the abolition of slavery, as has been done by Kris Manjapra (2018: 361): "During this age of abolition, new forms of forced and coerced labour arose on a global scale, and the plantation as an exploitative, racial, political-ecological complex began to expand". Manjapra (2018: 365) therefore concludes that abolition "did not mark the end of the plantation mode of production or racial capitalism, but rather their global expansion". Manjapra demonstrates how plantations emerged first in the northeast of Brazil and in the Caribbean between the 1640s and 1710s, then focused on the islands of Haiti and Jamaica between 1710 and 1790, including the application of scientific agricultural methods. Between 1790 and 1840, new geographical clusters formed with sugar production in Brazil and Cuba, cotton agriculture in the American South, and the expansion into Asia – specifically to Mauritius, Bengal, Assam, Kerala and Java – where sugar, indigo, tea and coffee production were established. "In this same time, Mississippi plantation overseers were recruited by the East India Company to institute slave-like labour control on Indian plantations" (Manjapra,

---

<sup>2</sup> Moore's reference to Ruy Mauro Marini's (2022) concept of superexploitation does not help at this point, given that Moore's use of the term is pretty much at odds with Marini's. Marini defines superexploitation as based on differences in productivity which then lead to lower wages – in contrast to Moore, who simply asserts that lower wages result from sexism and racism (Moore, 2023: 570).

<sup>3</sup> "Nature (...) served as an ideological hammer of worldwide class formation, not merely externalizing costs but enabling epoch-defining modes of appropriating unpaid work" (Moore, 2022: 420).

2018: 369). Central to this expansion was “British imperial statecraft” (Manjapra, 2018: 369). Caribbean planters who received reparations after abolition began to invest the money in other parts of the British Empire. From the 1840s to the 1870s, growing demand in Europe led to an expansion of agricultural markets, accompanied by the wave of indentured workers who circulated around the globe with debt bondage as a new form of labour control, reaching a high point between 1900 and 1910. After the 1870s, plantation holdings were increasingly concentrated, with the emergence of larger and more bureaucratised corporate empires in close relation to colonial states. Manjapra (2018: 378) characterises this phase as “the historical shift taking place from the plantation complex to the Third World, which corresponded to a shift between different modes of resistance and conceptions of anticolonial struggle”. In the wake of the Berlin conference in 1884/5, plantations expanded in Africa. “By the 1930s, thirty per cent of all foreign investment in the world was made in the plantation sector, and that number grew in the 1950s” (Manjapra, 2018: 379). The plantation economies therefore become visible as one of the central elements of global capitalism, imbricated with geoeconomics and racial hierarchies.

## Research Perspectives

The debate about racial capitalism is inspired by and continues the debate as to when capitalism began to exist as a global system. One of the most prominent early contestations of the thesis that capitalism began as agrarian capitalism in England came from André Gunder Frank (1969), who claimed that the work in plantations and mines in the Americas was capitalist labour, independent of the exact form of mostly forced labour. Frank’s text was the starting point for dependency theory, and while there was no clear consensus emerging on the question (see Laclau, 1971, who claimed the existence of feudalism in Latin America), Frank’s position received strong support from Wallerstein’s (1974) world systems approach, which had an enormous influence on Robinson’s work.<sup>4</sup> The crucial question, of course, is what do these historical debates mean for labour studies today, and how do these help to establish a theorisation of race within the ambit of global labour studies?

A first takeaway is from the debate on free and unfree labour, and how both forms are related to racialisation. Recent debates about free and unfree labour tend to converge on the aspect that there are many grey zones between free and unfree labour rather than a clear-cut boundary (Banaji, 2003; Fudge, 2019; Van der Linden, 2008). This finding stands against any clear demarcation between free wage labour and unfree or forced labour. At the same time, many authors who use the racial capitalism approach insist on wage labour and unfree labour as two poles which stand in contrast to each other, but they do not necessarily claim that there is a clear boundary between both forms in empirical reality. Legal frameworks and political understandings of differences between both forms of labour are among the central bases for racialisation. We can therefore conclude – based on the various approaches presented here – that the differentiation between freer and unfreer forms of labour is empirically characterised by many grey zones, while the distinction into two opposed poles of free wage labour and unfree labour has an enormous political and ideological impact due to racialisation and legal statuses, and also as a device of social control. In

---

<sup>4</sup> “The point is that the ‘relations of production’ that define a system are the ‘relations of production’ of the whole system, and the system at this point is the European world-economy. Free labour is indeed a defining feature of capitalism, but not free labour throughout the productive enterprises. Free labour is the form of labour control used for skilled work in core countries whereas coerced labour is used for less skilled work in peripheral areas. The combination thereof is the essence of capitalism” (Wallerstein, 1974: 127).

other words, grey zones in empirical reality coexist with a legal, political and ideological polarisation between free and unfree labour, and race is a central marker of this polarisation.

Second, the diagnosis of various authors that a white cross-class alliance is a crucial means of domination in at least a number of globally important countries suggests that race can be a powerful marker of identity and imagined communities. While this is not in any way a new insight, it raises more profound questions than are allowed for in much labour studies. Racial hierarchies, in other words, are central for ideological and social control in fomenting alliances between dominant classes and parts of the dominated classes, something that can be at work within a national social formation, but also as a transnational relationship, such as competition between Chinese and European steel workers embodied in the recent campaign of Industrial Europe against importing Chinese steel. Importantly, while such a white alliance is also at work in countries other than the US, where the majority of the population self-defines as Black, as in Brazil or in South Africa, such a white cross-class alliance will necessarily take different forms and use different strategies in those countries (See Kenny and Webster, 2021, on South Africa and Silva, 2019, on Brazil).

A third angle of the debate about racial capitalism is to what extent it is a theory exclusively based on the social and political reality of the Americas, and also of Europe to some extent. Can it be applied to Africa and Asia in the same way, or will the approach require profound adaptations? Plantations in India and Southeast Asia often had and have very similar characteristics to the ones in the Americas, and also saw similar waves of revolts, with a variety of popular organisations ranging from peasant armies to community organisations and agrarian associations. The direct linkages between the demise of Caribbean slavery and the surge in bonded labour within and beyond Asia demonstrate that race is a global discourse that has facilitated the management of labour since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The coolie system was not restricted to India, but expanded to China and across Southeast Asia, and similar forms of labour systems exist today not only in plantations in South Asia (Raj, 2022; Shahadat and Uddin, 2022), but also with Philippine labour in maritime and domestic work, and the massive labour migration from South Asia to the Gulf countries (Khalaf, AlShehabi and Hanieh, 2015). For sure, we can speak of varieties of racialisation, and we would have to concede that there might be countries where racialisation runs in parallel to and interdependent with other hierarchies such as the caste system in India, and with ethnic, linguistic and religious cleavages in China and Russia, for example. This does not cancel out that racialisation is at work at a global level, but it might not be the prime line of social division in every social context.

Fourth, the question of how forms of reproduction are associated with racialisation points to the inherent limits of labour studies and asks for a stronger interdisciplinary approach. The identification of productiveness with whiteness has also been established by the Latin American philosopher Bolivar Echeverria in his late works (2010; García Conde, 2016). This is a highly flexible association which is being iterated constantly, aligned and realigned due to political and economic conjunctures, allowing also for certain (but not all) racialised populations to “pass”, however transitorily and precariously, as long as they adapt to the norms and standard of whiteness and productiveness. Forms of social reproduction other than the ones associated with productive economies in the capitalist sense are marked and racialised: their allegedly unproductive nature legitimates their racialisation. It is in this area that the racial capitalism literature recently inspired a number of publications on community economies, some of which go back to the maroon societies that Robinson writes about (Hossein and Christabell, 2022; Hossein, Wright Austin and Edmonds, 2023).

Fifth, the debate on the Plantationocene motivates an approach that looks at the same time at productive organisation, labour, racialisation and ecology.

As a preliminary result, we have five elements of a more integrated theorisation of race and labour that emanate from the racial capitalism debate:

1. Free and unfree labour as empirically hard to distinguish by constant characteristics, but as opposite poles that establish better off and more oppressed workers as separate groups, often along racial hierarchies;
2. Racism and ethnic or religious hierarchies as an important element in alliances between dominant classes and parts of the dominated classes;
3. Different forms and geographical origins of racialisation that are globally articulated as labour management;
4. The identification of productiveness and whiteness racialises certain forms of social reproduction that do not serve the capitalist market.
5. The plantation as a prototype for industrial organisation established ecologically damaging and racialised forms of labour organisation which are still highly relevant today.

These are five elements which I hope I have shown how they are aligned with each other. A more systematic integration of those and other elements will have to wait for a later publication.

## References

- Althusser, L. (2018) Preface to *Le concept de loi économique dans "Le Capital,"* by Gérard Duménil. *Rethinking Marxism*, 30(1):4-24.
- Banaji, J. (2003) The Fictions of Free Labour: Contract, Coercion, and So-Called Unfree Labour. *Historical Materialism*, 11(3): 69-95.
- Banaji, J. (2020) *A Brief History of Commercial Capitalism*. Chicago: Haymarket.
- Bhattacharyya, G. (2018) *Rethinking Racial Capitalism. Questions of Reproduction and Survival*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Bonacich, E., S. Alimahomed and J. B. Wilson (2008) The Racialization of Global Labor. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 52(3): 324-355.
- Brookes, M. and J. McCallum (2018) The New Global Labour Studies: A Critical Review. *Global Labour Journal*, 8(3): 201-218.
- Cabral, A. (1966/1979). Presuppositions and objectives of national liberation in relation to social structure. (Speech delivered on behalf of the peoples and nationalist organizations of the Portuguese colonies to the First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (Havana, 3-12 January 1966) in the plenary session on 6 January). In: Amílcar Cabral: *Unity and Struggle*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 119-137.
- Camp, J. T. and C. Heatherton (2017) The World We Want. An Interview with Cedric and Elizabeth Robinson. In: *The Futures of Black Radicalism*, edited by G. T. Johnson and A. Lubin, London: Verso, 188-214.
- Cesaire, A. (1955/2000). *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Chhabria, S. (2023) Where Does Caste Fit in a Global History of Racial Capitalism? *Historical Materialism*, 31(2): 136-160.
- Davis, D.B. (1967) *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Echeverría, B. (2010) *Modernidad y blanquitud*. México: ERA.
- Fanon, F. (1961/2001). *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin.
- Frank, A.G. (1969) *The Development of Underdevelopment*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Frank, A.G. (1998) *Reorient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Fudge, J. (2019) (Re)Conceptualising Unfree Labour: Local Labour Control Regimes and Constraints on Workers' Freedoms. *Global Labour Journal*, 10(2): 108-122.
- García Conde, G. (2016) Cuerpo humano en el capitalismo: blanquitud, racismo y genocidio. *De Raíz Diversa*, 3(6): 215-236.
- Haraway, D. (2015) Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin. *Environmental Humanities*, 6: 159-165.
- Haraway, D. and A. Tsing (2019) Reflections on the Plantationocene. *Edge Effects*, June 18. Available online at <https://edgeeffects.net/haraway-tsing-plantationocene/>
- Harriss-White, B. (2014) Labour and Petty Production. *Development and Change*, 45(5): 981-1000.
- Hossein, C. S., and P.J. Christabell (eds.) (2022) *Community Economies in the Global South. Case Studies of Rotating Savings, Credit Associations and Economic Cooperation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hossein, C. S., S.D. Wright Austin, and K. Edmonds (eds.) (2023) *Beyond Racial Capitalism. Co-operatives in the African Diaspora*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Issar, S. (2021) Theorising "Racial/Colonial Primitive Accumulation": Settler Colonialism, Slavery and Racial Capitalism. *Race & Class*, 63(1): 23-50.
- Kenny, B. and E. Webster (2021) The Return of the Labour Process: Race, Skill and Technology in South African Labour Studies. *Work in the Global Economy*, 1(1-2): 13-32.
- Khalaf, A., O. AlShehabi and A. Hanieh (2015) *Transit States: Labour, Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf*. London: Pluto Press.
- Khan, M. (2021) The Indebted Among the "Free". Producing Indian Labor Through the Layers of Racial Capitalism. In *Histories of Racial Capitalism*, edited by D. Jenkins and J. Leroy. New York: Columbia University Press, 85-110.
- Kolsky, E. (2021) *Colonial Justice in British India: White Violence and the Rule of Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kumar, D. (1965) *Land and Caste in South India*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Laclau, E. (1971) Feudalism and Capitalism in Latin America. *New Left Review I*, 67: 19-38.
- Legassick, M. and D. Hemson (1976) *Foreign Investment and the Reproduction of Racial Capitalism in South Africa*. London: Anti-Apartheid Movement.
- Lewis, S. and M. Maslin (2015) Defining the Anthropocene. *Nature* 519 (7542): 171-180.
- Madison, O. (1997) Confronting Racism. Public Lecture. University of California, Santa Barbara. January 20, 1997.
- Manjapra, K. (2018) Plantation Disposessions. The Global Travel of Agricultural Racial Capitalism. In *American Capitalism. New Histories*, edited by S. Beckert, K. Desan. New York: Columbia University Press, 361-387.
- Marini, R.M. (1969) *Subdesarrollo y revolución*. México: Siglo XXI.
- Marini, R.M. (2022) *Dialectics of Dependency*. New York: Monthly Review.
- Marx, K. (1867/1967) *Capital*. Volume 1. New York: Vintage.
- Melamed, J. (2015) Racial Capitalism. *Critical Ethnic Studies*, 1(1): 76-85.
- Mintz, S.W. (1985) *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking.
- Moore, J.W. (2022) Power, Profit, Prometheanism, Part 1. Method, Ideology and the Violence of the Civilizing Project. *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 28(2): 415-426.
- Moore, J.W. (2023) Power, Profit, Prometheanism, Part 2. Superexploitation and the Web of Life. *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 29(2): 558-582.
- Moore, S.S., M. Allewaert, P.F. Gómez and G. Mitman (2019) Plantation Legacies. *Edge Effects*, 22 January.



Available online at <https://edgeeffects.net/plantation-legacies-plantationocene/>

- Munck, R. (2018) *Rethinking Global Labour. After Neoliberalism*. Newcastle: Agenda.
- Murphy, M.W. and C. Schroering (2020) Refiguring the Plantationocene. Racial Capitalism, World-Systems Analysis, and Global Socioecological Transformation. *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 26(2): 400-415.
- Nupen, C. (1972) Opening Address to the 56<sup>th</sup> NUSAS Congress. JSTOR Primary Resources. Available online at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/al.sff.document.spe19781127.026.022.000>.
- Patel, R. and J.W. Moore (2017) *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A guide to capitalism, nature and the future of the planet*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Raj, J. (2022) *Plantation Crisis. Ruptures of Dalit life in the Indian tea Belt*. London: UCL Press.
- Robinson, C. (2000/1983) *Black Marxism*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Robinson, C. (2001) *An Anthropology of Marxism*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Rodney, W. (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle-L'Overture Publications.
- Rodney, W. (1981) *The History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Shahadat, K. and S. Uddin (2022) Labour Controls, Unfreedom and Perpetuation of Slavery on a Tea Plantation. *Work, Employment and Society*, 36(3): 522-538.
- Silva, L.Â. da (2019) Companhia Siderurgica Nacional (CSN): A construção do discurso de classe trabalhadora como mascara para o racismo estrutural (1946-1997)? *Revista Perspectiva Histórica*, 9: 83-108.
- Silver, B.J. (2003) *Forces of Labor. Workers' Movements and Globalization since 1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Silver, B.J. and G. Arrighi (2001) Workers North and South. In *Socialist Register 2001*, edited by L. Panitch and C. Leys. New York: Monthly Review Press, 53-76.
- Singh, N.P. (2016) On Race, Violence, and So-Called Primitive Accumulation. *Social Text*, 34(3): 27-50.
- Taylor, M. and S. Rioux (2018) *Global Labour Studies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Van der Linden, M. (2008) *Workers of the World. Essays Toward a Global Labor History*. Leiden: Brill.
- Van der Linden, M. (2023) *The World Wide Web of Work. A History in the Making*. London: UCL Press.
- Viswanath, R. (2014) *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion and the Social in Modern India*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Virdee, S. (2019) Racialized Capitalism: An Account of its Contested Origins and Consolidation. *The Sociological Review*, 67(1): 3-27.
- Wallerstein, I. (1974) *The Modern World System. Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Academic Press.
- Washbrook, D. (1990) South Asia, the World System and World Capitalism. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 49(3): 479-508.
- Webster, E., R. Lambert and A. Bezuidenhout (2008) *Grounding Globalization. Labor in the Age of Insecurity*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Williams, E. (1944) *Capitalism & Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Wolford, W. (2020) The Plantationocene: A Lusotropical Contribution to the Theory. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 111(6): 1622-1639.
- Working Group on the Anthropocene (2016) Summary of evidence and interim recommendations. *Anthropocene*, 19: 55-60.
- Wood, E.M. (1995) *The Origins of Capitalism*. London: Verso.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I would like to thank Siddhant Issar, Alexander Gallas, Andreas Bieler, Marcel van der Linden, and two anonymous reviewers for comments that helped to improve the text. A debate of a draft version at the Working Group on Labour and Migration at University of Goettingen in November 2023 inspired me to include further issues into the scope of the debate.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

JÖRG NOWAK is Assistant Professor for International Political Economy at the Institute for International Relations at the University of Brasília, Brazil, whose research areas include racial capitalism, logistics and infrastructure, labour in the Global South, and Althusserian Marxism. [Email: joerg.nowak@gmx.de]