

Class struggle in times of crisis: conceptualising agency of resistance

Andreas Bieler

Abstract

Class struggle in times of crisis: conceptualizing agency of resistance. While movements of resistance against neo-liberal globalization have increasingly become subject of analysis, there is little agreement on how to conceptualize such agency. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to a conceptualization of resistance in order to understand better the possibilities of success, but also obstacles to more decisive action against global capitalism.

The paper will first discuss why it is important to draw on historical materialism in this respect in order to comprehend the historical specificity of capitalism. In a second step, it is argued that divisions along ethnicity and gender can be incorporated into analyses of class struggle, before suggesting four concrete ways of how to conceptualize expanded forms of class struggle including (1) Robert Cox's focus on non-established, informal labor; (2) Harry Cleaver's emphasis on the 'social factory'; (3) Kees van der Pijl's analysis of the extension of exploitation into the sphere of social reproduction; and (4) Chandra Talpade Mohanty's grounding of analysis in the experience of the most exploited female workers in the Global South.

Keywords: Historical Materialism, Global Capitalism, Agency of Resistance, Class Struggle

Introduction

The demonstrations against the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999 are widely regarded as the starting-point of what is sometimes called a movement the movements against neo-liberal globalisation. Further landmark events include the first World Social Forum meeting in Porto Alegre/Brazil in 2001, leading to a whole range of regional, national and sub-national social forum meetings as, for example, the first European Social Forum in Firenze/Italy in November 2002. And yet, while this movement of movements and resistance more generally has been widely studied, there is little agreement on how to analyse such instances of resistance. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to a conceptualisation of resistance in order to understand better the possibilities of success, but also obstacles to more decisive action against global capitalism. This paper is, thus, committed to movement-relevant research, i.e. 'research that is attuned to and addresses the knowledge interests of activists as opposed to merely scholastic dissections of the character and dynamics of collective action' (Barker et al 2013: 2).

The paper is structured in two parts. First, I will discuss why it is necessary to analyze capitalism and resistance from a historical materialist perspective including a discussion of the relationship between structure and agency. In the second part of the paper, I will then focus more closely on agency and explore how a focus on class struggle can be understood in a broad way, incorporating also struggles around ethnic and gender issues, for example.

Historical materialism and the analysis of capitalism

When reflecting on the current structure of the global economy, it is in my view absolutely essential to emphasize its capitalist nature. This paper, thus, adopts a historical materialist approach, which argues that the way production, understood in a broad sense, is organised, influences all other aspects of life and social relationships. The capitalist social relations of production are characterized by the relation between two independent classes. On the one hand, there is capital, which owns the means of production. On the other, there are workers, who are 'free' to sell their labour power.

Within the mainstream literature, historical materialism is often rejected for its apparently inevitable economic determinism. Even in more open and critical readings, the historical materialist variety of critical theory is rejected for the same reason be it by poststructuralists (e.g. de Goede 2003: 90), be it by other left-wing thinkers interested in a socialist alternative. Erik Olin Wright, for example, argues that 'the classical Marxist theory of alternatives to capitalism is deeply anchored in a deterministic theory of key properties of capitalism's trajectory' (e.g. Wright 2006: 104). Such easy dismissals are often based on a rather superficial engagement with Marx and wider Marxist literature, overlooking the many non-determinist historical materialist approaches. And yet, it needs to be clarified why a historical materialist analysis is essential in the first place. Many analyses within International Political Economy focus on the current global economic crisis and the possible ways of how to overcome it. The way this is done, however, is ahistoric. They often take the separation of state and market, of state and civil society uncritically as the starting-point of their investigation. They discuss in what way the state(s), i.e. the political, are in a position to re-establish control at the national and/or international level over the market(s), i.e. the economic. They conceptualise the role of civil society and how it may play a crucial role in re-asserting control over the economy. Thereby, it is overlooked that the fact that the state and market, civil society and the state, the economic and the political, do appear as separate is rather specific to capitalism (Burnham 1995). And in order to understand why they appear as separate, it is necessary to analyse the way the capitalist social relations of production are organised around the private ownership of the means of production, i.e. capital, and wage labour, i.e. workers. As a result of this particular way, the extraction of surplus labour is not directly politically enforced unlike in feudalism, because those, who do not own the means of production, are 'free' to sell their labour power (Holloway and Picciotto 1977: 79; Wood 1995: 29, 34). Nobody is forced to work for a particular employer. However, without owning one's own means of production, people are indirectly forced to look for paid employment. They are forced to sell their labour power in order to reproduce themselves. Thus, to understand the inequalities and exploitation characteristic of capitalism, we need to investigate the 'hidden abode of production'. 'We must explore the netherworld of production, outside and beneath the market, where economic necessity compels workers owning only their labour power to seek employment' (Barker 2013: 44). This is specific about the capitalist historical period and this is why the state and market appear to be separate, while they are ultimately only two different forms of the same underlying configuration of social class forces. Unless this historical specificity of our current period is understood, any conceptualization of resistance will fall short of grasping the concrete opportunities of, but also obstacles to, transforming capitalism.

And yet, even from within historical materialism, there is often an uneasiness voiced about structural varieties of Marxism, which overlook the importance of (class) agency. In a survey of classical Marxist political economy, Harry Cleaver outlines how many of these authors separated the economic from the political:

They analysed capitalist growth and accumulation independently of working-class initiative. Because of this it is of secondary importance that some of these authors endorsed social democracy and/or collaborated with capitalist governments (e.g. Bernstein, Kautsky, Hilferding, Bauer, Sternberg) while others endorsed a 'revolutionary' perspective (e.g. Luxemburg, Lenin, Pannekoek, Mattick). In all cases, by reading Capital as political economy they limited themselves to a critique of capitalist anarchical instability or exploitative nature (Cleaver 2000: 34).

As a result, agency is written out of history. Marx's work, while used to analyse the 'objective' structures of the current political economy, cannot provide any direction for working class strategy. 'One must conclude that such theories which accord all power to capital can only be in its interest' (Cleaver 2000: 46).

In response to such an ahistoric, political economy Marxist approach, Cleaver suggests a political reading of Marx, which puts class agency at the heart of analysis. Rather than identifying laws related to the structure of the capitalist social relations of production, he emphasises that all law like structures are ultimately the result of class struggle between capital and labour. 'The "laws of motion" of capitalist society are the direct product of the class struggle and denote only what capital has had the strength to impose, given the rising power of the working class' (Cleaver 2000: 88). Alf Nilsen puts forward a voluntarist approach with a heavy emphasis on agency along the lines indicated by Cleaver. Here, strategies of social class forces are investigated as if the specific structures did not matter. Indeed, structures are considered to be purely the result of class struggle. 'Such structures – and the social formations in which they inhere – are not static', Nilsen argues. 'Rather they are internally contradictory totalities that undergo constant processes of change as a result of contention between dominant and subaltern social groups over the structuration of needs and capacities' (Nilsen 2009: 114). The main emphasis is on praxis, on class struggle between social movements from below and social movements from above, the outcome of which determines the structural, institutional setting.

Praxis and its social organisation is posited as both the subject and object of social movements. Praxis is the subject of social movements in that movement activity is nothing more and nothing less than the conscious deployment of capacities to satisfy needs. Praxis is also the object of social movements in that movement activity seeks to effect changes in or maintain those structures through which human activity is socially organised, and/or the direction in which those structures are to develop (Nilsen 2009: 114-15).

In other words, Nilsen and Cox write elsewhere, 'we see social structures and social formations as the sediment of movement struggles, and as a kind of truce line continually probed for weaknesses and repudiated as soon as this seems worthwhile – by social movements from above and social movements from below' (Nilsen and Cox 2013: 66).

Thompson warns against a static, structural definition of class. 'From a static model of capitalist productive relations there are derived the classes that ought to correspond to this, and the consciousness that ought to correspond to the classes and their relative positions' (Thompson 1978: 148). He does not 'see class as a "structure", nor even as a "category", but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships' (Thompson 1968: 8). Hence, for Thompson 'class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition' (Thompson 1968: 10). Class is, therefore, for Thompson a historical category, observed behaviour over time. 'We know about class because people have repeatedly behaved in class ways; these historical events disclose regularities of response to analogous situations, and at a certain stage (the "mature" formations of class) we observe the creation of institutions, and of a culture with class notations, which admits of trans-national comparisons' (Thompson 1978: 147). It would, however, be

incorrect in my view to deduce from these observations that the social relations of production as structure have no role to play in the identification of social class forces. Thompson himself states that

the class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms. If the experience appears as determined, class-consciousness does not' (Thompson 1968: 8-9).

In short, what has to be avoided is the deduction of specific ideas, interests and strategies of workers from their location in the social relations of production. But this does not imply that the structural setting of class agency should not be examined. As Marx famously said himself,

Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living (Marx 1852).

Of course, there is a tendential link between the objective class position of social forces and the particular strategies they adopt. As Stuart Hall points out:

The economic aspect of capitalist production processes has real limiting and constraining effects (i.e. determinancy), for the categories in which the circuits of production are thought, ideologically, and vice versa. The economic provides the repertoire of categories which will be used, in thought. What the economic cannot do is (a) to provide the contents of the particular thoughts of particular social classes or groups at any specific time; or (b) to fix or guarantee for all time which ideas will be made use of by which classes. The determinancy of the economic for the ideological can, therefore, be only in terms of the former setting the limits for defining the terrain of operations, establishing the 'raw materials', of thought. Material circumstances are the net of constraints, the 'conditions of existence' for practical thought and calculation about society (Hall 1996: 44).

In other words, within each given structural setting, agents are not completely free in their actions, but they nonetheless still have a range of strategies at their disposal, from which they can choose how to go forward. Hence, the investigation here is started through a focus on the social relations of production, which by default implies that structure matters. Of course, (class) agency remains crucial, but strategies cannot be analysed in isolation of structure. It is accepted that structures are always instantiated by human beings, but this may be the result of actions in the past, with structures opposing social class forces as objective constraints in the present. These structures do not determine agency in the present. They may prevent, constrain or enable agency and they may be changed by collective agency. Thus, within any particular structural setting, social class forces can choose from a limited variety of different strategies (Bieler and Morton 2001: 16-29). When analysing capitalist structural dynamics, three key dynamics can be identified: (1) competitiveness and the focus on ever larger amounts of profit; (2) the structural tendency towards crisis; and (3) the outward expansive dynamic around uneven and combined development.

Organised around wage labour and the private ownership of the means of production, capitalist social relations of production are enormously dynamic, since both labour and capital have to reproduce themselves through the market. While workers compete with each other to sell their labour 'freely', capitalists are in constant competition with each other over profitability and market share. Hence, capitalism is characterized by a constant drive towards further innovation in order to

outcompete one's competitors. While capitalism is very dynamic, however, it is also crisis prone, a second structural dynamic. The more goods are produced the more profits are generated, looking for further profitable investment opportunities, the more difficult it becomes to bring together excess labour and excess capital in a fruitful way. Expressed differently, there is a situation of a surplus of both capital and labour, which can no longer be brought together in a productive way within the capitalist social relations of production, a 'state of overaccumulation' in Harvey's understanding (Harvey 1985: 132). Third, Rosa Luxemburg had already pointed to 'the inherent contradiction between the unlimited expansive capacity of the productive forces and the limited expansive capacity of social consumption under conditions of capitalist distribution' (Luxemburg 1913/2003: 323). Hence, capitalism constantly has to expand outward and incorporate new, non-capitalist space in order to overcome crises. The notion of uneven and combined development becomes relevant especially in relation to outward geographical expansion of capitalist accumulation. It was Leon Trotsky, who introduced the notion of uneven and combined development, when analysing the particular location of Russia within the world economy at the beginning of the 20th century. While Russia was economically backward based on a large sector of inefficient agriculture indicating the unevenness of development in relation to advanced Western countries, a number of small pockets of highly developed industries especially in military related production were established as a result of foreign pressure by more developed neighbours in the West. 'The Russian State, erected on the basis of Russian economic conditions, was being pushed forward by the friendly, and even more by the hostile, pressure of the neighbouring State organizations, which had grown up on a higher economic basis' (Trotsky 1906/2007: 27). Hence, capitalist expansion is also 'combined' as a result of 'the sociological outcome of international capitalist pressures on the internal development of non-capitalist societies' (Rosenberg 2006: 319). In short, in response to the crisis tendency of the capitalist social relations of production, there is an inherent, structural dynamic of outward expansion along uneven and combined lines. The following discussion of strategy needs to be seen against the background of these structural tendencies.

The agency of labour within the global economy

As discussed above, class agency has always several strategies to choose from within a given set of structural conditions. And it is this process, the decision on which strategy to adopt within a particular structural setting, which is played out in processes of class struggle. Thus, 'this approach replaces the notion of fixed ideological meanings and class-ascribed ideologies with the concepts of ideological terrains of struggle and the task of ideological transformation' (Hall 1996: 41). The material is, thus, determining only in the first instance.

As Barker maintains, 'conceptually and historically, "class struggle" precedes any "formation" of classes as potential actors, or any necessary "consciousness" of class' (Barker 2013: 43). When analysing class struggle and the possibility of resistance, the distinction between class-in-itself and class-for-itself is relevant. A class-in-itself can be identified due to the way production is organised, but it may not yet have developed a class consciousness in struggle and, thus, become a class-for-itself. Robinson, for example, argues that transnational labour so far has only developed into a class-in-itself resulting from the organisation of production at the transnational level. 'But this emerging global proletariat is not yet a class-for-itself; that is, it has not necessarily developed a consciousness of itself as a class, or organized itself as such ...' (Robinson 2004: 43). The transition from a class-in-itself to a class-for-itself is made in class struggle. People, 'experience exploitation (or the need to maintain power over those whom they exploit), they identify points of antagonistic interest, they commence to struggle around these issues and in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this discovery as class-consciousness' (Thompson 1978: 149). Hence,

although classes-in-themselves can be identified through a focus on the social relations of production, the analytical emphasis then has to turn towards the analysis of class struggle and the potential of forming class consciousness. In short, class struggle is the moment when agency meets structure, when labour meets the structural contradictions of the capitalist social relations of production. Class struggle is the process in which labour identities are formed and transformed. It is the moment when structural constraints are being confirmed or changed. Hence, it is through the prism of class struggle that we can analyse best trade unions' responses to global restructuring. Whether different labour movements engage in relations of transnational solidarity is not pre-determined by their structural location in the capitalist social relations of production, but ultimately depends on the outcome of class struggle.

Analysing class struggle and the divisions along ethnicity, gender, etc.

Traditionally, it was trade unions in industrialised countries after World War Two, which had been at the forefront of securing real material gains for workers and society more widely through the establishment of welfare states. Unsurprisingly, analyses of resistance, including Marxist analyses, tended to focus on class struggle at the work place and the conflict between trade unions and employers' associations. Importantly, trade unions' activities in these struggles have not always been progressive. Operating within institutions of social partnership with employers and the state, trade unions have frequently dropped their originally more radical demands and become reformist in ideological outlook (Wahl 2011). As Barker argues,

'as the "labour movement" has emerged as a recognised and licensed agency of working-class representation, it has also commonly narrowed its ideological agenda. Trade unions appear as agencies of both struggle for and containment of workers' demands ...' (Barker 2013: 52).

Nevertheless, as Barker also points out, 'that said, "trade unionism" is not a fixed quality' (Barker 2013: 52). Just because trade unions have become co-opted into capitalist structures does not by default imply that they cannot be differently.

And unsurprisingly too, Marxist class analysis has frequently been criticised for focusing only on struggles at the workplace, thereby overlooking the struggles over gender, race, nationalism, the environment, etc. In response, it is important to note that capitalism is indifferent to social identities of race, gender, etc. Capitalism exploits people regardless of their particular identities. As Ellen Meiksins Wood makes clear, 'if capitalism derives advantages from racism or sexism, it is not because any structural tendency in capitalism toward racial inequality or gender oppression, but on the contrary because they disguise the structural realities of the capitalist system and because they divide the working class' (Wood 2002: 279). Hence, capital may use these social identities around race, nationalism and gender for discourses to fragment and divide the working class (Harvey 2006: 383). Trade unions too have on occasion employed a discourse of gender or immigration to protect their white male membership on secure permanent contracts (Ledwith 2006: 98-9). Race, gender and other identities are, therefore, often closely involved in moments of class struggle. Indeed, 'it is difficult to conceive of a society that perpetuates class exploitation without using existing racial and gender differences (and etching new ones) as channels for that exploitation' (Smith 2000: 1026). At the same time, resistance against these forms of exploitation along gender or racial lines must not overlook that the fundamental dynamics of exploitation are rooted in the way the capitalist social relations of production are organised. 'The strategic implications are that struggles conceived in purely extra-economic terms – as purely against racism or gender oppression for example – are not in themselves fatally dangerous to capitalism, that they could succeed without dismantling the capitalist system but that, at the same time, they are probably unlikely to succeed if they remain detached from an

anticapitalist struggle' (Wood 2002: 281). In other words, these forms of exploitation must not be confronted in isolation of the fundamental economic exploitation within the social relations of production. For example, 'feminism that speaks of women's oppression and its injustice but fails to address capitalism will be of little help in ending women's oppression' (Holmstrom 2002: 2).

Racism, in turn, acquired a unique connotation as a result of capitalism, Wood argues. 'It was precisely the structural pressure against extra-economic difference which made it necessary to justify slavery by excluding slaves from the human race, making them non-persons standing outside the normal universe of freedom and equality' (Wood 2002: 280). Racism was used to justify colonial plunder and is still employed at times in relation to exploitation of migrant workers, for example, or when enforcing the extraction of raw materials in the Global South. Again, however, racism in itself, similarly to gender, is not a structural necessity of capitalism and ending racism would not end exploitation. When analysing resistance to capitalist exploitation in South Africa, Bond, Desai and Ngwane point out that for the period of Apartheid, racism and capitalist exploitation were overlapping and reinforcing each other. Nevertheless, they continue, 'the conventional mistake by radicals was in thinking that the defeat of one durable but ultimately conjectural manifestation of racism, Apartheid, would bring the capitalist system to its knees. Accordingly, we found that Apartheid was conjectural, but uneven and combined development is systematic' (Bond, Desai and Ngwane 2013: 253). In a way, one could argue, the fall of Apartheid was also due to the struggles around it ultimately endangering capitalist profitability in the 1980s and 1990s.

Environmental struggles too are not in themselves threatening capitalism. In fact, one of the predominant ways of responding to the crisis of global warming is the establishment of a CO2 emission trading schemes. In a way, the right to pollute the environment is being marketised. The environmental justice movement, which combines concerns for the environment with the defence of the poor is clearly more radical in that social injustice is linked with environmental injustice. And yet, this strategy too will only have a chance of success, if it is combined with a critical attack on the capitalist social relations of production themselves, as the same structural tendency towards a constant increase in surplus accumulation driving the relentless exploitation of the workforce also underlies the relentless exploitation of the environment. As David Harvey points out, environmental groups 'can either ignore the [capitalist] contradictions, remain within the confines of their own particularist militancies – fighting an incinerator here, a toxic waste dump there, a World Bank dam project somewhere else, and commercial logging in yet another place – or they can treat the contradictions as a fecund nexus to create a more transcendent and universal politics' (Harvey 1996: 400). Only the exploration of alternative modes of production can provide the possibility of overcoming social and environmental injustices and, as a result, 'is fundamentally a class project, whether it is exactly called that or not, precisely because it entails a direct challenge to the circulation and accumulation of capital which currently dictates what environmental transformation occur and why' (Harvey 1996: 401).

Consequently, whether in relation to gender, race or the environment, in order to transform the political economy fundamentally, the social relations of production need to be transformed and it is here that class agency is crucial. The potential collective refusal to work directly challenges the core of capitalist exploitation (Smith 2000: 1027). In short, a focus on class struggle does not imply that it is impossible to go beyond an exclusive focus on the struggle between employers and workers at the workplace or on negotiations or conflicts between employers' associations and organised labour, i.e. trade unions, at the national level. Hence, rather than getting side-tracked by understanding gender and ethnic struggles as separate from class struggles and without an economic dimension, the focus

needs to be more closely on the way production, understood in a broad sense, has become re-organised within globalisation.

Four ways of conceptualising expanded forms of class struggle

In the following, I will introduce four ways, each with one concrete example, in which class struggle allows us to think beyond struggles at the workplace: Robert Cox's focus on non-established, informal labour, Harry Cleaver's emphasis on the 'social factory', Kees van der Pijl's analysis of the extension of exploitation into the sphere of social reproduction, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's grounding of analysis in the experience of the most exploited female workers in the Global South. First, Cox already argued in 1981 that workers in globalisation have become fragmented along two lines. In addition to the division between national labour working in production sectors organised within a country and transnational labour working in transnational production sectors, he identified the division between established labour, workers on permanent contracts in the core of the economy, and non-established labour. The latter 'have insecure employment, have no prospect of career advancement, are relatively less skilled, and confront great obstacles in developing effective trade unions' (Cox 1981: 148). As part of the transnationalisation of production, we have not only experienced a centralisation of command in the global economy, but also a fragmentation with many aspects of the transnational production process being outsourced and sub-contracted to other companies. Together with a huge population influx into urban areas particularly in the Global South, this has led to an increasing casualisation and informalisation of the economy, in which permanent, full-time employment contracts have to a large extent become a feature of the past. In a way, 'it is no longer accurate today', Dan Gallin argued already in 2001, 'to describe the informal sector as "atypical"' (Gallin 2001: 228). This has always been the case in developing countries, but, informalisation more and more also affects developed countries in the North (Standing 2011), where employers are on the offensive and demand a flexibilisation of the labour market with the argument that this would be necessary in order to retain competitiveness. In a way, the periphery appears in the core, the South in the North and, of course, vice versa. Trade unions find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to organise the informal economy in the first place. Hence the need to think beyond traditional trade union organising of workplaces. Novel types of organisations may be required. StreetNet International is a good example of a non-union organisation mobilising new types of workers in the informal economy (<http://www.streetnet.org.za/>; 31/05/2011). Organisations, which directly organise street vendors, market vendors and/or hawkers, i.e. workers without a direct employer counterpart, can affiliate to StreetNet International. The goal is to exchange information on how to organize best people in the peripheries of the labour market so that they can represent their interests in the most effective way through local, national and international campaigns. Co-ordinating members especially from Africa, Latin America and Asia makes Streetnet International a truly transnational organisation.¹

Second, when reflecting on the increasing number of struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s, Harry Cleaver asserts that 'the reproduction of the working class involves not only work in the factory but also work in the home and in the community of homes ...; the working class had to be redefined to include nonfactory analysis' (Cleaver 2000: 70). Analysing what he called the 'social factory' allowed Cleaver to take into account all the other forms of unwaged activities including child rearing, education, which are necessary for the reproduction of capital, but take place outside the workplace. Drawing on the work of the so-called Italian New Left around Mario Tronti and Antonio Negri, he concluded that 'the identification of the leading role of the unwaged in the struggles of the 1960s in Italy, and the extension of the concept to the peasantry, provided a theoretical framework within which the struggles of American and European students and housewives, the unemployed, ethnic and

racial minorities, and Third World peasants could all be grasped as moments of an international cycle of working-class struggle' (Clever 2000: 73). This requires a new definition of 'worker', beyond the direct employee/employer relationship is necessary in order to incorporate the whole 'social factory' of capitalism. 'As this relationship is being replaced by a variety of more diffuse and indirect but nonetheless dependent relationships in the process of production, trade union organising can no longer focus primarily on the employment relationship' (Gallin 2001: 233). Trade unions as member organisations, therefore, need to reach beyond the workplace. The CTA in Argentina, for example, organises, of course, workers. Nevertheless social movements such as environmental groups and individuals, even if they are not workers in a traditional understanding, can also affiliate.² Community Unionism is another way of reaching beyond the workplace. The term 'Community Unionism' is used conceptually and practically in a number of different ways. In general, however, 'community unions identify with the broader concerns of their ethnic, racial and geographical communities. The organisations view housing or civil rights or immigration issues as connected to their core mission around worker organising and issues of class and race, class and place, class and gender and class and ethnicity are joined in this model' (Steward et al 2009: 8). Community unions reach back historically to a tradition, when it was normal that trade unions were involved with issues of working class communities beyond the workplace (Greenwood and McBride 2009: 201-1). Tattersall distinguishes between coalitions between unions and community organisations, organising workers on the basis of identity, and place-based trade union organising as sub-strands of Community Unionism (Tattersall 2009: 163). Her case study of a coalition between a teachers' union and a parents and citizens initiative in Sydney/Australia in the early 2000s illustrates well, how coalition unionism can be very successful at influencing policy-making, when it succeeds in rallying around issues of common concerns, and here especially small class sizes in this particular instance. In turn, this made it later easier for teachers to demand an increase in salaries. The moment trade unions connect with issues of relevance beyond their own direct workplace, there is a good chance of being more successful.

Another attempt to include struggles outside the workplace into class analysis is made by Kees van der Pijl. He argues that neo-liberal capitalism is characterised by the fact that capitalist discipline has now also been further extended within the entire process of social reproduction, involving the exploitation of the social and natural substratum. In response to the commodification of social services and the intensified destruction of the biosphere as well as the disruption of traditional life, a whole range of new, progressive but also nationalist rightwing social movements have emerged to defend the environment and sphere of social reproduction (van der Pijl 1998: 46-8; see also Bakker and Gill 2003). This has to be analysed as class struggle as much as exploitation and resistance to it in the workplace. In other words, the struggle of social movements against neo-liberal globalisation, for example, can also be conceptualised as class struggle. The current European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) on Water as a Human Right, a broad alliance of user groups as well as trade unions including the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU), represents a good example. The initiative collected more than 1.85 million signatures between May 2012 and September 2013. The demands of the ECI are threefold: '(1) For the EU to recognise the UN right to water and sanitation into EU law; (2) not to liberalise water services in the EU; and (3) to contribute to achieving access to water and sanitation for all across the world' (<http://www.right2water.eu/news/press-communication-%E2%80%9Cwater-human-right%E2%80%9D-will-submit-certificates-16-million-signatories>, accessed 19/12/2013). On the one hand, there is the interest of trade unions in keeping water provision in public hands, as working conditions are generally better in the public than the private sector. On the other, user groups are supportive of universal access to affordable clean water. It is again this inclusion of issues beyond the workplace, the right to access to clean water, which has allowed these trade unions to link up with other social movements and, thereby, broaden the social basis for resistance and form bonds of solidarity.

Finally, Mohanty from a 'revised race-and-gender-conscious historical materialism' argues that analysis of capitalist exploitation needs to be grounded in the experience of the most exploited workers in the global economy, i.e. female workers, often working from home in developing countries. 'Any analysis of the effects of globalization needs to centralize the experiences and struggles of these particular communities of women and girls' (Mohanty 2003: 235). It is from this perspective that capitalist exploitation of workers can be understood in its gendered and racial dimension and the way capitalism uses related discourses to fragment the working class. 'Management exploits and reinforces these ideologies by encouraging women to view femininity as contradictory to factory work, by defining their jobs as secondary and temporary, and by asking women to choose between defining themselves as women or as workers' (Mohanty 2002: 167). Moreover, 'the explanation also lies in the specific definition of Third World, immigrant women as docile, tolerant, and satisfied with substandard wages' (Mohanty 2002: 169). Equally, it is especially women, who are most affected by current cuts to public sector jobs and services, partly because the workforce in the public sector is predominantly female, partly because women are more likely to have caring responsibilities or be lone parents (see also Abramovitz 2002). Hence, when analysing exploitation and resistance in times of austerity, analysis can be grounded in the experience of women in industrialised countries. When thinking in terms of resistance by the most exploited women in the global economy, SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) in India, registered as a trade union, but organising predominantly female homeworkers, is one of the most successful examples of organising (Mohanty 2002: 175). Through initiatives such as its green livelihoods strategy, SEWA has protected the livelihood of many of its 1.3 million female members (Sahoo 2012). SEWA also provides an excellent example of how these novel forms of organisation can be integrated in formal global labour institutions. In 2006, it was accepted as affiliate by the International Trade Union Confederation (SEWA; <http://www.sewa.org/>; 14/06/2012). Not all is well yet. As Gallin points out, this 'was largely a symbolic achievement. The new International had neither a "department" nor a "desk" for informal workers, nor was the informal workers' agenda any part of the priorities of the new organization' (Gallin 2012: 11). Nevertheless, it points into encouraging directions of organising transnational solidarity in the current structuring conditions of global capitalism.

Conclusion

Stuart Hall states that 'what is "scientific" about the Marxist theory of politics is that it seeks to understand the limits to political action given by the terrain on which it operates' (Hall 1996: 45). Hence, this article initially asserted the importance of the structural dimensions of the capitalist social relations of production including the inherent drive towards the constant increase in surplus accumulation, the structural tendency towards periodic crises as well as processes of uneven and combined development resulting from attempts to overcome crises. Equally, however, it is the task to understand possibilities for successful action towards a transformation of the capitalist social relations of production. In particular, it is in moments of crisis that agency of resistance becomes relevant and influences directly the shape and extent to which strategies of restructuring are established by capital.

It is in processes of class struggle in the current global crises that alternative ways forward can be forged by social class forces, encompassing traditional workers and trade unions as their representatives as well as new social movements and their concerns around issues related to race, gender and the environment. As Barker asserts,

'successive waves of colonised and enslaved peoples, migrants, working women, white-collar employees, indigenous peoples, college and school students, gays and lesbians have all, indifferent ways and times, fought their way into "the social movement in general". In the

process, they have reshaped “class struggle” and enriched the notion of human emancipation’ (Barker 2013: 60).

Notes

¹ For an overview of other successful examples of organizing informal workers and the potential involvement of trade unions, see Bonner and Spooner (2011).

² Presentation by Bruno Dubrosin, CTA delegate at the tenth Congress of SIGTUR in Perth, Australia on 4 December 2013.

References

- Abramovitz, M. (2002) ‘Still under Attack: Women and Welfare Reform’, in Nancy Holmstrom (ed.), *The Socialist Feminist Project: A contemporary reader in theory and politics*: 216-27. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Bakker, I. and S. Gill (eds) (2003) *Power, Production and Social Reproduction: Human In/security in the Global Political Economy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Barker, Colin (2013) ‘Class Struggle and Social Movements’, in Colin Barker, Laurence Cox, John Krinsky and Alf Gunvald Nilsen (eds.) *Marxism and Social Movements*. Leiden-Boston, Brill: 41-61.
- Barker, Colin, Laurence Cox, John Krinsky and Alf Gunvald Nilsen (2013) ‘Marxism and Social Movements: An Introduction’, in Colin Barker, Laurence Cox, John Krinsky and Alf Gunvald Nilsen (eds.) *Marxism and Social Movements*. Leiden-Boston, Brill: 1-37.
- Bieler, A. and Morton, A.D. (2001) ‘The Gordian Knot of Agency-Structure in International Relations: A neo-Gramscian Perspective’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 7(1): 5-35.
- Bond, Patrick, Ashwin Desai and Trevor Ngwane (2013) ‘Uneven and Combined Marxism within South Africa’s Urban Social Movements’, in Colin Barker, Laurence Cox, John Krinsky and Alf Gunvald Nilsen (eds.) *Marxism and Social Movements*. Leiden-Boston, Brill: 233-55.
- Bonner, C. & D. Spooner (2011) ‘Organizing in the Informal Economy: A Challenge for Trade Unions’, *International Politics and Society*, 2: 87-105.
- Burnham, P. (1995) ‘State and Market in International Political Economy: Towards a Marxian Alternative’, *Studies in Marxism*, 2: 135-59.
- Cleaver, H. (2000) *Reading Capital Politically (second edition)*. Leeds: Anti/Theses.
- Cox, R.W. (1981) ‘Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 10(2): 126-55.
- Cox, R.W. (1992) ‘Global *perestroika*’, in R. Miliband and L. Panitch (eds) *The Socialist Register: New World Order?* London: Merlin Press: 26-43.
- Gallin, D. (2001) Propositions on Trade Unions and Informal Employment in Times of Globalisation, in P. Waterman & J. Wills (eds) *Place, Space and the New Labour Internationalisms*. Oxford, Blackwell: 227-45.

- Gallin, D. (2012) 'Informal economy workers and the international trade union movement: an overview', paper presented at the Critical Labour Studies 8th Symposium, University of Salford/UK; 18 – 19 February 2012.
- de Goede, Marieke (2003) Beyond Economism in International Political Economy'. *Review of International Studies* 29(1): 79-97.
- Greenwood, I. and McBride, J. (2009) 'Conclusion'. In Jo McBride and Ian Greenwood (eds.) *Community Unionism: A Comparative Analysis of Concepts and Contexts*. Basingstoke, Palgrave: 210-20.
- Hall, S. (1996) 'The problem of ideology: Marxism without guarantees'. In David Morley and K.-H. Chen (eds), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. London, Routledge: 25-46.
- Harvey, D. (1985) 'The Geopolitics of Capitalism', in D. Gregory and J. Urry (eds), *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*. London, Macmillan: 128–63.
- Harvey, David (1996) *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Harvey, D. (2006) *The Limits to Capital (new and fully updated edition)*. London: Verso.
- Holloway, J. and Picciotto, S. (1977) 'Capital, Crisis and the State', *Capital & Class* 2: 76-101.
- Holmstrom, N. (2002) 'Introduction', in Nancy Holmstrom (ed.), *The Socialist Feminist Project: A contemporary reader in theory and politics*. New York, Monthly Review Press: 1-12.
- Ledwith, S. (2006) 'The Future as Female? Gender, Diversity and Global Labour Solidarity', in C. Phelan (ed.), *The Future of Organised Labour: Global Perspectives*. Oxford et al: Peter Lang: 91-134.
- Luxemburg, R. (1913/2003) *The Accumulation of Capital* (translated by. Agnes Schwarzschild). London: Routledge.
- Marx, Karl (1852) The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte;
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/index.htm>; accessed 25/02/2014.
- Mohanty, C.T. (2002) 'Women Workers and Capitalist Scripts: Idologies of domination, common interests, and the politics of solidarity', in N. Holmstrom (ed.), *The Socialist Feminist Project: A contemporary reader in theory and politics*. New York, Monthly Review Press: 160-80.
- Mohanty, C.T. (2003) *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Durham/London: Duke University Press.
- Nilsen, A.G. (2009) "'The authors and the actors of their own drama": Towards a Marxist theory of social movements', *Capital & Class* 99: 109-39.
- Nilsen, Alf Gunvald and Laurence Cox (2013) 'What Would a Marxist Theory of Social Movements Look Like?', in Colin Barker, Laurence Cox, John Krinsky and Alf Gunvald Nilsen (eds.) *Marxism and Social Movements*. Leiden-Boston, Brill: 63-81.
- van der Pijl, K. (1998) *Transnational Classes and International Relations*. London: Routledge.
- Robinson, W.I. (2004) *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World*. Baltimore-London: John Hopkins University Press.

- Rosenberg, J. (2006) 'Why is there no International Historical Sociology?', *European Journal of International Relations* 12(3): 307-40.
- Sahoo, S. (2012) 'Organizing informal women workers for green livelihoods: the Self Employed Women's Association in Gujarat', in S. Mosoetsa and M. Williams (eds.) *Labour in the global South: Challenges and alternatives for workers*. Geneva, ILO: 181-99.
- Smith, N. (2000) 'What happened to class?', *Environment and Planning A* 32: 1011-32.
- Standing, G. (2011) *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Stewart, P. et al (2009) 'Introduction', in J. McBride and I. Greenwood (eds), *Community Unionism: A Comparative Analysis of Concepts and Contexts*. Basingstoke, Palgrave: 13-20.
- Tattersall, Amanda (2009) 'Using their Sword of Justice: The NSW Teachers Federation and its Campaigns for Public Education between 2001 and 2004', in J. McBride and I. Greenwood (eds), *Community Unionism: A Comparative Analysis of Concepts and Contexts*. Basingstoke, Palgrave: 161-86.
- Thompson, E. P. (1968) *The Making of the English Working Class*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Thompson, E. P. (1978) 'Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?', *Social History* 3(2): 133-65.
- Trotsky, L. (1906/2007) 'Results and Prospects'. In L. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, intro. Michael Löwy. London, Socialist Resistance: 24-100.
- Wahl, A. (2011) *The Rise and Fall of the Welfare State*. London: Pluto Press.
- Wood, E.M (1995) *Democracy Against Capitalism: renewing historical materialism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wood, E.M. (2002) 'Capitalism, and Human Emancipation: Race, Gender, and Democracy'. In N. Holmstrom (ed.), *The Socialist Feminist Project: A contemporary reader in theory and politics*. New York: Monthly Review Press: 277-92.
- Wright, E.O. (2006) 'Compass Points: Towards a Socialist Alternative', *New Left Review* 41: 93-124.