

# The Strategic Centrality of Class in the Politics of “Race” and “Difference”

Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale

*University of Windsor*

Peter McLaren

*University of California, Los Angeles*

This article argues against the radical displacement of class analysis and the decentering of capitalism within contemporary theoretical narratives, the political pusillanimity of post-Marxist “culturalist” discourses, and offers a historical materialist critique of the “politics of difference.” The authors argue that much of what falls under the rubric of “difference” politics amounts to little more than a demand for inclusion into the club of “representation”—a posturing which they argue merely reinscribes the banality of liberal pluralism rooted in the ideology of free-market capitalism. The authors advance an approach to “difference” and “race” that seeks to reanimate these constructs by acknowledging their embeddedness in capitalist social formations and material relations of power.

*Keywords:* Marxism; class; theory; race and difference; historical materialism

This is definitely not a postcapitalist world, nor is it a post-Marxist one.

—Foster (2002, p. 43)

In the recent chronicles of “radical” social theory, visions of social transformation and narratives of human emancipation have been banished to the proverbial dustbin of history and proclaimed as hopelessly obsolete in the bourgeois parlors of the Western intelligentsia. Discourses that purport to be “of the Left” celebrate, often with whimsical delight and irresponsible alacrity, the “decentering” of capitalism as well as the decline of all metanarratives, specifically those of Marxism that once claimed a liberatory thrust. Yet most self-identified “radicals” rarely ever name that which has triumphed as the result of the incredulity toward emancipatory narratives. It is only the “metanarratives of emancipation” that have apparently met with humiliating and resounding defeat, whereas the most

meta of all metanarratives of the past three centuries, the creeping annexation of the globe for the dominance of capital over laboring humanity has met, during

Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies, Volume 3 Number 2, 2003 148-175

DOI: 10.1177/1532708603252311

© 2003 Sage Publications

those same decades, with stunning success, in a very specific form, namely the form of neo-liberal capitalism. (Ahmad, 1997c, p. 364)

Global imperialist capitalism has paved the way for a world that is increasingly divided between those who enjoy opulent affluence and those who live in dehumanizing servitude and economic misery. In every country of the world, we are witnessing social disintegration accompanied by a rise in abject poverty, unemployment, inequality, and environmental degradation (Wallach & Sforza, 1999; World Health Organization, as cited in Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2002). Today, roughly 2.8 billion people—almost half the world's population—are living on less than U.S.\$2 a day (McQuaig, 2001, p. 27). These are the concrete realities that currently exist throughout the globe—vertiginous narratives of desperation, destitution, and despair that perversely betoken the “death of history” and the triumph of capitalism. Given this context, it seems unfathomable that many “leftists” have championed “the decentering of capitalism,” “the abandonment of revolutionary politics,” and the “emphasis on language—its priority over deeds, words or social forces” (Wray, 1998) at precisely a time when a critical and unrelenting interrogation of capitalism seems more necessary than ever. Are contemporary “leftists” serving as diversionists rather than political interventionists? Are they, as E. P. Thompson (1978) once suggested about his “radical” contemporaries, too “enclosed and imprisoned within their own dramas” (p. 4)? Has the allure of abstract theorizing (as an end in and of itself) designed to impress academic bedfellows with a command of academese become a “substitute for more difficult practical engagements” (pp. 249-251)? Have the panegyric accounts of postmodern theory blinded progressive scholars to the possibilities offered by historical materialist critique?

Thompson's (1978) caustic remarks are, of course, derived from his controversial book, *The Poverty of Theory*. At the time, he was concerned with those “Left” academics who had been caught in the “web of scholastic argument” and who had “broken the circuits” between theory and practice (p. 4). The tract also represented “a political intervention . . . addressed to the left” (p. 295), for Thompson had grown weary of the set of constitutive principles that had come to define large portions of “leftist” theorizing, and he was disturbed by the political implications of what he perceived to be unmeasured assaults on historical materialism. Echoing Thompson, recent critics such as Epstein (1998) and Harvey (1998, 2000) have identified a growing chasm between contemporary Left theory and political practice. “Theory” has become a hot commodity, but it is no longer valued for its explanatory power linked to a social revolution against entrenched relations of exploitation or its potential to inform social change but rather for how it can be used to deconstruct or otherwise disrupt established meanings, signifying systems, and regimes of representation. These gestures, although useful in challenging dominant epistemological frameworks, do not necessarily lead to radical mobilization or even to progressive

social critique. Like Thompson, we do not seek to dismiss theory tout court; rather, we are troubled by the political pusillanimity of some strands of “leftist” social theory—particularly those that seem either unwilling or ill equipped to grapple with the disturbing social conditions engendered by the globalization of capital. Moreover, we are concerned by those that have failed to imagine even the possibility of alternatives, those that have succumbed to the numbing logic of “there is no alternative” (TINA) so completely that they have become complicit, albeit unwittingly, in the carnage wrought by global capitalism.

We stubbornly believe that the insights of Marx and those working within the broad parameters of that tradition still have something to say despite proclamations to the contrary. Indeed, perhaps one of the most taken-for-granted features of contemporary social theory (especially the variety that purports to be “radical”) is the ritualistically dismissive and increasingly generic critique of Marxism in terms of its alleged failure to address forms of oppression other than that of “class.” Marxism is considered to be theoretically bankrupt and intellectually passé, and class analysis is often savagely lampooned as a rusty weapon wielded clumsily by those mind locked in the jejune factories of the 19th and 20th centuries. When Marxist class analysis has not been distorted or equated with some crude version of “economic determinism,” teleology or essentialism, it has been attacked for diverting attention away from the categories of “difference”—including “race” (Gimenez, 2001).<sup>1</sup> To overcome the presumed inadequacies of Marxism, an entire discursive apparatus sometimes called “post-Marxism” has arisen to fill the void. Regardless of Marx’s enduring relevance (cf. Greider, 1998) and despite the fact that much of post-Marxism is actually an outlandish “caricature” of Marx and the entire Marxist tradition, it has eaten through the “left like a cancer” and has “established itself as the new common sense” (Johnson, 2002, p. 129).

Eager to take a wide detour around political economy, post-Marxists (who often go by other names such as postmodernists, poststructuralists, radical multiculturalists, etc.) tend to assume that the principal political points of departure must necessarily be “cultural.” Many but not all post-Marxists have gravitated toward a politics of difference that is largely premised on uncovering relations of power that reside in a variety of cultural and ideological practices (cf. Jordan & Weedon, 1995). Advocates of difference politics posit their ideas as bold steps forward in advancing the interests of those historically marginalized by dominant social and cultural narratives. Various strands of post-Marxism have undoubtedly advanced our knowledge of the hidden trajectories of power and their fetishizing instrumentalities within the processes of representation, and they remain somewhat useful in discerning the relationships between difference, language, and cultural configurations. At the same time, however, the rhetorical excesses of post-Marxists—enamored with the cultural and seemingly blind to the economic—have been woefully remiss in addressing the constitution of class formations and the stark reality of contemporary conditions under global capitalism. In some instances, capitalism and

class relations have been thoroughly “otherized;” in others, class is reduced to “classism” and summoned only as part of the triumvirate of race, class, and gender in which class is portrayed as merely another form of difference. As we hope to show, the radical displacement of class analysis in contemporary theoretical narratives and the concomitant decentering of capitalism, the anointing of difference as a primary explanatory construct, and the “culturalization” of politics have had detrimental effects on “Left” theory and practice.

### Reconceptualizing “Difference”

The concept of difference has been one of the most potent weapons in the theoretical arsenal of those seeking to dismantle the contributions of the *philosophes* of the European Enlightenment as well as the revolutionary corpus of the Marxist tradition.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, the issue of difference has been taken up around two basic constellations. First, it has been used to (a) contest liberal humanism’s notion of a unified and static subjectivity; (b) elaborate an understanding of subjectivity as fractured, multiple, and fluid; and (c) examine the discursive constitution of the subject within language itself. The second approach to difference has generally revolved around differences between groups (particularly as they pertain to race, ethnicity, etc.), resulting in discourses of “identity” politics. Of course, in political terms there has been an increasingly fierce divide between how these two approaches to difference operate in relation to “identity” (Fuery & Mansfield, 2000).<sup>3</sup> It is clearly beyond the parameters of this article to explore these debates. Although there are significant distinctions between these variant positions, it is important to note that both converge to the extent that they valorize difference and heterogeneity as animating principles and in doing so have largely displaced the concept of class and the analysis of capitalism from the theoretical and political canvas. Our purpose here is not to rehash those well-worn debates or challenge their tenability. Rather, we view this effort, however partial, as a beginning—a point from which to launch a reconceptualization of difference.

For the most part, contemporary narratives have stressed the cultural dimensions of difference while marginalizing and, in some cases, ignoring its economic and material dimensions. This posturing has been quite evident in many post-al theories of “race” and in the realm of “ludic” cultural studies that have valorized accounts of difference in almost exclusively “superstructuralist” terms (Sahay, 1998). But this treatment of difference and claims about “the ‘relative autonomy’ of ‘race’ have been enabled by a reduction and distortion of Marxian class analysis” that involves “equating class analysis with some version of economic determinism” (Meyerson, 2000). The key move in this distorting gesture depends on the “view that the economic is the base, the cultural/political/ideological the superstructure.” It is then “relatively easy to show that the (presumably non-political) economic bases does not cause the political/cultural/ideological superstructure, that the latter is/are not epiphenomenal but rela-

tively autonomous or autonomous causal categories” (Meyerson, 2000, p. 2). In such formulations, the “cultural” is treated as a separate and autonomous sphere, severed from its embeddedness within sociopolitical and economic arrangements. As a result, “culturalist” narratives have produced autonomist and reified conceptualizations of difference that “far from enabling those subjects most marginalized by racial difference” have in effect reduced “difference to a question of knowledge/power relations” that can presumably be “dealt with (negotiated) on a discursive level without a fundamental change in the relations of production” (Sahay, 1998, p. 10).

To suggest that culture is generally conditioned/shaped by material forces and social relations linked to production does not reinscribe the simplistic and presumably deterministic base/superstructure metaphor, which has plagued some strands of Marxist theory. Rather, such a formulation draws on Marx’s own writings from both the *Grundrisse* (Marx, 1858/1973) and *Capital* (Marx, 1867/1967) in which he contended that there is a consolidating logic in the relations of production that permeates society in the complex variety of its “empirical” reality.<sup>4</sup> This emphasizes Marx’s understanding of capitalism and capital as a “social” relation—one that stresses the interpenetration of these categories and one that offers a unified and dialectical analysis of history, ideology, culture, politics, economics, and society (see Marx, 1863/1972, 1867/1976a, 1866/1976b, 1865/1977a, 1844/1977b). Moreover, foregrounding the limitations of “difference” and “representational” politics does not suggest a disavowal of the importance of cultural and/or discursive arena(s) as sites of contestation. We readily acknowledge the significance of theorizations that have sought to valorize precisely those forms of difference that have historically been denigrated. They have helped to uncover the genealogy of terror hidden within the drama of Western democratic life. This has been an important development that has enabled subordinated groups to reconstruct their own histories and give voice to their individual and collective identities (Bannerji, 1995; Scatamburlo-D’Annibale & Langman, 2002). Contemporary theorists have also contributed to our understanding of issues of “otherness” and “race” as hegemonic articulations (Hall, 1980, 1987, 1988), the cultural politics of race and racism and the implications of raciology (Gilroy, 1990, 2000), as well as the epistemological violence perpetrated by Western theories of knowledge (Goldberg, 1990, 1993). Miron and Inda’s (2000) work, drawing on Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, has been insightful in showing how race works to constitute the racial subject through a reiterative discursive practice that achieves its effect through the act of naming and the practice of shaming.

Hence, we would not discount the salience of such concerns, but nor should progressives be straightjacketed by struggles that fail to move beyond the discursive/cultural/textual realms. Such approaches have sometimes tended to redefine politics as a signifying activity generally confined to the realm of “rep-

resentation” while displacing a politics grounded in the mobilization of forces against the material sources of political and economic marginalization. In this regard, textual/discursive politics have their limitations for they fail to guarantee the “material power necessary for social flourishing and living freely” (Goldberg, 1994, p. 13).<sup>5</sup> In their rush to avoid the “capital” sin of “economism,” far too many post-al theorists (who often ignore their own class privilege) have fallen prey to an ahistorical form of culturalism that holds, among other things, that cultural antagonism external to class analysis and struggle provide the cutting edge of emancipatory politics. In many respects, this posturing has yielded an intellectual pseudopolitics that has served to empower “the theorist while explicitly disempowering” real citizens (Turner, 1994, p. 410). Although space limitations prevent us from elaborating this point further, we contend that such positions are deeply problematic in terms of their penchant for de-emphasizing the totalizing (yes totalizing!) power and function of capital and for their attempts to employ culture as a construct that would diminish the centrality of class.<sup>6</sup> In a proper historical materialist account, “culture” is not the “other” of class but rather constitutes part of a more comprehensive theorization of class relations in different contexts (cf. Scatamburlo-D'Annibale & Langman, 2002).

Because post-al theories of difference often circumvent the material dimensions of difference and tend to segregate questions of difference from analyses of class formation and capitalist social relations, we contend that it is necessary to (re)conceptualize difference by drawing on Marx’s materialist and historical formulations. Difference needs to be understood as the product of social contradictions and in relation to political and economic organization. Because systems of difference almost always involve relations of domination and oppression, we must concern ourselves with the economies of relations of difference that exist in specific contexts. Drawing on the Marxist concept of mediation enables us to unsettle the categorical (and sometimes overly rigid) approaches to both class and difference for it was Marx himself who warned against creating false dichotomies at the heart of our politics—that it was absurd to choose between consciousness and the world, subjectivity and social organization, personal or collective will, and historical or structural determination. In a similar vein, it is equally absurd to see “difference as a historical form of consciousness unconnected to class formation, development of capital and class politics” (Bannerji, 1995, p. 30). Bannerji has pointed to the need to historicize difference in relation to the history and social organization of capital and class (inclusive of imperialist and colonialist legacies) and to acknowledge the changing configurations of difference and “otherness.” Apprehending the meaning and function of difference in this manner necessarily highlights the importance of exploring (a) the institutional and structural aspects of difference; (b) the meanings and connotations that are attached to categories of difference; (c) how differences are produced out of, and lived within, specific his-

torical, social, and political formations; and (d) the production of difference in relation to the complexities, contradictions, and exploitative relations of capitalism.

Moreover, it presents a challenge to “identitarian” understandings of difference based almost exclusively on questions of cultural and/or racial hegemony. In such approaches, the answer to oppression often amounts to creating greater cultural space for the formerly excluded to have their voices heard (represented). Much of what is called the “politics of difference” is little more than a demand for an end to monocultural quarantine and for inclusion into the metropolitan salons of bourgeois representation—a posture that reinscribes a neoliberal pluralist stance rooted in the ideology of free market capitalism. In short, the political sphere is modeled on the marketplace, and freedom amounts to the liberty of all vendors to display their different “cultural” goods. A paradigmatic expression of this position is encapsulated in the following passage that champions a form of difference politics whose presumed aim

is to make social groups appear. Minority and immigrant ethnic groups have laid claim to the street as a legitimate forum for the promotion and exhibition of traditional dress, food, and culture. . . . [This] is a politics of visibility and invisibility. Because it must deal with a tradition of representation that insists on subsuming varied social practices to a standard norm, its struggle is as much on the page, screen . . . as it is at the barricade and in the parliament, traditional forums of political intervention before the postmodern. (Fuery & Mansfield, 2000, p. 150)

This position fosters a “fetishized” understanding of difference in terms of primordial and seemingly autonomous cultural identities and treats such “differences” as inherent, as ontologically secure cultural traits of the individuals of particular cultural communities. Rather than exploring the construction of difference within specific contexts mediated by the conjunctural embeddedness of power differentials, we are instead presented with an overflowing cornucopia of cultural particularities that serve as markers of ethnicity, race, group boundaries, and so forth. In this instance, the discourse of difference operates ideologically—cultural recognition derived from the rhetoric of tolerance averts our gaze from relations of production and presents a strategy for attending to difference as solely an ethnic, racial, or cultural issue.

What advocates of such an approach fail to acknowledge is that the forces of diversity and difference are allowed to flourish provided that they remain within the prevailing forms of capitalist social arrangements. The neopluralism of difference politics cannot adequately pose a substantive challenge to the productive system of capitalism that is able to accommodate a vast pluralism of ideas and cultural practices. In fact, the post-al themes of identity, difference, diversity, and the like mesh quite nicely with contemporary corporate interests precisely because they revere lifestyle—the quest for, and the cultivation of, the self—and often encourage the fetishization of identities in the marketplace as

they compete for “visibility” (Boggs, 2000; Field, 1997). Moreover, the uncritical, celebratory tone of various forms of difference politics can also lead to some disturbing conclusions. For example, if we take to their logical conclusion the statements that “postmodern political activism fiercely contests the reduction of the other to the same,” that post-al narratives believe that “difference needs to be recognized and respected at all levels” (Fuery & Mansfield, 2000, p. 148), and that the recognition of different subject positions is paramount (Mouffe, 1988, pp. 35-36), their political folly becomes clear. Eagleton (1996) sardonically commented on the implications:

Almost all postmodern theorists would seem to imagine that difference, variability and heterogeneity are “absolute” goods, and it is a position I have long held myself. It has always struck me as unduly impoverishing of British social life that we can muster a mere two or three fascist parties. . . . The opinion that plurality is a good in itself is empty formalistic and alarmingly unhistorical. (pp. 126-127)

The liberal pluralism manifest in discourses of difference politics often means a plurality without conflict, contestation, or contradiction. The inherent limitations of this position are also evident if we turn our attention to issues of class. Expanding on Eagleton’s observations and adopting the logic that seems to inform the unqualified celebration of difference, one would be compelled to champion class differences as well. Presumably, the differences between the 475 billionaires whose combined wealth now equals the combined yearly incomes of more than 50% of the world’s population are to be celebrated—a posturing that would undoubtedly lend itself to a triumphant endorsement of capitalism and inequitable and exploitative conditions. San Juan (1995) noted that the cardinal flaw in current instantiations of culturalism lies in its decapitation of discourses of intelligibility from the politics of antagonistic relations. He framed the question quite pointedly: “In a society stratified by uneven property relations, by asymmetrical allocation of resources and of power, can there be equality of cultures and genuine toleration of differences?” (pp. 232-233).

A historical materialist approach adopts the imperative that categories of difference are social/political constructs that are often encoded in dominant ideological formations and that they often play a role in “moral” and “legal” state-mediated forms of ruling. It also acknowledges the “material” force of ideologies—particularly racist ideologies—that assign separate cultural and/or biological essences to different segments of the population that, in turn, serve to reinforce and rationalize existing relations of power. But more than this, a historical materialist understanding foregrounds the manner in which difference is central to the exploitative production/reproduction dialectic of capital, its labor organization and processes, and the way labor is valued and remunerated. The real problem is the internal or dialectical relation that exists between capital and labor within the capitalist production process itself—a social rela-

tion in which capitalism is intransigently rooted. This social relation—essential or fundamental to the production of abstract labor—deals with how already existing value is preserved and surplus value is created. If, for example, the process of actual exploitation and the accumulation of surplus value are to be seen as a state of constant manipulation and as a realization process of concrete labor in actual labor time—within a given cost-production system and a labor market—we cannot underestimate the ways in which difference—racial as well as gender difference—is encapsulated in the production/reproduction dialectic of capital. It is this relationship that is mainly responsible for the inequitable and unjust distribution of resources. Hence, we applaud E. San Juan's goal of racial/ethnic semiotics that is "committed to the elimination of the hegemonic discourse of race in which peoples of color are produced and reproduced daily for exploitation and oppression under the banner of individualized freedom and pluralist, liberal democracy" (1992, p. 96).

A deepened understanding of this phenomenon is essential for understanding the emergence of an acutely polarized labor market and the fact that disproportionately high percentages of "people of color" are trapped in the lower rungs of domestic and global labor markets (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 1999). Difference in the era of global capitalism is crucial to the workings, movements, and profit levels of multinational corporations, but those types of complex relations cannot be mapped out without attending to capitalist class formations (Ahmad, 1998). To sever issues of difference from class conveniently draws attention away from the crucially important ways in which "people of color" (and more specifically "women of color") provide capital with its superexploited labor pools—a phenomenon that is on the rise all over the world. Most social relations constitutive of racialized differences are considerably shaped by the relations of production, and there is undoubtedly a racialized and gendered division of labor whose severity and function vary depending on where one is situated in the capitalist global economy (Meyerson, 2000; Stabile, 1997). That racism and sexism are necessary social relations for the organization of capitalism and new forms of emerging neocolonialism seems to escape the collective imaginations of those who theorize difference in a truncated and exclusively culturalist manner. Bannerji (2000, pp. 8-9) forcefully argued that culturalist discourses of difference have had the effect of "deflecting critical attention" from an increasingly "racialized" political economy.

We need to include an important caveat that differentiates our approach from those who invoke the hackneyed race/class/gender triplet that can sound, to the uninitiated, both radical and vaguely Marxian. It is not. Although race, class, and gender invariably intersect, they are not coprimary. On the surface, the triplet may be convincing—some people are oppressed because of their race, some as a result of their gender, and others because of their class—but this "is grossly misleading" and approximates what philosophers call a "category mistake." For it is not that "some individuals manifest certain characteristics

known as 'class' which then results in their oppression; on the contrary, to be a member of a social class just *is* to be oppressed," and in this regard, class is "a wholly social category" (Eagleton, 1998, p. 289). Furthermore, even when "class" is invoked as part of the aforementioned triptych, it is usually gutted of its practical, social dimension or treated solely as a cultural phenomenon or category—as just another form of difference. In these instances, class is transformed from an economic and, indeed, social category to an exclusively cultural or discursive one or one in which class merely signifies a "subject position." Class is therefore cut off from the political economy of capitalism, and class power is severed from exploitation and a power structure "in which those who control collectively produced resources only do so because of the value generated by those who do not" (Hennessy & Ingraham, 1997, p. 2). This has had the effect of replacing a historical materialist class analysis with a cultural analysis of class. As a result, many post-Marxists have also stripped the concept of class of precisely that element which, for Marx, made it radical—namely, its status as a universal form of exploitation whose abolition required (and was also central to) the abolition of all manifestations of oppression (Marx, 1978, p. 60).

With regard to this issue, Kovel (2002) was particularly insightful for he explicitly tackled the priority given to different categories (i.e., gender, class, race, ethnic, and national exclusion) of what he called "dominative splitting." Kovel argued that we need to ask the question: Priority with respect to what? He noted that if we mean priority with respect to time, then the category of gender would have priority because there are traces of gender oppression in all other forms of oppression. If we were to prioritize in terms of existential significance, Kovel suggested that we would have to depend on the immediate historical forces that bear down on distinct groups of people—he offered examples of Jews in 1930s Germany who suffered from brutal forms of anti-Semitism and Palestinians today who experience anti-Arab racism under Israeli domination. The question of what has political priority, however, would depend on which transformation of relations of oppression is practically more urgent, and although this would certainly depend on the preceding categories, it would also depend on the fashion in which all the forces acting in a concrete situation are deployed. As to the question of which split sets into motion all the others, the priority would have to be given to class because class relations

entail the state as an instrument of enforcement and control, and it is the state that shapes and organizes the splits that appear in human ecosystems. Thus class is both logically and historically distinct from other forms of exclusion (hence we should not talk of "classism" to go along with "sexism" and "racism" and "speciesism"). This is, first of all, because class is an essentially man-made category, without root in even a mystified biology. We cannot imagine a human world without gender distinctions—although we can imagine a world without domination by gender. But a world without class is eminently imaginable—indeed, such was the human world for the great majority of our species' time on earth, during all of

which considerable fuss was made over gender. Historically, the differences arise because “class” signifies one side of a larger figure that includes a state apparatus whose conquests and regulations create races and shape gender relations. Thus there will be no resolution of racism so long as class society stands, inasmuch as a racially oppressed society implies the activities of a class-defending state. Nor can gender inequality be enacted away so long as class society, with its state, demands the super-exploitation of women’s labor. (pp. 123-124)

Kovel’s remarks raise questions about the primacy given to class analysis and class struggle—a debate that continues unabated in most leftist circles. Contrary to what many have claimed, not all Marxian forms of class analysis relegate categories of difference to the conceptual mausoleum. In fact, recent Marxist theory has sought to reanimate them by interrogating how they are refracted through material relations of power and privilege and linked to relations of production. Marx himself made clear how constructions of race and ethnicity are “implicated in the circulation process of variable of capital.” To the extent that “gender, race, and ethnicity are all understood as social constructions rather than as essentialist categories,” the effect of exploring their insertion into the “circulation of variable capital (including positioning within the internal heterogeneity of collective labor and hence, within the division of labor and the class system)” must be interpreted as a “powerful force reconstructing them in distinctly capitalist ways” (Harvey, 2000, p. 106). Unlike contemporary narratives that tend to focus on one or another form of oppression, the irrefragable power of historical materialism resides in its ability to reveal (a) how forms of oppression based on categories of difference do not possess relative autonomy from class relations but rather constitute the ways in which oppression is lived/experienced within a class-based system and (b) how all forms of social oppression function within an overarching capitalist system.

This framework must be further distinguished from those who invoke the terms *classism* and/or *class elitism* to (ostensibly) foreground the idea that “class matters” (cf. hooks, 2000) because we agree with Gimenez (2001) that “class is not simply another ideology legitimating oppression” (p. 24). Rather, class denotes “exploitative relations between people mediated by their relations to the means of production” (p. 24). To marginalize such an understanding of class is to conflate individuals’ objective locations in the intersection of structures of inequality with individuals’ subjective understandings of how they are situated based on their “experiences.”<sup>7</sup> Another caveat. We are not renouncing the concept of experience. On the contrary, we believe that it is imperative to retain the category of lived experience as a reference point in light of misguided post-Marxist critiques that imply that all forms of Marxian class analysis are dismissive of subjectivity. We are not, however, advocating the uncritical fetishization of “experience” that tends to assume that personal experience somehow guarantees the authenticity of knowledge and that often treats experience as self-explanatory, transparent, and solely individual. Rather, we advance a framework that seeks to make connections between seemingly iso-

lated situations and/or particular experiences by exploring how they are constituted in, and circumscribed by, broader historical and social conditions. They are linked, in other words, by their “internal relations” (Ollman, 1993). Experiential understandings, in and of themselves, are initially suspect because dialectically they constitute a unity of opposites—they are at once unique, specific, and personal but also thoroughly partial, social, and the products of historical forces about which individuals may know little or nothing. A rich description of immediate experience can be an appropriate and indispensable point of departure, but such an understanding can easily become an isolated difference prison unless it transcends the immediate perceived point of oppression, confronts the social system in which it is rooted, and expands into a complex and multifaceted analysis (of forms of social mediation) that is capable of mapping out the general organization of social relations. That, however, requires a broad class-based approach.

Having a concept of class helps us to see the network of social relations constituting an overall social organization which both implicates and cuts through racialization/ethnicization and gender. . . . [A] radical political economy [class] perspective emphasizing exploitation, dispossession and survival takes the issues of . . . diversity [and difference] beyond questions of conscious identity such as culture and ideology, or of a paradigm of homogeneity and heterogeneity . . . or of ethical imperatives with respect to the “other.” (Bannerji, 2000, pp. 7, 19)

Various “culturalist” perspectives seem to diminish the role of political economy and class forces in shaping the edifice of “the social”—including the shifting constellations and meanings of difference. Furthermore, none of the “differences” valorized in culturalist narratives alone, and certainly not “race” by itself, can explain the massive transformation of the structure of capitalism in recent years. We agree with Meyerson (2000) that “race” is not an adequate explanatory category on its own and that the use of “race” as a descriptive or analytical category has serious consequences for the way in which social life is presumed to be constituted and organized. The category of race—the conceptual framework that the oppressed often employ to interpret their experiences of inequality—“often clouds the concrete reality of class, and blurs the actual structure of power and privilege”; in this regard, race is all too often a “barrier to understanding the central role of class in shaping personal and collective outcomes within a capitalist society” (Marable, 1995, pp. 8, 226).<sup>8</sup>

### Race and Class

Except in the toxic *doxa* of reactionary pseudoscholars such as Herrnstein and Murray—the authors of the notorious book *The Bell Curve*—and other right-wing pundits who advance eugenicist arguments<sup>9</sup> to attack virtually all social programs designed to assist the disadvantaged, the term *race* has “no scientific referent” (San Juan, 2002, p. 143), and one would be hard pressed to

find a competent scholar who would employ the construct of race as a determinant of specific social phenomena. Nonetheless, discussions of race dominate academic and popular discourse. Although some of the more nuanced perspectives on race have sought to problematize its very existence as a classificatory category, too many others (particularly in the mainstream social sciences) have succumbed to the notion that humanity exists as genetically distinct “racial groups” marked by a specific combination of biologically defined or imagined phenotypical characteristics and discrete cultural practices. Even those who have sought to explore the complex nature of racial formation (cf. Omi & Winant, 1986) have unwittingly reified race in a manner that has prevented them from adequately grasping the “interplay between the social relations of production and the racialization process” (Miles & Torres, 1999, p. 33). In many ways, the use of race has become an analytical trap precisely when it has been employed in antiseptic isolation from the messy terrain of historical and material relations.

Given these limitations, we agree with Gilroy’s (2000, p. 12) bold call for “transcending” and deliberately renouncing race. We understand, as did Gilroy, that efforts to eliminate race as a metaphor in scholarly work and as a general category that frames social understandings will be met with resistance—particularly by those who fear delegitimizing the historical movements for liberation that have been principally defined in terms of race struggles. Yet we agree with San Juan (2002) that race too often “conceals the predatory system of class relations” (p. 59) and as such must be abandoned as a lens through which social relations are explored and explained. Rather than attempting to advance a critical theory of race, progressive scholars should instead seek to understand race as a social construct that is embedded in the structures of power and privilege, in particular historical and geographical configurations, and that its signifying power is largely derived from its relationship to a “mode of production centered on capital accumulation and its attendant ideological apparatuses” that serve to rationalize inequitable property relations (p. 143). This does not imply that we ignore the realities of racism and racial oppression; rather, it suggests that an analytical shift from race to a pluralized conceptualization of racisms and their historical articulations with other ideologies and capitalist social relations is warranted (McLaren & Torres, 1999). In our view, this plural notion of racisms would more accurately capture the historically specific nature of racism and the variety of meanings/connotations attributed to evaluations of difference and assessments of the “superiority” and “inferiority” of various groups of people. An understanding of the plurality of racisms and a more dialectically oriented approach to examining the exclusionary social processes that function to perpetuate racialized social relations under capitalism are necessary.

We do not seek to subsume race into class for such a gesture would be antithetical to the animating principles of historical materialism (San Juan, 2002, p. 57). Rather, we advocate a position that strives to contextualize an under-

standing of racism within a broader framework of capitalist class relations—one that is similar to what Meyerson (2000) has called a “class rule social control explanation.” Callinicos (1993) has argued that racism as we witness it today is related to the development of capitalism as the dominant mode of production on a global scale. He noted that in hierarchical (precapitalist) societies that relied on extraeconomic force, slavery was “merely one of a spectrum of unequal statuses, requiring no special explanation” (p. 27). This changed with the advent of capitalist society. As Callinicos has explained, the capitalist mode of production is premised on the exploitation of free wage labor and the workers’ separation from the means of production and their compulsion to sell their labor power (the only productive resource available to them). Capitalism relied on slave labor and needed an ideological legitimization—that Black people were subhuman—to proceed apace.<sup>10</sup>

Callinicos’s observations are similar, in many ways, to the classic insights of Oliver Cromwell Cox in *Caste, Class, and Race*, first published in 1948. Recently, Reed (2001) has argued that Cox’s work is particularly valuable in light of some of the problematic aspects of contemporary theorizing around race. Cox proceeded consistently and rigorously from the “conviction that making sense of the meaning of race” and the character of racialized relations required “an understanding of the dynamics of capitalism as a social system” (p. 24). For Cox, race was most fundamentally an “artifact of capitalist labor dynamics”—a relation that “originated in slavery”—and racial antagonism as essentially “political-class conflict” (p. 27). Cox “emphasized the ruling-class foundations of racism as part of his critique of the liberal scholars of race relations who theorized race relations without regard to capitalist political economy and class dynamics” (p. 27). Reed suggested that Cox’s perspective

goes right to the heart of how we should try to understand race by encouraging us to move beyond categories for defining and sorting supposedly discrete human populations, beyond concepts of racial hierarchies, and beyond racist ideologies . . . and instead recognize that race is a product of social relations within history and political economy. . . . Cox’s interpretation is a refreshing alternative to the idealist frames that have persisted in shaping American racial discourse and politics. . . . Racism is . . . a pattern of social relations. . . . It exists only as it is reproduced in specific social arrangements in specific societies under historically specific conditions of law, state and class power. (pp. 27-28)

This implies that to abolish racism in any substantive sense, a serious challenge to capitalism must be launched.<sup>11</sup> It does not mean that racism will simply disappear if democratic socialism is established, but we agree with Callinicos (1993, p. 68) that the struggles for socialism and Black liberation are inseparable—something well understood by Black revolutionaries in the past and something seemingly forgotten by contemporary champions of “difference” politics (Fletcher, 1999).

As Bannerji (2000) has noted, a politics based on differences—be it in the form of cultural/racial nationalism or religious fundamentalism—is far more tolerable to those in power than would be “class based social movements” among “minority” populations (pp. 7-8).<sup>12</sup> Remarkably, much contemporary social theory, particularly those theories ostensibly concerned with race and difference, has failed to acknowledge that struggles based on class are fundamentally different from others for such struggles are aimed at the very foundations of capitalist society—including its racist, exploitative underpinnings. Class struggle, rooted “as it is in the objective structures of capital itself, is *ontologically distinct*” (Harvey, 1998, p. 7) from those forms of oppression that motivate the various agendas of difference and cultural politics. Multiple forms of oppression do exist, but these are best understood within the overarching system of class domination and the variable discriminating mechanisms central to capitalism as a system.

This position is emphasized by Foster (2002) when he insisted that

it is a serious mistake to view the working class, except as an artificial abstraction, as cut off from issues of race, gender, culture and community. In the United States the vast majority of the working class consists of women and people of color. The power to upend and reshape society in decisive ways will come not primarily through single-issue movements for reform, but rather through forms of organization and popular alliance that will establish feminists, opponents of racism, advocates of gay rights, defenders of the environment, etc. as the more advanced sectors of a unified, class-based, revolutionary political and economic movement. (p. 45)

We have argued that it is virtually impossible to conceptualize class without attending to the forms and contents of difference, but this does not imply that class struggle is now supplanted by the politics of difference. Indeed, we are now in the midst of returning to the “most fundamental form of class struggle” in light of current global conditions (Jameson, 1998, p. 136). Today’s climate suggests that class struggle is “not yet a thing of the past” and that those who seek to undermine its centrality are not only “morally callous” and “seriously out of touch with reality” but also largely blind to the “needs of the large mass of people who are barely surviving capital’s newly-honed mechanisms of globalized greed” (Harvey, 1998, pp. 7-9).<sup>13</sup> In our view, a more comprehensive and politically useful understanding of the contemporary historical juncture necessitates foregrounding class analysis and the primacy of the working class as the fundamental agent of change.<sup>14</sup>

This does not undermine the concerns of those marginalized by race, ethnicity, and so forth. Post-Marxists too often assume that privileging capitalist social relations necessarily undermines the importance of attending to difference and/or trivializes struggles against racism and so forth in favor of an abstractly defined class-based politics typically identified as “White.” Such formulations rest on a bizarre but generally unspoken logic that assumes that

racial and ethnic “minorities” are only conjuncturally related to the working class. This stance is patently absurd because membership in the “working class” undoubtedly included men and women of different races, ethnicities, and so forth (Mitter, 1997). A good deal of post-Marxist critique is subtly racist (not to mention essentialist) insofar as it implies that “people of color” could not possibly be concerned with issues beyond those related to their racial, ethnic, cultural “difference.” This posits “people of color” as single-minded, one-dimensional caricatures and presumes that their working lives are less crucial to their self-understanding (and survival) than is the case with their “White male” counterparts. It ignores not only the lengthy history of Black “working-class” struggle (Fletcher, 1999) but also “the fact that class is an ineradicable dimension of everybody’s lives” (Gimenez, 2001, p. 24) and that social oppression is much more than tangentially linked to class background and the social relations of production. On this topic, Meyerson (2000) is worth quoting at length:

Marxism properly interpreted emphasizes the primacy of class in a number of senses. One of course is the primacy of the working class as a revolutionary agent—a primacy which does not render women and people of color “secondary.” This view assumes that “working class” means white—this division between a white working class and all the others, whose identity (along with a corresponding social theory to explain that identity) is thereby viewed as either primarily one of gender and race or hybrid. . . . The primacy of class means . . . that building a multiracial, multi-gendered international working-class organization or organizations should be the goal of any revolutionary movement so that the primacy of class puts the fight against racism and sexism at the center. The intelligibility of this position is rooted in the explanatory primacy of class analysis for understanding the structural determinants of race, gender, and class oppression. Oppression is multiple and intersecting but its causes are not. (p. 1)

The cohesiveness of this position suggests that forms of exploitation and oppression are related internally to the extent that they are located in the same totality—one that is currently defined by capitalist class rule. Capitalism is an overarching totality that is, unfortunately, becoming increasingly invisible in post-Marxist “discursive” narratives that valorize difference as a primary explanatory construct.<sup>15</sup>

It is remarkable, in our opinion, that so much of contemporary social theory has largely abandoned the problems of labor and class analysis at a time when capitalism is becoming more universal, more ruthless, and more deadly. The metaphor of a contemporary tower of Babel seems appropriate here—academics striking radical poses in seminar rooms while remaining oblivious to the possibility that their seemingly radical discursive maneuvers do nothing to further the struggles “against oppression and exploitation which continue to be real, material and not merely ‘discursive’ problems of the contemporary world” (Dirlik, 1997, p. 176). Harvey (1998) has indicted the new academic entrepreneurs, the “masters of theory-in-and-for-itself” whose “discourse radicalism”

has deftly sidestepped “the enduring conundrums of class struggle” and who have, against a “sobering background of cheapened discourse and opportunistic politics,” been “stripped of their self-advertised radicalism” (pp. 29-31). For years, they “contested socialism,” ridiculed Marxists, and promoted “their own alternative theories of liberatory politics,” but now they have largely been “reduced to the role of supplicants in the most degraded form of pluralist politics imaginable” (pp. 30-31). As they pursue the politics of difference, the “class war rages unabated,” and they seem “either unwilling or unable to focus on the unprecedented economic carnage occurring around the globe” (pp. 30-31).

Harvey’s searing criticism suggests that post-Marxists have been busy fiddling while Rome burns, and his comments echo those made by Marx (1978) in his critique of the Young Hegelians who were, “in spite of their allegedly ‘world-shattering’ statements, the staunchest conservatives” (p. 149). Marx lamented that the Young Hegelians were simply fighting “phrases” and that they failed to acknowledge that in offering only counterphrases, they were in no way “combating the real existing world” but merely combating the phrases of the world. Taking a cue from Marx and substituting “phrases” with “discourses” or “resignifications,” we would contend that the practitioners of ludic difference politics who operate within exaggerated culturalist frameworks that privilege the realm of representation as the primary arena of political struggle question some discourses of power while legitimating others.<sup>16</sup> In their anathema towards totalization and in their penchant for thematizing culture with a particularizing impulse that domiciles class in the hinterland of a *divertissement*, they reinscribe racial formations within the prevailing logic of capitalist social relations. Moreover, because they generally lack a class perspective, their gestures of radicalism are belied by their own class positions. We agree with Reed (2000) who contended that cultural politics are class politics insofar as they are “manifestations within the political economy of academic life and the left-liberal public sphere” of the “petit bourgeois, brokerage politics of interest-group pluralism” (p. xxii). Regardless of the “radical-sounding patina” that such theorizing attempts to lay over this “all-too-familiar worldview and practice” (p. xxii), the paralysis and inconsequentiality of post-al, culturalist discourses in the face of globalized capitalism are patently clear. As Ahmad (1997b) has contended,

One may speak of any number of disorientations and even oppressions, but one cultivates all kinds of politeness and indirection about the structure of capitalist class relations in which those oppressions are embedded. To speak of any of that directly and simply is to be “vulgar.” In this climate of Aesopian languages it is absolutely essential to reiterate that most things *are* a matter of class. That kind of statement is . . . surprising only in a culture like that of the North American university. . . . But it is precisely in that kind of culture that people need to hear such obvious truths. (p. 104)

Ahmad's provocative observations imply that substantive analyses of "globalized" class exploitation have, for the most part, been marginalized by the kind of radicalism that has been instituted among the academic Left in North America. He has further suggested that although various post-Marxists have invited us to join their euphoric celebrations honoring the decentering of capitalism and the abandonment of class politics in favor of a post-al tomorrow filled with the proliferation of more and more forms of difference, such formulations will never be able to challenge let alone overturn "capitalist universality" (Ahmad, 1998, p. 22). Indeed, such gestures often result in a pragmatic fetishization of particularity and difference that precludes systemic critique, a serious analysis of capitalism, and coherent action. As such, Ahmad invited us to ask anew, the proverbial question, What then, must be done? To this question, we offer no simple theoretical or political prescriptions. Yet we would argue that if social change is the aim, as it has traditionally been for the "Left," progressive educators and intellectuals must cease in displacing class analysis with the politics of difference, they must resuscitate a sustained and unrelenting interrogation of capitalism in its globalized forms, and they must overcome the corrosive skepticism of those narratives that have rendered visions of social transformation hopelessly impractical or obsolete.

### Conclusion

We will take our stand against the evils [of capitalism, imperialism, and racism] with a solidarity derived from a proletarian internationalism born of socialist idealism. (National Office of the Black Panther Party, 1995, p. 220)

For well more than two decades, we have witnessed the jubilant liberal and conservative pronouncements of the demise of socialism. Concomitantly, history's presumed failure to defang existing capitalist relations has been read by many self-identified "radicals" as an advertisement for capitalism's inevitability. As a result, the chorus refrain of TINA sung by liberals and conservatives has been buttressed by the symphony of post-Marxist voices recommending that we give socialism a decent burial and move on. Within this context, to speak of the promise of Marx and socialism may appear anachronistic, even naive, especially because the post-al intellectual vanguard has presumably demonstrated the folly of doing so. Yet we defiantly believe that the chants of TINA must be combated for they offer as a *fait accompli* something that progressive leftists should refuse to countenance—namely the triumph of globalized capitalism and its political bedfellow, neoliberalism, which have worked together to naturalize suffering and obliterate hope. The grotesque conditions that inspired Marx to pen his original critiques of capitalism are present and flourishing. In fact, the inequalities of wealth and the gross imbalances of power that

exist today are leading to abuses that exceed those encountered in Marx's day (Greider, 1998, p. 39). These are the circumstances of our times—circumstances that require an unrelenting critique of capitalism and an oppositional politics capable of confronting capitalist universality. These are realities that require something more than the liberal pluralism of difference politics, something more than the cries of post-Marxists who would have us relegate socialism to the rag-and-bone shop of historical memory and mummify Marxism along with Lenin's corpse. We concur with Amin (1998) who claimed that the politics of historical inevitability sewn into the neoliberal undergarments of TINA supporters must be defied and revealed as absurd and criminal and who put the challenge we face in no uncertain terms: Humanity may let itself be led by capitalism's logic to a fate of collective suicide, or it may pave the way for an alternative humanist project of global socialism.

The urgency that animates Amin's clarion call for a collective socialist vision necessitates challenging the questionable assumptions that have come to constitute the core of "radical" theory and practice. In terms of effecting change, what is needed is a cogent understanding of the systemic nature of exploitation and oppression based on the precepts of a radical critique of political economy. Seldom before has a Marxian analysis of capitalism and class rule been so desperately needed. That is not to say that everything Marx anticipated has come true, for that is clearly not the case. Nonetheless, Marx's enduring relevance lies in his indictment of capitalism that continues to wreak havoc in the lives of most global citizens. Rather than jettisoning Marx, leftists must continue to engage his oeuvre and extrapolate from it that which is useful pedagogically, theoretically, and, most important, politically in light of the challenges that confront us in defeating capitalism and instituting a socialist alternative. The task for progressive intellectuals is to seize the moment and plant the seeds for a political agenda that is grounded in an array of historical possibilities, is informed by a vision committed to overcoming exploitative conditions, and incorporates Marx's notion of "unity in difference" in which people share widely common class and material interests. Such an understanding extends far beyond the realm of theory, for the manner in which we choose to interpret and explore the social world and the concepts and frameworks we use to express our sociopolitical understandings represents more than just a Faustian infatuation with abstract categories. They imply intentions, organizational practices, and political agendas. Identifying class analysis as the basis for our understandings and class struggle as the basis for political transformation implies something quite different than constructing a sense of political agency around issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and so forth. Contrary to "Shakespeare's assertion that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet," it should be clear that this is not the case in political matters. Rather, in politics "the essence of the flower lies in the name by which it is called" (Bannerji, 2000, p. 41).

For the vast majority of people today—people of all "racial classifications or identities, all genders and sexual orientations," the common frame of reference

arc across “difference,”—the “concerns and aspirations that are most widely shared are those that are rooted in the common experience of everyday life shaped and constrained by political economy” (Reed, 2000, p. xxvii). Does this mean that race should be reduced solely to a question of class or that we should ignore racism and center our efforts on class struggle? No. We acknowledge, along with Marable (2001), that socialist movements have been held in suspicion or rejected outright by the Black community because of “the manifestation of racism by white workers, labor unions, and white ‘progressives’ ” (p. 204). Furthermore, “white democratic socialists still seldom respect or even comprehend the African American’s legitimate claim to unique national identity, culture, and tradition of struggle” (p. 204). Here, we support the perspective of C. L. R. James who wrote,

The race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous. But to neglect the racial factor as merely incidental is an error only less grave than to make it fundamental. (as cited in Marable, 2001, p. 205)

Although post-Marxist advocates of the politics of difference suggest that the project of class struggle is outdated, we would argue that the categories they have typically employed are now losing their usefulness, particularly in light of actual social conditions and movements. “The day-to-day realities of corporate hegemony” are increasingly suggesting “promising possibilities for a shift beyond the difficulties” of identity and difference politics, for the “experience of multiple oppressions no longer requires multiple theories of oppression because corporations multiply oppress” (Starr, 2000, pp. 166-167). The current anticorporate globalization movements have redefined “enemies in ways that do not depend on identity as the basis of understanding and allies in ways that do not depend on a subtle and fragile ‘politics of difference.’ . . . What is at stake is political economic” (Starr, 2000, pp. 166-167). As such, notions of difference and identity “may no longer be the most important organizing principle for social movements”; rather, they “speak with clarity about the enemy,” that is, neoliberal, globalized corporate capitalism (Starr, 2000, pp. 166-167).

The mantra “another world is possible” has become the animating theme of recent global protests. It appears that those people struggling against tear gas, police batons, and rubber bullets in the streets of Seattle, Genoa, Prague, and Quebec City have not read about TINA, the end of grand narratives of emancipation, or the decentering of capitalism. It seems as though the struggle for basic survival and some semblance of human dignity in the mean streets of the dystopian metropolis does not permit much time or opportunity to read the heady proclamations emanating from the post-al academy. As E. P. Thompson (1978) once remarked, sometimes “experience walks in without knocking at the door, and announces deaths, crises of subsistence, trench warfare, unemployment, inflation, genocide” (p. 11). History, to paraphrase Thompson

(p. 25), does not seem to be following theory's script. This, of course, does not mean that socialism will inevitably come about; yet a sense of its burgeoning promise permeates contemporary protest movements (Zinn, 2000). Committed Left intellectuals must work to cultivate a democratic socialist vision that refuses to forget the "wretched of the earth," the children of the damned, and the victims of the culture of silence—a task that requires more than abstruse convolutions and striking ironic poses in the agnostic arena of signifying practices. Socialism in the United States remains a theory of social and economic justice rooted in a ruthless critique of capitalism and exploitation. It must be made into a living reality opposed to liberal democracy, which only serves to facilitate the reproduction of capital. In advancing this struggle, we advocate the building of a multiracial, gender-balanced, and anti-imperialist social movement dedicated to opposing racism, capitalism (both in private property and state property forms), sexism, heterosexism, hierarchies based on social class, as well as other forms of oppression. Whatever the misunderstandings or confusion surrounding the notion of socialism—largely bound up with a mistaken identification of Marxism with its opposite, Stalinism—the democratic and internationalist principles of socialism need to be reinvigorated among those serious about resisting the domination of capital and social relations that create inequality and oppression. Socialism today, undoubtedly, runs against the grain of received wisdom, but its vision of a vastly improved and freer arrangement of social relations beckons on the horizon. Its unwritten text is nascent in the present even as it exists among the fragments of history and the shards of distant memories. Its promise needs to be redeemed.

## Notes

1. Of course, one of the major critiques of Marx emanating from postcolonial theory is that Marx was Eurocentric and that historical materialism as a whole is "fatally compromised by its Enlightenment provenance" (San Juan, 2002, p. 265). For some "enlightening" criticisms of this position, see Ahmad (1997c), Callinicos (1995), Malik (1997), and San Juan (2002).

2. Unfortunately, far too many post-Marxist theorists have conflated the Enlightenment and Marxism and have failed to articulate the "differences" between liberal enlightenment discourse and Marxism—something that is ironic given the penchant for difference and specificity that presumably animates such narratives. Moreover, post-al thought has also conflated the bourgeois-democratic project of Enlightenment "with the socialist project, whose objective is precisely the overstepping of the limits of the bourgeois-democratic project" (Amin, 1998, pp. 103-104).

3. For an elaboration on these debates, see Langman and Scatamburlo (1996).

4. In this sense, culture is not merely a category or a previously coded body of artifacts, traditions, knowledges, and so forth but also a set of expressive activities in the context of an ongoing set of social relations. Although the charge of determinism may

be appropriately lodged against some Marxists, when such a charge is leveled at Marx, “it is patently unjust” (Amin, 1998, p. 138).

5. As San Juan (2002) noted, “When the sphere of culture becomes inflated and universalized to function also as politics—call it *cultural politics* or subaltern resistance—then cultural studies becomes nothing else but an apology for commodity fetishism” (p. 228).

6. As San Juan (2002) noted,

It is one thing to say that economic and political processes “depend on meaning for their effects and have cultural or ideological conditions of existence”; it is another to conclude that textuality or representation, in tandem with economic and political forces and in isolation from them, construct the social and political system we inhabit. The subsumption of relations of power to relations of discourse or cultural practices returns us to a one-sided culturalism. (p. 216)

7. As Petras (1998) noted,

Classes do not come into being by subjective fiat: they are organized by the capitalist class to appropriate value. Hence, the notion that class is a subjective notion, dependent on time, place and perception confuses class and class consciousness. While the former has objective status, the latter is conditioned by social and cultural factors. (p. 5)

8. We are well aware of some potential implications for White Marxist criticalists to unwittingly support racist practices in their criticisms of “race-first” positions articulated within the social sciences. In some instances, White criticalists wrongly go on “high alert” in placing theorists of color and proponents of race theory under special surveillance for downplaying an analysis of capitalism and class. Such activities must be condemned, as must be efforts to stress class analysis primarily as a means of creating a White vanguard position in the struggle against capitalism. Our position is one that attempts to link practices like those of racial oppression to the central, totalizing dynamics of White supremacist patriarchal capitalism. Hence, we want to make it abundantly clear that we support anti-racist struggles that are linked to anti-capitalist struggle. In acknowledging the materiality of white bodies, we don’t wish to underestimate the social position that white skin affords white people, regardless of how well-intentioned they might be. This is clearly something that cannot be “wished away” by merely dis-identifying with whiteness. However, contrary to John T. Warren’s (2001) assertions that choosing against whiteness while concomitantly choosing blackness or brownness constitutes a violent appropriation of another’s culture by privileged white people, we contend that such gestures represent a form of solidarity based on ideological/political identification rather than a form of cultural theft. Indeed, McLaren’s (1999) discussion of choosing blackness or brownness is informed by a quotation from James Cone who suggests that white folks cannot be true allies of black folks unless they become reinvented in “black being.” Cone argues that it is necessary for white folks to “destroy their whiteness by becoming members of an oppressed community” and that they can best be part of the larger struggle against racism “when their white being has passed away” (1986, p. 97). To choose blackness or brownness in this context is a choice of self-consciously working in solidarity with people of color in the larger struggle for social justice and socialism. It does not obviate responsibility for owning whiteness.

9. For a critique of Herrnstein and Murray and eugenics, see Scatamburlo (1998, pp. 112-124).

10. This follows from Marx who perceptively recognized the way in which European and American capitalists promoted racial divisions within the working class. In an 1870 letter that Marx wrote from London to two friends in New York, he noted that

every industrial and commercial center in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member of the ruling nation and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He cherishes religious, social and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the "poor whites" to the Negroes in the former slave states of the U.S.A. . . . This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power. And the latter is quite aware of this. (p. 3)

11. The internal linkage between class and race has been suggested by Bertell Ollman when he wrote that

though racial and sexual differences obviously existed before the onset of class society, it is only with the division between those who produce wealth and those who direct its production that these differences become the basis of the distinctive forms of oppression associated with racism and patriarchy. (as cited in San Juan, 2002, p. 329)

12. Bannerji (2000), in fact, contended that if given a choice between a revival of the "left wing Black Panther Party" and a movement similar to the Nation of Islam, the powers that be would undoubtedly prefer the latter and "offer cultural sensitivity as an excuse." It is the "culturalization of antiracist and other oppositional politics in the last decade or so" that has made it possible "for the government of the U.S. . . . to maintain the appearance of democracy" (p. 8).

13. Although it is apparent that there have been major changes in the class structure, they have not been "in the direction that post-Marxists point to." Indeed, the major changes have

reinforced class differences and class exploitation. . . . There are more temporary wage workers today than in the past. There are many more workers employed in unregulated labour markets (the so-called informal sector today) than in the past. The issue of unregulated exploitation does not describe a system that "transcends" past capitalism: it is the return to nineteenth century forms of labour exploitation. (Petras, 1998, p. 5)

14. It is important to note that arguing that the working class is the fundamental agent of change is not the same as suggesting that it is the only agent of change.

15. From a historical-materialist perspective, the "dynamic processes of social reality cannot be grasped without comprehending the manifold internal relations and linkages that constitute the totality of its objective determinations. Several levels of abstraction have to be clarified" (San Juan, 2002, p. 267). The importance of attending to totality in this manner is based on the ontological insight that phenomena must ultimately be understood contextually and relationally—that one would "always have to

specify and historicize the determinations which constitute any given field” (Ahmad, 1992, p. 21). Rejecting all notions of totality (which “post-al” theorists tend to do) summarily runs the risk of trapping oneself in particularistic theories that obscure the real connections and relationships that constitute forms of social organization. The valorization of difference, fragmentation, and indeterminacy characteristic of post-al narratives is not sufficient to grasp the current formations of global capitalism that are becoming more and more totalizing—through such a framework we cannot see the overall social relations that organize the concrete experiences of oppression. Furthermore, discarding the idea of totality has become a convenient excuse for post-Marxists—“not looking for totality is just a code for not looking at capitalism” (Eagleton, 1996, p. 12).

16. This is a point made forcefully by both Callinicos (1995) and Dirlik (1997) in their scathing indictments of postcolonial theory and its complicity with the ideology of global capitalism.

## References

- Ahmad, A. (1992). *In theory*. London: Verso.
- Ahmad, A. (1997a). Culture, nationalism, and the role of intellectuals. In E. Meiksins-Wood & J. B. Foster (Eds.), *In defense of history: Marxism and the postmodern agenda* (pp. 51-64). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Ahmad, A. (1997b). Issues of class and culture. In E. Meiksins-Wood & J. B. Foster (Eds.), *In defense of history: Marxism and the postmodern agenda* (pp. 97-111). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Ahmad, A. (1997c). Postcolonial theory and the “post”-condition. In L. Panitch (Ed.), *Ruthless criticism of all that exists, socialist register 1997* (pp. 353-381). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Ahmad, A. (1998). The Communist Manifesto and the problem of universality. *Monthly Review*, 50(2), 12-23.
- Amin, S. (1998). *Spectres of capitalism: A critique of current intellectual fashion*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Bannerji, H. (1995). *Thinking through: Essays on feminism, Marxism, and anti-racism*. Toronto, Canada: Women’s Press.
- Bannerji, H. (2000). *The Dark side of the nation: Essays on multiculturalism, nationalism and gender*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press.
- Boggs, C. (2000). *The end of politics*. New York: Guilford.
- Callinicos, A. (1993). *Race and class*. London: Bookmarks Publications.
- Callinicos, A. (1995). Wonders taken for signs: Homi Bhabha’s postcolonialism. In M. Zavarzadeh, T. Ebert, & D. Morton (Eds.), *Post-ality: Marxism and postmodernism* (pp. 98-112). Washington, DC: Maisonneuve.
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. (2002). *The CCPA Monitor*, 8(7).
- Cone, J. H. (1986). *A Black theology of liberation*. New York: Orbis.
- Dirlik, A. (1997). *The postcolonial aura: Third World criticism in the age of global capitalism*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

- Eagleton, T. (1996). *The illusions of postmodernism*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Eagleton, T. (1998). Defending the free world. In S. Regan (Ed.), *The Eagleton reader* (pp. 285-293). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Epstein, B. (1998). Interpreting the world (without necessarily changing it). *New Politics*, 6(4). Available from <http://www.wpunj.edu/~newpol/issue24/epstei24.htm>
- Field, N. (1997). Identity and the lifestyle market. In R. Hennessy & C. Ingraham (Eds.), *Materialist feminism: A reader in class, difference, and women's lives* (pp. 259-271). New York: Routledge.
- Fletcher, B. (1999). Can Black radicalism speak the voice of Black workers? *Race & Class*, 40(4). Available from <http://www.irr.org.uk/resources/blackrad.htm>
- Foster, J. B. (2002). It is not a postcapitalist world, nor is it a post-Marxist one. *Monthly Review*, 54(5), 42-47.
- Fuery, P., & Mansfield, N. (2000). *Cultural studies and critical theory*. Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Gilroy, P. (1990). One nation under a groove: The cultural politics of "race" and racism in Britain. In D. T. Goldberg (Ed.), *Anatomy of racism* (pp. 263-282). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gilroy, P. (2000). *Against race: Imagining political culture beyond the color line*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap.
- Gimenez, M. (2001). Marxism and class, gender and race: Rethinking the trilogy. *Race, Gender & Class*, 8(2), 23-33.
- Goldberg, D. T. (Ed.). (1990). *Anatomy of racism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Goldberg, D. T. (1993). *Racist culture: Philosophy and the politics of meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Goldberg, D. T. (Ed.). (1994). *Multiculturalism: A critical reader*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Greider, W. (1998). *One world, ready or not: The manic logic of global capitalism*. New York: Touchstone.
- Hall, S. (1980). Race, articulation, and societies structuring in dominance. In *Sociological theories: Race and colonialism* (pp. 305-345). Paris: UNESCO.
- Hall, S. (1987). Minimal selves. In *Identity: The real me* (Institute of Contemporary Arts Documents 6, pp. 44-46). London: Institute of Contemporary Arts.
- Hall, S. (1988). New ethnicities. In *Black film, British cinema* (Institute of Contemporary Arts Documents 7, pp. 27-31). London: Institute of Contemporary Arts.
- Harvey, D. (1998). The practical contradictions of Marxism. *Critical Sociology*, 24(1/2), 1-36.
- Harvey, D. (2000). *Spaces of hope*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hennessy, R., & Ingraham, C. (1997). Introduction: Reclaiming anticapitalist feminism. In R. Hennessy & C. Ingraham (Eds.), *Material feminism: A reader in class, difference, and women's lives* (pp. 1-14). New York: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2000). *Where we stand: Class matters*. New York: Routledge.
- Jameson, F. (1998). *The cultural turn*. London: Verso.
- Johnson, A. (2002). The legacy of Rosa Luxemburg: A critical reply to Stephen E. Bronner. *New Politics*, 8(4), 128-140.

- Jordan, G., & Weedon, C. (1995). *Cultural politics: Class, gender, race and the postmodern world*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Kovel, J. (2002). *The enemy of nature: The end of capitalism or the end of the world?* London: Zed Books.
- Langman, L., & Scatamburlo, V. (1996). The self strikes back: Identity politics in the postmodern age. In F. Geyer (Ed.), *Alienation, ethnicity, and postmodernism* (pp. 127-138). Danbury, CT: Greenwood.
- Malik, K. (1997). The mirror of race: Postmodernism and the celebration of difference. In E. M. Wood & J. B. Foster (Eds.), *In defense of history: Marxism and the postmodern agenda* (pp. 112-133). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Marable, M. (1995). *Beyond Black and White*. London: Verso.
- Marable, M. (2001). Why Black Americans are not socialists. In M. W. Howard (Ed.), *Socialism: Key concepts in critical theory* (pp. 185-209). New York: Humanity Books.
- Marx, K. (1870). *Marx to Sigfrid Meyer and August Vogt in New York*. Available from [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/letters/70\\_04\\_09.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/letters/70_04_09.htm)
- Marx, K. (1967). *Capital: A critical analysis of capitalist production—Volume 1*. New York: International Publishers. (Original work published 1867)
- Marx, K. (1972). *Theories of surplus value—Part three*. London: Lawrence & Wishart. (Original work published 1863)
- Marx, K. (1973). *Grundrisse: Foundations of the critique of political economy* (M. Nicolaus, Trans.). Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin. (Original work published 1858)
- Marx, K. (1976a). *Capital: A critique of political economy—Volume 1*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin. (Original work published 1867)
- Marx, K. (1976b). *Results of the immediate process of production, addendum to "Capital"* (Vol. 1). Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin. (Original work published 1866)
- Marx, K. (1977a). *Capital: A critique of political economy—Volume 3*. London: Lawrence & Wishart. (Original work published 1865)
- Marx, K. (1977b). *Economic and philosophical manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow: Progress Publishers. (Original work published 1844)
- Marx, K. (1978). *The Marx-Engels reader* (2nd ed., R. Tucker, Ed.). New York: Norton.
- McLaren, P. (1999). Rethinking whiteness, rethinking democracy: Critical citizenship in Gringolandia. In C. Clarke & J. O'Donnell (Eds.), *Becoming and unbecoming White: Owning and disowning a racial identity* (pp. 10-55). Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey.
- McLaren, P., & Farahmandpur, R. (1999). Critical pedagogy, postmodernism, and the retreat from class: Towards a contraband pedagogy. In D. Hill, P. McLaren, M. Cole, & G. Rikowski (Eds.), *Postmodernism in educational theory: Education and the politics of human resistance*. London: Tufnell.
- McLaren, P., & Torres, R. (1999). Racism and multicultural education: Rethinking "race" and "Whiteness" in late capitalism. In S. May (Ed.), *Critical multiculturalism: Rethinking multicultural and antiracist education* (pp. 42-76). London: Falmer.
- McQuaig, L. (2001). *All you can eat: Greed, lust and the new capitalism*. Toronto, Canada: Penguin.

- Meyerson, G. (2000). Rethinking Black Marxism: Reflections on Cedric Robinson and others. *Cultural Logic*, 3(1/2). Available from <http://eserver.org/clogic/3-1%262/meyerson.html>
- Miles, R., & Torres, R. (1999). Does "race" matter? Transatlantic perspectives on racism after "race relations." In R. Torres (Ed.), *Race, identity and citizenship: A reader*. Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.
- Miron, L. F., & Inda, J. X. (2000). Race as a kind of speech act. *Cultural Studies: A Research Annual*, 5, 85-107.
- Mitter, S. (1997). Women working worldwide. In R. Hennessy & C. Ingraham (Eds.), *Materialist feminism: A reader in class, difference, and women's lives* (pp. 163-174). New York: Routledge.
- Mouffe, C. (1988). Radical democracy: Modern or postmodern? In A. Ross (Ed.), *Universal abandon* (pp. 31-45). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- National Office of the Black Panther Party. (1995). The Black Panther party stands for revolutionary solidarity. In P. S. Foner (Ed.), *The Black Panthers speak*. New York: Da Capo.
- Ollman, B. (1993). *Dialectical investigations*. New York: Routledge.
- Omi, M., & Winant, H. (1986). *Racial formation in the United States*. New York: Routledge.
- Petras, J. (1998). A Marxist critique of post-Marxists. *Links*, 9. Available from <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/26/154.html>
- Reed, A. (2000). *Class notes*. New York: New Press.
- Reed, A. (2001). Race and class in the work of Oliver Cromwell Cox. *Monthly Review*, 52(9), 23-32.
- Sahay, A. (1998). Transforming race matters: Towards a critique-al cultural studies. *Cultural Logic*, 1(2). Available from <http://eserver.org/clogic/1-2/sahay.html>
- San Juan, E. (1992). *Racial formations/critical transformations: Articulations of power in ethnic and racial studies in the United States*. London: Humanities Press.
- San Juan, E. (1995). *Hegemony and strategies of transgression: Essays in cultural studies and comparative literature*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- San Juan, E., Jr. (2002). *Racism and cultural studies: Critiques of multiculturalist ideology and the politics of difference*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Scatamburlo, V. (1998). *Soldiers of misfortune: The New Right's culture war and the politics of political correctness*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, V., & Langman, L. (2002). Fanon speaks to the subaltern. In J. Lehmann (Ed.), *Bringing capitalism back for critique by social theory, current perspectives in social theory* (Vol. 21, pp. 253-284). New York: JAI.
- Stabile, C. (1997). Postmodernism, feminism, and Marx: Notes from the abyss. In E. M. Wood & J. B. Foster (Eds.), *In defense of history: Marxism and the postmodern agenda* (pp. 135-148). New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Starr, A. (2000). *Naming the enemy: Anti-corporate movements confront globalization*. London: Zed Books.
- Thompson, E. P. (1978). *The poverty of theory*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Turner, T. (1994). Anthropology and multiculturalism: What is anthropology that multiculturalists should be mindful of it? In D. T. Goldberg (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: A critical reader* (pp. 406-425). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

- Wallach, L., & Sforza, M. (1999). *The WTO: Five years of reasons to resist corporate globalization*. New York: Seven Stories Press.
- Warren, J. T. (2001). Performing whiteness differently: Rethinking the abolitionist project. *Educational Theory*, 51(4).
- Wray, M. (1998). Left conservatism: A conference report. *Bad Subjects*. Available from <http://english-www.hss.cmu.edu/bs/37/wray.html>
- Zinn, H. (2000). A flash of the possible. *The Progressive*, 64(1), 20.

**Valerie Scatamburlo-D'Annibale**, Ph.D., is an award-winning author and educator. She teaches in the Department of Communication Studies and chairs the Graduate Program in Communication and Social Justice at the University of Windsor, Canada. She is the author of *Soldiers of Misfortune: The New Right's Culture War and the Politics of Political Correctness* (1998) and numerous articles.

**Peter McLaren** is a professor in the Division of Urban Schooling, Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles. He is the author and editor of more than 40 books on topics ranging from critical pedagogy to critical social theory with an emphasis on Marxist theory and practice. His most recent book (coedited with Dave Hill, Mike Cole, and Glenn Rikowski) is titled *Marxism Against Postmodernism in Educational Theory* (Lexington Books, 2002). McLaren is the recent recipient of the Paulo Freire Social Justice Award presented by Chapman University, California.