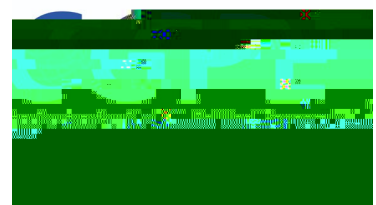
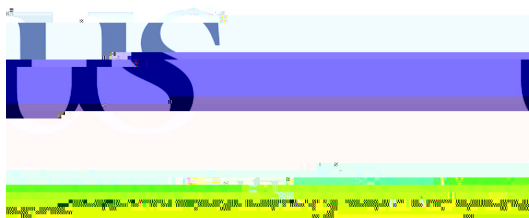


Looking Beyond England: Slavery, Settler Colonialism and the Development of Industrial Capitalism

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Looking Beyond England: Slavery, Settler Colonialism and the Development of Industrial Capitalism

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Abstract

This paper examines the debates surrounding industrial capitalism's origins, critiquing the Eurocentrism in the Political Marxist approach. Instead, using a dialectical framework, I argue that the transition from agrarian to industrial capitalism in Britain required the existence of slavery and settler colonialism in the New World. The reason for this is threefold: Firstly, the removal of surplus populations either to colonies or domestically by employing them in colony-related industries was necessary to avoid stagnation in capitalist development. Secondly, the cheapening of basic commodities leading to a reduction in wages (i.e. relative surplus value extraction) in Britain necessitated enslaved labour in the New World. Thirdly, British industrialisation itself required settler colonialism and slavery because of: 1) the importation of slave-produced raw materials that were manufactured in Britain, 2) the exportation of manufactured products to settler colonies in the Americas, 3) the investment into industry by slaveowners and 4) the credit provision by banks that were tightly linked to the slave trade. I, therefore, conclude by suggesting that taking seriously the links between capitalism and slavery/colonialism could unify post-colonialism and Marxism by demonstrating the interconnectedness between post-colonialism's principal object of analysis – colonialism – and Marxism's main object of analysis – capitalism.

¹ This paper is a revised and expanded version of a dissertation submitted for the award of an MA in Global Political Economy at the University of Sussex, which received the highest classification.

Looking Beyond England: Slavery, Settler Colonialism and the Development of Industrial Capitalism

When most people picture a ship named the *Jesus*, travelling across the Atlantic, they would not believe that the *Jesus* marked the beginnings of the English transatlantic slave trade. After John Hawkins's 1562 expedition to take enslaved people from Africa and sell them to the Spanish in the Americas returned enormous profits, Queen Elizabeth I provided him with a ship for his next voyage, which she personally named the *Jesus* (Rodney, 2012[1972]: 83). With the *Jesus*, Hawkins was able to make such large profits in the trade of human beings that the Queen eventually made him a knight (Rodney, 2012[1972]: 83). This marked the beginning of England's imperial ambitions, which saw it becoming the first capitalist economy in the world.

The origins of capitalism have been debated by generations of scholars, Marxists and non-Marxists alike (Higginbottom, 2018: 34). Some of the most influential writers in this so-called transition debate are Paul Sweezy and Maurice Dobb, who in the 1940s debated whether capitalism's birth in England was due to internal or external factors (Sweezy, 1946; Dobb, 1946). Dobb is often thought of as the father of the contemporary school of Political Marxism (PM), one of the key schools that has theorised about capitalism's origins. PM emerged in the 1970s and some of its most influential scholars include Robert Brenner and Ellen Wood. Both Brenner (1977: 78) and Wood (2002: 101) have situated the roots of capitalism in the sixteenth century

to draw linkages between capitalism and imperialism. Most importantly, though, Political Marxism is a Eurocentric theory, with both Wood (2002: 147) and Brenner (1977: 85) completely

establishment of relative surplus value production (a defining characteristic of capitalism) in Britain required the existence of slave labour in the colonies. This is because cheap slave-grown commodities like sugar, tobacco and coffee

colonialism and Marxism by demonstrating the interconnectedness between post-colonialism's principal object of analysis – colonialism – and Marxism's main object of analysis – capitalism (Bhambra, 2014).

Capitalism Explained

To begin with, it is necessary to explain capitalism, as it will become clear throughout the piece that a large part of the disagreements surrounding capitalism's origins have to do with its varying definitions. I will use the Marxist definition of capitalism, which sees it as a 'mode of production', the latter referring to a historical epoch containing a distinctive way of producing and correlating distinctive relati (5 s(l)-1.9 (o)11.1 (f)32.4 (p)3.4 (r)5.9 (o)11.1 (d)42.5 (u)0.5 (c)0.6 (t-1.6 (i)72.8 (

for themselves on a subsistence basis and are therefore required to sell their labour power to the capitalist class in exchange for a wage with which they can buy essential commodities (Harman, 2004; Heller, 2011: 12). Overall, then, the capitalist mode of production can be defined by the drive for surplus production and accumulation, which is achieved through the relations between the capitalist owners of the means of production and the wagedworkers, who are forced to sell their labour power to survive.

Debates on the Origins

Political Marxism, adhered to by scholars such as Robert Brenner and Ellen Wood, is one of the leading contemporary schools of thought that has theorised the origins of capitalism (Rioux, 2013: 94). The tradition began in 1977 with Brenner's publication of *The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism*, in which he critiques World Systems Analysis for being neo-Smithian because of its focus on exchange relations as opposed to class relations (i.e. relations of production). Brenner (1977: 27) views the relations of production that characterise the capitalist mode as requiring the complete commodification of labour power, which for him, means the establishment of wage labour.

Thus, Brenner (1977: 75) situates the origins of these distinctively capitalist social productive relations – and with them, the capitalist mode of production – in sixteenth century England. In the fourteenth century, class conflict between the feudal serfs and the ruling classes had led to the collapse of the feudal mode of production (Brenner, 1977: 78). This meant that landlords were given control over land – but no longer had control over people (Brenner, 1977: 78). As a result, they began introducing competitive land leases, a process which was followed by massive competition between capitalist farmers and ultimately resulted in the unprecedented rise in labour productivity that is so specific to the capitalist mode of production as a whole (Brenner, 1977: 78). Therefore, according to Brenner (1977: 78), the 'drive towards accumulation via innovation in agriculture' was the result of the prevailing relations of production, rather than being the cause of them.

In 2002, Wood's publication of *The Origins of Capitalism* further contributed to the PM literature regarding the transition debate. Wood (2002: 95) stressed the importance of capitalist exploitation being defined by economic as opposed type /n9.5 (18)2.7 (c)0.W5.7 (ypr.7 (a)-6J0.0c 0 Tw 24

occurred in a number of ways: firstly, the imperatives of competition and improvement that existed in English agriculture meant that it was far more productive than agriculture in continental Europe (Wood, 2002: 131-133). This productive agricultural sector was necessary in allowing a large urban workforce to emerge as it was able to mass produce basic subsistence commodities required by said workforce (Wood, 2002: 142). Secondly, the dispossession of peasants from their land during the enclosure movement meant that London became the largest European city by the eighteenth century from which a strong national market was able to emerge (Wood, 2002: 133). Here, there materialised a large consumer base that could purchase cheap everyday products, which subsequently fuelled the industrialisation process, ultimately resulting in the establishment of industrial capitalism (Wood, 2002: 142).

Both Wood and Brenner are critical of arguments that link the birth of capitalism to imperialism. According to Wood (2002: 147), capitalism emerged in the sixteenth-century England, which at the time was not the leading imperial power. The leading imperial powers in the sixteenth century were Spain and Portugal, which did not develop in a capitalist fashi

a clear-cut distinction between the two.

PM is right to advocate for the clear distinction between free wage labour and enslaved labour. Some scholars have, contrarily, argued that the boundaries between free and coerced labour may not be as clear as they seem. Rioux (2013: 120), for instance, contends that the transition from feudalism to capitalism represented a change in the form of servitude, not in the essence of servitude, suggesting that free wage labourers are still servants/slaves. This is because free wage labourers are still exploited by the capitalist class to whom they need to sell their labour power.

Parisot (2019: 289) has, on a similar line, argued that because slaves could hire themselves out on their day off and sell their labour power for money, i.e. work as wage labourers, the distinction between free and coerced labour is not as clear cut as it may seem. The problem with these arguments is that they undermine the distinctiveness as well as severity of exploitation under slavery, a severity that does not exist in any other form of exploitation. At no point should the exploitation of a free wage labourer (i.e. the lack of owning the means of production) be compared to the exploitation of an enslaved worker, as in the latter's case it is not one's labour that is a commodity but it is one's body, one's soul, one's being. The acknowledgement of this distinctiveness is a great strength in the PM literature.

511) himself said that “[absolute surplus value] forms the general groundwork of the capitalist system, and the starting point for the production of relative surplus value”. This suggests that, while relative surplus value production becomes more dominant as capitalism advances, the production of both forms is necessary to overall capitalist accumulation.

Brenner and Wood’s analyses use a positivist methodology, referred to as ‘analytical Marxism’, which hinders them from seeing the interconnectedness of capitalism’s contradictory features (Heller, 2011: 41). This positivist methodology is grounded in seeing monocausal links between two variables, one independent and one dependent and is, thus, similar to methodological individualism employed in neo-classical economics (Heller, 2011: 71). To counter this limitation, I will be using a dialectical approach, which focuses on seeing interconnections and relations as opposed to isolating distinct phenomena.

Furthermore, Brenner’s (1977) dismissal of Wallerstein and World Systems Analysis as ‘neo-Smithians’ is interesting considering how close to Adam Smith he is in his conceptualisation of the relationship between slavery and labour productivity. Smith (1999[1776]: 973) stated that “... the work done by slaves, though it appears to cost only their maintenance, is in the end the dearest of any. A person who can acquire no property, can have no other interest but to eat as much, and to labour as little as possible”. In other words, Smith argued that slave labour is inherently unproductive because enslaved people have no incentive to produce more efficiently, since they cannot acquire property.

Similarly, Brenner (1974: 30) sees wage labour as being the only defining factor in effectuating unprecedented increases in productivity. Kenneth Morgan (2000: 51), on the contrary, has found that slaveowners increasingly began using labour-saving, productivity-increasing technologies like grinding mills and steam engines on sugar plantations. They also revolutionised the labour process through technical improvements like introducing new methods of cutting sugar. Thus, in Jamaica, labour productivity amongst slaves increased by 35 per cent

Moreover, Wood's dismissal of the links between capitalism and imperialism on the basis that Spain and Portugal were the frontrunners in the colonial project in the sixteenth century is based on a limited empirical grounding. Firstly, England had already defeated Spain in 1588 turning back the Spanish Armada, ending Spanish naval dominance and paving the way for England's imperial supremacy (Morgan, 2000: 6). Secondly, while Spain and Portugal were indeed the primary powers to extract bullion from the Americas in the sixteenth century, they acted as conduits, transferring this bullion to major European financial hubs like Antwerp, Amsterdam, London, Paris and Genoa, thereby increasing capital in the Old World (Anievas & Nisancioglu, 2015: 143). In fact, nearly 50 per cent of the bullion obtained by Spain ended up in Holland, with Holland subsequently acting as a distribution centre for the rest of Europe, passing it onto the British Isles, Germany and Northern Europe (Anievas & Nisancioglu, 2015: 143). This demonstrates that despite colonial exploitation being primarily driven by Spain and Portugal in the sixteenth century, the gains from this exploitation were passed on to most of North

PM's conceptualisation of capitalism is Eurocentric because it only applies in the European example, thus declaring all other transitions to capitalism that occurred outside of Europe as anomalies (Heller, 2011: 4). This is a key feature of Eurocentrism because the processes that occurred in Europe are portrayed as characteristic of a global system and the differing developments in the colonised world were seen as outliers that do not impact the theory more broadly (Higginbottom, 2018: 32). Thus, PM's analyses fall into the category of what Blaut (2000: 133) calls "Eurocentric diffusionism". According to Blaut (2000: 128-129), Eurocentric diffusionism is the idea that all systems, developments and ideas first occur in Europe and from there diffuse or spread to the rest of the world. Both Brenner (1977: 27) and Wood's (2002: 145) argument that capitalism emerged solely in Europe with the non-European world being a static part ready to be subsumed by capitalist diffusion is the epitome of such an analysis. Wood (2002: 142) states that "wparayio2.8 (c)2.8 ()].9 (t)ofh wy (de)3-0.5 konid 0 Tw (")Tj7.8"t.0 59 0 6 8426.66reW

legislative acts passed in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, including the Vagabonds Act of 1597, which allowed for the removal of 'criminals' to the colonies to work in penal servitude (Anievas & Nişancioğlu, 2015: 151).

Thus, by the end of the seventeenth century, a total of 350,000 English people had crossed the Atlantic (Morgan, 2000: 6). Evidently, both of the factors that made England unique in its ability to deal with surplus populations were inextricably linked to England's colonial activities. As the removal of surplus populations was key for the transition from agrarian to industrial capitalism, the colonies played a major role in this process. Otherwise, the development of the capitalist mode could have become stagnant in the agrarian capitalist period of the sixteenth century (Anievas & Nişancioğlu, 2015: 152).

commodities that are required for the subsistence of the labouring class are cheapened, wages can be depressed without harming the reproduction of the working class. This, ultimately, leads to a reduction in necessary labour (wages) and a consequent increase in surplus labour (profit)

industrialisation (Morgan, 2000). This does not explain why in the half century before the Industrial Revolution began, Britain was the world's largest exporter (Heller, 2011: 168). In fact, between 1700 and 1760 British exports made up 56 percent of global industrial production, the prime importers of these products being North America, the Caribbean and Latin America (Heller, 2011: 168). Thus, it is evident that it was in fact the intensification of trade that not only preceded industrialisation but also acted as its stimulus.

A large portion of Britain's exports were in fact re-exports i.e. commodities that Britain had imported in raw form from its colonies and was subsequently re-exporting to other countries (Morgan, 2000: 18). Between 1700 and 1797, re-----

made from the Atlantic trade were invested in shipbuilding, snuff mills, sugar refineries, glassworks, ironworks, textiles and coal mines (Morgan, 2000: 59). Devine (1967: 1), for instance, has tracked the investments by tobacco, sugar, cotton, and rum merchants in Glasgow into Scottish industries, demonstrating a clear link. For instance, between 1730 and 1780, there were 163 merchants based in Glasgow involved in the colonial trade, more than half of which were investing their capital in extractive industries (Devine, 1967: 3). Hence, coal, iron and textile manufacturing became the three major industrialising sectors in Scotland during the eighteenth century (Devine, 1967: 3). Morgan (2000: 59), similarly, found that the mercantile capital that amassed in Bristol due to its colonial trading links, was invested in the mining industry in South Wales and Shropshire. The mercantile capital accumulated in Liverpool was invested in salt works, sugar refineries, breweries and distilleries as well as in copper, glass and iron smelting in Liverpool and south Lancashire (Morgan, 2000: 59). Furthermore, the capital accumulated primarily from the tobacco trade in the port of Glasgow was invested in textiles, iron, sugar refining, glassworks and leather manufactories across Scotland (Morgan, 2000: 59).

Britain's involvement in the slave trade was halted in 1807 and slavery itself was abolished in Britain in 1834 (Britain's Forgotten Slaveowners, 2015). However, even in its abolition slavery provided a last push for industrialisation in Britain. The modern equivalent of £17 billion was paid out as compensation to former slaveowners for losing their human property upon abolition (Olusoga, 2018). This money was subsequently invested into the British economy and fuelled industrialisation further (Britain's Forgotten Slaveowners, 2015).

Credit Provision

Profits made from the slave trade also helped build several banks in Britain that consequently acted as creditors for industrialisation. For instance, David and Alexander Barclay were able to establish Barclay's Bank as a result of the profits they made from first being involved in the slave trade (Rodney, 2012[1972]: 85). Furthermore, between 1750 and 1775, British colonial merchants helped establish the first banks in Bristol, Glasgow and Liverpool (Morgan, 2000: 77). For instance, Bristolian merchants trading in slaves, sugar and tobacco

helped establish the Old Bank in 1750, the Miles Bank in 1752 and the Harford Bank in 1769 (Morgan, 2000: 77). One of the major ways in which these and other banks fuelled the development of capitalism was through the provision of credit to manufacturers (Morgan, 2000:

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