

Non-capitalist Domination, Rentierism, and the Politics of Class

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Abstract: This article argues that we cannot derive a politics of class directly from capital's abstract social relations. Politics must instead address such abstract relations' concrete realisation, integrating the experience of individuals who bear the class relation. Concrete reality, I argue, is best grasped at the level of the total social reproduction of capital –capital's circulation – where multiple determinations, both capitalist and non-capitalist, unfold. The framework set up here will begin the process of understanding struggles of social reproduction – pertaining to expropriation on the market through rentierism, racial and gender-based domination, as well as ecological degradation – as class issues. This enables theory to grasp diverse struggles as rooted in a desire to prioritise life's reproduction above capital's. The politics here sought is encapsulated in a speculative proposition: if social reproduction produces the conditions of possibility of the class relation, social reproduction can be redirected to abolish the class relation altogether.

Keywords: class, ecology, exploitation, expropriation, race, gender, politics of class, rentier capital, social reproduction, value form.

Liberalism fragments politics. It sustains the ideal separation of concretely related 'single-issue' struggles. Despite affirmations of intersectionality, movements opposing domination in gender, race, colonization and ecological degradation are vulnerable to liberalism's elision of systematicity: they can, at times, neglect the ways in which the violences they contest provide conditions of possibility for capitalist exploitation and expropriation. Correlatively, when facing inflation, financialisation and rents, class struggle has been isolated to struggles in the workplace and advocacy for wealth redistribution, reflecting a similarly liberal demand for a more egalitarian capitalism. The capacity to create meaningful change across the aforementioned arenas of struggle – to overcome the limits of liberalism – would be better served by positioning class in relation to both non-capitalist domination and capitalist domination from the perspective of the total circulation of capital, or its reproduction. An analysis of capital from the perspective of its total reproduction not only avoids the fragmentation of struggles by illuminating the place of non-capitalist forms in capitalism's reproduction: it also allows analysis to integrate the role of expropriation within capital's circulation through 'rentierism', a form of surplus value capture outside of the wage relation, which subjects individuals to unpayable debts and unaffordable prices, placing further strain on the conditions that make it possible to sell labour power. Renterism, although not a direct labour-capital relation, produces and reproduces the specificity of an individual's class relation, as do other forms of

non-capitalist domination relating to gender, race, colonization and ecological degradation.

To analyse non-capitalist domination and capitalist domination from the perspective of total social reproduction, class needs to be understood according to Marx's presentation in *Capital*.¹ To do so, entails reckoning with its double nature: class as an abstract and formal social relation, on the one hand, and class as a concrete and political collective formation, on the other. Class, formally speaking, is a strictly abstract social relation internal to capital's independent drive to profit as an 'automatic subject'.² Within this formulation, the class relation is not comprised of a 'group', but is a relation bared by the individual, who personifies a position vis-à-vis capital. Every individual within capitalist society bears a distinct and contradictory labour-capital relation that is reproduced and sustained by other forms of domination. The class relation arises through a rule by abstraction that concretely appears in the life of an individual as they pursue their social reproduction, an arena that imposes multiple determinations of capitalist and non-capitalist social relations. The arena of social reproduction, in contrast to capital's abstract social form, presents class concretely, comprising groups of political actors. These two competing modes of class, as Étienne Balibar observes, reflect the "two different readings of the analysis of *Capital* [that] are constantly possible, according to whether one gives priority... ... to 'form', or alternatively to content. Either an 'economic' theory of class' or a 'political theory of class' is possible on the basis of the same text."³ Yet the political theory of class remains incompatible with the 'economic' or the logic of capital's abstract forms, where we find personifications of the capital relation who never come face to face because they are impersonally mediated by capital's abstractions.⁴ Reckoning with the social meaning of class's contradictory nature, as it is situated within its multiple determinations, I argue, requires theorisation from the perspective of capital's total reproduction.

This article's argument will unfold in three steps. In the first section, 'A Marxist Conception of Class', I will present a reading of Richard Gunn's text *Notes on 'Class'*,⁵ combined with Etienne Balibar's text 'Class Struggle to Classless Struggle' in *Race, Nation, Class*,⁶ synthesising the two to present a concept of class aligning with *Capital's*. Marx's

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1 Marx 1990.

2 Marx refers to capital as an 'automatic' subject on p. 255 of *Capital Volume I*, 1990.

3 Balibar 1991, p. 163.

4 Balibar 1991, p. 160.

5 Gunn, 1987.

6 Balibar 1991.

presentation of class will prove to be contradictory, split between formal abstraction and concrete politics. I will demonstrate why this contradictory understanding of class is required to grasp the nature of class-based domination.

The class contradiction elaborated in the proceeding section, 'Total Social Reproduction and the Politics of Class,' unpacks why the politics of class needs to be viewed not at the value theoretical level but at the concrete level of social reproduction, entailing an analysis of capital from the perspective of circulation (or total social reproduction). This perspective enables analysis to better approach the multiple determinations imposed upon living labour. I will show how class relations are concretised by non-capitalist forms of domination making the politics of class intrinsically an issue of social reproduction.

Finally, to begin articulating a politics of total social reproduction, the third section, 'Surplus Profit and Consumption,' shifts the analysis of social reproduction from the realm of the conditions of social reproduction to that of the role of active consumption on the market. Consumption enables social reproduction. But on the market consumers can be expropriated by rentierism, where surplus profits are extracted from the income of workers. In turning focus to rentierism, analysis can grasp the interconnected aspects of class politics internal to social reproduction: the conditions of social reproduction and consumption. Both of these are shaped by multiple modes of domination, capitalist and non-capitalist.

These three steps will substantiate the overall argument that social reproduction produces and reproduces capital's abstract relations, including – of course – that between labour and capital. While the politics of class is not located within the formal relation of class, knowledge of capital's abstract social form is needed to work out the direction and aims of a politics of social reproduction. Politics occurs at the level of the concrete. Yet one will not adequately address capitalist domination without knowledge of the relationship between the abstract (capital's self-movement to valorisation) and the concrete (what provides the conditions of possibility for capital's abstractions). The framework set up here will hopefully begin the process of understanding struggles of social reproduction – pertaining to racial and gender-based domination, as well as ecological degradation – as a class issue. This fundamentally enables one to see diverse struggles as rooted in a desire to prioritise life's reproduction above that of capital's. The politics here sought is encapsulated in a speculative assertion: if social reproduction produces the conditions of possibility of the class relation, social reproduction can be redirected to abolish the class relation altogether.

A Marxist Conception of Class

When referring to class formally, I refer to the abstract social relation between labour and capital that an individual bears, which is always a relation of struggle. Class, in this sense, represents the threshold between labour and capital, demarking the extent to which one sells their labour power. Class, as an abstract relation, exists at the level of capital's commodified abstractions, or the movement of value forms from commodity to money to capital, constituting the process of capital accumulation. In contrast, the concrete appearance of class – the dialectical other of class as an abstract social relation – appears at a different level of abstraction: at the level of the reproduction of human life and nature. It is at the level of the concrete, I argue, that one finds the politics of class.

As an abstract antagonistic social relation – in contradiction with concrete reality – the class relation is separated from concrete politics. The politics of class exists at the concrete level of groups collectively in struggle for the affirmation of their social reproduction. The politics of class is in reality determined by one's conditions of total social reproduction, which can only be grasped from the perspective of society: of capital's circulation. Comprising non-capitalist forms of domination, the politics of class is determined by a complex multiplicity of forms of domination, not explicitly capitalist, including gender-based domination, racialization, environmental expropriation and market consumption, where rentier expropriation extracts surplus profit from consumers in education, housing, childcare and healthcare (and also through taxation, etc). It is the unity of these two notions of class that constitute Marx's conception of class.

Richard Gunn's short text *Notes on 'Class'*, published in 'Common Sense' in 1987,⁷ offers a strikingly clear presentation of an explicitly abstract and formal definition of class. Rhetorically contrasting class in the formal sense with what he refers to as a sociological view, Gunn argues that theorists of Marx too often mistake class – a social relation – for a sociological group of individuals. A sociological view, according to Gunn, is often utilised in one of two ways: empiricist or structuralist. The empiricist view is most common place, defining the way class is generally ideologically understood in bourgeois society. It sees class as "a group of individuals, specified by what they have in common (their income-level or lifestyle, their 'source of revenue', their relation to means of production etc.)"⁸ While the structuralist strand of the sociological view, according to Gunn, sees class as a "relationally specified 'place'

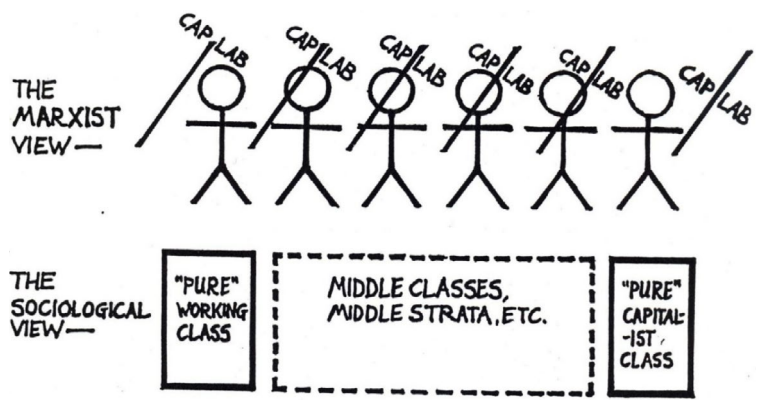
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7 Gunn 1987.

8 Gunn 1987, p. 1.

in the social landscape, a place which individuals may 'occupy' or in which, as individuals, they may be 'interpolated.'⁹ By defining class in terms of groups, both strands of the sociological view have, for Gunn, consequential shortcomings for thinking class in relation to a theory of capital's social form. This vitiates analysis' capacity to think the political possibilities internal to capital's social form.

First and foremost, individuals do not easily fit into classed categories such as 'capitalists,' proletarians,' and 'landlords.' Nor does a category such as 'middle-class' disclose anything about an individual's relation to capitalist exploitation and expropriation. It is Marx's critique of political economy in *Capital* – where class is shown to be a relational category expressing the capital-labour relation – that enables us to link class politics to capital's social form. By exposing the real antagonism between capital and labour within the class relation, theory can avoid the historically inaccurate assumption taken by the sociological view where classes are seen to somehow pre-exist or exist alongside yet separately from the capital relation and enter into struggle due to contestation over the wage relation.¹⁰ The later assumption that classes pre-exist the capital-labour relation is ignorant of the formal mechanisms behind capital's reproduction and assumes class to be a straight-forward precondition rather than a result of capital's social form that only through capital's circulation retroactively becomes a condition. In doing so, it misconstrues the struggle for the *abolition* of capital's rule by abstraction for an attempt to better participate *in* capitalism.

Commitment to understanding class as a social relation – not as a group – sees individuals riven by internal divisions, implicit in the capital-labour relation. See Gunn's diagram below:



Richard Gunn, Notes on 'Class' Common Sense, No. 2, 1987.

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9 Gunn 1987, p. 1.
10 Gunn 1987, p. 1.

By marking a contrast between the sociological view of class and Marx's view of class, Gunn reveals the inability of the sociological view to adequately account for the dialectical and contradictory nature of the bearer of the class relation. Gunn relays:

One difference between the Marxist and the sociological views...
...is that on the Marxist view the 'pure' worker, whose social being is in no way divided in and against him or herself, is in no way methodologically privileged. Neither is the 'pure' capitalist. Both, rather, are merely limiting cases and, as such, they are seen only as figures comingled with each other in a diversely structured crowd..."¹¹

Because the wage relation is itself is a 'bourgeois mystifying form' there is no such thing as a 'pure' worker rendered reducible to their abstract form. Individuals, including those who are full time producers of surplus value, live lives that are divided:

His or her feet mired in exploitation even while his or her head (which is tempted to construe this exploitation in terms of 'low wages', ie., in terms which are mystified) breathes in bourgeois ideological clouds. Accordingly, the line of class-struggle runs through the individual by whom surplus-value is produced."¹²

With this concept of class, politics becomes as varied as the class-relation itself. This perspective requires us to consider the multiple determinations underpinning such divided individuals in the realm of their social reproduction, to understand why they might bear the capital-labour relation with difference. Because class is an antagonistic relationship, however, there will still be a collective of individuals who share conditions of exploitation and those who collectively have a shared position as those who profit from exploitation. Those who sell their labour power experience their class relation as workers. It is not that there are not shared positions, but that there is no pure group within collective positions: there will be internal differentiation in one's class relation. More specifically,

the Marxist conception of class, or in other words, the point of view of totality,' [of capitalist social relations], rejects precisely the narrowness of the conception of politics which the sociological conception of class entails [the assumption that a class is a group

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¹¹ Gunn 1987, p. 2.

¹² Gunn 1987, p. 2.

of people]. On the Marxist view, the category of politics becomes as wide as forms which class struggle (and thereby class itself) unpredictably takes. Not merely is no issue excluded from the political agenda; the notion of political agenda is excluded since any such agenda excludes and marginalises whatever does not fall within some pre-established political domain.”¹³

While, Gunn insists that for Marx class has nothing to do with groups but, “like capital itself, [class is] a social relation,”¹⁴ the position is less consistently held in Marx. As Beverly Skeggs rightly points out Marx “was never very clear on how to define class, using the concept rhetorically as well as analytically, a problem that has beset any analysis ever since.”¹⁵ Yet Marx’s understanding of class developed as did his understanding of capitalism as a mode of production. Skeggs clarifies:

Marx’s writings over time about class, using a variety of tropes and rhetorical flourishes, depend on how he is putting class to use – as a dynamic force for revolution (the working class and/or the proletariat), the competitive innovators of industrialisation and exploitation (the bourgeoisie), objects of derision and contempt (the lumpen proletariat) or later as the bearers of abstract labour, the personifications of capital in *Capital*.¹⁶

It is specifically in *Capital* that class takes on a distinct social form as an abstract social relation based on one’s relationship to abstract labour, or the capital labour relation. This comes to be specific to a Marxist theory of capital as an abstract social relation that relies on exploitation of labour power for the accumulation of value. This concept of class deployed in *Capital*, as Gunn argues, reflects the specificity of class within the capitalist mode of production. Gunn is correct. but he explicitly and polemically elides a significant point. Marx retained at least two distinct – even incompatible – concepts of class. One is the uniquely capitalist concept of class deployed by Gunn and explicitly formulated by Marx in *Capital*. The other is a concrete notion that *is* sociological and *is* made up of groups. Class is sociologically deployed by Marx to talk about the collective lives of concrete historical individuals who explicitly sit on either side of the antagonism. These sociological classes are nonetheless made up of vastly complex and divergent individuals given the specificity of the nature of the capital-labour spit within their

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¹³ Gunn 1987, p. 5.

¹⁴ Gunn 1987, p. 1.

¹⁵ Skeggs 2022, p. 192.

¹⁶ Skeggs 2022, p. 193.

own modes of exploitation, as well as the multiple forms of non-capital's determinations shaping the nature of their own class relation.

As Balibar has shown in his chapter *From Class Struggle to Classless Struggle*,¹⁷ Marx's *Capital* focuses on the logical workings capital's structure, and, here, the proletariat as a group is absent. Instead, individuals perform their roles as personifications of the capital relation. Individuals are objectified actors within the 'theatre' of capitalism where value or abstract labour becomes subject through its circulation and valorisation as capital. Capital becomes the automatic subject through its self-reproducing drive for profit (the circulation of value), while individuals are mere actors, or functions of the capital relation. Yet a distinct and dialectically opposed category of class remains, since "human labour-power is *irreducible to the state of commodity* and will continue resisting in ever stronger and better-organised ways till the system itself is overthrown (which properly speaking is what is meant by the class struggle)."¹⁸ The immanently external nature of the concrete life of ecologically situated individuals reflects the irreducibility of human labour to the commodity form. But individual's, nevertheless, concretise the class relation and enable class relations to persist.

Gunn instructively highlights that class is not an identity. Class is a relation that produces personifications of capital; it is an expression of capital's fetish character where subjects are treated as mere objective personifications of social relations. Capital's social form endows each individual with a character mask i.e. capitalist, landlord or worker, rendering them a functional bearer of a social form. Since class is a conflict between capital and labour internal to each 'person,' it is also clear that the liberal provision of juridical equality between persons is a mystification. Equality between persons is closer between those whose class relation is more closely aligned only. There are, however, multiple determinations of domination that underpin one's ability to sell labour power, which could displace the formal class relation. Capitalist domination is not one of exploitation only. It is also one of expropriation, and expropriation relies on non-capitalist forms of domination to justify capture of value without payment. As Balibar states,

it is not that there is a predetermined linking of forms, but rather an interplay of antagonistic strategies, strategies of exploitation, domination and resistance constantly being displaced and renewed as a consequence of their own effects."¹⁹

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17 Balibar 1991, p. 160.

18 Balibar 1991, p. 165.

19 Balibar 1991, p. 164.

To fully understand the implications of the class relation – a relation of exploitation – we must understand the role of the multiple determination of expropriation and how these are interconnected within the broader circulation of capital or capital's total social reproduction. This will be a demonstration of connecting the abstract class relation with concrete multiple determinations to devise a theory of the politics of class.

Total Social Reproduction and the Politics of Class

To address class politically, to intervene with the lived reality of the class relation, a sociological view of class formation is needed. This view enables analysis to grasp how non-capitalist forms of domination are implicated in the capital-labour relation's reproduction. These non-capitalist forms of domination, I argue, are best understood dialectically as 'immanent externalities.' They are both internal to capitalist society and necessary for capital's reproduction but also are extra-capitalist and not specific to capital's social form. Therefore, to understand how these immanent externalities, or non-capitalist forms of domination, help to reproduce the capital-labour relation we need to view class from the perspective of total reproduction as total reproduction encompasses both capitalist and non-capitalist relations. Production and reproduction exist relationally within capital's broader circulation where non-capitalist conditions, limits and institutions have a bearing on the workings of production and profit extraction. While the abstract formal concept of class – as a labour-capital relation is an inherently capitalist social form – should be understood from the perspective of capital's abstractions, the lived experience of the class relation is best understood concretely, as "a concentration of multiple determinations", a unity of diversity.²⁰ This is where "the process of production and reproduction the proletariat takes shape as a concrete tangible reality."²¹ In a given historical conjuncture, non-capitalist modes of domination, such as financialization, indebtedment, rentierism, racialisation and gender norms, will tend to become necessary and immanent to the reproduction of capital. Yet these remain *other* to capital's particular social form.

Non-capitalist forms of domination are non-capitalist because they are not expressions of the value form and hence do not comprise of a relation of exploitation. Instead, they rely on a relation of expropriation, a form of domination within capitalism that has always been used as a method to create it's conditions of possibility. Expropriation does not create surplus value, but enables capitalists and rentiers to retain

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20 Marx 1973, p. 101.

21 Balibar 1991, p. 160.

larger proportions of profit by plundering resources, wages and labour freely without compensation. Expropriation facilitates the conditions of possibility of their accumulation of profit and is a form of distribution of profit that relies on extra-capitalist methods of domination: it is surplus profit made through methods other than the exploitation of labour and often is what makes for the conditions of possibility of capitalist exploitation such as the expropriation of unpaid domestic labour that is required to enable the worker to arrive at their job.

Class is a social relationship, the concrete reality of which depends upon individuals' historical experience of non-capitalist forms of domination, however capitalistically mediated those forms of domination might be. Because the mediation of capitalist and non-capitalist domination can only be seen at the point of total social reproduction – in 'society' – we need a theory of social reproduction to understand how class structures the lives of individuals. Marx's conception of class as a social relation, in this regard, I argue requires supplementing with a politics of social reproduction for its politicisation. Hence, Gunn's presentation of the formal social relation of class in Marx is most meaningful when applied to the total social reproduction of capital. So applied, the formal concept of class can enable analysis to understand how non-capitalist forms of domination are mediated by capital's abstractions. This sheds light on the concrete politics of class, allowing class to be constructed not merely as that which individuals bear in a contradictory way, but as an abstraction that requires the production and reproduction of other forms of domination for its condition of possibility. It is these multiple determinations of domination – both capitalist and non-capitalist – that comprise the concrete nature of an individual's class relation.

What kinds of forms of domination does the automatic subject of capital compel? Class, of course. But class appears in a society that typically uses changing racial and gendered modes of discipline to facilitate its reproduction. Hence, the politics of class – a shared relation to the conditions of social reproduction – must be interpreted in such way that accounts for not only exploitation, occurring via the labour-capital relation, but that addresses non-capitalist modes of expropriation, theorising unpaid domestic labour, ecological degradation, real-estate bubbles, and debt, among other phenomena. Non-capitalist expropriation occurs when capital takes from the social reproductive and natural resources of human life and nature without recourse to payment. But, exploitation and expropriation can happen simultaneously. When payment for labour cannot fully cover the social reproduction of the worker, the worker is both exploited and expropriated because they are forced to compensate for the full costs of reproducing their labour power. The exploitation of living labour is what enables the abstract and impersonal nature of domination in capitalism: it forms the basis

of capital's fetish. Yet, at the same time, it relies on interpersonal non-capitalist modes of expropriation to sustain its reproduction. Hence, the accumulation of value happens both through means of exploitation and non-capitalist forms of expropriation: both can become variables behind the capitalist mode of production.

I have thus far attempted to show that class can only be adequately politicised through recourse to analysis of its concrete existence. The concrete comprises both the site of subjection to value and the formation of groups through non-capitalist means. Class relations differ, individually speaking, on the basis of social reproduction, which is determined by non-capitalist relations of racialisation, colonisation, nationality, ethnicity, kinship, etc. Much Marxism, however, neglects the contribution of non-capitalist forms of domination when addressing the formal and structural production of class. As Skeggs observes, Marx pins down three factors that produce class:

- (1) class is produced through struggle over the means of revenue either through labour, ownership of capital and/or land;
- (2) class definitions depend on the groups' relationship to the means of revenue production, and hence to one other; and
- (3) classes are locked into a dependent relationship to each other, where one class is always a source of revenue for another, in terms of profit and/or rent. It is always the *relationship of exploitation* – developed by Marx through his theories of wage labour, labour-power, labour value and surplus value – which defines classes.²²

In contrast, I argue that it is not *always* exploitation that defines classes. There is an additional missing factor in what defines class that I argue is a fourth factor determining the class relation: *non-capitalist forms of domination that condition the individual at the level of their social reproduction through expropriation*. By considering this fourth factor, these non-capitalist conditions, we can understand the specific effects of concrete non-capitalist domination on abstract class relations. And vice versa. Without addressing the way that forms of non-capitalist domination produce and reproduce class immanently within capitalist society, the class relation has little concrete meaning. This is apparent when non-capitalist forms of expropriation, such as rentierism, environmental degradation and the racialised and gendered devaluation of the wage, have relativised the dominance of the capital-labour relation as a contributing factor in determining the lived experience of class.

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²² Skeggs 2022, p. 193.

Non-capitalist domination produces a distinct labour-capital relation through the intensification of exploitation, through expropriation and through the devaluation of (or exclusion from) the wage. Racialised expropriation, for example, encompassing the history of slavery, as well land stolen in colonisation, continues to make up an enormous amount of the world's wealth. The contemporary legacy of this racialised plunder is what Kojo Koram refers to as the 'material element of empire', ongoing in the post-colonial world.²³ Empire, so conceived, continues to transfer and expropriate resources and wealth across the globe. Expropriation has often been connected to slavery, racialisation, women's subordination, ecological degradation and the colonial theft of land. As Skeggs highlights:

Difference has been long mobilised for accumulation, as... ... contemporary studies of migrant workforce show: hyper-precarity, criminalisation and deportability are often institutionalised features for migrant workforces, in creating their vulnerability by reducing their ability to claim production and even wages. Convict and indentured labour was a central plank of racial capitalism.²⁴

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Through the production of difference – be it gendered, racial or otherwise – surplus profit is acquired in both exploitation and expropriation: surplus value is extracted from the wage *and* surplus profit is taken from unpaid labour. Unpaid labour, with all its life sustaining functions, is made more exploitative through a devaluation of wages for gendered and racialised workers. Cedric J. Robertson, in *Black Marxism*,²⁵ demonstrates how race has been used in capitalism as a method of producing a working class that can be exploited more. He defines this dynamic through his concept of 'racial capital.' Racial difference is here used by capitalism to extract surplus value cheaper from certain groups of workers. Robinson demonstrates how this dynamic can be traced to the emergence of capitalism in early industrial England, where Irish workers were racialised to extract increased amounts of surplus value. Hence, the specificity of the English working class was produced by way of race.²⁶ The production of difference that occurs through non-capitalist forms of domination reflect "relations and practices that are active structuring principles of the present

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23 Karam 2022.

24 Skeggs 2022, p. 197.

25 Robinson 2021.

26 See Part 1, ;Section 1: Racial Capitalism' and 'Section 2: The English Working Class as Mirror of Production' in Robinson 2021.

organisation of society and form of class relations”,²⁷ determining how class is lived. As Stuart Hall famously claimed, race is “the modality in which class is “lived,” the medium through which class relations are experienced.”²⁸

Working class protections have historically gained strength through trade unions and political organisation. Capital, meanwhile, has attacked the unprotected, maintaining and reproducing precarity through non-capitalist forms of domination. Non-capitalist forms of domination work to exclude people from the minimal protections of the wage-labour relation, differentiating the mass based on race, gender, sexuality and ability. Gendered care work provides a pertinent example. When reproductive labour is either given a grossly devalued wage, or is uncompensated, expropriation is justified through gender norms. Søren Mau writes, “capital needs proletarians who offer their labour-power up for sale, but it equally needs proletarians who perform the necessary reproductive labour – such as child- birth, childcare, cooking, cleaning, etc. – outside of the wage relation, that is, proletarians whose dependence on capital is mediated by their dependence on other proletarians.”²⁹ The reliance on expropriation in care is deeply integrated into the allocation of state funds. This is shown by the resistance states put up to free childcare. The state has historically relied on the expropriation of unpaid labour to ‘fund’ the population’s childcare and will not readily give up a good, expropriative source of value.

Expropriation doesn’t always leverage anthropological difference. One need only consider the effects ecological degradation have on social reproduction. The creation and reproduction of difference, however, explains why certain communities are forced to bear the greater burdens of climate change and rentierism. As non-capitalist material conditions, human life and nature co-exist in metabolic relation to one another through a process of consumption and excretion. Together they constitute the reproductive foundation of the capitalist system. Capital’s circulation of value is dependent on nature, both to supply its requirements, as medium or material, and to absorb its waste. Human life, too, irrespective of its social form, is dependent on nature, existing in a metabolic relation thereto. Yet capitalism treats nature and the reproduction of human life (i.e. care work) as self-replenishing and readily available for extraction. Its material is taken without compensation or replenishment. As Kohei Saito states in his book *Karl Marx’s Ecosocialism*:

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27 Skegg 2022, p. 199.

28 Hall 1980, p. 341.

29 Mau 2021, p. 9.

Marx's political economy allows us to understand the ecological crisis as a contradiction of capitalism, because it describes the immanent dynamics of the capitalist system, according to which the unbounded drive of capital for valorization erodes its own material conditions and eventually confronts it with the limits of nature.³⁰

Capitalism systemically, and necessarily, destroys its conditions of reproduction. This has caused catastrophic harm to the environment, diminishing the likelihood of human life's stable reproduction. Hence, the way in which communities experience global heating and pollution – caused by capital's plunder of resources without compensation (i.e. expropriation of land and human life) – determines their experience of the class relation. Illness from pollution – or the destruction of basic resources, from housing to infrastructure, occurring in extreme weather – affect the conditions of possibility for participating in waged labour, as well as the extent to which wage can cover the costs.

One's ability to burden the relationship of exploitation in the labour-capital relation (what sorts of contracts they enter or don't enter), and therefore the specificity of the labour-capital relation one bears, is dependent on one's experience of expropriation and non-capitalist forms of domination. By enabling an increased extraction of unpaid labour, non-capitalist forms of domination change an individual's class relation, determining how class is lived. By analysing the politics of class at the concrete level of social reproduction – from the perspective of circulation or total social reproduction – one can see the multiple non-capitalist determinations of living labour. From this, we can say that the politics of class is intrinsically an issue of social reproduction, where shared conditions of social reproduction are determined by a range of factors, both capitalist and non-capitalist.

We have established that non-capitalist forms of domination – often leveraging social difference, manifest in the realm of social reproduction – determine how individuals bear the capital-labour relation. But we have elided another form of non-capitalist domination that is needed to gain a full picture of the politics of total social reproduction today: consumption on the market. Through consumption, forms of rentier expropriation shape one's experience of class. Yet consumption is not neutrally distributed. The production of difference is implicated in the mechanics of unequal consumption and expropriation. By mediating an account of social difference's reproduction with an analysis of rentierism, analysis can consider the production of difference as a conditioning factor within the capture of surplus value through consumption.

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30 Saito 2017, p. 20.

Surplus Profit and Consumption

By synthesising an account of social reproduction with value form analysis, one can produce an analysis of class adequate to financialised rentier capital. As labour becomes heavily devalued globally, capitalism is marred by non-capitalist forms of rentier-based expropriation. A consequence of this is that increased strain is placed on social reproduction. Non-capitalist relations are increasingly employed for the accumulation of 'surplus profit', intensifying ecological devastation, alongside racialised and gendered forms of domination. The profit gained from expropriation is referred to by Marx at length in *Capital Volume III* when discussing markets, finance, competition and rents. 'Surplus profit', as defined by Marx, is not necessarily accumulated through the extraction of surplus value. It can comprise the increased profit gained through cutting costs, producing for cheaper, and through monopolisation and putting up prices: it can be profit conditioned not by capital's abstract form but by the conditions of the market.

Within the sphere of production, Marx claims surplus profit to be extracted both from what Marx calls "exceptionally favourable conditions" or "fortuitous fluctuations of market prices" and also "if certain spheres of production are in a position to evade the conversion of the values of their commodities into prices of production."³¹ The accumulation of surplus profit is a form of expropriation internal to capitalism and in productive capital can occur alongside exploitation: one can be both exploited and expropriated. The profit extracted by rents – which occur in the realm of capital's circulation – is solely surplus profit and is increased by rentiers through monopolisation: these are profits accumulated that do not take on a strictly capitalist form. Surplus profit acquired by capitalists or rentiers might be made up of capital – of valorised value extracted through the capital-labour relation – but it also might be made up of credit money or fictitious capital, which is money that is unvalorised (and therefore not necessarily profit or wealth accumulated through capitalist social relations).

Extra-capitalist social relations determine the class relation and in doing so relativise capital's specific form of abstract domination. The working class – comprised of workers and potential workers – is not merely a class of vendors of labour power: they are also buyers of commodities that facilitate their social reproduction. The role of consumption therefore is a significant arena of class production and reproduction. Consumption enables social reproduction through the provision of resources. This entails workers' subjection to non-capitalist forms of domination internal to the market, which will, in turn, determine the conditions in which they will sell their capacity to labour (the sorts of

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31 Marx 1991, p. 144.

labour contracts working people are compelled to). While it is important to remember that other forms of non-capitalist domination influence one's experience of rentierism within the realm of consumption since ownership has always been racialised and gendered, our focus here concerns how rentierism shapes and produces the class relation by affecting the labour market and the buying power of the wage.

Capital identifies rentierism as preserve of landlords. It is a form of profit-seeking that, while non-capitalist, is internal to capitalist relations. Rentierism beyond the more narrow definition involves the capture of scarce assets and commodities as a method to increase price, enabling the extraction of excessive profit. This includes finance, in the distribution of credit and investment in financial assets. With rentierism, the specifically capitalist form of accumulation by exploitation or labour and the subsequent circulation of value throughout commodity forms is supplemented by juridical-political modes of expropriation through “fees, leases, politically-sustained capital gains.”³² Rentierism entails “payment to an economic actor (the rentier) ... purely by virtue of controlling something valuable.”³³ These assets might be real estate, intellectual property, natural resources, utilities and other service contracts, including infrastructure such a train lines, digital platforms or credit money and financial assets. There are all assets that derive income “from the ownership, possession or control of scarce assets under conditions of limited or no competition.”³⁴

Rentierism is a significant arena of profit extraction in contemporary capitalism where wage labour has long been devalued globally. Profit accumulation increasingly seems to be extracted through rents and therefore capitalist social relations take on an increasingly non-capitalist distribution. This also means that profit accumulation is more directly targeted at the expropriation of means of social reproduction. Rentierism has enormous consequences for the class relation, solidifying and further bifurcating its experience, often operating along lines of who owns property and those who does not. This, of course, corresponds to the labour-capital relation: the working class are those who have nothing to sell but their labour. The intensification of rentierism in the present has emerged by way of several factors tied to deindustrialisation and privatisation in the global north. Financial deregulation, for example, (which has occurred differently at different rates in different countries) has enabled housing – even what was historically social housing – to become financial investments, traded as consolidated debts, as assets owned by banks through mortgage contracts, and ubiquitously used to gain passive income through

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32 Zacarés 2021, p. 49.

33 Christophers 2020, p. xvi, xxiv.

34 Christophers 2020, p. xvi, xxiv.

rents. This is but one factor of a range of instances of privatisation and financialisation that promote the funnelling of investment not towards production, and therefore to labour (however indirectly), but to the ownership of assets. When these assets are productive, they are increasingly monopolised, enabling profits to be taken through expropriation. For example, the privatisation of utility companies went hand in hand with their monopolisation. Within this dynamic, the “pace of societal reproduction is no longer set by fierce competition in the sphere of commodity production, but by securing, protecting and sweating scarce assets.”³⁵

The market dynamics of rentierism transforms modes of social reproduction at the level of workers’ lives, especially at moments of crisis. Market determinations – such as changes in use-values, on the basis of what can accrue profit, as well as changes imposed on any one of the classes positions (the capitalist, the renter and the worker) – become motors of change, determining what is possible outside of the wage relation in terms of social reproduction. The practices that bear the burden of reproducing labour power are a dynamic factor that, in turn, affects the concrete reality of class relations in capitalism. Market dynamics, such as the value of property and land, affect the social reproduction of working class people. Their social reproduction is thus constrained by dynamics of accumulation and rent seeking, taxes, and structural adjustment programmes. Yet social reproduction, nonetheless, has relative autonomy, affecting the market in a variety of ways. This can occur through consumer boycotts, doing things more cheaply and engaging in political struggles for accesses to healthcare, over education or student debt and for a higher social wage. The drive for self-preservation, despite capital’s compulsion to destroy life for the extraction of value, is a meaningful element of class politics that should not be ignored.

An individual’s experience of expropriation via rents, including debt, is determined by a non-capitalist form of domination that conditions their social reproduction. Social reproduction, therefore, also determines the way in which class relations are occupied. Consequently, class’s actuality – the labour-capital relation – will shift based on the dynamics of rentierism. Furthermore, one’s relationship to expropriation through rentierism will be exacerbated by the level of exploitation that occurs within their class relation. Rentierism, in this regard, is a distinct form of class production, which conditions the social reproduction of the worker. Not only does rentierism affect the concrete power of the wage to reproduce human life: it affects the class relation itself, requiring workers to enter into different working conditions and contracts based on those distorted conditions of social reproduction.

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35 Zacarés 2021, p. 50.

Conclusion

I have argued that the politics of class takes place at capitalism's most concrete level where we find the realm of social reproduction. Here, non-capitalist 'immanent externalities' shape and determine the specificity of how individuals bear the class relation. Within this framework, a politics of class is a politics of social reproduction, with both capitalist and non-capitalist forms shaping the ways individuals bear the abstract capital-labour relation.

By establishing a Marxist conception of class that revealed class's contradictory nature as both an abstract formal social relation and a concrete political category, I have established a method from which we can interpret the concrete politics of class in relation to its abstract social form. Here, the former is a condition of the reproduction of the later. I have then demonstrated why the politics of class needs to be viewed from the perspective of the concrete level of social reproduction. Only by doing so can analysis include the multiple determinations of domination that contribute to the class relation's production, such as how the production of difference, alongside ecological degradation, facilitates expropriation. Finally, I integrated what I refer to as the other side of social reproduction – consumption – to explore how the capture of surplus profits, in turn, determines how an individual will bear the class relation.

Through concise integration of the capitalism's specific form of domination and its production and reproduction of the labour-capital relation, we can conclude that analysis should add a 'fourth factor' to Marx's three factors outlined above. The first factor according to Marx was that class is produced in the struggle over revenue. The second was that it is produced by the relationship between their distinct means (labour, ownership of capital or land). And the third was that it is produced by the relationship of exploitation, where the dependent nature of the relationship between each means of revenue hinges on the extraction of abstract labour in the capital-labour relation. I then showed that the fourth missing factor within Marx's schema is that of social reproduction, where capitalistically immanent-external forms of domination and social organisation create the conditions of possibility for capital's abstract domination. This factor exists at the level of concrete reality, in which the politics of class is realised. As I have demonstrated, we cannot derive a politics of class directly from capital's abstract antagonistic social relation (the labour-capital relation). Politics, instead, must address the abstract relation from the perspective of the concrete lived experience of living individuals. This concrete sphere is that of social reproduction, where multiple determinations, both capitalist and non-capitalist forms of domination, unfold.

We can conclude that the class relation is neither produced nor reproduced without determinations of capital's total social reproduction. Nor is there a politics of class without a politics of social reproduction. Such a politics necessarily integrates multiple determinations arising from non-capitalist forms of expropriation. By grasping politics in this way, fragmented struggles for social reproduction – from struggles over racial, gender-based, colonial and environmental justice – can cohere under the framework of a class-based analysis. So rethought, class can once again become the central analytical category in contests over capitalist and non-capitalist forms of profit extraction.

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