

Introduction: Marxian anthropology resurgent

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Abstract: This introduction, coming out during the two hundredth anniversary of Karl Marx's birth, discusses the distinctiveness of Marxian anthropology and what it has to offer to our efforts at understanding, and confronting, the complexities of the social contradictions constituted by—and constitutive of—twenty-first century capitalism. The article points out common denominators of Marxian anthropology going back to Marx's insights, but also offers a cursory social history of the diverse lineages of enquiry within Marxian anthropology, shaped by the relations and inequalities of the context in which they emerged. Finally, we discuss certain crucial fields of engagement in contemporary Marxian anthropology as reflected in this theme section's contributions.

Keywords: capitalism, Karl Marx, global and relational analysis, Marxian anthropology

Something is rotten in the state of the capitalist world-system. As we finalize this introduction in mid-2018, the world economy is still in the grip of a crisis that began around 10 years ago in the financial centers of advanced capitalist nations and spread out from there across the European Union and into much of Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Carrier 2016; Friedman 2015; Kalb 2012; Narotzky and Besnier 2014). Global uprisings emerged soon after the 2008 financial meltdowns. The Spanish Indignados and the Greek Syntagma Square movements, for example, led to the rise of new political parties such as Podemos and Syriza, much like the Latin American "pink tide" response to yet another wave of structural adjustment programs enabled electoral gains for leftist movements (Kalb and Mollona 2018; Kasmir and Carbonella 2014; Lem and Barber 2010).

Yet, successful resistance was often short lived. Syriza budged in the face of German-

led European Union threats, the pink tide now faces violent backlashes in Brazil and Argentina, Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement was starved out by Beijing, and the largest workers' uprising in recent Indonesian history, around the Bekasi Special Economic Zone that employs around one million workers, was beaten down by riot police forces (Panimbang and Mufakhir 2018). Beyond this, the so-called Arab Spring uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East were either quashed in similar ways—in Bahrain, for example—or otherwise instrumentalized by various “holy” alliances that either used armored vehicles and machine guns to spread clerical fascist Islam or used aerial bombing raids, proxy armies, and mercenaries to spread Western capitalist democracy.

Anthropologists have been vigilant participant observers and often activists in many of these moments of crisis, resistance, and backlash. Yet, their empirical accounts and analyzes of what happened, why, and what is to be done differ with regard to their choice of paradigm, the way they frame their research, and the themes they emphasize. On the one hand, there is a strong focus on hope, on care and morality, and on possibilities for a better future—“anthropologies of the good,” as Sherry Ortner (2016) calls them. They often engage in meta-descriptive ethnographic theories and focus on the subjective positioning of individuals and sodalities in the present—sometimes with due attention to their unwitting complicity with the geontopowers that dominate social conceptions of life and nonlife (Povinelli 2016; Robbins 2013; Zigon 2018).

This special issue, on the other hand, contributes to a different trend in anthropology, which emerges from ethnographies and theories that are critical of the political economy of neoliberal globalization and earlier global modes of capitalist exploitation and thus mark a resurgence and advancement of the discipline's long-standing, polyphonic Marxian approaches. Their shared focus is not only to record and analyze the vicissitudes of neoliberal capitalism but also to build on an active involvement in political and economic struggles

(Lem and Leach 2002). It requires anthropologists to continue to reflect critically on their own relevance as intellectuals embedded in movements for a better future for the majority of humankind (Narotzky 2015; G. Smith 2014). This requirement facilitates processual—future-oriented yet historically aware—inquiries into the forces that drive the current global condition and how they may be overcome. At the core of this analytical and empirical paradigm is a refusal to romanticize, and thereby fictionalize, political economies at any scale. Marxian anthropologists do not conjure secure, radically different safe spaces outside of capitalism but rather focus on analyzing people’s various struggles *within* and *against* histories dominated by global capitalism—a force that structures not just people’s economic lives but also, for instance, their political possibilities and intimate relationships (Sider 2003). Indeed, one strength of Marxian anthropology is its analysis of how capitalist logics seep into people’s struggles at all scales to the extent that even the most intimate terrains, which tend to feel the most “authentic,” or “our own,” are already implicated, usurped, and enclosed by capitalist logics.

One central task for any political movement—and hence for a critical anthropology of the unevenness of capitalism’s multifarious agency in establishing, consolidating, and refining exploitation (Gill and Kasmir 2016)—is thus an acute awareness of the successes and pitfalls of past struggles. In recent years, faced with a world they perceive as one of dismay and decay, academics, activists, and, in fact, the global public have devoted significant attention to several rounds of anniversaries of historical uprisings. As we write this, conferences; features in newspapers, TV, radio, and blogs; academic special issues, edited volumes; and monographs revisit and discuss the significance of the works of Karl Marx on his two hundredth birthday as well as the global uprisings of 1968. And whereas many of the 2008 anniversary reflections of 1968 saw student uprisings and worker protests through a Western-centric lens, there is an explicit effort in 2018 to understand the global

character of protests across all continents. Anthropologists are making important contributions here, advancing an understanding of the sometimes coordinated and certainly entangled and mutually referential anti-colonial, anti-imperial and also anti-fascist movements (Becker 2018).

What is more, current anthropology, and especially so a Marxian anthropology, in its active contribution is critical about relegating debates about 1968 to an ill-defined nostalgia (Baca 2018). Instead, there is a serious engagement with the many actors searching for new pathways toward agency and efficiency in overcoming capitalist exploitation and its various manifestations in global warring and escalating inequalities (Carrier and Kalb 2015; Narotzky 2016; Reyna 2016). Another anniversary, the 2017 centenary of the Russian Revolution, has received far too little attention. Yet, an extended review article by Don Kalb (forthcoming) establishes the relevance of that revolution and of related uprisings for anthropological theory. In a juxtaposition of the political activities and analytical writings of Leon Trotsky and Marcel Mauss, Kalb contrasts Trotsky's class position and active "being there," which were crucial for his monumental critical assessment of the successes and failures of 1917, with Mauss's privileged upbringing under the wings of his anti-revolutionary, republican uncle Émile Durkheim and his Eurocentric armchair anthropology comparison of Roman and Sanskrit law with contemporary societies in Melanesia and the Northwestern United States.

With this in mind, this special issue seeks to contribute to emerging reflections on the role of Marx's writings for anthropology on the two hundredth anniversary of his birth. In taking some foundational principles of Marxian thought in his writings as a starting point, the following also broaches the works of Trotsky, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and other contemporaries of the interwar period in Europe that have been foundational texts for leading anthropologists of the twentieth century such as Peter Worsley (1964, 1970), Eric Wolf (1969, [1982] 2010, 1999), Sidney Mintz (1974, 1985), Kathleen Gough (1968, 1990), and

Jonathan Friedman (1994, [1979] 1998). In light of the fact that these texts remain fundamental inspirations for twenty-first century anthropology, this introduction revisits and seeks to shed new light on the many and diverse engagements of earlier generations of anthropologists with Marxian thought and links these to the present generation of Marxian anthropologists, of which we are part.

Our introduction and the contributions to this special issue are part of a larger project, carried by dozens of scholars who contributed to panels at the American Anthropological Association meetings in Montreal (2011) and Chicago (2013) and at the International Union for Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences world conference in Manchester in 2012. In preparing and running these events, we were fortunate to have the support from leading Marxian anthropologists and their networks, such as the Anthropology and Political Economy Seminar and the colleagues involved in the editorial board of *Focaal, Dialectical Anthropology, Identities, and Anthropological Theory*. The next section seeks to position these contemporary initiatives within the long history of Marxian anthropology and the diversity of lineages of thought and enquiry. The second section extends this to the four articles in this special issue and points toward further crucial fields of engagement in contemporary Marxian anthropology.

Common denominators and multifarious lineages in Marxian anthropology

For obvious reasons, lineages of Marxian anthropological thought have a common denominator, an ancestry in the works of Karl Marx and his coauthor and comrade Friedrich Engels. A fairly recent, detailed introduction into their works, *Karl Marx, Anthropologist* by Thomas Patterson, highlights their two-pronged tackling of the analysis of contemporary conditions of capitalism in the second half of the nineteenth century.

First, Marx and Engel's early works emerged from a keen interest in the localized

everyday life challenges of their contemporaries. Those were the German and even more so the English working class, with Engel's *The Condition of the English Working Class*, first published in 1845, based on a two-year stint in the then center of English industrial capitalism, Manchester, and "a legitimate claim at being the first urban ethnography" (Patterson 2009: 2). Beyond Europe, Marx did his best to draw critical attention, in the pieces he wrote for the *New York Daily Tribune*, to the ambiguities of British colonial rule in India: whereas he harbored no romanticism for India's caste system and thought the development of India's railways might shake up feudal inequalities (the Indian railways indeed grew into a major historical bastion of labor unionism), he also analyzed colonialism's destructive impact on the Indian textile industry.

Second, besides these works dealing with the transformations of social life under capitalism, Marx and Engels researched and analyzed the historical emergence of capitalism as a global systemic force. In the process, Marx put forward a theory of world historical change that identifies antagonistic classes and their political movements as the major actors. Marx's focus was thus actor-centered and in explicit opposition to other nineteenth century scholars, whose rather mechanistic modeling of change revered a *Weltgeist* (Hegel) or an early version of *Superman* (Nietzsche) as the engines of progress and regress. Marx developed a critique of the former in his famous *Theses on Feuerbach* and then in *The German Ideology*, which both attacked the so-called Young Hegelians for their essentialist view of the history of humankind as isolated from political economic processes. Marx and Engels (1998: 571, their italics) insisted that "philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it." They lived this ambition as leading figures in the communist and socialist movement throughout much of their lifetime (Neveling forthcoming). Yet, Marx also set out to criticize and rewrite "political economy," the name given in the nineteenth century to the social-cum-humanist science that, in the legacy of

thinkers such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, informed much of the national and imperial policies responsible for the poverty and abject exploitation of the global working class.

Marx's magnum opus, *Das Kapital*, opens with a detailed study of the industrial labor process, on the basis of which Marx identifies and defines how capital is accumulated by the owners of the means of production; capitalists (Marx and Engels 1965). The topics and themes covered in those volumes are too numerous to list in this introduction, but suffice it to note that an explicit and lively dialogue with Marx and the Marxian thinkers that succeeded him continues today in anthropological work on finance, divisions of labor and labor struggles, ideologies of dispossession, identity politics, migration, social movements, and the incorporation of kinship structures into social processes (Aiyer 2008; Friedman and Friedman 2008, 2013; Glick-Schiller and Çağlar 2016; Goddard and Narotzky 2015; Kalb 1997; Kasmir and Carbonella 2014; Neveling 2015; Nilsen 2010; Strümpell 2014; Steur 2017; Trapido 2016a; Weiss 2015).

One of several contemporary currents that emerge from Marx and stand out in anthropological debates is the notion of primitive accumulation and the related concept of accumulation by dispossession (Franquesa 2016; Hirslund 2016; Kaminer 2015; Narotzky 2016; Nonini 2015; Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2016; Saleminck and Rasmussen 2016). In this regard, it is paramount to note that Marx's chapter on "The Original Accumulation of Capital" in the first volume of *Das Kapital* presents this as a multilinear evolution from the end of the fourteenth century onward, a combined and uneven development driven in part by the growing demand for wool on international markets that increased wool prices and thus motivated the British gentry to expropriate dependent smallholder farmers from their lands and turn these into pastures. Whereas some members of that same gentry would fall prey to the seventeenth-century uprisings led by Oliver Cromwell and his army of levelers that

succeeded in decapitating the English king, the expropriated smallholders would be forced into the industrializing urban centers. By the eighteenth century, these former smallholders had formed into an army of cheap laborers, welcomed by a new breed of industrialists, whose super-exploitative factory regimes thrived not least because they enjoyed the state's backing in vagrancy laws that forced those unwilling to dwell in urban misery into workhouses and coerced labor. Yet, Marx's focus went beyond the usual suspects that feature in ordinary histories of the making of industrial Britain. He also analyzed global processes, such as the problem of creating a sufficient number of dependent wage laborers in the vast British settler colonies where land was available in abundance as long as one was ready to kill local populations. Marx was also explicit about the complicity, if not active involvement, of Scottish highland clan chiefs in the making of English capitalism, as they used a combination of privileged market access, kinship hierarchies, and authority to appropriate clan lands and thus turned their clanspeople into dependent wage laborers (Marx and Engels 1965 1: 507–547).

This global emphasis—where “global” is not simply about “international connections” or “transnational flows” but rather about keeping a constant eye out for the relational totality that shapes the more seemingly concrete realities of local social life—remains a unique strongpoint of Marxian analysis and one that continually challenges established facts and fictions of yet unenclosed outsides to capitalism (e.g., Turner 2009). Don Kalb's forthcoming “Trotsky over Mauss,” mentioned in our opening section, for instance, demonstrates that despite the intense synchronic and diachronic analysis of the conditions of the Russian working class and peasantry that was central to the projects of both Lenin and Trotsky before, during, and after the revolutionary years, these same revolutionary leaders were unprepared for the food and trading embargo from Western advanced capitalist. If anything, Kalb's analysis of key publications from 2017 and of the works of Lenin and

Trotsky thus points to a relative neglect, even by these revolutionaries, of global relations over local data.

This overview of the two-pronged tackling of capitalism as both a local and a global force of injustice that requires synchronic and diachronic analysis is certainly and necessarily incomplete. Still, it underlines the foundations of Marxism, socialism, and communism in its initial design: an impetus for changing a world characterized by the exploitative rule of the few over the many, which mobilizes a certain dose of skepticism toward all too immediate or habituated, often religiously inspired, moral sentiments and instead seeks to align our sense of justice with an analysis of historical processes profoundly rooted in the lived realities and intimacies of human agency. The complex, situated, and dialectical nature of this endeavor—in both the activist and the academic spheres of Marxism—is reflected in the historical diversity of socialist and communist movements that have always come in plurals and disagreed on the analysis of contemporary and historical social process and struggles as much as on the ways and means needed for changing the world. This diversity, logically, is also reflected in the lineages of Marxian anthropology, which we will go deeper into now.

In starting our short social history of Marxian anthropology, it should be noted, however, that despite the anthropological tendency in Marx and Engels' writings, academia was void of Marxian anthropology until well after World War II (Kalb forthcoming). In Europe, where sociology and anthropology as the institutional disciplines we recognize as such today developed, canonical thinkers other than Marx worked with very different political-intellectual aims. In France, Durkheim was a staunch supporter of the republican counterrevolution that cracked down on the Paris Commune uprising in 1871 (Hobsbawm 1983). In Germany, Max Weber's idea-centric, spirited analysis of the origins of capitalism in a *Protestant Ethics* offered a similar antidote to Marxian critiques of capitalism's political economy (Allen [2004] 2017; Frank 1975; Wolf 1999). Likewise, anthropology's canonical

studies before 1945—the writings of Frantz Boas, Marcel Mauss, Bronisław Malinowski, and Richard Thurnwald, as well as Edward Evans-Pritchard, Meyer Fortes, and Raymond Firth, to name but a few—were all published in an academic environment that knew little debate and certainly no interventions from established leftist academics.

Marx, Engels, and their empirical and analytical project, to large extent, were ghosts in anthropology until the gradual opening of university education to working-class students in Western Europe and the United States in the years after 1945. From then on, demobilized soldiers from the US Army had access to grants for university education. One of these was the late Sidney Mintz, who worked with other Marxian anthropologists, among them Eric Wolf and Stanley Diamond, on a project at Columbia University. Headed by Julian Stewart, a cultural ecologist with a keen interest in the impact of material conditions on human sociality, these graduate students engaged in the People of Puerto Rico project that pioneered the comprehensive and comparative study of non-Western societies as contemporary, modern societies in a capitalist global economy that impacts all humans in comparable, albeit uneven and unequal ways (Baca 2016; Palmié et al. 2009; Silverman 2011).

Mintz's contribution to Marxian anthropology emerged from his lifetime engagement with the Caribbean, which from early on he understood as a sociocultural arena in its own right, shaped by the vicious impact of colonial slavery and imperial indenture, plantation cultures, and transcolonial capital. In this he often referred to—and was directly inspired by—radical Caribbean scholars like Eric R. Williams (1942, 1944) and C. L. R. James (1938), who thereby had an important influence on Marxian anthropology, despite anthropology lacking an institutional presence as a discipline in the Caribbean, as in most of the Global South.ⁱ An important intervention in Marxian thought that Mintz's engagement with Caribbean realities—and thinkers—produced was the argument that rather than originating in England, the capitalist mode of production in its factory-based format in fact

developed in these Caribbean plantation societies, which were laboratories for the industrial labor process that would later be brought to perfection in the cotton mills of Lancashire.

In taking forward Marx's work on the global entangledness of capitalist transformations, Mintz (1966, 1985, 1996) identified the crucial role that refined cane sugar had as a commodity that provided cheap calories for the British working classes throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and how, vice versa, the enslaved and indentured populations of the Caribbean were modern-day consumers of British industrial produce. Mintz's close engagement with political organizations and activists in Puerto Rico—and other field sites—was moreover evident in his monograph about the life of Don Taso, his close friend in the Puerto Rican cane fields. In this he captured how the shift of the once radical, socialist, and anti-colonial Puerto Rican Partido Popular Democratico toward embracing US rule and abandoning New Deal economic policies had turned his friend from one of the leading party and trade union organizers in his community to a devout, otherworldly Pentecostal Christian (Mintz 1974).

In similar ways to Mintz, yet from a more global angle, Wolf engaged anthropology in central conversations among critical social sciences and humanities scholars of the era of the Cold War and decolonization. Where Mintz inserted an emphasis on the agency of supposedly peripheral locations into the paradigm of dependency theory and world systems analysis, Wolf developed an anthropologically grounded global history of capitalism in his seminal monograph *Europe and the People without History*. Central to Wolf's global historical anthropology was “to challenge those who think that Europeans were the only ones who made history” and at the same time remain wary of the dangers of ignoring the significant power imbalance in any era of world history by adhering to the Marxian paradigm that people “make their own history but not under conditions of their own choosing. They do so under the constraints of relationships and forces that direct their will and their desire”

(2010 [1982]: xx, 386). In this, Wolf of course addressed the long-standing practice of supremacist Western historiography that had relegated the study of non-Western societies to anthropology and the study of European societies to sociology. Yet, Wolf also rejected a primitivist strand in anthropology that had embraced such a division of labor—in Claude Lévi-Strauss’s notion of societies “whose histories have remained ‘cold’” and in the otherwise widespread understanding that non-European societies could be regarded as “contemporary ancestors” in whom anthropologists of Maussian and Malinowskian inclination could find evidence of the prehistory of Europe.

In insisting that working classes as much as non-Western societies are contemporaries, Wolf engaged with the Marxist notion of the “mode of production” in an emphatically anthropological manner, rejecting its usage as a way of distinguishing—let alone teleological ordering—societies in favor of using the concept as a means to base any analysis of “cultural” phenomena in “a specific, historically occurring set of social relations through which labor is deployed to wrest energy from nature by means of tools, skills, organization, and knowledge.” This brought Marx’s axiomatic binary of humans as active agents in their evolution and of the sociality of humans—their existence in “organised pluralities,” which circumscribe such agency—into anthropology (74–75). An equally important—and rarer—achievement of Marxian anthropology is reflected and summarized in Wolf’s book; the emergence of empirical and theoretical work from anthropology as central focus in a major debate in the social sciences and humanities.

Throughout the 1970s, major academic journals and numerous monographs debated the modes of production approach as a paramount pathway for understanding what Trotsky had termed the uneven and combined development of global, imperial capitalism and its coexistence and articulation with non-capitalist political economic relations—also with reference to Marx’s concept of an Asiatic mode of production as a historical condition of

political economies that could take the pathway to capitalism from feudalism and yet do not see the emergence of a bourgeoisie to challenge the feudalist state (e.g., Banaji 1977; Foster-Carter 1978). The debate began with French Marxian anthropologists' efforts—from Pierre-Philippe Rey, Claude Meillassoux, and Maurice Godelier, for example—to systematically expand the notion of class and class struggle (or its absence) to societies in former French colonies in Africa (for recent summaries and advances, see Kalb 2013; Trapido 2016b). As those societies were considered precapitalist, there was a strong structuralist element in early French analyzes, which was successfully shoved aside in Samir Amin's 1973 book on *Le Développement inégal* about the uneven articulation of capitalism on African peripheries. Wolf extended Amin's approach, which rubricated numerous competing categories of modes of production in precapitalist, complex, centralized political systems and early empires under the heading "tributary mode of production," toward an understanding of the articulation of such modes, thus capturing the interaction of a plurality of organized ways of labor exploitation within an overall capitalist world economy ([1982] 2010: 81–85).

French Marxian anthropology certainly did not stop at the somewhat failed efforts to explain precapitalist class differentiation in Western Africa. If Emmanuel Terray (1969) and others initially identified age-group related class struggles with younger men unhappily subject to the financial power and authority of elders and dependent on bride-price financing, they did so from a position of committed engagement in the French communist movement and in the 1968 uprisings in Paris, which they sought to steer toward explicit solidarity not only with the Vietnamese liberation movement but also with communist and socialist struggles in Cote d'Ivoire and other African field sites. Crucially, Terray and other French Marxian anthropologists were among the few in the discipline to develop an explicit taste for Maoism in the 1970s, which, in concert with their training in Lévi-Straussian structuralist thought and the huge influence of Louis Althusser in leftist French academia, led them to

develop their own variant of an advanced modes of production research agenda.

Most studies of the late 1970s and 1980s moved toward detailed analyzes of household budgets and hierarchies and inequalities driven by kinship structures and beyond. In this sense, French Marxian anthropology was equipped with possibly the wrong tools and foci in order to take on the Foucauldian hype and other manifestations of the post-structuralist anti-humanism of the late 1980s. Yet, a work such as *Maidens, Meals and Money* by Claude Meillassoux (1981) stands out until today as a formidable empirical and analytical fusion of the major strengths and unique calling points of classical anthropology—research on kinship, myths, and domestic economies—with major manifestations of late twentieth-century capitalism—the rise of multinational corporations and the super-exploitation of a new international division of labor in global sweatshops. Likewise, Maurice Godelier's (1999) work on how the mythopraxis of the Baruja in Papua New Guinea is a pillar of gendered exploitation and, at the same time, a deliberate fabrication that the Baruja men anxiously guard from the knowledge base of women, and his 1990s masterful materialist overview of *The Enigma of the Gift* is as timely as ever in an anthropology debate that increasingly revives an outdated and widely falsified canon ritually centered on Marcel Mauss's (1954) *Essay sur le don*.

Whereas US and French Marxian anthropology made genuine and widely recognized contributions to wider debates in the social sciences and humanities, especially so in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, British anthropology kept a critical, if appreciative, distance to Marxian thought. This is possibly best evidenced in Maurice Bloch's introduction to an otherwise important edited volume on *Marxist Analysis and Social Anthropology* (1975) and in his short book on *Marxism and Anthropology: The History of a Relationship* (1983). The latter is overly concerned with Marx's *Ethnographic Notebooks* and thus with the Marxian analysis of precapitalist societies, which is remarkable at a time when contemporary

anthropology in France and the United States tackled present-day exploitations, produced several important reviews and rectifications of canonical studies from the Kwakiutl potlatch to Edmund Leach's work on highland Burma, and took on the nascent culturalist turn and Clifford Geertz as the leading figure of the Reaganite backlash in anthropology (Cannizzo 1983; Friedman [1979] 1998; Kobrinsky 1975; Roseberry 1982).

In fact, British anthropology had actively rid itself of a potentially world-leading figure in Marxian anthropology. Peter Worsley, who was from a working-class background, like Mintz, and managed to enter university as a demobilized soldier of World War II, had published forceful critiques of the work of Margaret Mead in the 1950s already and won prestigious prizes as a PhD student. Yet, his membership of the British communist party meant he was banned from entering the then Australian territory of Papua New Guinea for field research and had to write his book on Melanesian cargo cults as anti-colonial movements, *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, based on a collection of accounts of others (Worsley 1970). Certainly, his forceful call for anthropologists to show solidarity with the Kenyan Mau Mau rebellion and protest the violent British colonial repression in Kenya and elsewhere did little to improve his standing in a British anthropology dependent on funding from late British imperial institutions (Worsley 1957a). When it was made clear to him that he would have no place in a British anthropology department, Worsley went on to become one of the best-selling authors in British sociology and was one of the first authors to write a comprehensive, field-research-based monograph on the People's Republic of China—which he visited in 1973, the year of US President Richard Nixon's world-changing visit to China. His 1964 publication *The Three Worlds*, which rewrote the canon of anthropology from an early world-system's angle, is possibly the most underrated book in anthropology to this day (Worsley 1957b, 1964, 1975).

If this introduction remains cursory, and overly focused on the trajectories of Marxian

anthropology in a few Western countries—by necessity as most anthropological knowledge production throughout the twentieth century took place in these nation-states—it was intended to highlight common features. These are, in the legacy of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, a lasting commitment to the critique of capitalist and other political economies and to the uneven and combined development of capitalist accumulation and exploitation across the globe. Further, Marxian anthropology is an anthropology of the contemporary as a necessary product of multidimensional and interlinked historical processes, with the synchronic and the diachronic as two sides of one coin that is chiefly rooted in ethnographic research in both the centers and on the margins of capitalist accumulation. Also, Marxian anthropology was and is subject to historical processes in academia: as David Nugent (2002) so clearly demonstrates, anthropological knowledge, including Marxian anthropology, cannot be analyzed as a linear process of growth but in fact gets produced under the same conditions of inequality and struggle that characterize the social worlds that anthropologists research.

Decades of backlash against progressive thinkers not only affected the career of Peter Worsley but also forced many Marxian anthropologists in the United States to tone down the historical materialist foundations of their research and analysis in order to maintain a career (Price 2016). Nazism and fascism as global ideologies, the Cold War, and other eras of anti-Marxist witch hunts certainly also shaped the trajectory of German anthropology and, more profoundly, the massacres of alleged communists in Indonesia, Kenya, and elsewhere across the decolonizing Third World may have stopped Marxian anthropology very early in its tracks. At the same time, communist and socialist nations under Stalinism—and after—reduced anthropology to ethnology and folklore studies that were not allowed access to contemporary issues in their own societies and were extremely nationally-oriented (Hann et al. 2005). This was even the case in democratically socialist countries like India where, until recently, few bridged the gap between the encyclopedic, government-commissioned

ethnographies of various “tribes” and “castes” and the highbrow, usually Brahmin-dominated Marxian scholarship of the subaltern studies school where the written word (in literary or archival form) took central stage and eventually spelled a marked “decline of the subaltern in subaltern studies” (Sarkar 1996).

That said, the above overview of Marxian anthropologies is certainly incomplete. Anthropologists in Brazil and Portugal, for example, have published important critiques of national elites, developmentalism, and migration politics (de Lima 2003; Feldman-Bianco 1992; Ribeiro 1994), and we would hope that our overview is an invitation to others to insert an explicit focus on Marxian anthropology into the world anthropologies movement. What is more, younger generations of radical scholars in various countries where anthropology is an institutional latecomer or has been actively suppressed, are attracted to the discipline precisely for its ability to facilitate the kind of empirically curious yet globally theorizing research that Marxian, anti-imperialist analysis foregrounds and are finding creative ways of entering the discipline. Meanwhile, there is a revival of interest in Marxian anthropology in the older centers of anthropological knowledge production where the 2008 crisis and its gradually intensifying effects has instilled the awareness that the logic of capital may well, after all, be “the real that lurks in the background” (G. Smith 2006, quoting Zizek). The contributions to this special issue showcase some of the themes and currents debated within Marxian anthropology today.

Contemporary engagements with Marxian anthropology

Each contribution to this theme section engages overlapping research fields; socialist and postsocialist infrastructures, property regimes, and vertical urbanism in Michal Murawski’s article; tourism, heritage, gentrification, and urban planning in the case of Marc Morell; pastoral nomadism, boundary making, and uneven historical incorporation into global

capitalism in Riccardo Ciavolleva's article; and human-environmental relations and materiality from Penny McCall Howard. Each contribution moreover seeks to show a way beyond mainstream anthropology's "idealist refusal to even recognize capitalism as a coherent category" (N. Smith 2010: 241). If anthropology is threatening to become a discipline driven by keywords—"globalization," "hybridity," "trans-" and now "millennial capitalism," "neoliberalism," and "crisis" (Friedman 2015: 185)—these articles help to overcome the deficit of explanatory power in the discipline.

Michal Murawski's analysis of the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw treats this Stalinist skyscraper as an emblematic structure. Moving between the palace's many floors and the manifold historical entanglements of the palace and the city, Murawski establishes a bird's eye view on the state of urban anthropology, as well as on yet another recent turn: the infrastructural one. Warsaw's real-world urban politics have always been concerned with the vertical and the horizontal. Postmodernist scholars' claims to "complexify" (Murawski, this issue) deny this productive dichotomy and thus end up flattening the representation of urban sociality and political economy. The multifaceted inequalities that planning the planet for capitalism's ventures nurtures, such as gentrification, real estate trading, and other stratifying and fragmenting features of life in the twenty-first century, come to light as Murawski liberates urban anthropology, and, more generally, anthropology's recent rediscovery of infrastructure, from postmodernist analytical bracketing and disappearance strategies.

Mainstream anthropological analysis—this time of tourism—is also served a helping in Marc Morell's analysis of the historical political economy of Palma, the capital of Majorca and the Balearic Isles. Much like Murawski's findings on capitalist "complexification" in present-day Warsaw, Morell brings to the fore a vertical urban politics of dispossession. The act of dispossession is not a standardized pattern, however. What happens in Palma is a

contemporary extension of “the original accumulation of capital” that Marx analyzed with a focus on land grabbing, turning farmland into pastures for sheep, and supplying the English wool industry (1965 1: 507–547). In Palma, the tourism industry consumes the products of past and present human sociability, and the democratic state is a leading facilitator of this, as urban development and heritage policies allow only a limited and select number of actors to extract surplus from the global economic processes that are the tourism industry. This way, Morell helps address a hiatus in research and analysis that exists because the anthropology of tourism is focused on symbolic analyzes and not on the politics of (re)production, which determine, for example, what may or may not become marketed as heritage at some point. Morell’s discussion of the relationship between human oeuvres and human labor engages the fact that tourism is a world-leading industrial sector and makes this central to empirical research and analysis.

Riccardo Ciavolella’s analysis of political initiatives of subaltern groups in the Beninese savanna also deals with the entangled exploitation that transnational migration facilitates. Here, several subaltern groups with different genealogies of immigration to the region encounter the remnants of the developmental state that the Cold War generated throughout the Global South. This state is Janus-headed in that it offers the possibility for social mobility to all while at the same time nurturing the concentration of capital among a few “big hats,” who seek in various ways to incorporate the different groups into their entrepreneurial ventures. Ciavolella disassembles the romance of resistance that many anthropologists cling on to as they maintain static, libertarian misinterpretations of Gramsci’s analysis of hegemony under capitalism. Instead, his analysis of hegemony as an unstable project reveals that in the Beninese savanna there is not an amoral capitalist economy eating up a precapitalist moral economy. Accordingly, every effort to establish an alternative to a given pattern of exploitation in an unstable local social space-time is yet also a potential

reification for the same exploitative pattern. This is why, contrary to the common celebration of subaltern agency and the romanticist image of organic intellectuals leading localized struggles, the struggle for a better life among Fulani herders and others requires capacities for changing global, translocal configurations of capital.

The final article in this theme section, by Penny McCall Howard, addresses the characteristic of the configuration of global capital that is perhaps most rapidly emerging in political consciousness, namely its tendency to destroy the planet's vital systems. Fully sympathetic to the concerns behind new trends in anthropology that focus on global environmental crisis and that have developed new methodological and theoretical approaches to do so, McCall Howard's article, however, warns that "post-human" or "beyond-human" anthropologies avoid engagement with the greatest rift causing environmental destruction, that is, the capitalist class relations that assign the control of human relations with their environments to a tiny elite who subject these relations to capital's endless need of accumulating surplus. The article backs this argument up with detailed ethnographic insights into the changing working lives and subjectivities of Scottish fishers. At the same time, however, it offers clear and sophisticated exposé of the difference between the new wave of materialism in anthropology and the relational and historical materialism of Marxian anthropology, demonstrating why the latter can produce the kind of sharp analysis and critique that can confront the planet's present crisis.

The contributions to this special issue thus propose Marxian ways out of the predicament that capitalism has posed and continues to pose for mainstream anthropology. They contribute to an anthropology that is not so intimidated by "grand narratives" that it jettisons the search for coherent, unifying theories altogether. And while continuing the effort to scrutinize anthropology's imperialist and at the same time submissive tendencies—vis-à-vis its subaltern interlocutors and, in the inverse, vis-à-vis its neo-imperialist funders—

Marxian anthropology does cherish the (limited) power we have as intellectuals to intervene in public debate and propose emancipatory visions and strategies. Indeed, in the year of Marx's two hundredth birthday we may finally, as a discipline, make the move beyond Cold War fears and myths and rediscover Marx as someone who combined a powerful analytical and public role in confronting capitalism with a continuous doubt and restlessness about even his own analyses and strategies. Rather than seeking to escape into the search for a purer, less cumbersome outside to these contradictions, these doubts pushed him to always try to go deeper in his analysis, embracing the new theoretical complications and political challenges that emerged as capitalism as a relational process continues. What perhaps distinguishes us most as Marxian anthropologists is likewise this determination to struggle intellectually within the social and relational contradictions of capitalism, convinced that it is only as a whole, and through class struggle, that humankind can truly escape its injustice. Thus, with neoliberal capitalism's house of divisive cards on fire and everyone smelling smoke and feeling the heat, a resurgent Marxian anthropology helps to make sense of particular intimate, lived realities of turmoil while confronting the exploitative, exclusionary logics of the relational process of capitalism as a whole.

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Note

ⁱ For other such important cross-disciplinary influences from the Global South, see Nugent (2002).