



BRILL

# Elements of a Historical-Materialist Theory of Racism

*David Camfield*

University of Manitoba, Winnipeg

*david.camfield@umanitoba.ca*

## Abstract

This article aims to advance the historical-materialist understanding of racism by addressing some central theoretical questions. It argues that racism should be understood as a social relation of oppression rather than as solely or primarily an ideology, and suggests that a historical-materialist concept of race is necessary in order to capture features of societies shaped by historically specific racisms. A carefully conceived concept of privilege is also required if we are to grasp the contradictory ways in which members of dominant racial groups are affected by social relations of racial oppression. The persistence of racism today should be explained as a consequence of two dimensions of the capitalist mode of production – imperialism and the contribution of racism to profitability – and of a social property emergent from racism: the efforts of members of dominant groups to preserve their advantages relative to the racially oppressed.

## Keywords

Racism – race – privilege – theory – Marxism – historical materialism

Upsurges of racism in many parts of the world today underscore why it is important for historical materialists to be able to understand this form of oppression in order to be able to act effectively against it.<sup>1</sup> But the ability

---

1 Thanks to Felix Boggio Éwanjé-Épéé, Susan Ferguson, Todd Gordon, David McNally, Jeffery Webber, Sheila Wilmot, the editors of *Historical Materialism* and the anonymous referees for comments on earlier versions of this article.

of historical materialism to provide an adequate account of racism is widely questioned among anti-racist analysts. In light of the widespread inattention to racism or inadequate analysis of it in the Marxist tradition, this scepticism is not unreasonable.

Frantz Fanon once famously suggested that 'Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to deal with the colonial problem';<sup>2</sup> I believe that this is also true whenever racism is concerned. There is plenty of evidence that historical materialism can be expanded in this way. As Betsy Esch and David Roediger maintain, 'Marxism has produced the best tools for understanding race and racism.'<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, all too often these are not put to use. Moreover, many would agree with critical race theorist Charles Mills's observation that 'while I am sympathetic to the claim that historical materialism ultimately provides the most promising theoretical tool for understanding the genesis and persistence of racism, that does not mean that I am not also aware of the many problems there have been in Marxist attempts to theorise race in its multidimensionality. So this seems to me more of a project in progress than a successfully completed one.'<sup>4</sup>

The objective of this article is to contribute to this project by addressing the most basic questions that confront it, questions which historical materialists have rarely treated head-on: how ought we to understand the concepts of racism, race and privilege, and how should the persistence of racism be explained? I argue that racism should be theorised as a distinct phenomenon rather than in terms of a less specific category inherited from classical Marxism, and that it is best understood as a social relation of oppression rather than as solely or primarily an ideology. Ever since the genesis of racial oppression various historically-specific racisms (which it is beyond the scope of this article to analyse) have been part of the mutually mediating matrices of social relations of which societies have been composed. Against those who reject all talk of race, I suggest that a historical-materialist concept of race is necessary in order to capture features of societies shaped by racism. A carefully conceived

---

2 Fanon 1968, p. 40. In referring to Fanon, I do not mean to equate colonialism and racism, which are distinct forms of oppression. Colonialism involves one society conquering another and then ruling over it. Where it exists today it is always interwoven with racism. However, racial oppression frequently exists in the absence of colonialism (although the presence of racially-oppressed populations within imperialist countries obviously arises out of histories of colonialism). This article does not attempt to take up the interlocked colonialism and racism inflicted on indigenous peoples (see Lawrence and Dua 2005 and Sharma and Wright 2008).

3 Esch and Roediger 2014.

4 Mills 2009, p. 272.

concept of privilege is also required if we are to grasp the contradictory ways in which members of dominant racial groups are affected by social relations of racial oppression. Finally, the fact that racism remains a very real feature of the contemporary world should be explained as a consequence of two dimensions of the capitalist mode of production – imperialism and the profitability of racism – and of a social property emergent from racism, namely the efforts of members of dominant groups to preserve their advantages relative to the racially oppressed.

By refining and presenting key theoretical tools, I hope to encourage more people who do historical-materialist research to put them to use and to stimulate discussion about how best to integrate anti-racism into our analyses. Consequently, this article aims to engage all who do historical-materialist research on the contemporary world and on historical settings in which racism has been present, not just those whose research focuses on racism. To acknowledge some delimitations, this contribution is developed on the basis mainly of English-language texts produced within advanced capitalist countries by writers primarily concerned with questions of social structure (rather than philosophy or cultural representations). It is also mainly concerned with racism within these countries.<sup>5</sup> It proceeds from two assumptions: first, in spite of the value of some existing historical-materialist work on the subject, most of the inherited Marxist tradition does not deal with racism adequately, and, second, better answers to basic theoretical questions can help remedy this weakness. To provide such answers, historical materialists need to draw on the best previous work in our tradition and draw on theoretical insights developed in other traditions, stretching but not breaking from historical materialism.<sup>6</sup>

Before proceeding, it is worth considering a prominent objection to the claim made by Esch and Roediger to which Mills also declares himself sympathetic. Some critics argue not just that existing historical-materialist attempts to understand racism have fallen short but that historical materialism is inherently incapable of dealing with racism in an adequate way. Notable here is Cedric Robinson, whose *Black Marxism* aims to excavate the ‘Black radical tradition’. Robinson contends that Marxism is inescapably a product of Western civilisation, one of whose ‘ordering ideas’ has, since the feudal era, been ‘racialism: the legitimation and corroboration of social organisation as natural by reference to the “racial” components of its elements’. As a result,

---

5 However, this approach can readily be used in other settings in which racial oppression is practised by a dominant group whose identity is not white (for example, Hindu fascism in contemporary India, to use one reviewer’s example).

6 I discuss this approach in Camfield 2014.

‘the deepest structures of “historical materialism,” the foreknowledge for its comprehension of historical movement, have tended to relieve European Marxists from the obligation of investigating the profound effects of culture and historical experience on their science.’<sup>7</sup> Historical materialism is, he claims, an economic-reductionist theory that is unable to reckon properly with matters of ideology, culture and consciousness, including how the ‘particularistic forces of racism and nationalism’ shaped the development of capitalism.<sup>8</sup>

Robinson’s writing on Marxism raises a host of issues; I will limit myself here to the question of whether historical materialism is inherently incapable of being reconstructed to deal with racism. This is Robinson’s view, yet he offers no direct and detailed engagement with core concepts of historical materialism in order to demonstrate its alleged incapacity. This is what would be required to sustain his claim; identifying weaknesses in the thought of Marx, Engels and other Marxists is not enough. Historical materialism as a theoretical approach cannot be equated with what Marx or any other Marxist wrote, even if this habit has been common among both its would-be practitioners and foes.

*Black Marxism* was published in 1983, the year after the publication of *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, a milestone in anti-racist historical-materialist analysis.<sup>9</sup> Yet Robinson does not examine this book or Stuart Hall’s work on racism that influenced it.<sup>10</sup> Nor does he scrutinise the contributions of non-European Marxists such as Jose Carlos Mariategui, Amilcar Cabral and Walter Rodney<sup>11</sup> or other work that demonstrates a concern with developing theory to understand the specificities of non-European societies. But, given Robinson’s concern with ideology, culture and consciousness, perhaps the most remarkable absence is any consideration of Gramsci’s theoretical contributions. In addition to the lack of attention to core concepts of historical materialism and the limited review of theorists working in this tradition, Robinson’s case can also be questioned on methodological grounds. Its positing of deep structures of civilisational thought that persist at a level beneath that at which people socially produce and reproduce the means of life and life itself separates consciousness from existence. This is an idealism that resembles the target of Marx and Engels’s critique in *The*

---

7 Robinson 2000, p. 2. See also Robinson 2001.

8 Robinson 2000, pp. 66, 10–11.

9 Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1982.

10 Hall 1980.

11 The latter two are cited in Robinson 2000 but their contributions are not considered in relation to its verdict on historical materialism.

*German Ideology*.<sup>12</sup> Considering these failings,<sup>13</sup> it is not difficult to conclude that Robinson fails to provide a compelling case that historical materialism is irredeemable when it comes to understanding racism.<sup>14</sup> I therefore proceed to consider the most basic question to which an anti-racist historical materialism needs to be able to provide a well-developed answer.

### What is Racism?

In addition to an anti-imperialism that over the years became increasingly radical 'just as his theory of social development evolved in a more multilinear direction',<sup>15</sup> Marx had some perceptive insights about a few realities of his day that we can readily understand as racism even though they were not identified in those terms at the time. He famously observed in 1870 that

Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two *hostile* camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life . . . He cherishes religious, social and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the 'poor whites' to the Negroes in the former slave states of the USA . . . *This antagonism is the secret of*

---

12 Marx and Engels 1970.

13 In addition, the discussion in *Black Marxism* of what Robinson sees as racial thinking in feudal Europe does not stand up well in light of more recent historical studies (see Bethencourt 2013), and its treatment of the history of capitalism has major problems stemming from the commercialisation model found in the work of Pirenne, Braudel and Wallerstein (see Wood 2002 and Brenner 1977) on which it draws. My reference here to Wood and Brenner should not be interpreted as an uncritical endorsement of their perspective on the origins of capitalism, which I see as very important (see Dimmock 2014) but insufficient. For a discussion of some 'international determinations and conditions' missing from the work of Brenner, Wood and many others influenced by them, see Anievas and Nisancioglu 2013.

14 Robinson's focus is ultimately more on Marxian socialism as a politics of liberation than on historical materialism as a theoretical approach. Although obviously of tremendous importance, this and Robinson's political alternative (whose utopian-socialist character is very evident in Robinson 2001) are beyond the scope of this article.

15 Anderson 2010, p. 244. On these dimensions of Marx's thought, see Anderson 2010, Achcar 2013 and Pradella 2015.

*the impotence of the English working class*, despite its organisation. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power.<sup>16</sup>

However, Marx did not theorise racism as such or recognise that, since its emergence, societies have been socially organised by racism as well as by relations of class (and by those of gender and sexuality).<sup>17</sup>

In the broadest terms, we can identify five ways that racism – understood just for the moment in a loose sense as the domination experienced in the modern era by non-Europeans, people of non-European ancestry and Jews at the hands of Europeans and people of European ancestry, as distinguished from earlier forms of subjugation and religious persecution (a more precise definition is developed below) – has been conceptualised among historical materialists. The first three approaches do not accord racism much specificity and subsume it into existing categories, which are sometimes combined.<sup>18</sup> It is these understandings that we find in classical Marxism in its heyday.<sup>19</sup> The other two approaches, which are more recent, attempt to deal with racism as a distinct phenomenon.

### *Super-exploitation*

Some Marxists have treated racism as fundamentally a matter of an exceptional level of class exploitation inflicted on a particular population. This view was present, for example, among early Communists in the US<sup>20</sup> and one current within the ‘New Communist Movement’ in the US in the 1970s. According to a publication of one group within that current, racism is ‘the super-exploitation of black people’ and ‘Race is only one aspect of labor/capital class conflict.’<sup>21</sup> As one commentator has written, this position ‘acknowledges the specificity of Afro-American oppression beyond general working-class exploitation, yet it defines this specificity in economic terms.’<sup>22</sup>

---

16 Marx and Engels 1975, p. 222.

17 The effort in Paolucci 2006 to show that there are concepts of Marx’s that are vital to the analysis of racism evades the issue of what is not found in Marx’s work.

18 For example, see Bonacich 1999.

19 For example, see Communist International 1983, Reed 1920, Stewart 1985, Trotsky 1978.

20 See Reed 1920.

21 The New Voice 1975.

22 West 1988, p. 19.

### *National Oppression*

This approach treats racism as a manifestation of the oppression of one nation by another, a phenomenon familiar to historical materialists from Marx onwards.<sup>23</sup> This was how the Sixth Congress of the Communist International (1928) characterised the condition of African-Americans.<sup>24</sup> More recently, Theodore Allen has argued that national oppression exists when ‘social control depends upon the acceptance and fostering of social distinctions within the oppressed group’ rather than on denying such distinctions. This, he suggests, was the case in Britain’s Caribbean colonies and in Ireland after Catholic Emancipation.<sup>25</sup>

### *Denial of Democratic Rights*

Prior to the development of efforts to grasp racism as a distinct phenomenon, which stemmed from the rise of anti-imperialist and anti-racist struggles from the 1950s through the 1970s, it was very common to consider racism in terms of the denial of rights established in capitalist democracies. For instance, in 1933 Max Shachtman condemned the ‘vast code of white master class laws, written and unwritten, [that] operates to keep the American Negro in an inferior social, economic and political position’, adding that ‘The abstract democratic equality for the Negro which was written into the Constitution three generations ago has remained on paper.’<sup>26</sup>

### *Ideology*

In *Caste, Class, and Race*, Oliver Cox raised the level of historical-materialist discussion of racism by attempting to distinguish what he called ‘race relations’ from other phenomena. ‘What then is the phenomenon, the beginnings of which we seek to determine? It is the phenomenon of the capitalist exploitation of peoples and its complementary social attitude.’ Dubbing ‘race prejudice’ as ‘an attitudinal instrument of modern human, economic, exploitation’ dating from European colonialism in the Americas after 1492, he argued it was ‘propagated among the public by an exploiting class for the purpose of stigmatising some group as inferior so that the exploitation of either the group itself or its resources or both may be justified.’<sup>27</sup> This, in spite of its very real weaknesses, was an effort to theorise racism as such in a historical and

---

23 Löwy 1998.

24 Naison 1983, pp. 17–19.

25 Allen 1994, pp. 241, n. 11, 36.

26 Shachtman 2003, p. 40.

27 Cox 1948, pp. 321, 330, 393.

materialist way, avoiding ahistorical theories of inter-group enmity and the ‘substitution of the history of a system of rationalisation for that of a material social fact.’<sup>28</sup> It contends that racism is an ideology justifying exploitation. This understanding of racism as a ruling-class instrument has contemporary exponents, and has been strikingly echoed by Robert Young.<sup>29</sup>

Anti-imperialist struggles and anti-racist organising within imperialist countries during the Long Boom, above all the African-American freedom movement, stimulated new historical-materialist efforts to comprehend racism. A notable effort to theorise racism as ideology was made by Stuart Hall. ‘It is clear’, Hall argued,

that ‘racism,’ if not exclusively an ideological phenomenon, has critical ideological dimensions. Hence, the relative crudity and reductionism of materialist theories of ideology have proved a considerable stumbling block in the necessary work of analysis in this area. Especially, the analysis has been foreshortened by a homogenous, non-contradictory conception of consciousness and of ideology.<sup>30</sup>

Hall strove to provide an alternative to economic-reductionist conceptions of racism and to those that treat racism as one of a number of independent factors that shape events. Suggesting that Althusser supplemented by Gramsci<sup>31</sup> provided the theoretical resources for a non-reductionist historical-materialist approach to racism, he noted ‘there is as yet no adequate theory of racism which is capable of dealing with both the economic and the superstructural features’ of ‘racially-structured social formations’ ‘while at the same time giving a historically-concrete and sociologically-specific account of distinctive racial aspects.’<sup>32</sup> Hall emphasised that such a theory would need to apply ‘the premise of historical specificity’ to study ‘historically-specific racisms’. It would need to bear in mind that ‘one cannot explain racism in abstraction from other social relations – even if, alternatively, one cannot explain it by reducing it to those relations.’<sup>33</sup> He proposed that ‘One must start, then, from the concrete historical “work” which racism accomplishes under specific historical conditions – as a set of economic, political and ideological practices, of a distinctive kind,

---

28 Cox 1948, p. 321.

29 See Young 2006, p. 38.

30 Hall 1986, p. 26.

31 On Hall’s interpretation of Gramsci’s use for the study of racism, see Hall 1986.

32 Hall 1980, p. 336.

33 Hall 1980, pp. 336, 337.



concretely articulated with other practices in a social formation.<sup>34</sup> It was this approach that informed the influential historical-materialist studies of racism in the UK produced by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.<sup>35</sup>

Writing in the wake of Hall's contributions, which he faulted for not pinpointing 'what the many different racisms have in common qua racism',<sup>36</sup> Robert Miles proposed that racism be understood strictly as ideology, identified by its content, and rigorously distinguished from 'exclusionary practice'. Miles and coauthor Malcolm Brown suggest that 'the precise definition of ideology is not important', although they stress that racism is 'an ideology because it represents human beings, and social relations, in a distorted manner'. 'Rather, it is the *content* of this ideology that is important.'<sup>37</sup> Racism signifies

some biological and/or somatic characteristic(s) as the criterion by which populations are identified. In this way, these populations are represented as having a natural, unchanging origin and status, and therefore as being inherently different. . . . Second, one or more of the groups so identified must be attributed with additional (negatively evaluated) characteristics and/or must be represented as inducing negative consequences for (an)other group(s). Those characteristics or consequences may be either biological or cultural.<sup>38</sup>

Connected to this approach is a concept of racialisation: the 'process by which meaning is attributed to particular biological features of human beings, as a result of which individuals may be assigned to a general category of persons that reproduces itself biologically. This process has a long history in precapitalist and capitalist societies'.<sup>39</sup> Thus racism is 'a particular form of (evaluative) representation that is a specific instance of a wider (descriptive) process of racialisation'.<sup>40</sup> Whether particular exclusionary practices involve racism demands specific investigations; 'exclusionary practices that result in disadvantage for racialised groups cannot be assumed to be determined

---

34 Hall 1980, p. 338.

35 Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1982.

36 Miles and Brown 2003, p. 63. This coauthored book is a revised edition of Miles 1989, hence my reference in the text to this as Miles's perspective. Miles discusses his work in an interview: Ashe and McGeever 2011.

37 Miles and Brown 2003, pp. 8, 9, 8.

38 Miles and Brown 2003, p. 104.

39 Miles and Brown 2003, p. 102.

40 Miles and Brown 2003, p. 109.

wholly or in part by racism.<sup>41</sup> Miles's approach has an enduring influence within academic Marxism in the UK.<sup>42</sup>

### *Social Relation of Oppression*

The Black Power movement in the US also generated a way of theorising the specificity of racism which does not treat it as solely or primarily a matter of ideology. Conceptualising racism as a form of oppression – as distinct from class exploitation and alienation – is the hallmark of this approach, which has not been theoretically elaborated to the same extent as racism-as-ideology. However, many of its adherents would agree with the general idea that oppression exists when 'groups within and across classes, identified by ascribed characteristics, are subjected to specific discriminatory practices' and that racism is a unique instance of oppression.<sup>43</sup>

Robert Blauner's *Racial Oppression in America* was a significant text of its time in this regard. For Blauner, racism should be understood as racial oppression, which involves 'a dominant group, which thinks of itself as distinct and superior, rais[ing] its social position by exploiting, controlling, and keeping down others who are categorised in racial or ethnic terms.'<sup>44</sup>

Blauner's work displays sympathy to historical materialism rather than using historical-materialist concepts; he openly acknowledged that in his book 'racial oppression and racial conflict are not satisfactorily linked to the dominant economic relations nor to the overall distribution of political power in America.'<sup>45</sup> In the same period, avowed Marxists were also advancing ways of understanding racism that aimed to go beyond limited inherited notions of super-exploitation, national oppression and unequal rights by identifying racism as a specific form of oppression and which did not conceptualise it as ideology. For example, in 1967 Noel Ignatin emphasised that 'the practice of white supremacy' provided the 'material basis' of 'the ideology of white chauvinism'.<sup>46</sup>

Ignatin's cothinker Theodore Allen later argued that racial oppression is a system of social control that 'depends upon the denial of the legitimacy of social distinctions within the oppressed group'.<sup>47</sup> Alex Callinicos's claim that

41 Miles and Brown 2003, p. 112.

42 For example, Carter 2007; Carter and Virdee 2008.

43 Bakan 2008, p. 249.

44 Blauner 1972, p. 22.

45 Blauner 1972, p. 13.

46 Ignatin 1976, p. 1.

47 Allen 1994, p. 241, n. 11.

‘racism exists where a group of people is discriminated against on the basis of characteristics which are held to be inherent in them as a group’ is a less restrictive way of characterising the specific distinguishing feature of racism as oppression.<sup>48</sup> Étienne Balibar’s assertion that ‘racism is a social relation’ makes explicit an idea that is generally implicit in this approach.<sup>49</sup>

### The Concept of Race

In addition to divergent views on the nature of racism as a social phenomenon, disagreement exists around the concept of race. There is overwhelming agreement among anti-racist social researchers that there is no biological basis for any notion of race.<sup>50</sup> However, there is no unanimity about how to answer the question of whether a concept of race understood as referring to a product of society has any legitimacy. Both historical materialists and other critical analysts of racism are divided between those whom Mills dubs eliminativists, who believe ‘race should be seen as comparable to “phlogiston” (an element supposedly released during combustion whose existence was disproved by the chemist Lavoisier in the eighteenth century) and purged from our theoretical vocabulary, and anti-eliminativists who redefine race ‘so it refers to one’s structural location in a racialised social system... [w]ithout implying any biological referent.’<sup>51</sup>

The anti-eliminativist case suggests, in Roediger’s words, that ‘race is itself a critically important social fact... Race also defines the consciousness of commonality uniting those oppressed as a result of their assumed biology, perceived colour, and alleged cultural heritage, as well as the fellow feeling of those defending relative privileges derived from being part of [a] dominant... race.’<sup>52</sup> Hall argues that race is ‘the modality in which class is “lived,” the medium through which class relations are experienced, the form in which it is appropriated and “fought through.”’<sup>53</sup> From a different anti-eliminativist angle, Allen maintains that ‘it is not “race” in general that must be understood, but the “white race,” in particular; so the “white race” must be

---

48 Callinicos 1992, p. 6.

49 Balibar and Wallerstein 1991, p. 41.

50 For a good critical discussion of this and ‘the new racial science’, see Roberts 2011.

51 Mills 2012.

52 Roediger 2008, p. xii.

53 Hall 1980, p. 341.

understood, not simply as a social construct, but as a *ruling class social control formation*.<sup>54</sup>

Arguing for eliminativism, Miles and Brown ‘do not deny that the structure of social stratification can be and is racialised’ but argue that when race is used in social explanation ‘what needs to be represented as a social process and explained is reconstructed as a social fact that can be used to explain other social facts’.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Robert Carter rejects the concept because of its dubious history and because ‘the discrediting of its ontological referent – races of human beings – leaves it without an object’. It is, Carter contends, ‘impossible to formulate a research question using it that is capable of being answered’.<sup>56</sup>

### Elucidating Racism as a Social Relation of Oppression

It is my contention that the most promising way to develop a stronger historical-materialist approach to racism is to theorise it as a social relation of oppression with an anti-eliminativist understanding of race. At the outset it is useful to identify two foundational guidelines for any adequate historical-materialist approach to racism. First, care must be taken to avoid retaining residual naturalist or transhistorical notions. For example, at one point Hall suggests that ‘the question is not whether men-in-general make perceptual distinctions between groups with different racial or ethnic characteristics, but rather, what are the specific conditions that make this form of distinction socially pertinent, historically active.’<sup>57</sup> This suggests that racial characteristics define groups prior to historically-specific social processes of racialisation. Second, there must be no minimisation of racism. One version of this is the downplaying of the impact of racism on racially oppressed persons or of racism’s social significance.<sup>58</sup> Another is the diminution of racism’s ontological status. This is evident in Mike Cole’s stark assertion that ‘it is *capitalism*, not white supremacy, that is a structural system of oppression’.<sup>59</sup> Such ontological claims treat racism as literally less real, in Cole’s case as an epiphenomenon

---

54 Allen 1998.

55 Miles and Brown 2003, pp. 7, 91.

56 Carter 2007, p. 446.

57 Hall 1980, p. 338.

58 See the examples discussed in Roediger 2006.

59 Cole 2009, p. 258. For a similar position, see Carter 2007, p. 448.

of capitalism, and are conducive to the minimisation of racism's social and political importance.

Those preliminaries aside, why should we treat racism as a social relation of oppression? I believe there are both historical and logical grounds for choosing this as an approach. In his recent historical work *Racisms*, Francisco Bethencourt argues that the evidence does not support 'the idea that the theory of races precedes racism – a relatively consensual view among historians': 'classification did not precede action'.<sup>60</sup> Consistent with this is Barbara Fields's important observation that 'people are more readily perceived as inferior by nature when they are already seen as oppressed'.<sup>61</sup> Although Bethencourt's definition of racism as 'prejudice concerning ethnic descent coupled with discriminatory action'<sup>62</sup> is inadequate, for reasons that will become clear below, his point that racial ideology did not precede racist practices suggests one reason why treating racism as ideology in the manner of Hall and Miles is not the best way to proceed.

Another is, simply, that a materialist method should prioritise human activity, while recognising that social being is always and everywhere conscious, intersubjective and linguistic. Historical materialism should not merely invert an idealist elevation of ideas (or discourse) over matter, although this habit has unfortunately been common in the history of Marxism. Rather, it should follow Marx in rejecting the dualism of material and ideal altogether and asserting the unity of consciousness and human individuals, so that social existence and social consciousness are seen as an internally-related ensemble. Within that unity, there is a hierarchy of determination: bodies are prior to or determinate of thought. 'Starting from the standpoint of objects, of the non-conceptual, materialist critique resists all idealist moves to absorb the object into concepts.'<sup>63</sup> Such methodological premises do not prevent us from recognising the importance of racist ideology. However, they do suggest that racism should not be theorised primarily in terms of ideology.

Along with these general reasons for choosing the social relation of oppression approach over that of racism-as-ideology, it is also worth addressing some problems in the versions of the latter developed by Cox, Hall and Miles. Cox's instrumentalist theory 'assumes that the capitalist class *as a whole* benefit[s] from racism', whereas racism's effects may be contradictory for at least some capitalists. It also portrays racism 'as inauthentic to the working

---

60 Bethencourt 2013, p. 3.

61 Fields and Fields 2012, p. 128.

62 Bethencourt 2013, p. 1.

63 McNally 2001, p. 74.

class, something externally imposed by the ideological dominance of the ruling class. This [is] not only sociologically unpersuasive, but it discourage[s] serious consideration of racism within the working class, since the real sources of such racism [are] held to be the ruling class and its functional need to manage the conditions of labour exploitation.<sup>64</sup>

The emphatic separation by Miles of 'exclusionary practice' from racism as ideology has the unfortunate consequence of distancing racism as he defines it from the material realities of what Bethencourt dubs 'discriminatory action'. If racism involves the ideological signification of a group on the basis of allegedly natural characteristics and the identification of negative qualities or consequences, then it is possible to say that racism exists in the absence of any significant 'exclusionary practice'. In Miles's terms, a system of 'anti-white' beliefs present among a profoundly-marginalised and impoverished community of recent African immigrants in a European country could qualify as racism; this detaches racism from any considerations of social power. Even more troubling is the difficulty that Miles's separation creates for identifying racism when 'biological and/or somatic' characteristics are not, or not explicitly, 'the criterion by which populations are identified'<sup>65</sup> in ideology. For example, Miles and Brown quite consistently conclude that 'Islamophobia is not to be regarded as an instance of racism'.<sup>66</sup> However, Fanny Müller-Uri and Benjamin Opratko make the important point that 'anti-Muslim racism works by essentialising cultural difference, that is to say the construction of *Islam* as a static, homogenous and characteristically different culture',<sup>67</sup> a point whose broad significance will be taken up below.

Satnam Virdee's praise for Hall's contributions of the 1970s and early 1980s as 'a genuine *tour de force*' and 'the intellectual high point of scholarly work that was sparked by the mass protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s'<sup>68</sup> is merited. However, they are not without significant weaknesses. Hall's theory is, as Miles contends, imprecise about what makes racist ideology racist. Although Hall is not uncritical of Althusser's conception of ideology, his own theory, like Althusser's, is ultimately missing the important dimension of ideology-critique found in Marx (and also in Gramsci), which Hall 'erroneously reduces to a critique of "false consciousness"'.<sup>69</sup> As a result, it does not engage with

64 Carter 2007, p. 435.

65 Miles and Brown 2003, p. 104.

66 Miles and Brown 2003, p. 164.

67 Müller-Uri and Opratko 2013, p. 12.

68 Virdee 2010, pp. 144–5.

69 Rehmann 2013, p. 188. See also the excellent discussion of Althusser on pp. 147–8.

Marx's insights about how capitalist social relations generate "socially valid, and therefore... objective thought forms"... which are reproduced directly and spontaneously as "current and usual thought forms".<sup>70</sup> The influence of Althusser also explains why Hall is also 'unable to capture analytically how the class struggle, especially its intensification, *may* contribute to the destabilisation of well-entrenched racialised subjectivities.'<sup>71</sup> These specific problems along with those common to all versions of racism-as-ideology take us back to the need for an alternative approach.

What, then, of theorising racism as a social relation of oppression? While references to oppression by Marxists are longstanding, the development of a distinctive meaning for the term began as a response within advanced capitalist countries to the rise of new movements, among women, people who experience racism, and others in the 1960s. Activists in these eruptions of self-organisation all stressed their experience of forms of domination other than class exploitation and developed ideas to understand these. Oppression was the problem for which liberation was the solution. This term is preferable to others, such as discrimination and prejudice, because of its stronger connotations and its implication that the harm done is systemic and structural, quite often 'as a consequence of... the normal processes of everyday life'.<sup>72</sup>

In spite of their many important insights, non-Marxist theories of oppression do not offer a concept of oppression in general that can be used in historical materialism. This is because they almost always treat class as a form of oppression, consider forms of oppression as involving exploitation akin to class, or do both.<sup>73</sup> This is clear in, for example, Iris Marion Young's discussion of 'Five Faces of Oppression',<sup>74</sup> which posits exploitation as one of these faces, thereby subsuming it under an overarching notion of oppression. Such theories are unable to capture the distinctive differences between class exploitation and the phenomena I consider as forms of oppression; the same problem also occurs in Marxist work that fails to make a rigorous distinction between exploitation and oppression. Class, anchored in the extraction of surplus labour, has historically always been mediated by gender oppression

---

70 Rehmann 2013, p. 43.

71 Virdee 2010, p. 147. For the historical analysis of racism and class struggle in the UK in the 1970s that supports this claim about Hall, see Virdee 2000.

72 Young 1990, p. 41. Frye 2003 was an important theoretical contribution in this regard.

73 For a discussion of the second of these problems in Christine Delphy's feminist theory, see Arruzza 2013, pp. 92–7.

74 Young 1990, pp. 39–65. The same problem occurs in Cudd 2006 and Frye 2003.

and often by other forms of oppression.<sup>75</sup> But not all members of an exploited class must also be oppressed; consider the condition of higher-paid white male able-bodied heterosexual workers in advanced capitalist countries today, who endure exploitation and alienation but not oppression.

There is no truly adequate conceptualisation of oppression in general to be found in the many historical-materialist efforts to understand the forms of oppression to which feminist, anti-racist, national-liberation, lesbian and gay, indigenous and other movements draw attention and that do distinguish exploitation from oppression. For the sake of intellectual precision and clarity, I propose that oppression is best understood to mean *systemic harm, arising from social practices, inflicted on a group that is not constituted on the basis of a common relationship to social production*. Racism, sexism and heterosexism are qualitatively different instances of this general phenomenon.

Callinicos's contention that oppression 'on the basis of characteristics which are held to be inherent in . . . a group'<sup>76</sup> is the defining feature of racism begins to capture what distinguishes this form of domination. Unlike Miles, Callinicos appreciates that biological or somatic references are not essential features of racism. Unlike Allen's insistence that racial oppression involves 'the denial of the legitimacy of social distinctions within the oppressed group',<sup>77</sup> which entails that racism does not exist where oppressors recognise the legitimacy of high-status strata among the oppressed, Callinicos is not excessively narrow. Yet what Callinicos says of racism is also true of other forms of oppression, such as patriarchy, heterosexism and the oppression of people with disabilities, in cases where members of the oppressed group in question are seen to have relevant inherent characteristics. Thus his contention is not sufficiently precise.

It is therefore helpful to consider the conclusion reached by George Fredrickson at the end of *Racism: A Short History*, acknowledged by Bethencourt as the 'first general history of racism in the Western world'.<sup>78</sup> Fredrickson writes that 'we might say that racism exists when one ethnic group or historical collectivity dominates, excludes, or seeks to eliminate another on the basis of differences that it believes are hereditary and unalterable'.<sup>79</sup> Fredrickson's suggestion has a number of strengths. It is certainly better than Bethencourt's view of racism as 'prejudice concerning ethnic descent coupled with discriminatory action'<sup>80</sup>

75 On the historical inseparability of class and gender, see Coontz and Henderson 1986.

76 Callinicos 1992, p. 6.

77 Allen 1994, p. 241, n. 11.

78 Bethencourt 2013, p. 4.

79 Fredrickson 2002, p. 170.

80 Bethencourt 2013, p. 1.



because it foregrounds what amounts to oppression, rather than prejudice and discrimination. It also grasps that the differences alleged to exist are treated as not only inherited, as Bethencourt notes and Callinicos does not, but also inherent, a feature missed by Bethencourt. Fredrickson's conception tells us more about who suffers from racism than Callinicos's. It is compatible with Müller-Uri and Opratko's argument that

Historically, the construction of racist difference has always been about the essentialisation of socio-cultural differences that allegedly express themselves in biological characteristics, but only tendentially and always precariously. This brings us to see that while these cultural differences should tendentially be linked to bodily markers, racist discrimination does not stop where this isn't possible. This can be illustrated through many historical and contemporary examples where strategies of artificial visibilisation were necessary, such as the yellow badge/star of David in Antisemitism.<sup>81</sup>

However, Fredrickson's reference to ethnicity – a concept 'that emerged into social-science parlance in the 1950s as a way of avoiding the concept of race (while often holding on to much of its baggage)<sup>82</sup> – is unfortunate, since the meaning of this vexed term is not clarified.<sup>83</sup>

Building on Fredrickson, I believe that the following conceptualisation best fits the global historical evidence: racism is *the oppression of a multi-gender social collectivity on the basis of differences (not limited to those surrounding sexuality or impairment) that are treated as inherited and unchangeable*. This captures the defining feature, the oppression of communities of persons on the basis of differences that are, in practice, considered inherent and inherited, without limiting the differences in question to those that are supposedly biological.<sup>84</sup> It also clearly differentiates racial oppression from patriarchal oppression, heterosexism and the oppression of people with disabilities, which

81 Müller-Uri and Opratko 2013, p. 10.

82 Nirenberg 2014, p. 39.

83 On some problems with 'ethnicity', see Sizwe 2013.

84 Two readers for the journal questioned the claim that racial oppression always involves the essentialisation of differences, citing the treatment of migrants and of African-Americans seen as mired in a 'culture of poverty'. I believe the history of racism suggests that essentialisation of differences is a defining feature of this form of oppression. This essentialisation happens both in practice and in how racially-oppressed groups are presented ideologically; we should not limit ourselves to the latter. It is also possible for migrants to experience xenophobic oppression that is not racist in character.

frequently involve the essentialisation of socially-constructed differences in the oppressed group. Beyond this minimal characterisation, there is not much that can be said about the content of racial oppression in general. As Hall has argued, we should think in terms of 'historically-specific racisms' and avoid positing 'a common and universal structure to racism, which remains essentially the same, outside of its specific historical location'.<sup>85</sup>

One point that can, however, be made about racial oppression in general is that its existence does not require that it always be consciously perpetuated. Carter's claim that 'racism requires racists' needs to be qualified.<sup>86</sup> Drawing on concepts of Andrew Sayer, he argues that most manifestations of racism (which, following Miles, he considers an ideology) are 'identity-sensitive mechanisms', not 'identity-neutral mechanisms' whose functioning does not depend on the identities of agents.<sup>87</sup> While it is evident that many practices of racial oppression do indeed involve conscious actions by people in dominant groups directed against members of racially oppressed groups, Carter's sweeping claim is questionable. Many anti-racist activists have stressed that what matters most when dealing with racism are effects, not people's intentions. Impersonal practices carried out without racist intent can and frequently do reproduce racial oppression. Consider the example of rules for university admission that prohibit reference to racial identity in applicants' personal statements and its consideration in admissions decisions. Such rules prevent members of racially oppressed groups from referring to important life experiences, including disadvantages encountered, without which their life stories may be 'both incomplete and incomprehensible'.<sup>88</sup> In so doing, they can be objective barriers to access to university education for persons who belong to racially oppressed groups whose members are less likely to graduate from university. University staff who are committed to anti-racism but required to implement such rules thereby reproduce racism. Similarly, laws that ban people wearing 'ostentatious' religious items from accessing services or being employed in certain positions perpetuate anti-Muslim racism against Muslims who wear headscarves regardless of the consciousness of those who enforce such legislation.<sup>89</sup> In considering racism, we should be attuned to harmful effects on members of groups defined by differences that are treated as inherited and unchangeable, rather than focused on subjective racist intent.

---

85 Hall 1980, pp. 336, 337.

86 Carter 2007, p. 450.

87 Carter 2007, pp. 448–9.

88 Carbado and Harris 2012, p. 206.

89 Zemni 2011.

To make the best use of this understanding of racism, we need a historical materialism whose social ontology is more multidimensional than Marx's. Racism, like patriarchy and heterosexism, is not an epiphenomenon of class. Forms of oppression constitute the mutually-mediating matrix of social relations that is social reality at the same time as it is constituted by class. Racism, like other forms of oppression, operates simultaneously with class, both in the subjective experiences of individuals (at the level of identities) and in the objective happening of social processes.<sup>90</sup>

The absence of such an ontology leads to a theoretical downgrading of racism. This is not always formulated explicitly, but Carter provides a very clear example:

Marxism, in arguing that human beings make history but not in circumstances of their own choosing, acknowledges a distinction between the contexts in which people find themselves and the efforts of those people to change or reproduce those contexts. The forces shaping these contexts are the social relations of production; these . . . define the context within which all forms of social inequality are generated. . . . [T]he social relations of production refers to emergent, and relatively enduring forms of social relation; racism to ideas and ideology, to the forms of thought developed in response to, and in the effort to manage, these social relations.<sup>91</sup>

Here the forces that condition the contexts of human agency are literally reduced to relations of production, while racism is merely ideas and definitely nothing like a 'relatively enduring . . . social relation'. From this perspective, it is difficult to imagine that racism could be very significant in shaping social processes in time. In this way, theoretical downgrading opens the door to an underestimation of racism's political importance.

### Race and Racialisation

Should this theory of racism be accompanied by a concept of race? There is general agreement among historical materialists that race has no basis in nature. Historical-materialist proponents of eliminativism concur with Carter that the concept should simply be discarded because the natural-scientific demonstration that human races do not exist 'leaves it without an

90 Kelley 1997 is just one of many studies that support this claim.

91 Carter 2007, pp. 447–8.

object'.<sup>92</sup> However, holding this position creates difficulties when it comes to analysing particular features of societies in which racial oppression is part of the interlocking matrix of social relations.<sup>93</sup> The eliminativist position can also create 'immense problems relating to political practice'<sup>94</sup> when, as in the case of Miles, it leads to a questioning of anti-racist mobilisations organised around the racial identities of racially oppressed groups, although eliminativism does not necessarily lead to such a conclusion.

Where racism exists, societies come to possess features that are a certain set of what Paul Taylor designates as 'institutional facts, facts that depend for their existence on constitutive networks of social conventions', which 'assign meaning' to them. 'Races and racial identities', Taylor maintains, are such 'institutional facts'. They are 'created and sustained' by practices that 'assign meanings to human bodies and bloodlines'.<sup>95</sup> Races can be understood as 'probabilistically defined populations' that are 'brought into being by the practices of racial identification', which link 'certain bodies and bloodlines to certain social locations and modes of treatment'.<sup>96</sup> A 'racial identity is a way of specifying someone's location on a racialised social terrain'.<sup>97</sup> Himani Bannerji helpfully describes race as 'no more or less than an active social organisation, a constellation of practices motivated, consciously and unconsciously, by political or power imperatives with implied cultural forms – images, symbols, metaphors, and norms that range from the quotidian to the institutional'.<sup>98</sup> All this suggests that the concept of race does indeed have an object – not, of course, in nature, but in certain phenomena of social ontology. A critical concept of race is a tool for the analysis of these phenomena, important institutional facts generated by racial oppression and anti-racist resistance. The eliminativist refusal of such a concept leads to problems in understanding such realities. For this reason, then, there are good grounds for using a historical-materialist concept of race in the analysis of societies in which racial oppression exists, to capture aspects of social relations that exist in and through racism.

---

92 Carter 2007, p. 446.

93 The term 'interlocking' should be understood in this article as synonymous with mutually-mediating, and distinct from the idea of intersection (which suggests the coming together of externally-related phenomena rather than inner-relatedness within a social ontology of internal relations).

94 Virdee 2010, p. 31.

95 Taylor 2009, p. 185.

96 Taylor 2004, p. 117; Taylor 2009, p. 185; Taylor 2004, p. 117.

97 Taylor 2009, p. 186.

98 Bannerji 2005, p. 149.

To highlight the ways in which persons and social relations acquire racial meanings, the concept of racialisation is useful. In Miles's usage, racialisation refers to 'instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities'.<sup>99</sup> But in keeping with the understanding of racism argued for here, there is no reason to embed biology in this way. At issue are differences (not limited to those surrounding gender, sexuality or impairment) that are treated as inherited and unchangeable. Thus we can say that racialisation happens when racism exists and the meanings linked to differences derived from it are assigned to persons or things. As Virdee suggests,<sup>100</sup> historical materialists can benefit from drawing on Michael Omi and Howard Winant's racial-formation theory. For Omi and Winant, race is a 'concept which signifies and symbolises social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies' and racial formation is 'the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed'.<sup>101</sup> Yet, as Nikhil Pal Singh argues, their 'identification of race as primarily a question of social meaning – even when that meaning has been understood to be productive of "structures" of inequality in wealth, employment, housing, law enforcement, and the like – continues to operate within a methodological discourse that imagines the category of race as something that can ultimately be *precipitated out of social relations*, rather than as something that is constantly made and remade *as a social relation*'<sup>102</sup> or, to put it in a manner consistent with the position developed here, as a dimension of an oppressive social relation. Singh's astute observation takes us back to the starting point of racism as a relation of oppression, without which racialisation would not happen.<sup>103</sup>

Where racism exists as a social relation of oppression, all social relations that are mediated by it become racialised to at least some degree. Consequently, racial formation happens, producing what Sadri Khiari calls 'social races': 'hierarchically-ordered social groups that think of themselves and oppose each other as races, demarcated by imagined and reified differences'.<sup>104</sup> Races

---

99 Miles and Brown 2003, p. 101.

100 Virdee 2010, p. 157.

101 Omi and Winant 2015, pp. 110, 109 (emphasis removed).

102 Singh 2012, pp. 285–6.

103 For Miles, racialisation is not connected in any way to oppression. Miles sees racialisation happening in ancient Greece (Miles and Brown 2003, pp. 100–3), where racial oppression was absent, as is evident from Bethencourt 2013 and Fredrickson 2002.

104 Khiari 2009, p. 21 (my translation).

in this sense are historical formations cross-cut by other social relations including those of class, gender and sexuality, and existing simultaneously and in the same social spaces as class and other formations generated by a matrix of mutually-mediating relations. The emergence of the 'white race' – a reactionary development of world-historical importance – can be located in the cauldron of gendered class conflict and dispossession of indigenous people in English colonies in North America and the Caribbean in the 1600s. In colonies of the southern coast of the Atlantic Ocean, rulers responded to unrest among subaltern Europeans and Africans directed both at them and indigenous people by imposing life-long and hereditary enslavement upon Africans, policed by Europeans of all classes, thereby creating a 'new regime that sought to set poor people apart from each other much more clearly on the basis of "race"'.<sup>105</sup> Although racial oppression has been reorganised in many ways since then and processes of racial formation have reconfigured whiteness, Allen's claim that the white race originated as a '*ruling class social control formation*'<sup>106</sup> is well-founded. This brings us to the question of how historical materialists should conceptualise the effects of membership in a dominant race on its members.

### Privilege

In the 1960s, some US Marxists, inspired by W.E.B. Du Bois's analysis of the history of the US South after the Civil War in *Black Reconstruction*, began to argue that people socially categorised as belonging to the white race in the US received privileges as a consequence of their racial location. These 'material and spiritual privileges' underpinned the 'white chauvinism' that was 'the greatest ideological barrier to the achievement of proletarian class consciousness, solidarity and political action'<sup>107</sup> in the US. The original formulators of this perspective, Ignatin and Allen, did not draw the conclusion that the white section of the US working class had no revolutionary potential. Nor did some of the other socialists who developed different interpretations of the analysis.<sup>108</sup>

---

105 Roediger 2008, p. 6. Roediger 2008 provides a recent synthesis of the historical literature, including Allen 1997.

106 Allen 1998.

107 Ignatin 1976, pp. 150, 149. Michael Staudenmaier (Staudenmaier 2007) states that the term 'white-skin privilege' was first used by Theodore Allen in a 1965 speech.

108 For example, Smith 2007. The history of US Marxist studies of whiteness is surveyed in Roediger 2011.

However, some radicals who adopted the concept of white-skin privilege, such as the current in Students for a Democratic Society that became the Weather Underground, did reject white workers as a force capable of fighting for radical change – a fact that helps explain the vociferousness of debate around the concept of white privilege in the 1970s.<sup>109</sup>

During the 1980s, after the revolutionary left formed by participants in the movements and struggles of the 1960s and early 1970s had gone into steep decline, the term ‘white-skin privilege’ spread among sections of the left in the US and beyond.<sup>110</sup> But now the phrase was increasingly detached from any kind of historical-materialist understanding of society and change in the US or anywhere else. Some people have also generalised the idea of privilege as ‘unearned advantage’ to refer to any and all forms of social inequality. Because today the term ‘privilege’ is used with significantly different meanings by adherents of very different theoretical and political positions, it is a mistake to create an amalgam dubbed ‘privilege theory’, as some critics have.<sup>111</sup> Doing so lumps together variants of historical materialism, critical race theory, liberal analytical philosophy and other perspectives.<sup>112</sup> This polemical technique is especially problematic because a clearly conceptualised concept of ‘privilege’ can be a valuable tool for historical materialism.

The idea of privilege is used today by some non-Marxists to refer to any differential of social condition. This is a kind of generalisation of a stratification conception of class, and like the latter it is fundamentally arbitrary. Instead of illuminating determinate relations of exploitation and oppression it obscures them with a logic of infinite differences between individuals. Even when it is used in a way that is linked with a more social and relational notion of oppression, ‘privilege’ is often associated with an emphasis on the interpersonal dynamics of oppression rather than systemic dynamics, and with the absence of a conception of social totality.<sup>113</sup>

Nevertheless, historical materialism needs a concept to analyse the advantages that members of dominant races experience because of how they are positioned by social relations of racial oppression. When these advantages

---

109 Staudenmaier 2007. See Geier and Gerson 1972 for a critique of ‘white-skin privilege’ politics within SDS.

110 Staudenmaier’s suggestion (Staudenmaier 2007) that ‘the adoption of the white skin privilege concept by a segment of the white feminist movement was the catalyst for the general diffusion of the idea within the white left over the course of the 1980s’ is plausible.

111 For example, Choonara and Prasad 2014.

112 Consider Ignatin 1976, Smith 2007, Mills 2009 and Cudd 2006.

113 D’Arcy 2014; Smith 2013; Tietze 2014.

are not scrutinised, the conditions of members of dominant races are assumed to be the norm from which the conditions of the racially oppressed are deviations; the latter are treated as significant but the former are not. Marxists who reject any use of the concept of privilege can acknowledge the obvious fact that, as two put it, 'life for black workers is often significantly harder than for white workers'.<sup>114</sup> However, they are left with no theoretical tool for exploring how white workers are affected by the material differentials that make their lives relatively easier.

A carefully specified concept is needed to examine this reality. In general terms, privilege should be taken to mean *advantages relative to the conditions of an oppressed group that are conferred on members of a dominant group as a consequence of how they are positioned by a social relation of oppression*. Note that there is no suggestion that privilege is voluntarily chosen or that it can be freely discarded by individuals. Nor is the claim that these advantages are unearned. This is a common view of privilege, but it rests on untenable assumptions that are traces of the ideology of meritocracy. It implies that some advantages are acquired purely by individual effort and have nothing to do with social conditions ('earned') – an idealist and voluntarist view – and others are assigned by social conditions ('unearned'). In reality, no individual acquires or fails to acquire anything outside of social conditions. Each form of oppression produces privileges for persons in the oppressor group. However, because the members of an oppressing group are divided by class and usually by other relations of oppression, the character of privilege is highly variable. An interlocking matrix of social relations produces a complex pattern of privilege; most members of the working class today are conferred at least one form of privilege, however minimal (consider, for example, the lives of heterosexual Latinas working for wages in the US without legal immigration status).

The scope and significance of racial privilege has varied enormously; class, gender and other relations powerfully mediate its distribution. Consequently it needs to be analysed concretely. For instance, the advantages conferred on middle-class German citizens classified as Aryan by Nazi legislation that barred Jews from practising law, medicine and other professions were substantially different from those obtained in the 1930s by non-Jewish would-be doctors in the US, where many medical schools had quota systems that limited the admission of Jewish students.<sup>115</sup> But it is the impact of privilege on the working class that has been the flashpoint of debate among historical materialists.

It is often argued that because racism divides the working class and weakens working-class power it leads to lower wages for white workers, and so 'at most

---

<sup>114</sup> Choonara and Prasad 2014.

<sup>115</sup> Sokoloff 1992.



what white workers receive is the imaginary solace of being members of the superior race.<sup>116</sup> This evades the contradictory reality of racial privilege. The traditional socialist claim that racism divides, weakens and economically harms the working class as a whole, including workers who do not face racism, is very well-supported by theoretical reasoning and empirical evidence.<sup>117</sup> Yet it is also the case that racial oppression confers privilege on workers assigned to dominant locations in racial hierarchies, and that the relative advantages that accrue to them as a consequence are material as well as psychological; some of what Du Bois referred to as 'a sort of public and psychological wage' is not merely 'imaginary solace'.<sup>118</sup> Preferential access to information about job openings, treatment in competition for employment, jobs with better pay and conditions, and promotion are not imaginary. Nor is preferential treatment by landlords, service providers, business owners and the police.

How should such relative advantages be evaluated? Allen insists that white privilege is real but not in the 'day-to-day real interests of the white workers', which lie in 'the development of an ever-expanding union of class conscious workers, white and black'.<sup>119</sup> It is, in his words, 'poison bait'. Although this view has been challenged by those who follow the Weather Underground and maintain that racial privilege deprives white workers of radical potential, it is well-founded. The ability of white members of the working class to meet their needs and flourish as human beings is fundamentally constrained by their place within capitalist relations of production. Their interests, like those of all workers, are objective: that which helps them to meet their needs and flourish is in their interests. The limited and relative advantages provided by racial privilege are not in white workers' interests because racial privilege weakens and harms the entire working class. This is similar in some ways to how competition between workers engaged in piece-work lowers average wages but can allow some individuals to make higher than average wages. Michael Lebowitz's conclusion that '[r]ather than separation and competition, only combination and cooperation yields the optimum solution for workers' applies in both cases.<sup>120</sup>

Unfortunately, racial privilege is an obstacle to white workers understanding what their interests are. Its materiality underpins what, in the US context,

---

116 Callinicos 1992, p. 25.

117 Lebowitz 2003, pp. 157–60, pinpoints the issue in theory. Three of many empirical studies are Du Bois 1935, Szymanski 1976 and Goldfield 1997.

118 Du Bois 1935, p. 700.

119 Allen 1967, p. 174.

120 Lebowitz 2003, p. 85. My argument about interests is also influenced by Callinicos 1987, pp. 129–33.

George Lipsitz terms the ‘possessive investment in whiteness’,<sup>121</sup> which affects white workers as well as whites of other classes. As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor argues, privilege ‘has a deleterious effect on the development of working-class consciousness’. It

necessarily complicates the fight against racism because it convinces white workers that they have something to lose by not being white – which, of course, is true. If they did not get some advantage – and with it, the illusion that the system works for them – then racism would not be effective in dividing . . . workers.<sup>122</sup>

As this suggests, a carefully-specified historical-materialist concept of privilege used in the analysis of concrete situations can provide a more dialectical understanding of a contradictory reality that is one aspect of social relations of racial oppression.

### The Persistence of Racism

In order to be intellectually persuasive, a historical-materialist theory of racism must be able to explain the persistence of racism in the contemporary world. Being able to explain the historical origins of racial oppression is less vital; genesis and persistence are distinct issues. For present purposes, it is sufficient to proceed on the basis of the very well-supported claims that racial oppression did not exist for most of human history and that capitalist colonialism was extremely important in forging racial oppression and diffusing it globally.<sup>123</sup>

The key question in dealing with the persistence of racism is not *how* racial oppression is reproduced, though it is vital to be able to show this in order to avoid falling into functionalism;<sup>124</sup> racism is reproduced in a myriad of ways in various situations, as has been demonstrated in detail by anti-racist researchers. Nor is it a question of locating a ‘material basis’ for racism, since such a framing of the problem assumes that racism is an ideology rather than a social relation. Rather, the question is *why* does racial oppression remain a major feature of matrices of social relations in the contemporary world?

---

121 Lipsitz 2006.

122 Taylor 2013.

123 Fredrickson 2002, Bethencourt 2013, Roediger 2008 and Allen 1997 support these claims.

124 On which, see Sayer 1987.

Some critical race analysis, influenced by poststructuralism, does not go beyond identifying the pervasiveness of ‘race thinking’ – as Sherene Razack puts it, ‘a structure of thought that divides up the world between the deserving and the undeserving according to descent’.<sup>125</sup> While this phenomenon is both real and significant, naming it does not explain the persistence of racism in a way satisfactory to defenders of any kind of materialism. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva offers a materialist explanation that is widely shared among contemporary anti-racist researchers:

Racial structures remain in place for the same reasons that other structures do. Since actors racialised as ‘white’ – or as members of the dominant race – receive material benefits from the racial order, they struggle (or passively receive the manifold wages of whiteness) to maintain their privileges. In contrast, those defined as belonging to the subordinate race or races struggle to change the status quo (or become resigned to their position). Therein lies the secret of racial structures and racial inequality the world over. They exist because they benefit members of the dominant race.<sup>126</sup>

This explanation has more than a grain of truth to it, as I will argue. However, it is inadequate because it fails to identify any connection between specific features of capitalism and the persistence of racism or to make distinctions about who benefits from racism and how. But some historical materialists deny that this kind of explanation has any validity whatsoever. Callinicos argues that ‘the Marxist claim’ is that ‘the forces and relations of production, a complex set of historically developed and changing powers, *explain* relations of domination’.<sup>127</sup> There are two problems with this approach. The first is that it equates an explanation of the origins of a form of oppression with an explanation of its persistence. I believe that the genesis of racial oppression can be explained by historical analysis of forces and relations of production. However, as Mills argues, ‘genealogy does not necessarily translate into continuing causal pre-eminence’.<sup>128</sup> The second is that it treats forms of oppression as generating no properties that contribute to their own persistence. However, there is considerable evidence that they do. This is why Esch and Roediger contend that ‘understanding racism necessitates a separate and distinct perspective on

---

125 Razack 2008, p. 8.

126 Bonilla-Silva 2003, p. 9.

127 Callinicos 1990, p. 163.

128 Mills 2003, p. 164.

power relations beyond the terms of class'. For example, they suggest that 'racist acts are sometimes or maybe often acts of racial empowerment, rather than of class disempowerment'<sup>129</sup> – an insight that many Marxist accounts of racism and white workers do not acknowledge because they lack a concept of racial privilege. While it is better to treat such acts as often being about both 'racial empowerment' and 'class disempowerment' rather than one or the other, Esch and Roediger's point about the limits of treating racism as explicable solely with reference to the forces and relations of production is clear. In their spirit, I suggest that racism's persistence today can be explained as flowing from three deeply-rooted features of contemporary society that are interwoven in reality but analytically distinguishable: imperialism, the profits of racism, and efforts to defend or enhance racial privilege.

### *Imperialism*

Imperialism is an essential dimension of the capitalist mode of production. The system develops in an uneven and combined manner both in time and space, with 'spatial cycles of development at one pole and underdevelopment at another'.<sup>130</sup> This is a consequence of differential profits, which can lead to 'a self-reinforcing process that gives rise to privileged concentrations of high-productivity capital'.<sup>131</sup> The ensuing domination of the globe by capitalist imperialism has been interwoven with racism almost from its inception.<sup>132</sup> A result of this fact has been histories in which, as Susan Ferguson has argued,

People become [negatively] racialised insofar as they are *associated*... with *other* socio-geographic spaces. The 'other,' of course, is relative – and determined largely by the historical configuration of geo-political and social relations... So while people are necessarily 'territorialised' by matter of their birth (we are all born and live *somewhere*), they are only *racialised* as a function of how their location figures in the broader socio-geo-political ordering of capitalism.<sup>133</sup>

Today imperialism reproduces, Winant writes, 'a worldwide pattern of employment discrimination, violence, morbidity, impoverishment, pollution,

---

129 Esch and Roediger 2014.

130 Smith 2006, p. 192.

131 Callinicos 2009, p. 89.

132 I say almost, because British capitalism's imperialist domination of Ireland was not racist in character in its earliest years.

133 Ferguson 2008, p. 52.

and unequal exchange'. This is 'a global system of social stratification' that 'correlates very well with racial criteria: the darker your skin is, the less you earn; the shorter your life span, the poorer your health and nutrition, the less education you can get.'<sup>134</sup> Even if we set aside the contentious issue of unequal exchange and assert the huge importance of class divisions within imperialised countries,<sup>135</sup> Winant's correlation still matters. Even when explicitly racist ideology is absent today, imperialism reproduces 'an already racialised structural distribution of property and economic power . . . which is the product of the long history of global racialised dispossession.'<sup>136</sup> Moreover, imperialism today frequently operates in ways that treat the populations of imperialised countries as different in inherent and unalterable ways. This makes their oppression by imperialism racial in character. While in the twenty-first century the differences used to mark imperialised populations are not always posited explicitly as ones of inferiority, imperialised populations are in practice routinely treated as essentially culturally deficient. This can be seen in the neoliberal ideology of international development's depiction of the people of imperialised countries as mired in irrational culture.<sup>137</sup> The treatment by imperialist state officials of Muslims and Arabs as essentially pre-modern, religious and irrational is another case in point.<sup>138</sup> Such racialised imperialist practices and ideologies are also influential within the borders of imperialist countries; they powerfully condition how state managers structure immigration controls and politically administer the portions of their populations who have migrated from imperialised countries or who are descended from such migrants or enslaved ancestors.<sup>139</sup> This in turn has a broad influence on the ideological environment in advanced capitalist countries.

### *The Profits of Racism*

The mediation of capitalism by racism almost from its very beginning<sup>140</sup> that was registered in the preceding paragraph can also be seen in the history of

---

134 Winant 2004, pp. 134, 135.

135 This is my preferred term for countries oppressed by imperialism.

136 Gruffyd Jones 2008, p. 924.

137 Taylor 2010. The move from an identification of people's culture as the problem to essentialising their alleged cultural qualities in practice is an easy one because of the pervasiveness of racist ideological conceptions of people of colour.

138 See Razack 2008, Fekete 2009 and Kumar 2012.

139 Much the same can also be said about the treatment of indigenous people in colonial-settler states. On capitalist state power and racism, see Gordon 2007.

140 The development of capitalism in England between 1400 and 1600 (Dimmock 2014) occurred prior to the emergence of racism in England's colonies.

how production has been socially organised. The massive use of racialised African slavery and Asian indentured migrant labour was succeeded in the twentieth century by new flows of immigration from imperialised countries. Today these flows increasingly involve migrants from imperialised countries engaging in unfree or highly precarious wage labour. As Ferguson and David McNally note,

What is unique about the neoliberal period, therefore, is not that [negatively] racialised labour-power is appropriated from the peripheries of the global system. That has been a constant of the capitalist mode of production. Instead, the key development has been the massive expansion of the global labour reserve as a result of the most accelerated and extensive processes of primitive accumulation in world history.<sup>141</sup>

Across the history of capitalism, then, employers have often dealt with working classes stratified by racial hierarchies (and simultaneously by divisions rooted in patriarchal and other forms of oppression), which they have frequently cultivated directly or indirectly.<sup>142</sup> They have done so and often continue to do so in large part because racism is conducive to higher profitability. This is true in a number of ways. First, a workforce divided by racism is less able to resist managerial control, which allows employers to extract more effort from workers. Second, labour-market competition among workers divided by racism can result in workers placed lower in a racial hierarchy being willing to work for lower wages and/or in ways preferred by employers than workers ranked above them in the racial order.<sup>143</sup> This can extend to workers at the bottom of a racial hierarchy being willing to take jobs that other workers are unwilling to do because the work is seen as so undesirable. It is possible for employers to successfully 'use race as a sorting mechanism in their pursuit of increased productivity', with particular skills or capacities linked to specific racial groups, thereby reducing training costs.<sup>144</sup> Finally, the weakening of the social power of the working class (not simply solidarity at the point of production) by racism facilitates capitalist profitability.<sup>145</sup> It is admittedly easier to argue convincingly

---

141 Ferguson and McNally 2014, p. 9.

142 Roediger and Esch 2012 examines the racial management of labour in the US into the early twentieth century in detail.

143 Mason 1995.

144 Chibber 2013, pp. 141, 140. Chibber refers to occupational skills, but the linguistic and cultural competencies of labour-power are equally relevant.

145 See footnote 117. Reich 1981 is a rare attempt by a radical political economist to empirically demonstrate the contribution of racism to capitalist profitability.

that the existence of racism contributes to profit-making than to show that this in part actually explains the contemporary perpetuation of racial oppression; the latter is important in order to avoid functionalist explanations of racism's persistence. Nevertheless, the frequency with which employers use perceived racial identity as a sorting mechanism in dealing with job applications and play workers off against each other along racial lines lends support to this claim. So too does the widespread opposition of capitalists and their political advocates to measures that would substantially improve the bargaining power of racially oppressed workers in labour markets, such as granting citizenship or permanent-resident status to non-status migrants and those with temporary residency rights and instituting effective anti-racist reforms to employment law.<sup>146</sup>

### *Efforts to Defend and Enhance Racial Privilege*

The third force responsible for the perpetuation of racial oppression is not an aspect of the forces and relations of production in capitalism, although it is interwoven with them. It is the one that has been least recognised in historical-materialist explanation due to the simple absence or conscious rejection of a concept of racial privilege. Yet there is overwhelming evidence that efforts by members of dominant social races, to use Khiari's term, to preserve their advantages relative to the racially oppressed play a role in the persistence of racism. While such attempts to maintain both the material advantages and the less tangible compensations conferred by oppression are not, as Bonilla-Silva suggests, 'the secret of racial structures and racial inequality', they definitely are a factor. Failing to recognise this results in weaker analysis and detracts from the appeal of historical materialism to many anti-racists. Omi and Winant's concept of racial project – 'simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organise and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines'<sup>147</sup> – can be used to place particular mobilisations to defend or expand privilege within a broader array of forces configured with respect to racial oppression in a given society. Such projects, which are often cross-class formations, can themselves be analysed, following Gramsci, as part of hegemonic blocs of social forces.

There is no shortage of examples of efforts to defend or expand privilege perpetuating racial oppression. It is common for white workers to respond to competition for jobs in ways that harm racially oppressed workers. This is a response rooted in the material differentials of privilege and the absence

<sup>146</sup> Oreopoulos 2011; Roediger and Esch 2012, pp. 205–12; Longhi 2013.

<sup>147</sup> Omi and Winant 2015, p. 125 (emphasis removed).

of a compelling practical alternative based on anti-racist working-class solidarity.<sup>148</sup> It is also conditioned by state action.<sup>149</sup> A historical example with far-reaching consequences is the white-supremacist assault on the newly-acquired citizenship rights of African-Americans and other Reconstruction-era reforms in the US South, whose methods included terrorism and guerrilla warfare. This was both the enactment of a cross-class racial project to enhance white privilege and a successful attempt to restore the hegemonic class-power of the former slave-owning planters.<sup>150</sup> More recently, campaigns to roll back affirmative action in the US and employment equity in Canada are not difficult to analyse as defences of privilege articulated in the language of 'colour-blindness' and opposition to 'reverse racism'. In the US, these have included referendum victories against affirmative action in California in 1996, Washington in 1998, Michigan in 2006, Nebraska in 2008 and Oklahoma in 2012. In Canada, opposition to the just-enacted employment-equity legislation of the Ontario New Democratic Party government contributed to the victory of hard-right Conservatives in the 1995 provincial election and the rapid repeal of the law.<sup>151</sup> Mobilisations against multiculturalism policies and the presence of Muslims in the public sphere are also moves to defend or enhance privilege that shore up racism. The racial advantages at stake here are often miniscule or nonexistent in material terms, no matter how meaningful they are to some white citizens of all classes. Demands in Western Europe, the US and Canada that official representations of national culture reaffirm its whiteness are a good example, as is the ban on the building of new mosque minarets in Switzerland. However, the advantages are sometimes more substantial: consider policies in European countries that prohibit the wearing of 'ostentatious' religious items. These have the effect of barring Muslims from some jobs, which in terms of racial privilege mainly serves to advantage white workers. Of course, all such relative advantages are corrosive for working-class solidarity and therefore antithetical to the interests of all workers, but such is the contradictory nature of privilege as poison bait.

Inadequate theory does not always lead to problems in political practice, and the weakness of the radical left today means that the negative political

---

148 Brenner and Brenner 1981 identifies the logic behind 'attempts by stronger sections of the working class to defend their positions at the expense of weaker sections'.

149 For example, as one reviewer pointed out, both major political parties in the US have usually catered to white hostility to affirmative-action measures but neither has pressed seriously for major pro-worker reforms to labour law.

150 Du Bois 1935, pp. 670–709; Roediger 2008, pp. 110–19.

151 Roediger 2008, p. 207; Saloojee 2000.



effects of inadequate theories of racism are not easily documented. However, as a reminder of the political significance of the theoretical questions with which this article has dealt it is worth concluding with a note about one country where a sizeable radical left does exist, France. In September 2014, a poll reported that for the first time the leader of the fascist *Front National* (FN), Marine Le Pen, would win the presidency in a second-round contest against current president François Hollande of the Socialist Party.<sup>152</sup> The rise of FN support is directly connected to the growing extent to which national identity, immigration and the place of Islam in French society have become central political issues in the country, an outcome achieved by the efforts of the forces (of which the FN is just one element) pursuing a reactionary racial project.<sup>153</sup> Neither the radical left as a whole (including both its anti-neoliberal and consistently anti-capitalist wings) nor any of its components have been able to intervene in this dangerous political process in a way that effectively challenges the appeal to white workers of this project and its political definition of what matters. Much of the blame for this failure lies with the influence within the radical left of politics that are not guided by a strong understanding of racial oppression and white privilege in France.<sup>154</sup> Here, alas, the politics of theory are not difficult to interpret.

## References

- Achcar, Gilbert 2013, *Marxism, Orientalism, Cosmopolitanism*, Chicago: Haymarket Press.
- Allen, Theodore W. 1967, 'Can White Workers Radicals Be Radicalised?', in *White Blindspot*, edited by Noel Ignatin, available at: <<http://www.sds-1960s.org/WhiteBlindspot.pdf>>.
- 1994, *The Invention of the White Race. Volume One: Racial Oppression and Social Control*, London: Verso.
- 1997, *The Invention of the White Race. Volume Two: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America*, London: Verso.
- 1998, 'Summary of the Argument of *The Invention of the White Race*', *Cultural Logic*, 1, 2, available at: <<http://clogic.eserver.org/1-2/allen.html>>.

---

<sup>152</sup> Nardelli 2014.

<sup>153</sup> See Khiari 2009, pp. 210–21.

<sup>154</sup> Khiari 2012.

- Anderson, Kevin B. 2010, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Anievas, Alexander and Kerem Nisancioglu 2013, 'What's at Stake in the Transition Debate? Rethinking the Origins of Capitalism and the "Rise of the West"', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 42, 1: 78–102.
- Arruzza, Cinzia 2013, *Dangerous Liaisons: The Marriages and Divorces of Marxism and Feminism*, Pontypool: Merlin Press, in association with Resistance Books and the International Institute for Research and Education.
- Ashe, Stephen D. and Brendan F. McGeever 2011, 'Marxism, Racism and the Construction of "Race" as a Social and Political Relation: An Interview with Professor Robert Miles', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 34, 12: 2009–26.
- Bakan, Abigail B. 2008, 'Marxism and Antiracism: Rethinking the Politics of Difference', *Rethinking Marxism*, 20, 2: 238–56.
- Balibar, Étienne and Immanuel Wallerstein 1991, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, London: Verso.
- Banaji, Jairus 1977, 'Modes of Production in a Materialist Conception of History', *Capital and Class*, 3: 1–44.
- Bannerji, Himani 2005, 'Building from Marx: Reflections on Class and Race', *Social Justice*, 32, 4: 144–60.
- Bethencourt, Francisco 2013, *Racisms*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Blauner, Robert 1972, *Racial Oppression in America*, New York: Harper and Row.
- Bonacich, Edna 1999 [1980], 'Class Approaches to Ethnicity and Race', *Critical Sociology*, 25, 2/3: 166–94.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo 2003, *Racism without Racists: Colour-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Brenner, Robert 1977, 'The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism', *New Left Review*, 1, 104: 25–92.
- and Johanna Brenner 1981, 'Reagan, the Right and the Working Class', *Against the Current*, 1, 1, 2: 29–35.
- Callinicos, Alex 1987, *Making History: Agency, Structure and Change in Social Theory*, Cambridge: Polity.
- 1990, 'Marxism and Power', in *New Developments in Political Science*, edited by Adrian Leftwich, Aldershot: Edward Elgar.
- 1992, 'Race and Class', *International Socialism*, 11, 55: 3–39.
- 2009, *Imperialism and Global Political Economy*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Camfield, David 2014, 'Theoretical Foundations of an Anti-Racist Queer Feminist Historical Materialism', *Critical Sociology*, online before print, 17 February, doi: 10.1177/0896920513507790.

- Carbado, Devon W. and Cheryl I. Harris 2012, 'The New Racial Preferences: Rethinking Racial Projects', in *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Daniel Martinez HoSang, Oneka LaBennett and Laura Pulido, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Carter, Robert 2007, 'Marxism and Theories of Racism', in *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*, edited by Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis, *Historical Materialism* Book Series, Leiden: Brill.
- Carter, Bob and Satnam Virdee 2008, 'Racism and the Sociological Imagination', *British Journal of Sociology*, 59, 4: 661–79.
- Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1982, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, London: Hutchinson, in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.
- Chibber, Vivek 2013, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, London: Verso.
- Choonara, Esme and Yuri Prasad 2014, 'What's Wrong with Privilege Theory?', *International Socialism*, 11, 142, available at: <<http://isj.org.uk/index.php?id=971&issue=142>>.
- Cole, Mike 2009, 'Critical Race Theory Comes to the UK: A Marxist Response', *Ethnicities*, 9, 2: 246–69.
- Communist International 1983 [1923], 'The Black Question', in *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, edited by Alan Adler, London: Pluto Press.
- Coontz, Stephanie and Peta Henderson 1986, 'Property Forms, Political Power, and Female Labour in the Origins of Class and State Societies', in *Women's Work, Men's Property: The Origins of Gender and Class*, edited by Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson, London: Verso.
- Cox, Oliver Cromwell 1948, *Caste, Class and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company.
- Cudd, Ann E. 2006, *Analysing Oppression*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- D'Arcy, Stephen 2014, 'The Rise of the Post-New Left Political Vocabulary', available at: <<http://publicautonomy.org/2014/01/27/the-rise-of-the-post-new-left-political-vocabulary>>.
- Dimmock, Spencer 2014, *The Origin of Capitalism in England, 1400–1600*, *Historical Materialism* Book Series, Leiden: Brill.
- Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt 1935, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880*, New York: Russell and Russell.
- Esch, Betsy and David Roediger 2014, 'Nonracialism through Race (and Class)', *New Socialist Webzine*, available at: <<http://newsocialist.org/757-nonracialism-through-race-and-class>>.

- Fanon, Frantz 1968 [1961], *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington, New York: Grove Press.
- Fekete, Liz 2009, *A Suitable Enemy: Racism, Migration and Islamophobia in Europe*, London: Pluto Press.
- Ferguson, Susan 2008, 'Canadian Contributions to Social Reproduction Feminism, Race and Embodied Labour', *Race, Gender and Class*, 15, 1/2: 42–57.
- and David McNally 2014, 'Precarious Migrants: Gender, Race and the Social Reproduction of a Global Working Class', in *Socialist Register 2015*, edited by Leo Panitch and Greg Albo, London: Merlin Press.
- Fields, Karen E. and Barbara J. Fields 2012, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, London: Verso.
- Fredrickson, George M. 2002, *Racism: A Short History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Frye, Marilyn 2003 [1983], 'Oppression', in *Oppression, Privilege and Resistance: Theoretical Perspectives on Racism, Sexism and Heterosexism*, edited by Lisa Heldke and Reg O'Connor, Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Geier, Joel and Jack Gerson 1972 [1969], 'SDS and the Movement', in *The New Left of the Sixties*, edited by Michael Friedman, Berkeley: Independent Socialist Press.
- Goldfield, Michael 1997, *The Colour of Politics: Race and the Mainsprings of American Politics*, New York: New Press.
- Gordon, Todd 2007, 'Towards an Anti-Racist Marxist State Theory: A Canadian Case Study', *Capital and Class*, 91: 1–29.
- Gruffydd Jones, Branwen 2008, 'Race in the Ontology of International Order', *Political Studies*, 56: 907–27.
- Hall, Stuart 1980, 'Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance', in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*, Paris: UNESCO.
- 1986, 'Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity', *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 10, 5: 5–27.
- Ignatin, Noel 1976 [1967], 'Letter to *Progressive Labor*', in *White Blindspot*, edited by Noel Ignatin, available at: <<http://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1/whiteblindspot.pdf>>.
- Kelley, Robin D.G. 1997, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Khiari, Sadri 2009, *La contre-révolution coloniale en France. De de Gaulle à Sarkozy*, Paris: La Fabrique Éditions.
- 2012, 'Internationalisme décolonial, antiracisme et anticapitalisme', available at: <<http://indigenes-republique.fr/internationalisme-decolonial-antiracisme-et-anticapitalisme>>.
- Kumar, Deepa 2012, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire: Globalization & Imperialism*, Chicago: Haymarket.

- Lawrence, Bonita and Enakshi Dua 2005, 'Decolonising Antiracism', *Social Justice*, 32, 4: 120–43.
- Lebowitz, Michael A. 2003, *Beyond 'Capital': Marx's Political Economy of the Working Class*, Second Edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lipsitz, George 2006, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Benefit from Identity Politics*, Second Edition, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Longhi, Vittorio 2013, *The Immigrant War: A Global Movement against Discrimination and Exploitation*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Löwy, Michael 1998, *Fatherland or Mother Earth: Essays on the National Question*, London: Pluto Press.
- Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels 1970 [1845], *The German Ideology*, edited by C.J. Arthur, New York: International Publishers.
- 1975, *Selected Correspondence*, Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Mason, Patrick L. 1995, 'Race, Competition and Differential Wages', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 19: 545–67.
- McNally, David 2001, *Bodies of Meaning: Studies on Language, Labour and Liberation*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Miles, Robert 1989, *Racism*, London: Routledge.
- and Malcolm Brown 2003, *Racism*, Second Edition, London: Routledge.
- Mills, Charles W. 2003, *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism*, Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield.
- 2009, 'Critical Race Theory: A Reply to Mike Cole', *Ethnicities*, 9, 2: 270–81.
- Mills, Tom 2012, 'Racism and the Political Economy of Domination' [Interview with Charles W. Mills], *New Left Project*, available at: <[http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article\\_comments/racism\\_and\\_the\\_political\\_economy\\_of\\_domination](http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/racism_and_the_political_economy_of_domination)>.
- Müller-Uri, Fanny and Benjamin Opratko 2013, 'What's in a Name? The Challenge of "Islamophobia" and Critical Theories of Racism', unpublished paper.
- Naison, Mark 1983, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression*, New York: Grove Press.
- Nardelli, Alberto 2014, 'Unprecedented in France: Front Nationale's Le Pen Tops Presidential Poll for First Time', *The Guardian*, available at: <<http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/sep/08/le-pen-tops-presidential-poll-for-first-time-ever>>.
- Nirenberg, David 2014, 'Hell is Other Peoples' [Review of Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms*], *Literary Review*, 417: 39.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant 2015, *Racial Formation in the United States*, Third Edition, New York: Routledge.
- Oreopoulos, Philip 2011, 'Why Do Skilled Immigrants Struggle in the Labor Market? A Field Experiment with Thirteen Thousand Résumés', *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 3: 148–71.

- Paolucci, Paul 2006, 'Race and Racism in Marx's Camera Obscura', *Critical Sociology*, 32, 4: 617–48.
- Pradella, Lucia 2015, *Globalisation and the Critique of Political Economy: New Insights from Marx's Writings*, New York: Routledge.
- Razack, Sherene 2008, *Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Reed, John 1920, 'America and the Negro Question', available at: <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/reed/index.htm>>.
- Rehmann, Jan 2013, *Theories of Ideology: The Powers of Alienation and Subjection*, *Historical Materialism Book Series*, Leiden: Brill.
- Reich, Michael 1981, *Racial Inequality: A Political-Economic Analysis*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Roberts, Dorothy 2011, *Fatal Invention: How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-Created Race in the Twenty-First Century*, New York: New Press.
- Robinson, Cedric J. 2000 [1983], *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press.
- 2001, *An Anthropology of Marxism*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Roediger, David R. 2006, 'The Retreat from Race and Class', *Monthly Review*, 58, 3, available at: <<http://monthlyreview.org/archives/2006/volume-58-issue-03-july-august-2006>>.
- 2008, *How Race Survived US History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon*, London: Verso.
- 2011, 'Accounting for the Wages of Whiteness: US Marxism and the Critical History of Race', in *Wages of Whiteness and Racist Symbolic Capital*, edited by Wulf D. Hund, Jeremy Krikler and David Roediger, Berlin: Lit Verlag.
- and Elizabeth D. Esch 2012, *The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labor in US History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Saloojee, Anver 2000, 'Containing Resistance: The Neoliberal Boundaries of Employment Equity', in *Restructuring and Resistance: Canadian Public Policy in an Age of Global Capitalism*, edited by Mike Burke, Colin Mooers and John Shields, Halifax, NS.: Fernwood.
- Sayer, Derek 1987, *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytic Foundations of Historical Materialism*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Shachtman, Max 2003 [1933], *Race and Revolution*, edited and introduced by Christopher Phelps, London: Verso.
- Sharma, Nandita and Cynthia Wright 2008, 'Decolonising Resistance, Challenging Colonial States', *Social Justice*, 35, 3: 93–111.
- Singh, Nikhil 2012, 'Racial Formation in an Age of Permanent War', in *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Daniel Martinez HoSang, Oneka LaBennett and Laura Pulido, Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Sizwe, No [Neville Alexander] 2013 [1979], *One Azania, One Nation: The National Question in South Africa*, available at: <<http://marxists.anu.edu.au/archive/alexander/one-azania-one-nation.pdf>>.
- Smith, Andrea 2013, 'The Problem with "Privilege"', available at: <<https://andrea366.wordpress.com/2013/08/14/the-problem-with-privilege-by-andrea-smith/>>.
- Smith, Chip 2007, *The Cost of Privilege: Taking On the System of White Supremacy and Racism*, Fayetteville: Camino Press.
- Smith, Neil 2006, 'The Geography of Uneven Development', in *100 Years of Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects*, edited by Bill Dunn and Hugo Radice, London: Pluto Press.
- Sokoloff, Leon 1992, 'The Rise and Decline of the Jewish Quota in Medical School Admissions', *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 68, 4: 497–518.
- Staudenmaier, Michael 2007, 'The White Skin Privilege Concept: From Margin to Center of Revolutionary Politics', available at: <<http://kasamaarchive.org/2011/05/12/white-skin-privilege-its-place-in-revolutionary-politics/>>.
- Stewart, Larry 1985, 'Black Liberation and the Comintern in Lenin', *Bulletin in Defence of Marxism*, 17, available at: <<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/stewart/1984/comintern.htm>>.
- Szymanski, Albert 1976, 'Racial Discrimination and White Gain', *American Sociological Review*, 41, 3: 403–14.
- Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahatta 2013, 'Making Sense of Society in Order to Change It', *socialistworker.org*, 7 November, available at: <<http://socialistworker.org/2013/11/07/making-sense-of-society-to-change-it>>.
- Taylor, Marcus 2010, 'Conscripts of Competitiveness: Culture, Institutions and Capital in Contemporary Development', *Third World Quarterly*, 31, 4: 561–79.
- Taylor, Paul C. 2004, *Race: A Philosophical Introduction*, Cambridge: Polity.
- 2009, 'Race, Rehabilitated – Redux', *Critical Sociology*, 36, 1: 175–90.
- The New Voice 1975, *Defeat the 'National Question' Line in the US and Unite to Fight Racism*, available at: <<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-8/new-voice-nation/chapter6.htm>>.
- Tietze, Tad 2014, 'What Privilege Theory Doesn't Explain', *socialistworker.org*, 14 January, available at: <<http://socialistworker.org/2014/01/14/what-privilege-theory-doesnt-explain>>.
- Trotsky, Leon 1978, *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, New York: Pathfinder.
- Virdee, Satnam 2000, 'A Marxist Critique of Black Radical Theories of Trade-Union Racism', *Sociology*, 34, 3: 545–65.
- 2010, 'Racism, Class and the Dialectics of Social Transformation', in *The SAGE Handbook of Race and Ethnic Studies*, edited by Patricia Hill Collins and John Solomos, London: SAGE Publications.

- West, Cornel 1988, 'Marxist Theory and the Specificity of Afro-American Oppression', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Winant, Howard 2004, *The New Politics of Race: Globalism, Difference, Justice*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Wood, Ellen Meiksins 2002, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View*, London: Verso.
- Young, Iris Marion 1990, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Young, Robert 2006, 'Putting Materialism back into Race Theory: Toward a Transformative Theory of Race', in *Race and the Foundations of Knowledge: Cultural Amnesia in the Academy*, edited by Joseph Young and Jana Evans Braziel, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Zemni, Sami 2011, 'The Shaping of Islam and Islamophobia in Belgium', *Race and Class*, 49, 3: 76–87.