Wikipedia: An Info-Communist Manifesto

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Abstract

The task of this article is to analyze the political economy of Wikipedia. We discuss the specifics of Wikipedia's mode of production. The basic principles of what we call the info-communist mode of production will be presented. Our analysis is grounded in Marxist philosophy and Marxist political economy, and is connected to the current discourse about the renewal and reloading of the idea of communism that is undertaken by thinkers like Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou. We explore to which extent Wikipedia encompasses principles that go beyond the capitalist mode of production and represent the info-communist mode of production. We present the subjective dimension of the mode of production (cooperative labor), the objective dimension of the mode of production (common ownership of the means of production), and the subject–object dimension of the mode of production (the effects and products of the mode of production).

Keywords

Wikipedia, political economy, communism, info-communism, mode of production, Karl Marx

Introduction

Wikipedia is today an undeniable success: As of February 2012, Wikipedia is the sixth most visited website worldwide (Alexa 2012). Published academic papers conclude that the quality of Wikipedia's articles is fair and equal to corporate encyclopedia. The first important study concerning the subject was published in *Nature* (Giles 2005). The researchers compared forty-two Wikipedia articles and Encyclopedia

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Britannica articles. They found four inaccuracies in Wikipedia's articles, three in Britannica's, and therefore concluded that the two encyclopedias had the same quality. Chesney (2006) asked fifty-five academics to assess the quality of Wikipedia. On average, the academics gave it a fairly high credibility ranking.[1] Also, it appeared that academics were rating articles higher that belonged to their own field of expertise, showing at the same time the good quality of articles and their general lack of trust of Wikipedia. Halavais and Lackaff (2008) conclude that all encyclopedic topics within Wikipedia are sufficiently covered, except for Law and Medicine.

This article discusses the political economy of Wikipedia. We argue that Wikipedia's mode of production, which is used in other cooperative information productions, such as free software, bears strong resemblance with what Marx and Engels described as communism. At the same time, Wikipedia, as a semiautonomous system, is influenced by society at large and by the effects of inequality and exploitation of the capitalist system. First, we give an overview of the relationship of concepts of communication, communism, and the commons. Then, we analyze Wikipedia's mode of production in three parts: we present the subjective dimension of the mode of production (cooperative labor), the objective dimension of the mode of production (common ownership of the means of production), and the subject–object dimension of the mode of production (the effects and products of the mode of production). Finally, we reflect on the relationship between info-communism and capitalism.

The literature published on Wikipedia (for an overview, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedia_in_academic_studies) is positivistic and lacks a critical focus, because it pays little heed to its societal implications in terms of economic property, economic production, and participatory democracy.[2] We argue that Wikipedia is important in the sense that it presents a new way of collaborative decision making and a new way of producing, owning, consuming, and distributing goods. Wikipedia's decision-making process is an original method based on debate and consensus, a nonhierarchical and egalitarian system that bears emancipative outcomes (Firer-Blaess 2011). Thanks to the intrinsic qualities of informational products, Wikipedia prefigures a new mode of production, based on cooperation, which could supersede the capitalist model and anticipates an alternative mode of production.

Communication, Commons, and the Communist Idea

One interesting thing about Marx is that he keeps coming back at moments when people least expect it, and in the form of various Marxisms that keep haunting capitalism like ghosts, as Jacques Derrida (1994) has stressed. It is paradoxical that almost twenty years after the end of the Soviet Union, it has become clear in the course of the new world economic crisis that capitalism has led to severe poverty and the rise of unequal income distribution. These problems brought a return of the economic and, with it, a reactualization of a Marxian critique of capitalism. Although a persistent refrain is "Marx is dead, long live capitalism," the 2008 global economic crisis shows that Marxist theory is still important today (Foster and Magdoff 2009). The renewed

discussion about the relevance of Marx's critique of political economy as an analytical tool for understanding the crisis has been accompanied by a discussion about the need for establishing a democratic form of communism as an alternative to capitalism (Badiou 2008; Douzinas and Žižek 2010; Hardt and Negri 2009; Harvey 2010a, 2010b). For Badiou (2010), the idea of communism can now only materialize in new, original social organizations that are not classical political parties. Negri (2010, 164) claims that the State is the enemy of the idea of Communism, and also calls for common militancy and the production of new institutions. For Žižek, the true task is to "make the State itself work in a non-statal mode" (2010b, 219).

Marx and Engels did not mean communism to be a totalitarian society that monitors all human beings, operates forced labor camps, represses human individuality, installs conditions of general shortage, limits the freedom of movement, etc. For them, communism was a society that strengthens common cooperative production, common ownership of the means of production, and enriches through individuality. Humans engage in cooperative social relations and by making use of different means of production (i.e. technologies, resources) to create a new good or service. This overall process has subjective and objective dimensions in the transition from a capitalist to a communist society (Fuchs 2011, chapter 9; Fuchs 2012).

Communism is not the Soviet Union, Stalin, Mao, and the Gulag, but participatory democracy. Stalin, Mao, and the Soviet Union called themselves communist but had nothing in common with participatory democracy and therefore were alien to the Marxian communism. Communism was for Marx the "struggle for democracy" (*MEW* 4:481). By democracy, Marx means a specific kind of democracy—participatory democracy.

Raymond Williams (1983) pointed out that the term *commons* stems from the Latin word *communis*, which means that something is shared by many or all. Williams argued that there are affinities and overlaps between the words *communism* and *commons*. The notion of the commons is also connected to the word *communication* because to communicate means to make something "common to many" (Williams 1983, 72). Communication and the means of communication are part of the societal commons in that they are continuously created, reproduced, and used by all humans as conditions of their survival. Therefore, the commons of society should be available freely without costs or access requirements for all people.

The freedom of the commons would include the creation of a commons-based Internet, ergo a communist Internet. A communist Internet involves an association of free producers and consumers that is cooperative, self-managed, and surveillance-free regardless of social class. Free access would imply no advertising and no corporations in charge of network access. In a communist Internet Age, programmers, administrators, and users would control Internet platforms by participatory self-management. Internet literacy programs would be widely available in schools and adult education in order to enable humans to develop capacities that allow them to use the Internet in meaningful ways that benefit themselves and society as a whole. Web platform access, computer software, and hardware would be provided to all humans. Humans would

engage more directly with each other over the Internet without the mediation by corporations that own platforms and exploit communicative labor. Instead, users would (1) cocreate and share knowledge that help them self-actualize as well-rounded individuals and (2) be equal participants in the decision-making processes that concern the platforms and technologies they use.

A truly communist Internet is only possible in a communist society, but short of that, Wikipedia offers a communist project. Communism is not a distant society, it exists to a certain degree in each society. David Harvey argues that "communists are all those who work incessantly to produce a different future to that which capitalism portends. . . . If, as the alternative globalization movement of the late 1990s declared, 'another world is possible', then why not also say 'another communism is possible'" (Harvey 2010b, 259). Like alternative globalization activists, Wikipedians engage in communist production practices that need to be developed, extended, and intensified in order to create a communist Internet and a communist society.

The Political Economy of Wikipedia

We show in this section why Wikipedia should be considered as being a communist project and anticipates a communist mode of production. The mode of production at work in Wikipedia goes beyond the collaborative encyclopedia; it is also present in the production of, for instance, free software. This mode of production, which we call *info-communism*, is an informational mode of production, that is, a dialectic connection of social relations and information technology–based productive forces that create informational goods and services. In contrast to the capitalist mode of production, in the info-communist mode of production both the relations of production and the productive forces are fully socialized—they are based on common ownership of the means of production and collaborative work. In an info-communist mode of production, information production, circulation, and use is based on communist relations of production and communist productive forces. We do not claim that an info-communist society is only based on an informational mode of production; rather there is an interaction of various modes of production (even agricultural and classical industrial modes of production). But a high level of technological productivity enables a communist post-scarcity society and the end of hard, alienating work, which means that a realm of creative intellectual work opens up for all. This realm is the informational part of the communist modes of production—info-communism. It is based on knowledge work and makes use of and creates information technologies that also shape the other communist modes of production.

Information is different from a material good in the sense that it is an abundant product that can be used nonexclusively by many (Samuelson 1954). In addition, information has low or no reproduction costs, particularly in the digital age. Given these conditions, the profitability of information requires the introduction of copyright to control the product as private property. Copyrights grant the legal owners the right to put a price on each copy of information and create artificial scarcity. This artificial

rise of the cost of information is a waste for society as a whole. Info-communism, by contrast, unfetters the abundance of information through its cooperative labor, ownership structure, democratic and participatory production relations, and the use-value of its product.

There are three important dimensions of communism (Fuchs 2011, chapter 9):

1. The subjective dimension of production: communism as cooperative form of production
2. The objective dimension of production: communism as the common ownership of the means of production
3. The effect dimension of production: communism as the emergence of well-rounded individuals.

In this section, we will discuss the relevance of each of these three dimensions for Wikipedia.

Cooperative Labor

For Marx and Engels, communism is a community of cooperating producers that operate in a highly productive economy, use the means of production together to produce use values that satisfy the needs of all, and take decisions in the production process together. Marx speaks of communism as "general cooperation of all members of society" (*MEW* 4:377), "communal production" (Marx 1857/58, 172), and the "positing of the activity of individuals as immediately general or social activity" (Marx 1857/58, 832).

Info-communism relies heavily on intellectual work. In Wikipedia, the labor force is constituted by thousands of intellectual workers, mainly Western youth or students and "elite workers" who are very educated, white collar, and digitally literate (Glott et al. 2010; Jullien 2011). These Wikipedians have sufficient income, skills, and time to work within info-communism in their leisure time. Their narrow specificity as a labor segment reflects the general stratification patterns in global capitalism and shows that a truly info-communist mode of production requires a communist society in which free time, skills, and material wealth become universal.

The work on Wikipedia is cooperative. No one can claim the authorship of an article, as it is often the result of dozens of people writing and debating together about what should be written. Most of the articles have between seven and twenty-one coauthors (Auray et al. 2007, 194). Wikipedians have developed an ad hoc decision-making process (DMP) based on debate and consensus, which can be considered as participatory democracy (Figure 1). This process enables them to collaboratively edit the Wikipedia articles. It is supported and enabled by the *wiki* web software, which generates webpages that can be edited by anyone and that supports discussion between the users. An editorial change by a user will be accepted or rejected through what we can call a passive consensus; the new edit stays in place until it is deleted, or modified

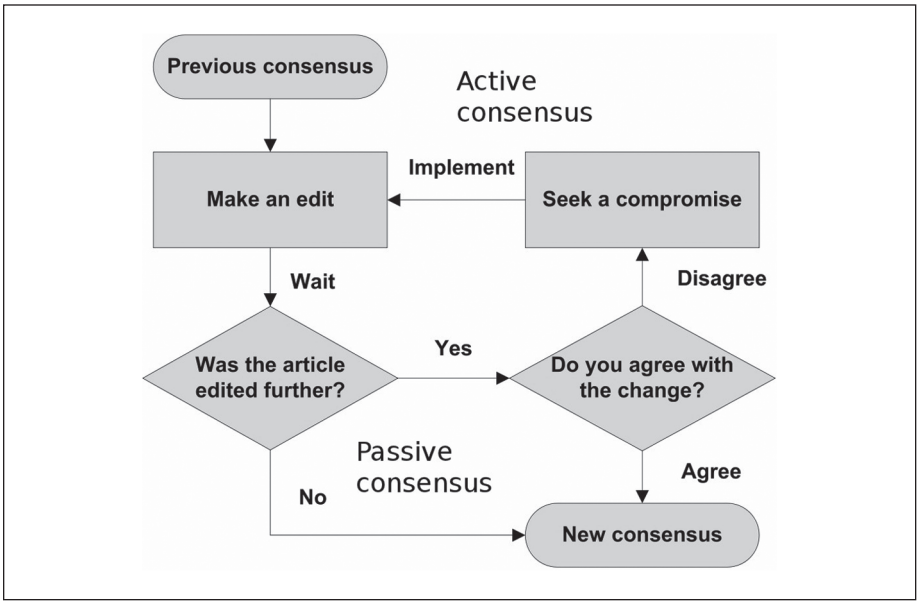

Figure 1. The decision-making process in the edition of articles of Wikipedia (source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Consensus accessed on June 5, 2011, license CC BY-SA 3.0)

in the article. This process can go on indefinitely until Wikipedians disagree with one another whether an edit should stay. In order to resolve differences of opinion, Wikipedians must then enter into a process of active consensus. This process takes place on the "discussion" page attached to each article. Here the disagreeing parties will present their arguments and debate what edition should remain.

It is a custom, as well as a Wikipedia policy (Wikipedia 2011a), that parties in conflict should reach an agreement by themselves, but the debate is also structured by internal rules, such as rules of style and content. Policies that structuring debate include the Neutral Point of View, which asserts that Wikipedia articles should present all significant facets or competing positions and that they should in the presentation of these positions weigh their popularity in the scientific or cultural field (Wikipedia 2011b). Other policies are the Verifiability Policy (Wikipedia 2011c), which rules that each claim should be attributed to a verifiable and reliable source, and the Prohibition against Original Research (Wikipedia 2011i), which rules that sources must have undertaken a peer review process. Much of the DMP concerns interpretations of such policies. Therefore, arguments in debates are often based on, and legitimated by, the aforementioned rules.

Wikipedia's policies as well as the discussions about the content of articles are decided by Wikipedians in a deliberative process. These debates are part of the cooperative labor process and are based on the common ownership and control of the platform by the users. This means that the governance aspect of Wikipedia has both

aspects of collaborative work and common ownership. The latter aspect will also be discussed in a later section.

Common Ownership of the Means of Production

Communism did not mean for Marx and Engels that there would be no private goods for consumption. The main difference from a capitalist society is rather that the means of production (the technologies of production, the firms, the decision power in firms) are no longer only owned by a small group but controlled by all producers. Communism is a democratic way of organizing industry and the economy. It extends economic property from a small group to all producers. Communist firms are self-managed and do not have a power division between owners and workers—all workers are at the same time owners.

Marx and Engels extended the notion of the commons to all means of production. Marx spoke of "an association of free men, working with the means of production held in common, and expending their many different forms of labor-power in full self-awareness as one single social labor force" (Marx 1867, 171). In this association, machines are the "property of the associated workers" (Marx 1857/58, 833) so that "a new foundation" of production emerges. This new system is a system of commons (Marx 1894, 373; Marx 1857/58, 159; *MESW*, 305; *MEW* 4:370), social property (Marx 1867, 930), a control of structures by society as a whole (*MEW* 4:370; *MEW* 3:67).

For Marx, individuals in capitalism are not-yet fully developed social beings because they do not cooperatively own the means of production and operate the production process. He therefore spoke of the emergence of "social individuals" (Marx 1857/58, 832) and "the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e. human) being" (Marx 1844, 102). A communist economy is not based on money and the exchange of goods: "money would immediately be done away with" (Marx 1885, 390), "producers do not exchange their products" (*MESW*, 305). Rather, the economy is so productive that all goods are given for free to consumers (*MESW*, 306). Marx's notion of a communist economy is what Crawford Macpherson (1973) and Carole Pateman (1970) described as participatory democracy in the economic realm. Participatory democracy involves the intensification of democracy and its extensions into realms beyond politics. This also involves the insight that the capitalist economy is an undemocratic dictatorship of capital, but should be democratized. Participatory democracy requires for Macpherson and Pateman that the means and the output of labor are no longer private property, but become common property.

Participatory Ownership

In info-communism, the means of production belong to the workers. Wikipedia is operated by the Wikimedia Foundation, a nonprofit organization registered in San Francisco. The total expenses of the Wikimedia Foundation are rather low, US$10 million in

2009–2010 (Wikimedia Foundation 2010). Donations finance Wikipedia directly, bypassing the need for capitalist investors. The Wikimedia Foundation is a public charity under U.S. law, with the statement of purpose to "empower and engage people around the world to collect and develop educational content under a free license or in the public domain, and to disseminate it effectively and globally" (Wikimedia 2012, article II). The Wikipedia community elects the top managers of the Wikimedia Foundation and thereby has some control over the Foundation (Wikimedia 2012, article IV, section 3).

The means of production of info-communism consist of servers, programs, and personal computers. Personal computers used for accessing Wikipedia and creating its content are private property of the users, unless the users employ public services (as e.g. computers in libraries). Programs and servers can be considered as common property managed by the Wikimedia Foundation. Servers are bought thanks to donations. Wikipedia uses the free software MediaWiki to run its website. MediaWiki is based on a "copyleft license" (Wikipedia 2012a) that makes it a free software commons. This means the code is free to use and to analyze. Users can copy and share the software with others. The code can be modified and distributed. It is illegal to use and/or modify part of the code outside of the copyleft license, which prevents a future proprietary enclosure of the commons. Wikimedia's servers are becoming de facto public goods for the community of workers whose efforts do not serve capital accumulation purposes.

Participatory Democracy in the Relations of Production

In the info-communist mode, production is controlled by the workers. They make all decisions together and control the production process as an expression of economic participatory democracy. On Wikipedia, the rules structuring cooperation are decided in common. Policy making follows the same debate/consensus decision-making process (DMP) as in the editing process to adjudicate matters of style and content, of behavior in the editing process, of copyright and other legal matters, as well as of policy enforcement (Wikipedia 2011e) (Figure 2). Most of the time a policy is created when some Wikipedians realize that something is not working well or could be improved. A proposal usually emerges from a discussion in the village pump (Wikipedia 2011f), the general forum of the Anglophone Wikipedia. After the community has shown concern, a user will create a "policy proposition" page, and advertise the policy proposal through an "advert" section on sensitive pages. The policy proposition page serves as a forum where DMP takes place. Once consensus has emerged, a policy page is created (in a communal way, and following the DMP for editing). These policy pages have the status of official policies and therefore can be claimed in any DMP and enforced. As everywhere in Wikipedia, things are never fixed, and the policy pages stay open to amendments and modifications following the latest DMP edition (Wikipedia 2012b).

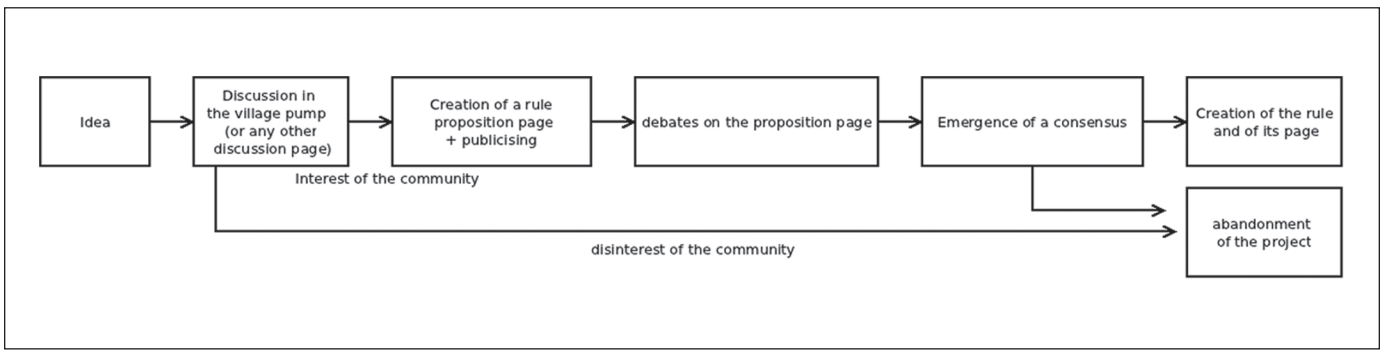

Figure 2. Policy Decision-Making Process (Source: Firer-Blaess 2011)

In contrast to the modern democratic system, the means for decision making on Wikipedia is not the vote but the consensus; votes are explicitly excluded from Wikipedia (Wikipedia 2011g). This is an important matter. The egalitarian ideology of the polling democracy (in which one person = one vote), is replaced by a process, whereby a point of view is weighed by the perceived quality of the argument. This maximizes the involvement of users. It is not enough to have points of view; one must also make them explicit and rational. Finally, the Wikipedia DMP not only enables the making of decisions but positively constructs them. Often in the talk pages, long and heated debates happen, and from the debates, new solutions appear. Unlike a representative democracy, in which citizens vote on solutions created by experts, Wikipedia agents are the makers and the deciders of solutions in a dialogical fashion.

The Use-Value of Free Content

The use of the means of production by workforces within definite relations of production results in the creation of use-values that serve human needs. In capitalism, use-values are exchange values and commodities, but in communism they are commonly owned and accessible to all people without payment. According to Wikipedia's terms of use, articles are licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License and the GNU Free Documentation License, which grants the users the same rights as under copyleft, namely, the right to freely use the Wikipedia content, to share it with others, and to modify it as long as the resulting work is under the same license.

Interestingly, Wikipedia allows for commercial use of its content. Enterprises can also sell services that use Wikipedia content. In order to increase the compatibility with other free contents, the Wikimedia foundation proposed to take Wikipedia's content out from under the GNU Free Documentation License and register it as a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike license. The Wikipedia community agreed to this proposition through a vote that ended on May 3, 2009 (Wikipedia 2011h). Wikipedia itself is not subject to commercial logic, but the commercial use of content is due to its license possible and a reality. Some Wikipedia articles are reused on commercial websites, which use advertisements on their web pages (an example is *answers.com*). Services are created in order to facilitate direct access to the Wikipedia website. For instance, some smartphone applications propose a direct and simplified access to Wikipedia, but they either charge a fee for download or display advertising, thus selling the user as a commodity.[3] A commercial publishing house has recently published books that are copying the content of Wikipedia (Bateman 2011).

While available for free, info-communist products can therefore become commodified. More precisely, it is not the info-communist product that is sold, but a service attached to it, like better user access or support. Whenever the commodification of Wikipedia knowledge happens, the work of Wikipedians is infinitely exploited. Unpaid users create surplus value such that the rate of surplus value rs = s / v (surplus value / variable capital=wages) converges toward infinity (see Fuchs 2010). Commodified Wikipedia work is like voluntary slavery because no one other than the exploited and

unremunerated Wikipedians have opted for a policy that makes commodification of their labor possible.

This circumstance shows that Wikipedia is to a certain degree entangled into the capitalist relations of production. In order to go beyond them, Wikipedians would have to change Wikipedia's license from a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike Unported License to a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 3.0 Unported License, which prohibits the commercial exploitation of Wikipedia (Creative Commons 2012).

The Effects of Wikipedia Production: Cooperative Intellectual Work

For Marx and Engels, communism also means that productivity has developed to such a high degree that in combination with common ownership of the means of production and the abolition of the division of labor, the time for self-directed activities can be enlarged so that humans can engage in many-sided activities and can thereby realize and develop creative potentials that benefit society as a whole. For Marx, a true form of individuality develops through the cooperative character of production.

With the technological increase of the productivity of labor in communism, "the part of the social working day necessarily taken up with material production is shorter and, as a consequence, the time at society's disposal for the free intellectual and social activity of the individual is greater" (Marx 1867, 667). There is a "general reduction of the necessary labor of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free" (Marx 1857/58, 706). Based on the development of the productive forces, "the realm of freedom really begins only where labor determined by necessity and external expediency ends" (Marx 1894, 958f). Freedom is here the freedom to determine one's own activities.

Reducing necessary labor time by high technological productivity is for Marx a precondition of communism (Marx 1857/58, 173, 711). Wealth would then result from the free activities of humans (Marx 1857/58, 488, 705, 708). Marx saw high technological productivity and the increase of disposable time as foundation for a rich human individuality. He spoke of the emergence of the well-rounded individual. The "highest development of the forces of production" is "the richest development of the individuals" (Marx 1857/58, 541, see also: 711; *MEW* 3:67f). The best known passage that describes the emergence of "complete individuals" (*MEW* 3:68), of "well-rounded human beings" (*MEW* 4:376), and of "a society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle" (Marx 1867, 639) can be found in the *German Ideology*:

> In communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the

> evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic. (*MEW* 3:33)

If capitalism is driven primarily by the thirst for profit, followed with the natural or fabricated need for consumption, in info-communism, production seems to be driven primarily by the pleasure of collective work and other incentives related to common ownership. One must ask why so many people decide to work voluntarily for info-communist projects. Some free-software programmers are motivated by the improvement of their position in the labor market through their programming experience (Hars and Ou 2002, 29), a motivation absent from Wikipedia (Auray 2007, 192; Nov 2007, 63). The main incentive for most of the workers in info-communism, and especially in Wikipedia, is the pleasure derived from intellectual and cooperative work (Auray 2007, 192; Bauwen 2003, 3.1.C; Hars and Ou 2002, 27–28; Kuznetsov 2006, 6; Nov 2007, 63; Rafaeli 2005). To this point, a Wikipedian comments:

> This common work gives a feeling of power. When one notices that a text one has submitted has been amended by someone else a few hours later, sometimes translated in many languages (for instance Latin and Esperanto), one has the feeling to be supported by an army of volunteers: a feeling of empowerment, with no whip nor carrots. It is exhilarating. One experiences a pride that has nothing to do with vanity, this is the simple pride to have achieved something. And one feels like an ant accomplishing a work of ant but supported by the immense mass of the others, carried by a vast ocean. This is what we call the Wikilove, an exhilarating atmosphere. (Foglia 2008, 54-55,[4] translation by the authors)

The pleasure to work is not only derived from cooperative production and from the love to program or to write articles but also from the autonomy of the worker within the production process (Schroer and Hertel 2009). The work process is self-determined: Wikipedians work on whatever bit of program or article they want. The time Wikipedians work on Wikipedia is self-determined work time, an expression and anticipation of the communist mode of production, in which all work is self-determined and expression of well-rounded individuality.

At the same time, not everyone can access the pleasure from info-communist labor. Those who have the time and skills required for Wikipedia production are part of a well-educated elite. The intellectual skills and the wealth and time needed for contributing actively to Wikipedia are not available to all because global capitalism is a class society that creates classes of wealthy and poor people: the wealthy are rich in material resources, skills, time, relations, networks, etc., which the poor are deprived of these. Class structures are fluid, overlapping, and many-layered (the material rich are not automatically the culturally rich or most educated, although they can use money to try to convert money capital into cultural capital, e.g.). Wikipedia is embedded into global capitalism and therefore operated by an elite that can afford its elite status. A truly

communist Wikipedia can only be achieved in a classless society, in which all humans have a wealth of resources and capacities.

Info-communism and Historical Materialism

Communism is not about the establishment of a repressive state-centered society, but about the struggle for establishing a participatory democracy. There is a need for a renewed debate about democratic communism and a renewal of the critique of political economy. Wikipedia has communist potentials that are antagonistically entangled into capitalist class relations. Its practices and the roots of info-communism emerge within the economic structures of informational capitalism both through profit-driven Internet infrastructures and personal computer markets, and through an international class of educated workers with enough leisure time and education to develop info-communism. The free knowledge production by Wikipedians is a force that is embedded into capitalism, but to a certain degree transcends it at the same time. A new mode of production can develop within an old one. "The economic structure of capitalist society ha[d] grown out of the economic structure of feudal society" (Marx 1867, 875). According to Marx, a mode of production becomes outdated when it begins to restrain and fetter the possibilities of a larger and better production process that lies within the social structure in a potential but not-yet-achieved state. There is no guarantee that the roots of a new society can be realized, because this is a task of political practice.

Info-communism can only be applied to informational goods. The production of physical goods is more resource intensive, but in any physical production, information is present. From the simplest artifact to large-scale industry, knowledge and know-how are needed. Knowledge in physical production is an important factor and info-communism could therefore potentially expand into the sphere of the production of physical goods. Indeed other knowledge projects that are based on the wiki principle are Wiktionary, Wikiquote, Wikisource, Wikibooks, and Wikiversity, all owned by the Wikimedia Foundation. Well-known open software projects are the Operating System GNU/Linux, the Apache http server software, the blogging software WordPress, the web browser Firefox, and the social networking site project Diaspora. So Wikipedia is not alone in challenging the capitalist domination of the ICT realm.

Info-communism is however not the dominant mode of production. Capitalist companies try to make use of free software and open access principles. They hire programmers to modify or add modules to already-existing free software for their specific needs; or they simply take ideas from existing open source projects and develop their own proprietary software (Ågerfalk and Fitzgerald 2008). Wikipedia is prone to the forces of commercialization and commodification. If Wikipedia were sold to a company, all of the voluntary labor would suddenly become exploited free labor. Their past labor would nonetheless have become exploited and turned into profit. The question is if Wikipedians would still contribute their labor in the future under such conditions.

Wikipedia shows that there are two types of relations between capitalism and info-communism: competition and collaboration. In the former, capitalistic products confront info-communist products. In the latter, capitalist corporations abuse the info-communist mode of production to develop their own profitable software. There are therefore two possible futures for info-communism. In the first scenario, info-communism is politically nourished by communist class struggles, taking evermore market shares at the expense of the capitalist mode of production. In the second scenario, some of the characteristics of info-communism, such as the principles of open access, free content provision, and online mass collaboration, are absorbed by capitalism, thereby destroying the communist character of info-communism. Wikipedia is the brightest info-communist star on the Internet's class struggle firmament. While it is possible that capitalism subsumes the transcendent elements of info-communism, it is therefore the primary political task for concerned citizens to resist the commodification of everything and to strive for democratizing the economy, that is, building a participatory grassroots economy that is not controlled by corporations but the people.[5]

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Notes

1. On average, the academics gave Wikipedia articles a ranking of three, on a scale from one (very credible) to seven (very incredible).
2. An exception is Erik Olin Wright (2010), who discusses Wikipedia based on a critical framework and discusses its implications for "real utopias."
3. An example for such a commercial use is the application "Wiki Encyclopedia" for Android, http://www.appbrain.com/app/wiki-encyclopedia/uk.co.exelentia.wikipedia (accessed June 2011).
4. From the interview of a French Wikipedian by François-Dominique Armingaud in 2005.
5. Our study focused on the direct application of Marx's critique of political economy to Wikipedia. In future work, it will be interesting to engage more deeply with contemporary social theory such as the autonomist Marxist tradition (Hardt and Negri 2004; Dyer-Witheford 1999; Terranova 2004), contemporary theories of info-communism (Kleiner 2010; Söderberg 2007; Moglen 2003, Mueller 2008); to develop the discussion on the notion of "commons" (Berry 2008; Benkler 2007); and last but not least to acknowledge the tensions between capitalism and info-communism within the free software movement (Kelty 2008; Coleman 2011).

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The Continuing Relevance of the Marxist Tradition for Transcending Capitalism

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Abstract: No idea is more closely associated with Marx than the claim that the intrinsic, contradictory dynamics of capitalism ultimately lead to its self-destruction while simultaneously creating conditions favourable for a revolutionary rupture needed to create an emancipatory alternative in which the control by the capitalist class of investments and production is displaced by radical economic democracy. Marx's formulation of a theory of transcending capitalism is unsatisfactory for two main reasons: 1) the dynamics of capitalism may generate great harms, but they do not inherently make capitalism unsustainable nor do they generate the structural foundations of a collective actor with a capacity to overthrow capitalism; 2) the vision of a system-level rupture with capitalism is not a plausible strategy replacing capitalism by a democratic-egalitarian economic system. Nevertheless, there are four central propositions anchored in the Marxist tradition that remain essential for understanding the possibility of transcending capitalism: 1. Capitalism obstructs the realization of conditions for human flourishing. 2. Another world is possible. 3. Capitalism's dynamics are intrinsically contradictory. 4. Emancipatory transformation requires popular mobilization and struggle. These four propositions can underwrite a strategic vision of eroding the dominance of capitalism by building democratic-egalitarian economic relations within the contradictory spaces of capitalism.

Keywords: Karl Marx, 200th anniversary, transcendence of capitalism, real utopias, socialism, contradiction, crisis

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1. Marx's Argument

No idea is more closely associated with Marx than the claim that the intrinsic dynamics of capitalism contain deep contradictions that ultimately lead to its self-destruction, and what's more, these dynamics simultaneously create conditions favourable for a revolutionary rupture needed to create a new form of society much more conducive to human flourishing. The first part of the argument constitutes a strong prediction about the destiny of capitalism: In the long-term, capitalism is an unsustainable social order and will inevitably come to an end. This is a much stronger claim than simply that capitalism generates harms of various sorts and suffers from periodic crises. It is a prediction that capitalism ultimately destroys itself. The second part is somewhat less deterministic: The dynamics that destroy capitalism open up new historic possibilities (especially because of the development of the forces of production and human productivity) and, at the same time, create a collective agent – the working class – capable of taking advantage of those possibilities to con-

struct an emancipatory alternative through revolution. How long it will take before this latent capability will actually result in the realization of this alternative, and precisely what the alternative will look like, depends on range of more contingent processes: the dissemination of revolutionary ideology, the emergence of robust solidarities, the development of forms of political organisation able to give coherence to struggles, and so on. Taken as a whole, therefore, the theory embodies an interplay of deterministic claims about the inevitable self-destructive demise of capitalism and the emergence of favourable structural conditions for revolution with less deterministic claims about the timing and institutional design of an emancipatory future beyond capitalism.[1]

This duality of deterministic and nondeterministic claims is part of what made Marx's theoretical ideas such a compelling basis for political movements. The nondeterministic elements validate the importance of purpose-filled collective agency and the willingness of individuals to join in the struggle for a better world. The deterministic elements give reasons for optimism: Even when the obstacles to revolution seem daunting, anti-capitalist forces could believe that 'history is on our side' and eventually the conditions will be 'ripe' for a revolutionary break-through.

2. The World Today

We now live in a world very different from the one in which Marx formulated his theoretical ideas, and it is difficult to sustain the exuberant optimism of Marx's theory of the future beyond capitalism. Two issues are especially salient.

First, some of the key empirical predictions, crucial for the overarching aspiration for transcending capitalism, have not been born out: Rather than becoming steadily more homogeneous, the working class has become increasingly fragmented, internally unequal, and heterogeneous in all sorts of ways, impeding the broad class solidarity needed for sustained collective action against capitalism; capitalism has proven much more resilient in responding to crises with new modes of accumulation; the capitalist state has proven much more flexible in absorbing popular demands and counteracting crises, while resorting to effective repression when needed; the material standards of living of most people in developed capitalist societies and many in poorer regions of the world, have continued to rise, even during the recent decades of relative economic stagnation.[2] Other predictions of Marx, of course, have been

[1] There is a longstanding debate within the Marxist tradition over how deterministic Marx himself was about the destiny of capitalism. There is no ambiguity in his views that the contradictions of capitalism would necessarily destroy its conditions of existence. His model of capitalism contains no prediction about how rapidly this will occur, but it is clear about the ultimate demise of the system. I believe that in his major writing, Marx was also prepared to make strong predictions about the destiny beyond capitalism: Once the structural conditions favourable to a rupture are present, eventually a revolutionary break-through would occur. The precise timing was contingent on ideological and political processes, but not the ultimate outcome. Rosa Luxemburg is famous for saying that the choices facing humanity were "socialism or barbarism", which implies that an emancipatory future beyond capitalism is not inevitable even in the long run; barbarism is also a possibility. Marx did not express such ambiguity. In any case, regardless of Marx's own views on this, many people who identify with the Marxist tradition today adopt a much less deterministic view about the overall trajectory of capitalism and especially about the possibilities and prospects after capitalism.

[2] This last point is worth emphasizing. While it is true that real wages have been relatively stagnant for the median wage-earner in many rich countries since the early 1980s, never-

spot on: Capitalism has become a global system, reaching the far corners of the world; the forces of production have developed in astonishing ways, tremendously increasing human productivity; capitalist markets deeply penetrate most facets of life; economic crises, sometimes severe, are a persistent feature of capitalist societies. The problem is that none of these trends are central to the core prediction that capitalism necessarily destroys its own conditions of existence while simultaneously creating an historical subject capable of its overthrow. These dual linked propositions have lost credibility.

Some people argue that new crisis tendencies unforeseen by Marx, especially catastrophic climate change, may make capitalism not simply undesirable, but unsustainable. Of course, if, as some environmentalists claim, global warming will ultimately make human life impossible, capitalism would also be impossible. But short of such apocalyptic outcomes, it is not obvious that climate change poses a mortal threat to capitalism as such. The terrible effects of capitalism on the environment are one important reason to oppose capitalism, but the irrationality and undesirability of capitalism do not imply its unsustainability. Climate change is like war: Just as war is often good for capitalism because of the role of the state in assuring capitalist profits in war industries, there is a huge amount of money to be made out of the massive public works projects needed for climate adaptation. Climate change may threaten the specific neoliberal form of capitalism, but it is much less clear that in and of itself it renders capitalism as such unsustainable. Furthermore, unlike the specific dynamics proposed by Marx, even if the climate crisis made capitalism unsustainable, it does not simultaneously create favourable conditions for the powerful, cohesive forms of solidarity needed for an emancipatory overthrow capitalism; it generates no latent "historical subject" comparable to Marx's vision of the proletariat.[3]

The second reason why Marx's optimistic vision has lost credibility is the tragic history in the 20th century of the attempts at constructing an alternative to capitalism in the aftermath of socialist revolutions. It is very difficult to have confidence that even if crises create the opportunity for revolutionary political forces to seize power, that they will have the capacity to actually construct an emancipatory alternative.

Marx himself never gave much attention to the problem of either the design of socialism, or to the actual process through which it would be constructed. Basically, he

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theless the material standards of living – the bundle of what people actually consume – of the median household have risen on virtually every indicator over the past four decades. Some of this is due to the increase in labour force participation of women, but much of it is due to significant improvements in the quality of many products and the availability of cheap mass produced consumer goods. Inequality has increased dramatically, but this has gone along with modest improvements in median living standards.

[3] There are other arguments people make to support the proposition that the endogenous dynamics of capitalism ultimately destroy its conditions of possibility, in particular, capitalism needs endless growth, but endless growth is impossible (Harvey 2014, chapter 15), or the rapid acceleration of automation will ultimately destroy the conditions of profitability for capitalist firms (Mason 2016, Rifkin 2014). I do not have space in this essay to explore these arguments, but briefly: (1) *Growth*: Capitalist investment and competition do foster growth, but this does not inherently imply a growth in physical output, nor does it imply that across the cycles of growth and decline there must be net growth overtime. (2) *Automation*: The idea that automation will destroy capitalism depends on a specific use of the Labour Theory of Value in which only labour generates value and only surplus labour in the form of surplus value generates profits. If one rejects the LTV, then there is no reason to believe that high levels of automation necessarily undermine system-level profits.

felt that given his prediction of the conditions under which this task would be undertaken – the decay of capitalism, the emergence of a powerful, extensive working class, and the existence of a class conscious revolutionary movement – the creative forces of the collectively organized working class would figure this out through a process of experimental trial-and-error. The experience of the 20th century does not provide much evidence to support this expectation.

Why the revolutions of the 20th century never resulted in robust, sustainable human emancipation is, of course, a hotly debated matter. Was this simply because of the economic backwardness of the places where revolutions occurred, or strategic errors or problematic motivations of leadership? Or do the repeated failures to build sustainable emancipatory alternatives through attempts at radical ruptures in social systems reflect the impossibility of the task? Perhaps attempts at system-ruptures will inevitably unravel into such chaos that revolutionary parties, regardless of the motives of their leadership, will be compelled to resort to pervasive violence and repression to sustain social order, and such violence, in turn, destroys the possibility for a genuinely democratic, egalitarian process of building a new society. The unintended negative consequences of what it takes to carry out a system-rupture may overwhelm the intended emancipatory goals. Regardless of which (if any) of these explanations are correct, the evidence from the revolutionary tragedies of the 20th century is that system-level rupture doesn't work as a strategy for social emancipation.[4]

3. The Robust Anchors for Continuing a Marxist Theory of Transcending Capitalism

In the 21st century, therefore, it is no longer plausible to see the "laws of motion of capitalism" as inevitably destroying the viability of capitalism while simultaneously creating favourable conditions for its emancipatory transcendence through a revolutionary rupture. This does not mean, however, that the Marxist tradition has lost its relevance for both the scientific understanding of contemporary society and the efforts to create a better world. In particular, four central propositions, firmly anchored in the Marxist tradition, remain essential:

Proposition 1. Capitalism obstructs the realisation of conditions for human flourishing.

The sharpest indicator of this is persistent poverty in the midst of plenty, but the harms of capitalism extend beyond material deprivation to other values important for human flourishing: equality, democracy, freedom, and community. The source of these harms of capitalism is above all its class structure, understood as the power relations through which investment, production, and distribution are organised. The class relations of capitalism create harms through a variety of familiar mechanisms: exploitation; domination; alienation; the conversion of economic power into political power; destructive forms of competition; the expansion of markets in ways that undermine community and reciprocity.[5] The harms embodied in these processes can be

[4] This, of course, does not prove that a ruptural strategy for system-level transformation could never work at some time in the future, but currently there are no theoretical arguments sufficiently compelling to neutralize the empirical evidence from past failures.

[5] Many writers in the Marxist tradition also argue that the harms of capitalism are generated by markets as a mechanism of economic coordination. Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, for example, in their various writing on participatory economics, argue that not only must the class relations of capitalism be transformed, but that markets must be eliminated if social emancipation is to occur in a sustainable fashion. In contrast, I argue that the harms of

amplified or moderated by various countervailing processes, especially organised through the state; but it nevertheless remains the case that capitalist class relations continually generate harmful effects.

Proposition 2. *Another world is possible*.

The harms generated by capitalism provide ample grounds for resistance to capitalism and for the *desire* for an alternative. By themselves, however, harms do not demonstrate that an alternative to capitalism is actually possible.

The theoretical argument that another world is in fact possible is perhaps the most fundamental idea of the Marxist tradition: An emancipatory alternative to capitalism, in which the control by the capitalist class of investments and production is displaced by radical economic democracy, is realisable.[6] Marxists are not alone in identifying harms generated by the ramifications of capitalism and its class relations. Indeed, many of the relevant mechanisms identified within the Marxist tradition have been incorporated into non-Marxist social science. What is distinctive to the Marxist tradition is the argument that a fundamental alternative to capitalism is not simply *desirable*, but also *viable* and *achievable*. This is what changes Marxism from simply a critique of capitalism into an emancipatory social science.

Of particular importance in the Marxist tradition is the idea that the development of the forces of production within capitalism opens up new possibilities for human flourishing which are blocked by the continuing dominance of capitalist relations of production. The advances in human productivity make it possible, under suitable social relations of production, to drastically reduce the amount of time people need to spend producing their means of livelihood, thus expanding what Marx (1981/1894, 958-959) called "the realm of freedom". This liberation of human activity, however, can only occur if capitalism is replaced by socialism, understood as a democratic, egalitarian, solidaristic organisation of the economy.

Proposition 3. *Capitalism's dynamics are intrinsically contradictory.*

Capitalism cannot achieve a stable equilibrium in which everything fits together into a coherent, functionally integrated whole. Even if there is no inherent tendency for capitalist contradictions to reach an intensity to make capitalism unsustainable, they repeatedly destabilise and undermine existing institutional configurations. In particular, the relationship between capital accumulation and the state is always fraught with contradictions. The state continually faces incompatible imperatives for reproducing capitalism: There are inconsistencies between what is optimal in the short-run and the long-run; between what is best for different sectors of capital; between the imperatives for social peace and capital accumulation. Sometimes these inconsistencies are pretty well managed, but forms of state regulation and intervention which stabilise

markets in capitalism come from the distinct form of capitalist markets, and that even in a democratic-egalitarian economy, markets will almost certainly play an important role. For a debate between Robin Hahnel's views and my own, see Hahnel and Wright (2016).

[6] Marx himself did not frame the idea of socialism as radical economic democracy, but this is basically what it means to say that the working class collectively controls the means of production. There are many possible institutional forms through which this idea could be realised, but the heart of the matter is a democratic-egalitarian structure of power over the economy.

capitalism in one period often become obstacles to accumulation in another and institutional lock-in makes smooth adjustments impossible. The result is periodic crises, which open spaces for new possibilities and transformative struggles.

Proposition 4. *Emancipatory transformation requires popular mobilisation and struggle.*

The realisation of emancipatory possibilities requires collective action and mobilisation from below. Struggles are ultimately over power, and these inevitably involve confrontation. While positive class compromises[7] may be one of the outcomes of struggle, such compromises will only become part of a larger project of social transformation when they are backed by robust popular mobilisation. For such compromises to occur, elite allies may be crucial, but emancipatory social transformation will not simply be the result of the initiatives of enlightened elites.

Emancipatory transformation also requires building new institutions that embody the emancipatory ideals, and these too must be grounded in the collective organisation and initiative of the masses. The social emancipation of the masses must, at its core, be the self-emancipation of the masses. There may be a constructive role for "social engineering" from above guided by experts, but in a sustainable process of emancipatory social transformation, such social engineering must itself be democratically subordinated through effective mechanisms of popular empowerment.

4. A Strategic Logic of Transcending Capitalism for the 21st Century

The four propositions above have a pedigree that can be traced back to Marx. They constitute fundamental parameters of the on-going Marxist tradition with which virtually everyone who describes their views as "Marxist" would almost certainly agree.[8] They are not, however, sufficient to formulate a strategic vision for transcending capitalism in the 21st century. Here I will focus on one specific additional theoretical argument which I think is critical for understanding the possibility of a future beyond capitalism.

Every process of social transformation involves the interaction of two kinds of social change: social changes that occur "behind the backs" of people as the cumulative, unintended consequences of their actions, and social changes that are the intentional result of conscious strategy. In Marx's original theoretical formulation, conscious, strategic action for emancipatory transformation was mainly important in two contexts: First, in creating the necessary political organisation and forms of consciousness of the masses needed to overcome capitalism when conditions made this possible; and second, accomplishing the arduous task of constructing the new society after the revolutionary seizure of power. Constructing socialism for Marx would certainly require sustained conscious action, with a continual process of learning-by-doing and experimentation. Viable socialist institutions could not simply be the unintended by-product of the actions of revolutionaries. But Marx did not see conscious strategy as playing an important role in creating the underlying structural conditions

[7] The term "positive" class compromise identifies a situation in which a compromise is not simply the result of a balance of forces (a "negative class compromise"), but embodies real solutions to problems within capitalism that also contribute to consolidating popular power. For an extended discussion of positive class compromise, see Wright (2015, chapter 11).

[8] These propositions are particularly important for understanding the possibilities of transcending capitalism, but there may be other propositions which could legitimately be considered essential elements of the Marxist tradition for other purposes.

needed for a revolutionary rupture in the first place. Those conditions include the massive development of the forces of production; the homogenisation of the conditions of life of the working class; the falling rate of profit; the increasing social character of production as the scale of organisation and division of labour increases. None of these are the result of a conscious strategy to create the needed conditions for emancipatory transformation; they are the result of the "laws of motion" of capitalism which propelled it along a trajectory which would eventually make capitalism vulnerable to overthrow. For Marx, although the structural conditions that make possible emancipatory transformation are the cumulative side-effect of human actions, they are not primarily the result of conscious strategy to create those conditions.

Marx was certainly correct in understanding history as the interplay of structural conditions and conscious strategy, but I do not think the particular sequencing implicit in his theory of the revolutionary transcendence of capitalism is adequate. Specifically, if, as I have argued, a ruptural strategy for transcending capitalism is not plausible, then if radical economic democracy is to be a future beyond capitalism, the task of consciously building it through strategic action needs to begin inside of capitalism itself. This requires going beyond Marx's view that capitalism becomes increasingly "social" in character as an unintended by-product of the laws of motion of capitalism. It requires a different understanding of the potential for strategies to deliberately affect the functioning and trajectory of existing economic systems by building the alternative to capitalism within economic systems still dominated by capitalism.

To understand the issues in play here, it will be helpful to begin with a stylised contrast between two ways of understanding the idea of a social "system". One metaphor for understanding a system is that of an organism. An organism is an integrated system in which all of the parts functionally fit together into a coherent whole. An organism is a "totality". Another metaphor for a system is an ecosystem. Think of a lake. A lake consists of water in a landscape, with particular kinds of soil, terrain, water sources and climate. An array of fish and other creatures live in its water and various kinds of plants grow in and around it. Collectively, these constitute the natural ecosystem of the lake. This is a "system" in that everything affects everything else within it, but it is not like the system of a single organism in which all of the parts are functionally connected in a coherent, tightly integrated whole. Social systems, in general, are better thought of as ecosystems of loosely connected interacting parts rather than as organisms – tightly integrated totalities – in which all of the parts serve a function.

Now consider capitalism. No economy has ever been – or ever could be – purely capitalist. Capitalism is defined by the combination of market exchange with private ownership of the means of production and the employment of wage-earners recruited through a labour market. Existing economic ecosystems combine capitalism with a whole host of other ways of organising the production and distribution of goods and services: directly by states; within the intimate relations of families to meet the needs of its members; through community-based networks and organisations in what is often called the social and solidarity economy; by cooperatives owned and governed democratically by their members; though non-profit market-oriented organisations; through peer-to-peer networks engaged in collaborative production processes; and many other possibilities. Some of these ways of organising economic activities can be thought of as hybrids, combining capitalist and non-capitalist elements; some are entirely non-capitalist; and some embody democratic-egalitarian-solidaristic principles that prefigure an emancipatory alternative to capitalism. Some of these non-capitalist forms are functionally hitched to capitalism, and in one way or another con-

tribute to the stability of capitalism; others are in tension with capitalism; and some are both functional for and in tension with capitalism. We call such a complex economic ecosystem "capitalist" when it is the case that capitalism is dominant in determining the economic conditions of life and access to livelihood for most people. In a parallel manner, a socialist economy is an economic ecosystem in which democratic-egalitarian relations are dominant.

Marx certainly recognised that real societies were never purely capitalist, and contained a variety of non-capitalist economic forms, especially vestiges from earlier modes of production. He even acknowledged that some of these non-capitalist forms could be thought of as prefiguring a future socialist economy. In particular, by the 1860s he came to appreciate the anti-capitalist character of worker cooperatives. The virtue of these experiments, for Marx, were primarily ideological: "By deed instead of by argument, they have shown that production on a large scale, and in accord with the behests of modern science, may be carried on without the existence of a class of masters employing a class of hands" (Marx 1962/1864, 383). Cooperatives thus contributed to creating the ideological conditions for challenging capitalism, but Marx did not see them as part of a strategy of actually building a more democratic, egalitarian economy within a system that was still dominated by capitalism.

The strategic problem, then, is whether or not it is possible erode the dominance of capitalism within this complex economic ecosystem by expanding the weight of alternative, non-capitalist economic activities organized through democratic-egalitarian-solidaristic relations. This way of thinking about the process of transcending capitalism is in certain respects like the typical stylised story told about the transition from pre-capitalist feudal societies in Europe to capitalism. Within feudal economies in the late medieval period, proto-capitalist relations and practices emerged, especially in the cities. Initially this involved merchant trading, artisanal production under the regulation of guilds, and banking. These forms of economic activity filled niches and were often quite useful for feudal elites. As the scope of these market activities expanded they gradually became more capitalist in character and, in some places, more corrosive of the established feudal domination of the economy as a whole. Through a long, meandering process over several centuries, feudal structures ceased to dominate the economic life of some corners of Europe; feudalism had eroded. This process may have been punctuated by political upheavals and even revolutions, but rather than constituting the basis for a rupture in economic structures, these political events generally served more to ratify and rationalise changes that had already taken place within the socioeconomic structure.

Of course, the process of transcending capitalism, if it were to happen, would not be a recapitulation of the process through which feudalism was eroded and eventually superseded by capitalism. In particular, eroding feudalism was not a *strategy* of proto-capitalist merchants, but rather a long-term unintended consequence of their profit-making practices. Strategy would have to play a significant role in eroding the dominance of capitalism and displacing it by a radical economic democracy. Here is the basic scenario:

Economic activities organised around democratic-egalitarian relations emerge where this is possible within an economy dominated by capitalism. These activities grow over time, both spontaneously and as a result of deliberate strategy. Some of these emerge as adaptations and initiatives from below within communities. Others are actively organised by the state to solve practical problems, either in the form of the direct state provision of goods and services as in classic state sector production, or in the form of state-funded collaborations with civil society organizations. These

alternative economic relations constitute the building blocks of an economic structure whose relations of production are, to a variable degree, characterised by democracy, equality, and solidarity. I have referred to these building blocks as *real utopias*: "Utopias" insofar as they embody emancipatory ideals and aspirations; "real" insofar as they can be built in the world as it is in order to push it towards a world that could be[9] (Wright 2010). Struggles involving the state take place, sometimes to protect these spaces, other times to facilitate new possibilities. Periodically what seems to be structural "limits of possibility" are encountered, and to go beyond such limits may require more intense political mobilisation directed at changing critical features of the "rules of the game" within which capitalism functions. Often such mobilisations fail, but at least sometimes political conditions allow for such changes, and the limits of possibility expand. Eventually, the cumulative effect of this interplay between changes from above and initiatives from below may reach a point where the democratic, non-capitalist relations created within the economic ecosystem become sufficiently prominent in the lives of individuals and communities that capitalism can no longer be said to dominate the system as a whole.[10]

As a strategic vision, eroding capitalism is both enticing and far-fetched. It is enticing because it suggests that even when the state seems quite uncongenial for advances in social justice and emancipatory social change, there is still much that can be done. We can get on with the business of building a new world within the interstices of the old. It is far-fetched because it seems implausible that the accumulation of emancipatory economic spaces within an economy dominated by capitalism could ever really erode and displace capitalism, given the immense power and wealth of large capitalist corporations and the dependency of most people's livelihoods on the well-functioning of the capitalist market. Surely if non-capitalist emancipatory forms of economic activities and relations ever grew to the point of threatening the dominance of capitalism, they would simply be crushed.

There are thus reasons to be sceptical. Two issues are particularly vexing. First, there is the problem of the state. The idea of eroding capitalism depends in significant ways on initiatives by the state. But the state in capitalist society is not simply a neutral apparatus that can be readily used by social forces opposed to capitalism. It is a particular kind of state – a capitalist state – designed in such a way as to systematically protect capitalism from threats. Eroding capitalism, therefore, is only possible if, in spite of the in-built class biases of the capitalist state, it is nevertheless possible use the state to facilitate the expansion of emancipatory non-capitalist rela-

[9] The idea of real utopias is not restricted to emancipatory aspirations for alternatives to capitalism. Real utopias include constructing alternative institutions for the state and democracy, the family and gender relations, community and cultural identity, and any other aspect of social relations which generate obstacles to human flourishing

[10] This strategic vision for a future beyond capitalism bears a certain affinity to Gramscian arguments about the conditions for struggle against a hegemonic capitalist system. Gramsci argued that in capitalist societies with strong civil societies and effective states, it was impossible to seize power through a "war of manoeuvre." What was needed was a "war of position" to build a coherent, mobilised counter-hegemony in civil society. The idea of building economic institutions organised through democratic-egalitarian relations within an economic system dominated by capitalism is parallel to the idea of a counter-hegemonic "war of position." The difference is that Gramsci still saw the war of position as the prelude to an eventual war of maneuver in which a revolutionary seizure of power would occur and make possible a system-level rupture. The scenario presented here does not presuppose a culminating rupture.

tions that point beyond capitalism. The fact that the capitalist state is not an instrument ideally suited to the erosion of capitalism does not mean it cannot be used imperfectly for that purpose. The trick for anti-capitalist political forces is to exploit the internal contradictions within the state and the contradictions it faces in solving problems within capitalism in order to expand the possibilities for creating democratic, egalitarian, solidaristic economic alternatives. A key to this possibility is the quality of democracy within the capitalist state: The more deeply democratic is the capitalist state, the greater the possibility of state policies supporting the conditions for non-capitalist alternatives. Struggles to "democratize democracy" – to use an expression of the Portuguese sociologist, Boaventura Santos (2007) – are thus pivotal to the prospects for eroding capitalism.

However, for the capitalist state to be used even imperfectly in a strategy to erode capitalism, there must be political forces mobilized to use it for these purposes. Eroding capitalism, like any strategy, needs collective actors. Strategies don't just happen; they are adopted by people in organizations, parties, and movements. This is the second vexing issue. Where are the collective actors for eroding capitalism? In classical Marxism "the working class" was seen as the collective actor capable of challenging capitalism. Few people today see the working class as sufficiently homogeneous to readily become what used to be called the "Subject of history". Rather, the formation of a politically coherent collective actor for a potent anti-capitalism of the 21st century will require bringing together people from a much more heterogeneous set of structural locations in the economy and society, with much more diverse identities. Class remains at the centre of such collective action, since, after all, the objective of struggle is the transformation of the class structure; this is what eroding capitalism means. But the political identity of the collective actor must be forged around the values of democracy, equality and solidarity rather than simply class as such, and this means constructing such a collective actor with people from a much more heterogeneous set of locations in the social structure. This is a daunting task. Figuring out how to do it is a central problem for the Left in the world today.

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A Better Life? Migration, Reproduction and Wellbeing in Transition

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Abstract

Mainstream theoretical approaches to migration and reproduction in Asia and elsewhere separate questions relating to reproduction from exploration of economic migration, leading to limitations in current understandings. The tendency to see migratory livelihoods in largely productive terms and to conceptualise the reproductive in terms of consequence or constraint neglects the complex inter-linkages between migration and reproduction in the search for a 'better life'. Addressing these 'missing links' involves taking a broader approach to reproductive behaviour that factors in not only sexual relations and reproductive management but also social reproduction, gender relations between men and women and wider well-being. The transitional economies of Vietnam and China have experienced rapid growth in new forms of migration, in particular rural-urban migration that challenge existing presumptions about migration and reproduction. Not only does marriage migration in this context have strong economic dimensions, economic migration also has clear reproductive dimensions. Prevailing policy and popular stereotypes about how migration intersects with reproduction are being undermined by an increasing diversity of migrant strategies for building and sustaining their own families. Moreover existing institutional and policy constraints mean that these strategies often involve difficult and unpalatable trade-offs for individual and family well-being. In both countries the remaining household registration system and the related structuring of social entitlements lead to social exclusion of migrants and their families in urban areas, and perpetuate rural-urban inequalities, with outcomes detrimental to the well-being of current and future generations of the migrants who are trying to build livelihoods and meaningful lives.

Keywords: Rural-urban migration; Reproduction; Gender; Social entitlements; Well-being; Vietnam; China

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Introduction

Prevailing analytical approaches to the intersections between migration and reproduction in Asia have focused relatively narrowly on productive labour and fertility. As a result, we argue, these approaches neglect important linkages between migration and reproduction. The first part of our paper reviews theoretical concerns about the way prevailing analytical approaches to migration and reproduction in Asia are framed. The second part proposes a different conceptual approach that offers more scope for inter-linking migration, reproduction and well-being. The third part illustrates the significance of these interactions with reference to Vietnam and China. Our intention is to make a strong theoretical and empirical case for improving understandings of how migration, reproduction and well-being are linked.

We focus on Vietnam and China where the process of economic transition[1] has been accompanied by new kinds of migration, in particular rural-urban migration, which have rapidly gained in momentum. In both contexts, popular opinion and public policy have often been informed by unquestioned assumptions about the nature and meaning of rapidly increasing mobility and its implications for reproductive behaviours and risks to health. For instance, rural migrants have been depicted as evading fertility regulations[2], as carrying infectious diseases, or as swelling the numbers of sex workers (Tan 2005). Early policy responses to migration, fertility and reproductive and sexual health suggest that migrants and their reproductive behaviours are in some senses trespassing beyond official sanctions. Consequently, Vietnam and China offer strong potential for exploring the linkages between reproduction and migration, and their implications for social policy and well-being.

Analytical Approaches to Migration and Reproduction

It is taken-for-granted in much of the existing literature on rural-urban migration in Asia that '[rural] populations migrate to seek a better life' (Dang et

1 'Transition' refers to the multi-dimensional changes that accompany the dismantling of centrally-planned economies in favour of market-oriented economies. In the case of China and Vietnam transition there have seen limited formal political changes, but included the reorganisation of agricultural production, land use rights and inheritance practice, the reform of state-owned enterprises, the restructuring of the social sector, the emphasis on the 'rule of law', important shifts in state-citizen relations, as well as increasing space for the practice of religion and civic activities. Associated with this process are other unintentional developments, such as the growing cultural influence of globalization, that play a significant role in transition.

2 For example, in China the 'above-quota birth guerrilla' was a popular comic expression adopted to ridicule rural migrant couples, who were seen as trying to take advantage of an administrative loophole by having 'above-quota' children through migration.

al. 1997:322, emphasis ours) and for the most part this has been interpreted in terms of the search for productive livelihood. The dichotomy widely drawn between migration for survival or accumulation (Waddington 2003) betrays the overwhelming concern with material and economic well-being. Indeed, Saith's (1999) review of migration processes and policies in Asia focuses on 'migration which is more immediately related to economic factors and motivations' whilst at the same time recognising that there are other forms of migration broadly defined that are immensely significant in Asia, including marriage-related migration, political migration and the illegal trafficking of women.

These forms of migration are commonly bracketed off as being about something different (customary kinship arrangements, illegality or globalisation) and therefore are dealt with in separate analytical spheres. Marriage and marriage migration are downplayed in the migration literature, because of 'the general lack of attention on gender, the assumption that marriage is no more than a life event that triggers migration, and the notion that marriage is an end to migration rather than a means to an end' (Fan and Li 2002: 619; see also Davin 2007; Palriwala and Uberoi 2008).

In contrast, the large body of demographic work that deals with rural-urban migration has tended to focus on its impact on fertility because of the consequences for population growth and associated concerns such as environmental sustainability and urban development. In particular, this work has been concerned with how different migratory processes (temporary, permanent, circular) lead to the 'adaptation' or 'disruption' of fertility behaviour to varying extents. However, the emphasis on the 'cumbersome biological acts of fertility' (Bledsoe 1990:98 cited in Greenhalgh 1995:15) tends to obscure broader reproductive strategies, interests and experiences. Consequently, this literature has not paid much attention to the way that reproductive aspirations may shape migration processes, or how migrants actively negotiate marriage, marital relations, the timing of childbearing and spousal separation, ways of childrearing and children's education or the implication of these strategies for reproductive well-being and the welfare of individuals and families involved (but see Hoy 1999 and Hoy 2009 for important exceptions).

More recently, the analysis of gender-selective migration has highlighted the importance of linkages to sexuality and reproduction. As migrants, both men and women are often excluded from sexual and reproductive health services at the same time as they are seen as adopting risky non-traditional behaviours (Iredale et al. 2005; Qian et al. 2005; Yang et al. 2005). Male migration has long been associated with the growth of the female commercial sex industry, and the unabated HIV/AIDS pandemic has focused policy attention on migrants' sexual

behaviours and risks (IOM and UNAIDS 2005; Yang 2004). Where men migrate leaving behind wives and families, they may bring infection back home with them, and unprecedented levels of unmarried female migration have raised concerns about the sexual exploitation and abuse of women, particularly young girls driven into the sex industry by poverty, social exclusion and marginalisation in urban settings, including the urban labour market (Skeldon 2000). In these analyses, reproduction and reproductive 'ill-being' are seen in terms of consequences or risks entailed through migration.

In addition, the gendered dimension of migration has largely addressed two themes: firstly, the implications of classic male rural-urban migration for gender relations in rural agrarian production; and, secondly, the consequences of female migration for women's empowerment since the 1980s as increasing numbers of younger women are leaving for urban areas to work as cheap labour for global capital. This latter research has drawn attention to these workers' lack of maternity rights, as well as practices of compulsory pregnancy testing, restricted toilet breaks, and sexual harassment that can jeopardise their reproductive health, as well as women's resistance (Pearson and Seyfang 2001; Pun 2005). Whilst contributing significantly to our understanding of gendered migration, the central concerns have been the relations of production whilst the linkages and intersections between migration and sexuality and reproduction have not been given primary considerations (but see Kabeer 2007 for an important exception addressing social reproduction).

Similarly, livelihoods research on migration has provided valuable insights in understanding the motivations, processes and outcomes of migration, which point to the need for longitudinal perspectives and the recognition of intra-household as well as wider community relations. In the main, however, livelihoods approaches have been insufficiently gendered and also remain concerned mainly with productive issues. For example, studies on household livelihoods in Vietnam tend to overlook gender, and where gender is taken into account, the emphasis tends to be placed on the institutional constraints for women to participate in economic activities. These constraints include cultural norms, gendered roles, expectations and divisions of labour including those around reproductive roles (Kabeer and Thi Van Anh 2002). Thus, reproduction is either downplayed or conceptualised as one of a number of constraints that disadvantage women and this emphasis sits well with that found in the literature on the gendered selectivity of migration.

In short, we have, in this section, drawn attention to the normal demarcation of migration related to reproduction as somehow different from economic migration, to the overwhelmingly productive interpretation of migration as a

material livelihood strategy, and to the focus on the reproductive in terms of consequences and constraints. Against this backdrop, we turn to examine the largely overlooked intersections between migration, reproduction, and well-being and argue for the value of looking in a more interactive way at their inter-linkages.

Reconceptualising the Links between Migration and Reproduction

Making a life is not merely about making a productive living but involves, amongst other things, the creation and maintenance of meaningful familial and social relationships that bring a sense of belonging, achievement and emotional satisfaction. Amongst these relationships, childhood, wifehood and motherhood are central. In addition, access to a productive living (or the fruits of it) is at many points across the life cycle for women achieved through their performance of reproductive roles. Broader understandings of livelihoods such as that offered by Whitehead (2002: 577, cited in Waddington 2003: 5) as 'the diverse ways in which people make a living and build their worlds', lend themselves to better situating productive activities as key elements in a larger strategy of living a life. Reconceptualising livelihoods in this way enables us to factor in reproductive dynamics and a broader understanding of well-being in examining migration.

Overcoming the problematic analytical divisions between spheres of production and reproduction and their presumed associations with the male and the female respectively is integral to this task. This will involve going beyond the view that motherhood and the related caring roles of women can be regarded as a 'reproductive tax' (Kabeer and Thi Van Anh 2002) to acknowledge the economic components of reproductive strategies and the intrinsic value of reproductive well-being to mobile livelihoods. Chant confirms that for women particularly 'migration for, or within the context of marriage, is an important factor, notwithstanding that migration for marriage is often associated with economic and social mobility' (1992: 3). Indeed, the emerging literature on transnational motherhood, such as Parrenas (2001) and Piper and Roces (2003), makes important progress in exploring these tensions for women undertaking care work across international boundaries. We propose a different way forward offered by the growing literature on the social relations of reproduction which draws heavily on anthropology, sociology, politics and gender studies. It engages closely with the way reproductive strategies are embedded in wider social relations and processes, exploring both the ambiguity of lived experiences and the iterative ways that reproductive outcomes are shaped and given meaning as women and, importantly, men attempt to 'manage' their reproductive lives (Bledsoe 1994; Greenhalgh 1995; Tremayne 2001).

The social importance of paternity for men, especially of sons, in many settings is well recognised, but there has been little exploration of how this cultural imperative is linked to the everyday reality of reproductive relations or to male 'reproductive agency' (Unnithan-Kumar 2001: 31). Men are frequently absent from discussions of fertility and appear only 'as shadows: as partners by implication of those engaged in childbearing' (Bledsoe et al. 2000: 1). However, Ali's work on Egyptian men shows that the 'caring and affection that these men felt for their wives and children' was 'intrinsically linked… to her reproductive and childbearing capacities' and involved 'desire to retain control and power' over them (2000: 130-2). The deeply ambivalent nature of male power over reproduction on one hand, and the 'massive male disengagement from parental responsibilities' (Bledsoe et al. 2000: 3) on the other, suggests that far from segregating or stereotyping men there may be much to be gained by taking a holistic look at the changing ways men negotiate their reproductive and productive lives in the context of migration. Emerging, empirically-rich, research on masculinities and migration will make an important contribution in this respect (Yeoh and Hung forthcoming).

Reconceptualising the links between migration and reproduction in these ways means recognising that engaging successfully in migration for productive work may be centrally about, as well as in tension with, being a dutiful wife/reliable husband and a good mother/father. Whilst affirming that the division of household labour is unequal and that the devaluation of reproductive work is problematic, we argue that there remains a need for more serious attention to reproduction in migration research. Migration for a 'better life' may be intrinsically about reproductive relations as well as involving distinct reproductive strategies with different implications for reproductive well-being. We now turn to the specific context of growing rural-urban migration in Vietnam and China in order to explore how such an approach to linking migration, reproduction and well-being opens up new insights and valuable concerns.

Vietnam and China in Transition

Vietnam and China have experienced a substantial growth of 'new' kinds of migration associated with their processes of economic transition. Both nations regard the scale of this mobility and its implications for population growth as a matter of concern and both have a history of attempting to control mobility and fertility, creating quite specific pressures on migration and reproduction. Below, we outline key similarities and differences in the context of transition, migration and reproduction between the two states. We focus on rural-urban migrants

engaged in a variety of migratory processes often cyclical, or seasonal, that may 'end' in return to the village, further migration, or with marriage/occupational success leading to settlement in the city.

In both states transition has been initiated through far-reaching economic reforms, with limited formal political change. Vietnam's reforms were largely modelled on the Chinese experience (from the late 1970s), but began a decade later (in 1986). Both have achieved high economic growth rates and initially positive responses to new incentives from their large agricultural sectors (Summerfield 1997: 204). Whilst Vietnam has substantially rolled back state employment, China, while attempting to reform state-owned enterprises, has faced huge challenges of tackling unemployment, new forms of poverty, and maintaining social and political stability. As Summerfield argues: '[t]he social safety net in Vietnam, in contrast to China, is separate from state-owned industry reducing the welfare loss of cutting state jobs, but in both countries, funding for human security has been problematic since the reforms' (1997: 204). Although absolute poverty has been reduced, inequality, relative poverty and social stratification have significantly increased in Vietnam and China (Khan and Riskin 2001; GoV 2002; Wang and Hu 1999; Zhang, et al. 2006). Growing differentials between richer and poorer regions, between different economic sectors, between and within rural and urban areas (GoV 2002; Wang 2004) are creating spatial inequalities in incomes, opportunities, and general development. This, combined with relaxed state control over movement, has led to rapidly increasing numbers of people moving, especially from rural to urban areas (Guest 1998; Summerfield 1997).

China has experienced unprecedented large scale rural to urban migration since the early 1980s. This has become known popularly as the 'floating population' (liudong renjou) or the tide of migrant labourers (mingongchao) (Zhang 1999: 5) and there are now an estimated 120-200 million migrant workers in Chinese towns and cities (Huang, 2009; State Council 2006: 3-4), constituting more than 10 per cent of the entire population of 1.3 billion. In Vietnam, although the level of migration is relatively modest compared to surrounding countries, it is large compared to pre-1986 and migration to urban areas has accelerated during the 1990s (Zhang et al. 2006). It has been generally understood in both countries that 'employment strategies to improve the family's well-being have resulted in increased rural-urban migration by men and young women, while middle-aged, married women remain in the countryside taking care of the farms and children' (Summerfield 1997:201). However, the aggregate flows mask changing patterns in the character of migration, gender differences in migrant flows and considerable micro-level diversity (see for example: Guest 1998; Dang et al. 1997; Davin 1996; GSO 2005; Zhang 1999).

In both cases migration and its linkages to reproduction are stratified by qualifications for residency and related social entitlements: whereas state-sanctioned migrants, and increasingly wealthy migrants, may obtain or purchase 'permanent' urban household registration, those migrants with work or business permits from their home authorities are only eligible for 'temporary' residence permits at destination (Zhang 2007). It is estimated that in Vietnam over 80 per cent of migrants have a form of temporary registration (GoV 2002:4), and there have been 'ongoing concerns that the registration system restricts migrants from accessing services in their places of destination' (GSO 2005:10). In China the overwhelming majority of migrants are 'unregistered' and they have largely been denied rights to urban social security schemes on the grounds that their security is provided by their home villages. Although temporary residence permits enable them to work in urban areas, they need frequent renewal at police stations and involve financial costs (Davin 1996; Li 2004). Attempting to secure a residence permit involves bureaucratic difficulty, frustration, time and substantial costs (Li 2002, 2004; Zhan et al. 2002) and 'only the most successful migrants could consider purchasing a permanent residence permit' (Davin 1996: 27).

In both Vietnam and China, the social rights of migrants, particularly female migrants, have been largely neglected by the state as well as by researchers until recently. Migrants' employment is often short-lived, contracts are non-existent or short term, they are easily fired, most live in poor conditions and they are vulnerable to harassment by the local police/authorities. In China, migrants complain of detention, arbitrary fining or even periodic repatriation to their rural origin (Davin 1996), in the name of 'maintaining urban order' (Li 2004) and similar treatment was proposed in Vietnam where the government is concerned about the number of migrants as well as their 'perceived lack of control of the migration process and a feeling that this has contributed to social problems such as increased crime and other social evils' (Guest 1998: 6). At the early stage of reforms, both official and popular perceptions of rural migrants were predominantly negative partly owing to the legacy of tight control over population mobility but also as a result of deep-rooted urban bias (Croll 1997; Goldstein et al. 1997; GoV 2001; Guest 1998; Skeldon and Hugo 1999). For example, they have been variously depicted as possessing traditional values and norms of preferring more children, particularly sons, in comparison with urban dwellers; as using migration as a strategy to evade family planning regulations at home; and more recently young female migrants have been linked to prostitution in urban areas.

However, a recent shift towards a more positive public discourse on rural-urban migration, supported by development agencies and by policy-relevant research (such as Xiang and Tan 2005), has led to more ambivalence towards rural

migrants in urban settings. While prejudice and discrimination remain widespread, both the Chinese and Vietnamese governments have recognised migrants' contributions to economic development and articulated commitments to improve migrants' working and social security conditions (GoV 2001, 2002; GSO 2005; State Council 2006), including relaxing the household registration system (GoV 2002; Zhan et al. 2002).

These changing perceptions are played out in official policy relating specifically to the reproductive behaviour of migrants. Population policy in Vietnam seeks to limit childbearing but has never been as strict as in China, with a two rather than a one-child policy (Summerfield 1997: 203). In China '[m]igrants in the urban areas are perceived as having too many children, because they are 'difficult to control' and 'no-one is responsible for them" (Davin 1996: 28). In 1991 the government established 'Measures for the management of family planning in the floating population' making it a national requirement to carry family planning certificates listing marital status, fertility history and contraceptive status (Goldstein et al. 1997: 481; Hoy 1999: 134). These should theoretically be shown before a residence, business or work permit can be issued, enabling government personnel in destination areas to police migrant's fertility behaviour (Hoy 1999: 135). In Vietnam, although the two-child policy has been more loosely implemented, with wide variations in adherence, malpractices have been reported (Banister 1993; Johansson 1998), and from 1988 families who did not observe the two-child limit were prohibited from moving into urban centres and industrial zones (Banister 1993: 82). However, fears that Vietnam might follow China's harder line on population have been dispelled by the strengthening of the official line that all family planning decisions are voluntary (GoV 2002; UNFPA 2004).

Having reviewed the general situation and prevailing interpretations of links between migration and reproduction in Vietnam and China, we now probe some inter-linkages between migration, reproduction and well-being that relate closely to the theoretical concerns raised in the previous section. Firstly, we draw attention to the significant economic content of marriage migration and, vice versa, to the significant reproductive content of economic migration. Secondly, we question the prevailing stereotypes that married women are either left behind with young children in the villages or come to the city to evade family size restrictions. Thirdly, we raise emerging concerns about managing reproduction around migration and point to the difficult trade-offs and unpalatable compromises they imply for family and individual well-being. Our attempt is necessarily selective and in particular is limited with respect to men because of the lack of published data.

Marriage, Mobility and 'Economics'

The general understanding in Vietnam and China is that the majority of migrants move in search of work, that young women migrate before marriage and afterwards are 'tied to the bamboo grove' (Fong 1994 cited in Kabeer and Thi Van Anh 2002: 120) by their reproductive roles and responsibility for rural farming households. Similarly older women who do migrate are seen as 'naturally' following partners (Dang et al. 1997: 333). These generalisations see economics as the driver of migration with marriage and reproduction as consequence or constraint. As noted, this perspective neglects both important economic elements to marriage strategies and reproductive dimensions to labour migration.

Tellingly, in Vietnam intra-provincial migration is usually excluded in migration studies because 'marriage migration', which is frequently intra-provincial, is seen as being unrelated to 'responses to socio-economic development' (Dang et al. 1997: 322). However, Murphy (2002) demonstrates that young women in villages in Anhui Province, China, often attempt to secure a better life in the future through marrying well. Indeed, Fan and Li (2002) explore new longer distance patterns of women marrying into better-off villages with high rural–urban migration in western Guangdong. They report that some men migrating to urban areas had difficulties finding a suitable marriage partner in their villages because large numbers of women were also migrating. Their subsequent marriages with women from inferior situations were characterised by greater social differences between husbands and wives, suggestive of retrogressive intra-household relations, and marrying-in wives were left at home to manage the farm and the children, making their husbands' continued migration possible. This demonstrates that changing patterns of marriage mobility may be integral to processes of socio-economic development, especially in the context of institutional imperatives to retain the family farm, and that they have implications for the character of reproductive relations.

It is also clear that labour migration itself may be about opening up space for different life options for young unmarried women, crucially including escaping the life of a rural farm wife. Strategies include young women sending remittances to increase obligations in the natal home to make a good marriage for them; searching for a desirable and ideally urban marriage partner themselves; and shoring up their personal financial security, making them less reliant on either father or husband (Wan 1993 cited in Davin 1996; Zhang 1999). As one young woman in Tianjin, China said: 'I hope I can marry and settle in the city if possible, and have a happy, stable marriage. I want to achieve something meaningful in my life' (Zhang 1999: 35). Zhang points out that most of the female migrants she interviewed intended to delay their marriages in an attempt

to work for longer periods or even settle in the city (1999: 31): for these women their urban jobs were often the means for social mobility that significantly included improvements in marital prospects, expectations and obligations.

Left-Behind or Evading Family Planning Regulations?

The generalised narrative that the wives of migrants are to be found raising children in rural areas is in tension with official and popular perceptions that migrants come to urban areas to escape restrictions on fertility as well as with the emerging evidence about the marital status and behaviours of migrants. Recent research shows that there are growing numbers of married women and couples in migrant populations and a significant proportion of female migrants are bearing or raising children in the cities, but at no greater rate than their rural contemporaries (Hoy 2009; Zhang 2010).

In Vietnam, 59 per cent of women migrants in Hanoi in 2004 were married as were 46 per cent in Ho Chi Minh City (GSO 2005:31-2). At least 36 per cent of migrant women in Hanoi and 16 per cent in Ho Chi Minh City were accompanied by school age children (ibid.: 68). Rates of contraceptive use amongst older married women are similar to those of urban residents and whilst younger migrants are slightly less likely to use contraceptives, this appears to reflect a desire to 'catch up' after delayed marriage (ibid: 7, 148). Despite their predominantly temporary residential status, it seems likely that substantial proportions of these migrants have married in the city and would like to settle permanently there (ibid: 57-8).

In China, the significant differences between married and unmarried women labour migrants in Shanghai suggest that the former 'are probably accompanying and working with their migrant husbands' and it is estimated that as many as a third of rural labour migrants are migrating as couples (Roberts 2002: 492). Rather than a 'floating population', they may be 'the vanguard' of potential settlers (ibid.). This has led to the emergence of 'urban villages' (chengzhong cun) (Zhang 2007) as well as residentially- segregated communities of rural migrants and their families in the suburbs of China's large cities (Zhang 2010). Hoy's study in Beijing in 1994 of 403 ever-married women of reproductive age who were registered as temporary migrants found that 80 per cent had children and of these, the majority migrated after the birth of their first child (61 per cent) (1999). Hoy's findings for registered temporary migrants concur with Goldstein et al.'s findings in 1988 in Hubei Province that unregistered migrants 'seldom…[moved]…to circumvent the nation's family planning policies' (1997: 488) and that 'temporary migrant women do not have more children than their non-migrant counterparts' (ibid.: 490).

Managing Reproduction during Migration: Choices and Trade-Offs

In Vietnam and China the household registration systems and their function of mediating access to urban social entitlements has been intended to discourage the migration of dependents, thus retaining the costs of reproducing the migrant labour force largely within the countryside, and to preserve social order in the growing cities. These institutional barriers pose severe constraints to migrants trying to build and sustain marriages, child-bearing and child-rearing. Being 'left behind' or temporarily returning to the village is among the ways in which women migrants and their families navigate these structural constraints and risks at particular life stages (see for instance, Fan and Li 2002: 634). Family separation may be resolved sooner or later, either by return of husband or onward migration of the family, or take on new configurations, for instance as children become old enough to be left with rural grandparents whilst their mother rejoins her husband to work in the urban area.

In Vietnam, lack of permanent residency creates problems for migrants with access to housing, credit, employment and the registering of motor cycles but is less conclusive with respect to social services for migrants (GSO 2005: 4). The stricter adherence to registration requirements in Ho Chi Minh City and the Southern Industrial Zone before 2005 meant that a fifth of migrants faced economic problems for schooling children in the city, as compared to less that ten per cent of non-migrants (GSO 2005).

In China, the restrictions related to the household registration system 'induce many migrants to send their children back to their home areas when they reach school age, even if they have not done so earlier. Even migrant women who marry urban residents may face this problem, as the children's household registration follows that of their mothers' (Davin 1996: 26). Few of the 70,000 school age children of migrants are enrolled in city schools (Ding and Stockman 1999:127), migrants are disproportionately subject to out-of-pocket expenses for urban health services in comparison to residents (Zhan et al. 2002: 51), and pregnant migrants, lacking maternity leave and rights, usually go back home to deliver to avoid the high urban maternal health charges and may experience worse birth outcomes (Davin 1996: 29; Zhan et al. 2002; Zhang et al. 2006)[3].

This, combined with the impact of the overall restructuring and reform, has rendered migrant women workers with specific reproductive needs particularly

[3] Zhan et al.'s (2002:49) found that 44 per cent of the 2,381 migrant mothers who gave birth at three hospitals in Minhang District in Shanghai between 1993-1996, had no prior ante-natal visits as compared to only five per cent of permanent residents and the number of still-births amongst migrants (1.5 per cent) was twice that of the control group (0.8 per cent).

vulnerable. In Vietnam, despite the institutional legacy of the Communist Party, 'women are losing some of these rights…[including]…labour laws, extensive access to maternity benefits and child-care centres' (UNDP 2000: 9). In China the legislative framework '[d]ating from a time when rural women were not allowed to leave the land is especially weak in protecting the large numbers of female migrants who have started working in the city in recent decades' (Zhang 1999: 33).

Once they have given birth, migrant women must make difficult choices and craft complex strategies to rear their children. Three-generational households, where grandmothers are available to care for small children, are less common and entitlements to grandmothers' care are structured by gendered intergenerational obligations that prioritise sons and their children over daughters' (Davin 1996: 26). Leaving very small children with others for extended periods may entail risks including serious malnutrition, neglected health, even death, as well as psychological and developmental problems for children (Xiang 2005: 3-4; Ye et al. 2005). Women who cannot make suitable arrangements for childcare and schooling either return to rural areas, or look after the children in the city without being economically active when children are young.

Family separation for labour migration involves dilemmas and hardships (Xiang 2005). In China and Vietnam, Summerfield reports that 'growing numbers of men either divorce or illegally start a second family in the city. Migration is now contributing to a small but growing trend for families to break up' (1997: 206). Revealingly though, Fan and Li's Guangdong study found a new kind of marriage between migrating women and men formed on the basis of affection where, in four out of the five cases, husband and wife as migrant returnees stay back in the village to work rather than face spousal/parental separation (2002:632-4).

For many, migration is motivated by survival needs and involves unpalatable compromises with strong reproductive dimensions. Illustrative examples include: the young Chinese woman who bought her way out of an unhappy marriage by forfeiting her son and raising child support for the father through labour migration (Davin 1996: 28); the Chinese migrant who tolerates the infidelity, diminishing remittances and visits from her absent husband and at the same time finds the children she has 'left behind' to be alienated and undisciplined (Xiang 2005); and the large numbers of middle aged migrant women who work as scavengers because they lack marketable skills and do not want to return home unemployed (Ding and Stockman 1999: 128).

Conclusions

The way in which reproductive strategies and capabilities are articulated with migratory processes has important implications for migration studies. Although it is well recognised that particular flows of migrants often tend to be structured by sex and by stages in the life course, especially the reproductive and marital life course where women are concerned, there has been little investigation of what this means for managing reproductive life. Rather than seeing reproductive factors as given constraints or triggers that play into who migrates and for how long, or separating out economic migration from migration 'for' marriage, we have argued that there is value in exploring how reproductive strategising articulates with migratory processes for women and men who are 'making a life'. This approach may be central to understanding the impact of migration on different aspects of well-being, including sexual and reproductive well-being, as well as to identifying and addressing the specific social needs of migrants.

The changing character of rural-urban migration in Vietnam and China suggests that there are powerful context-specific linkages between migration, reproduction and well-being that merit greater attention. Here, many young women migrants aspire to a different sort of life, including a different sort of reproductive life, and their mobility may contribute to the renegotiation of gender relations in both rural and urban areas.
In contrast to the view that women in migrant households are 'left behind' after marriage, the ways of negotiating marriage and migration are much more diverse and complex than commonly portrayed. Migrant couples may both return to the home village after marriage, or migrate together either leaving children behind, sending them back, returning temporarily, or keeping the family together in the city. The alternatives of the wife and/or her children staying behind either temporarily or permanently involve dilemmas and hardships that can put the health, well-being and relationships of children and the mother at risk.

Improved understanding of these dynamics is important if social policy is to contribute to improved well-being. Despite the growing momentum of 'new' migration in Vietnam and China, the institutional constraints on movement and fertility that structure social entitlements are yet to be fundamentally challenged. This has interacted with the declining public financing of social provisions and with cultural expectations around marriage, child-bearing, child-rearing and inter-generational relations in ways that are strongly gendered. Migrants have been socially excluded in particular ways and the remedy involves pursuing strategies to enhance their entitlements and rights in urban society. Improving working conditions is of fundamental importance, but strategies also need to go beyond this to build broader entitlements for migrants and their families, in

particular to health, including maternal and child health, and education for migrant children. More determined and forceful national public action to counter growing spatial and social inequalities is also important so as to ensure that whole communities are not left behind by transition (Xiang 2005). This policy will play a role in enhancing the social resilience and adaptability of rural-urban migrants and also in reducing the risks, vulnerabilities, and perhaps the distances associated with building and managing family life for migrants.

The dearth of information about migrant men's reproductive agency is particularly striking, especially at a time when there is growing concern over their disengagement from the family, but for women too the linkages between reproductive and migratory motivations, strategies and vulnerabilities are poorly understood. Priorities for enhancing understanding must include both macro-level analysis to build a stronger reproductive and demographic picture of migration and detailed micro-level work investigating migrant livelihood trajectories, reproductive histories and well-being outcomes over longer time periods so that we can begin to understand the many ways in which migration as it is interconnected with reproduction plays a role in 'building a meaningful life'.

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The Ontology of the Intellectual Commons

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Intellectual commons are the great other of intellectual property–enabled markets. They constitute noncommercial spheres of intellectual production, distribution, and consumption, which are reproduced outside the circulation of intangible commodities and money. They provide the core common infrastructures of intellectual production, such as language, nonaggregated data and information, prior knowledge, and culture. This article formulates a processual ontology of the intellectual commons by examining the substance, elements, tendencies, and manifestations of their being. The first part of the article introduces the various definitions of the concept. The second part focuses on the elements, which constitute the totalities of the intellectual commons. The third part emphasizes their structural tendencies. Finally, the fourth and last part of the article deals with the various manifestations of the intellectual commons in the domains of culture, science, and technology.

Keywords: intellectual commons, commons-based peer production, ontology, definition

Today, the epicenter of wealth creation in our societies has rapidly shifted from tangible to intangible assets. Intellectual production is more than ever considered to be the engine of social progress. As a result, the focus of business, policy making, and civil society has accordingly shifted to the regulation of intellectual production, distribution, and consumption. Moreover, rapid technosocial developments have led to the convergence of media and communications in a single network of networks based on packet-switching technologies, making the Internet the archetypal communication medium of our times. It is exactly at this cutting edge of technological progress and wealth creation that people have started to constitute intellectual commons free for access to all, by devising collaborative peer-to-peer modes of production and management of intellectual resources.

New intellectual commons—such as spectrum commons, open hardware, open standards, free software, wikis, open scientific publishing, openly accessible user-generated content, online content licensed under Creative Commons licenses, collaborative media, voluntary crowdsourcing, political mobilization through electronic networks and hacktivism, Internet cultures, and memes—have reinforced cultural and technoscientific commons that constitute the building blocks of our civilization, such as language, collective history, ideas, beliefs, customs, traditions, folk art, games, shared symbols, social systems of care, knowledge in the public domain, and all our past scientific and technological advancements (Merges, 2004). This kaleidoscope of sharing, collective creativity, and collaborative

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innovation constitutes our digitized environments not as private enclosures, but as shared public space, a social sphere divergent from the one reproduced by the market and the state.

Along these lines, a grounded ontology of the intellectual commons is essential for our capacity to understand and analyze the phenomenon. This article formulates a processual ontology of the intellectual commons by examining the substance, elements, tendencies, and manifestations of their being. It constructs an ontological perspective of the intellectual commons as social practices of both pooling intangible resources in common and reproducing the communal relations developed around such practices. The first part of the article introduces the various definitions of the concept. The second part focuses on the elements, which constitute the totalities of the intellectual commons. The third part emphasizes their structural tendencies. Finally, the fourth and last part of the article deals with the various manifestations of the intellectual commons in the domains of culture, science, and technology.

Definitions

The concept of commons is today most commonly defined in connection to resources of a specific nature. In her seminal work, Ostrom (1990) conceives of the commons as types of resources—or better resource systems—which feature certain attributes that make it costly (but not impossible) to exclude potential beneficiaries from appropriating them. Hess and Ostrom thus broadly describe a commons as a resource shared by a group of people, which is vulnerable to social dilemmas (Hess, 2008; Hess & Ostrom, 2007b). Following the same line of thought in relation to intangible resources, the same authors stress the importance of avoiding the confusion between the nature of the commons as goods and the property regimes related to them (Hess & Ostrom, 2003). According to this approach, information and knowledge are socially managed as common-pool resources due to their inherent properties of nonsubtractability and relative nonexcludability. These two attributes of common-pool resources make them "conducive to the use of communal proprietorship or ownership" (Ostrom & Hess, 2000, p. 332). Yet resource-based approaches run the danger of reifying the commons and downgrading their social dimension.

In contrast, property-based definitions equate the social phenomenon of the commons with collective property in contradistinction with private and public property regimes (Boyle, 2008; Lessig, 2002a; Mueller, 2012). In the intellectual realm, James Boyle labels the commons of the mind as "property's outside" or "property's antonym" (Boyle, 2003, p. 66). Along the same lines, Jessica Litman considers that the intellectual commons coincide with the legal concept of the public domain, which she juxtaposes to intellectual property (Litman, 1990). Their equation with collective property restricts the ontological examination of the intellectual commons to rules of ownership and ignores the fact that the latter are actually systems of wider social relations, which also include modes of production and governance.

Alternatively, relational/institutional approaches define the commons as sets of wider instituted social relationships between communities and resources (Dardot & Laval, 2015). As Helfrich and Haas (2009) state, "Commons are not the resources themselves but the set of relationships that are forged among individuals and a resource and individuals with each other" (p. 5). Linebaugh (2008) adds that

> Commons are not given, they are produced. Though we often say that commons are all around us—the air we breathe and the languages we use being key examples of shared wealth—it is truly only through cooperation in the production of our life that we can create them. This is because commons are not essentially material things but are social relations, constitutive social practices. (pp. 50–51)

Hence, according to relational/institutional approaches, the commons can be defined as "a social regime for managing shared resources and forging a community of shared values and purpose" (Clippinger & Bollier, 2005, p. 263) or even an "institutional arrangement for governing the access to, use and disposition of resources," in which "no single person has exclusive control over the use and disposition of any particular resource" (Benkler, 2006, pp. 60–61). In conclusion, relational/institutional approaches pinpoint that commons refer neither to communities nor to resources, but instead to the social relations and structures that develop between the two (see Figure 1).

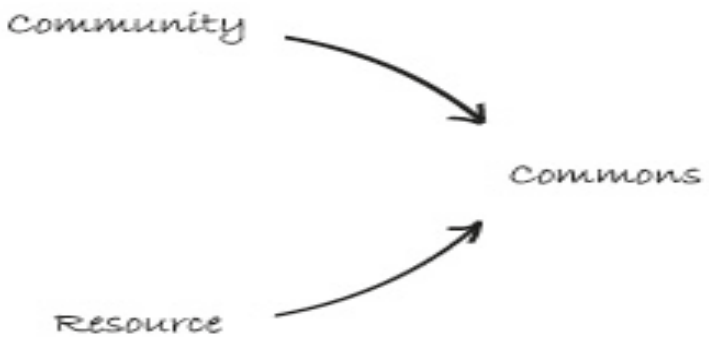

Figure 1. Locating the commons.

At an even higher level of complexity, processual definitions pinpoint the dynamic element of the commons. According to processual approaches, commons are defined as fluid systems of social relationships and sets of social practices for governing the (re)production of, access to, and use of resources. In contrast to resource-based or property-based definitions, the commons are not equated with given resources or to the legal status emanating from their natural attributes, but rather to social relations that are constantly reproduced. Furthermore, in contrast to relational/institutional approaches, the commons do not coincide with, but are rather co-constituted by their institutional elements. According to the processual approach, the commons are a process, a state of becoming, not a state of being. Therefore, Peter Linebaugh (2008) has invented a neologism to reimagine commons as a verb—that is, the process of "commoning" (pp. 50–51). Hence, in contrast to analytical definitions, processual approaches refer to the ontology of the commons not as a common pool resource, but as the very process of pooling common resources (Bollier & Helfrich, 2015).

Nonetheless, social practices taking place within the commons are not only restricted to the (re)production of the resource. On the contrary, throughout these practices, the community itself is constantly reproduced, adapting its governance mechanisms and communal relationships in the changing

environment within and outside the commons. According to such an "integrated" approach, the commons should be viewed in its totality as a process that produces forms of life in common, a distinct mode of social coproduction (Agamben, 2000).

Elements and Characteristics

Intellectual commons are related to terrains of mainly intellectual, as demarcated from those of chiefly manual, human activity. In other words, they refer to social structures related primarily to intellectual work in terms of the production, distribution, and consumption of information, communication, knowledge, and culture, which are subject to dynamic change. Taking into account that the commons in general is not a singular concept, the commons of the mind exhibit multiple layers of (re)production and may involve the *commonification* of both tangible and intangible resources.

Most theorists consider any commons as consisting of three main elements, which more or less refer to the social practice of pooling a resource, the social cooperation of productive activity among peers, and, finally, a community with a collective process governing the (re)production and management of the resource (Bollier & Helfrich, 2015; Caffentzis, 2008; De Angelis, 2009; Hess & Ostrom, 2007b). In dialectical terms, the elements of the intellectual commons can be restated according to the dialectic of subject and object. According to this dialectical scheme, a producing subject interrelates with its external objective environment. The interaction of subject and object takes the form of subject/object, an entity that preserves certain elements of subject and object, eliminates others, and sublates the status of such an entity through the emergence of novel properties that did not exist in its generating entities (Figure 2).

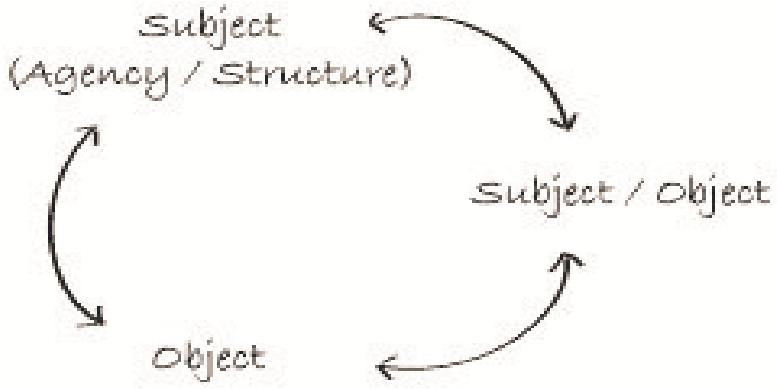

Figure 2. The elements of the intellectual commons.

In this light, the intellectual commons are produced by the interrelation between their subjective and objective elements, as described in Table 1. The subjective element is twofold, consisting, on the one hand, of the collective actors and, on the other hand, of the communal structures of the intellectual commons. The objective element consists of the intangible resources that are used as input for commons-based peer production. The products of the sublation between the objective and subjective elements of the intellectual commons are again twofold. Obviously, practices within the intellectual commons yield more information, communication, knowledge, and culture. Hence, intangible resources are both object of the dialectical process and outcome of the sublation. This characteristic distinguishes the intellectual commons from other types of commons. Yet the dialectical process constantly reproduces and evolves itself, its social bonds being both medium and outcome of the process. Rather than being analyzed as separate from one another, the objective and subjective elements of the commons should be viewed as forming an inseparable and integrated whole (Bollier & Helfrich, 2015).

Table 1. Characteristics of the Intellectual Commons.

	Elements		
	Object (resource)	**Subject/agency (productive activity)**	**Subject/structure (community/institution)**
Characteristics	Nonexcludability	Nonmonetary incentives	Rules of self-governance
	Nonrivalry	Voluntary participation	Communal ownership rules
	Zero marginal costs of sharing	Self-allocation of productive activity/consensus-based coordination	Access rules
	Cumulative capacity	Self-management	Communal values

As far as their objective element is concerned, intellectual commons are primarily related to the (re)production of intangible resources, in the form of data, information, communication, knowledge, and culture (Benkler, 2006; Frischmann, Madison, & Strandburg, 2014). Practices within the commons in relation to tangible resources are characterized by resource attributes of relative nonexcludability and of rivalrousness (Ostrom & Ostrom, 1977). In particular, the exclusion of individuals from the use of common-pool resources through physical or legal barriers is relatively costly, whereas any resource units subtracted by one individual are deprived from others (Ostrom, 1990). As a corollary, such resources are susceptible to problems of congestion and overuse and can even be open to the risk of destruction—matters that have to be dealt with by commoners through sophisticated and adaptable governance technics, if commons upon them are to last and thrive. In contrast, intangible resources have the status of pure public goods in the strict economic sense (Samuelson, 1954). First of all, intangible goods share the attribute of nonexcludability with common-pool resources, except in the case of the former, such nonexcludability is absolute rather than relative (Hess & Ostrom, 2007b). Furthermore, they are nonrivalrous in the sense that their consumption does not reduce the amount of the good available to others (Benkler, 2006). In addition, information, communication, knowledge, and culture have been

known to bear a cumulative capacity (Foray, 2004; Hess & Ostrom, 2007b). Finally, intangible resources enjoy near zero marginal costs of sharing among peers in the sense that the cost of their reproduction tends to be negligible (Arrow, 1962; Benkler, 2006). The partly intransitive attributes mentioned above—that is, nonexcludability, nonrivalry, zero marginal costs of sharing, and cumulative capacity, which characterize the objective element of the intellectual commons—are not found in types of commons based on tangible resources.

Regarding their subjective agency element, intellectual commons are reproduced according to a commons-based peer mode of intellectual production, distribution, and consumption, which significantly differentiates itself from the dominant mode, based on capital and commodity markets (De Angelis, 2007). In the context of the intellectual commons, the subjective productive force of the social intellect interrelates with communal relations of reproduction. The social intellect can be defined as the collective intellectual worker, producing prior and existing information, communication, knowledge, and culture through cooperative work and an aggregation of the work of many humans. Communal relations between peers are characterized by voluntary participation, the self-allocation of tasks, and autonomous contribution to the productive process (Soderberg & O'Neil, 2014). Participation in the productive process is motivated less by material incentives and more through bonds of community, trust, and reputation (Benkler, 2004; De Angelis, 2007). Coordination is ensured "by the utilization of flexible, overlapping, indeterminate systems of negotiating difference and permitting parallel inconsistencies to co-exist until a settlement behavior or outcome emerges" (Benkler, 2016, pp. 111–112). Eventually, such relations tend to be based on sharing and collaboration between commoners, who join their productive capacities together as equipotent peers in networked forms of organization (Bauwens, 2005). Even though the degree and extent of control may vary, the productive process, available infrastructure, and means of production tend to be controlled by the community of commoners (Fuster Morell, 2014). Taking into account that intellectual production has always had a very close relation with communication and collaboration, today's information and communication technologies have contributed to the process by compressing time and space and by facilitating peer-to-peer collaboration (Benkler, 2006). As a result, technology has significantly decreased the transaction costs to forge communal relationships and has made it more attractive for creators to establish efficient communities of production.

In relation to their subjective structural element, the intellectual commons arise whenever a community acquires constituent power by engaging in the (re)production and management of an intangible resource, with special regard for equitable access and use (Bollier, 2008). In this sense, there can be no commons without a self-governing community. Rules of self-governance include both rules for the management of the productive process and rules of political decision making. On the one hand, self-management rules determine the general characteristics of the mode of production, distribution, and consumption of the resource, the choices over the design of the resource and the planning of the productive process, the criteria for the allocation of tasks and the division of labor. On the other hand, political decision making determines the collective mission or goal of the process, the membership and the boundaries of the community, the constitutional choices over the mode of self-governance, the participation of individual commoners in the decision-making process, the interaction between commoners, the adjudication of disputes, and the imposition of sanctions for rule violation. In addition, the intellectual commons are regulated by ownership and access rules. Ownership rules determine the

property status of both the means of production and the resources produced. Access rules regulate the appropriation and use of resource units (Ostrom, 1990). Access can be open to all or managed and limited to certain individuals or usages (Mueller, 2012). Property rights are bundles of access, contribution, extraction, removal, management/participation, exclusion, and alienation rights, thus conferring different types of control over resources vis-à-vis persons and entities other than their right-holder (Hess & Ostrom, 2007a). Ownership of communally managed and communally produced resources bestows the rights to regulate access and use. Access rules generally aim to sustain and guarantee the communal mode of resource management and to avert exhaustion through commodification. They constitute the constructed boundaries between the realm of the intellectual commons and the sphere of commodity markets. Hence, ownership and access in the intellectual commons are inextricably linked. Furthermore, the intellectual commons are established as communities of shared values, oriented toward communal stabilization and reproduction through time (Clippinger & Bollier, 2005). Values, such as reciprocity, trust, and mutuality among peers, are not confined to one-to-one relations. Rather, they develop and are set in circulation both within and among commoners' communities. Communal values are very important for the well-being of the intellectual commons, since their circulation and accumulation contribute to the construction of group identities and the consolidation of reciprocal patterns of pooling resources in common. Yet communal values within the spheres of the intellectual commons also function in contradistinction and as alternatives to circuits of dominant monetary values. There is an underlying confrontation between alternative and dominant value systems, which is connected with patterns of pooling resources in common and processes of commodification (De Angelis, 2007). Intellectual commons communities reveal a wide diversity of institutional practices, which evolve through time in correspondence to the vulnerabilities to enclosure or underproduction of the relevant resource and the social dilemmas faced by the community during the course of sustaining each specific commons (Hess, 2008).

As any other type of social institution, intellectual commons control and, at the same time, empower the activity of their participants. Nevertheless, they significantly differ from state or market regulation of people and resources, since they constitute social systems, in which institutions are immanent in, rather than separate from, the reproduction of the community.

Tendencies

According to Vincent Mosco (2009), commodification is "the process of transforming things valued for their use into marketable produces that are valued for what they can bring in exchange" (p. 2). Today, the commodification of intellectual produces is confronted by the contending force of the expansion of the intellectual commons. Fifteen years after the then Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer compared Linux with cancer, contaminating all other software with the General Public License (Greene, 2001), free and open source software projects have grown exponentially and have become the technological base for large parts of the software development industry (Knorr, 2015), proportionally displacing closed intellectual property business regimes of software development. Intellectual commons develop in the form of virtuous circles and ecosystems. Sharing is a practice at the core of the intellectual commons. The more they are shared, the more information, communication, knowledge, and culture enhance their social utility (Bollier, 2008; Frischmann, 2012; Hardt, 2010; Rose, 1986). Hence, sharing literally fuels innovation. It is through the practices within the intellectual commons that this sharing potential of intangible resources for social

utility is taken advantage in full. When productive communities possess institutions that guarantee that the output of their production remains within the virtuous circle of commons-based peer production, then practices of pooling resources in common acquire network effects. This gives rise to an expansion of both the quantity/quality of intellectual production and the size of productive communities, which has been characterized as the "cornucopia of the commons" (Bollier, 2007, p. 34). This phenomenon of expanding the pooling of resources in common can be termed *commonification*. Contrary to the opposite transformations of commodification, commonification transforms social relations, which generate marketable commodities valued for what they can bring in exchange, into social relations, which generate resources produced by multiple creators in communal collaboration, openly accessible to communities or the wider society and valued for their use.

In informational capitalism, exchange value is not the sole form of social value in circulation, and intellectual property–enabled commodity markets are not the only value systems monopolizing the production, distribution, and consumption of information, communication, knowledge, and culture. The intellectual reservoir of the public domain, the intangible resources pooled in common, and the patterns of sharing and collaboration within and among intellectual commons communities interconnected through peer-to-peer networked structures mutually compose and reproduce openly accessible intellectual ecosystems of culture, science, and technology. Hence, in contrast to the circulation of exchange values within intellectual property–enabled commodity markets, use and other social values circulate within and among the intellectual commons, forming alternative spheres of value circulation/accumulation. Examples of such spheres include the open source software community, alternative public spheres formed by bloggers and alternative media, Internet cultures in social media, and online meeting points like 4chan.

Even though they are fundamentally characterized by their orientation toward self-governance and open access to their productive output, in societies dominated by capital, the commons of the mind unfold themselves neither as wholly open nor as entirely self-governed. Instead, openness and self-governance are tendencies, which emerge from the essential properties encountered in the social relations of the intellectual commons. As in any other productive process, intellectual commons are determined only to a certain extent by the properties of the resources involved, being after that point greatly dependent on the sociohistorical context in which they evolve (Kaul & Mendoza, 2003). In particular, the degree of openness and self-governance in each community of commoners is determined by the specific outcomes of the dialectics between the intellectual commons and dominant forces/relations in their social context. In this view, institutions within the intellectual commons are the result of the interaction between the intellectual commons and the objective conditions of their environment. Such a perspective also leaves ground for counterinfluencing agency/structure dialectics between the resulting institutions within the intellectual commons, their generative elements, and their social context.

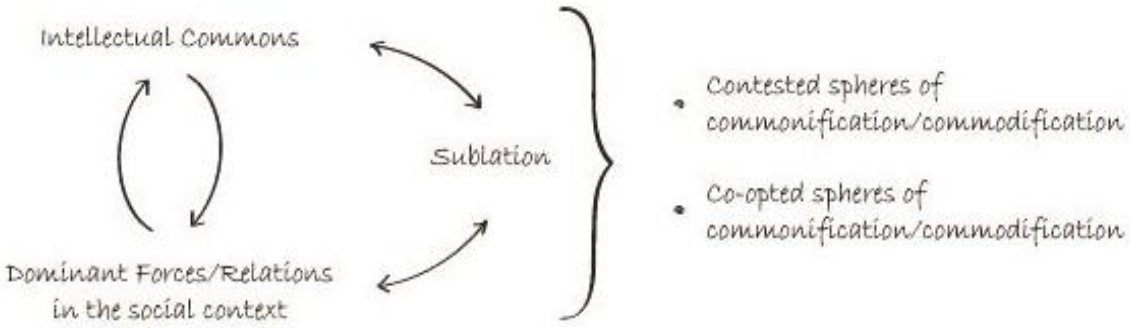

Figure 3. The dialectics of the intellectual commons.

Hence, as shown in Figure 3, in capitalism, structures of pooling resources in common are inherently contested and contradictory terrains of social activity, which are constantly reproduced in a nonlinear manner on the basis of the dialectics mentioned above but also counterinfluence their environment. Outcomes of the interrelation between the intellectual commons and dominant forces/relations in the social context can be classified in two distinct spheres of reproduction: contested spheres of commonification/commodification and co-opted spheres of commonification/commodification.

The dialectics within the reproduction of the intellectual commons exhibit certain tendencies and countertendencies (see Table 2), which emanate from their essential characteristics and the essential characteristics of the wider social context. In particular, due to the attribute of nonexcludability, intellectual commons are less vulnerable to "crowding effects" and "overuse" problems and relatively immune to risks of depletion (Lessig, 2002b, p. 21). Therefore, practices of pooling resources in common in relation to intangible resources have the potential to be structured as open access commons on their demand side—that is, "involving no limits on who is authorized to use a resource" (Ostrom & Hess, 2000, pp. 335–336). Examples of open access intellectual commons include our common cultural heritage and the public domain. Yet intellectual commons are also subject to opposing forces in the social context, manifested in legal institutions and technological infrastructures of enclosure, which tend to socially construct information, communication, knowledge, and culture as artificially scarce; to monetize access; and, eventually, to commodify them (Hess & Ostrom, 2007b). Accordingly, the characteristics of nonrivalry and zero marginal costs of sharing observed in relation to intangible resources tend to encourage patterns of sharing among creators, which may result in the pooling of common resources, on the condition that forces of commonification are also set in motion. Conversely, institutions and technologies in the social context enable the fixation of intellectual works in the form of commodities and, thus, make them susceptible to market allocation and private accumulation (Cohen, 2007). Sharing is a fundamental characteristic that distinguishes commons from commodity markets or other systems of private resource accumulation (Madison, Frischmann, & Strandburg, 2010). Therefore, the degree of sharing tolerated by the sublation of the opposing tendencies mentioned above gives evidence about the degree of their relative independence or co-optation by market logic.

Table 2. Tendencies and Countertendencies Within the Intellectual Commons.

Characteristics of pooling resources in common (commons-based peer production)	Tendencies (forces of commonification)	Interrelation (subject/object dialectics)	Countertendencies (forces of commodification)	Characteristics of commodification (capitalist mode of production)
Nonexcludability	Open access	Commonification ↔ commodification	Monetized access	Enclosure
Nonrivalry/zero marginal costs of sharing	Sharing	Pooling of common resources ↔ private accumulation of resources	Market allocation	Fixity
Cumulative capacity, nonmonetary incentives, voluntary participation	Collaboration	Commons-oriented relations of production ↔ market competition and oligopolies	Antagonism	Monetary incentives
Self-allocation of productive activity and consensus-based coordination	Self- and collective actualization	Self-management of the productive process ↔ hierarchical management of the productive process	Alienation	Command
Communal value system	Circular reciprocity	Work in collaboration or waged labor	Labor as commodity or exploitation	Market value system
Communal ownership	Self-governance	Consensus-based decision making ↔ hierarchical decision making	Domination	Private/state ownership

The dialectics, which give birth to the sphere of the intellectual commons, are framed by additional characteristics and tendencies, the social determination of which is even more extensive than the partly intransitive attributes of intangible resources. In this context, several researchers have pinpointed that individuals are motivated to engage in intellectual commons communities by diverse and heterogeneous incentives, which are primarily nonmonetary, such as communal reciprocity and skills building (Ghosh, Glott, Krieger, & Robles, 2002), social status gains and reputation among peers and beyond the community (Lakhani & Von Hippel, 2002), and the use value of produced resources and the hedonic pleasure of creativity (Lerner & Tirole, 2002). The important role of nonmonetary incentives within intellectual commons communities certainly does not imply that commoners are free from extrinsic monetary pressures arising from the immersion of such communities in the dominant value flows of commodity markets. Hence, other researchers have recorded that the exploitation of reputation within the intellectual commons as a means to leverage employment opportunities also plays a motivational role among commoners (Von Krogh, Haefliger, Spaeth, & Wallin, 2012). Nonmonetary incentives and the participation of commoners on a voluntary basis combined with the partly intransitive characteristic of the cumulative capacity of intangible resources weave relations within the productive process, which generate collaborative tendencies among peers. Contrariwise, the dominance of monetary incentives in the wider social context reproduces antagonistic relations. The countervailing tendencies mentioned above impact both the patterns of pooling resources within intellectual commons communities and the relations among them, pushing toward either commons-oriented peer relations of production or market competition, accumulation of market power and oligopolies.

Furthermore, the characteristics of self-allocating tasks and consensus-based coordination in the productive practices of pooling resources in common promote the self- and collective actualization of commoners. On the contrary, hierarchical command of labor in the productive processes, which dominate the social context, generates alienation of creative individual workers. The synthesis between the two juxtaposing spheres shifts the productive practices of the intellectual commons either toward self-management or toward hierarchical management. Intellectual commons should also be examined as alternative communal value systems reproduced at the margins of dominant market value systems. Whereas markets circulate social power in the form of monetary values and labor in the form of commodity through decentralized bilateral transactions, intellectual commons communities are based on circuits of circular reciprocity among peers. Interrelations between the two value systems generate relations of production within the intellectual commons, which may widely range between the two extremes of collaborative work among peers and exploited waged labor. Finally, the communal or private/state ownership of the infrastructure and means of pooling resources is critical for the degree of self-governance and domination encountered in each intellectual commons community and eventually determines its mechanisms of political decision making—that is, whether such mechanisms shall be consensus-based or hierarchical. In conclusion, intellectual commons generally share the characteristics mentioned in the previous section. Nonetheless, the extent and quality of those characteristics in each case of commons is ultimately determined by the dialectics between forces and relations of commonification/commodification. Hence, the more an intellectual commons community dynamically transforms its practices and orients itself from the sphere of commonification toward the contested sphere of commonification/commodification to the co-opted sphere of commonification/commodification, the less extensive and qualitative its characteristics of open access, self-management, and self-governance will be and vice versa.

In corollary, the intellectual commons have the potential to be noncommodifiable, yet are not insulated from phenomena of commodification. The establishment of either intellectual commons contesting commodification on the basis of sharing and collaboration or intellectual commons being co-opted by commodity circulation and subject to value capture by capital are ultimately socially constructed outcomes. These outcomes are determined by the dialectics constituting the spheres of the intellectual commons vis-à-vis the value system of commodity markets. They are related to tendencies and countertendencies, which may be realized or remain unrealized. The intellectual commons embody the potential to unleash in full the creative and innovative powers of the social intellect, yet their future remains open, subject to struggles for social change within their spheres and in the wider social context.

Manifestations

Intellectual commons ascribe to practices of social reproduction in relation to primarily intellectual human activity. Intellectual work manifests itself in the reproduction of data, knowledge, and communication. Correspondingly, intellectual commons are related to the reproduction of information, communication, knowledge, and culture. The commons of the mind cannot be separated from practices of pooling resources in common in other spheres of human activity, but rather operate in combination and, thus, have the potential to commonify social reproduction in its totality. The same circuits of the commons may manifest themselves in productive activities involving information, communication, knowledge, culture, manufacturing, sociality, and so on.[2] In addition, they do not refer to a supposed "immaterial" realm, but rather to the movement of matter through cognitive, communicative, and cooperative practices and to the reproduction of social relations (Williams, 1989).[3]

Information refers to collections of data meaningfully assembled "according to the rules (syntax) that govern the chosen system, code or language being used" (Floridi, 2010, p. 20). It is a combination of data and intellectual work, which embodies human interpretation. Therefore, to be accessible and comprehensible, any assemblage and transformation of data into information must comply with a socially constructed and shared system of semantics. Furthermore, the process of assembling information by the pooling together of data is in itself based on patterns of sharing and collaboration. Since the accumulation of factual data and its collaborative assimilation into information constitute the foundation for knowledge production, robust commons of information are a precondition for all modes of intellectual production, distribution, and consumption. The information commons includes the vast realm of nonaggregated data

[2] For example, open hardware commons have the potential to manifest themselves in the commonification of all their terrains of social reproduction, such as in relation to designs, communications media, manufacturing spaces, material infrastructure, and products—or at least in some of them. Hence, fablab networks mainly commonify hardware designs—that is, they are mainly manifested as knowledge commons. Yet practices of pooling resources in common in hardware design have the potential to colonize the production of material goods through artisanal networks and, thus, acquire a deeper layer of commonification within social reproduction.

[3] For instance, spectrum commons may combine practices of pooling resources in common in relation to natural (radio spectrum), social (means of communication), and intellectual (wireless communication technologies) resources, all of which are reflected in matter and the movement of matter.

and information, which has been collected, processed, accumulated, and stored across history by humanity as a result of sharing and collaboration among many individuals. It also includes aggregated data and information about nature, human history, and contemporary society, which has not been enclosed either directly or indirectly by virtue of patent, copyright, and database laws or by technological means and, therefore, lies in the public domain.[4] Reliance of intellectual production on sharing and collaboration is acknowledged by our systems of intellectual property law, which, therefore, purposefully include limitations to exclusivity and common use provisions of information resources. Such an equilibrium between enclosure and the commons embedded in law has led certain scholars to maintain that the system of intellectual property rights is "a mixed system of private property and commons" (Cunningham, 2014, p. 65).

Knowledge is the assimilation of information into shared structures of common understanding (Machlup, 1983). It is a social product generated on the basis of objects of a transitive dimension (i.e., prior knowledge produced by society) and objects of an intransitive dimension (i.e., structures or mechanisms of nature that exist and act quite independently of humans; Bhaskar, 2008). By the term social reference is given to the fact that the production of knowledge is essentially a process of cooperation among several individuals (Marx & Engels, 1844/1998), which is structured in dynamic subprocesses of cognition, communication, and cooperation (Fuchs & Hofkirchner, 2005). The accumulated knowledge of humankind constitutes the intellectual basis of social life. The building blocks of human knowledge are produced and managed as commons, according to socially constructed rules, which prohibit any kind of exclusionary conduct.[5] Hence, discoveries about physical phenomena and laws of

[4] As a general rule, data and information do not per se fall under the scope of copyright or patentable subject matter or, instead, do not per se fulfill other criteria of copyright protection or patentability. Nonetheless, the commodification of information flows and the subsequent investment of time, money, and effort for the compilation of databases have pushed for the introduction of statutory private monopolies over information, the most prominent of which is the 1996 European Union directive on the legal protection of databases. By virtue of the latter, an exclusive sui generis right for producers of nonoriginal databases has been established throughout the European Economic Area, which, instead of protecting units of data per se, grants its holders the right to exclude others from the extraction and/or reutilization of the whole or of a substantial part of the contents of the databases under protection.

[5] According to the Articles 1 and 2 of the 1886 Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, copyright applies only to expressions of ideas that have been fixed in a tangible medium and not to ideas themselves. Articles 9 and 2 of the 1994 Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) further clarifies the scope of copyright: "Copyright protection shall extend to expressions and not to ideas, procedures, methods of operation or mathematical concepts as such." Along the same lines, U.S. copyright law explicitly excludes ideas from its protective scope by providing that: "In no case does copyright protection for an original work of authorship extend to any idea, procedure, process, system, method of operation, concept, principle, or discovery, regardless of the form in which it is described, explained, illustrated, or embodied in such work" (17 U.S.C., Sec. 102(b), 1982). In relation to patentability, Articles 27 and 1 of the TRIPS agreement includes in the scope of patentable subject matter only inventions, whether products or processes of technology, which "are new, involve an inventive step and are capable of industrial application." In a more detailed manner, Articles 52 and 2 of the 1973

nature, abstract ideas, principles and theories, mathematical symbols, methods and formulas are managed as open access commons pooled together by the cooperative activity of the scientific community, past and present. All in all, the core of scientific knowledge is generally managed as a commons, advanced through sharing and collaboration among peers in community.[6] The knowledge commons also consists of technological inventions that fall short of patentability because they do not fulfill the criteria of novelty, nonobviousness/involvement of an inventive step, social utility/susceptibility of industrial application. Broadly speaking, this includes the accumulated technological advancements of the greatest part of human history—namely, inventions (1) that were conceived before the existence of patent laws; (2) that have been communicated to the public, but have not been filed for patent protection by their inventors; (3) that had their patent rights expire; or (4) that have been invalidated by litigation. Furthermore, technologies in use, whether protected by private monopolies or not, lead to further innovation and invention through practices of maintenance, repair, and modification shared among the communities of their users (Edgerton, 1999; Von Hippel, 2005). In addition, the knowledge commons includes all types of "traditional knowledge." The latter refers among others to the know-how, practices, skills, and innovations developed within and among communities through patterns of sharing and collaboration in a wide variety of contexts, such as governance, agriculture, science, technology, architecture, arts and crafts, ecology, medicine, and biodiversity (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2012). Finally, the development of packet-based electronic communication systems and advanced information technologies in the form of the Internet and the World Wide Web have greatly facilitated the sharing of knowledge between peers along with commons-based peer modes of production based on collaboration.

Communication refers to a socialized process of symbolic interaction between human subjects through which meaning is exchanged. Therefore, being more than the transmission of data, communication is in essence the social production of meaning that constitutes social relationships (Mosco, 2009). Furthermore, exercising free speech through communication between citizens essentially involves drawing from the vast pool of intellectual resources held in common. Hence, the wider the scope of the intellectual commons, the more the fundamental freedom of speech is empowered (Netanel, 2008). Cultures are unities of symbolic systems reproduced by means of interpersonal human communication (Cuche, 2010). Culture includes the fundamental elements of socialization, which are necessary for life in common—that is, the a priori of human society. It is essentially a socialized process based on sharing and collaboration and a collective project in constant flux. To begin with, any culture is reproduced upon a common language, which is also in itself a system of symbols. Furthermore, a cultural system includes the

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European Patent Convention excludes from the scope of patentable subject matter (a) discoveries, scientific theories, and mathematical methods; (b) aesthetic creations; (c) schemes, rules, and methods for performing mental acts, playing games, or doing business, and programs for computers; and (d) presentations of information.

[6] Due to the fact that patentability criteria apply only to technological applications of scientific knowledge, scientific advancements cannot in themselves be patented, except in their embodiment as useful/industrial applications. It is, after all, to this end that the publication of the knowledge underlying an invention as freely accessible is a prerequisite for the granting of private monopoly rights over technological applications in most patent systems.

reproduction and evolution of shared ethical, moral, religious, and other value systems, which determine anything from body techniques and patterns of behavior to ways of life and orderly social function within social groups (Elias, 1969; Mauss, 1973; Sahlins, 2013; Williams, 1983). Culture also exhibits common traditions, habits and customs, religious or secular belief systems, and interacting worldviews and shared conceptions about social life in general. In addition, culture consists of common aesthetic systems and styles, artistic and cultural techniques, practices, skills, and innovations along with artistic and cultural expressions of folklore, such as folk art, arts and crafts, architectural forms, dance, performances, ceremonies, handicrafts, games, myths, memes, folktales, signs, and symbols. Last but not least, when we talk about culture, we refer not only to its contemporary form but also to cultural heritage and collective historical narratives handed down from one generation to the next (Burke, 2008). In conclusion, cultures are commons, reproduced and evolving through practices of collective sharing and collaboration between peers and social groups within and among cultural communities. They constitute the cultural bases that render human creativity and social life possible. Yet the cultural commons also includes the public domain. The public domain is a legal artifact in flux, each time carving the line between private property and the intellectual commons (Goldstein, 2003). Intellectual works in the public domain—that is, not protected by copyright or unbundled from exclusionary private rights—include works created before the existence of copyright, those of insufficient originality for copyright protection, works the copyright of which has expired or is otherwise inapplicable due to invalidation by litigation along with government works, works dedicated by their authors to the public domain, and works that are licensed by their authors under conditions that are orientated toward open access. In addition, the cultural commons includes the fair use limitations engraved in copyright law (Samuelson, 2006). De facto cultural commons, which develop beyond the boundaries of law, have also been facilitated by contemporary information and communication technologies through the unauthorized sharing or mixing of copyright-protected works in digitized environments.

Conclusion

Intellectual commons are the great other of intellectual property–enabled commodity markets. They constitute noncommercial spheres of intellectual production, distribution, and consumption, which are reproduced outside the circulation of intangible commodities and money (Caffentzis, 2013). Yet intellectual commons are not just an alternative to the dominant capitalist mode of intellectual production. On the contrary, they provide the core common infrastructures of intellectual production, such as language, nonaggregated data and information, prior knowledge and culture (Mitchell, 2005). In addition, they constantly reproduce a vast amount of information, communication, knowledge, and cultural artifacts as common-pool resources. It is the compilation of these intellectual infrastructures and resources with the productive force of the social intellect, subjected to the rule of capital, which constitute the foundation of the capitalist mode of intellectual production. As De Angelis (2007) pinpoints, "every mode of doing needs commons" (p. 243). Capitalist modes of producing intellectual goods are inescapably dependent on the commons. Nonetheless, such dependence is not mutual. Forces of commonification can materialize their potential to unleash socialized creativity and inventiveness without the restraints of capital.

The engagement with theoretical ventures over the intellectual commons needs to be attentive to the fact that wider radical transformations required for the expansion of commons-based peer intellectual

production, distribution, and consumption cannot be pushed forward purely by theorizing. Instead, they presuppose tectonic shifts in co-relations of power between incumbent economic forces and the emerging commoners movements. Therefore, our transition to commons-based societies may only come as a result of social and political action. Because the commons cannot be separated in their tangible/intangible expressions, in this project no division of labor between its intellectual and sociopolitical aspects is possible. Participants can only be commoners of the mind as much as of the soul and body.

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Toward Transversal Cosmopolitanism: Understanding Alternative Praxes in the Global Field of Transformative Movements

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ABSTRACT *This article critically reflects on theoretical dilemmas of conceptualizing recent ideological shifts and contention among global transformative movements. Some studies conceptualize these movements as ideologically mature and coherent, while other inquiries highlight disorganization, fragmentation, disillusion, and dispute. The former line of argument suggests that underlying emerging global solidarities—to the extent they genuinely exist—there are some identifiably coherent cosmopolitanist, or globalist, values. The latter claim that existing global justice and transformative movements lack an effective ideological position for uniting the masses behind a global (political) project for transforming global capitalist social relations. By drawing upon an interpretive review of empirical studies conducted throughout the last decade, the article delineates four modalities, defined in terms of their orientations toward cosmopolitanist values. Among these modalities is a new and promising one, termed here as 'transversal cosmopolitanist' ('transversal' here understood as a process verb, indicating a new form of cosmopolitanist praxis). This approach assumes the possibility of creating a common ground for fruitful dialogue, constructive collective learning, progressive hybridization, and active political cooperation among diverse identities and ideological visions of contemporary global transformative movements, against existing capitalist social relations and structures of domination.*

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, transversalism, meta-ideology, transformative movements

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Introduction: Ideological Encounters

In the early 1990s, the global Left, overwhelmed by the enormity of historical changes in the political economy of the capitalist world system, was facing a historically acute question: does the failure of Communism mean the end of our hope for a better world? Would the global Left after the collapse of 'actually existing socialism' in the East, and the slow demise of social democracy in the capitalist West, still be capable of building a plausible alternative? The end of the Cold War presented an opportunity for the global Left to free itself of past ideological orthodoxies and dogmatic rigidities, which were in part responsible for the demise of state socialism. The 'fall' opened up the promise of a more progressive and democratic discourse intended to revitalize the (democratic) socialist project and reanimate transformative social visions and praxes. However, the fall of communism contributed to delegitimizing much of the traditional global Left.

The relative economic stagnation and multiple and recurring crises of the capitalist world system dating from the 1970s onward worked to the advantage of economic conservatives on the New Right. By constructing a crisis narrative that condemned Keynesianism and social democracy as sources of 'stagnation' and 'economic failure', the New Right were able to rearticulate their ideology of market fundamentalism and advocate neoliberal economic globalization. More recently, in the painful and prolonged aftermath of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC), conservative center-right political forces have showed continued ideological and political resilience, manipulating the GFC into yet another opportunity for advancing policy 'reforms'. These policies have been intimately interwoven with a crisis narrative justifying deep austerity measures, while re-embedding market fundamentalist ideology and neoliberal economic globalization. This socially cruel regime of austerity has depended upon the (re)commodification of labor (and of the natural environment), while reducing social protection.

Public opposition to these measures, though often vigorous, has yet remained largely limited to activist campaigning, mass street protests, and occupations. Thus, the historically necessary project of the 'reinvention' of the Left globally, in a form capable of overturning the ideology and policies of the global Right, still appears unfulfilled, despite the GFC. The muting of the severity of the financial crisis through the monetary and fiscal responses of governments has had the effect of forestalling the prospects for a situation of radical transformation, while preserving most of the status quo of pre-crisis 'global economic governance' (Helleiner, 2014). A quarter of a century has now passed since the end of the Cold War, and despite a major GFC, the global Left is widely perceived to have failed to galvanize majority support for a coherent alternative ideological and policy framework for progressive radical social transformation.

At the turn of the millennium, the rising 'anti-globalization' or 'global justice' movements seemed to some observers to hold the key. From the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, a new 'movement of movements' formed through cycles of protest against the neoliberal policies promoted by international financial institutions (Mertes, 2004). Many in these movements not only protested against corporate globalism and free market ideology, but also called for the systemic transformation of capitalist social relations and the creation of radical democratic alternatives. Participants in these 'transformative movements' have in fact opposed continuing economic liberalization programs in both global South and North, and proposed a broad range of approaches the purpose of which is to transform capitalist relations. These have included reformist orientations toward the democratic social regulation of 'capital', and the creation of institutions 'providing additional choices' and antipodal alternatives to the existence of capital (Fuller, Jonas, & Lee, 2010). The old question was back: Could the transformative

ideas and practices of these new movements initiate viable alternative systems, or reinvigorate some old ones?

Over the past decade, a number of researchers, including the present authors, have focused on the ideational structure of new transformative movements, attributing distinctive modes of cognition to them (Gills, 2000; Goodman, 2006, 2002; Hosseini, 2006, 2010). Further empirical studies are still necessary to examine the bases for solidarity formation among these diverse movements. To avoid reductionism, such inquiries require the construction of careful theoretical frameworks to conceptualize the dynamics of ideological encounters and analyze the patterns of shared identification. There have been valuable attempts to map ideological orientations in this field; examples are Starr (2000), Worth (2013), and Steger, Goodman, and Wilson (2013). Yet, these existing studies primarily provide categorizations, comparisons, and mappings through discursive analyses. The interrogation of 'ideological encounters' between movements has remained marginal. While some studies conceptualize these movements as ideologically mature and coherent (Hardt & Negri, 2004; Steger, 2008), others highlight disorganization, fragmentation, disappointment, uncertainty, exclusion, and dispute (Worth & Buckley, 2009). Whereas the former argue that underlying global solidarities reveal coherent cosmopolitanist, or 'globalist', values, the latter claim that global justice movements 'are too fragmented and too diverse to be adequately framed as strong enough to challenge the global order' (Worth & Abbott, 2006, p. 50). The lack of a clear shared ideological structure has been claimed by some as a point of strength, one that can immunize the movements against utopian, radical, romanticist, reactionary, and orthodox forces of both the Left and the Right (Day, 2004). Others view the absence of shared coherent ideology and policy positions by the global Left as a profound source of political weakness, immobilism, and failure.

There is no doubt that reality is always more complex than our abstract categorizations will allow. This complex reality includes a multitude of practices, ideas, and actors that despite their diverse particular concerns are yet able to create short- and long-term alliances across class, regional, ethnic, and other boundaries, and to transnationalize their networks, bridging between the global North and South. The great challenge is to (re)conceptualize the normative and cognitive structures that underpin new global political solidarities.

We propose a new analytical framework to investigate diverse ideological encounters within the global field (in Bourdieu's sense of the meaning of a 'field') of transformative movements. There are clearly different ways to construct the ideational landscape of the field, depending on research objectives. Our assumption is that a critical account of cosmopolitanism is the most appropriate lens for examining alternatives to the existing dominant social relations of capital in an era of globalization and multiple crises. In terms of opening up 'moments and conditions' for other alternatives to flourish (Gills, 2001, 2005), *critical cosmopolitanism* emphasizes an 'openness' to other ideologies, a commitment to 'dialogue' and to identifying and exploiting shared 'commonalities' bridging ideological visions of transformative praxes (Hosseini, Goodman, & Gills, 2016). It leaves space for 'differences', while encouraging 'self-reflexivity' (Appiah, 2006; Holton, 2009). Cosmopolitanism can, therefore, function to enable movement-building at a *meta-ideological* level.

Meta-ideology is required precisely because ideologies are reductionist, and meta-ideology thus appears as an ideational stance. We define meta-ideology as an *ideational process* through which the interactions and deliberations between different ideological positions make actors overtly *conscious* of their shared and distinct assumptions, experiences, and ideals. Ideologies are the politically institutionalized forms of collective ideations and reductionist in nature, being a set of propositions that tend to cement some ideas or 'certainties' and reject others; a

feature that gives ideology structure and therefore is understandable from a pragmatist point of view. However, this reductionist feature prevents ideologies from effectively responding to the newly emerging and increasingly challenging social conditions. A meta-ideology is required to regulate the contestations and interactions between ideologies and to create an ideational base for the reformation or evolution of ideological visions.

A series of questions arises from this concept. Is there a cosmopolitan meta-ideology underlying contemporary transnational alliances and networks of transformative movements? What about the cases in which solidarities appear to be unsustainable or fractured? Can cosmopolitanism provide transformative movements with a 'non-totalizing' sense of commonality (Caraus, 2015)? Could cosmopolitanism function at the ideational level as a meta-ideology beyond a sense of a doctrine of its own with fixed meanings? Might cosmopolitanism be the ideational missing link, the source of new ideas/ideation, 'the twenty-first-century Prince' bringing a common ground to diverse movement actors?

This article aims to answer the above questions by addressing the theoretical dilemma of how to conceptualize the ideological structure of transformative movements. The next section takes up this challenge, drawing together some strands of the literature and evidence. We argue that ideological encounters within the global field of transformative movements over the last decade point to four modalities of response.

We will differentiate these four modalities in terms of their orientation toward a set of delineated cosmopolitan values. The nature of cosmopolitan orientation in each modality determines how the relationship between diverse ideologies is regulated. Our intention is not to present a mere classification of activist groups and movement organizations. Rather, we aim to develop a heuristic framework that helps us analyze the ideational underpinnings of interactions and solidarities among significant movement actors. The ideal-typical visions we deploy are based on our interpretive review of a decade of academic and activist controversies over globalization and transformative responses. The modalities are defined here as modes of social response, and forms of sociability and political agency, which arise in antagonism with the global processes of commodification and the extension and deepening of capitalist social relations. The four modalities being delineated are as follows:

- The *inter-nationalist* modality; often offers a post-neoliberal alternative as the ultimate goal, but operates within existing state structures with the aim of taking national political power to implement a transition to an alternative system independent from dominant global capitalist relations. Values are instrumental, seeking state power and interstate alliances to achieve a staged transformation to post-neoliberalism. New 'socialist' regimes in Latin America, and the 'Bolivarian' coalitions in the region are among exemplary cases.
- The *alter-cosmopolitan* modality; seeks to transform global capitalist relations by way of policy reform and institution-building. Some examples include global social democratic discourses, global (post-)Keynesian agendas, for example, the Tobin Tax, transnational alternative currencies, and new market socialism.
- The *post-cosmopolitan* modality; overtly rejects hegemonic capitalist relations in favor of autonomous communities of resistance or intentional communities centered on shared 'commons'. This approach can encompass de-growth movements, indigenous liberation, bio-civilization, and communitarian economies.
- The *transversal cosmopolitan* modality; seeks organizations and enterprises for practicing post-capitalist relations within relatively autonomous spaces, and aims to expand these

spaces through transnational solidarity networks. Within these, there may be an emphasis on self-reflexive deliberations and practices across boundaries.

We will argue that of the four modalities, it is the *transversal cosmopolitanist* modality (or *transversalism*) that is new and proactive in terms of its modes of solidarity, political identity, and transformative praxes. This modality of transversalism cannot be exclusively attributed to any specific activist group, organization, or movement. Nevertheless, its ideational elements can be recognized, to different degrees, among a variety of movements today. A growing number of studies point to the rise of practically experienced, though not consciously articulated, modes of *transversal cosmopolitanism* from below (Hosseini, 2013; Kurasawa, 2004; Landau & Freemantle, 2010). The World Social Forum, for instance, with a significant number of delegates from disempowered societies, has provided diverse movements with new public spheres or 'open spaces' for meaningful interaction, where differing social forces and political agendas, from the margins and the mainstream of movements, can find shared agendas and accommodate 'Self' with 'Others'.

Regarding our definition of meta-ideology as a *process* rather than a thing, the 'transversal' modality is a meta-ideological engagement for normative purposes. The extent to which the intellectual bases of this modality are adopted by different groups varies, but we argue that this collective cognitive capacity has the real potential to enhance new types of ideologically integrative projects and transformative cosmopolitan praxes across different geographical and political settings. It is, therefore, a very good candidate to be considered as an emergent modality for alternative praxes in the global field of transformative movements.

Addressing Theoretical Dilemmas: Toward a 'Critical Cosmopolitanist' Framework

An investigation of how transformative movement actors respond to social dislocations that result from the multiple injustices of globalizing capitalist social relations is a central concern of our theorization. Meta-ideological regulation implies a more abstract level above the level of conventional ideology.

In terms of the coherence attributed to transformative movements, we suggest that practical political solidarities will become stronger the more underlying meta-ideological assumptions are shared across diverse identities and ideologies. To cut across and transcend initial differences and fragmentations to create new and politically productive relationships are what cosmopolitanism claims to be capable of realizing in theory and practice. Conversely, the more ideological certainties are reflexively deliberated by and among movement actors, the more capable will they be of transcending initial divisions and fragmentations, or of creating new and coherent transversal cosmopolitanist praxes of sociopolitical transformation in response to the global expansion of capitalist social relations.

In reality, however, we need to acknowledge that this is not a natural process. Movement actors are not always consistent with their own pre-established thoughts and values. There are often inconsistencies between behaviors and beliefs; values and beliefs are subjects of constant reinterpretation and redefinition in the shadow of actors' intentions, interests, and experiences. People do not necessarily become engaged in cross-identity solidarity, making processes, or cross-ideological dialogues, simply on the basis that they may share some cosmopolitan values. People may reproduce or reinterpret such values as the result of the inconsistencies they actually experience in active networks of solidarity and through processes of open dialogue (Bakhtin, 1993; Hosseini, 2015). There is a dialectical relationship between ideals and practices.

Accordingly, we may reword our question as follows: How is the engagement in transformative practices across identities and ideological affiliations associated with the promotion and growth of cosmopolitanist values and perspectives?

The scholarly field of the study of cosmopolitanism has recently gained wider currency, among a range of areas including political philosophy, international relations, human rights, values studies, political sociology, critical literature, public attitudes, and research methodologies (see Delanty, 2012; Holton, 2009). Conceptual debates around the notion of cosmopolitanism have resulted in a proliferation of new terms to describe different formats, or modes of cosmopolitanism, for example, by adding modifiers such as liberal, European, imperial, working-class, premodern, Asian, Islamic, situated, vernacular, radical, critical, and postcolonial (Caraus, 2015).

The attribution of cosmopolitanism (as a meta-ideology) to the field of global justice and transformative movements is no less problematic than the attribution of any other mode of ideation to this field. Nonetheless, this allows a specific focus on the multiplicity of cosmopolitan subjects and their projects, which, we argue, is useful in building an understanding of how new 'global solidarities' are formed, and how they change. Here the global field of resistance is conceptualized as extending beyond the (Neo-Gramscian) concept of 'counter-hegemony', to encompass also possible 'alter-hegemonic' or 'post-hegemonic' orientations that may influence ideational encounters and mutual ideological cross-fertilizations. All these, in one way or another, respond to the dominant market ideology, the global extension of capitalist social relations, and the attendant forms of conventional liberal-capitalist cosmopolitanism.

What we will call 'conventional cosmopolitanism' emerged in eighteenth-century Europe, initially as a political philosophy espoused by Enlightenment philosophers such as Immanuel Kant. This conventional cosmopolitanism can be interpreted historically as an intellectual response to internal conflicts then occurring among rival European empires. It likewise addressed (and legitimated) the aggressive colonial extension of 'Western Civilization' toward the end of the subordination of much of the peoples of the globe, defining itself in contradistinction to its 'Others' (Federici, 1995). Conventional cosmopolitanism thus emerged as a new intellectual (and political) commitment to defining the principles of a 'peaceful' relationship between the subjects of presumably 'enlightened' and 'rational' European societies, to create a new social harmony between previously antagonistic European Selves. It also simultaneously implied the need to define an 'inter-national' ethico-political framework for integrating the non-European 'Others' into a presumably universal, civilized, and peaceful global future. This mode of (European civilizational-imperialist) cosmopolitanization was in part constituted by, and functioned to (globally) reproduce and maintain an Orientalist construction of the European 'Self' versus the Non-European 'Others' (Said, 1978).

The core problem for early European cosmopolitans such as Kant was determining who qualified as being 'civilized' and who did not. As Mignolo (2010) argues, during the twentieth century (nominally one of formal decolonization processes), this colonialist spirit was actually historically regenerated, this time in the form of 'market globalism'. It adopted a new question: Who can work and consume under an advanced, civilized, self-sustaining, homogenous economic system, disregarding their ethnicity, sexuality, or religious affiliation? Moreover, mainstream scholarly accounts of cosmopolitanization are still influenced by the intellectual quests and values of those who produce these accounts (Pieterse, 2006). In the absence of sufficient critical cultural reflexivity, the current scholarly discussion of ideological transitions in relation to the possible modes of cosmopolitanism remains limited in scope. We still tend to judge reality by measuring the distance between what we see and what we expect to see, and thereby create

theories that are incapable of sufficiently conceptualizing the complex dynamics of the global interconnections and intensions between diverse ideologies.

In the context of ongoing post-GFC uncertainties, our cognitive capacity to go beyond conventional cosmopolitanism rests upon our ability to offer a critique of contemporary elitist illuminist cosmopolitan rhetoric, and most notably to reveal its otherwise veiled motivation to serve dominant global capitalist (and imperialistic) interests and their oppressive and exploitative global social impacts. This critique is rooted in an awareness of the structural and dialectical logic of global capitalist crises, including their inherent interdependencies, multidimensionality, and asymmetries. The GFC has, in numerous countries, been translated into multifaceted political, economic, and social crises shaped by prevailing social hierarchies, and social divisions around gender, class, race, ethnicity, social status, and power. Consequently, global public awareness of the interrelatedness of numerous social and environmental problems (at the local and global scale) has been translated into transformative practices, such as anti-austerity movements of mass protest. The multiplicity of crises and their inherent asymmetries ranging across social dimensions, spatial contexts, and multiple scales have been reflexively acknowledged by a growing number of movements around the world. The popular experience of multiple, unresolved, continuing crises motivates and mobilizes those social forces who seek to develop autonomous or transformative alternatives or resistance (Santos, 2007).

In such a situation, those social forces and actors who have been most directly experiencing interrelated systems of exploitation and social exclusion may be more capable of developing critical reflexive knowledge and of engaging in new modes of transversal solidarities and transformative praxes. This situation has led some scholars to begin to focus attention on the growing global 'precariat', including youth, educated, and skilled migrants in global cities, asylum seekers, the homeless, and other marginalized groups, who face intersectional sources of exclusion (e.g. in terms of ethnic-racial/gender/class background), and see new potential for gaining political agency (Standing, 2012). Others focus on emergent 'meta-industrial classes' consisting variously of women, indigenous peoples, small-scale farmers and peasants, and others whose livelihoods are most directly and negatively affected by ecological degradation and increased commodification of the Commons (Goodman & Salleh, 2013). Thus, these new potential agents for social change are conceptualized as encompassing a widening range of social forces, classes, and categories, to constitute new alternatives to the conventional cosmopolitanism of globalizing capital. Such social groups enact and directly experience alternative modes of 'cosmopolitanization from below', though not necessarily articulating explicit general and abstract ethical or political standards.

In order to construct a framework to theorize the processes of ideological encounters and mutual transformations, we will propose an interpretive framework based on the social actors' own orientations toward global justice and governance. These orientations are normally determined by two processes: (1) the contestation of hegemonic ideologies—(including neoliberal values, alienation, and commodification processes)—and which include reformist and transformationalist forms of contestation; and (2) intra-movement interactions within the field of transformative praxes (including internal fragmentations, inequalities, differences, and power relations) (see Figure 1).

In terms of how we understand contestation, ideological opposition to homogenizing liberal-capitalist cosmopolitanist values is by definition in an antagonist relation *vis-à-vis* prevailing neoliberal social values, most especially against possessive individualism and market-based commodified social relations. Capitalist market relations break apart solidaristic social bonds, and this dis-embedding of the 'economic' from 'society' (Polanyi, 1944) is often experienced

<table>
<tr><td>Continuum 1 (Contestation of hegemony)</td><td colspan="3">Reform ⟷ Substitution ⟷ Disjunction</td></tr>
<tr><td>Continuum 2 (Intra-movement interactions)</td><td colspan="3">Transcend ⟷ Coalesce ⟷ Self-entrench</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Four Modalities of Transformative Praxes</td><td>2) Alter-cosmopolitanism</td><td>1) Inter-nationalism</td><td>3) Post-Cosmopolitanism</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">4) Transversal Cosmopolitanism (Transversalism)</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 1. Cosmopolitan modalities.

directly as dispossession and alienation. The alternative imagined political community is driven by a rejection of neoliberal values and an aspiration for creating alternative ways of relating with one another. Movements may be positioned along a continuum of praxeological orientations, ranging from advocating a *reformist* transition within the system, to the (either incremental or revolutionary) *substitution* of the system, to seeking a radical *disjuncture* or break from the existing capitalist system, in search of more autonomous and transformative social relations. There are significant translational relations (from a postcolonial point of view) between dominant hegemonies and the posited counter-hegemonies; for example, powerful institutions of global economic governance such as the WTO and the World Bank respond to criticisms from diverse movements and may adapt or revise their policies and especially the rhetorical framing. Among the most striking examples are the 'green economy' and 'participatory budgeting', which have been incorporated into the World Bank's revised discourses of development practices.

In terms of 'intra-movement interactions: transformative projects may be understood not simply as oppositional formations; but as affirmative and prefigurative' moments, predicated upon the necessity of a certain transformative experience, which enact new kinds of social bonds. Constructing a counter-hegemonic move always entails establishing common bonds, often across vast cultural and geographic distances. These new modes of sociality-beyond-commodification are the practical foundation for constructing alternative orientations. They may be classified across different modes, for example locally centered communalism, transformative internationalism, transnational social solidarities, and transversal politics and strategic alliances. Such emergent forms of political community do not come 'naturally' or historically 'ready-made', but rather have to be forged through processes of mutual engagement, common action, and deliberate productive efforts at transversality. Cosmopolitanist values, practices, or events may play a significant role in constructing this solidarity-building. Here, there is a continuum from commitments to transcend communal and national boundaries (a *transcending* tendency), to pragmatist commitments to forge strategic alliances (a *coalescing* tendency), to autonomist commitments to create a self-determining, self-containing system of social relations conforming to existing communal boundaries (a *self-entrenching* tendency).

By putting the two continuums together (see Figure 1), we can conceptualize four broad ways in which movements may engage with cosmopolitanism:

- *Inter-nationalism* can be identified where movements seek to ultimately substitute the global capitalist hegemony by focusing on specific configurations of interstate coalition-building. This approach can offer a post-neoliberal alternative, but nevertheless operates within existing

state structures, with the aim of utilizing national political power in order to implement a transition to an alternative system independent from dominant global hegemonic capitalist relations. Here, values are instrumentally deployed, while seeking state power and fostering interstate alliances in order to achieve a staged transition to post-neoliberalism. Socialist or populist reforms, relying on the regulatory capacity of the state in association with unions and other national or communal organizations, may be achieved by delinking from capitalist globalization and its form of liberal market-oriented cosmopolitanism. Strategic or pragmatic alliances between these national-level alternatives are possible, for example, in the case of inter-national Bolivarian coalitions recently formed in Latin America and the Caribbean. While power ultimately rests in the hands of state authorities, there can be a strong strategic imperative for solidaristic inter-nationalist alliances. A popular meta-ideological assumption has underpinned a prolonged historical quest for a progressive alternative form of regional integration in Latin America, that 'genuine progress would only be possible in a truly sovereign region' (de la Barra & Dello Buono, 2009). The left-oriented governments in Latin America and the Caribbean have pursued 'regional sovereignty' by extending the ALBA[1] initiative as a strategic alliance, not only to resist integration under a neoliberal form of cosmopolitanism (i.e. the Free Trade Areas of Americas), but also to develop an alternative to the existing elite-driven modes of regional integration, such as ECLAC,[2] CAN,[3] and MERCOSUR[4] (Muhr, 2013). However, as studies of ALBA reveal, the initiative faces many serious challenges, including rivalry between varying geopolitical aspirations, contradictions between the interests expressed by state managers and the (class) interests of popular sectors, the membership of partners in conflicting institutions, and inconsistencies between more revolutionary and moderate reformist regimes (de la Barra & Dello Buono, 2009).

There are multiple ways of imagining post-capitalist futures in Latin America, including a 'neo-developmentalist approach' adopted by center-left governments (e.g. Brazil), a post-neoliberal approach founded on the lessons of 'real socialism' (e.g. Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador), and the promotion of social and ecological Commons, often inspired by indigenous peoples' movements. There has been a rising wave of innovations in relationships between state-controlled industry and a multi-stakeholder nexus of unions, communities, and cooperatives, such as in the concept of the 'solidarity economy'. However, as Santos (2014) argues, the failure to create inter-ideological translations between these approaches can lead to intense social frustrations. Such problems can reflect the continued state-centric focus of political projects. In response, a growing number of grassroots movements have sought more transparency, responsibility, dialogue, and solidarity between civil societies and ALBA members, at communal, municipal, regional, and national state levels, seeking a deepened form of (socially based) internationalism (Webber & Carr, 2012).

- *Alter-cosmopolitanism* can be identified when movements seek to *reform* global capitalist hegemony, and aim to *transcend* locality, especially statism and state-centricity. Alter-cosmopolitanism aims at producing a universally applicable set of values, laws, and rights in order to address global challenges which cannot be effectively addressed within the existing framework of the Westphalian interstate system. How the new world order can be realized through such reform is, therefore, a key point of debate. Views diverge on how to establish a worldwide 'cosmo-polis' where individuals regardless of their national citizenship can exercise their political, social, and economic rights. Some argue for the establishment of a world state, a world parliament, and world parties, while others (e.g. ATTAC)[5] argue for the reform of existing international law and institutions of global governance. Cosmopolitan forms of (global) social democracy, new autonomist versions of Marxism, and market socialist and

global Keynesianism currents can be placed within this category of alter-cosmopolitanism. They all seek to undermine the rigidity of national state boundaries and some aim to establish a world unity of the working class(es) or a social democratic system on a world scale.

The political imagination of many contemporary transnational movements has been influenced by a meta-ideological assumption that a new world order has been emerging wherein the nation-state and its territorially bounded sovereignty are now becoming secondary or even subordinated to global structural forces. The universalist ontology underpinning neoliberal capitalist globalism has, however, been passively accepted by some oppositional forces, especially within the global North. During the upsurge of 'anti-globalization' popular mobilizations in the global North, a new shared sense of 'global collective identity' developed among transnational activists, who saw themselves as 'global actors opposing neoliberalism and seeking social and environmental justice and democracy from below' (Staggenborg, 2011, p. 154). This emerging global collective identity was founded on cosmopolitanist interpretations of core values such as democracy, diversity, human rights, and world citizenship (Kurasawa, 2004; Langman, 2010). Testamentary books with such new forms of globalist orientations, for example, Hardt and Negri's *Empire* and Naomi Klein's *No Logo*, became widely popular among the (re)emergent global Left. 'Master frames' like 'Another World Is Possible' and framing concepts like 'global civil society' reflected these new globalist ambitions and the emergent 'global imaginary' (Steger, 2008) carrying new alternative thinking and innovative policy-making (Vujadinovic, 2009).

- *Post-cosmopolitanism* can be identified among those movements that are *disjunctive*, seeking a sharp or radical break from the current world order, and that seek to achieve this by *entrenching* their political community, for example through strong self-governance and autonomy. Conventional or reformist cosmopolitanism is viewed from this perspective as a global expansion of modern rationalism, which is criticized as being incapable of responding effectively to today's complex and acute global crises. The alternative proposed solution resides in the radical idea of dismantling of existing economic structures at the national and international levels. A very radical form of this 'post-modernization' (or post-development) tendency is manifest in new ideological and political movements of radical autonomism, post-anarchism, nativism, green localism ('small is beautiful'), de-growth, de-globalization, and even 'local Keynesianism'. Although the advocates of this approach, like inter-nationalist cosmopolitanism, reject universalist liberal capitalist aspects of conventional cosmopolitanism, they nevertheless share aspects of a *critical cosmopolitan* approach, manifest in strong commitments to values of openness, dialogue, and (direct) democratic decision-making both within and between autonomous communities, constituting a 'trans-local' model for a just world order.

  A common meta-ideological assumption among the advocates of this modality is the principle of 'subsidiarity', according to which social justice is inherently inconsistent with large, complex, and centralized organizations, and where problems are considered to be best resolved by those positioned closest to them. However, the question of how to sustain solidarity or harmony among self-sustaining autonomous entities in dealing with complex global crises poses a serious challenge to these movements. Few see any merit in the market or the state to play a central or dominant role in regulating the relations between and beyond local limits. An interesting example is the 'de-globalization' vision, which adopts a strategy of global economic de-linking, to enable trans-local relinking as part of a common struggle to disestablish and 'rerail' market globalism (Bello, 2004). This approach has influenced a number of global transformative movement initiatives, such as La Via Campesina, the

international peasant movement for food sovereignty (Solon, 2014). De-globalization ideology has evolved in response to criticisms, for instance by adopting a more open approach to trade based on the principle of complementarity rather than competition, yet remains pessimistic about the utility of state power.

- *Transversal cosmopolitanism* is identified by its being founded on an evolutionary move into a post-capitalist network of democratically governed relatively autonomous alternative systems, and by the strong aspiration to build meaningful common (shared) ideological and political action orientations that transcend counterproductive divisions among transformative movements. It seeks an accommodative mode of social consciousness centered on a common ground for dialogue, collective learning, and concrete action among multiple progressive identities and ideological visions within the field of transformative movement praxes. Transversalism grounds its interpretation of cosmopolitanist values on recognizing but not being limited to local, grassroots, and communal particularities. Santos (2014) has referred to 'subaltern cosmopolitanism', which aims at consolidating political coalitions and ideational accommodation between 'social groups on both a class and a non-class basis'. Therefore, it 'does not imply uniformity, a general theory of social emancipation and the collapse of differences, autonomies and local identities' (Santos, 2014, p. 135). This requires an attitude of openness and the intention of exchanging mutual experiences (via engagement of Self with Others) and ideas across a variety of local fields of transformative movements of resistance. As discussed in the next section, the intellectual elements of this vision can be found in the adaptive and innovative accounts from activists who are engaged in flexible networks for exchanging ideas and experiences for 'transformative praxes from below'.

The first three modalities of cosmopolitanism discussed above have been well studied in recent years (see for instance, Caraus & Parvu, 2015; Eschle & Maiguashca, 2005; Goodman & James, 2007; Muhr, 2013; Patomaki & Teivainen, 2004; Santos, 2006; Steger et al., 2013; Worth, 2013). Transversal cosmopolitanism, however, remains a less known and still under-theorized modality of cosmopolitan praxis. Therefore, we devote the rest of this article to further delineate its key features.

Transversalism: Traversing Cosmopolitanisms

First, transversal cosmopolitanism acknowledges the differences between national contexts of transformative praxes and resistance. However, what marks-out this approach is its commitment and purposeful openness to exchanging experiences and ideas across a variety of local fields of praxis. Transversalism is rooted in participants' experience of power relations, and of the logic of social inequality and human suffering, and their responses to these experiences. It requires mutual engagement based on intersubjective solidarity. As such, it cannot be essentialist or relativist, but rather is a relational approach promoting cross-fertilization of ideas and practices. Transversal cosmopolitanism as defined here cannot be otherwise than ideational (a broad meta-ideological framework potentially inclusive of multiple ideologies, without being itself an ideology) and thus appears more as a traversal move, related to the core of transformative experience.

We attribute the following characteristics to transversalism: (i) recognition of diversity and difference within the field of transformative action, (ii) dialogue and deliberation across differences, (iii) systemic self-reflection, (iv) intentional engagement to explore contending experiences, (v) acknowledgment of power relations between sources of resistance, and finally (vi) a commitment to creating common agendas, proposals, and programs directed at gaining

practical political leverage. Here, alternative cosmo-politics emerges from the exchange of experiences, building on meaningful experience in order to transcend it.

In the global field of transformative movements, transversalism emerges at the political and the epistemological/ideational levels. Political transversalization involves the extension of existing ideologically driven solidarity networks and practices into integrative projects beyond pragmatist and transitive alliances. We can find elements of this approach in classical cases like trans/feminist networks (Goodman, 2007; Yuval-Davis & Stoetzler, 2002). More recently, it surfaces in converging attempts through coalition-building forums between a number of transformative movements in Europe, including self-organized cooperatives, social economy activism, degrowth advocatory, peer-to-peer production initiatives, collaborative economy activists, and the Commons movements (see, for instance, a report by Bollier & Conaty, 2014). Ideational transversalization surfaces within projects to enhance cross-ideological hybridizations, such as between ecofeminist and socialist theories (Salleh, 1997), new economic democracy (as described by Engler, 2010), solidarity economy (Santos, 2006), Commons (Routledge, 2004), 'green syndicalism' (Shantz, 2002), and 'participatory economy' (see Hahnel, 2012). In many cases, the ideational and the political formats are intertwined; in Conway's (2012, p. 391) words, 'commitment to transversality is both a political practice and epistemological principle . . . founded on an alternative regime of truth'. The following subsections briefly discuss the political and epistemological dimensions by drawing on some exemplary cases. The cases are selected strategically to saturate the theoretical needs of delineating the emerging alternative positions to conventional cosmopolitanism.

Political Transversalization

At present, as discussed in our introduction, there is a widely held sense that a lack of coherence between alternatives to capital stands in the way of a holistic program. A comprehensive political response can be promoted that is aligned with one or other priority, although this will inevitably exacerbate some forms of tensions. Alternatively, a more abstract approach can be pursued as a meta-ambition, in order to rise above initial disagreements. Such propositions, however, are necessarily inadequate to the further task of gaining political traction.

A less ambitious, but more embedded approach is to seek common ground through 'transversal' linkages. This approximates to a process of solidarity-through-recognition, or 'transversality', where the autonomy of each alternative is maintained and brought into alignment, in order to achieve a common understanding (Goodman, 2007; Hosseini, 2006). This is a minimal position—where mutual openness and dialogue enable the recognition of the common field of action, so that at the very least movements do not oppose each other. A claim in broad terms to be 'on the same side' can stem from growing awareness of shared drivers, enemies, and problems. Here, transversality expresses common identification in the field of antagonism: mutual understanding as a process of building interconnections, and engagement then reinforce that solidarity. Only when mutual engagement occurs can the limitations or broader implications of existing alternative political projects be brought more fully into conscious self-reflective view. Ideally, therefore, transversal engagement involves the potential conditions for processes of reflexivity, *realignment*, and *self-transformation*.

In the case of transversalism, global issues such as global poverty, debt cancellation, and global inequalities are not simply articulated as a self-interest, as may be the case with more conventional 'laborist' social protection demands. Solidarity with refugees, migrants, and outworkers in the North, and women, workers, and farmers in the global South, for example, is not

conceptualized as being directly instrumental in this sense. Nor is it altruistic, or founded upon highly abstract 'humanitarian' precepts. Rather, its inner motivation is the sense of (out)rage against the injustice of a global system that is mutually encompassing, and which is structured to inflict wide human suffering. Instead of drawing on non-negotiable universal values in creating solidarities across ideological and identity boundaries, transversalist projects pursue dialogue across differences, to systemically negotiate shared values, demands, disputes, conflicts, and inequalities (Conway, 2011). In these contexts, new forms of political community can emerge, new agendas and possibilities can develop, and existing movements can be transformed.

An example of transversal solidarity can be found in the case of feminist involvement in global justice movements. As Conway (2011) shows, an organic and evolving relationship between some transnational feminist networks and non-feminist networks emerged in the context of the World Social Forum. Through critical deliberations around the marginality of women especially of the global South, feminist networks developed methods for extending alliances beyond their original terrain. As a result, these feminist movements experienced a substantial shift in their own previously held ideological perspectives. Such shifts come with risks in terms of abandoning strongly held positions, and may require considerable effort, especially in terms of translating the transformation into political leverage. If alliances are not institutionalized through spaces and methods of collaboration and dialogue, then experiences can hardly be translated into lasting empowering projects of transformative praxes. Examples of such fragile convergences can be found in a number of state-partnered grassroots initiatives, such as Syriza's adoption of commoning schemes in Greece (Kostakis, 2015), Correa's openness to Commons-based peer production models in Ecuador, and Chavez-Madura's idea of the Communal State (Foster, 2015).

Epistemological Transversalization

It is vitally important to examine the role of contemporary ideologies, not only in shaping actors' views and actions, but also in facilitating divisions and connections among them. This examination needs to focus on the extent to which ideologies can be adapted to arrive at accommodation with other progressive ideas, to produce new types of knowledge and transformative praxes. Important interactions happen between the proponents of contending ideologies, both within and across schools of correspondence and generations of thinkers. Cross-ideological deliberations and hybridizations are not new phenomena. However, the global field of transformative movements, reflecting the multiplicity of ideological encounters it has generated, has shown a great capacity for transversalism.

As noted, epistemological transversalization is a kind of negotiation over how to conceptualize problems, root causes, solutions, and strategies. A classical exemplar is offered by a debate between ecofeminists and eco-socialists that was played out in the activist-academic journal *Capitalism Nature Socialism* (Salleh, 2005; Salleh & O'Connor, 1991). In the course of this exchange, a specific attempt was made to reconcile the socialist focus on the mode of production with a feminist emphasis on relations of reproduction. Over time, the dialogue found common ground centered on the relationship between women's subjugation and the domination of nature and labor under capitalism. This offered a form of 'embodied materialism' as common ground where both sides could develop 'a more fully amplified account of how capital degrades the "conditions of production"' (2005, p. 14). The framework for this debate was self-consciously reflexive and transformative: as Salleh put it, 'dialogue means to listen to the other and the corollary is being changed in the encounter. It does not mean to co-opt the other within one's own

discourse' (Salleh & O'Connor, 1991, p. 137). Central to this integrative eco-politics is the analysis of the nature–woman–labor nexus; ecofeminists question the transcendent vision of eco-socialists, and ask them to consider the immanent reality of how humans are materially embedded in natural cycles and embodied by the labor of maintaining these cycles. This move triangulates socialist, feminist, and ecological objectives within ecofeminism. At the same time, ecofeminists ask eco-socialists not to overlook the plurality of paradigms within feminism at large, suggesting that ecofeminism has more in common with eco-socialism than with most other feminisms.

There are, of course, many other cases of such co-evolving processes, notably the recent interactions between de-growth and direct democracy visions (Asara, Profumi, & Kallis, 2013; Boillat, Gerber, & Funes-Monzote, 2012; Cattaneo, D'Alisa, Kallis, & Zografos, 2012; Escobar, 2015; Ott, 2012; Romano, 2012).

Conclusions

Despite being profoundly discredited by the GFC, the neoliberal project has perversely become more entrenched at both the global and national levels of governance. Ironically, neoliberal prescription became popularized to answer crises of its own making—carbon trading as the remedy for climate change, for instance. While the neoliberal market vision of the human future can no longer be positioned as a utopia, and in fact may now be widely recognized as profoundly dystopian, it continues in a 'zombie' mode, with policy elites trapped into multiple forms of path dependence, constrained by the narrow horizons of its one-world market vision.

The fragmentation and 'de-globalization' of capital in response to the 2008 financial crisis, growing tensions between regional and 'rising' powers (Gray & Gills, 2016), and disillusion with neoliberal governance on issues such as climate change have all contributed to the latest shifts in the global field of transformative movements. In the historical conjuncture of the crisis of 'late neoliberalism', a major focus of social movements has been on strengthening national democracies through protest and direct actions against economic austerity and political corruption (della Porta, 2015). One may argue that the post-GFC grassroots responses have in part shifted ground to the national and domestic arenas, manifested in Occupy challenges to austerity regimes in the North and the South, and the pro-democracy uprisings such as the 'Arab Spring' movements in the Middle East and North Africa (Agathangelou & Soguk, 2013). This shift does not mean, however, that post-GFC movements have abandoned cosmopolitan values (Hosseini, 2013). As argued in this article, a multiplicity of cosmopolitanist visions is deployed in the movements and these can be analyzed to assess their potential and to better understand the coexistence of seemingly contradictory and cross-cutting orientations. Participant ideas in transformative movement networks can be investigated in terms of their alignment with the modalities proposed in this article. These modalities should not be viewed as fixed categories. Rather, they need to be constantly revised against empirical findings and historical changes.

The contending ideological traditions of political economy—liberalism, social democracy, communalism, and socialism—retain a dominant influence in the old cosmopolitan modalities. The GFC has not so far changed these traditions profoundly, nor as yet provoked the rise of a paradigmatically different tradition to global prominence (Gills, 2011). In Fine's words (2012, p. 384), 'in a world in which people are required to choose between camps, the in-between can be a rough terrain to try to occupy'. However, as we have shown in previous works and argued here, a new cosmopolitanization process has been at work, potentially altering

the relationships between these traditions, and producing new orientations, new transformative praxes.

Transversalism is best understood as a constellation of dynamic ideational contentions and political co-evolutions. To transform capitalist relations, more sophisticated and systematically articulated levels of inter-ideological exchange, dialogue, and progressive learning are needed. This requires cosmopolitanism to oppose the dualism of our age, and to function as a meta-ideological framework to facilitate such exchanges and to lead them to the creation of more comprehensive and integrative alternatives to existing capitalist social relations.

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Notes

1 Bolivarian Alternative for Americas.
2 UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.
3 The Andean Community of Nations.
4 South American Common Market.
5 The Association pour la Taxation des Transactions financières et pour l'Action Citoyenne (Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and Citizen's Action).

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The materiality of precarity: Gender, race and energy infrastructure in urban South Africa

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Abstract

Analysis of precarity has offered a critique of labour market experiences and politically induced conditions of work, housing, migration, or essential services. This paper develops an infrastructural politics of precarity by analysing energy as a critical sphere of social and ecological reproduction. We employ precarity to understand how gendered and racialised vulnerability to energy deprivation is induced through political processes. In turn, analysis of energy illustrates sociomaterial processes of precarity, produced and contested through infrastructure. Our argument is developed through scalar analysis of energy precarity in urban South Africa, a country that complicates a North-South framing of debates on both precarity and energy. We demonstrate how energy precarity can be reproduced or destabilised through: social and material relations of housing, tenure, labour and infrastructure; the formation of gendered and racialized energy subjects; and resistance and everyday practices. We conclude that analysis of infrastructure provides insights on how precarity is contested as a shared condition and on the prospect of systemic change through struggles over distribution and production.

Keywords

Precarity, social reproduction, racialization, vulnerability, surplus population

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Introduction

This paper develops an infrastructural politics of precarious urban lives by analysing energy as a critical sphere of socio-ecological reproduction in South Africa. Energy has been a prominent feature of oppression and contestation (Macdonald, 2009; Mitchell, 2011) and the South African economy has historically depended on a system of accumulation distinctive in its exploitation of both energy and labour (Fine and Rustomjee, 1996). Apartheid was maintained through mineral extraction and beneficiation, cheap electricity generated from domestic coal, and exploitation of black workers through a migrant labour system that simultaneously displaced the costs of social reproduction of labour power onto rural peripheries. All black people in South Africa were exploited to maintain a racially divided system of accumulation that was "uniquely dependent on electricity and uniquely electricity-intensive" (Fine and Rustomjee, 1996: 8). Under post-apartheid democratic rule, electricity access has been a powerful symbol of social inclusion and continued struggle of low-income residents to meet basics needs (cf. von Schnitzler, 2016). This paper employs precarity to understand how gendered and racialised energy deprivation is induced through political processes. In turn, we argue that analysis of energy inequalities illustrates socio-material processes of precarity, produced and contested through infrastructure.

Our first aim is to develop understanding of how precarity renders some people vulnerable to suffering through socio-material processes – those that operate through relationships between the human and the non-human world. We situate our analysis in South Africa, a country with similarities and important distinctions to the Northern economies where precarity has primarily been developed and deployed (Ferguson, 2015; Scully, 2016). We explore how energy precarity is reproduced or destabilised through socio-material relations, including intersecting materialities of housing, tenure, infrastructure and planning; the uneven management of energy supply and demand; and subject formation.

Our second aim is to integrate the infrastructural politics of energy access and supply with the gendered and racialised dynamics of energy demand. We use precarity to explore how gender and race are enlisted in municipal energy policy as a "development project" that represents low-income black women simultaneously as a vulnerable demographic and a latent entrepreneurial force that can be instrumentalised in policy. Finding that current policies in South Africa do not address precarity, we consider alternative sites and expressions of power. We explore whether strategies that engage with material practices of social reproduction and contestation of the state create incentives to contest precarity. We conclude that privileging production over distributive struggles may neglect important political strategies to contest precarity that stem from the livelihoods of the urban poor.

The paper is organised as follows. First, we situate our analysis within literature on precarity as a signifier of politically induced inequalities and the possibility of transformative politics. We then outline a multi-scalar qualitative methodology to study the materiality of precarity in urban South African. The analysis begins with description of how vulnerability to energy deprivation has been politically produced through intersections of planning, housing, tenure, gender and race. We then explore the uneven processes by which people and energy practices can be rendered governable, creating racialised and gendered energy subjects through municipal interventions in energy demand management and the creation of entrepreneurial citizens. The final section situates strategies of overt resistance and everyday energy practices within a discourse of precarity and explores the possibility for collective action to address precarity.

Precarity, infrastructure and difference

Butler (2009: 25) describes precarity as a politically induced condition "in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death". Precarity is related to yet distinct from 'precariousness' – an ontological condition of bodily vulnerability that constitutes life in general and is shared by all (Butler, 2009). Precarity signifies a differential exposure to violence – a socio-political condition by which some subjects and populations are put at greater risk of suffering than others. As Harker (2012) notes, the political processes that produce differential precarity are not only social and economic but spatial, and recent debates have explored the significance and limits of precarity as critical spatial analysis (Burridge and Gill, 2017). First, precarity has been conceived as a distinctive condition to emerge from neoliberal labour markets and has been used to delineate a range of alternative politics, especially in the global North (Suliman and Weber, 2019; Waite, 2009). Second, precarity has been used to depict the uneven geographies of politically induced inequalities (Ettlinger, 2007; Vasudevan, 2014).

Geographical analysis of precarity has proliferated through both registers, including relationships between precarity and labour geography (Strauss, 2018), home-(un)making (Harris and Nowicki, 2018), and asylum and citizenship (Arpagian and Aitken, 2018; Waite and Lewis, 2017). Scholarship on different forms of precarity has described structural inequalities and uncertainties that result from relations of domination along the lines of gender, race, ethnicity and class (Lorey, 2015). Recent analyses have expanded the conceptualisation of precarity and space (Ettlinger, 2007: 319; Zeweri, 2017), responding to concerns that precarity has been theorised from social conditions particular to the global North (Munck, 2013). Critique has been directed towards precarity "as a single phenomenon" (Scully, 2016) that universalises historically specific meanings and particular contexts (Breman, 2013). Ferguson (2015) argues that the association between precarity and production has privileged productive labour and obscured significant channels of distribution that have historically supported Southern African livelihoods. Similarly, South Africa's broad-based anti-apartheid movement is often cited as disrupting concepts of precarity developed in contexts of near-full employment, having successfully linked class struggle with demands for citizenship rights from those excluded from the labour force but nonetheless exploited under white minority rule (Lee and Kofman, 2012). Alternative analyses have suggested unpacking the conceptual complexity of precarity by studying lived experiences (Barchiesi, 2011), situated and place-based struggles (Burridge and Gill, 2017), experimentations and encounters (Lee and Kofman, 2012).

Time is similarly important to analysis of precarity. Debates on the precarious nature of services and infrastructure provision in the global North often emerge – or at least intensify – during times of austerity or in reaction to events (Ettlinger, 2007; Peck, 2012). Precarity may appear to signify ephemeral crises. Yet, as Suliman and Weber (2019) argue, this discourse risks obscuring connections between contemporary struggle and historical processes. Urban lives in the South have been depicted as perennial struggles, as improvisation and adaptation, or "hustle" (Thieme, 2017). An increasing number of people in both the global North and South live in a semi-permanent "state of emergency" characterised by an inadequate provision of services (Simone, 2004), discernible institutions (Vasudevan, 2014) and "incremental infrastructures" (Silver, 2014). Yet, the materiality of precarity has received limited attention (Mould, 2018), particularly regarding how material infrastructures and services associated with water or energy constitute precarity (Burridge and Gill, 2017; Vasudevan, 2014, von Schnitzler, 2016). Meanwhile, critical analysis of energy and

gender (e.g. Listo, 2018) and energy and race (see Newell, 2020) has only recently emerged. Infrastructure provides an analytical lens to explore the material basis of social relations. It emphasises that social relations including those of gender and race are encoded, negotiated and contested through material infrastructure (Graham and McFarlane, 2014; Larkin, 2013; von Schnitzler, 2016).

We use precarity as an analytical device by assessing how vulnerability to energy deprivation is politically induced through socio-material relations of infrastructure. Petrova (2018) proposes "energy precarity" to account for a fluctuating process of material deprivation underpinned by multiple material, social, and economic factors (Bouzarovski and Thomson, 2018). We advance understanding of energy precarity as a politically induced, gendered, racialised and geographically uneven process that operates across multiple scales and through the spheres of energy production, distribution and consumption. This approach draws on and complements energy vulnerability literature, which captures the dynamic exposure of individuals and households to energy deprivation, their sensitivity to the effects, and their adaptive capacity (Bouzarovski and Petrova, 2015; Middlemiss and Gillard, 2015). Vulnerability emphasises that deprivation is neither linear nor continuous, but a dynamic process (Rigg et al., 2016). Precarity provides insights on vulnerability as an outcome of political processes in and beyond the home that shape exposure to risk and harm – and hence as an axis of inequality rather than a universal condition.

This approach bridges a North-South binary within literature on energy deprivation or poverty. Energy poverty is commonly framed as an issue of demand and affordability in the global North, and an issue of access, supply and infrastructural deficit in the South (Bouzarovski and Petrova, 2015). An analogous distinction is evident in social scientific literature on energy in South Africa. Analyses of energy supply have critiqued systems of production that reproduce historic inequalities (Baker et al., 2014; Jaglin and Dubresson, 2016; Macdonald, 2009), but these studies remain disconnected from analyses of energy and social reproduction within the home, including how individuals, households and groups are unevenly rendered vulnerable to energy deprivation (Tait, 2017; Prasad, 2011; Winther et al., 2017). We use energy precarity to connect these processes, providing a political perspective on the spatial and temporal dynamics of getting into and overcoming a state of inadequate social and material provision of energy services in the home (Petrova, 2018).

Finally, in contrast to an understanding precarity as a condition (Butler, 2009; Lesutis, 2019), understanding precarity as a dynamic process aids analysis of the transformative possibilities or limits of precarity as a signifier of struggle, rebellion, or insurgency (Ettlinger, 2007). Precarity has been conceived as a capacity to resist subjugation by evading processes by which people are rendered governable and vulnerable (Waite, 2009). For both Lorey (2015) and Butler (2015), the constitution of precarity as suffering also holds the possibility for political mobilisation that contests the condition of precarity. Precarious lives may offer opportunities for positive imaginaries and political acts that unsettle the singularity of social order (Rancière, 2015). The struggles and tactics used by the urban poor to access services such as electricity in the global South have often been interpreted as rebellious, potentially transformative, or prefigurative of political alternatives (Alexander, 2010; Silver, 2014). While systems of informal provisioning can certainly be interpreted this way, the relationship between insurgence and informality is always complex, never linear, and complicated by relationships with material infrastructures and artefacts (Roy, 2009; von Schnitzler, 2016). Whether responsive strategies reinforce precarity or translate into transformative politics is an open question for place-based empirical evaluation (Lesutis, 2019). We analyse how precarity as oppositional politics may – but does not necessarily – challenge the socio-material order of gendered and racialised urban energy inequalities.

Methods

To analyse energy precarity in urban South Africa we adopt a methodology to identify how differential vulnerability to energy deprivation is produced and contested. We use qualitative data from Johannesburg and Polokwane – a metropolitan and secondary city, respectively – to explore multi-scalar processes of precarity in urban and infrastructural context. Both cities have active municipal programmes to address energy poverty in partnership with non-governmental stakeholders including Sustainable Energy Africa, an NGO partner in our research project. We analyse 42 interviews conducted by the first author between April 2017 and June 2018. Purposeful and snowball sampling were used to select interviewees from the energy industry, national, provincial and municipal government, non-governmental organisations, and activist and residents' organisations from outside policy-making and consultation arenas. Interview data is supported by observer participation at workshops with staff and external stakeholders of municipalities. Workshops focused on the development of a gender and household energy strategy in Johannesburg and reflections on municipal energy governance in Polokwane. Two workshops with analogous constituencies were also held in Cape Town on municipal financing and on strategy development for low-income energy services. All workshops were co-convened by the municipal government and Sustainable Energy Africa (Reddy and Wolpe, 2018).

Energy precarity in South Africa

South Africa is often an archetype of exception in political and economic analysis, neither representative of African or Southern experiences nor comparable to other industrialised economies. Generalisation is frustrated by particularities, including modalities of white minority rule, the racialised labour system, anti-apartheid struggle and – in the case of energy – a distinctive system of accumulation and exploitation (Fine and Rustomjee, 1996). Indeed, analysis of South African politics has been influential in critique of universalism – unsettling assumptions and de-centring theories, including precarity (Parnell and Robinson, 2012; Scully, 2016). Accounting for energy precarity in Southern cities requires accounting for the implications of structural unemployment, "informal" livelihoods, incremental housing and disrupted energy access. Here, we argue that vulnerability to energy deprivation is a product of "hyper-precarity" (Lewis et al., 2015) that entails complex socio-material relations of energy infrastructure, labour, housing, tenure and planning.

Urban governance underwent significant changes after apartheid, including fiscal decentralisation and the commercialisation of energy governance (Gentle, 2009; Pieterse, 2019). Market reforms accelerated decline in low skilled employment in mining and agriculture in particular (Seekings and Nattrass, 2005). Apartheid-era grants from national to local government were reduced and municipal governments became increasingly reliant on property taxes and revenues from services including water and electricity (Eberhard, 2007). Municipal electricity departments were ring-fenced, and costs of energy provision were shifted from state to consumer (Macdonald, 2009). Simultaneously, the extension of social grants and end-user subsidies such as a limited supply of free electricity provided new channels of distribution decoupled from labour (Ferguson, 2015). Writing on analogous water policies, Loftus (2004) describes a "strange double movement" in the commercialisation of governance and extension of the "free water commodity". As we explore below, this neoliberal-era response to redistribution has both induced and moderated energy precarity in South African homes.

The imperative to increase energy access in South Africa has focused post-apartheid energy policy on an infrastructural deficit and increasing household electricity connections. Policy-makers suggest it wasn't until 2008 that energy affordability became a significant policy concern, when wholesale electricity prices began to rise significantly to fund new coal-fired power generation and debts began to accumulate in the energy sector (*Manager*, local government association; *Technical Manager*, City of Johannesburg). As electricity has become less affordable, non-payment or "theft" of electricity through illegal connections has increased, household consumption has declined (amid latent demand), and many smaller, poorly resourced municipalities have become increasingly indebted to the vertically integrated state utility, Eskom, which by 2019 faced restructuring to secure its survival (*Manager 1*, Eskom; *Manager 2*, Eskom). Where electricity is unaffordable or unavailable, cheaper alternative such as kerosene, candles, fuelwood, or coal typically replace the relative safety and convenience of electricity with a poorer service, insecurity of supply, and gendered vulnerability to the externalities of "dirty energy", such as fire risk and indoor air pollution. Where domestic electricity is affordable, it is reliant on domestic coal mining and power generation that create outdoor air pollution elsewhere. Although many low-income residents experience chronic vulnerability to energy deprivation (Reddy and Wolpe, 2018), the cycle of access and disconnection ensures that different forms of precarity and risk are dynamic.

This condition has been shaped by the primacy of electricity in South African domestic energy practices. With the isolation of the South African economy under apartheid and with significant surplus generation capacity in the 1990s, Eskom produced demand and shaped household energy practices around electrical appliances for energy-intensive household practices such as cooking, water heating and space heating:

> This was during the time of Eskom plenty, when they were encouraging everything to be electric. What a mistake that was! You should rather have diversified your energy sources. But instead, we had this big brother called Eskom that would generate enough for everybody (*Manager,* Municipal-owned Distribution Company).

As such, recent efforts by some municipalities to diversify energy sources within the home are not only frustrated by the political economy of energy production (Jaglin and Dubresson, 2016), but by established household energy practices (City of Johannesburg 2015). As one government employee notes, electricity is highly valued for both its utility and its racialised, symbolic power:

> It's because of the historical context – what it meant. And when the [ANC] government took over it prioritised electricity and entrenched the notion – the connection between the quality of life and electricity and water and housing... Electricity is so important in this country, because it symbolises access to services that are useful and that the privileged enjoy (*Manager*, government research institution)

For those who cannot afford electricity and for whom wage labour and secure income are an unlikely prospect, a grid connection remains one of several infrastructural signifiers of post-apartheid citizenship and inclusion (cf. Lemanski, 2019). The susceptibility of South African households to infrastructures of precarity and rising electricity tariffs has been politically induced through both socio-cultural and political-economic processes of energy production and consumption.

However, energy precarity is not simply described by insufficient supply or household income, it is infrastructurally conditioned. Many inefficiencies are locked-in to the fabric of housing and shaped by tenure systems. In this regard, energy precarity is shaped by *in*flexible material infrastructures as much as uncertain, flexible incomes. In a labour-scarce economy, South Africa's state housing program has been a principal policy of direct distribution delivered at scale, although the housing backlog remains substantial. Building houses and transferring ownership to the poor provides a capital subsidy to citizens whose prospect of wage labour remains slim, but who may lever their plot to generate income (Charlton and Meth, 2017). Various business opportunities are viable, including electronic repairs, hair-styling, and food vending. With some investment, plots are sub-divided into "backyard shacks" through which owners extract a surplus from tenants who typically pay most for space and electricity through a flat-rate rental, in exchange for proximity to limited economic opportunities. Hence, while South African cities remain spatially divided by wealth and race, territorial divisions can be poor indicators of how energy vulnerability is differentiated. Tenure status and formal state recognition alone can be similarly poor signifiers. As one government employee observed of domestic energy deprivation:

> The only difference between formal and informal settlements can be whether you have an electricity connection. Income levels are similar. So, when informal settlements are connected formally by the municipality the [electricity] theft continues... Most people see shacks and assume they are informal; most are not (*Manager*, government research institution)

Less visible still are the complex relationships between gender and tenure. While a title deed is often assumed to clarify ownership and empower individuals (De Soto, 2000), tenure security can be eroded by the regularisation of settlements and the formalisation of customary tenure arrangements (Cousins, 2007). Meanwhile, plural, customary legal systems can similarly be used by men to resist women's claims to land (Whitehead and Tsikata, 2003). Legal processes often perform poorly in understanding complexity and improving upon existing tenure arrangements (Hornby et al., 2017). As such, precarious conditions of housing and energy can be politically induced through formalisation as much as by informalisation.

A variety of factors beyond the home also condition demand and induce energy vulnerabilities. Demand for backyard shacks highlights both an urban housing shortage and the enduring spatial legacy of apartheid labour exploitation. Accessing the city is an energy-intensive, time-consuming and expensive process for the poor (Reddy and Wolpe, 2018), while maintaining a place in the city can be a continual struggle amid rising land values and exclusionary urban policies (Budlender and Royston, 2017). Policy trade-offs are evident as provincial and municipal governments weigh the relative benefits of densifying inner cities or extending infrastructure to vast new "mega urban settlements" on urban peripheries (Harrison and Todes, 2017). The intimate socio-material relationships between urban planning, tenure, housing and energy highlight how energy precarity is politically induced through a multi-scalar process, ensuring that no singular policy domain addresses the experience of hyper-precarity.

Spatial-temporal politics of infrastructure and precarity

Energy precarity is elaborated further by accounting for how people and energy practices are rendered governable. Several authors have analysed metering and prepayment as governmental technologies that fetishize infrastructure and police the poor, creating

"calculative citizens" who economise consumption of essential social goods such as water and electricity (Loftus, 2006; van Heusden, 2008), whether or not people resist or embrace this subjectivity (Baptista, 2016). von Schnitzler (2016: 6) interprets prepayment meters as "technologies of precarity that reflect the multiple dilemmas and vicissitudes of life" after the age of formal employment, characterised by irregular incomes. For residents that remain on credit meters, electricity can be the first service to be withdrawn from defaulting residents in municipal supply areas. As one municipal employee commented: "Legally, you can't disconnect a household's water, you can't stop the sewers, but you can disconnect electricity" (*Officer*, local government association). As a service that can be readily withdrawn from individual consumers without immediately endangering life, the materiality of electricity supply infrastructure shapes how residents are governed. For some analysts, improving service delivery through the state nonetheless means taking seriously the financial stress of municipal service providers, and prepayment technologies need not impoverish the poor if tariff structures are designed for redistribution (Parnell et al., 2017). Here, analysing the spatio-temporal management of energy demand can advance debates on the politics of metering that have become polarised (Jaglin, 2008), provoking useful normative questions such as: When is it reprehensible to render household energy practices governable?

It is illustrative to contrast the spatio-temporality of how domestic energy practices are governed in low- and high-income homes. A material infrastructural perspective on precarity reveals hierarchies of precariousness in differential access to basic services and exposure to risk. Like utilities elsewhere, South African municipal electricity distributors generate revenue from sales. Yet, at peak times, many municipal electricity distributors including those in Johannesburg and Polokwane pay Eskom more for the electricity they distribute than they charge consumers (*Manager*, City of Johannesburg; *Manager*, Polokwane Municipality). Hence, the daily and seasonal temporality of household energy practices have become a municipal concern. Load shedding provides the most immediate short-term measure to reduce demand, discursively linked to 'overdemand' from illegal connections in Soweto, where many residents do not currently pay for electricity, as a legacy of anti-apartheid rent boycotts. Load shedding is aggregated over territorial supply areas, but a series of interventions also reach into the household to reduce or shift peak demand, or "to manage peakiness" (*Manager*, City of Cape Town). An NGO representative noted that governing when consumers use energy is a challenging task, unevenly implemented:

> It's quite difficult to shift a low-income household because there's less transport flexibility… The middle-income have a lot of potential in shifting peak… But people say the middle-income grumble, so we can't do that. We always gear our service provision to the wealthy really – we put them to the least bother (*NGO representative*, Cape Town).

State support for energy efficiency may offer welcome cost savings for low-income households. Experiments in demand management include solar water heating in government-built housing, and energy efficient cooking technologies that reduce the fuel requirement of slow-cooked staple foods popular in low-income households and regions. Yet for one municipal employee, focusing demand management on the poor neglects latent demand, providing only partial solutions to energy deprivation:

> We shouldn't be telling the poor to use less energy; we should be helping them to use more… but no one wants to fund an education program for the wealthy (*Manager*, City of Cape Town).

Energy demand management is not inequitable simply for targeting interventions to low-income households. Yet, energy vulnerability is relational (Bouzarovski and Petrova, 2015), such that targeted interventions may be inequitable when formulated without reference to energy abundance and wealth. The gendered, classed and racialised inequities of demand management are particularly stark where black, female domestic workers fulfil many of the energetic functions of social reproduction (e.g. cleaning) in the homes of the wealthy, and have been rendered responsible by energy efficiency campaigns targeted at them by the electricity utility (Bracking, 2015).

In contrast, emerging strategies to govern demand from wealthier consumers have been subject to distinct temporal dynamics. In recent years a significant number of businesses and some households have installed generators or roof-top solar photovoltaic panels, reducing their demand for electricity from the grid and hence decreasing their contributions to municipal budgets (Janisch et al., 2012). Some municipalities fear this spatial reconfiguration of supply and demand could create a two-tier infrastructure system in which grid defection by the wealthy accelerates the decline of centralised grid infrastructure on which the poor will remain dependent (Baker and Phillips, 2019). Tariffs and temporality provide the means for municipalities to balance the loss of municipal revenue from the wealthy with the benefits of decentralised renewable energy generation. In Johannesburg, the municipal electricity company requires distributed solar producers to adopt new time-of-use tariffs and accept low payments for the power they export to the grid. These are justified as pro-poor policies, maintaining grid infrastructure as a social infrastructure of redistribution:

> We're not incentivising it in any way. But I think the message needs to go out that we're using the increased margin on renewable energy to cross-subsidise the poor (*Manager*, Distribution company)

The temporal power that municipalities exercise over energy demand through tariffs is fragile, threatened by the medium-term prospect of battery storage that may allow wealthy consumers to store enough power for the evening and morning peak and for consecutive overcast days. Spatio-temporal power may shift from centralised state or corporation to a distributed network of wealthy "prosumers" (producer-consumers) of electricity with property and capital, reducing the ability of municipalities to maintain redistribution by governing energy practices in wealthy homes and businesses.

While energy precarity is a dynamic process, household energy practices are unevenly rendered governable through both spatial and temporal expressions of power. This raises questions about how governmental technologies induce or reduce different energy vulnerabilities, whose energy practices are rendered governable for the benefit of whom, and how state power should be used in engineering energy transitions. Clearly, household energy interventions are never politically neutral. As we explore below, gendered and racialised power is exercised through household energy interventions and the representations of women and gender empowerment that they can create.

Energy and social reproduction: Re-inscribing gendered and racialised precarity

If energy precarity can reproduce gendered and racial inequalities and vulnerabilities, then how does this occur? Much of the unwaged work of producing labouring bodies is gendered

and racialised, and services such as energy are crucial to social relations of reproduction (Bhattacharya, 2017; Meehan and Strauss, 2015). The gendered impacts of energy deprivation are widely recognised (Annecke, 2000; Prasad, 2011). Yet, many policies and analyses mobilise a problematic binary in the feminisation of energy poverty and the heroic entrepreneurialism of women who suffer the effects of energy deprivation disproportionately, refracted by intersectional identities (see Listo, 2018). Discourses of entrepreneurism are notable in how gender has been represented in South African policy debates. Chitonge (2017: 38) suggests that advocacy has shifted from gender-sensitive energy planning to a "narrow, class-based project of promoting the growth of elite businesswomen in the energy sector". In part, this reflects post-apartheid policy of promoting a black capitalist class to increase control of core sectors of the South African economy, including energy (Southall, 2007). Here, we focus on the encounter between the entrepreneurial household and the local state, arguing that discourses of feminised poverty and entrepreneurism provide only limited insights into gendered and racialised precarity. We illustrate this account by exploring how relationships between gender, race and energy have been articulated by NGO and municipal employees involved in developing a gender-sensitive energy plan for the City of Johannesburg.

Energy is widely recognised as important for social reproduction, shaped through traditional gender roles performed within the home that render women more vulnerable to energy deprivation than men. An NGO Director describes feminised urban energy deprivation in familiar terms of gender roles in social reproduction:

> There are many *female-headed households* in both [urban and rural areas], but many men and women are *unemployed* in the city. Even in households where men are present and working it is often the *women who control the household energy* – when the electricity needs to be bought. They are the ones with the power in that respect to make those decisions of whether they are *cooking* with solar or the Hot Bag [an energy-saving cooking appliance] … However, they may not be able to make the *decisions over the money* to be used. They are *the ones that are home* and also have *to travel* distance to buy paraffin or coal, *sit with kids* to do homework (*Director 1*, NGO, emphasis added)

It is important to document and recognise how individual needs, resources and interests are differentiated by gender (Matinga and Annegarn, 2013; Prasad, 2011). Yet, providing material resources does not necessarily affect power relations within households (Cornwall et al., 2008). Rather, gendered divisions of labour can be reproduced through household interventions that treat gender as an individual-level category. This is common with the introduction of energy efficient or labour-saving household technologies that are intended to reduce the costs and burden of household tasks:

> My biggest focus is on women. If they don't have energy, they can't support their families… without them children won't eat, husbands wouldn't be clean and all this. So, we gave people solar panels and taught them about easy cook utensils… (*former Manager*, Ministry of Energy).

Furthermore, the introduction of new technologies can induce energy vulnerabilities. Off-grid solar home systems installed in informal settlements can often improve service provision, but typically do not meet all household energy needs. Sufficient for lighting but not cooking, these incremental solutions may form part of an inclusive energy policy for poor households, beyond the limitations of grid supply (discussed below). Yet, celebratory

accounts appear at odds with gender empowerment where new technologies formalise the flexibility that women exercise when required to choose between material needs:

> Life is much easier and safer now… Now she can monitor her electricity consumption and make informed decisions. Is there enough electricity to watch TV for two hours and have lights on and charge her phone, or must she make a choice? (Sustainable Energy Africa, 2017)

Similarly, remedies are often individualised in efforts to unleash the productive potential of energy and women's labour (see de Groot et al.,2017). Expectations of flexibility and adaptability are embedded in rhetorical support for the entrepreneurialism of the poor, yet they can exploit the capacities of women and induce vulnerabilities. In municipal policy making, the entrepreneurial activity of women in poor neighbourhoods has been expressed as both a means and an end, where development effectiveness relies upon identifying entrepreneurial individuals with key characteristics:

> I want to think about what these young people can do. If I'm going to work with someone I need to see some activity from them in the first place… Someone who can see the future; someone who is already business-minded; someone who is not waiting to be saved from the comfort of their bed (*Director 1*, NGO)

Similarly, the Director of a gender and energy NGO described how citizens should imagine their own contribution to reducing urban energy poverty:

> [Interviewee]: …that SA is my country, Johannesburg is my city, and its alive with possibilities. There are needs here and if I can think and identify a niche and then I can answer that niche and set up a business, and empower myself and empower my community, for a fee. […] Something needs to change and somebody needs to ignite and facilitate that change of mind set.
> [Author]: What is that mind set?
> [Interviewee]: To always be expecting things from outside, whether it's from government or from donors. (*Director 2*, NGO)

The policy focus on entrepreneurialism aims to tap into unutilised energies of young people and women in low-income neighbourhoods. It is not divorced from the state as facilitator, but is associated with common assumptions of a post-apartheid malaise, in which black, low-income citizens have grown dependent on the state and where channels of distribution are maligned:

> …you create this ridiculous dependent child who cannot do anything…. How does that help a developmental state? Do you want it to become a welfare state done badly – without the tax base and with people saying "I'm doing nothing, because the state does"? (*Manager*, City of Johannesburg)

Flexibility and adaptability are already evident in communal and individual strategies by which women negotiate urban life (Goebel, 2015), characterised by both co-operation and conflict (Mosoetsa, 2011). Yet, daily improvisation is not the signifier of entrepreneurial activity invoked by the municipality. Different logics of entrepreneurialism are evident in corporate business models and those of poor urban residents (Thieme, 2015), which caution against an instrumental approach to entrepreneurial subject-formation. The rationalisation of investing in low-income women for more effective

development outcomes – informed by assumptions of misplaced entitlement and dependency – offers only a conservative approach of devolving responsibility to the household as an entrepreneurial unit.

The feminisation of poverty is likely to remain a significant narrative in mobilising support for gender-sensitive energy planning, which activists have struggled to institutionalise in post-apartheid energy policy (Annecke, 2000). Yet, well-meaning support for community-based solutions to energy poverty can exploit the flexibility and ability of women to adopt and balance responsibilities for social reproduction and income generation. This process of precarity places responsibility with women who may have few resources and limited power over the processes that render them and others vulnerable to energy deprivation. Under these conditions, strategies designed to reduce energy deprivation can reinforce energy precarity. Binary narratives of victimisation and heroic entrepreneurialism obscure the causes of energy deprivation, leaving gendered and racialised social relations unchallenged. As a mechanism of government, energy interventions have unevenly embedded market forces into the lives and homes of residents to create responsible subjects. As we explore next, these rationalities produce indeterminate encounters of market forces and social reproduction, where possibilities to contest gendered power relations are not foreclosed (Ferguson, 2010; Prügl, 2015).

Resistance and struggles with energy precarity

How then, might resistance and struggle with energy precarity be shaped to challenge gendered and racialised social relations? We argue that precarity offers insights into how vulnerabilities are contested as a shared condition, with potential for broader systemic struggle (Bhattacharya, 2017). We explore strategies of spectacular resistance and everyday practices as experimentation with how energy and infrastructures are constitutive of gender and racial inequalities (Eriksson, 2018; Suliman and Weber, 2019).

First, analysis of precarious energy access may illuminate trade-offs in the reproduction of risk. For example, off-grid solar technologies can currently meet fewer energy needs than grid electricity in low-income homes. For example, they provide insufficient power for cooking. Hence, a social enterprise that provides solar home systems in an informal settlement achieved "social acceptance" only after affirming that solar power would be a temporary solution, "while you wait for the grid" (*Manager*, social enterprise). From one perspective, municipal policy to promote off-grid solar technologies in informal settlements would require citizens to exercise flexibility: to choose between material needs and to accept a bifurcated model of citizenship that could formalise energy precarity and transfer responsibility for energy deprivation from state to low-income residents. This possibility is evident in how one municipal employee frames the development of an off-grid energy policy in Johannesburg:

> We are looking for off-grid solutions to anything that the City provides as a basic service – we need to change the model from dependency to independency [...]. And which government doesn't want citizens to be more self-sufficient? (*Manager*, City of Johannesburg)

However, since grid supply is unaffordable for poor households, the security and quality of service provided by off-grid technologies can be greater, while the gendered and racialised health risks of "dirty fuels" that otherwise meet energy demand are reduced. Given the

symbolic importance of grid electrification and its significance in protest, the frequent failure of off-grid alternatives to secure social acceptance from users cannot be explained through a technocratic failure of community engagement. Alternative accounts of resistance and contestation should account for different forms of gendered risk, insecurity, vulnerability and flexibility that can occur on- and off-grid, and which can be induced through infrastructure formalisation or informalisation. An infrastructural account of precarity foregrounds these processes and the associated trade-offs, values and politics of technological interventions.

Similarly, analysis of precarity cautions against romanticising coping strategies or celebrating resistance uncritically. Many extra-legal means of accessing essential energy services have their roots in apartheid struggle and payment boycotts (von Schnitzler, 2016), including bypassing household meters, "ghost vending" of prepayment tokens, and illegally connecting unelectrified informal settlements to adjacent powerlines. Many can be characterised as ingenious, subversive means by which poor (and non-poor) people meet their energy needs without payment and challenge the commodification of social reproduction. Yet, many remain palliative and individualised strategies that reproduce multidimensional vulnerabilities associated with electrocution and fires that can spread quickly through informal settlements, reproducing precarity. Other household strategies are more socially structuring, including organised resistance to the installation of tamper-proof metering technologies, sharing pension payments collected by older women, or accessing energy services in the homes of others (*Residents*, Soweto; Mosoetsa, 2011). Literature on urban energy literature has reflected broader debates in urban studies over the conditions in which survivalist strategies, disengagement, subversion, or "social infrastructures" might be pre-figurative of alternative ways of organising services and alternative models of development (Angel, 2019; Bayat, 2000; Silver, 2014). Arguably, the state remains an important collective social structure to address energy precarity and secure material improvements made possible by "seeing and engaging urban spaces that are characterised simultaneously by regularity and provisionality" (Simone, 2004: 407). Analytically, attention to state agents and practices is important to understand how conditions of possibility enacted in the everyday are constrained or enabled.

Furthermore, precarity provides tools to analyse socio-material relationships between state, residents and infrastructure. In analysis of South African service delivery protests, Alexander and Pfaffe (2014: 217), conclude that "while there is social distance between workers and the poor, there is too much intermingling, family loyalty, lifestyle fluidity and shared experience for it to be helpful to explain this distinction… through a theory of class separation". For Meagher (2019), informal workers are increasingly integrated into global value chains, and hence with producing value (for others). In contrast, Ferguson (2015: 41–47) describes a productivist misrecognition in accounts of a shared class position between workers and livelihood earners – one that oddly mirrors the liberal market misrecognition of the "informal economy" as a pool of micro-entrepreneurs. From this perspective, demands for 'service delivery' suggest that struggle over distribution may hold radical potential, claimed with reference to neither the "neoliberal 'rights talk' within which it is often subsumed" nor productive labour, but to a rightful share of socially produced material goods and services owed to a deserving citizenry (Ferguson, 2015: 47).

These politics of social stratification are engaged daily by those making collective demands for energy as a means of social reproduction. For a member of anti-capitalist group Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (see Naidoo and Veriava, 2009), the challenges

of forging class-citizenship solidarity are significant, yet class remains a unifying category for those who experience energy and housing precarity under different conditions:

> Landless people feel that "the state is helping everyone except us". It's not based on a systemic critique...it's the politics of informal settlements. So, we have to win their trust on a different platform: we are a class. Whether you're in a house or a shack, whether employed or unemployed, we're a class (*Scholar-activist*, Johannesburg)

The radical platform invoked involves a combination of practical and rhetorical strategies, but debating modes of distribution such as electricity tariffs is discounted:

> Other groups engage with that argument, calling for a more affordable rate. We say: "No! We are not paying". We use global arguments that energy is a public good; a national argument that energy is a right; we use moral and socio-economic arguments. Then, working class arguments that workers produce energy so why should they pay twice?... As socialists, we make the argument as a transitional one. We envision a world where people get what they need (*Scholar-activist*, Johannesburg)

Similarly, Loftus (2006: 1039) emphasises the limits of contesting tariffs and illegal connections as secondary to and derivative of production and ownership, as "the relationships that first brought about the unequal distribution of water". Instead, he locates the prospect of radical democratic change in reproductive labour – much of it performed by women – and situated knowledges that emerge from struggles to survive "in a world defined by both capitalist and non-capitalist social relationships".

These debates over the political potential of distribution have implications for strategies to oppose energy precarity and to facilitate a "just transition" from South Africa's coal dependency. Where ownership of energy production is contested in South Africa, distribution is critical to how markets are organised socially. South African unions that represent coal and power sector workers have failed to act upon their call for "socially owned" renewable energy generation, while actively opposing private sector renewable power projects. For their critics, opposition "just looks like another strategy of fossil fuel incumbency" (*Academic*, Cape Town), with disastrous effects for climate change and for air quality near coal mines and power stations. Meanwhile, global production networks for renewable energy technology make low- or high-skilled jobs in South Africa unlikely (Baker and Sovacool, 2017), such that prioritising production over distribution may neglect the interests of most workers and those excluded from wage labour.

Furthermore, decentralised solar power requires production to be understood within a new infrastructural context that situates the distribution network as site of struggle and empowers a new set of 'prosumers' with property and capital to capture the benefits of infrastructure ownership (Baker and Phillips, 2019). Bakker (2007) describes a set of unhelpful binaries of resource governance – public-private, citizen-consumer, commodities-rights – to which we may add producer-consumer. In the short term, distributive mechanisms such as tariff structures, property taxes and regulations provide tools for government to protect redistribution through networked infrastructure, tools that municipalities have uneven capacity and differing incentives to use. South Africa's crisis of energy production – evident in Eskom's financial deterioration and load shedding – is intimately tied to the politics of distribution – evident in ongoing discursive struggle over the meaning of non-payment for electricity as 'theft', patronage, or resistance – and social reproduction – evident in how people meet energy needs in practice. In these contexts, distributive struggles over the social

ordering of markets and infrastructure have potential to either address or entrench precarity. More fundamentally, an infrastructural perspective signals how production and distribution are difficult to disentangle, such that privileging production over distributive struggles may neglect political strategies that engage with the materiality of precarity that have radical potential.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have employed precarity to understand how gendered and racialised vulnerability to energy deprivation is politically induced. In turn, we illustrate socio-material processes of precarity, produced and contested through infrastructure. We situate energy deprivation within multi-scalar processes that produce it, in contrast to frameworks that remain focused on individual circumstance or political-economic analyses that privilege national and global scales over others.

First, energy precarity is induced through both political economic and socio-cultural processes, which unsettle binaries of production and consumption, formality and informality, resistance and passivity. As one dimension of "hyper-precarity" in South Africa, energy is related with racialised and gendered exclusions from labour markets, as well as inequitable systems of housing, tenure, planning and urban form. Multiple axes of difference including gender, race, class and citizenship affect whose lives are rendered precarious or affected by interventions in households and markets. As such, analytical frameworks are required that account for multiple processes of (in)security, (in)flexibility and (in)formalisation by which precarity can be reproduced or destabilised.

Second, precarity is a dynamic process rather than a stable state or condition, manifested and contested over space and through time. While many find themselves in a chronic state of vulnerability to energy deprivation, such conditions are continually reproduced and subject to multiple temporalities. Policies that are unresponsive to the dynamic character of vulnerability may be ineffective in tackling the multiple ways that people experience precarity. Lessons of previous essentialist or paternalistic efforts at gender-sensitive planning are rarely heard. Instead, we argue that gender, energy and race have become a development project in which empowerment of women is individualised and instrumentalised through processes of subject formation associated with productivity, commercialisation and entrepreneurialism. Gendered and racialised relations of energy production and consumption remain largely unchallenged.

Third, precarity can signify resistance, insurgency and struggle against a singular social order and expression of power through infrastructure. Energy precarity is contested daily in the spectacular resistance of South African service delivery protests and the everyday practices by which energy needs are partially met. Yet the challenge of transforming energy systems requires collective social arrangements that provide alternative systems of infrastructure, knowledge and power. As a process of subject-formation, precarity can render people and practices governable: an expression of socio-temporal power mediated through infrastructure. The burden of this change and the agency of citizens are distributed unevenly within society, such that social outcomes of subject-formation are not predetermined. So too, precarity as oppositional politics may unsettle or reinforce dominant social orders associated with the household, state and market, with production and distribution. As Berlant and Povinelli (2014) note, "The most unbearable precarity is in the radical individuality sold as liberal freedom, where people imagine that competition is what's natural while relations that build worlds are exceptional". It remains a political priority to foster collective

action that addresses the socio-material processes that inflict violence and harm, and to address precarity and as a shared condition.

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Fertility, Reproduction and Conjugal Loyalty: Renegotiating Gender Relations amongst Dalits in Rural Tamil Nadu

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Fertility, Reproduction and Conjugal Loyalty: Renegotiating Gender Relations amongst Dalits in Rural Tamil Nadu

Nitya Rao

Introduction

> We will get affection and support from our husbands if we have children. It doesn't matter then if the parents-in-law squabble with us. Childlessness is however a matter of concern. Having children, at least two, is good, as others won't speak ill of us.

1 The above narrative from Mallika,[1] a 22 year old Madhari (Dalit) woman in rural Tamil Nadu, points to the centrality of reproduction for women's identities. Daughter of agricultural laborers, food scarcity at home made her begin working in a hosiery factory in Thiruppur at the age of 14. Married at 16, she continued to work in a mill, until her daughter, now five, was born. Now that she also has a young son of two, her husband, who works at a powerloom, wants her to stay at home to look after the children and family. He hands over all his income to her, confident that she will spend it well.

2 Mallika's narrative points to at least two important contributions reproduction makes to a woman's life: while her own desire for motherhood is not articulated, she speaks of gaining affection and support from her husband, and social approval. This concern for social respectability alongside conjugal loyalty raises the key question I explore in this paper. In a context of rapid socio-economic change, wherein Dalit women are not necessarily active in the workforce, are they being assimilated into brahmanical patriarchal ideologies that emphasize notions of honor and status (valuing virginity,

ritualizing puberty and glorifying marriage and motherhood—all of which seek to control women's bodies [Irudayam, Mangubhai, and Lee 2011])? Are they able to critique some of this morality and instead use it to maintain and negotiate reciprocal and equitable gender relations?

3 Much of the literature on Dalits, and Dalit women in particular, deals with issues of violence based on class, caste and gender (Irudayam et al. 2011; Shah 2001; Viswanathan 2005; Chakravarti 2003). While stories of exploitation by landlords and contractors at work or by drunken husbands at home are commonplace, what is left out is the women's own representation of their everyday lives, which is often contradictory, and speaks of victimhood alongside the exercise of strategic choices (Geetha 2000; Viramma, Racine and Racine 2000; Bama 2000).

4 Control over marriage and fertility decisions have been identified as key indicators of women's autonomy and status in India (Dyson and Moore 1983; Dube 2003; Jejeebhoy 2000; Rege et al. 2013). Historically, Dalit and landless households have been considered as cases where more egalitarian gender relations are possible, in terms of physical freedom, marital mobility and companionate marriages, largely driven by their material poverty, and the need for women to work alongside their men (Deshpande 2011; Dube 2003). This was indeed noticeable in my research context, consisting of a cluster of five villages in the Palladam block of Thiruppur district, with self-arranged or "love" marriages reported only by the Dalits. The dominant Gounders (with "Other Backward Caste" classification) acknowledged that young people now had several opportunities to meet and get to know each other prior to marriage, especially in higher education, but love marriages were not encouraged. In fact, they were punished, including through disinheritance and ostracism from the community.[2]

5 Simultaneously, however, reproductive success, especially producing a son, has become central to Dalit identities and marital security. This is an important shift as amongst the Dalits, who served primarily as landless agricultural laborers, sons and daughters were equally valued for their contributions to the household, both in terms of money and emotional support (Rao 2014:90). While it is difficult to date this trend precisely based on the data collected, it is likely to reflect the changing economic context, especially the expansion of the knitwear industry in the 2000s. More jobs were created for men, and migrants from other Tamil Nadu districts and Indian states, who presently constitute about 60 per cent of the labor in the industry (Dorairaj 2010 cited in Heyer 2012).

6 Over the past four decades, the location studied has undergone a decline in agriculture due to lowering water tables and an expansion of the Thiruppur industrial cluster, which has become a global center for hosiery and garment production. This has led to a general change in labor relations, with patronage-based, agricultural labor sharply declining. Dalits, especially those who are educated, are unwilling to work in agriculture for low wages and in near-'bonded' conditions for Gounder landlords (Carswell and de Neve 2014; Heyer 2010). For Dalit women, factory work has gained in importance, but given the difficult conditions, such work is seen as a sign of poverty and lack of choice rather than an exercise of agency (Heyer 2014; Rao 2014). Yet women are not a homogenous group, and don't all have the same relations to the production process (Kapadia 1999). In an earlier paper I found that the outcomes of paid work for their sense of self and wellbeing are mediated by factors such as age, education, the social location from which they enter the workforce—and importantly—reproductive success (Rao 2014).

7 In a context of relative economic security, for the first time, Dalit women like Mallika, have the possibility of focusing full-time on the tasks of motherhood and the upbringing of their children, at least temporarily, as long as the children are young. Mothering is more than care-giving; it is seen as central to nurturing relations of affection and intimacy, with working-class women—who depend on employment and are unable to stay home with their children—cast as "deficient mothers" (Donner 2008:48). Mallika's apparent conformity to upper-caste norms of domesticity[3] and attention to motherhood has in fact helped strengthen her voice in the conjugal relationship while also enhancing her social worth. While she is not earning at present, her contribution to the production and maintenance of "status" (Papanek 1979), a concept that describes any work undertaken to reproduce the social standing of a household beyond its survival, is recognized. Rather than valorizing motherhood per se, she therefore uses this idea as a status-enhancing strategy.

8 Status production varies by caste; the forms it takes also changes over time (Rao 2014). The focus of this paper on Dalit women's agency in relation to status production, through investments in reproduction, fertility and notions of conjugality, is not entirely new—there is a rich ethnographic literature on women's work, their health and fertility. What this paper offers is a nuanced insight into women's strategies for negotiating the very notions of conjugality and respectability, using their sexual and reproductive choices as a lens. Their struggles are located within a changing politico-economic context, which present significant shifts in employment opportunities, education, State social protection and Dalit mobilization. Empowering women in some respects, these larger changes appear to simultaneously consolidate new forms of patriarchy, emphasizing motherhood and reproductive success as central to women's identity and selfhood, rather than their productive work and income contributions (Rege et al. 2013).

9 In the next section, I review the different strands of literature around women's agency in relation to reproduction, fertility and motherhood, within which I locate my research. Section 3 briefly sets out the methodology adopted and profiles the major caste groups in the locality, while Section 4 outlines the broader changes taking place, particularly in livelihoods and social policy. In sections 5 and 6, I turn to an analysis of a few narratives by Dalit women, complementing this where possible with the voices of their men and other caste women as points of comparison. The focus in these two sections is to explore a) how women use reproduction for a wider exercise of agency in building conjugal partnerships and b) the strategies for dealing with anxieties around infertility and its repercussions for social respectability, apart from material and marital insecurity. Section 7 concludes.

Fertility, reproduction and selfhood

10 Two distinct strands are visible in the study of fertility and reproduction in contemporary India. The first, led by demographers and health professionals, emphasizes population control and improved health outcomes. Large datasets such as the National Family Health Surveys have been used to examine women's reproductive bodies, including the changes in marriage age, fertility behavior and the adoption of birth control measures, and their links to women's autonomy and status (Jejeebhoy 2000; Kishor and Gupta 2009; Deshpande 2011). Women's bodies are mainly valued in relation to motherhood, as

reflected in both state policy discourses and health services that prioritize reproductive health for women (Whitehead 1996; Anandhi 2000).

11 The second strand consists of more sociological and anthropological work, focusing on women's lived experiences of production and reproduction (Jeffery, and Jeffery 1994), including their implications as status-markers. Marriage and reproduction are not just central elements of selfhood, but also serve as boundary markers between social groups. Amongst the upper castes, in upholding caste purity and hierarchy, they lead to an emphasis on restrained behavior and control of women's sexuality (Dube 2003; Uberoi 1996; Chakravarti 1996; Dube, Leacock, and Ardener 1986). Yet conformity with such norms does not guarantee women's autonomy or voice, shaped as these are by a host of social relations mediated by residential patterns, closeness to natal kin, and perhaps education or employment (Jeffery, and Jeffery 1994; Unnithan 2010).

12 Despite the freedom of movement and relative autonomy arising from women's economic roles and functions, recent analyses indicate an erosion in the sense of equality amongst Dalit men and women (Irudayam et al. 2011; Rege 2006). Kapadia (1995) nuances this analysis, pointing out that the control over women's sexuality and appropriate behavior becomes a concern when a household is upwardly mobile and women's withdrawal from work adds to male status (p. 174). In the context under study, this upward mobility is not just about male status; rather it lays claim to the benefits of globalization, and the ways in which it produces distinctive identities—both political and social (cf Donner 2008). Both the nature of jobs and consumer practices have changed in the locality—from agricultural labor, most women, especially younger women, now have experience with factory jobs based on modern management practices. They are media-savvy and aspire to new forms of consumerism, in the areas of food, clothing, and indeed choice of educational or health facility.

13 Women's subjectivities are not universal and static; they shift over their life course and with changes in their immediate personal and local context. Amongst the Dalits, it is assumed that individual interests are subordinated to those of caste and kin collectivities, and only become important when articulated in opposition to other groups (Rege 2006). While Dalit women do articulate concerns around violence and gender subordination (Rao 2015), given the persistent inequalities they face in the labor and wage markets, they simultaneously seek to build their moral reputation and agency around reproductive success. Kalpana Ram (2000) makes a similar point in noting how within rapidly changing macro-contexts, such as amongst the fishing communities in coastal Tamil Nadu, notions of "modernity" are framed through a discourse of feminine morality, "a morality produced by acceptance and internalization of a hard and rigorous disciplining of one's bodily subjectivity" (p. 292).

14 Amongst the middle classes, women's employment has now become central to the making of a "modern" persona, yet their sense of self, including professional success, continues to be linked to their family's prestige (Belliappa 2013). Professional women's everyday practices are often contradictory, combining trying work regimes with efforts to reproduce family norms and values, seen as contributing to a "respectable femininity" (Radhakrishnan 2009; Thapan 2009). Respectability involves a complex set of practices defined by appropriate behavior, language, and appearance, apart from the visible espousal of social rules and moral codes, which enable people to be framed in ways that justify the unequal distribution of resources (Skeggs 1997). The symbols of respectability, however, do not automatically lead to respect, as seen in the treatment meted out by

others; this involves mutuality, which emerges from both self-confidence and recognition by others (Sennett 2003). In fact rather than accepting variability in experiences, social responsibility now calls for an adherence to patriarchal codes, relating particularly to sexual and bodily discipline. What emerges is a sense that the idioms of the family, of reproduction and conjugality, are important responses to broader socio-economic and livelihood changes, and enable individuals and households to gain both status and respectability.

15 Beverley Skeggs' (1997) insight that legitimate middle-class femininity becomes in itself a kind of symbolic capital that women, especially from the working classes, seek to embody, could help explain the greater emphasis on domesticity and motherhood amongst Dalit women in my research context. Rather than signifying enhanced subordination, it could reflect creative navigations and renegotiations of both conjugal and wider social relations of caste and class (cf Heyer 2014). It is important to point out here that relations of reproduction are not confined to the household, but rather are crucial to an understanding of economic and political institutions more broadly (Engels [1884] 1972). As Ginsburg and Rapp (1995) have argued, "reproduction provides a terrain for imagining new cultural futures and transformations, through personal struggle, generational mobility, social movements and the contested claims of powerful religious and political ideologies" (p. 2).

16 Edholm, Harris and Young's (1977) analytical distinction between social reproduction, reproduction of the labor force, and human or biological reproduction, is useful in pointing to the different pathways available to people, especially women, for improving their life chances. Lower-status groups, such as the Dalits in the studied context, find a plurality of ways in which they can use consumerism and social practices—including surrounding childcare and parenting—that draw on high caste ideals of chastity and domesticity alongside notions of appropriate work, to craft "respectable" identities for themselves. Through their inventive use in their everyday practices of the symbols and language created by the elites, they give them a different meaning, challenging dominant meanings rather than just reproducing a dominant practice (de Certeau 1984:32). Here, women's agency cannot be understood in binary terms, as constraints and freedoms, resistance and subordination. Shaped by the opportunities available to them, their personal and social circumstances, as well as their need for peace and stability in their lives, it is a complex mix of both the active and passive, with endurance itself a choice, albeit a difficult one (Sangari 2002; Reader 2007; Rao 2015).

17 In this paper, I unpack the everyday struggles of Dalit women, and their negotiations in the domain of the family, in the studied context, to demonstrate that while the "domestication" of women is visible within Dalit households, this is not driven by upper-caste, brahmanical ideologies or status considerations alone, rather it is embedded within changing economic and societal contexts. The successful upbringing of a few children (especially their education) is valued as a potential pathway for upward mobility, more than women's monetary contributions. Rather than establishing that Dalit women have no agency, or that it is confined to child bearing and rearing, I highlight the ways in which they use their new domesticity to negotiate their status more broadly, drawing on the care and concern of their partners.

Methodology and sample

18 This paper is based on empirical evidence collected from a cluster of five villages in Thiruppur district, Tamil Nadu, in 2009–10.[4] Seeking to understand the nature of intra-household resource allocations, the project included a household survey of 400 rural couples, as well as in-depth interviews with 40 of these couples, alongside focus-group discussions and key-informant interviews at each site. Men and women were interviewed separately by male and female researchers, both as part of the survey and during the in-depth interviews, in order to gauge their perceptions about their own and their spouse's contributions to the household, their relative access to a range of assets and information, their work and life experiences, and who had the final say in household decisions and allocations.

19 As a Tamil-speaking Indian woman, I could speak to both women and men; however, on this particular issue of reproduction and the "domestic realm," women were both more expansive and open. Interviews often ran on for over two hours, as the women were keen to talk about their lives; men however were more reticent, even with male researchers. This difference in terms of the gendered nature of "voice" and articulation on particular issues is in fact a methodological constraint confronting much of gender/feminist research (Jackson 2012). Without specific attention to male insecurities in relation to infertility, central to their masculinities (Tolley 2015), social problems around violence, alcoholism and extra-marital relationships, will be difficult to address.

20 Couples displaying diverse patterns of decision-making were selected for the in-depth work. They included different caste groups, age and education levels, as well as employment statuses. Dalits constitute around 19 per cent of the population of Tamil Nadu. They however constituted 35 per cent of our survey sample and 42.5 per cent (17 out of 40 households) were included in the qualitative research, given our overarching focus on poverty and development. In the research site, the lowest-ranked Arunthathiyars, locally-known as Madharis, constituted the majority-group of Dalits. The remaining population included two distinct groups amongst the Other Backward Castes (OBCs): the landowning Gounders and the handloom-weaving Devanga Chettiars.

21 There is a marked contrast in the gendered work and educational status by caste for the research sample. 75 per cent of Dalit women (and 63 per cent below the age of 30)[5] remain illiterate in contrast to 29 per cent of OBC women in general (literacy is higher amongst the Gounders, but the survey data was not disaggregated by sub-caste), a pattern observed in Tamil Nadu as a whole (Swaminathan 2002). Most Madharis, men and women, are casual wage workers, and only a small proportion work as annual paid farm servants (*pannaiyals*). Their wages however are unequal, with women earning around half that of men for similar work (NSSO 2010). Interestingly, for the first time perhaps, Madhari women, at least those in their reproductive years, were able to drop out, even if only temporarily, from hard manual work, with 25 per cent reporting themselves as not active in the workforce, or engaged only in domestic work.

22 The Gounders, an agricultural caste, owning most of the land in the area, work on their own farms, set up enterprises like power looms and poultry farms or work in factories on both regular and casual contracts. Gounder women, especially older ones, work on their farms and supervise Madhari labor when required, while the younger-generation women seek regular work in or around the village, especially as teachers. The Devanga Chettiars

are largely self-employed in weaving. The women all support their husbands' loom work —preparing thread, and weaving themselves at times. Around 35 per cent of women from these groups reported themselves as not active or engaged only in domestic work.

A context of change

23 Describing changes in Iruvelpattu (Villupuram district) over the 20th century (1916–2008), Harriss, Jeyaranjan and Nagaraj (2010) note that over the last 25 years, [a] diversification of the rural economy, [b] Dalit political mobilization and [c] state welfare provision have together contributed to a decline in hegemonic landlord control over village life and enhanced class and caste mobility. While sufficient evidence of Dalit political mobilization could not be collected in this research context, the other two factors were obviously present. There is a diversification of employment, with jobs—particularly for men—much more easily available in the Thiruppur industrial cluster, but also in decentralized production units, power looms, poultry farms and plantations, in the rural areas. As one Gounder landlord noted:

> Till the 1970s, tobacco was the main crop and it was quite profitable. In 1975, the government started a campaign against tobacco. Agriculture became impossible, as the water table too had gone down. Many Gounders sold their land and invested in power looms; later some set up poultry farms. Employment opportunities have increased, but the labor now want to relax, not work hard, so it is a big risk for us employers. They take advances as a condition of work and use it to buy cell phones, vehicles and alcohol—the money disappears in a flash. We now have a strong association of power-loom owners here. You must have read in the papers about our strike. There is a demand for higher wages, but with only small margins, there is no way we can pay this.

The above narrative points to labor mobilization and the demand for higher wages by Dalit workers. Given the competitiveness of the power-loom industry in the locality and the tight labor market, the Gounder owners face a situation of labor scarcity. Yet, they were unwilling to pay the wages demanded by the workers, resulting in a stalemate and ultimately a strike by the owners. Several Madhari men were without work during our fieldwork, yet stuck to their demands regarding wages and working conditions. A clear change in economic relations between the Gounders and Madharis is visible, wherein the latter's pliability can no longer be counted on. The changing nature of the social ties between Madharis and Gounders raises a question regarding why the former then appear to be adopting the patriarchal social norms common amongst the latter and other mid-level castes.

24 Apart from the difficulties of combining factory work with their reproductive responsibilities (Rao 2014:86), Madhari women have been supported in their mothering and domestic roles by state social protection and welfare services. Tamil Nadu has largely maintained its allocation to nutrition and social services (Heyer 2012), which enables poor women to take time off work, if needed, without becoming totally dependent on their men. Amongst many, two schemes that have had a significant impact on gender relations and choices are the universal Public Distribution System (PDS) and the Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit scheme. While there was a worksite set up under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), this was mentioned less by women in their narratives. The PDS provides the staple food rice free of cost to below-poverty-line households. This has facilitated access to basic grains,

however, with severe inflation in the prices of all other commodities—pulses, oil, vegetables—and unpredictable male contributions—performing the task of preparing a complete meal can still pose a challenge for women (Rao 2015). It has nevertheless eased the pressure on women for meeting basic survival needs.

25 The Maternity Benefit scheme directly addresses women's reproductive lives, providing support to poor women for a period of nine months, three during late pregnancy and child-birth and six after birth. The amount of assistance was doubled from Rs 6,000 to Rs 12,000 per birth for the first two births in May 2011.[6] Ravindran and Balasubramanian (2012) in their five-district study, found that only 25 per cent of Dalit and landless women were able to access financial benefits under the scheme, partly due to the long process of documentation and partly due to the dominant landholding castes serving as mediators, providing both information and support for filling-in the required forms. While precise data from the survey is not available, during qualitative interviews, Madhari women did not raise any particular issues in this regard—their narratives were largely positive.

26 Along with these social protection schemes, the State has also distributed several freebies over the past decade. Almost every household has a television, a mixer grinder, cooking gas, a power supply and a concrete house with a tiled roof. Targeted largely at women, they seek to reduce the burden of domestic work. Most of the Madhari men have bicycles; a few have mopeds or motorbikes. The OBCs, especially the Gounders, additionally have modern fixtures in their kitchen and living room, and usually a motorbike, and for the best off, a car. Their houses are much larger, as they own land, and usually some cattle.

Fertility and reproductive choice: women's narratives

27 This section presents detailed narratives of a few women, reflecting on different dimensions of fertility and reproduction, the securities and insecurities entailed therein, but also how this contributes to their agency and sense of self in relation to both conjugal relationships and household-status mobility. While focusing on Madhari women, I compare their perspectives with those of Gounder women, also providing insight into male views when possible.

28 29-year-old Jaya, quiet and controlled in personality, was married to her mother's brother's son at the age of 16. She said,

> He works as a plumber and can earn about Rs 1,000 a week, but now his company is incurring losses, so his earnings are reduced. I too have been working for the past six months in a power loom owned by the Gounder in our village. I dropped out of school after grade 5 because I was poor in maths and could not tolerate constant scoldings by the teacher. It was the tradition in my place that teenage girls (post-pubertal) would stay at home, helping with household work. My uncle suddenly died (my aunt had died earlier), and since I had dropped out of school, my mother, who wished me to marry his son, got us married, so I could look after him. A year later we had a son.

Jaya's mother is tasked with controlling her sexuality following puberty, identifying a suitable groom, and getting her married once she dropped out of school. The emphasis on "tradition" here can be understood in the context of upward mobility to which her family aspired (cf Kapadia 1995). Her grandparents had a few head of cattle and a plot of land (two acres), and lived reasonably comfortably in their life. Her father had studied up to the 9th grade and was offered a teacher's job, but due to household pressures at that time, he didn't accept it. Nevertheless, her parents did seek to educate their daughters and give

Jaya a better life. She was socialized to look after her husband, but as she points out at the beginning of the narrative, this includes not just personal care, but also earning an income to compensate for his reduced earnings. She continued,

> My husband does not have any bad habits like smoking or alcohol, but occasionally I think he drinks outside before coming home. I find him brushing his teeth at night, saying that his mouth does not feel fresh. From the day of our marriage, he has given me all his earnings, and continues to do so. Along with the weekly provisions, he would also purchase my favorite milk sweet and some jasmine flowers. Three years ago he took me to a famous sari shop called Ganapathi Silks and bought me a lovely green sari for my birthday. I was really happy.
>
> There is only one thing I feel really bad about. My son is now 13 years old, but I have not conceived again. My husband's sister and grandmother scold me as if it is only my fault. They suspect I am taking birth control pills[7] and don't want a second child because I might lose my beauty. This is not true. In our community, if anyone takes a bath daily and wears a neat and clean sari, people start gossiping about her. My husband however treats me well.

Jaya started on a positive note about her husband, although she gradually admitted to some drinking and (as we shall see in the next extract) some violence. She is quick to add that he seeks to compensate for this by not only handing over his earnings and fulfilling his provider role, but also buying her gifts. The simultaneous display of authority and affection is seen as an acceptable part of the conjugal relationship. What troubles her in relation to her inability to conceive a second child, however, is the interpretation of the attention to her body and dress as an expression of an individual's sexual desire (John and Nair 2000), such attention being a signifier of morally reprehensible conduct (Skeggs 2009:100). Normatively, women's sexuality is seen as exclusively harnessed to the project of reproduction, rather than sexual desire, hence she is scolded and criticized for her attention to her body (cf Kannabiran, and Kannabiran 2003). In fact, affinal relatives and other women in the locality see her as arrogant in seeking to maintain her own beauty and figure in order to fulfill her sexual desires, rather than producing another child. Her husband's purchase of flowers and saris for her has perhaps also evoked a sense of jealousy. Apart from the usual policing of women's behavior, the remarks surrounding her immorality reflect resentment by other women of the conjugal support and spousal affection she seems to enjoy (cf Unnithan-Kumar 2001). While not necessarily reflecting a change in social morality, her peers' behavior does reflect an intensification of jealousy due to the relatively secure economic status of the household, and the companionship she enjoys in conjugal relations. She continued,

> Only once, when my son was two years old, we had a major fight. My husband has many cousins (teenage girls); they used to sit on his lap, and take money from him. I didn't like this and told him that I can't live with him if he continues like this. On that day he hit me. I didn't eat for two days and tried to commit suicide by pouring kerosene on my body. My neighbors came, gave me a bath, and sent me to my grandparent's house. Meanwhile, my husband went to my parent's home in search of me. They all got worried; my father cried and so did my husband. He felt lost without me. I realized then my value and consoled him saying "You are not an orphan as long as I am with you." I will never leave him even if there is a big problem.

This incident gave Jaya the opportunity to renegotiate several elements of her relationship with her husband. While female sexuality is to be controlled post-marriage, male flirting and even promiscuity is seen as permissible. She challenged this, but when he didn't respond favorably, out of sheer desperation, she attempted suicide and left his home. It is only once he realized her value and agreed to meet her expectation of loyalty

from him that she returns. While Jaya was unable to convince her husband to undergo treatment for infertility, as discussed in the next section, she managed to convince him to buy a plot of land in her name and build a house close to her parents' home. They had to take out a large loan for this purpose, but now she has more friends, greater support and faces fewer sarcastic comments about her "good looks." Conjugal loyalty has helped her exercise considerable agency in improving her life and to her, therefore, symbolize respectability and security as well as an expression of her self-identity.

29 Her husband, Chinnasamy, who works as a plumber with a daily wage of Rs 150, is hardly educated. He confirmed that he was very close to his wife, and they discussed all matters; in fact she managed all the money they both earned, and he had received a lot of assistance from his wife's parents. When asked about why they had stopped with one child, he responded: "According to his horoscope it is not good to have another child after our son turned 12 years of age." He then changed the topic, and mentioned that as his son was now in secondary school (grade 8), his wife too had started working on a power loom so they could pay for his tuition and other expenses, alongside repaying the loan for constructing their house. While emphasizing their companionate relationship and support for each other in both production and reproduction, he felt uncomfortable talking about the difficulties of conceiving a second child, and blamed it on his horoscope or fate.

30 Quite different in her actions and strategies is 20-year-old Amritha who, having studied up to the 10th grade, is one of the more educated Madhari women. Having worked earlier on a tea plantation, she proudly mentioned completing three months of computer lessons. She said:

> I am very frank with him; if I have anything on my mind, I say that to him. I don't talk about it outside. He knows this, so he supports me. It is only with his support that I can gain respect in society, especially with my in-laws. My mother-in-law kept squabbling with me, so my husband suggested we move out and set up our own home, even though he is their only son. Once I was upset because he forgot to wish me on my birthday, so I got up crying, and left home early for work. He felt bad, so took a loan from his company to buy me a beautiful mobile phone as a gift. He also bought me a cake, sweets and some flowers.

Amritha is young and capable, and while working in a spinning mill herself, she has focused on building conjugal solidarity and mutuality through being open and frank with her husband, seeking his support for whatever she does. She seems to give and expect affection as a person in her own right, and does not just see herself as a machine for reproduction. She is confident of her husband's loyalty—he has given up drinking, hanging around with his friends, and goes to work regularly. As she is more educated than him (he has completed grade 8), he genuinely feels that she gives him good advice and is committed to building their life together. He confirmed this, saying,

> My wife has helped me control my temper and reduce my smoking and drinking habits. She manages the household money, but discusses everything with me. We are as close as when we got married. We have no secrets.

The separation of both living and cooking spaces from her in-laws, to a single room her husband has built just opposite their house, has been one way to expand both her own space and build conjugal solidarity and intimacy between spouses. The daughter-in-law is expected to take responsibility for domestic tasks alongside working for wages, as it is not just caste and class identity but one's gender positioning that decides what is socially acceptable and appropriate behavior (Guru 1995). The spatial separation, in this case, also reflects a shift in kin relations, individualizing notions of motherhood to biological bonds,

from wider social and cultural practices (Donner 2008:38). Realizing that the responsibility for child-care will now primarily be hers, and not shared by her in-laws, Amritha seriously reflects on timing. She continued:

> I don't want a child for at least two years. We are deep in debt. My husband took a loan of Rs 30,000 for our marriage (a love marriage). My parents too took a loan. We both need to work to repay ours, and then help my parents. I started working two months after our marriage at a mill at Palladam. My husband works in an export company. But work is not always available, hence earnings aren't assured. I would like to stay at home for a while when I have a child, so we need to save.

Another way of strengthening their conjugal bond has been through sharing the responsibility for loan repayment and managing the home. Her husband appreciates this and therefore doesn't mind acceding to her wish to postpone having their first child until they are financially secure. This is significant as producing a child within the first year of marriage is seen as the sign of a man's virility and equally a woman's fertility, and is the cultural and social expectation, as seen in Jaya's case. Amritha wants to continue studying and complete her computer course, so she can get a better job. Her husband has promised to support her, but at present, this plan is on hold. While the link between education and women's agency is unclear (Jeffery and Jeffery 1994; Chanana 1988), Amritha seeks to use her skills to enhance conjugal solidarity and reciprocal support, rather than independence at all cost.

31 I started this paper with a narrative by Mallika. Apart from the early experience of work and reproductive success, she was also able to convince her husband, working at a power loom until the recent strike, that two children was enough. She is not working now, and they have a debt of close to Rs 10,000. She noted:

> My son was born by caesarean section in the government hospital. I got Rs 3,000 from the government after the birth. Following the delivery, I opted for a laparoscopy, so I don't get pregnant again. We want to educate our two children well.

While wanting to go back to work, especially given the uncertainty of her husband's earnings, her decision to opt for sterilization provides her control over her own body, and the ability to enjoy a normal, sexual relationship with her husband without the constant fear of pregnancy. It challenges the singular link between sex and reproduction for women, which is quite different from male indulgence in sex for pleasure (Uberoi 1996). It also gives her the confidence to negotiate with her husband to provide the best available opportunities to their children, in this case, the possibility of studying in private schools. Additionally, she realizes that multiple pregnancies can affect not just her health, but also more generally her ability to work and live well (Sharma and Vanjani 1994).

32 What becomes clear from these narratives is that Madhari women use their bodies, especially the capacity for biological reproduction, to negotiate decisions on several issues affecting their everyday lives. These include whether or not to work, the timing of work, expanding physical and social space—either through splitting the conjugal household, or moving closer to their own natal kin, purchasing a plot of land in their own name, changing their husband's behavior, controlling household finances, and so on. Within their material context of economic insecurity and non-stop drudgery, they seek to transform their conjugal relationship into one of genuine respect and reciprocity (cf Butler 1993), even by adopting practices of "domesticity" that appear to reflect patriarchal control (Guru 1995). Their concern is not with demographic variables of age at marriage, contraceptive use or even fertility per se, but of ways and means to strengthen the conjugal bond and build an equitable and meaningful partnership. This conjugal

bonding also serves to subtly challenge the domination of upper caste men over Dalit women. While none of the women interviewed reported sexual abuse by a factory owner, several of them did speak of the lack of choice with regard to work and the long working hours that made it impossible to have a normal work/life balance, especially if they had children.

Infertility, childlessness and gender relations

33 Apart from daily violence, the costs of childlessness can be high, leading to rejection and separation as revealed by 30-year-old Indrani. She works as a cleaner in a studio, earning Rs 50 per day, while her husband works as an agricultural labor, earning about double that amount, when work is available. She said:

> After one and a half years of marriage, we did not have a child. My husband used to shout at me everyday, "you have no child, why have I married you?" Listening constantly to this refrain, I got angry and went to my parent's home. A month later, my father-in-law came and asked me to return. He assured my parents that he would keep me well, so my parents sent me back. We went to a Siva temple and I offered my hair to the God if I conceived. After that I had a child and now I have three. My husband is very affectionate towards me.

In terms of health-seeking efforts, Indrani mentions visiting a temple, and offering her hair to Siva if she conceives. Spiritual healers are often the first port of call for women confronted by the social aspersions of infertility, which construct them as both incomplete and inauspicious. Ram (2013) provides a detailed account of spirit possession as an exercise of agency by rural Tamil women going through some form of crisis in their experience of marriage and maternity. While I did not encounter any examples of spirit possession, this is part of a plethora of everyday practices that helps women confront their sense of responsibility for reproduction (pregnancy and contraception), and shame at the failure to do so.

34 Jaya has been unable to conceive a second child. Secondary sterility can have multiple causes, reproductive tract infections being a major one. As Unnithan (2010) notes in her Rajasthan study, this is quite a widespread phenomenon, affecting 15–18 per cent of rural women, yet health services rarely focus on it. Women therefore end up going to a host of local healers as well as private medical practitioners. Visits to temples and local healers provide not just a lower-cost option to expensive infertility treatment in private clinics, but working within the same cultural framework of shared beliefs about bodily processes, the evil eye, and the social connectedness of a person's physical and mental state, they also provide relief from anxiety to both women and men (Unnithan-Kumar 2001). Given the stigma attached to infertility, Jaya has tried all options. As she notes:

> We have been on many pilgrimages and visited temples in order to try to have another child. We also consulted a doctor who said there is some problem with my husband and he needs an operation. But my husband is not interested. He says, "I don't need any treatment for another child, instead of spending money on treatment we can spend on our child." He wants him to study to be an engineer. Yet I would like to have a girl. We went to an astrologer, he said that my son would have a sibling in his twelfth year, but this has now passed. If it had been a problem with me, I could have asked for help. Since it is in my husband, I have not spoken about it to anybody.

While frustrated at not being able to have a daughter, and realizing that her husband's infertility contributed to the rebukes she got, she nevertheless uses this well-kept secret,

to negotiate with him on a host of key strategic life decisions, as will be discussed in the last section. Taking him up on his commitment to devote money to their child's education, she has arranged private tuitions for him, even though, given her husband's declining earnings, this has meant her resuming work. Alongside these negotiations, the visible display of health-seeking efforts through visits to temples and astrologers, performing rituals when required, helps women like her overcome individual stigma, alongside repairing social relations.

35 While the threat of separation due to childlessness is real amongst the Madharis, status considerations make this more difficult amongst the middle and upper castes. Thangam, a 40-year-old Gounder woman, did not have a child until three years after marriage. She was worried. She said, "If there is no child to a woman, society will talk ill of her. She will have no respect." Her husband confirmed, "When any one meets us, they don't ask about wealth, only about how many children we have and how they are doing. They will comment if a woman has no children."

36 Given the revaluation of "reproduction" (Edholm et al. 1977) as a significant contribution made by women to household status production, there is enhanced pressure for success in this realm. Responses, however, are different across castes. Amongst the Madharis, childlessness affects women's security, status and voice, raising the chances of violence, and separation, in their lives. Surprisingly, the narratives of the Gounder women, while also pointing to childlessness as a reason for lack of respect and shame, do not reflect a similar level of threat in terms of marital security. This could be a result of upper-caste status norms, which look down on separation and remarriage, alongside the availability of fewer eligible women for marriage in these groups. As Thangam candidly noted, "Girls are few amongst the Gounders. For 40 boys, there may only be 20 girls, hence following divorce there is no guarantee that a man will be able to find another wife."[8] Yet in both instances, regardless of caste, women seek multiple sources of treatment, both individual —as reflected in their visits to medical practitioners—but more importantly, social—be it visits to temples, astrologers, or ritual actions like feeding the poor.

Conclusion

37 There are several layers of representation in assembling social reality, both individual and collective. The notions of public and private too are constructed at multiple levels—political, economic, but also discursive (Sangari and Vaid 1989). At the policy level, there is an emphasis on women as mothers, with state-provisioning of basic food and amenities increasingly encouraging and supporting women in their reproductive roles. While laboring is central to Dalit identity for both men and women—perhaps as a result of poverty, social exclusion and a life of hardship—in an economic context where employment opportunities for men are expanding, but for women (especially those who are married with children) there is a deep disadvantage within global production systems, social norms seem to be changing. New forms of domesticity are emerging, with Madhari women—who previously had no choice but to work—now dropping out of the workforce when their children are young. While this could be interpreted as an enhancement of patriarchal controls (Irudayam et al. 2011), women seem to be negotiating the practice of these domesticity norms in plural ways, choosing from a range of possibilities according to their needs.

38 First, their early experience of paid work enables them to enter and exit the labor market as the need arises, so they are not completely dependent on their men for financial support. In fact, most Madhari women aspire to perform exclusively domestic roles only when their children are very young, and then return to work, hence making their period of "domesticity" short-lived. In conjunction, their acceptance of domesticity is shaped by the nature of paid work available. With a decline in agriculture, work opportunities mainly lie in the industrial sector, and therefore not just far from the village, but also demanding in terms of both time and work schedules. While paid labor continues to be valued, especially regular jobs as in the case of professional middle-class women, children, especially sons, are valued as an investment in future security. Hence, during the reproductive years, it is domesticity and child-care that gives women both autonomy and status.

39 Secondly, the scope of the "domestic" has expanded to include several spaces and institutions—education and health, social welfare, savings groups and community networks (Rao 2012). In fact, for women, the focus on domesticity and "looking after their children" does not imply lack of control over their mobility or confinement to the home. Rather it demonstrates the recognition that if education is to succeed as a pathway to upward mobility, then children, especially those who are first-generation learners, need adequate support. Women's sphere of influence then involves undertaking a host of tasks that facilitate childcare and child development (including keeping the children well-groomed, taking them to nursery schools and later private tuitions), as well as engagement with social and religious activities (including visiting temples) that aid social reproduction. Women's agency is here expressed through the quality of the childcare and opportunities they provide for their children, rather than employment per se. "Domesticity" then emerges as a discursive tool for negotiating conjugality and household reproduction, an option that hardly existed for them earlier. In the process, they alter its meanings, assigning to it different values in terms of knowledge and obligation (de Certeau 1984). Their everyday practices also create spaces for escape and evasion, as reflected in justifying a return to work to support the education of their children.

40 Finally, other elements of modernity also challenge patriarchal hegemony. While not discussed in this paper, access to information and ideas through television programming (distributed to every household by the State as an election sop), give greater recognition to the tasks of status production, in particular providing better education and opportunities for their children.

41 The narratives presented in this paper draw out the ambiguities in Dalit women's personal lives, the small, everyday actions undertaken to expand the spaces—physical, social and emotional—available to them for expressing their sense of self and building "respectable" identities. While appearing to conform to middle/upper caste, patriarchal ideologies of honor, shame and appropriate behavior, as embedded in notions of domesticity and motherhood, they are responding not just to the stigma of being "deficient mothers," but using this as a tool to achieve a longer-term vision of normative and social change based on conjugal loyalty and reciprocity.

42 Women are seeking here to reformulate the terms of domesticity within a changing economic and social scenario. The emphasis on reproductive work is used strategically to draw on the care and concern of their partners in order to negotiate a range of issues concerning their lives and livelihoods, be it reforming the man's drinking and smoking

practices, securing a separate dwelling, controlling household finances, or indeed the decision to join or withdraw from the workforce. There are trade-offs inherent in the choice of subject-position available to these women—as mothers, wives, workers, or just women—and these involve renegotiating definitions of work, domesticity and conjugal loyalty. Whether the focus on domesticity will ultimately negate some of the emancipatory edge from their agency remains to be seen.

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NOTES

1. All names have been changed to maintain anonymity.
2. Interview D. Gounder.
3. The upper castes make a distinction between the domestic space and outside work, devaluing women's labor outside the home, apart from norms around purity and the avoidance of pollution (Chakravarty 2003).
4. RES-167-25-0251: "The Intra-household Allocation of Resources: Cross-cultural Tests, Methodological Innovations and Policy Implications." Funded by DFID-ESRC, the project involved field-level experiments, a household survey and qualitative interviews to explore the question under consideration.
5. Age-wise literacy or work participation data is available on request.
6. This is much higher than the national-level maternity benefit, which offers women Rs 5,000 for one birth.
7. Birth control pills and other forms of contraception are not easily available to these women.
8. In her analysis of sex ratios in Tamil Nadu, Srinivasan (2015) notes that while Coimbatore and Thiruppur districts have a higher child-sex ratio than Tamil Nadu, there is a declining trend between 2001 and 2011. The sex ratios, however, vary according to caste group, with the landowning Gounders having a long history of son preference and daughter elimination. The primacy of land in this patrilineal agrarian community has led to the adoption of the small family norm and strengthened son preference. In a survey of 1,822 households in 2014, she found 755 males for 209 females in the 26+ age group, revealing a significant shortage of brides.

ABSTRACTS

Much of the literature on Dalits, and Dalit women in particular, focuses either on issues of violence, and subordination based on class, caste and gender, or the relative egalitarianism within Dalit households, which arises out of a context of shared hardship. It leaves out the contradictions and negotiations inherent in their everyday lives, of victimhood alongside the exercise of strategic life choices. In this paper, using qualitative data obtained primarily from Dalit women in rural Tamil Nadu, I draw attention to the growing emphasis on conjugal loyalty and (upper-caste) norms of domesticity within Dalit households. Reflecting normative changes based on the ideas of respectability and status, this trend appears to be consolidating new forms of patriarchy. However, contextualizing this phenomenon in relation to changes in the larger political economy, especially the significant shifts in labor relations, education, State social protection and Dalit mobilization, reveals that rather than accepting a subordinate status, Dalit women are strategically using these ideas to negotiate their sexual and reproductive entitlements, and companionate conjugality.

INDEX

Keywords: conjugality, reproduction, respectability, gender, Dalits, Tamil Nadu, India

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I link … sexual conceptions of freedom to a broader social conception, in which a battle against the new commercial, nationalist and racialised gay normality has to be integrated into a fight against the neoliberal world order. Ultimately gay normality and neoliberalism can only be defeated by attacking their roots: that is, by a queer anti–capitalism. Although queer anti–capitalism will inevitably be a convergence of different left currents, I suggest that Marxists can make a specific and crucial contribution, not only through a working–class perspective, but also by drawing on Karl Kautsky's and V.I. Lenin's commitment to fighting non–class oppression, on a global conception of the fight for economic and sexual transformation, and on socialist feminists' view of independent women's and lgbt movements as integral parts of an anti–capitalist force. All these different insights should flow together into a transformative, intersectional rainbow politics.

∽ Peter Drucker. *Warped: Gay Normativity and Queer Anti–Capitalism*. Leiden, The Netherlands, and Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV. 2015. Page 5.

… the material relations of production and reproduction constitute the fundamental matrix underlying all of social reality. It also has political implications. In the political introduction, I argued that especially in a period like this one, anti–capitalists cannot afford to neglect sexual and racial identity politics, because particularly when progressive class–based movements are weak, what are called the 'culture wars' in the us are often the wellspring of politics. This is vital in day–to–day and year–to–year struggles. But if economic long waves are ultimately determinant for the shift from one same–sex formation to another, then on a scale of decades and centuries sexual radicals cannot afford to neglect the dynamics of capitalist economies. In other words, consistent queer opponents

of homonormativity have to be at least anti–neoliberal if not anti–capitalist.

∽ Peter Drucker. *Warped: Gay Normativity and Queer Anti–Capitalism*. Leiden, The Netherlands, and Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV. 2015. Page 60.

Knoche, Manfred

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The Crisis-Ridden Capitalist Mode of Production as Driving Force for Restructurations and Transformations in and of the Media Industry. Explanatory Theoretical Elements of a Critique of the Political Economy of the Media

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Abstract: The goal of this article is to explain long term restructurations and transformations of the media industry. In order to do so, the article uses theory elements of a critique of the political economy of the media. The paper is a contribution to the development of theoretical approaches that provide a theoretical analysis of the media in capitalism based on Karl Marx's concepts. The capitalist mode of production is the primary driving force of media corporations' strategic action and of the media economy's structural transformations. Factors that are of particular relevance in such structural transformations include profit orientation, capital accumulation, capitalist crises, state policies, behaviour of producers and consumers, private property, class relations, the antagonism between productive forces and relations of production, the antagonism of variable and constant capitalism, the antagonism of use-value and exchange-value, and competition. Competition, capital's need to survive, and capitalism's immanent crisis potentials force corporations try to create innovations such as new digital technologies. Informatisation, which includes the use of the computer as universal machine and the Internet, is the provisionally latest stage in the development of the productive forces that has affected media technologies and the media industry. The capital-driven structural digital transformation of the media industry has resulted in the convergence of production, distribution and consumption, the creation of a variety of non-tangible digital products, digital rationalisation and automation, and the universal real subsumption of labour under capital. These developments have also created the potential potentials for overcoming the capitalist character of the media economy and advancing decommodification based on the emergence of a universal digital media system.

Keywords: critique of the political economy of the media, structural transformation of the media industry, capitalist mode of production, capitalist crisis, real subsumption of labour under capital, formal subsumption, digital media, digitisation, informatisation, universal medium, universalisation, productive forces, computer, computing

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1. Communication Studies' Views of the "Structural Change" of the Media

The goal of this article is to explain long-time restructuration and transformation of the media industry. In order to do so, the article takes a theoretical approach to the critique of the political economy of the media. Object of the analysis are not only traditional mass media, but also processes of change in an extended media and communications industry (see Knoche 2016).

The article proceeds from the central notion that the capitalist mode of production is the primary driving force of media corporations' strategic action as main "actors of structural transformations"[1]. Capitalist production, since it is the dominant mode of production, includes the social formation that bears its stamp, including the hegemonic forms of distribution and consumption and the manner of life pursued by members of a given society. It is in this sense that the capitalist mode of production is a 'driving force' that also offers explanations for the behaviour of advertisers, politicians and states, banks and sellers of information, in many ways, for the behaviour of the entire population. It is for these reasons that this piece attributes general theoretical 'explanatory power' to the capitalist mode of production.

According to the dialectical mode of thought and analysis developed within the Marxian critique of political economy (cf. Marx 1863-1865, 1867, 1885, 1894) and their recent further development by the approach of the New Reading of Marx (in particular, see Haug 2013, Bonefeld and Heinrich 2011, Harvey 2018, Heinrich 2011a, Hoff 2009, Elbe 2008), the capitalist mode of production is regarded as *contradictory in principle* and as essentially *in crisis*[2]. Therefore, no single linear, monocausal-determinist explanation is applied here. Instead, contradictory elements of the crisis-based capitalist mode of production will be viewed as fundamental determining factors for actions and behaviour of actors.

1.1. Critique of Traditional Ways of Thinking

The dominant use of the term "structural change of the media" signals a specific way of thinking, revealed in typical phrases like "a world of media that is changing itself", "a media system that is differentiating itself". In this manner, change is consecrated as "natural-supernatural", as *deus ex machina*, even reified as a barely explicable natural event, which comes about or takes place as a matter of fate. Accordingly, the erroneous idea is spread that companies are "affected" by change, that they have to "adjust". Continual measures of restructuration can thus appear as reaction to pre-existing change. This reversal covers up the fact that the media's structural transformation is in reality the *result* of companies' purposeful and strategic restructuring activity.

[1] The metaphor 'driving force' is used here to imply "impulse, movens, motor, motivation", in the sense of compulsion towards actions for companies and individuals. Capitalist media companies are driven drivers that drive dependant workers in order to effect "media change" in the interest of capitalist owners.

[2] The following reflections are, within the framework outlined above, only intended as a starting point for what I regard a useful application of work critical of capitalism from neighbouring disciplines to the discussion around the "structural change" of the media; work which, so far, has not been acknowledged within Communication Studies.

Much of what, within media studies, has been rashly labelled "structural transformation" – usually with reference to technological change alone – is in fact only evidence of cyclical modification of superficial phenomena[3].

1.2. The Critique of the Political Economy of the Media's Way of Thinking

In order to answer the fundamental question which modifications may be justly called "structural transformation of the media", it is necessary to take scientific analysis to a higher level of abstraction. In this way, modifications can be appreciated in their different qualities as more or less substantial, as fundamental phases of development, upheavals, transitions, substitutions or long-term tendencies. The author of this article will mostly consider empirically identifiable *restructurations* in the media industry on the level of abstraction of Marx's categories of the capitalist mode of production. With this perspective, *fundamental restructurations* regarding changing *power relations* can also be described as *transformations* of and in the media industry.

The possibility, in principle, of a (partial) *transformation of* the private sector, profit-oriented media industry's *mode of production* into a non-capitalist media production and distribution belongs to this higher level of abstraction. It includes socially relevant transformations regarding the dominant relations of production today, alongside the antagonism between the owners of the means of production and waged or "free" workers.

Finally, it is the object of a critical analysis to ask in which areas there are *no* or only *small* modifications, for example regarding relations of production that come with specific forms of property, appropriation and legal arrangements. In my view, the identification and explanation of relevant *non*-modifiations is more significant for analysis as well as for practical purposes than the usual documentation of a confusing number of less relevant phenomena of "change". Such an academic interest in knowledge could stimulate research that has the aim of recognising the ideological content of various "structural change"-narratives in terms of interest-oriented legitimacy, distraction, or attempts to mislead.

While Marx has not produced a critique of the political economy of the media, there are still, in Marx and Engels' work, there are plenty of academic foundations fitted to the task (cf. Fuchs 2011; 135ff; Fuchs 2009a, b). Yet the specificity of media production as both physical and intangible, as well as the great number of different sources of revenue within it justify, or rather, demand, the development of a distinct critique of the *media*'s political economy. Furthermore, this particular approach to the media is required because media economy fulfils a fundamental role both in the economy overall and in political ideology (cf. Knoche 2002; 2001).

The academic mode of thought that underpins the theoretical approach taken by the author of this paper can in its most general form be characterised in the following form: "all science would be superfluous if the form of appearance of things directly coincided with their essence" (Marx 1894, 956). Accordingly, the general goal is to analyse and explain multiple and various forms of appearance, on a higher level of abstraction and in a systematic-theoretical context, as essential. Marx's works are not used here as a source of incontrovertible, eternal truths, but as a valuable stimulus for the continuation of critical thinking – in the knowledge that Marx's theory, in its specific

[3] Technological "change" is even often erroneously presented as *causative actor*, as is apparent in common expressions such as 'the Internet has effects/ requires' or 'publishers have to respond to/ become fit for the internet'.

elaborations, includes some inconsistencies as a sign of its unfinished nature (cf. Heinrich 2011b).

A critical application of Marx's analytical method serves the *theoretically led, empirical analysis and explanation* of media production, distribution and consumption. A critique of the political economy of the media, under application of Marx's method as a unit and application of a historically focused analysis of form, structure, action, actor, process and function, can meet the requirements of a basic theory in Communication Studies. To meet the demands of a conventional empirical assessment in its strictest form is, however – as generally in capitalism – near-impossible, especially given that capitalist enterprises, protected by law as private entities, make excessive use of trade secrets. Instead, this attempt at theoretical explanation will build on the *structural empirical method* of identifying how the logic of capital links empirically identifiable structural phenomena and processes of differentiation.[4]

2. Explanatory Models

2.1. The Capitalist Mode of Production's Tendency Towards Crisis

In principle, the individual strategic behaviour of a given enterprise – in the interest of the owners of capital and in cooperation with government actors – is the main active cause, the "trigger" of processes of restructuration and transformation. Accordingly, they can explain structural transformation in an *immediate* fashion. Yet, at the same time, these patterns of behaviour and of action are *mediated* and *prepared*, *generally conditioned* and *prearranged*, if *not predetermined in the individual case*, by the structural, social and societal conditions and initial constellations of the crisis-ridden capitalist mode of production[5]. Given that capitalist media enterprises strive permanently to maximise profits (by the valorisation of capital via value-added production on the basis of private ownership of the means of production), they certainly remain under the structural pressure of contradictory laws of movement of capital, and most of all, under the pressure of competition (as essential to the driving force of the capitalist mode of production) to an extent that generally leaves little room for manoeuvre. "Marx shows how the processes of production are, in capitalist society, incessantly transformed under the impetus of the principal driving force of that society, the accumulation of capital" (Braverman 1974/1998, 6).

The following principal *driving forces* (and therefore scientific *components of explanation*) can be distinguished in general terms:

- the basic requirements of the capitalist mode of production to which the media industry is subject to the same extent as other industries;
- specific factors emerging from the crises of the capitalist mode of production that, modified by the initial historical situation of individual media enterprises, effect problems with the valorisation of media capital and are interlinked with enduring processes of capitalist restructuration;

[4] Adherents of Popper's principle of falsification may therefore choose to consider my theoretical attempts at explanation as hypotheses that can claim validity until the point were they will be empirically falsified.

[5] Crisis is an *enduring* and *essential* element of capitalist production. Crisis and change condition each other in a permanent process. It is therefore academically quite shortsighted when a book title asks "media change or media crisis?" (*Medienwandel oder Medienkrise?)* and thereby opposes change and crisis and reducs the media crisis to a funding crisis or even to a funding crisis of newspapers (cf. Jarren et al. 2012, 11ff., 165ff.).

- strategies of companies that have to date acted outside the media industry, which are now built up as new media enterprises in order to exploit favourable opportunities for profit maximisation;
- strategies of the advertising sector;
- interaction with the "unleashing tendencies" of the state's economic (media) policy (privatisation, deregulation, the promotion of concentration, judicial policy etc.);
- patterns of behaviour by members of society as consumers or producers with different agendas: a thus far dominant majority that does or would like to participate in the "structural change" afforded by the capitalist mode of production ("sharing", "prosumers"), or a minority that adds non-capitalist elements (non-commercial production and distribution, e.g. as public goods or creative commons).

As a general rule, the specifics of elements in a given mode of production characterise the social formation attached to it (cf. Resch/Steinert 2011, 41ff). Marx articulated the characteristics of the capitalist mode of production, in the first instance, in order to distinguish epochs of different dominant social formations alongside different historical modes of production (of antiquity, Asia, feudalism). From this perspective, the capitalist mode of production appears broadly *constant/ unvarying*. That said, Marx also pointed to a *periodisation* within capitalism on the basis of significant *transformations* of the capitalist mode of production. These ideas are taken up now, within the critique of capitalism in the contemporary discussion, even with a view to the possibility of a *transition* to a non-capitalist mode of production via transformation (transcendence) or revolution (cf. Haug 2008).

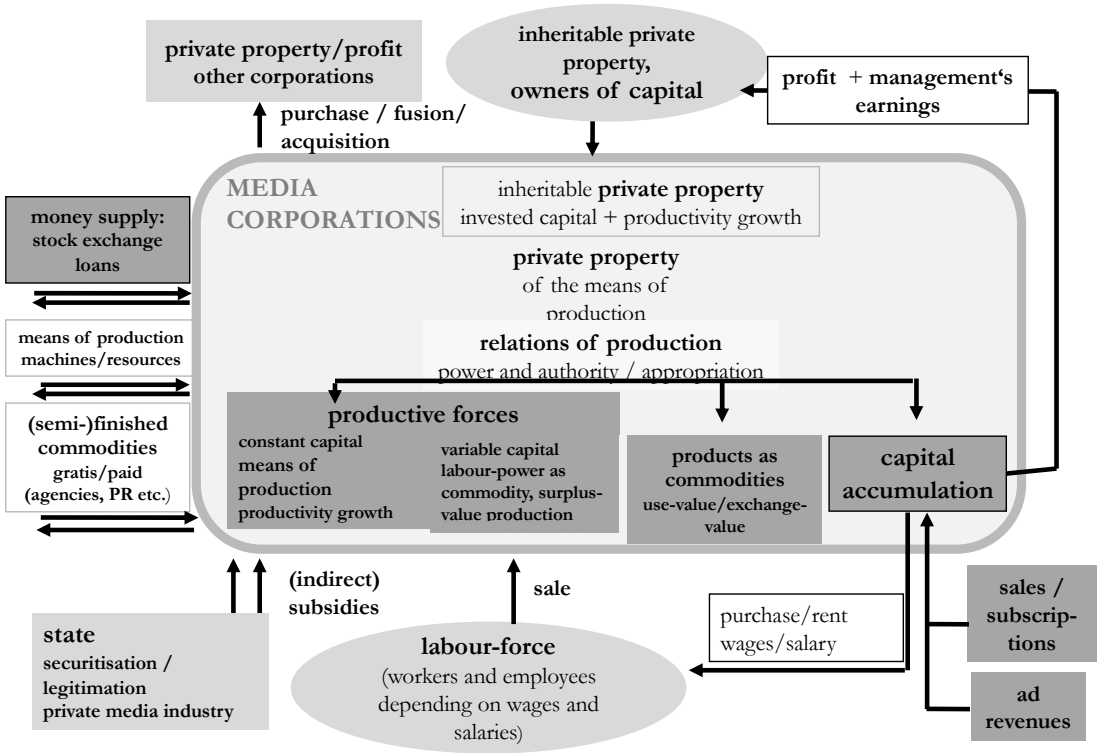

Figure 1: The capitalist mode of production in the media industry

For the owners of capital, what is at stake is thus also to effect suitable *modifications*

of the capitalist mode of production to *prevent* transformations directed against their interests. In their stead, and as a matter of principle, they only initiate restructurations and transformations that optimise the valorisation of capital and secure the relations of capital as well as the capitalist social formation. In this way, the process of formal and real subsumption of society under capital is expedited (cf. Brandt 1990, 181-, 254ff; Schmiede 1989; 2006; Mendner 1975; Marx 1863-1865, 1019-1038; Marx 1867, 645). The main determining factors (driving forces) for long-term restructuration- and transformation activity are the following, broadly *constant* elements (see Figure 1) of the necessarily crisis-driven capitalist mode of production:

- the protection by law of (inheritable) private ownership of the means of production and its goal, the accumulation of capital for the sake of profit maximisation;
- the relations of production as the rule of owners of capital over workers (power of disposal over labour-power as commodity and appropriation of the surplus value generated);
- the exclusive right to determine the goals of production and the accordant use of capital;
- the appropriation of products by the owners of property.

We find the following principal, *variable*, crisis-ridden elements of the capitalist mode of production:

- the antagonistic interdependency of the productive forces and the relations of production;
- within productive forces, a contradictory relation of constant (means of productions) and variable capital (workers);
- the contradiction between the use values and exchange values of commodities;
- the realisation of surplus value and exchange value (rate/sum of accumulation and profit)
- the stabilisation of the mode of production via the cooperation of owners of capital and state.

The driving force of *competition* is the essential component of the capitalist mode of production. Competition forces all enterprises to engage in fundamental and wide-ranging restructuration and transformation as key method to get ahead in the permanent battle for hegemony, especially via the restructuration of productive forces.

2.2. The Dialectic of Productive Forces and Relations of Production

The capitalist mode of production is marked by a dynamic interrelationship between historically specific productive forces and relations of production. Due to unclear and ambiguous statements by Marx on the topic (e.g. Marx 1847, 165-166) it remains a matter of dispute which of the two elements is dominant in their relation to each other, and beyond, which is decisive in the development of the capitalist mode of production and capitalism as a social formation. Marx's emphasis on the primacy of material productive forces has, for some, evoked the controversial idea of automatic revolution once productive forces reach a particular level of development:

> At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the

> framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution (Marx 1859, 263).

In contrast, this article considers relations of production as relations of rule, and the actions by owners of capital that are based on it as the decisive driving force for the development of productive forces (means of production and labour). Productive forces under capitalism are often developed in such a way that the technological development of means of production becomes an essential *means* for the increase of *labour productivity*. The restructuration of the production process, which takes the form of reorganisation and control of the labour process, becomes possible on the basis of the means of production, and with it, an increase in labour intensity. In principle, this also effects a modification of the relations of production, in that they effect modifications in the power relations between owners of capital and the workforce. Such modifications can, depending on the kind and significance of the increase or loss of power[6], be finally considered as relevant modifications of the capitalist mode of production and the capitalist social formation (the transformation of capitalism).

2.3. The Compulsion to Innovate and Produce: Structural Overaccumulation, Overcapacities and Overproduction

Capital, usually copiously accumulated ("overaccumulation"), forces competing enterprises to innovate and to produce, with the aim to avoid the (usually latent) threat of a crisis that might lead to the reduction of surplus value and rates of profit and so the devaluation or destruction of capital. Independently from this pressure, strategies of innovation are implemented in order to further the concentration of capital and markets[7].

Problems of structural overaccumulation generally consist of the amassing of *too much* capital, in the sense that surplus capital cannot be exploited with an appropriate rate of profit. It is a fact that, in the decades after 1989, media enterprises were able to temper their problems of overaccumulation by expanding to the formerly socialist countries. But, at the same time, the attendant accelerated increase of capital still exacerbated those problems. Structural overaccumulation, and the overcapacity and overproduction that come with it, are expressions of the contradictory nature of the capitalist mode of production (cf. Kisker 1997).

[6] We might place the discussion regarding the autonomy or dependency of journalists in this context.

[7] The usual means to solve overaccumulation problems, or to prevent them in the first place, are the buying and selling of companies and shares in companies, concentration activities, as well as the opening up of new lines of business.

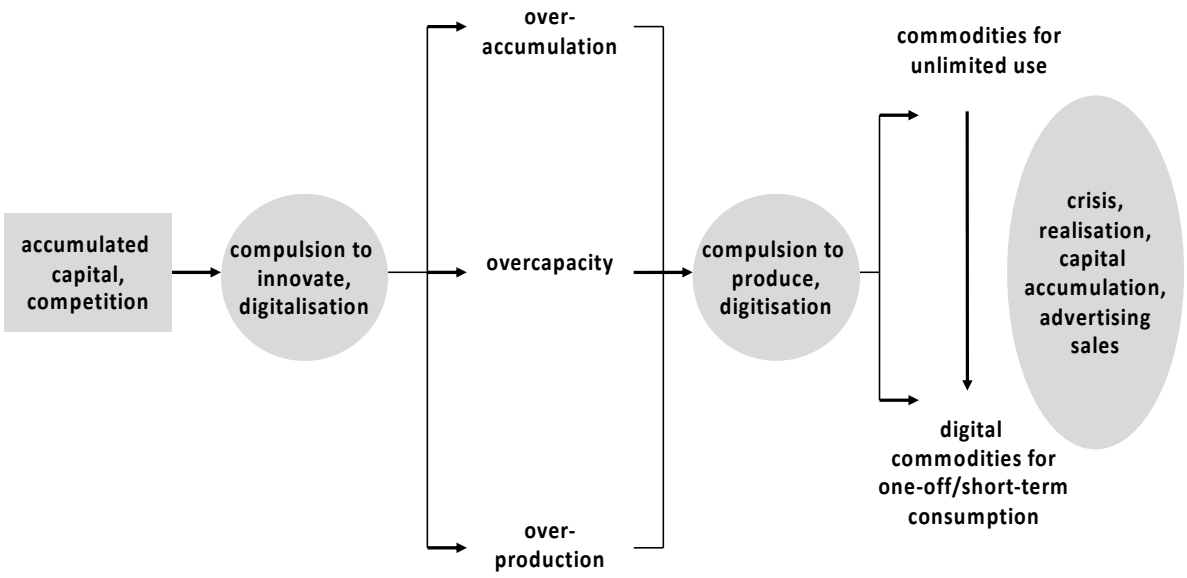

Figure 2: Capitalism's immanent, permanent crisis-ridden structural overaccumulation: the compulsion to innovate and produce in the example of digitisation

Accordingly compelled to increase innovation and production (see Figure 2), the entire media industry produces as many digital commodities for one-off or short-term consumption as possible, so that individual media enterprises will inevitably, if to a variable extent, suffer crises in the realisation of accumulated capital via insufficient proceeds from sales and/or advertising.

3. The Media Industry's Restructurations

Within the framework of a critique of the political economy of the media, the author in this article seeks theoretical explanations on the basis of elements of the capitalist mode of production; these explanations are focused, under application of Marx's terms and categories, on the fundamental processes of long term "structural change" in and of the media industry that take the shape of restructurations and transformations[8]. In what follows, these will, by *systematic abstraction*, be categorised as *substantial modifications in form and formation*, driven principally by the strategies of media enterprises "as a gradual and diversified process of restructuration" (Dolata and Schrape 2013, 8). Current modifications in the media industry are centred on processes that can be understood as "catch-up industrialisation and tendencies towards the Taylorisation of intellectual labour" (Teschner and Hermann 1981, 129).[9]

In the first instance, I focus my analysis of such long-term *transitional* processes on three essential and interrelated *entrepreneurial areas of restructuration* (all conditioned by the capitalist mode of production): a continual, principally technologically mediated

[8] Economically, restructuration is understood as "a non-crisis causing, planned and focused modification of organisational structures, processes and systems to the end of increasing effectiveness and efficiency" (http://www.daswirtschaftslexikon.com/d/restrukturierung/restrukturierung.htm (16.4.13)). Restructuration is more comprehensive than the equally common term reorganisation.

[9] Accordingly, there is also a required catch-up in industrialisation in scholarly reflections within Communication Studies as well as in the consciousness of media workers.

restructuration of *productive forces*, connected to modified restructurations of the *relations of production* and the *capitalist mode of production* in the interest of the valorisation of capital. Media owners drive these transitional processes in individual competition with each other, as they pursue the same interests that all owners of capital in all industries and branches of industry, but also in partial cooperation in the common interest of all owners of capital (for example regarding waged workers, consumers and the state).

3.1. The Productive Forces: Universal Informatisation and Universal Automation

The driving force of the capitalist mode of production becomes especially apparent in the continual restructuration of productive forces (means of production and the labour force's manner of working) that is an existential requirement for the owners of capital. These restructurations are a basic method to increase, in the interest of capital, productivity, distribution and consumption. It is for this reason that the development of productive forces is often regarded as the main indicator for the distinction of historical levels of development in the capitalist mode of production. This approach is also expressed in terms like "highly technological mode of production" or "high-tech-capitalism" (cf. Haug 2005; Ohm and Haug 2004; Haug 2012; 2008; 2003).

Likewise, the "outline for a theory of the productive force of the media" divides the development of communication technologies as productive forces of communication (art, culture, media) into consecutive phases of transformation and formal modification as graphic, electronic and digital "media metamorphoses" (cf. Smudits 2002, 73ff.). A process seen as related is the continuing industrialisation of cultural activity, which comes with a transition from a purely formal subsumption under the capitalist mode of production to a real one (cf. Smudits 2002, 146ff.).

Over the last few decades, one can observe in the media industry, just as in the rest of society, a discernible development of "informatisation as productive force" (Boes and Kämpf 2012); that is, the restructurations of processes of production and labour are based on the integral use of microelectronics and the internet (cf. Sauer 2006, 89). This process is even considered by some German sociologists of labour and industry as "a structural transformation of the mode of production" (Schmiede 1996, 15). The term "informatisation" denotes a social development of the productive forces within which intellectual activities (intellectual labour) are subjugated, via computerisation with client-server-conceptions and the Internet as a worldwide "space of information", to the capitalist industrial process of production and exploitation in the form of "real wage labour" to denote a "new phase of capitalism" (Boes and Kämpf 2012, 317, 326).

In comparison to the previous period of mechanisation, the separation of manual and intellectual work tends to be reversed. Intellectual work is no longer organised according to individual capacity vouched for by qualifications, but is instead integrated into processes supported by computer software (computerisation of intellectual labour). This also facilitates new possibilities for the control of labour and the production process, but most of all the direction of production towards the market, which comes to pass as the valorisation-oriented, flexible standardisation of production by automation (cf. Benz-Overhage et al. 1982). In this way, "services by individual subjects that, until this point, had escaped capitalist control, are by virtue of the productive forces' new structure, newly integrated into capitalist valorisation processes" (Boes and Kämpf 2012, 330).

Finally, the restructuration of technological productive forces also serves as a means to stabilise or modify the relations of production as relations of domination or

dependency. As a consequence of the de-individualisation as well as the de-qualification of workers, effected by the use of computers as universal machines for the far-reaching automatisation of production, in the context of the situation on the labour market where we find the tendency of journalists becoming “superfluous and a substantial “industrial reserve army” (unemployment, precariat), power relations are altered significantly in favour of capital at the negative expense of waged and freelance journalists (cf. Schmiede 1996, 44-45).

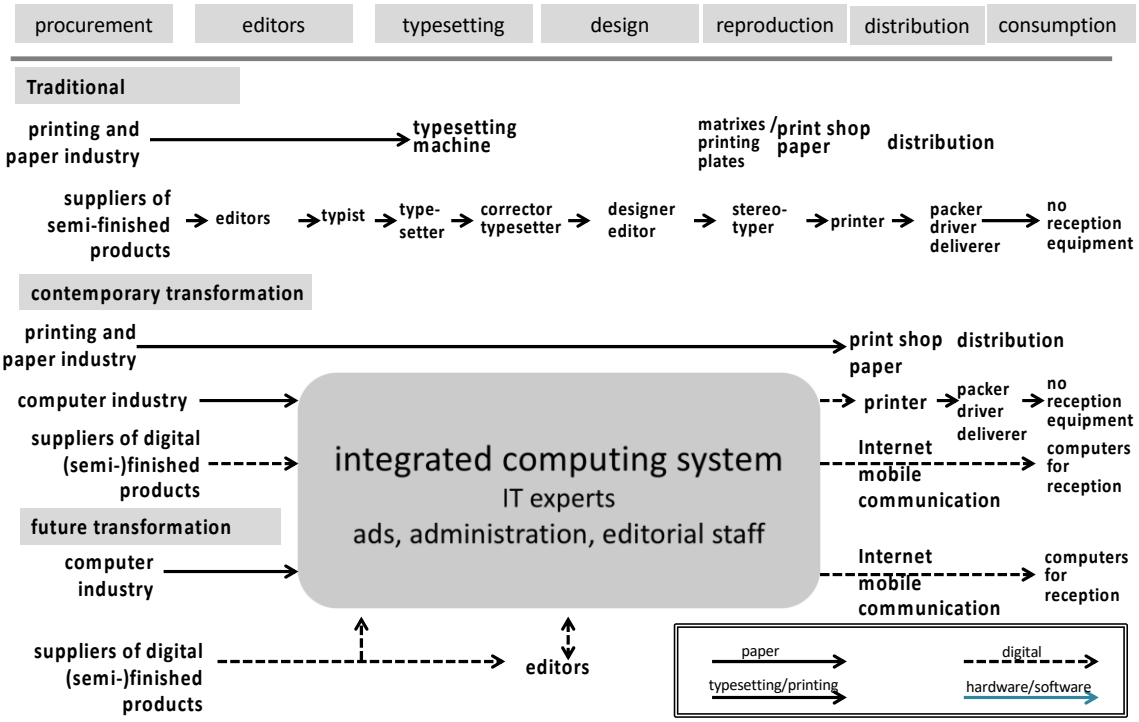

Figure 3: The restructuration of the productive forces in respect to media production, media distribution, and media consumption

This is why, since the 1970s, the restructuration of productive forces (see Figure 3) has been driven by publishing houses in a continual process initially only *inside companies*. Weischenberg (1982) already described this process in its early phase as “technological change of the media”, characterised by mechanisation, automation, informatisation, rationalisation and Taylorisation. This restructuration took its course over several phases, initially against the futile resistance of typesetters, printers and journalists. Figure 3 sketches the three phases of restructuration:

- First, the starting point of the traditional means of production and organisation of labour: only material production with composing room, page make-up, reproduction (print and paper) and distribution. The means of production are controlled by the print- and paper-industry.
- Second, the restructuration as transitional period, during which the means of production are controlled by print- and paper industry *as well as* by the computer industry. Even in this early phase traditional physicall production was already gradually digitalised (only printing without plate and distribution as “remainder” of material production), but production was still confined to physical publishing products. Yet, many workers from traditional professions in physical industrial production were rendered obsolete alongside the corresponding steps in the production process. During

the rest of this stage of restructuration, physical/tangible and intangible (digital) production were conducted on the basis of separate production processes in a complementary manner[10].

- Third, the already foreseeable, future transformation of productive forces, which will be defined by the total dismantling of traditional means of production and the transition to exclusively intangible production. The computing industry alone will dictate the means of productions. Some media enterprises have already concluded this transition for some of their products, the rest are currently still working on the integration of physical/tangible and intangible production.

3.2. The Relations of Production: The Universal Real Subsumption of Labour Under Capital

The "driving force" of the capitalist mode of production is rendered visible in the continual attempts by owners of capital to pursue the real subsumption of labour under capital via the restructuration of productive forces. This means that production- and labour processes are increasingly fine-tuned to the valorisation interests of capital. Within the context of this continual expansive capitalisation of the media industry, the formal and real subsumption under capital also presses ahead in areas of art and culture (painting, sculpture, photography, theatre, opera, concerts, dance, museums etc.) as well as of the Internet and of individual communication (including "social media") that had so far been only marginally affected or not subsumed at all (cf. Knoche 2001; cf. Smudits 2002, 146ff.)

Marx distinguishes between formal and real subsumption, first, in order to differentiate the capitalist mode of production from the pre-capitalist (feudal) mode of production, and second, in order to show the phases of development of the former[11]. For Marx, the real subsumption of labour under capital results in the emergence of the "*specifically capitalist form of production*" (Marx 1863-1865, 1024). There are some problems with the criteria Marx uses to distinguish between formal and real subsumption, particularly regarding the differentiation between absolute (increase of work time) and relative (intensification of work) production of surplus value and the development of the productive forces of manufacturing and (big) industry. For Mendner, it is clear that "the real subsumption of labour under capital was conducted since its beginnings and did not have to wait for the technological adequacy of the means of production in the shape of machines. Real subsumption does not only take place in the phase dominated by relative production of surplus value" (Mendner 1975, 33).

It therefore makes sense that Mendner distinguishes only two phases of real subsumption according to the development of productive forces: a phase of mechanisation and a phase of automation.

By contrast, Herkommer and Bierbaum (1979, 159), on the one hand point out that "formal subsumption always remains the basis of capitalist production", and on the other state that "the extension of the work day as a method for the extraction of (absolute) surplus value is not limited to the so-called phase of formal subsumption".

In the 1970s and 80s, Marx's theory of formal/real subsumption was the foundation of theoretically led, extensive empirical study in industrial sociology at the Frankfurt

[10] Currently many media enterprises are increasing the integration of physical and intangible production.

[11] Subsumption signifies the direct subordination/submission of labour or labourers as waged workers, and more generally of the production and labour process under the conditions for the valorisation of capital (production of surplus value).

Institute for Social Research (cf. Eichler et al. 2010; Brandt 1990; 1984; Schmiede 1989; Institut für Sozialforschung 1981)[12]. Most cited was the modification of the theory by Sohn-Rethel (1972; 1978). That said, the proposal was substantially revised on the basis of empirical study, as well as on a theoretical basis by Sohn-Rethel himself, especially in terms of the original "revolutionary-theoretical" assumption of an "alternative, system-transcending formal law" (Brandt 1981, 46).

Schütt, in his application of the theory of formal/real subsumption to the early phase (1970s) of the restructuration of productive forces at press enterprises, that is, the computerised material production via computer-based word processing systems, suggests that the subsumption of journalistic labour under the capitalist press remains merely *formal*, since they brought "no qualitative, but merely organisational modifications of the labour process" (Schütt 1981, 99). Journalistic labour, according to Schütt, was "principally determined, due to its material characteristics, by the subjective capacities of the journalist" (Schütt 1981, 99). He assumes, in the traditional manner, that there is a distinction between mental and material production. Even though, in discussing the introduction of computer-controlled word processing, he describes many features that, according to Marx's criteria are markers of real subsumption, he does not recognise the transition to real subsumption. Schütt's conclusion is based on the neglect of various relevant features of real subsumption for the sole focus on manual labour/ manufacturing, which Marx had listed, amongst others, as a marker of formal subsumption.

In contrast, Jansen (1983, 216, 236, 252, 256) at least recognises "moments of real subsumption" in the introduction of computer-controlled word processing, that is, the productivity-enhancing restructuration of journalistic work (integration of intellectual and manual work) that produces relative surplus value.

According to the most relevant criterion of *immediate* subsumption under the conditions of capital valorisation, real subsumption in truth begins with the wage dependency of journalists and their fitting into the division-of-labour-based, industrial capitalist production and valorisation process. Since then, three stages of the *gradual intensification* of real subsumption regarding the criterion of the progressive informatisation (automation, abstraction of labour) of journalistic production can be identified. In these three stages, the restructuration or transformation of technological means of production are decisive means towards the "revolution" of the productive forces (with the increase of labour productivity), and towards those of the relations of production (organisation and control of labour):

- 1970s: electronic, in-house, computer-based word processing as well as the cross-company electronic computer-controlled news communication facility of the German Press Agency (DPA),
- 1980s: microelectronic, cross-company, integrated content management systems (workflow control for editing, adverts, technology, controlling, marketing, supply chain, sales monitoring, total quality management etc.),

[12] This period at the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, during which Gerhardt Brand was Theodor Adorno's successor as director of the institute between 1972 and 1984, and which saw scientific research led by Marx's work, is completely neglected in the available and substantial histories of the Frankfurt School (cf. Eichler et al. 2010, 164).

- 1990s onwards: Internet-based, microelectronic, cross-company, integrated content management systems with automated cross media publishing, dynamic publishing, digital publishing, multi-format publishing etc.[13]

Even the apparently precapitalist mode of production by apparently "self-employed" or "freelance" workers as "owners of the means of production" and individual "free sellers of commodities" is no advantage in the case of "merely" formal subsumption, since, via the integration into the content management system, they are subsumed under capital in a "quasi-real" fashion. What becomes apparent is a double strategy of media capital: one the one hand, to exploit the advantages of real subsumption of a variable, constantly reduced "core staff", whilst on the other to avoid the aspects of real subsumption that are potentially disadvantageous for owners of capital (pay rate agreements, labour committees, potential processes of identification by workers, acts of solidarity, collective action etc.) by outsourcing and offshoring. This combination of formal and real subsumption, which, via universal computer technology, is a form of *universal-real* subsumption, is the basis of the optimal valorisation of capital, particularly via the minimisation of wages or payment for waged and "free" labour facilitated by it.

3.3. The Capitalist Mode of Production's Dialectic of Universal Real Subsumption Under Capital and "Potentials of Liberation"

In the first instance, the described processes of restructuration that result in a universal-real subsumption of labour under capital provide the foundation for the increased prosperity of established and new media enterprises and for further concentration processes of. But there also are contradictions in the development that can be regarded in terms of their "liberation potential" to partially overcome the capitalist mode of production.[14] They include:

- the dismantling of structural production and distribution monopolies of capitalist media enterprises (that previously facilitated the exclusion of "non-commercial", "free", "alternative" media production) via miniaturisation, reduction in cost and standardisation of digital means of production, distribution and consumption, as well as the enormous reduction in cost (fixed and variable) for production and distribution; in relation to this, reduced dependency on investment capital (as there no longer is a dependency on capital intensive industrial machinery in traditional media sectors);
- the dismantling of structural "gatekeeper" monopolies previously held by capitalist media enterprises by direct communication with consumers that circumvents media enterprises via news, PR and advertising agencies, enterprises, political parties, state institutions, social organisations etc.

4. The Media Industry's Transformation

Beyond the restructurations discussed so far, substantial and fundamental restructurations can also be seen as substantial qualitative transformations. These are most apparent with a view to modifications in the *form of media products*, the *form of capital valorisation* and of *media formation*. This is also the area were the particularities of the

[13] In the US, 'robot journalism', that is, mechanically generated production of text by programmes like 'narrative science' for sport, finances and real estate are already trialled (cf. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 4 April 2012 – http://www.faz.net/-hbj-6yw8g (accessed on 29 October 2019)

[14] For more details on '"iberation potentials" see Knoche 2014.

media industry that set it apart from other industries become apparent. Regulated in the interest of the dominant owners of capital, these transformations will remain only partial transformations so long as complementary forms of capital valorisation based on complementary forms of products can bring overall higher profits than a total transformation.[15]

4.1. The Media Product Form: Universal Dephysicalisation, Universal Detemporalisation, Universal Despatialisation

The technologically mediated general modifications of media products via digitalisation is of a fundamental nature, and such that the characterisation of this modification as a transformation that reaches beyond individual restructuration appears justified. That said, and against the over-the-top, often misleading ideological use of terms like "immaterial" or "dematerialisation" regarding labour, production, goods or even the entire economy, it is necessary to define what precisely is different in media products today in comparison to their traditional forms (cf. Haug 2003, 97ff.).

The content production of texts, music, etc. has as "intellectual" production always been "immaterial". What is modified is merely the form of their material reproduction/duplication as they are materialised on carriers like paper, CD, etc. A detachment from carriers has taken place since the beginning of radio and television. But the necessity of materialisation as condition for the consumption of "immaterial" products has principally remained. This materialisation has been limited to consumer devices.

In essence, the current transformation of the forms taken by media products that were traditionally books, the press, audio, video and film is only a "catch-up development" in comparison with radio and television. As a consequence, the transfer to physical (intermediate) carriers and thus the physicality of the products are eliminated and the physicalisation/objectification, novel for books and the press, is focused on devices of use.

The fundamental novelty/otherness of modified media products lies, and this also applies to the electronic media radio and television, in their universalisation via digitalisation and their consequent dephysicalisation, detemporalisation, and despatialisation. On this basis, new forms of "immaterial" labour (for example "online journalism", "prosumers") and new forms of consumption ("interactivity") are developed via their materialisation on new forms of consumer devices. What is fundamentally new also becomes apparent in the attendant transformation's modification of the conditions for the valorisation of capital that are the reason for these transformations of media products. For example, on the basis of:

- convergence of hitherto separate *forms* of communication text, audio, image, sound, language, audio vision into universal forms of communication with additional, more complex html-based forms of communication (blogs, postings, links, animations, interactivity etc.);
- abolition of the distinction between press products according to rhythms of publication (daily, weekly etc.) and forms of publication (newspapers, magazines etc.) and replacement of it with "24 hour real time journalism" that is equally permanent and independent of place and time for everyone (as already the case in news agencies);

[15] It is in this way that the staging of a nervous search for 'new business models' as the supposed main problem of ' structural media transformation' is misleading, a manipulation by enterprises and an error committed by those who believe and reiterate it. (cf. Knoche 2014).

- automated production for diverse universal consumer devices (PC, smartphone, tablet etc.) “without metabolism”, that is, without expensive and carrier-specific physical duplication and distribution.

The fundamental significance of the transformation of the media product form for media enterprises becomes especially clear with a view to the unique possibilities for the valorisation of capital that it creates: only one original must be produced and then acts as universal, original digital copy. The sale of this original does not include a change of owner, or a time-limited change of hands as in the sale or renting out of physical (media) products; instead, the original remains, regardless of the number of reproductions (downloads) the property of the producing media enterprise. It thus is neither sold nor used up.

4.2. The Form of the Valorisation of Capital: Systemic Rationalisation and Capital Accumulation in the Context of the Modification of the Media Product Form

Typical for capitalism’s most recent development is a general move towards *systemic rationalisation* as a phase of continual enterprise reorganisation, including increase in flexibility, integration and networking based in a comprehensive informatisation of production and distribution processes (cf. Sauer 2006). The use of developed information and communication technologies serves the central purpose of achieving a radical reduction of production cost and a stabilisation/increase of the rate and extent of profit by *systemic rationalisation*. This goal is decisively met by a technology-based restructuration of the mode and organisation of labour and the resulting increase of productivity.

Integrated content management systems, used as computer-, Internet- and mobile network based *universal* instruments of production, direction and control, are applied more than thus far to orient the content of media products towards the demands of the market, also regarding submission to the political and cultural editorial line that takes the form of automatised factual constraints. So even journalist become, more than hitherto, a systemically integrated “driving force of the process of valorisation”, even as they maintain their traditional sense of self in terms of subjective freedom, autonomy, self-directed work or even their view of themselves as able critics (Baukrowitz 2006, 112).

With the use of computer technology, capital succeeds in the realm of the media industry in *substantial contrast* to other industries to radically lower the costs for procurement, production and distribution by focusing on the creation of “immaterial”/intangible online products. The fixed and variable costs per single unit of an intangible commodity converge towards zero. And capital also succeeds in radically lowering fixed constant capital (the costs of the means of production) because there is no longer a need for the printing/reproduction and distribution of physical products. Furthermore, a structural modification of the organic composition of (fixed constant) capital can be realised by increasing the share of the means of production as constant capital in relation to the share of labour-power as variable capital. This change of the organic composition of capital is usually achieved by reducing the number of workers whose labour-power is replaced by production technologies. At a whole, these developments create in comparison to all industries focused on physical production (e.g. the car industry) a *unique* foundation for the increase of the rate and mass of profit.

In particular specialised companies in the media sector producing the “classical” carrier media of the press and books face the economic and political necessity to un-

dertake transformations in the form of *systemic rationalisation.* In the realm of the carrier media of audio, video and film, there is an attenuated necessity for such rationalisation . In the realm of the already largely digitised electronic transmission media of radio and television, this necessity is further attenuated.

Because of the necessarily high importance of the role that the applied media technologies play as instruments of rationalisation, the profit-maximising industry producing means of production (that is moved by the driving force of the capitalist mode of production) exerts an elementary, strong pressure. This industry produces universal digital media technologies that are media companies' means of production as well as uniform means of production and consumption for producers and consumers. These universal digital technologies are *unitedly universal* for all realms of society, which constitutes one of the main tendencies of the media industry's transformation.

Accordingly, the actions of the industries that provide the means of production, distribution and consumption – also driven by the capitalist mode of production – emerge as real "driving force" behind the actions of media enterprises. Especially print media enterprises are correctly identifying their chance to solve acute or foreseeable capital valorisation problems not only through enormous reductions of costs (investment capital, fixed productions costs and especially the variable cost of reproduction and distribution). [16] But also – and this has so far not been duly acknowledged – by immense increases in proceeds.[17] Further means for the stabilisation or increase in profits are:

- an enormous intensification of journalists' labour in the form of increased work quotas, achieved by technologically facilitated increase in the rate of labour, modifications in the organisation of labour, but also by unpaid "over-time" (cf. Fuchs 2005);
- a radical reduction in production time as well as in the timed needed for the circulation of goods and capital;
- the integration of ecommerce, marketing, advertisement and social media (marketing and prosumers);
- a shift of distribution costs from media enterprises to consumers (costs for device technology with short innovation cycles, transmission costs for internet and mobile communication) on the basis of a universalised, digital technological infrastructure for production, distribution and consumption;
- the transformation of hitherto long-term *use of goods* (media technology and content) into short-term *consumption* via limited access rights (e.g. streaming, automatic deletion of downloads, copyright restrictions etc.), strategies for short cycles of product innovation in combination with *inbuilt obsolescence* (cf. Knoche 2005), and the conversion of bundle-based goods (newspaper, magazine, CD, DVD etc.) towards individual items of *piece goods* (texts, articles, individual tracks of music etc.) sold or rented out individually.

4.3. Media Formation: The Universal Form of Production, Distribution and Consumption and the Universalisation of the Media Industry

Media enterprises conduct the transformation of the media formation via the universalisation of the media industry (Knoche 2016). This universalisation comes alongside a

[16] Current complaints by publishers about reduced turnover are thus in no way and indication of reduced profit.

[17] So, the technologically based modifications of the capitalist mode of production, actively pursued by enterprises of the extended media industry, also facilitates the new profitable 'business models' (cf. Knoche 2014).

restructuration or dismantling of traditionally separate media sectors, in particular regarding carrier media. The dismantling particular affects parts of business and trade capital bound up with the traditional distribution of carrier media (wholesalers, book trade, CD trade, rentals etc.). It goes hand in hand with the subsumption of work which had hitherto been unproductive for media industry capital, and which has now been 'transformed' into productive labour (Braverman 1974/1998; Marx 1862-1865).

In the current transitional phase, there is a push for the universalisation of the media industry. It takes the form of a successive restructuration of media communication, from traditional carrier or transmission media (production, distribution, consumption) to *universal* online and mobile communication (see Figure 4). The distribution of uniformly universal, digitalised media products again proceeds via various *universal* transmission networks (digital-electronic broadband cable – and wireless networks, especially internet and mobile telephony). Consumption takes place via combined, diverse *universal* consumption devices (Internet TV, PC/ notebook, tablet and smartphone).

This integration of sectors in the media- and communication industry via *partial* universalisation on the levels of production, distribution and consumption is pursued, during the transitional phase, as complementarity (multiple valorisation) of traditional and universal media alongside each other, but leads up to the establishment of central world wide *universal media* in the form of media portal or platforms to the ends of the *substitution* of carrier media book, news press, audio, video and film. Established large enterprises, which had already been restructured as multi-media corporations for some time, are forced to push ahead with these universalisation processes in intensified competition with each other, as well as with the new, highly capitalised large enterprises that are already fully universalised.

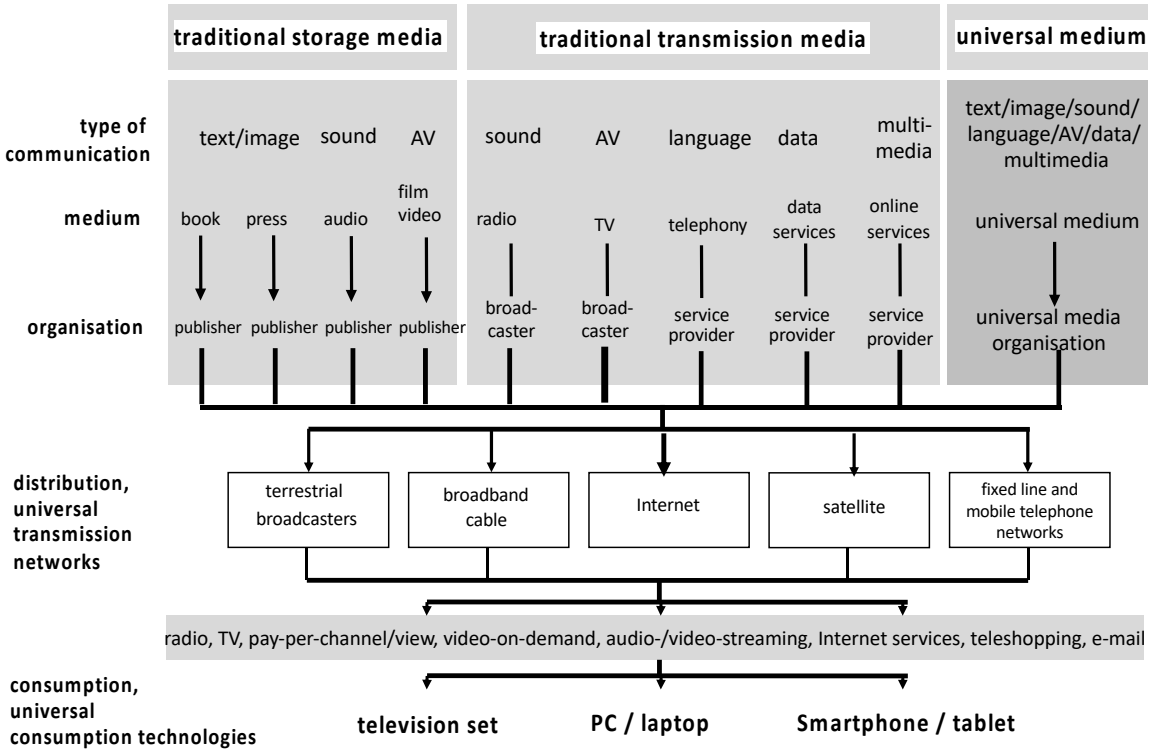

Figure 4: The transformation of the media formation: the media industry's partial universalisation

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Locke also has a principle - we should notice - which limits the volume of goods that may be accumulated to that quantity which can be properly used or disposed of. A person 'offended against the Law of Nature' if he allowed the things in his possession to spoil or perish 'without their due use' (25). What is the rationale of this provision, if not that the spoilage of goods is to be deplored just in case the needs or interests that some have in those goods remain unsatisfied? After all, decay is an integral part of natural cycles, and is hardly contrary to the 'Law of Nature' in itself. The rationale of the principle is surely that accumulation is to be limited by the consideration that none should be deprived, by the greed of others, of the means to satisfy their needs and legitimate interests. To take this seriously, however, is to leave liberalism far behind.

25 Locke, op.cit., Section 37.

Rousseau is a better guide than are the Libertarians to the moral status and implications of the institutions of private property:

> The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying 'This is mine,' and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars, and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows: 'Beware of listening to this imposter; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody (26).

26 J.-J. Rousseau, A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, p192 (in The Social Contract and Discourses, trans. and ed. G.D.H. Cole, London, 1968).

Forces of Production and Relations of Production in Socialist Society

Sean Sayers

I Introduction

It seems evident that class differences and class struggle continue to exist in socialist societies; that is to say, in societies like the Soviet Union and China, which have undergone socialist revolutions and in which private property in the means of production has been largely abolished. I shall not attempt to prove this proposition here; rather it will form my starting point. For my purpose in this paper is to show how the phenomenon of class in socialist society can be understood and interpreted in Marxist terms; and, in particular, to explain and expound Mao Zedong's attempt to do so. For one of Mao's most striking and important contributions to Marxism was his recognition that 'contradictions among the people' continue to exist in socialist society, and his attempt to explain them within the theoretical framework of historical materialism.

Marx outlines his account of historical development in the following well-known words:

> It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary it is their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or - what is merely a legal expression for the same thing - with the property relations within the framework of which they have hitherto operated. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. At that point an era of social revolution begins. With the change in the economic foundation the whole immense superstructure is more slowly or more rapidly transformed.
> (Marx, Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy)

It has been common to interpret these words as expressing a simple form of economic or even technological determinism which would rule out the very possibility of class divisions continuing to be a fundamental feature of socialist society. For, according to this account, a socialist society, by abolishing the private ownership of the means of production, thereby abolishes the material and economic basis of class differences; and so classes are destined to die out in socialist society as the forces of production are developed.

According to this interpretation, which I shall call

1 This is a revised and much expanded version of a paper which appeared originally in China Policy Study Group BROADSHEET, July 1977.

the 'traditional' account, in Marx's account of historical development all the emphasis is placed upon the development of the productive forces. These are regarded in merely technical and economic terms, as machinery and techniques, and looked upon as the sole dynamic element in historical change. As the productive forces develop in capitalist society and become more social in character, through the development of new machinery and new techniques, they come into conflict with the existing relations of production which are embodied, on this view, in the system of individual ownership. This contradiction is reflected in an intensifying class struggle, the outcome of which is ultimately socialism. With the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production, the relations of production are brought into harmony with the social character of the productive forces. The economic basis of class is thus, supposedly, abolished in socialist society and class struggle destined to die out.

Of course, it is not suggested that all class conflict immediately ceases after the expropriation of private property. On the contrary, as all Marxists recognise and as all historical experience shows, in the first period of socialism the new society has powerful enemies to contend with. Externally, the surrounding imperialist powers use all the means at their disposal, including armed intervention, to restore the old society. And there are internal enemies too: the expropriated classes, together with those who have lost power, privilege and position as a result of the overthrow of the old society, all seek to regain their old property and positions. They seek to frustrate, sabotage and oppose the new society - they seek to overthrow it and to restore the old. Furthermore, the habits, customs, beliefs and attitudes of the old society are still active, and they continually hamper the development of the new.

Nevertheless, within the socialist society itself the material basis of class has, according to this account, been abolished. As the new society is consolidated and as it develops, old enemies become increasingly resigned and reconciled, and they die off. Old habits and attitudes should die out too for, supposedly, they have no basis in the new society, except in the remaining areas of backward, small-scale, individual production. The major task for socialist society ceases to be the political one of class struggle, and becomes the purely economic and technical one of developing the productive forces, of modernising the economy. Thus, simply through the development of the productive forces under a socialist system of ownership, the old class distinctions are supposed to die out automatically, creating the conditions for 'the withering away of the state' and the transition to full communism.

By and large, this has been the official Soviet and Eastern European account of socialist society. However, the actual historical development of these societies manifestly contradicts the picture which this account presents. For, in fact, in the Soviet Union, in Eastern Europe and in all other socialist societies, class differences and increasing class conflict have become abundantly apparent, even to the casual observer. In the 60 years since the October Revolution, in a period when the productive power of Soviet society has developed gigantically, there has been no sign of class and class struggle automatically 'dying out', nor of the state 'withering away'.

It is sometimes said that Trotskyism recognises the continued existence of class conflict in socialist society and offers an alternative account of it in Marxist terms. But this is false. In the Soviet Union, it is said, a 'bureaucracy' has seized power from the proletariat, the revolution has been 'betrayed'; and the result is a monstrosity: neither a socialist society nor a capitalist one, but some new form inexplicable within the traditional framework of Marxist thought. In other words, Trotskyism abandons Marxism in its account of actually existing socialist societies. In fact, underlying most Trotskyist accounts of the Soviet Union, China and other historically existing socialist societies (none of which, needless to say, accord with the Trotskyite ideal), is the same traditional, mechanical and economistic picture of Marxism (2). As we have seen, according to this view, the abolition of private ownership abolishes the economic basis of class. Therefore, the conflicts which Trotskyism correctly recognises to exist in socialist societies must be explained by it in other, non-Marxist, terms. Trotskyism duly abandons the Marxist account of class, and talks instead of the ruling class of 'socialist' societies as a 'bureaucracy' - a group which is defined in purely political and social terms and not in the materialist terms of Marxism, not in terms of its relationship to the means of production.

If the traditional interpretation of Marxism were the correct one, then the continued existences of classes in socialist society would indeed constitute the 'refutation' of Marxism it is so often claimed to be by Marx's critics. In what follows, however, I want to try to show that Mao's work offers an important alternative interpretation of Marxism, and one which is able to account for classes in socialist society. For a fundamental aspect of Mao's understanding of socialism has been his insistence that class differences and class struggle continue to exist in socialist society. The abolition of private ownership of the means of production, he argues, is not alone a sufficient basis for the abolition of classes.

> In China, although in the main socialist transformation has been completed with respect to the system of ownership, and although the large-scale and turbulent class struggles of the masses characteristic of the previous revolutionary periods has in the main come to an end ... the class struggle is by no means over. The class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie ... will continue to be long and tortuous and at times will even become very acute. The proletariat seeks to transform the world according to its own world outlook, and so does the bourgeoisie. In this respect, the question of which will win out, socialism or capitalism, is still not really settled.
> ('On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People', p115)

Furthermore, according to Mao, socialist society can and must be analysed within the basic theoretical framework of historical materialism:

> The basic contradictions in socialist society are still those between the relations of production and the productive forces and between the superstructure and the economic base.
> (op.cit., p92)

2 A noteworthy exception to this generalisation is C.J.Arthur's useful discussion of these issues in 'The Revolution Betrayed', Radical Philosophy 3, Winter 1972.

To see how these terms can be applied to socialist society it is essential to understand the Marxist account of the economic basis of society in a concrete and dialectical way. The productive forces and the relations of production must be seen as two contradictory aspects of a single totality: the productive activity of people in society. In particular, the relations of production must not be entirely reduced to the legal relation of ownership, nor must they be entirely abstracted from the forces of production. Furthermore, the forces of production must not be conceived simply as machinery and techniques, in abstraction from the relations of production. I will take each of these points in turn.

II The Relations of Production

The traditional interpretation of Marxism that I have just been considering tends to equate the relations of production with the legal system of ownership. Ownership is regarded, not as 'merely a legal expression' of the existing relations of production, but as their sole aspect. It is true, of course, that the acquisition of political power by the proletariat and the transformation of the system of ownership are the absolutely fundamental and necessary preconditions for the creation of a socialist society. However, it must be seen that the abolition of private ownership is the beginning and not the end of 'the epoch of social revolution' to which Marx refers (see above quote). The process of socialist revolution involves not just a change in the system of ownership, but also a thorough and total transformation of all aspects of the social relations of production and also of the 'whole immense superstructure'. In Marx's words:

> Socialism is the declaration of the permanence of the revolution, the class dictatorship of the proletariat as the necessary transition point to the abolition of class distinctions generally, to the abolition of all the relationships of production on which they rest, to the abolition of all the social relations that correspond to these relations of production, to the revolutionising of all the ideas that result from these social relations.
> (The Class Struggles in France 1848-50, p223)

In other words, although ownership is indeed a vital and essential aspect of the concrete social relations which constitute the material basis of class distinctions, class and class struggle in society are not dependent upon this aspect alone. Class differences are embodied in all aspects of the social relations of production, as Lenin recognised when he wrote:

> Classes are large groups of people differing from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relations (in most cases fixed and formulated by law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organisation of labour, and consequently by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose and the mode of acquiring it.
> ('A Great Beginning', p486)

Socialism - the transition to classless society - must involve the transformation of all the aspects of the relations of production mentioned here by Lenin: not only a change in the system of ownership, but also a transformation of the relations of distribution and in the organisation and division of labour. These changes are fundamental and profound ones, and they will involve a long historical process. Until they are completed, social relations will continue to have class features in socialist society and class struggle will continue to exist. Such class struggle has a material basis within socialist society itself. Bourgeois forces continue to arise, not just because of external influences or of attitudes and habits from the past - they are continually engendered anew within socialist society, on the basis of bourgeois aspects of the relations of production which persist under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

The social basis of class cannot be understood merely as a matter of the ownership or non-ownership of the means of production. For this has the effect of isolating the legal system of ownership from the other aspects of the relations of production, which are its concrete conditions, and thus of making an abstraction of it. Marx, by contrast, sees property as a concrete social phenomenon:

> In the real world ... the division of labour and all M. Proudhon's other categories are social relations forming in their entirety what is today known as property; outside these relations bourgeois property is nothing but a metaphysical or juristic illusion.
> (Letter to P.V. Annenkov, 28 December 1846)

By the 'relations of production', therefore, Marx understands something more than mere ownership in its narrow, legal sense. What more? Mao, following Lenin as I have suggested, distinguishes two other aspects, besides the system of ownership, which go to make up the relations of production: (i) the system of distribution, and (ii) the social organisation and division of labour.

(a) Distribution

As regards the system of distribution in socialist society, it is impossible to live merely by ownership of the means of production. To live one must work, and one receives goods in proportion to the amount of one's work according to the principle, 'to each according to his work'. This represents a great advance in equality over the system of distribution in capitalist societies; and yet, as Marx emphasises in his Critique of the Gotha Programme, the principle of distribution in socialist society 'is still perpetually burdened with a bourgeois limitation' (p16) - it remains an imperfect and still transitional form.

> Equal right here is still - in principle - bourgeois right... It recognizes no class differences, because everyone is only a worker like everyone else; but it tacitly recognizes unequal individual endowment and thus productive capacity of the worker as natural privileges... Further, one worker is married, another not; one has more children than another, and so on and so forth. Thus, with an equal performance of labour, and hence an equal share in the social consumption fund, one will in fact receive more than another, one will be richer than another, and so on... But these defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society.
> (pp16-17)

Such 'defects' certainly exist in China. Although China is a remarkably egalitarian society by western standards, inequalities exist there, and it would be

utopian to imagine that things could be otherwise in a society at China's stage of historical development. The pertinent question to ask of a socialist society is not, 'Do inequalities exist in it?', for surely they will do; but rather, 'How are they being handled?', are they being diminished or increased? To what extent is the socialist principle of 'to each according to his work' actually realised? In this connection it is noteworthy that, by and large, China has not developed the rigid system of privileges and ranks so characteristic of the Soviet system. The overall tendency in China's socialist development has rather been towards a restriction of the class aspects of distribution and a closer and closer approximation to the socialist principle of distribution according to work (although, needless to say, progress in this direction has been uneven).

As the Soviet and Eastern European example so clearly shows, the continued restriction of inequalities in distribution is not an automatic product of socialist revolution; and yet, it is an important aspect of class division which must also be tackled in a socialist society if it is to continue to develop along the 'socialist road'.

(b) Social Organisation and Division of Labour

This is a further aspect of the relations of production in which class differences are embodied. For as Marx often stresses, class division in society is based also in the social organisation and division of labour, and, at the most fundamental level, in the division between mental and manual labour. Even more so than in the case of distribution, it is clear that a revolutionary transformation of the state and a change in the property system - profound as these changes are - will not immediately change the division of labour. The processes of production, like the tools and instruments of production, are inherited from the previous society and can be transformed only gradually, as the means of production are themselves transformed: this is the work of a whole historical epoch.

In the Soviet Union there has been little attempt to diminish the division between mental and manual labour. In China under Mao's leadership, by contrast, there has been a remarkable series of steps taken to diminish what the Chinese call 'The three great differences': the difference between industry and agriculture, between town and country, between mental and manual labour. These experiments and ideas have caught the imagination of people all over the world. Again, however, one must not be carried away by utopian dreams: it would be wrong to imagine that the division of labour has been, or could be, eliminated or even significantly transformed in a society at China's stage of development (3). The elimination of 'the three great differences' must needs be a long and gradual process, occupying the whole historical epoch of socialism.

(c) The Property System

A material basis for class distinctions does thus continue to exist in socialist society, even after the abolition of private property in the means of production. It continues to exist in the relations of production, which must be understood as comprising not just the system of ownership, but also that of distribution and of the division of labour. Indeed, these other aspects of the relations of production must be seen as the concrete basis and embodiment of the system of ownership, which is 'merely a legal expression' of them. And on closer scrutiny it becomes clear that even the system of ownership in the first stages of socialist society also has its 'differences' and 'defects'. Individual ownership of the means of production may all but be eliminated relatively rapidly, but a fully socialised property system cannot at once replace it. Collective property must continue to exist alongside state property ('property of the whole people'); and it is important to see that even the transformation of the system of ownership is completed only, as Mao says, 'in the main' (4).

Bettleheim's Account

The significance of the relations of production (beyond mere ownership) in understanding the Marxist account of class has also been strongly emphasized by a number of recent writers. In opposing the mechanical interpretation of Marxism, they have rightly stressed that the relations of production retain class features, and that a sphere of 'bourgeois right' continues to exist, even after private ownership has been abolished. However, it is equally important not to stress the role of the relations of production and of bourgeois right in a one-sided and exclusive way, and not to make abstractions of them. This can result in an equal and opposite distortion of Marxism: a voluntarist and idealist interpretation of Marxism in place of a mechanical one; a revisionism 'from the left', as opposed to the revisionism 'from the right' which I have so far been considering (5).

In opposition to both these alternatives, what needs stressing is that the material and economic base of class and class struggle cannot be found either in the productive forces alone, if these are viewed in

3 Bettelheim, I think, is guilty of such utopianism. In his Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organisation in China, written in 1971, he persistently talks as if the Chinese were not merely attempting to eliminate the division of labour within their factories, but had actually succeeded in doing so. Now that he has turned against the Chinese (see China After Mao, 1978), he blames them for not having done so. The error in both cases is the very idea that a society like China could possibly have achieved this.

4 There are interesting discussions of the significance of the continued existence of these two forms of property in J. V. Stalin, Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR, Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1972; and in Mao Tsetung, A Critique of Soviet Economics, trans. M. Roberts, Monthly Review Press, 1977.

5 See Lenin, 'Marxism and Revisionism', Selected Works.

abstraction from the social relations of production, or in the social relations of production alone, if these are abstracted from the forces of production. No: the material basis of class struggle lies in the interaction, the concrete unity and contradiction, within the economic base, of the forces and relations of production. This is what Bettelheim is saying when he writes:

> The field in which Lenin considered that 'the main features of what is most important, most fundamental, have not yet been completed' was that of 'the creation of the economic basis of the socialist system'. This was to be interpreted later as referring above all to the low level of the productive forces in Russia, from which it was deduced that the main thing was to 'build the material foundations' of socialism. There is no doubt that Lenin did have this aspect of the revolution's task in mind: it really is a task without which progress towards socialism is not possible. But when Lenin spoke of the 'economic basis' of socialism he did not have in mind only the development of the productive forces, but also, and especially, the socialist transformation of production relations. These are two associated tasks which have to be accomplished by the socialist revolution, two tasks which the Chinese Communist Party expresses in this concise formula: 'Grasp Revolution and Promote Production'. These two tasks are dialectically interconnected. They constitute two contradictory aspects of a single task.
> (Class Struggles in the USSR: First Period 1917-23, p443)

Bettelheim has been prominent among those in the West who have recently tried to provide an analysis of class struggle in socialist society in Marxist terms. However, despite the clear statement of his just quoted, it seems to me that there is considerable confusion on this matter in his work. At other times (and, unfortunately, it must be said that these are more characteristic of his thought) he writes as if the development of the productive forces were entirely secondary to class struggle and to the relations of production. For example, in Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organisation in China, he writes,

> In the combination productive forces/production relations, the latter play the dominant role by imposing the conditions under which the productive forces are reproduced. Conversely, the development of the productive forces never directly determines the transformation of the production relations; this transformation is always the focus of intervention by the contending classes - that is, of class struggle. The struggle for the socialist transformation of the production relations cannot be waged in the name of the 'development of the productive forces', since the forms this development assumes reflect class relationships and are determined by the class interests, perceptions, aspirations, and ideas of the contending classes.
> (pp91-92)

Bettelheim is correct to oppose the traditional interpretation (which, following the Chinese, he calls the 'theory of productive forces'), with its abstract and one-sided emphasis on the role of the development of the productive forces in shaping history. But to oppose this theory with the opposite theory - which we could call the 'theory of production relations' - that the relations of production are always the principle aspect, is simply to embrace the opposite error. To isolate either the productive forces or the production relations, and to make either absolutely subordinate to the other, is to falsify the dialectical and concrete relation between them.

This is not to deny that in all contradictions there is a principal and a secondary aspect; but, as Mao says,

> This situation is not static; the principal and the non-principal aspects of a contradiction transform themselves into each other and the nature of the thing changes accordingly.
> ('On Contradiction', p54)

And he goes on to say:

> Some people think that this is not true of certain contradictions. For instance, in the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production, the productive forces are the principal aspect; in the contradiction between theory and practice, practice is the principal aspect; in the contradiction between the economic base and the superstructure, the economic base is the principal aspect; and there is no change in their respective positions. This is the mechanical materialist conception, not the dialectical materialist conception. True, the productive forces, practice and the economic base generally play the principal and decisive role; whoever denies this is not a materialist. But it must also be admitted that in certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of production, theory and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role. When it is impossible for the productive forces to develop without a change in the relations of production, then the change in the relations of production plays the principal and decisive role... Are we going against materialism when we say this? No. The reason is that while we recognise that in the general development of history the material determines the mental and social being determines social consciousness, we also - and indeed must - recognise the reaction of mental on material things, of social consciousness on social being and of the superstructure on the economic base. This does not go against materialism; on the contrary, it avoids mechanical materialism and firmly upholds dialectical materialism.
> (ibid, pp58-59)

What Mao is saying here is aimed primarily at the mechanistic 'theory of productive forces', but it surely applies with even greater force to the view that the relations of production always play the dominant role.

To ignore the influence of the forces of production in historical development and to imagine that the relations of production are always dominant is to stand things on their head - it is idealism. Marx, by contrast, emphasises that the relations of production are themselves ultimately the product of the productive forces.

> M. Proudhon the economist understands very well that men make cloth, linen and silk materials in definite relations of production. But what he has not understood is that these definite social relations are just as much

produced by men as linen, flax, etc. Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist.
(Poverty of Philosophy, p95)

Of course, here as always, we must avoid giving a mechanistic interpretation to these words. It would certainly have been preferable if Marx had added the qualification 'in general' to this brilliantly striking aphorism. For if it is interpreted too narrowly it would appear to rule out the very possibility of socialist revolutions in relatively non-industrialised societies like Russia in 1917 and China even today, where small-scale production is still very widespread, particularly in agriculture. However, equally we must not deny the fundamental materialist truth which Marx is here stating: that the relations of production are, in general and ultimately, a product of the productive forces. The continued existence of small production does tend towards producing class relationships - the landlord and the peasant - and remains a gigantic force of backwardness in socialist society. As Lenin says, 'Small production engenders capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, 'hourly, spontaneously, and on a mass scale' ('Left Wing' Communism, an Infantile Disorder, p518). The consolidation and development of socialist social relations, the elimination of classes from society, absolutely requires the development of the productive forces and the elimination of such small production.

We must not make an abstraction of the relations of production, but regard them dialectically, as in concrete unity with the productive forces. Transformation of the relations of production and the development of the forces of production must necessarily go hand in hand. The relations of production comprise the sphere of Right, which Hegel regarded as the sphere of the Will (6). However, the sphere of Right and of the Will, isolated and abstracted from its material basis, is an illusion. The relations of production cannot simply be transformed at will. This is the error of Voluntarism. Bourgeois right cannot be restricted, nor can anything concrete be achieved, simply by being militant and having 'the correct line'. There are real, physical limitations, in the shape of the actually existing productive forces and the practical and economic necessities that they impose, which condition and contradict the political dynamic of the relations of production and of the will. Not to recognise this is to abandon materialism and to abandon the scientific in favour of the utopian approach to practical problems (7).

Why, then, does class struggle persist in socialist society? First of all, it is very important to see that the relations of production are not completely transformed with the abolition of private ownership and a development of the productive forces, as Bettelheim and others have rightly stressed. Nevertheless, we must go on to ask: Why must bourgeois relations of production and bourgeois right continue to exist in socialist society? What is the basis of their necessity? It is on these further questions that what Bettelheim has to say is far less satisfactory.

Marx explicitly addresses himself to the question of the continued existence of bourgeois right in the Critique of the Gotha Programme.

> These defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society as it is when it has just emerged after prolonged birth pangs from capitalist society. Right can never by higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby. In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly - only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety...
> (p17)

In other words, the restriction and abolition of bourgeois right is dependent both on the transformation of the relations of production and on the development of the productive forces.

Commenting on this passage, however, Bettelheim writes:

> Everyone knows that Marx, in his Critique of the Gotha Programme, speaks of the 'bourgeois limitation' which affects the distribution of goods during 'the first phase of communist society'; however, this 'limitation' is not related to the level of the productive forces, but to 'the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour' and to the corresponding social relations which hinder the development of the productive forces.
> (Class Struggles in USSR: First Period 1917-23, p52 note 37)

This is the very opposite of what Marx says. According to Bettelheim, the continuation of bourgeois right is 'not related to the level of the productive forces', whereas in this very passage Marx explicitly states the opposite: 'right can never be higher than the

6 See Hegel, Philosophy of Right, introduction.
7 Cf. Marx: 'The basis of Bakunin's social revolution is the will, and not economic conditions' ('Conspectus of Bakunin's Statism and Anarchism', On Anarchism etc., p149). As I am suggesting here, it seems to me that a similar criticism applies to Bettelheim.

economic structure of society.' Marx, unlike Bettelheim here, does not oppose productive forces to relations of production in this exclusive, either/or way. The transformation of social relations, the restriction and abolition of bourgeois right in socialist society, must go hand in hand with the development of the productive forces, and it is an illusion to believe that these things can be achieved in isolation.

III The Forces of Production

As well as distorting the Marxist concept of the relations of production, the traditional interpretation also has an impoverished picture of the productive forces. It sees the major task of socialist society as being to develop the productive forces; but this task is itself conceived in a one-sided and mechanical fashion. The productive forces are regarded as comprising only machinery and techniques, and thus the development of production is seen solely in technical and economic terms.

However, machinery and techniques must not be seen in abstraction. A machine requires people to build, operate and maintain it - only in this context is it a productive force. In considering the productive forces of a society, it is therefore vital to recognise that these comprise not only machinery and techniques, but also people, with the necessary skills and organisation to operate them. Indeed, as Marx says, 'Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive power is the revolutionary class itself' (Poverty of Philosophy, p151).

The creative initiative and energy of the working people is the most gigantic productive force. 'Of all things in the world, people are the most precious' said Mao. The traditional account of Marxism is blind to this, and to the fact that the working people themselves are a great productive force. It pictures the productive forces as merely machinery and techniques, and people as subordinated to them as their appendages. It is mechanistic and economistic. However, the development of the productive forces is not a merely economic and technical matter of modernising the processes of production. It is also, and equally importantly, a political process of mobilising and organising the energies and creativity of the people.

There is no greater force than the people, united politically, organised and mobilised. This has been demonstrated in China's recent history in remarkable ways, but none more striking than in the phenomenon of 'people's war', whose theory and practice were pioneered by Mao and the Chinese Communists in the 1930s and '40s. 'The Atom Bomb is a Paper Tiger,' said Mao in 1946,

> Of course, the atom bomb is a weapon of mass slaughter, but the outcome of a war is decided by the people, not by one or two new types of weapon... Take the case of China. We have only millet plus rifles to rely on, but history will finally prove that our millet plus rifles is more powerful than Chiang Kai-Shek's aeroplanes plus tanks.
> ('Talk with the American Correspondent Anna Louise Strong', pp101-02)

And so history did prove, only three years later, with the victory of the Communist forces. More recently, the victory of the Vietnamese people against the might of US imperialism has demonstrated, even more decisively, that weapons and military technology are not the sole sources of military strength. On the contrary, according to Mao, 'the richest source of power to wage war lies in the masses of the people' (On Protracted War, p186); and he rejects the theory that 'weapons decide everything' as

> a mechanical approach to the question of war and a subjective and one-sided view. Our view is opposed to this; we see not only weapons but also people. Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things, that are decisive. The contest of strength is not only a contest of military and economic power, but also a contest of human power and morale. Military and economic power is necessarily wielded by people.
> (On Protracted War, p143)

The mechanical approach involves a blind faith in the intrinsic power of technology. In its account of the productive forces it puts a one-sided stress on the aspect of machinery and techniques. However, in rejecting this, we must again take care to avoid the equal and opposite errors of voluntarism and idealism. In emphasising the human factor, and the role of human initiative and creativity as productive forces, we must avoid doing so one-sidedly and making abstractions of them. For, like all human characteristics and features, initiative and creativity are themselves a product of human productive activity, which is based ultimately upon certain machinery and techniques. Without these people would no longer be people, and their creativity and initiative would be reduced to a sub-human level.

In this connection, it is important to see that when Mao says 'it is people not things that are decisive', he is not opposing people to things in an exclusive fashion - he is not denying or negating the role of science or technology, for Marxism has nothing in common with the anti-scientific and anti-technological attitudes which have been so widespread in recent years; and what the Chinese people accomplished under Mao's leadership should not be mistaken for any sort of pre-industrial, rural utopia. On the contrary, as Engels says in his 'Speech at the Graveside of Karl Marx': 'Science was for Marx an historically dynamic, revolutionary force.' And it is so, according to Marx, because it leads to the development of the productive forces, which brings them into contradiction with the existing relations of production; as the following, from Wilhelm Liebknecht's Reminiscences of Marx, illustrates:

> Marx made fun of the victorious European reaction which imagined that it had stifled the revolution and did not suspect that natural science was preparing a new revolution. King Steam, who had revolutionised the world in the previous century, was coming to the end of his reign and another incomparably greater revolutionary would take his place, the electric spark... The consequences are unpredictable. The economic revolution must be followed by a political one, for the latter is only the expression of the former.
> (Marx and Engels Through the Eyes of their Contemporaries, p51)

Of course these developments also have a negative side. Marx was perfectly aware that the introduction of new technology in capitalism has inhuman and destructive consequences. Indeed, no one has given

a more powerful or lucid description of these than Marx. However, his attitude to such developments is by no means merely negative and critical. He rejects the sort of criticism which sees only the negative side of things as characteristic of the utopian socialists who, he says, 'see in poverty nothing but poverty, without seeing in it the revolutionary, subversive side, which will overthrow the old society' (Poverty of Philosophy, p109). So too with science and technology: to see only the negative and destructive side of their impact in capitalist society is one-sided and undialectical. We must recognise also the positive and revolutionary side of their role. This is the dialectical approach which, in Hegel's words, grasps opposites 'in their unity' and 'the positive in the negative' (Science of Logic, p56). Marx's use of this method is well illustrated in his remarkable little 'Speech at the Anniversary of the People's Paper':

> In our days everything seems pregnant with its contrary. Machinery, gifted with the wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labour, we behold starving and overworking it. The new-fangled sources of wealth, by some strange weird spell, are turned into sources of want. The victories of art seem bought by the loss of character. At the same pace that mankind masters nature, man seems to become enslaved to other men or to his own infamy. Even the pure light of science seems unable to shine but on the dark background of ignorance. All our invention and progress seem to result in endowing material forces with intellectual life, and in stultifying human life into a material force. This antagonism between modern industry and science on the one hand, modern misery and dissolution on the other hand; this antagonism between the productive powers and the social relations of our epoch is a fact, palpable, overwhelming, and not to be controverted. Some parties may wail over it; others may wish to get rid of modern arts in order to get rid of modern conflicts... On our part, we do not mistake the shape of the shrewd spirit that continues to mark all these contradictions. We know that to work well the new-fangled forces of society, they only want to be mastered by new-fangled men - and such are the working men. They are as much the invention of modern times as machinery itself. In the signs that bewilder the middle class, the aristocracy and the poor prophets of regression, we do recognise our brave friend, Robin Goodfellow, the old mole that can work in the earth so fast, that worthy pioneer - the Revolution. (pp359-60)

The contradiction between the development of the productive forces and the relations of production continues in the period of socialism; and it continues to be a revolutionary one: the motor of history and the material basis of class struggle. According to Mao, therefore, the revolutionary struggle must be continued even after a socialist society has been established, under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat; although, of course, the form and content of this struggle are changed. As Mao says,

> Contradictions in a socialist society are fundamentally different from those in the old societies, such as capitalist society. In capitalist society contradictions find expression in acute antagonisms and conflicts, in sharp class struggles; they cannot be resolved by the capitalist system itself and can only be resolved by socialist revolution... The case is different with contradictions in socialist society, where they are not antagonistic and can be resolved one after another by the socialist system itself. ('On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People', p92)

Contradictions among the people - class and class struggle - continue throughout the period of socialism and reflect the contradictions in the economic base between the forces and the relations of production. It is one of Mao's most important contributions to Marxism to have developed this theory for the first time in explicit and clear-cut terms.

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"Means of Communication as Means of Production" Revisited

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Abstract: *This paper seeks to examine the claim made by Raymond Williams that the means of communication are a means of production. While agreeing with the central claim by Williams, the paper argues that the model which Williams' represents this claim with is insufficiently realized. By looking at the work of Marx and Althusser in relation to this claim, we suggest a new conceptual tool to actualize Williams' claims.*

Keywords: *Raymond Williams, Means of Communication, Internet, Means of Production, Marx, Althusser*

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1. Introduction

In this essay I wish to explore Raymond Williams' assertion that the means of communication can be identified as a means of production. I seek to do this in the context of a critical enquiry of Williams' paper *Means of Communication as a Means of Production* (2005[1978]). It will be my thesis that Williams work opens up new possibilities in *new communications* theory. However I contend that despite opening up these possibilities, Williams' own theory is unable to develop these possibilities to their ultimate conclusion and we must turn towards Althusser's structural Marxism to assist in such development. The essay itself will be structured in three main sections. In the first section I'll outline Marx's definition of the means of production and how he viewed the means of communication as a form of the relations of production. I will also discuss Marx's base-superstructure and what defining the means of communication as the relations of production does for this understanding of society. In the second section I'll outline Raymond Williams' argument for identifying the means of communication as a means of production, drawing on the vast literature provided by Williams over his career, I'll argue that while Williams offers an interesting proposition, his argument is based on a definition of terms like 'production', which reduce their capability to express what the explicit means of production are. I'll argue that while Williams' wants to insist that production is beyond that of just 'commodity production', the use of communications now is one in which the information provided by the means of communication is treated like a commodity. In the last section, I want to examine how elements of Althusser's philosophy can produce the theoretical intervention necessary to examine the the internet as a means of communication identified as 'means of production' which produces 'information as a commodity'. The aim of this paper is twofold. To develop a foundation for the continued analysis of the means of communication such as the Internet, in the vein of Marxist theory and, to attempt to overcome the criticisms of structuralism that are contained in Raymond Williams' work.

2. Karl Marx and the Means of Production

In 1857, Marx wrote one of his more enduring pieces of work. The *Preface* to *a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Marx 1859/1994) is for many within Marxist theory the Rosetta stone, by which all work by Marx and Engels produced after this time are understood. However it is one significant passage within this document, which has received substantial exegetical focus. Marx writes that

> "In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a give stage in the

> development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social formation is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of old society. Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve, since close examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation" (Marx 1994, 211).

The passage itself is rich with information that can help guide our understanding of the *means of* production. From the idea that "the totality of relations of production constitute the economic structure of society…on which arises a legal and political superstructure" (Marx 1990, 211), which briefly outlines the base-superstructure edifice which has become a central component, and heavily debated aspect of the Marxian tradition, to the idea that "at a certain stage of development; the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production" (ibid.), we can begin to formulate how Marx constructed the *means of production*. Necessarily it is these two important segments from the passage of the preface that concern us in this paper. If Raymond Williams' proposal that the means of communication are a means of production then this would necessitate a rethinking of society's structure, or would it? In order to understand the problem, we need to first be able to understand the elements that are used in constructing the problem. The main elements, as we see in the title of Williams essay, are: 1.) The means of communication and 2.) the means of production. We may argue that the title of the essay *Means of Communication as a Means of Production* identifies the means of production as a larger category than the means of communication, that the means of communication become just a subcategory of the means of production. Seem in this way it is then necessary, that if we are to identify the means of communication as a means of production, to come to an understanding of what the means of production are.

In Marx, the means of production refers to two elements of production that when entered into a labour process becomes a unified productive force. We can understand then, according to the account of *historical materialism* that is outlined in the passage above that these elements, the instruments of labour and the raw materials are then an aspect, in their development, of the conflict that arises between the productive forces and the relative production. As such they play a role in defining the social structure. It is then required that we explore these categories further. For Marx "an instrument of labour, is a thing, or a complex of things, which the worker interposes between himself and the object of his labour and which serves as a conductor, directing his activity onto that object" (Marx 1990, 285). While there is debate surrounding the actual means of production and what can and cannot be understood by them, G.A. Cohen (2000) argues that such things as strength, skills, knowledge, and intelligence are not an aspect of either raw materials or instruments of labour but that they are in effect a means of the labour process. The ambiguity of terms such as *means of production* and *instruments of labour* allow for discrepancies in how one describes such elements of the productive process. It seems then that what an instrument of labour is, according to

such a definition, is an instrument such as a hammer, or even a factory, anything which focuses activity on an object of labour. Despite the broadness of such a concept, it become even broader when we take into account Marx's assertion that "we may include among the instruments of labour...all the objective conditions necessary for carrying on the labour process" (Marx 1990, 286).

We can, I believe, infer then that included in the instruments of labour are the raw materials and objects of labour. We must also be careful about the conflation of the raw materials with the objects of labour. While all raw materials are objects of labour, it cannot be said that all objects of labour are raw materials. In Marx's sense raw materials are only to be understood as raw materials if they have already passed through the labour process (Marx 1990). We may say then that a plank of wood is a raw material, while a tree standing in the forest is a natural resource. The difference between them is that the plank of wood has been worked on already by instruments of labour to turn it into such a product. According to what I've said above, the instruments of labour can be understood as the totality of the means of production. This is because for Marx any form, which provides the objective conditions for carrying out labour, is an instrument of labour. Seeing as such that the object of labour is needed for labour to take place, we can infer then that an object of labour is an instrument of labour, which is worked on by other instruments of labour to produce a product for consumption. We may perhaps say then that, the means of production are nothing more then the instruments of labour. Considering that the productive forces are the unity between the labour process and the means of production, it is the attribution of 'work' to the instruments of labour that unifies them as productive forces.

2.1. Marx and the Means of Communication as a Means of Production

How does this pertain to our discussion that the means of communication are a means of production? If we are to interpret the means of production as an instrument of labour which is a necessary condition of the labour process, then we must provide evidence that the means of communication are an instrument of labour and that the means of communication as a means of production provide a necessary condition for the labour process.

In *Capital* Vol 1, in the section entitled *Machinery and Large Scale Production*, Marx discusses the relation of the means of production and the means of Communication. He writes briefly that "the revolution in the modes of production of industry and agriculture made necessary a revolution in the general conditions of the social processes of production", these "social processes of production" are what Marx calls the "means of communication" and the "means of transportation" (Marx 1990, 506). When Marx was writing, these forms of *social processes of production* could be seen actualized in the telegraph and railroad systems. However, Marx does not often speak of the "means of communication" apart from the times he speaks of the means of transportation. In fact it is difficult, at least in the work of *Capital,* to evaluate any discernible differences between what Marx calls the means of communication and the means of transportation. This is given strength by comments that Marx makes in Vol. II of *Capital* in asserting the non-commodificatory aspects of the communication industry "for moving commodities and people and the transmission of mere information" (Marx 1992 134). If we follow Marx, can we not then ascertain, from the Preface to *The Contribution of a Critique of Political Economy* that the means of communication are a form of relations of production for Marx? By the relations of production we may understand the totality of the social relationships that promote production and reproduction of the means of life. We see this in the Preface where Marx writes that "in the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production" (Marx 1994, 211).

In the sense that we attribute the means of communication as relations of production we refer to the social relations of production, thus understood as the socio-economic relations that constitute the social structure of society. What we see here is the necessary foundations between the material productive forces (instruments of labour + labour) and the social relations of production (the means of communication and transportation). It is easy to recognize the means of communication as relations of production in exactly the way Marx has set it out. What we see in Vol 2. of *Capital* is another type of distancing, in which the communications industry is signalled out as an important branch of industry, along with the transport industry, "in which the product of the production process is not a new objective product" (Marx 1992 134). For Marx, both the transport industry and the communications industry do not produce new products, but only "displace people and things" (Marx 1992 135). It is well documented in *Capital,* as shown above, that for Marx the means of communi-

cation were closer in structure and process to the means of transportation then they were to the means of production, and even developed in the same way when revolutionized (Marx 1990, 506). What is remarkable and in need of further discussion is that in the revolution of the means of transportation and the means of communication they become fetters upon the large-industry manufacturers (which we may understand as productive forces). According to Marx, at a stage in the development of the material forces of production the social relations of production block (or fetter) any further development. At this stage, social revolution takes place which revolutionizes the relations of production allowing for further development of the productive forces. Of course if Marx argues that the means of communication are a relation of production, then at some stage we must confront a contradiction between what Marx says about the means of communication and what Raymond Williams says. In the next sections I will look at Raymond Williams' Cultural Materialism as a proposal of society's structure against Marx's historical materialism and argue that it is the emphasis on culture rather then the economic in Williams' works that allows him to identify the means of communication as a means of production.

But we must recognize a difference between the tangible nature of goods and the intangible nature of "communication". At one level, there exists a form of communication between the producers and the suppliers; at another level between workers and managers. There is also a level of communication that exists between the consumer and the producer. We must then recognize a distinction between *mass communication* and *localized communication.* The distinction between *mass* and *localized* is never made in Marx's work; the type of communication that is discussed in the work of Marx is ultimately related to that of mass communication. This is communication that appears on a grand scale in the productive process. We can say that *localized communication* is a sub-domain of *mass communication*. Without the effects of *localized communication*, or the manager telling the workers what to do, then there would be no effective *mass communication* or the dispersal of information from the workers as producers of a certain product, to various other groups including suppliers and consumers.

3. Williams on Base and Superstructure

In the exposition of Williams' discussion on the base and superstructure, we find the focus is on specific keywords that formulate the discourse. We are confronted in Williams work with a detailed discussion of *production*, *determination*, *base* and *superstructure*. It is Williams's position that the base and superstructural construction of society originally formulated by Marx has been misconstrued by thinkers throughout the generations due in part to a misunderstanding of Marx's use of particular forms of language. It was an aspect of Williams's method to study the language of individual thinkers rather then the abstractions that they posed (Eldridge and Eldridge 1994). As he writes in *Marxism and Literature* (1977): "In the transition of Marx to Marxism, and then in the development of expository and didactic formulations, the words used in the original arguments were projected…as if they were precise concepts, and…as if they were terms for observable 'areas' of social life" (Williams 1977, 77). For Williams, the description that Marx posed of the base and superstructure edifice is no more than an analogy (Williams 1993), a linguistic expression of the structure of society which does not adequately portray society, it merely provides a simplified variation of what society is actually like. For Williams, the letter to J. Bloch written by Engels in 1890 provides grounds which lessen the usefulness of the formula of the base-superstructure that Marx used (Williams, 1993). Of the formula provided by Marx, Williams turns to a passage in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* to show that Marx asserted rationalism to the superstructure which Williams's states increased the complexity of the formula. He writes of this that "recognition of complexity is the first control in any valid attempt at a Marxist theory of culture. The second control…is an understanding of the formula of structure and superstructure" (Williams 1993). In the letter that Engels writes to Bloch, Engels argues that any statement which reduces the social structure to the determined effect of the economic base has misconstrued what Marx and himself meant and that any such reduction becomes "meaningless, abstract and absurd…." (Engels 1890). Engels writes further that "the economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure….also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form" (Engels 1890, 475). Building from this, Williams argues that Engels provides the complexity of the social structure, which is needed in the development of a Marxist theory of culture and shows Marx's formula to be just an analogy, in reality the structure is less absolute and less clear. Williams does not fully follow Engels approach, chastising him for failing to escape

the formulaic approach in terms of levels. Williams argues that Engels' model falls into the same problem as Marx's. He writes that "Engels does not so much revise the enclosed categories….as reiterate the categories and instance certain exceptions, indrectnesses, and irregularities which obscure their otherwise regular relation" (Williams 1977, 80). We can argue from this point that Williams is determined to move away from any Marxian theory of culture that privileges the economic base over the superstructure. For Williams, "Marx…had correctly stressed the connection between culture and the economy, but had badly mistaken the nature of that connection. Culture and communication were to be understood as primary and not secondary components of the social totality, constitutive and not reflective in the maintenance and development of the social order" (Higgins 1994, 110)

Williams' objection to the base and superstructure analogy of Marxian theory is summed up in this passage which appeared in *Marxism and Literature*. He writes: "The social and political order which maintains a capitalist market, like the social struggles which created it, is necessarily a material production. From castles and palaces and churches to prisons and workhouses and schools; from weapons of war to a controlled press: any ruling class, in variable ways though always materially, produces a social and political order. These are never superstructural activities. They are necessary material production within an apparently self-subsistent mode of production can alone be carried on" (Williams 1977, 93). Of course, it is only logical to conceive of castles, palaces, churches and prisons as material production, despite their "superstructural activities", but we can immediately perceive a deficiency in Williams' argument. While it may be true that the "superstructure" has in the past been seen to be nothing more then a immaterial form of consciousness. This is a rejected claim in contemporary Marxian theory. As Terry Eagleton has pointed out: "there is a strong implication through…Williams' work that to label a phenomenon 'superstructural' is somehow to assign it a lesser degree of effective reality than an element of material production" (Eagleton 1989, 168). It may be perhaps that Williams, like Althusser, had in mind a Hegelian form of causality which expressed the idea that all phenomena of the social totality may be reduced to a particular form of essence. But unlike Althusser, who showed that Marx had moved past the Hegelian influence of his past, Williams' contends that the base-superstructure of the late Marx was still heavily invested in this form of effective causality. In Eagleton's mind all Williams' has done thus far is to re-invent the wheel. His criticism of an outdated model of the base and superstructure is more ritualistic then useful in any theoretical sense (Eagleton 1989). Williams' *Marxism and Literature*, like Althusser's *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* can be seen as "a return to the complex unity of Marx's original insight into the 'indissoluble unity' of the 'whole social process'" (Higgins 1994, 114) It is "the overcoming of the dichotomy between 'society' and 'nature'" (Williams 1977, 19) For Williams instead of the economy as the central concept of society, he has argued that it is culture at the centre "of modern thought and practice" (Williams 1977, 11). The term *culture* thus become a central concern of Williams, evidenced by his attempt to formulate a *Cultural Materialism* (See Williams 1977, 1993) and a *Sociology of Culture* (See Williams 1981). For Williams, "Marx…had correctly stressed the connection between culture and the economy, but had badly mistaken the nature of that connection" (Higgins 1994, 110). It was not that culture was a secondary attribute aligned with the superstructural elements such as the politico-legal, as some Orthodox Marxists were fond of saying, but that "culture and communication were to be understood as primary…components of the social totality" (Higgins 1994, 110). Cultural Materialism is the position that *Culture* should be recognized as both a social and material productive process and practice which identifies "the arts" as social uses of material means of production (Williams 1980). Following on from the German Romanticism of Herder and Coleridge, Williams sort to establish culture "as separate from and yet superior to both economics and politics" (Milner 1994, 45). Is this culturalism, however, not just simply a form of determinism, which privileges culture over economy? A reverse of the formulation of the Orthodox Marxists that Williams criticizes? Not necessarily. Though it appears as such, *determinism* in Williams is a quite specific meaning different from that which he seeks to criticize. The notion of *determination* plays a large role in Williams' work: "no problem in Marxist cultural theory is more difficult than that of 'determination'", he writes in a section of *Marxism and Literature* entirely dedicated to this keyword. He seeks to define determination, not as a "predicted, prefigured, controlled content", but moreso as content which sets the limits and exerts pressure (Williams 2005, 34). This is in keeping with his dislike of the technological determinism that he feels is present in the orthodox Marxist presentation. Once again we must point out a similarity that Williams shares with Louis Althusser. Both thinkers, rather than see determination as a process of control, saw it as a setting of limits. Both to some extent follow the Engelsian description

of determination laid out in the letter to Bloch which we discussed above. Williams criticizes what he calls *abstract objectivity* in which the determining process is independent of men's will in the absolute sense that they cannot control it. This is the basis for the position of economism that was widespread in the 2nd International, furthermore Williams thinks this position as a philosophical and political doctrine is worthless (Williams 1977). Economism is rejected by Williams, but despite his words to the contrary, determinism still plays a role in his work. Williams asserts the primacy of culture within the societal structure, culture is no longer superstructural but becomes a basic process along with other determining elements such as the economy and politics. In order to escape from the *cultural determinism* that may be levelled at such a position as Williams, he connects his work with that of Antonio Gramsci, specifically the concept of hegemony. Hegemony in this sense refers to notions of dominance and subordination. This is to say that the dominant element of the societal structure does not "rule" over the other elements, as one might be persuaded to say in the sense of Orthodox Marxism, but that the dominant element necessitates the needs and wants of other elements of society and in those other elements recognizes its own needs and wants. In this sense, for Williams, the cultural, political and economic elements of the societal structure work cooperatively in the construction of society.

Under Williams model, due to his own neglected way "material" is used in describing the "base" and "superstructure", the means of communication cannot properly be identified as a means of production. If we were to accept Williams model, then the use of *production* would be broadly defined to such an extent that the Marxian notion of *production in general* would become colloquially used to be defined as any type of *production*. Without a determining base, even one that "in the last instance" is never actually realized. Society becomes an open category, always being redefined. Instead in the following section, I will argue that the means of communication can be adequately identified as a means of production by applying the structural-Marxist formulation of society that was devised by Louis Althusser.

4. Althusser and the Means of Communication as a Means of Production

Unlike Williams, Althusser strongly recommends the model first proposed by Marx in the 1859 *Preface*. However, Althusser also takes into account the reaction by Engels, formulated in a letter to Bloch, to the point that the economy is the primary determinant of the social structure. Louis Althusser's reading of Marx overcomes the determination and economism that Williams also tried to overcome, but the benefit of Althusser's reading is that he does not fall into a deterministic mode of relying on culture as Williams did. Like Williams, Althusser's starting point is the importance of complexity in the Marxian social structure and Engels' letter to Bloch. For Althusser there is still the importance of the base-superstructure edifice, but in following Engels, Althusser argues fro the *relative autonomy* of the superstructural elements, of which the economy only determines in the last instance. Now at a glance this determination in the last instance seems to present an extrapolated version of Marx's determinism. However for Althusser, the type of determinism involved is one of setting limits. This is to say that the economy, in the last instance, determines the elements of the social whole that dominates in the social formation. This is not a fixed absolute, as Williams may contend, the dominant element "varies according to the overdetermination of the contradictions and their unseen development" (Althusser and Balibar 2009, 357). We are interested in two points that arise from this firstly, the differences between *determination in the last instance* and *structures in dominance* and secondly, the role of *overdetermination*. Williams' criticized the notion of *overdetermination* as being a "repetition of the basic error of 'economism' which is that it still relies on the economy as a primary determinant within the social structure (Williams 1977). However before we get to deep into a discussion about *overdetermination,* we must discuss the difference between "*determination in the last instance"* and *domination*. The category of *determination in the last instance* first becomes known in the letter between Engels and Bloch that we have referred to throughout this paper. Engels writes that "there is an interaction of all…elements in which, amid all the endless host of accidents (hat is, of things and events whose inner interconnection is so remote or so impossible of proof that we can regard it as non-existent, as negligible), the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary" (Engels 1890). This is to say that where a causal connection cannot be found in regards to the elements of the social structure, it is the economic base, which asserts itself as the determining force. Althusser takes up Engels notion and expands it in regards to the structural reading of Marx's social structure. One of the expansions that Althusser added to this form of determination is that the *last instance* is never actually realized (Al-

thusser 2005). What Althusser is trying to do is apply an applicable form of causal relation instead of the two past forms of causal relation (i.e. mechanical and effective) which he sees as containing flaws. For Althusser, structural forces are at work within social formations. Contained within these social formations are elements of the social structure which interrelate with one another to determine the effect that the social formation has. This is understood in that the effects of the social structure are determined not by something that lies outside the social structure but by the elements of the social structure itself (Althusser 2009). What Williams and the Orthodox Marxists had in common was that they conceived of the base structure (whatever it may contain) as a separate entity from the superstructure. Althusser remedied this by arguing that the base and superstructure were elements of the same structure and that it was the interrelationship between these elements that explained the social structure.

How does Althusser's structural theory succeed in identifying the means of communication as a means of production, where Williams's theory failed? In Williams' theory, as we have shown already, his problem was that he had presupposed that the superstructural was combined of immaterial content that as such, in arguing for the materiality of the superstructure, attempted to show that the elements of the superstructure were just as much an aspect of material production as was economic production. However, no one would disagree that the elements of the superstructure are material and that they themselves produce things. In Althusser's famous essay *Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus* (1990), he argues for the materiality of ideology, which makes up the elements of the superstructure. For Althusser, "an ideology always exists in an apparatus" (Althusser 1990, 112) and he claims that ideology has a material existence. For Althusser, the notion of material exists in different modalities, which are all rooted in physical existence. So while ideology may not be "material" in the sense that Williams' palaces are material, they still nonetheless exist in a specific material modality. So while we may maintain that *ideology* as an imaginary relation to reality doesn't have material existence, Althusser wants to argue that the realization of these beliefs in action and practices confirm their materiality. We have certain relations to the real that require us to partake in certain practices within the material ideological apparatus. These practices can then be confirmed as the material existence of our ideological beliefs. In this sense the superstructure pertains to be a material structure. The practices of the social, legal and political ideologies are to be seen as the material existence of these ideologies. In Williams' case he argues that the means of communication can be understood as a means of production because of the sense in which "material" is used. But as I have just shown, there is no need to change the keyword of "material" if we just apply a structuralist thinking to the problem.

5. E.P. Thompson's Critique of Althusserian Marxism

Having given an overview of Althusser's position, I'll now attend to a critique of Althusser's Marxism by E.P Thompson (1978). Thompson's critique, as polemical as it was "moving from irony to caricature….to mere abuse" (Thompson 1978, 130) attributing Althusser's Marxism to a neo-Stalinism does provide good insights and has provided influential. Although Gregory Elliot has stated that Thompson's critique has less to do with Althusser and more to do with Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst (Elliot, 2009). Nevertheless we shall outline one particular criticism provided by Thompson in an attempt to over come it. For E.P. Thompson, Althusser and his Marxian methodology are unable to provide answers to questions about Culture (Communications) because the structuralism that Althusser endorses departs from Marx's historical method he writes that "Althusser (and his progeny) find themselves unable to handle, except in the most abstract and theoretic way, questions of value, culture – and political theory" due to in part the "structuralism of stasis" that departs from Marx's own historical method (Thompson 1978, 197). He further argues that Althusser's conceptual universe does not provide the adequate tools for the explanation of change. According to Thompson, Althusser' structuralism does not allow for transformations; historically or socially. "Structure, like a whale, opens up its jaws and swallows process up…process survives unhappily in the structure's stomach" (Thompson 1978, 283). This is to say that while processes may take place within the structure of society as elaborated by Althusser, they don't actually change the structure itself which remains a constant. However Althusser's structuralism is far from a static monolith as Thompson would like to suggest. The explanation of the structure, in Althusser's structural causality does not exist in a form of static. The relationship between the irreducibility of the base and the superstructure does not allow for the stasis that Thompson sees, it is the overdetermination of processes within the structure which Althusser saw, and by introducing concepts such as 'determina-

tion in the last instance and structures in dominance, he avoided the structures collapse into relativism. Anderson (1980) shows that Thompson's reading of Althusser does not show that Althusser put forward a definition of "the object of history" which unveils a dynamic structure: "For Althusser does attempt a more substantive definition of the object of history: a historical fact is one 'which causes a mutation in the existing structural relations'….Thompson has overlooked what is the hinge of the definition he is attacking, the term 'mutation'. Althusser's formula puts an impeccable emphasis on *change*, rather than on stability as Thompson imagines it to do" (Anderson 1980, 14).

Althusser's structuralism is based upon the notions of *Overdetermination, determination in the last instance* and *Structures in dominance*. It is these notions which provide the dynamism within Althusser's system which is at odds with Thompson's allegations. For Althusser, as we showed above, the determination he speaks of one which exerts pressure on the particular elements, setting the limits by which the 'structure in dominance' is able to function. this Thompson misreads in Althusser and would very much agree with him, as he himself states that 'Williams and I have been insisting for years of defining "determine" in its senses of "setting limits" and "exerting pressures" (Thompson 1978, 351). *Structures in Dominance* are not permanently fixed but vary according to the overdetermined contradiction (Althusser 2009). If it is true, as we believe it is, that Althusser's structuralism is one of dynamism and not one of stasis as Thompson believes, then we may also argue that Althusser's conceptual universe does provide us with the conceptual tools to judge and analyse change and further more allow us to grasp questions related to culture.

The contestation between Althusser and Thompson lies in the heated debate between that of structure and human agency. The debate is that of the primacy of structure or agency in the development of human behaviour. We know from Marx that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (Simon 1994, 211). For Marx it is the structure of the superstructure (ideology) that determines the consciousness of human behaviour. Althusser follows this presenting humanism as an ideology which manifests itself in the interpellation of the individual as a subject by the ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1990). In contrast to this Thompson argues that while social structure may have an effect on human behaviour, its effect is weak "for any living generation, in any 'now', the way in which they 'handle' experience defies prediction and escapes from any narrow definition of determination" (Thompson 1978, 363).

The debate between structure and agency is far too large to cover adequately in this paper. But let us try and think what we have already said back to the main argument of the piece. The internet, it cannot be denied, as proved to be a major cultural change in Western society. As such, human behaviour has itself changed in order to cope with such change. One is now always connected to the internet; the checking of emails is a daily (or even twice daily) occurrence. Contra Thompson, Structures of society do determine our behaviour, but I agree with Thompson to the extent that I do not think Structure is the only determinate of human behaviour. Given Althusser's structural causality as a dynamic structure, I do not think that it is claimable that structure determines every aspect of human behaviour. In many respects the debate between structure and agency is also a debate of nature or nurture.

6. The Internet as a Means of Communication and a Means of Production

The technological advancement of media and communications has been astounding since the publication of Raymond Williams' paper. In this last section, I want to argue that the means of communication that we have available to us via the Internet, such as Facebook and Google, are in fact a type of means of production, though not in the way that Williams would probably suggest. In Marx, the means of production are the unity between the tools of production and the materials of production. The tools of production are, or can be defined as things, which an agent will use on the materials of production in order to formulate a specific item of interest. In an economic situation, this item of interest, known as a commodity, would then be sold in the marketplace for a value. However, the type of process we have described does not only take place within an economic framework. Let us take as an example: the production of this paper you are now reading. The author is provided with two things: 1. The tools of production, by which we mean, in this case, conceptual tools such as Marx's theory of capital and Althusser's structural Marxism, the PC used to write the paper on, the books poured through in order to understand the fundamental components of each thinkers arguments and so on and so forth. 2. The materials of production, or the work of Raymond Williams. The author then uses his material and conceptual tools to develop the material of production

into a product, or the paper that now sits before you. Essentially, the author is not driven primarily by the capitalist commodity production, which Raymond Williams argued dominates society, of course we may argue that a reason to be published is in order to secure a position at an academic institution, but this is only a subset of reasons which play into the whole publishing culture of academia. This type of production is not only limited to the production of knowledge, which happens in academia, and the production of commodities that happens in the economy, but can also be applied to the idea of the means of communication that we have available to us via the Internet. Let me give an example of how the types of means of communication described above act as a means of production. In the use of Facebook, the user will gain access to this Internet forum by use of a computer, mobile phone or any sort of electronic device, which has access to the Internet. We have thus identified two forms of tools of production: 1) An electronic device linked to the Internet and 2) The Internet itself. Our task now is to identify the materials used in production. In this case the materials provided to be used by the tools of production are the voluntarily submitted information. Whether it is everything about you, including your hobbies, your likes and dislikes etc, or just a simply name and email address, what you provide Facebook with is raw materials, which are then used to produce a finished product, i.e. your Internet profile. I must admit that the use of the term "production" is broad in this sense, but I do not think that this denigrates that such Internet forums as "Facebook" can be identified as a means of production.

The internet as a means of communication is also a fast growing means of production. Following Alvin Toffler (1980) and Christian Fuchs (2012), I want to use the notion of a prosumer in the development of this idea. Prosumer, as the name suggests is a neologism of "producer" and "consumer". The Internet as a means of communication and a means of production has seen the growth of the prosumers. Fuchs (2012) has argued that while users of the Internet have seen to the growth of the commodity market of the internet based on their user activity, they have also recognized as content producers that "there is user-generated content, the users engage in permanent creative activity, communication, community building and content production" (Fuchs 2012, 43). As a means of production, the Internet, or in particular, web-based companies such as Google, Facebook and Youtube are able to take the raw material of information that is provided to them by the user and use that information to create new products, whether that be new online games designed to have the user invest time and money or simply a new addition to their integral system which gets such companies more users. We have briefly confronted the question of the Internet both as a means of communication and as a means of production, but can the Internet be a means of communication as a means of production.

We can also distinguish between the social means of production and the economic means of production. As Jacob Torfing has written: "Mass media are…engaged in the production of the fabric of everyday life as they organize our leisure time, shape our social behaviour and provide the material out of which our very identities are constructed in terms of class, race, nationality, sexuality and distinctions between 'us' and 'them'" (Torfing 1999, 210). In terms of social "means of production", sites like Facebook and the search engine Google are said by Eli Pariser to have formulated algorithms so that what you view on your specific page is informed by your interests and has even gone so far as to suggest that ideological viewpoints dissimilar to your own are filtered from your immediate view, what he called "filter-bubbles" (Pariser 2011). I call this a social "means of production" because the product generated by this algorithm working on your personal information generates an identify of yourself viewed by the world. In the same way we can understand the means of communication as an economic means of production, in which your personal information is used by advertisers of certain products to appeal to you. One needs simply to look at the front-page of their Facebook profile to be bombarded with advertisements that "you may like" according to Facebook. Fuchs (2012) has discussed this in relation to the advertising cookie *DoubleClick*. Purchased by Google in 2007, *DoubleClick* "collects and networks data about usage behaviour on various websites and sells this data" (Fuchs 2012, 46). This information allows companies to then target you with personalized advertising messages.

7. Smythe: Blindspots, Audience Commodity and the Means of Production

The role of advertising, both in the economic and cultural milieu of the capitalist mode of production was heavily analysed by Dallas Smythe. Smythe (1977) argued that when it came to mass media and communications, an inability to present "the economic and political significance of mass communication systems" presented a blindspot in "Marxist theory in the European and Atlantic basin

cultures" (Smythe 1977, 1). As we mentioned above Google employs tactics of data mining in order to target the consumer of Google's product with advertisements that are produced in line with the consumer's interests. For Smythe, such advertisements are an aspect of the economic function of capital (Smythe 1977, 1981) In answering the question of what the form of the commodity of mass-produced, advertiser-supported communications are (Smythe 1977) the audience. According to Smythe, the advertisements that appear on television, Radio and (in our case) the internet are bought from the communicative industry in an attempt to build particular audiences of their specific product. Traditionally it was thought that advertisers bought space from the communications industry in order to advertise their products. It was understood that space was the commodity. (Meehan 1993) However if the commodity of advertisers and communications was space then space would be equal value no matter where the advertisers placed their advertisement. However this is not the case. The value of certain spaces of advertisement (i.e. Billboards, Television ads, Radio ads, Internet ads) is higher according to the space in which the advertisement occupies. In terms of the internet, A website with a high-traffic yield is capable of charging more for advertising then a website with a low-traffic yield. This presents us with the fact that while space is an aspect of the commodity that advertisers purchase, it is not the whole aspect. Smythe argues that what the advertiser is purchasing is the "services of the audiences with predictable specifications who will pay attention in predictable numbers and at particular times" (Smythe 1977, 4). This can be seen in respect to television and internet advertisement. For example, if I am watching a particular television show, advertisers who product may correspond to that particular show will press for that advertising space (i.e. A Cartoon show usually have advertisements about the toys of characters presented in the show). For Smythe, the audience becomes the commodity in the communicative industry as it is bought and produced, and sold, in various ways.

How can we understand this further in terms of the means of communication as a means of production? I showed in the previous section that the internet has seen the growth of the productive consumer; this is to say that while we as users of the internet consume its products, we also have the ability to generate products for the internet. An obvious case in this is the ability to join and create your own Facebook page. Why is this product? In creating your own Facebook page, regardless of what it is about, you use the means of production (i.e. information, computers, internet access) to produce something that others will use. It is these types of pages which generate much interest in Facebook and contributes much to its survival as one the largest social networking site. In introducing the work of Dallas Smythe, we also introduce a new level to the means of communication as a means of production. In this sense we can see the means of communication (Television, Radio, Internet etc) as producing audiences through advertising. We may then seek to understand the means of communication as a means of production at the structural level, in which the level, which has been elaborated by Smythe, helps inform, the level of prosumers.

8. Conclusion

The Internet challenges the conception of industrial production that Marxist theory has been most comfortable with. It may be suggest that in our time, Marx's conception of the productive forces and relations of production may be better used to understand the productive processes of television, telecommunications and newspapers. But the Internet is not only a combination of these three processes, but expands upon them in new directions in terms of cognition, communication, cooperation, production, circulation, distribution, consumption. As a "virtual world", its capacity to participate with a materialist theory of production is still in need of much discussion and theorizing. The introduction of concepts such as *prosumers* may only account for a tiny amount of the projects that need to be actualized in relation to a Marxian theory of the Internet. Perhaps in a similar vein to *prosumers*, a concept of *promunication* (productive communication) needs to be thought out.

The way forward in developing a theory in which one can properly address the issues raised by the communicative array of the internet is by submitting it towards a structural Marxist interpretation of society. While the economy is an element which is involved in the development of the internet, not only as a productive force but also as a politico-legal and cultural element, it is far from being a determining factor. I have discussed above the difference between *determination in the last instance*, an instance that never comes, and *domination.* This is the type of relation which occurs daily, hourly, minutely on the Internet. In respect to Williams, we may say that the dominating force of the Internet is culture. The vast majority of interactions between people are social interactions; whether they are via an online game, a dating website, or just friends communication for free using

various types of freeware and software. But this is not to say that culture is a determining element of the internet. In the tradition of the structural Marxists, the Internet is overdetermined, but each interaction that takes place on the Internet is dominated by a different element, whether that be political, legal, economic or cultural. This cannot however be the final word on the subject, nor will it. What I have tried to provide in the paper above is a foundation for further development of the idea that the Internet as a means of communication can be identified as means of production.

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About the Author

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Relations of production

Relations of production (German: *Produktionsverhältnisse*) is a concept frequently used by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their theory of historical materialism and in *Das Kapital*. It is first explicitly used in Marx's published book *The Poverty of Philosophy*, although Marx and Engels had already defined the term in *The German Ideology*.

Some social relations are voluntary and freely chosen (a person chooses to associate with another person or a group). But other social relations are involuntary, i.e. people can be socially related, whether they like that or not, because they are part of a family, a group, an organization, a community, a nation etc.

By "relations of production", Marx and Engels meant the sum total of social relationships that people *must* enter into in order to survive, to produce, and to reproduce their means of life. As people *must* enter into these social relationships, i.e. because participation in them is not voluntary, the totality of these relationships constitute a relatively stable and permanent *structure*, the "economic structure" or mode of production.

The term "relations of production" is somewhat vague, for two main reasons:

- The German word *Verhältnis* can mean "relation", "proportion", or "ratio". Thus, the relationships could be qualitative, quantitative, or both. Which meaning applies can only be established from the context.
- The relations to which Marx refers can be social relationships, economic relationships, or technological relationships.

Marx and Engels typically use the term to refer to the socioeconomic relationships characteristic of a specific epoch; for example: a capitalist's exclusive relationship to a capital good, and a wage worker's consequent relation to the capitalist; a feudal lord's relationship to a fief, and the serf's consequent relation to the lord; a slavemaster's relationship to their slave; etc. It is contrasted with and also affected by what Marx called the forces of production.

Contents

How Marx uses the concept

Here are four famous quotations showing Marx's use of the concept of relations of production:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these **relations of production** constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing **relations of production** or – this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms – with the **property relations** within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.

— 1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*

Economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, the abstractions of the social relations of production, M. Proudhon, holding this upside down like a true philosopher, sees in actual relations nothing but the incarnation of the principles, of these categories, which were slumbering – so M. Proudhon the philosopher tells us – in the bosom of the "impersonal reason of humanity." M. Proudhon the economist understands very well that men make cloth, linen, or silk materials in definite **relations of production**. But what he has not understood is that these definite social relations are just as much produced by men as linen, flax, etc. Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist. The same men who establish their social relations in conformity with the material productivity, produce also principles, ideas, and categories, in conformity with their social relations. Thus the ideas, these categories, are as little eternal as the relations they express. They are historical and transitory products. ... The **production relations** of every society form a whole.

— *The Poverty of Philosophy* [1] (https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/poverty-philosophy/ch02.htm)

We have seen that the capitalist process of production is a historically determined form of the social process of production in general. The latter is as much a production process of material conditions of human life as a process taking place under specific historical and economic **production relations**, producing and reproducing these production relations themselves, and thereby also the bearers of this process, their material conditions of existence and their mutual relations, i.e., their particular socio-economic form. For the aggregate of these relations, in which the agents of this production stand with respect to Nature and to one another, and in which they produce, is precisely society, considered from the standpoint of its economic structure. Like all its predecessors, the capitalist process of production proceeds under definite material conditions, which are, however, simultaneously the bearers of **definite social relations** entered into by individuals in the process of reproducing their life. Those conditions, like these relations, are on the one hand prerequisites, on the other hand results and creations of the capitalist process of production; they are produced and reproduced by it.

— *Das Kapital*, Vol. III, Ch. 48 [2] (https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch48.htm)

> ...Wakefield discovered that in the Colonies, property in money, means of subsistence, machines, and other means of production, does not as yet stamp a man as a capitalist if there be wanting the correlative — the wage-worker, the other man who is compelled to sell himself of his own free-will. He discovered that **capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons**, established by the instrumentality of things. Mr. Peel, he moans, took with him from England to Swan River, West Australia, means of subsistence and of production to the amount of £50,000. Mr. Peel had the foresight to bring with him, besides, 3,000 persons of the working-class, men, women, and children. Once arrived at his destination, "Mr. Peel was left without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river." Unhappy Mr. Peel, who provided for everything except the export of English modes of production to Swan River!
>
> — Karl Marx, (https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch33.htm)*Das Kapital*, Vol. I, Ch. 33, courtesy of www.marxists.org

(In other words, the English relations of production did not exist in Australia; there was no system of property rights and legal obligations and no economic necessity compelling workers to work for their boss. The servants therefore could leave Mr. Peel in order to find work or occupy free land to make a better living.)

Definitions

A social relation can be defined, in the first instance, as

- a relation between individuals insofar as they belong to a group, or
- a relation between groups, or
- a relation between an individual and a group

The group could be an ethnic or kinship group, a social institution or organisation, a social class, a nation or gender etc.

A social relation is therefore not simply identical with an interpersonal relation or an individual relation, although all these types of relations presuppose each other. A social relation refers to a common social characteristic of a group of people.

Society for Marx is *the sum total of social relations connecting its members*.

Social *relations of production* in Marx's sense refer to

- (often legally encoded) ownership and control relations pertaining to society's productive assets,
- the way people are formally and informally associated within the economic sphere of production, including as social classes,
- co-operative work relations (including household labor),
- socio-economic dependencies between people arising from the way they produce and reproduce their existence,
- relationships between different worksites or production sites
- the quantitative proportions of different aspects of the sphere of production, considered from the point of view of society as a whole.

The totality of social relations of production constitute the social structure of the economy, which according to Marx determine how incomes, products and assets will be distributed.

Social/technical distinction and reification

Combined with the productive forces, the relations of production constitute a historically specific mode of production. Karl Marx contrasts the social relations of production with the technical relations of production; in the former case, it is people (subjects) who are related, in the latter case, the relation is between people and objects in the physical world they inhabit (those objects are, in the context of production, what Marx calls the "means of labor" or means of production).

However, Marx argues that with the rise of market economy, this distinction is increasingly obscured and distorted. In particular, a cash economy makes it possible to define, symbolise and manipulate relationships between things that people make in abstraction from the social and technical relations involved. Marx says this leads to the reification (thingification or *Verdinglichung*) of economic relations, of which commodity fetishism is a prime example.

> The community of men, or the manifestation of the nature of men, their mutual complementing the result of which is species-life, truly human life—this community is conceived by political economy in the form of exchange and trade. Society, says Destutt de Tracy, is a series of mutual exchanges. It is precisely this process of mutual integration. Society, says Adam Smith, is a commercial society. Each of its members is a merchant. It is seen that political economy defines the estranged form of social intercourse as the essential and original form corresponding to man's nature.
>
> — Karl Marx, Notes on James Mill (https://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/james-mill/index.htm)

The marketplace seems to be a place where all people have free and equal access and freely negotiate and bargain over deals and prices on the basis of civil equality. People will buy and sell goods without really knowing where they originated or who made them. They know that objectively they depend on producers and consumers somewhere else, that this social dependency exists, but they do not know who specifically those people are or what their activities are. Market forces seem to regulate everything, but what is really behind those market forces has become obscured, because the social relationship between people or their relation with nature is expressed as a commercial relationship between things (money, commodities, capital) (see also value-form).

Some social relations of production therefore exist in an objective, mind-independent way, not simply because they are a natural necessity for human groups, but because of the mediation of social and technical relations by commerce. In addition to creating new social and technical relations, commerce introduces a proliferation of relationships between tradeable 'things'. Not only do relationships between 'things' (commodities, prices etc.) begin to indicate and express social and technical relations, the commercial relations also begin to govern and regulate the pattern of human contact and technique.

The fact therefore that particular social relations of production acquire an objective, mind-independent existence may not be due to any natural necessity asserting itself but only to a purely social necessity: commodity exchange objectifies social relations to the point where they escape from conscious human control, and exist such that they can be recognised only by abstract thought.

Relations of distribution

One of the theoretical problems in Marxian economics is to distinguish exactly between *relations of production* and *relations of distribution*, determining the significance of each in the allocation of resources. According to the crudest and most vulgar interpretations of *Das Kapital*, exploitation occurs only at the point of production. Marx himself obviously did not assert this at all, he only postulated the command over the surplus labour of others as the basis of the existence of capital and its economic power.

Marx discusses the theoretical problem in two main places: the introduction to the *Grundrisse* manuscript and in chapter 51 of *Das Kapital*. In the *Grundrisse*, where he defines the total economy to include production, circulation, distribution and consumption (similar to James Mill), he raises the following question:

> In society... the producer's relation to the product, once the latter is finished, is an external one, and its return to the subject depends on his relations to other individuals. He does not come into possession of it directly. Nor is its immediate appropriation his purpose when he produces in society. Distribution steps between the producers and the products, hence between production and consumption, to determine in accordance with social laws what the producer's share will be in the world of products. Now, does distribution stand at the side of and outside production as an autonomous sphere?
>
> — Karl Marx, Grundrisse (https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch01.htm)

He answers his own question negatively:

> The structure [German: *Gliederung*] of distribution is completely determined by the structure of production. Distribution is itself a product of production, not only in its object, in that only the results of production can be distributed, but also in its form, in that the specific kind of participation in production determines the specific forms of distribution, i.e. the pattern of participation in distribution.
>
> — Karl Marx, Grundrisse

Disagreeing with David Ricardo, who regarded *distribution* as the proper object of study for economics, Marx argues that the mode of production largely *determines* the mode of distribution: the *source* of income and products in production, and their *distribution* among the population must be analysed within one framework:

> In the shallowest conception, distribution appears as the distribution of products, and hence as further removed from and quasi-independent of production. But before distribution can be the distribution of products, it is: (1) the distribution of the instruments of production, and (2), which is a further specification of the same relation, the distribution of the members of the society among the different kinds of production. ... To examine production while disregarding this internal distribution within it is obviously an empty abstraction; while conversely, the distribution of products follows by itself from this distribution which forms an original moment of production.
>
> — Karl Marx, Grundrisse (https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch01.htm)

In the last chapters of *Das Kapital* Vol 3, he develops the argument, defining relations of distribution as the "forms" which "express the relationships in which the total value newly produced is distributed among the owners of the various agents of production" (as income and products).

His critique of political economy in this regard was (1) that relations of production or distribution are posited as "natural and eternal" rather than as historically specific relations, (2) that forms of distribution of income and products are crucially determined by property relations pertaining to productive assets; (3) that by constantly reproducing the relations of production, the mode of production of capital also reproduces the relations of distribution corresponding to it.

Late in his life, Marx touches on the issue again:

> Any distribution whatever of the means of consumption is only a consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production themselves. The latter distribution, however, is a feature of the mode of production itself. The capitalist mode of production, for example, rests on the fact that the material conditions of production are in the hands of nonworkers in the form of property in capital and land, while the masses are only owners of the personal condition of production, of labor power. If the elements of production are so distributed, then the present-day distribution of the means of consumption results automatically. If the material conditions of production are the co-operative property of the workers themselves, then there likewise results a distribution of the means of consumption different from the present one. Vulgar socialism (and from it in turn a section of the democrats) has taken over from the bourgeois economists the consideration and treatment of distribution as independent of the mode of production and hence the presentation of socialism as turning principally on distribution. After the real relation has long been made clear, why retrogress again?[1]

Criticism of Marx's concept

It is frequently objected by Weberian sociologists (those in the tradition of Max Weber) that Marx paid insufficient attention to the *intersubjective* dimension of social relations, i.e. the meanings consciously attached by people to their social interactions.

However, Marx's argument is that these subjective or intersubjective meanings permit of infinite variations, and therefore cannot be the foundation for a genuine science of society. Individual meanings depend on shared meanings, and these shared meanings arise out of objective circumstances which exist independently of individuals. So one must begin with understanding those objective interdependencies which by necessity shape and socialise human beings, i.e. those social relations which people as social beings must enter into, regardless of what they may think or wish.

In this context, the young Vladimir Lenin commented:

> Hitherto, sociologists had found it difficult to distinguish the important and the unimportant in the complex network of social phenomena (that is the root of subjectivism in sociology) and had been unable to discover any objective criterion for such a demarcation. Materialism provided an absolutely objective criterion by singling out "production relations" as the structure of society, and by making it possible to apply to these relations that general scientific criterion of recurrence whose applicability to sociology the subjectivists denied. So long as they confined themselves to ideological social relations (i.e., such as, before taking shape, pass through mans consciousness) —we are, of course, referring all the time to the consciousness of social relations and no others— they could not observe recurrence and regularity in the social phenomena of the various countries, and their science was at best only a description of these phenomena, a collection of raw material. The analysis of material social relations (i.e., of those that take shape without passing through mans consciousness: when exchanging products men enter into production relations without even realising that there is a social relation of production here)—the analysis of material social relations

> at once made it possible to observe recurrence and regularity and to generalise the systems of the various countries in the single fundamental concept: social formation. It was this generalisation alone that made it possible to proceed from the description of social phenomena (and their evaluation from the standpoint of an ideal) to their strictly scientific analysis, which isolates, let us say by way of example, that which distinguishes one capitalist country from another and investigates that which is common to all of them... Then, however, Marx, who had expressed this hypothesis in the forties, set out to study the factual (nota bene) material. He took one of the social-economic formations—the system of commodity production—and on the basis of a vast mass of data (which he studied for not less than twenty five years) gave a most detailed analysis of the laws governing the functioning of this formation and its development."[2]

In fact, Marx devotes a great amount of attention in *Das Kapital* to explaining why economic relations appear in human consciousness in the way that they do, and why they might appear in a different way than they really are.

Another sort of criticism, from economists, consists of the observation that processes of distribution (of products and income) can to a considerable extent develop *independently* or autonomously from what happens in production, with the aid of a developed credit system.

In fact, gross distortions between value added in production, and the distribution of products and incomes, might occur—for example, as a result of underdevelopment, imperialism, state intervention, unequal exchange, fictitious capital, credit bubbles, or capital gains from rising property values.

That is, a society or region might get much more or much less income than the value of what it produces. In that case, there are intermediary agencies between production and consumption influencing the allocation of resources.

Probably Marx would have acknowledged that, but he would presumably have argued that ultimately, the dyssynchrony or distortion between production and distribution would cause a crisis and then a readjustment of distribution to the real structure of production relations.

See also

- Capitalist mode of production
- Character mask
- Law of value
- Reserve army of labour
- Sociology of space

Notes

1. "Critique of the Gotha Programme-- I" (https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm). *www.marxists.org*.
2. Vladimir Lenin, *What the “Friends of the People” Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats*, 1894.

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- Vladimir Lenin, *What the "Friends of the People" Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats*.

- Göran Therborn, *Science, Class and Society*.
- Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*.
- Herbert Gintis, Samuel Bowles, Robert T. Boyd and Ernst Fehr, *Moral Sentiments and Material Interests: The Foundations of Cooperation in Economic Life*.
- John McMurtry, *The Structure of Marx's World-View*
