

WSIP PANELS AT *RETHINKING MARXISM*

A1: 8:30-10:00 [Campus Center 174-76]

Brave New Worlds: Race, Capital, Reproduction

This panel takes as its theme the racialization of capital within histories of empire, both in its formal and developmental guises. The papers share a concern with reproduction as the means of development itself (Vials), interrogating how eugenic reproduction is aligned variously with romantic anticapitalism in the case of the racialization of Asians as abstract labor (Day), and with the liberal feminist subject in the case of transnational surrogacy in India (Nadkarni). Thus reproduction is not only the motor of development but is also a crucial site of development, and one of the means through which the racialization of capital occurs. Looking at distinct historical moments and geographies, each paper problematizes the relationship among race, capital and reproduction to think through utopian and dystopian narratives of complicity and resistance. Sponsored by the World Studies Interdisciplinary Project, the panel considers long and fragmented histories of imperialism and its contemporary iterations.

Laura Briggs (University of Massachusetts Amherst) Chair

Iyko Day (Mount Holyoke College)

“The New Jews: Asian Racialization and Romantic Anticapitalism”

My presentation examines the increasing prevalence of the “New Jews” analogy to describe the upward economic mobility of Asians in North America. While the analogy idealizes patterns of economic integration as evidence of racial assimilation in North America, my paper focuses on the more disturbing implications of the Asian-Jewish analogy, particularly in terms of the dangerous economism historically attributed to Jews. Examining the secular dimension of anti-Semitism through which Jews came to personify the abstract evils of capitalism, my paper probes the historical and cultural modalities of Asian immigrant labor in North America that have similarly aligned Asians with abstractions that are associated with a malicious sphere of capitalism. However, unlike European Jews’ historical segregation in financial sectors of the economy that fed an ideology of Jewish control over capital, my presentation demonstrates how the economism of Asian racialization is derived from the stereotype of labor efficiency. My paper surveys how a eugenic ideology of romantic anticapitalism negatively aligns Asians with abstract rather than concrete labor. Like Jews before them, my paper shows how the personification of destructive capitalism as Asian ultimately solves a problem of representation, giving human shape to the abstract circuits of capital that are otherwise unrepresentable.

Chris Vials (University of Connecticut)

“Neoliberal Development, the Rise of Apocalyptic Popular Culture, and the Crisis of Reproduction in the United States”

Outlined in Volume 2 of *Capital*, Marx’s “expanded reproduction” is a cycle of capital flows that grow in size with the completion of each circuit. It is essentially a temporal register that posits time as a primary means through which capital imprisons humanity. As British imperialism of the 19th century articulated

reproduction through a rubric of “progress” and “reform,” the business press of the United States continues to envision reproduction as “development,” a teleological sense wherein time rewards those who wait for incremental, economic change at the hands of the market. This paper examines the rise of apocalyptic popular culture in the U.S. – inclusive of dystopian sci-fi futures, zombie nightmares, and environmental catastrophes – to reveal a cultural crisis of faith in neoliberal development. This presentation will use apocalyptic popular culture as a site to show how developmental narratives no longer hold purchase among domestic populations, particularly for the purposes of neoliberal empire-building abroad. After noting the failure of many of these dystopian texts to imagine an alternative, I will conclude with a brief note on Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* as a representational strategy that puts forth a resistive notion of reproduction in which subaltern subjects actively shape the future.

Asha Nadkarni (University of Massachusetts Amherst)
“Transnational Surrogacy and the Neoliberal Mother India”

Through a reading of Zippi Brand Frank’s 2010 documentary, *Google Baby*, this paper considers the outsourcing of reproductive labor to India. It argues that the so-called “liberal” eugenics of new reproductive technologies smooth over the inequalities structurally necessary to globalization and posit a brave new world in which the reproduction of the economically “well-born” is dependent upon the economic necessity of those more fertile but less economically eugenic. At the same time, by coding the outsourcing of reproductive labor to Indian surrogates in a feminist language of empowerment, *Google Baby* presents a meliorist account of how technology has transformed reproduction into an act determined less by chance than by the market. This language of economic empowerment relies upon a liberal feminism that posits as its endpoint the modern, developed, reproductive subject who can freely make choices in her own best interests, thus ignoring how the desires and interests of such a subject are conveniently made to coincide with the interests of global capitalism. The very logic that “globalization is making [transnational surrogacy] affordable,” as the opening sequence of the documentary informs us, therefore references both contemporary systems of exploitation and longer histories of colonialism and imperialism.

Laura Briggs (University of Massachusetts) Discussant

B3: 10:15-12:00 [Campus Center 163C]

Development's Backstory: Discourses and Conjunctures Across "Medieval" Middle East and "Modern" Atlantic

This panel asks what new narratives of economy and culture emerge when we think across the entrenched divisions between medieval and modern as well as across hemispheres, and here especially linking Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds. As Kathleen Davis shows (2008), a sharp divide has long been instituted between feudal and modern, in studies of capitalism as well as culture, and perpetuated by thinkers as diverse as J.G.A. Pocock and Antonio Negri. The binary between medieval and modern then ramifies into corollary divisions, dividing the globe so that “the West” and “the North” equal modern, dynamic, secular, and democratic, and “the East” and “the South” equal the stagnating, medieval opposites, where states cling to simple traditions pre-dating systems and capitalism.

The first two papers present material eschewing and cutting across these divisions, revealing economies, cultural encounters, and literary-economic discourses that confound and complicate them. Against this background, the third paper examines the discourses of development deployed by Anglo-Europeans as they turned toward the Americas for their point of leverage in competition with powerful states and merchant networks in the global East and South. Taken together, the papers invite us to consider what new conjunctures come into view, in both past history and present events, when we adjust our historical and geopolitical coordinates in this way.

Wes Yu (Mount Holyoke College) Chair

Sahar Amer (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill)

“Rethinking Modernity and Political Economy through Cross-Cultural Medieval Studies”

What is the relevance of medieval cross-cultural research to contemporary postcolonial, economic, and modernity studies? How would our understanding of contemporary European-Mediterranean relations change if we took into account the legacy of the past and the history of pre-modern contacts? How would narratives of political, economic, and cultural history change if we questioned conventional medieval/modern and east/west divisions? I will address these questions by offering some examples of cross-cultural political, economic, and cultural encounters between medieval Islamic societies and Christian Europe, exploring the relevance of this background to the highly contested notions of “modernization” and “civilization.”

As recent scholarship establishes, in the medieval period “contact zones” and intersections between the Middle East and Europe were widespread and multiple, far exceeding Crusader invasions: they included active trade relations between Muslim societies and medieval European courts; political missions between rulers North and South of the Mediterranean; scientific study that brought European scholars to Arabic-language Andalusian, Italian, and North African courts; and intermarriages between Byzantine princesses and the European nobility. Each gives us a window into unsuspected continuities, contests, and intertextualities among empires that have long been considered divided, separate, and remote. Studying selected examples of medieval cross-border interactions, I consider the ways that they challenge contemporary

narratives of modernity, economy, and cultural history.

Jane Degenhardt (University of Massachusetts Amherst)

“Global Trade and Early English Empire: Inter-imperialism and the Pursuit of Gold on the Renaissance Stage”

Viewing the early world-system as a precursor to modern-day globalization, I address the question of how England’s early participation in global trade informed its fashioning of itself as an empire. This analysis demonstrates the need to lengthen our chronologies and widen our maps of world economy.

While the dominant narrative of early British imperialism emphasizes colonial expansion in the Americas, it is also true that contemporaneous participation in eastern trade not only conditioned the formation of British empire but also shaped English perspectives on its global trade in relation to other models of empire, in particular colonial empires. Approaching this topic from the discipline of Renaissance literary study, I present a case study of Thomas Heywood’s play *The Fair Maid of the West, Part I* (c. 1600), a play that other critics have argued aligns the English with other European Christians. Using an inter-imperial framework that brings not just Spain and Morocco into view, but also the Amerindians and the imperially-dominant Ottoman empire, I examine how Heywood’s play imagines English empire in alliance with North African trade and in contradistinction to Spanish New World colonialism. This understanding of the early-modern world economy and of cultural interventions in it, reveals the limitations of both East-West and medieval-modern divisions.

Valerie Forman (New York University)

“Developing New Worlds”

This paper provides a genealogical approach to the concept of “development” in the discourses and practices of the early modern transatlantic political economy. In contrast to Europe’s social and economic relationships with the Ottoman Empire and the East Indies, both of which had longstanding trade networks recognized and even envied by Europe, those with the Americas emerged as forms of “development” that imagined the transformation of “wild” spaces into productive property.

Focusing especially on the West Indies, my concern is to reveal the ways that discourses that seem merely to rationalize colonialism must instead be understood within the context of debates about the relationships among labor, possession, consumption, and management of resources that themselves emerge from the increasingly global economy. What are the roles of the market and of labor in enabling the integration of territories into a global economy directed toward capital accumulation? How do these relations develop as a product of the interdependencies as well as forms of competition and cooperation among various European sovereignties and their West Indian colonies? By historicizing the fundamental links among development, possession, and capital accumulation as they emerged across the Atlantic, I hope to open up new ways to reflect critically on how the “West” both defines itself and what it means to be participant in the global capitalist economy today in order to imagine more cooperative and non-Eurocentric alternatives.

C3: 12:45-2:15 [Campus Center 174-176]

Rehistoricizing World Economy: Empires, Environment, Ethnicity, and Capitalism

This panel reframes the longstanding question of the relation between states and capitalism, with implications for conventional analyses of trade, surplus, and solidarity. Bringing new cutting-edge histories of empire and world politics to bear, while also taking account of ethnicity and environment, presenters redraw the typical coordinates for studies of states and capitalism. Taken together, the three papers highlight the need for longer historical and more multi-dimensionally dialectical analyses of political economy.

Although Lenin identified “rivalry between a number of great powers in the striving for hegemony” as a feature of imperialist capitalism, he understood this rivalry as a late result of capitalism in its later-nineteenth/early twentieth-century monopoly stage (1920 [1917]). Recent research in world history (expanding on Janet Abu-Lughod’s seminal *Before European Hegemony*) shows, however, that such rivalries have been in play and have shaped profit-driven core-periphery economies at least since the medieval period; state rivalries and institutions have long operated as fundamental elements of capitalist formation, in the process manipulating physical environments and ethnic identities. This WSIP-sponsored panel will introduce this research; consider its implications for our theories of political economy; and present specific cases for analysis. Political scientist Greg White will serve as respondent.

Stephen Platt (University of Massachusetts Amherst) Chair

**Laura Doyle (University of Massachusetts Amherst)
“Inter-imperial Economies and Geopolitical Agencies”**

This paper proposes wider coordinates for study of global political economy as clarified by recent data in world history; and it argues for the value of an inter-imperial analysis of this data, including for Marxist, postcolonial, gender, and world-systems theory.

Such an analysis begins, I argue, with a more precise global map of interacting states—one that encompasses not only British, American, and European empires but also their large-state precursors and competitors, including Chinese, Abbasid, Safavid, Ottoman, Mughal, Russian, Almoravid, and Ethiopian empires, without which Europe would likely never have gotten its foothold in what we call capitalist modernity. The term “inter-imperiality” serves to designate these relations: it highlights the conditions created by dialectically co-formed empires and by interacting persons moving between and against empires. Although such processes arose a millennium ago, they have intensified: as states (especially empires) have competed and imitated each other’s systems, the reach of some has become more invasive and global; and their legacies have become more deeply sedimented through material habituses, in Bourdieu’s sense. And yet these conditions have also provoked powerful solidarities among inter-imperially situated laborers, women, and minorities. The paper points to specific cases, with attention to infrastructures, technologies, and dialectical transformations, advocating for revision of current critical paradigms.

Alan Mikhail (Yale University)

“War and Charisma: Horses and Elephants in the Indian Ocean Economy”

This paper will outline the Indian Ocean animal trade, extending my earlier research on environment and empire, and it will argue for the centrality of animals in understanding the early modern economy. I examine the role of horses and elephants in the period from roughly the thirteenth-century Mongol conquests of Central Asia to eighteenth-century British colonial ventures in South Asia.

This period’s trade fed horses from Iran and the Arabian Peninsula to South Asia for wars between the independent principalities of the Deccan, in return for elephants from India traded to the Ottoman and Safavid Empires. The Middle East thus funneled war animals to India, and India returned wondrous creatures for imperial menageries, indicating important intersections between a military “staples” trade and an imperial “gifting” economy. Other regions such as China and East Africa, keen to get Arabian and Persian horses both for warfare and for a foothold in the lucrative Indian Ocean economy, became a secondary source of “charismatic” megafauna like elephants. For rulers, elephants given as gifts served to cement alliances and to impress upon rivals their power to harness the riches of the natural world; meanwhile horses served in the battles through which they seized and consolidated power. All dimensions were formative for the interlocking Indian Ocean and Middle Eastern economies.

Sergey Glebov (Smith College and Amherst College)

“Imperial Trades: Accommodation and Security in Political Economy of 17th Century Eurasian Empires”

Our contemporary understanding of empire still rests on Lenin’s critique of imperialism, which presented empires as functions of the capitalist market and as large and repressive states. By looking at the 17th century Eurasian empires (Muscovy and Poland-Lithuania) I will argue that empires traded in security and the management of diversity as a fundamental element of their economies. Their political economies were not singularly influenced by large scale transcontinental trade (such as, for instance, fur or rhubarb trade) but also rested on their ability to offer protection and accommodation to a large selection of ethnic, linguistic and social groups.

To illustrate this point, I focus first on how the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Rzecz Pospolita) pointedly balanced diverse interests as a stabilizing element in its economy, until the counter-Reformation unsettled this balance and provoked the uprising of the Greek Orthodox frontiersmen, the Cossacks--thus precipitating the Commonwealth’s decline. Muscovy’s expansion into Siberia offers another case in which ethnicity and culture direct an empire’s economy. While often described as driven by fur trade, in fact the expansion into Siberia was based on resource extraction and entailed ethnic relations, including taxation of the native groups--in fur. This situation led to a political economy in which the incorporation of native elites into governance became a guiding goal of the empire.

Greg White (Smith College) Discussant

D12: 2:30-4:00 [Room TBA]

Africa and its Diaspora: Marx and Method, Labor and Surplus

Joye Bowman (University of Massachusetts Amherst) Chair

Maghan Keita (Villanova University)

“Marx And The People Without History: Rethinking Marxist Historiography”

In his celebrated volume, *Europe and the People Without History*, Eric Wolf attributes the phrase 'people without history' to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels as a descriptor of backward nature of the peoples of Eastern Europe. Built on Marx's interpretation of Hegel's Philosophy of History, the concept is, and has been easily transferred, historically and in the contemporary sense, to numerous peoples who have been the subjects of modern imperialism.

However, as both Hegel and Marx would observe, even this idea has been subject to the forces of the 'dialectic'. Even as it became a philosophical and historiographic mainstay of the very imperial powers that were central to Marx's critique, 'people without history' were clearly making and doing history, and articulating it in ways that would challenge Enlightenment paradigms of who and what they were. Marx's envisioning of 'history from below'--histories of the laboring masses--would undergo catastrophic shifts with realization of breadth, depth, and complexity if those masses globally, and the stories they had come to transmit over time.

Within this theoretical and historiographic transformation were political economic questions that would ask for what purpose and to what degree might categories such as race, gender, age, sexual proclivity, or any other socio-political economic construction, be put to serve the work of the control of the distribution of resources in any given society, globally, and over the course of history. Such a transformation requires challenges to conventional notions of Marxism, as well as a recognition and analysis of the historical context out of which these theorem arose.

This piece proposes to rethink Marxist historiography in relation to race through the lens of the historiographies of Renaissance Europe. Central to this project will also be a challenge to what it means to be 'European'.

John E. Higginson (University of Massachusetts Amherst)

“Revolutions Then and Now”

African slavery, the earlier bullion crisis of the latter fifteenth century, and the consequent hyperinflation of the Price Revolution of the sixteenth, compelled the aristocracy and other possessors of great wealth in the West Atlantic countries to think of human labor as something almost as important as precious metals in the maintenance of wealth. The wealth generated by the slave trade and slavery was powerfully destructive of mercantilist conceptions of how an economy should be organized and the place of aristocratic privilege in the maintenance and organization of the state. African slavery and plantation agriculture demonstrated that human labor could also generate new riches as well as maintain previously accumulated wealth. But as the

boundaries and quantities of the new kind of wealth expanded in, say, England, France and the Netherlands and in their overseas colonies, new conceptions of personal freedom and political power, which had grown markedly during the Reformation and Thirty Years War, arrived at an impasse. The English Civil War, which played itself out in several guises between 1640 and 1688, broke this impasse and gave a political meaning to Galileo and Johan Kepler's conception of revolution.

Dale Tomich (Binghamton University)

“Successive Approximations: The Anthropology of Sidney Mintz”

I would like to show a segment of a documentary film that I made with Sidney Mintz. The film is entitled *Caribbean Journey: Conversations with Sidney Mintz*. In it, Mintz reflects on his career as an anthropologist of the Caribbean. The segment that I would like to show is called *Successive Approximations*. In this segment, Mintz discusses the methodological approach that he has used in his work. Mintz draws the term “successive approximations” from the work of historian Jan Gross. It refers to an approach that selects a limited number of problems – in Mintz's case, the plantation, sugar, peasantries – and continually revisits them from different angles. The purpose is to create a continual dialogue between concepts and evidence that continually deepens our understanding of the relations at hand, but makes no claim to treat them exhaustively. This approach allows continual reflection on concepts and reveals new dimensions of the phenomena under consideration. This segment illuminates Mintz's own anthropological practice and offers an alternative that claim that make truth claims by absolutizing either the facts or theoretical concepts.

Mwangi wa Gĩ thĩ nji (University of Massachusetts Amherst)

“Economic and Cultural Identity: Ethnic Solidarity as Access to Surplus”

Those who assert – and in our view rightly – that the motive force of history is the class struggle, would certainly agree to re-examining this assertion to make it more precise and give it wider application, if they had a deeper knowledge of the essential characteristics of some of the colonized peoples (dominated by imperialism). In fact, the general evolution of mankind and each of the peoples in the human groups of which it is composed, classes appear neither as a generalized and simultaneous phenomenon throughout all these groups, nor as a finished, perfect and spontaneous whole.

Amilcar Cabral (1979)

Ethnic identity is often seen as a bane if not the bane of the development of modern African societies. From both the political right and left, ethnicity was expected to be swept away by the forces of capitalism and modernity. As capitalism progressed cultural identities would be subsumed by economic identities. Individuals would cease to primarily identify as part of a cultural group and identify more closely with their economic roles. The actual history of ethnicity in African countries however has followed a different path. Rather than being subsumed by economic forces it has morphed and in the context of multi-party electoral systems has strengthened. This has led many to see it, as the motive force of history in the present African context. Ethnic solidarity has become a way of controlling the state, the development of capitalism and therefore access to the surplus.

In this essay we build a political economy of ethnicity in the modern African state. Central to our view of political economy is an understanding of class as a process and the process being centered on the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus. This understanding of class allows us to think about

how ethnicity is used in the appropriation and distribution of surplus and therefore how it interacts and articulates with class. To do this we begin with the construction of ethnic groups not just as cultural groups but also as economic entities. Within these economic entities the elites control the surplus via control of the complimentary assets that individuals need for production such as land or cattle. With the onset of capitalism individuals are freed economically from the constraints of being a member of the ethnic group for economic reasons. The impact of this would be to decrease the control of the ethnic elites. However if ethnic elites are able to become the mediators of the entrance of individuals into the capitalist system they are able to maintain their status. This gives the elites an incentive to emphasize ethnic allegiances. In this essay we explore to what extent ethnicity in Africa fits into this materialist perspective.