


# Capitalism, mutual aid, and material life: Understanding exilic spaces

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## Abstract

Anarchist and Marxist scholarship differ mainly in emphasis: anarchists tend to emphasise cooperation, while Marxists have traditionally focused on exploitation and domination. The most recent wave of anarchist scholarship analyses non-state spaces and practices that stand outside the logic of state and market, while Marxist analyses are still dominated by processes of accumulation and the capital relation. The aim of this brief intervention is to suggest that both approaches are needed, and that understanding life at the edges of capitalism, including possible emphases on relations of mutual aid instead of market competition, is necessary for a complete understanding of capitalism as a system.

## Keywords

Anarchism, capitalism, exilic spaces, material life, mutual aid

I would argue that a third sector should be added to the pre-industrial model – that lowest stratum of the non-economy, the soil into which capitalism thrusts its roots but which it can never really penetrate. This lowest layer remains an enormous one. Above it, comes the favoured terrain of the market economy, with its many horizontal communications between the different markets: here a degree of automatic coordination usually links supply, demand and prices. Then alongside, or rather above this layer, comes the zone of the anti-market, where the great predators roam and the law of the jungle operates. This – today as in the past, before and after the industrial revolution – is the real home of capitalism. (Braudel 1982: 229–230)

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## Introduction

The new wave of anarchist history (Scott 2009) and anthropology (Graeber 2001) attests to the relationship between anarchist and Marxist scholarship. They differ mainly in emphasis: anarchists tend to emphasise cooperation, while Marxists have traditionally focused on exploitation and domination. The most recent anarchist scholarship analyses non-state spaces and practices that stand outside the logic of state and market, while Marxist analyses are still dominated by processes of accumulation and the capital relation. The aim of this brief intervention is to suggest that both approaches are needed. This essay is primarily a call for research and theorisation, rather than a fully developed argument. It is an invitation for further reflection on the nature of anarchist and Marxist scholarship.<sup>1</sup>

Our proposal is simple. One way to bring together the analytical strengths of anarchist and Marxist approaches is to focus on recent scholarship on non-state spaces, which we chose to call *exilic spaces*, and on their relationships to capitalism. Exilic spaces can be defined as those areas of social and economic life in which people attempt to escape from capitalist relations and processes, whether territorially or by attempting to build structures and practices that are autonomous of capitalist accumulation and social control. Our guides in this effort include Peter Kropotkin, the historian Fernand Braudel, the sociologists Karl Polanyi and Terence Hopkins, and the economist Albert Hirschman.

## Marxism

To analyse the historical development of world capitalism, we may follow a well-worn path. Marx is still unsurpassed in laying out the processes of accumulation, the hidden abode of labour, class struggle and the inherent tendencies of crisis and recovery within capitalism. Joseph Schumpeter, Alfred Chandler and others explain processes whereby innovations in the technique and organisation of large corporate capitalism drive outward shifts of productivity and periodic contractions. Analyses of world capitalism, from Luxemburg and Lenin to Baran and Sweezy and then to world-systems analysis, emphasise how the behaviour of giant monopolies and associated states produces an unevenly developed world economy, including subjugated zones that are not dominated by proletarian commodity production. These explain Braudel's second and third sectors (above) pretty well.

Yet Marx cannot help much in understanding cooperation and self-organisation from below, either by escape from capitalism or within its interstices. Recovering this 'waste of experience' requires a *sociology of absences*; that is, research into actually existing social practices and institutions that have been made non-existent and treated as unbelievable alternatives to the status quo. Real historical and contemporary existences are made absent by being labeled ignorant, backward, inferior, local, and unproductive. Then, a *sociology of emergences* constructs concrete, utopian and realist possible futures. The two sociologies are linked by de Sousa Santos: 'Whereas the sociology of absences amplifies the present by adding to the existing reality what was subtracted from it ... the sociology

of emergences enlarges the present by adding to the existing reality the possibilities and future expectations it contains' (2012: 57).

Absent spaces include borderlands, swamps, forests, mountains and deserts; but also places within capitalism in which people practice direct democracy and mutual aid on a daily basis. These include households, communities, tenant yards, churches and prisons. The contribution of anarchist theory to understanding contemporary and historical capitalism is to understand the political and economic practices and institutions that develop within exilic spaces.<sup>2</sup> By comparing experiences, one can locate patterns and regularities about when and under what conditions escape societies develop characteristics that have become popular themes of social sciences, as 'real utopias' (Wright 2010) and 'altruism' (Sober & Wilson 1999).

## Anarchism

The first systematic attempt to analyse cooperation and self-organisation was Kropotkin's 1902 study, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*. Whereas the popular version of Darwin's theory of natural selection had emphasised a 'gladiatorial view' of survival of the fittest in a 'war of all against all', Kropotkin emphasised how mutual aid rather than combat is the chief criterion of success in the struggle for existence. In doing so, he followed a Russian humanist critique of competitive Darwinism. In 1909, Kropotkin noted: 'Kessler, Severtsov, Menzbir, Brandt – four great Russian zoologists, and a fifth lesser one, Poliakov, and finally myself, a simple traveler ... see a great deal of mutual aid where Darwin and Wallace see only struggle' (quoted in Todes 1987: 546).

Kropotkin's ultimate conclusion was:

If we ... ask Nature: 'who are the fittest: those who are continually at war with each other, or those who support one another?' we at once see that those animals which acquire habits of mutual aid are undoubtedly the fittest. They have more chances to survive, and they attain, in their respective classes, the highest development of intelligence and bodily organization. (2012: 6)

Kropotkin's great innovation was to move the discussion of mutual aid from biology to human society, arguing that in each stage of human development – from clan to family to village to town to mediaeval city to early modernity – new forms of social organisation and regulation arose that tended to drive people apart. Yet in each stage, mutual aid reappeared as a common way of organising social relations from below – a sort of antidote used by communities to protect themselves against the cruelties of proto-state, then state, then capitalist forms of regulation and oppression. Kropotkin's central principle of the conflict between institutions of mutual aid and possessive individualism is as relevant as ever today.

Kropotkin's model of struggle between institutions of mutual aid and possessive individualism may be placed in the broader theoretical context of the development of social conceptions of value, production, effort and time. Capitalism has undeniably restricted the conception of economy to the market, its commodities and work, to efforts that produce exchange values. Household and community, sites of mutual aid, are considered

uneconomic and thus devalued (especially when women are involved). This raises important issues for exilic social economies, as we shall see in our discussion of substantive and formal economy, below.

## **Anarchist history of 'non-state spaces'**

The most ambitious attempt to understand 'non-state spaces' is Scott's (2009) analysis of the 'art of not being governed'. Expanding on the work of Clastres (1987), Scott creates a history of those who got away. Although the study of the South-East Asian region that he calls 'Zomia' is his central concern, living without a state was a common human pursuit involving escape from imperial projects, the subjugation of indigenous people in 'white-settler' colonies, and the dialectic between sedentary people and nomads. Although the precise shape of encounter is unique to each case, their ubiquity provides us with many possibilities for comparative research (Scott 2009: 3).

Scott identifies a pattern of state-making and unmaking that produced peripheries composed of refugees *and* people who had never been state subjects: *shatter zones* 'where the human shreds of state formation and rivalry accumulated willy-nilly, creating regions of bewildering ethnic and linguistic complexity'. Shatter zones were geographically inaccessible and practiced agricultures and social organisation of escape.

Some crops are suited to escape: they are inaccessible to states because they can be grown in difficult terrains, and are hard to count/measure and tax. The escape crop of choice in South-East Asia was maize, while the New World favourite was cassava. Some crops allow people to disperse widely, making their social structures resistant to incorporation by introducing a 'friction of space' that exhausts state attempts to extend its power.

Escape social structures are flexible. Scott speaks of 'innumerable small units, seemingly in constant movement': societies in which the elementary unit is the household, and where 'villages, tribes, and confederations [are] provisional and shaky alliances' (p. 38). In the absence of surplus-absorbing religious or political establishments, the 'sociological pyramid ... is rather flat and local'. Hill farmers move regularly to new farmlands. Scott observes equality built from dispersal, movement and fierce individualism, rather than from cooperation: from an insistence on not being governed, rather than from self-governance. If there is mutual aid among hill peoples, it is under-observed. Scott sees illiteracy as a strategic choice designed to impede appropriation. People without (written) history choose not to have a fixed history in order to maximise their space for cultural manoeuvre.<sup>3</sup>

Today, however, Scott says that talk of non-state spaces makes no sense. Once the 'modern state' develops 'distance-demolishing technologies' that encompass the globe and 'diminish the friction of terrain', there are no more places to which people can escape (p. xii). An all-encompassing modern state enclosed non-state spaces and effectively brought non-state spaces and people 'to heel', creating 'an era in which virtually the entire globe is "administered space" and the periphery has been enclosed' (Scott 2009: 15).

Are non-state spaces and activities defunct? Is the project we propose an anachronism? We propose not. Scott's political economy is limited to agriculture. Once one recognises that different kinds of economic activities could be beyond state and market control, one opens up the possibility that 'distance-demolishing technologies' cannot snuff out all possibilities of escape.

We propose, as a research hypothesis, the existence of structural cracks in nation-states, localised states, and the interstate system in which people practice escape production and mutual aid (see Holloway 2013). We also propose, from our understanding of contemporary movements like the Zapatistas in Mexico, that geographical escape may not be as anomalous as Scott suggests, although it requires different strategies and faces different threats than those of Zomia.

Zibechi's analysis of contemporary urban non-state spaces in Latin America opens up such possibilities. As a consequence of neoliberal shock therapy, he argues, a new relationship between people and spaces arose. Neoliberal forces caused greater internal migration and widened the fissures in which the poor could create 'new forms of sociability and resistance' (2010: 50). People moved to the outskirts of major cities, where capital has a limited and distant presence. New settlements (*asentamientos*) are 'dispersed spaces' with autonomous urban economies.

In the southern cone of South America, for example, the 'flight of capital reflected the workers' flight from capitalist relations of production and subordination'. Tens of thousands of residents of *asentamientos* set up 'independently controlled forms of production'. Although they remained connected to and dependent on the market, 'vast sectors now control their forms and rhythms of production, and are no longer dominated by the rhythms of capital and its division of labor' (Zibechi 2012: 22). They recycle materials discarded by consumerist society and set up micro-enterprises of all kinds. They build their own habitats: houses, public spaces, streets, marketplaces, and even sewage and water facilities. In El Alto, Bolivia, for example, 70 per cent of the working population is engaged in family or small semi-entrepreneurial activities, including restaurants, construction and manufacturing. Non-remunerated work predominates, with family members teaching each other how to do the work.

Zibechi is unclear as to how these activities vary in their relationships to the market economy. For example, do enterprises tend to act as subcontractors to mainstream firms? Nor do we know much about the degree to which the reproduction of labour in these areas subsidises labour costs in the capitalist economy.

It is thus difficult to define exilic economic activities in the case of structural exit. Once we recognise the points about reproductive labour made by Federici (2012) and others, as well as the difficulties autonomous communities have in providing for their needs through non-waged activities, a key question is whether freely provided and mutually beneficial labour can constitute free activity, or whether world-systemic pressures force them to revert to dependence on wage labour, money incomes and market purchases, rather than self-provisioning.

A central question about exilic activities, then, is their relationship to accumulation. This raises a point made in the distinction between substantive and formal economics (Polanyi 1957; Hopkins 1957). Formal economists continually talk about scarcity and the importance of economising to the success of an economic system. Yet substantive economy emphasises provisioning, supplying things people need – the useful disposition of the social surplus (if any), rather than economising.

This raises the connection between political and economic organisation. How will exilic communities decide on the distribution of economic resources and human effort and the disposition of surplus? Is there private property, and if not, how are land and

other forms of property allocated and reallocated? Do exilic communities produce a surplus from autonomous activities, and if so, can disposition of the surplus into the community strengthen economic autonomy and enable the exilic zone to delink from world-capitalism?

The flight of capital causes a loss of legitimacy of elected representatives. In Bolivia, urban spaces in El Alto and Cochabamba practice a directly democratic style of politics known as 'back-seat driving'. Communities or groups designate representatives to 'go before them', to control and guide them (Zibechi 2010: 26). Notice, however, that these are not complete withdrawals from representative politics: by sending delegates 'to go before them', communities seek to put clear limits on representative politicians while simultaneously practicing alternative forms of direct democracy in their communities.

## Missing factors

Kropotkin's writing on cooperation and voluntary association begs for a new field of study: comparative research of non-state (exilic) spaces as expressions of concentrated mutual aid that may stand in contradiction to the development of capitalism. Contemporary scholars including Scott (2009) and Zibechi (2012) refer to zones that either survive capitalist incorporation or develop because of capitalism's failures to meet human needs.

Yet these approaches often assume that non-state spaces and those who populate them are outside the capitalist world system. Our working hypothesis (our expectation) is that exilic spaces and actors interact with world capitalist processes, institutions and actors. We ask how and to what degree this interaction limits their self-activity, and how these limits change over time. To return to Braudel's analogy, if utopians succeed in fertilising the soil of material life, they may also attract the roots of capital and give it reasons and ways to penetrate.

We distinguish between spatial and structural withdrawal. Geographical withdrawal is obvious, yet exilic spaces may be structural. Although people work, produce and trade in the capitalist economy, they do activities that are not fully incorporated into structures of capitalist accumulation: in the household, the community, or elsewhere; for self-benefit, for the benefit of others, or simply for enjoyment. Rather than assuming that one lives either within or outside of states or capitalist-economies, it may be more useful to follow Wright (1978) and assume that people have *contradictory locations* with regard to states and formal labour. Some things draw them into capitalist and state-centered processes, and others lead them to seek withdrawal. Parts of their lives are 'in' capitalism, while they spend much time and effort trying to escape it. They are the parts of Braudel's 'material life' into which capitalism has hardly been able to sink its roots ... yet.

Several strands of analysis may help to illuminate exilic spaces and their relationships to capitalism. Our starting point is Kropotkin's concept of a battle between mutual aid and institutions of possessive individualism. Mutual aid lives in a lifeworld that understands value and production as they were before the rise of states and capital redefined and restricted their meanings. Polanyi (1957) and Hopkins (1957) partly reflect these conflicting understandings in their distinction between substantive and formal economy; yet we believe that this must be developed further. Besides broadening our understanding of

'economy', we place exilic economy within the context of world-historical changes in the ways that regions and people are incorporated into processes of accumulation. Finally, a frame of analysis that helps capture the dynamic interactions between those who seek autonomy and those who represent the interests of capital is Hirschman's (1970) work on exit, voice and loyalty. We will begin with a broader understanding of economy.

## A broader understanding of 'economy'

Let us turn to production, including subsistence. We have proposed that production is only a subset of 'economy' in the wider sense, where 'value' reflects what people choose to exert time and effort into producing, whether material or not. What kinds of economic activities are characteristic of exilic spaces, particularly when their subsistence is threatened by capitalism? Are they likely to be communal, do they support mutual aid and equality, or are they fragmented at individual or household levels? What are their dynamic properties: are they sustainable, do they tend to reintroduce hierarchies and inequalities? How, if at all, can we distinguish economic activities that enable the production and reproduction of exilic spaces from those that, even if not commodified, are integrated into world-capitalist accumulation?

For Hopkins (1957), *formal economy* is mainstream economics: a system whereby scarce resources are distributed among unlimited wants through a (supposedly self-regulating) market. The problem is 'economising': getting the most out of what has been endowed. The activities that succeed in such a system produce more output at lower cost (fewer labour and resource inputs). In the real world, as Polanyi (2001, originally 1944) points out, 'self-regulating markets' are imperfect social creations that are manipulated by states and corporate actors. 'Economising' can include many things that are not recognised in neoclassical economics, including the use of unfree labour and the plunder of resources. These are important sources of accumulation and uneven development.

'Substantive economy' contains myriad ways in which people provide for themselves and each other, often outside of market exchange. Substantive activities that are unrecognised by formal economics include reciprocity (doing things for each other), redistribution (transferring resources from one entity to another), householding (self-production), and even gifting (Polanyi 1957; Hopkins 1957; Mauss 1954). 'Economic' and 'noneconomic' actions, roles and institutions are combined in many different ways: the priest who gives aid to the poor; a community presenting food to a stranger upon entry to the village; the tradition of 'barn-raising'. Economic roles and actions are embedded in social institutions including cultural practices.

At first glance, then, it may appear that the formal market economy is the world of capitalism and the substantive extra-market economy that of the 'outside', including exilic spaces. Reciprocity and redistribution provide things according to usefulness and need, rather than according to the law of value; resource-uses and distributional questions are decided by individual agreements, direct democracy, representative systems, or customary practice rather than markets and ability to pay.

Yet substantive activities must be considered, in the first instance, by their relationship to capitalist accumulation. From the earliest formation and expansion of the modern world system, householding and extra-market activities were central to strategies of

incorporating new regions. In order to keep workforces at relatively low pay, extra-market activities had to be located in households where export-oriented activity formed only part of their incomes (Wallerstein 1988: 777). Reproductive labour continues to be an important way that the substantive economy subsidises the formal economy by cheapening the cost of labour. Federici (2012) claims that this part of the substantive economy is under continuous and vicious attack by the formal economy, in a clear indication of our claim that incorporation is an ongoing and incomplete process. The recent phase of neoliberal globalisation, for instance,

has produced a historic leap in the size of the world proletariat, through a global process of enclosures that has separated millions from their lands, their jobs, their 'customary rights' and through the increased employment of women ... By destroying subsistence economies, by separating producers from the means of subsistence, by making millions dependent on monetary incomes ... once again, the capitalist class has through the world labor market, regained the initiative, re-launched the accumulation process, cut the cost of labor-production. (2012: 101)

At the same time, through conservative macroeconomic policies, states disinvested in pensions, healthcare, public transport and so on, reducing the redistributive side of the substantive economy. As a result, many activities that were redistributive are now either marketised or, for the masses who cannot afford to buy reproductive services, provided more intensively in the home or community by reciprocity or householding. Does this encourage exilic activities?

To answer this question, we need to complicate the distinction between formal and substantive economy. To understand economy in its widest sense, we follow Turner's suggestion that,

[one] would do better to start from Marx's and Engels' programmatic 'anthropological' definition of production in *The German Ideology*, in which production is said to comprehend, not merely the production of the means of subsistence, but of human beings and families, social relations of cooperation, and new needs as well ... commodity production narrows the range of activities that count as productive to those that form part of the 'economy' (i.e. that produce Value), while separating the other forms of productive activity from 'production', and *a fortiori* from those considered to be producers. (1986: 100).

As Graeber (2001) notes, 'production' in many pre-capitalist societies included all things that were 'valued' in the sense that people were willing to expend their energies and time doing or making them. Often, they were even given away (Mauss 1990). Perhaps more importantly, in many societies people expend most energy not on subsistence but on socialisation (*producing* human relations as well as things).

Clearly, economy in its broader definition involves time, effort, and commitment. Effort is connected to commitment since intensity, creativity, attention to detail and quality are all impacted by alienation and force as well by as positive forces like solidarity, empathy, and hope. When one brings time into the equation, an interesting result emerges: workers struggle to reduce the working day when effort is regulated by a boss or manager and is tied to wages; yet effort is intensified and time lengthened when it is



regulated by interest, creativity, and solidarity. 'Development' has a vast impact on the allocation of time during the day and, combined with the degree to which work and life are separated (which goes to the heart of how we define 'economy' under capitalism), it fundamentally changes not just how we spend our 'working day' but how we spend our whole day.

To the extent that mutual aid is a basis of exilic society, the work of the exilic community is not only the household chore of producing children, but also the joint task of producing community. This involves a great deal of cultural 'work'. As Ehrenreich (2007) notes, before people had a written language or settled into villages they saw dancing as important enough to record on stone. Evidence from neurological sciences indicates that 'music together with dance have co-evolved biologically and culturally to serve as a technology of social bonding. Findings of anthropologists and psychiatrists ... show how the rhythmic behavioral activities that are induced by drum beats and music can lead to altered states of consciousness, through which mutual trust among members of societies is engendered' (Freeman 2000: 411).

A surprising conclusion of this way of redefining economy is that 'work' and 'play' are no longer opposites. Kropotkin already seemed to get this. Observing animals, he identified play as a creative activity that is a form of pleasure in itself, while also being part of the 'work' of building community and relations of mutual aid:

We know at the present time that all animals, beginning with the ants, going on to the birds, and ending with the highest mammals, are fond of plays, wrestling, running after each other, trying to capture each other, teasing each other, and so on. And while many plays are, so to speak, a school for the proper behavior of the young in mature life, there are others which, apart from their utilitarian purposes, are, together with dancing and singing, mere manifestations of an excess of forces – 'the joy of life,' and a desire to communicate in some way or another with other individuals of the same or of other species – in short, a manifestation of sociability proper, which is a distinctive feature of all the animal world. (2012: 25)

Playful cooperation and pleasure are neglected aspects of the rich concept of mutual aid, too hastily glossed over by many Marxists and anarchists. Cooperation for pleasure, 'together with dancing and singing', is fundamental to our understanding of economy as *production* of life, joy, and communal bonds.<sup>4</sup>

Yet 'civilised' people often stereotype indigenous people as 'lazy', or are incensed by 'easy' crops that enable natives to expend efforts on cultural rituals, rather than on 'work'. For this reason, says Ehrenreich, they launched a 'Global campaign against festivities and ecstatic rituals':

At some point, in town after town throughout the northern Christian world, the music stops. Carnival costumes are put away or sold; dramas that once engaged a town's entire population are cancelled; festive rituals are forgotten or preserved only in tame and truncated form. The ecstatic possibility, which had first been driven from the sacred precincts of the church, was not harried from the streets and public squares. (2007: 99)

After that, festivals were 'occupied' by the lower classes and the dispossessed as a way of exercising discontent and making voice. At the upper end, behaviour was governed by

‘civilizing’ etiquette (Elias 1969). Along with the end of public joy came an ‘epidemic of melancholy’, first in 17<sup>th</sup>-century England, then 18<sup>th</sup>-century Germany, and then as endemic throughout the western world (Ehrenreich: 129–131).

There appears to be a contradiction. The natives are ‘lazy’ when it comes to physical labour, yet they have ‘vitality’ in the practice of customs such as dancing. This should not surprise us: it takes us right back to ‘value’ as the regulator that determines where people exert their physical, emotional, and spiritual efforts in the absence of capitalist labour regulation and consumerist alienation. Outside of capitalism, once subsistence is achieved, the centre of economy is the production of community, often through collective joy. ‘Development’ may thus be defined as the replacement of communal joy by commodity production. Is there a dialectic, parallel to Kropotkin’s struggle between mutual aid and possessive individualism, in which exilic actors invest great time and effort into expressions of collective joy while capital and state institutions support the development of what Crary (2013) calls ‘24/7 capitalism’?

## **World-systemic change: incorporation, cycles, divisions of labour and control**

Aside from a failure to define ‘economy’ in a wider sense that can accommodate exilic spaces and activities, as well as the production of community and intersubjective relationships, a sufficient approach to the study of material life must account for the changing world system and its effects on localities. As Wallerstein (1988) presents it, the world economy consists of a system of multiple states of unequal power linked in an interstate system. This is no mere assemblage of states, but an ordered structure whose rules and mechanisms are predominantly about the law of value. To one degree or another, they ensure that conditions prevail whereby capital, especially that which is organised in the core of the system, can accumulate profits over time. As accumulation proceeds and the system expands, it is constantly in search of new labour, resources and markets. Capitalism intensifies in areas in which it is already established as it incorporates new areas with fresh labour into the system. Yet there are constant pressures against the law of value, especially from direct producers who struggle to reduce exploitation and alienation in the workplace, who try to gain more value in the marketplace, and ‘perhaps above all’, who struggle for greater rights in the political arena (Hopkins & Wallerstein 1988: 765).

Economic growth is uneven across time and space. During downturns especially, there are pressures to restructure the world economy, including an uneven process of renewing and deepening connections between zones, as well as of drawing in new regions. Restructuring often accompanies the rise of a new hegemon, a single power with world dominance economically, politically and militarily. Each such rise is usually associated with a new global production regime (for Holland, entrepôt trade; for Britain, cotton, then railroads and iron; for the USA, consumer durables, then computers), and by a different characteristic form of rule (British territorially-based colonial empire, US direct-investment-based imperialism). Yet within these defining regime-types, there is significant local variation.

What does incorporation mean for a zone that has been external to the system? Or how does restructuring affect a region that was already incorporated, but which is

'reincorporated' or transformed due to changing production priorities? At its simplest level, incorporation means making what was external internal, and restructuring activities in a region so that they conform to the priorities of the capitalist world-economy. According to Hopkins and Wallerstein, this means (1) transforming production so that the activities that take place in an area are 'essential' to the worldwide division of labour; and (2) transforming governance so that state structures become members of and operate within the rules of the interstate system (Wallerstein 1989:131).

Yet incorporation and subsequent changes in any part of the system are contingent on historically specific relations between the incorporating powers and the region that is incorporated (McMichael 1988). The desires and actions of core states and capitals may be influential though not determinant; local forces have more or less ability to influence outcomes of external powers' attempts to manipulate them.

This relational approach to understanding systemic change is important in understanding the development of regional or local economies. Tomich (2003) and Quijano (2000) approach the capitalist world economy as a concrete historical entity that is constructed and reproduced through various interrelated and interconnected processes, always historically specific, mutually constituted and integrated as a socio-historical whole. More than a mere sum of economic processes, it is a unified network of political power, social domination and economic activities that presupposes the unity of the global and local.

Incorporation, therefore, was and is an impartial and contradictory process whereby historical labour forms – serfdom, slavery, small mercantile production, reciprocity, etc. – are brought into the service of capital and integrated into a worldwide division of labour with the wage-form at its core. New labour forms are created or old ones revived in new forms.

Along with the combination of different labour forms, the nation-state combines other historical forms of control over the distribution of collective authority. Relationships between different societal power relations within capitalist modernity are not unilinear or unidirectional, all moving toward a single regime of government (Quijano 2000: 7). Rather, world capitalism is a historically negotiated and structurally heterogeneous whole in which one or more components have primacy, but not as determinants or as a basis for determinations (Tomich: 2003).

If the capitalist world economy is conceived as a complex and structured totality, then the role of historical sociology is to reconstruct the historical development of local experiences that are produced by it, and which together make it up. Local specificities should be particularly important in the way that authorities and exilic communities bargain and interact, and in the outcome of those interactions at any given time. Local specificities will be foremost in determining the availability of different strategies of exit and the chances of successfully maintaining autonomy, including the nature of exilic production possibilities and of bargains between exilic communities and local authorities. These are not just local bargains between the exilic community and the regional power, but must be considered in the context of the world-economy, increasingly so as the region that envelops exilic communities is itself (re)integrated into world-systemic institutions and processes.

This process has two key and related parts: the impacts of global change on states' capacities to exert control over exiles or potential exiles; and the changes that new

economic activities and units have on the demand for labour and resources. With regard to states, existing political structures have to be reorganised or even eliminated and replaced by new structures. This involves a delicate balancing act: 'if they were too strong they could obstruct flows of commodities, capital, and labor; if they were too weak they could not prevent others (particularly those within their jurisdiction) from obstructing them' (Hopkins & Wallerstein: 778). Since a main objective of incorporation is the successive elimination of alternatives to world capitalism, regional states should exert more and more control over exilic peoples, communities, and spaces. This would entail (1) forcing, cajoling, or enticing them to produce bulk goods for export; and (2) exerting greater external control over local government, possibly by transforming direct democracy and its charges/delegates into representatives appointed from above or outside. Whether and how this happens is a major question of research on exilic spaces.

Put another way, how do the possibilities and realities of exilic spaces differ during periods in which the regional state is external to the world-economy, during and after incorporation, and in successive stages of reintegration into restructured world-economy? What restrictions and possibilities are created by hegemonic regimes, changing economic sectors and global and regional divisions of labour? One hypothesis, proposed by Scott (2010), is that non-state spaces belong to a previous world time and become increasingly anomalous as world accumulation and state-formation proceeds. Alternatively, we propose that forms of exilic spaces may change across world time. In particular, where escape was once primarily spatial, today's exilic spaces may be *structurally* separate, involving niches or cracks within capitalism in which communities practice mutual aid and direct democracy. This kind of escape may be less comprehensive than before and, particularly, may come with subsistence constraints that necessitate movements in and out of capitalist relations. If so, this raises new concerns about the sustainability of exile.

## Non-state spaces or exilic spaces?

Taken together, the works of Scott and Zibechi – as well as related studies on Cossacks (Boeck 2009), pirates (Linebaugh & Rediker 2000), maroons (Price 1996), contemporary shack dwellers (Pithouse 2006), urban dwellers (Gray 2004), and others – indicate that comparative research of exilic communities can tell a story of considerable importance. It is a story that melds with Marxian analyses of capitalist accumulation, exploitation and alienation. Scholars and activists should take this task seriously, not only by challenging prevailing concepts, but also by introducing things that Scott, Zibechi and others have missed.

While Scott's thesis of non-state spaces is compelling, there is almost no mention of capitalism and, surprisingly, very little mention of self-governance or mutual aid. This leaves us with several problems. First, the modern state is not adequately theorised because it is seen as a regional entity that has changed little since early agrarian societies, only attaining greater capacity and technologies of power. Second, enclosure is conceptually divorced from regionally specific processes of incorporation into the capitalist world economy. Thus, while Scott treats this process as universal, complete and finished, we

believe it to be variable, contested, partial and ongoing. This is why we encourage studies of cracks *within* the contemporary capitalist world economy.

Zibechi, unlike Scott, incorporates political economy, yet he ignores history. Taken from a historical perspective (for example, as Kropotkin analysed mutual aid), there is nothing spontaneous or surprising about the emergence of non-state spaces and non-market activities. Zibechi detects a 'new relationship between people and territories' (p. 16), yet is this relationship really new, and if so, in what respects? It may be specific in a given manifestation, but is it also a predictable response to an enduring logic of exit inscribed in the *longue durée* of historical capitalism? Instead of ruptures and breaks, we see a long-term, large-scale historical process of state making and state breaking, of ongoing and uneven incorporation and exilic re-appropriation, of the creation of institutions of possessive individualism and defensive responses of mutual aid.

We propose that non-state spaces are products of specific forms of incorporation in the capitalist world-economy. Braudel (1979: 42) briefly proposes the existence of 'black holes in the world-economy': self-organised spaces structured outside of the realm of the interstate system and capitalist accumulation. They may be left aside by encroaching process whereby core powers incorporate external arenas into the capitalist world economy, or (as we suggest here) they may be responses to encroachment, as forms of defense by populations which, for one reason or another, refuse to be incorporated. In Scott's earlier terminology, 'black holes' are a manifestation of the *infrapolitics* of capitalist world-economy, which includes a 'wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name' (Scott 1990: 38). Infrapolitics provide a 'structural underpinning for more visible political action, not as a substitute, but as its condition' (1990: 58).

In the context of world capitalism, it is clearer to speak of instances and spaces of exit rather than *non-state spaces*. Gray (2004) speaks of exilic spaces as physical and psychological spaces of refuge for the urban poor in Jamaica. Although Gray defines such spaces in cultural terms, as spaces in which a humiliated population seeks recovery and social honour, the concept combines a sense of spatial exile with one of structural exit from 'acceptable society' (in this case, capitalism), even though one is technically still 'in' that society and at times participating in its institutions and even working in its formal economies. Exilic spaces are not beyond the intrusion and surveillance of the state, but they are largely places of refuge from the state and 'civilised' society. In Jamaica, they are inferior urban spaces: street corners, tenement yards, streets, ghetto neighbourhoods. They are spaces of cultural hybridity, of 'black power' *and* borrowings from dominating cultures, including British colonialism and US consumerism. Politically, says Gray, 'inclinations to self-governance and autonomy' in such spaces move 'from restraint to indiscipline' (p. 118). Actions are often aggressive, rude and even harmful to the poor populations in the spaces. Yet they may have subversive and even popular effects, especially when common crime becomes a matter of official concern and anti-crime campaigns take on political overtones. In these cases, 'ideological rule-breaking' is engaged in by youth gangs, the unskilled unemployed who are deprived of work by political victimisation, street vendors who have turned their backs on wage labour, the minimum-wage lumpenproletariat, and jobless school dropouts.

Although Gray avoids analysing the economy of exilic spaces, he does speak of the ecology of the street and tenement yard. It is a space of public performances, theatre, music and sport. This takes us back to Mauss, Turner, Ehrenreich and Graeber's conception of production and value: people spend time and energy not merely producing subsistence, but 'human beings and families [and] social relations of cooperation' (Turner 1986: 100).

Is it improbable to think that the history of the capitalist world system is, to a degree, a struggle against self-activity in exilic spaces? Taking a long historical view, attempts to incorporate local economic actions and institutions into regional and global divisions of labour may be viewed, among other things, as a struggle against autonomous economy. The assertion of capitalist control over activities outside of the working day, in the household and in leisure, is part of that struggle. State formation and capitalist incorporation could be seen, among other things, as a struggle against processes of state *de*-formation. The history of the interstate system is a history of struggle against non-state spaces. Incorporation is not only a process of integrating new territories into a system-wide division of labour, but also of integrating self-organised, exilic spaces.

We refer to the production of such forms of place-based politics within the cracks of the global capitalist system as the *infra*-politics of the capitalist world economy. *Infra*-politics is the production of exilic spaces in the capitalist world economy. More precisely, the *infra-politics of capitalist world economy* describes the very process of breaking away from systemic processes of state and capital – a process of the production and circulation of relatively autonomous and partially incorporated exilic spaces and practices – and the subsequent antagonistic relationship between the exilic space and the hierarchical organisation of a capitalist world economy. Defined as such, *infra*-politics is a constant aspect of politics in the world system. The incomplete and contradictory incorporation of certain regions in the capitalist world-economy conditions the emergence of the exilic spaces and practices. During the normal historical life of the capitalist system, these are largely invisible (in Scott's [1990] terms, they are part of the 'hidden transcript' of the capitalist world economy). In times of hegemonic transitions, however, exilic spaces and exilic practices become conditions for 'more visible forms of political action', and enter the 'public transcript' of capitalist politics. The uprising in Chiapas and other forms of structural escape analysed by Zibechi (2012) are long-term results and consequences of the hidden transcript of capitalist modernity. Placing emphasis on the contradictory processes of self-organisation and escape from the structures of state/capital would help avoid the rigid functionalism and economism of some Marxist analysis and, at the same time, give economic dimension to anarchist interventions such as Scott's and Zibechi's. Attending to these interesting spaces that are produced within, against, and beyond market and state, would help illuminate the respective strengths of anarchist and Marxist scholarship.

## Exit, voice, and loyalty

Finally, let us put all of this together by examining the strategic choices of discontents within the capitalist world-economy, and those who reluctantly face incorporation within it. We propose that exilic communities use three complementary protective strategies: exit, voice, and loyalty. *Exit* includes various capital- and state-resisting practices

designed to prevent recapture; *voice* refers to open resistance and other strategies by which exiles actively oppose structures of capital and the state; and finally, *loyalty* is strategic dependence on state or extra/state actors (see Hirschman 1970).

These are important considerations for the research of exilic spaces, since some form of exit is necessary to establish autonomy. Since critical scholars tend to see states as increasingly all-encompassing over time – proto-states are succeeded by nation states and hegemonic states in the inter-state system – perhaps the first instinct is to see escape/exit or capture/recapture as distinct alternatives. Yet historically speaking, the outcome is less distinct. Failing recapture, states try to manage exit. They bargain with those who remain external to direct control.

Those who exit may pay a price to maintain their autonomy. State actors may attempt to 'starve them out', so that the result of exit is bad enough to dissuade others from following suit. Or a local state may counter autonomy by proposing a bargain whereby the exile pays a 'loyalty' price through some mechanism. Maroons in Jamaica agreed to police the frontier for the state, even sending escapees back so that exit was no longer a threat (Price 1996). Pirates in the emerging Atlantic economy agreed to attack enemy ships if England turned a blind eye to their raids (Linebaugh & Rediker 2000). There are numerous other examples.

Are such bargains stable? A most important research question is not just the nature of loyalty bargains and their impacts on exilic societies, but their dynamics. As state boundaries expand and the 'friction' of control is overcome, exilic communities may be overrun. More interestingly, the changing world economy can have a determining impact on exilic societies and the outcomes of their bargains with states and other entities.

Take, for instance, the relationship between the Russian state and exilic Cossacks over the course of world-systemic change.<sup>5</sup> The society of Cossacks from the Don region was made up of escapees from the emergent Russian state and its social relations of serfdom. Before the 18th century, it was an exilic society based on direct democracy, herding and raiding. Agriculture and private property were forbidden, and all escapees, regardless of ethnicity, were welcomed as Cossacks once they reached the exilic territory. The original bargain that protected autonomy was one in which the Cossacks pledged loyalty to the Tsar, and protected the frontier in return for a large annual subvention and the freedom to engage in raids. The hegemonic shift from Holland to Britain and the accompanying Industrial Revolution, however, created strong pressures for previously external regions to produce inputs for the industrial economy. As Russia became a 'bread-basket' for the West, pressure to produce wheat for the world market led the Russian state to induce the Cossacks to switch from herding to farming, and to favour a Cossack elite in ways that eroded political autonomy. As the Russian state became stronger and was itself incorporated into world economic structures, the terms of its loyalty bargains with Cossacks eroded their exilic autonomy. Democratic practices, protection of the commons and the welcome for new exiles were worn away by world systemic processes and successive bargains with the Russian state. Private property was instituted, and a class society ensued. *Exit with autonomy* became *exit without autonomy*, and eventually no exit at all. But the founding principles of exile were about autonomy and mutual aid, while subsequent exiles who entered the Don were clearly seeking the same (see Grubačić & O'Hearn 2016).



The exilic experience of the Mexican Zapatistas in recent years displays some interesting similarities to that of the Cossacks. As Kropotkin argued, people who face bad government and institutions of social regulation strive to produce alternative institutions of mutual aid and autonomy. Yet instructive differences in the two cases are due both to different historical times and different relations between exiles and the state/capital. Therefore each side tried to control or evade the other using different strategies.

A key difference is bargaining power. The Cossacks had bargaining power with Muscovy for a time because they were in a unique position to protect the nascent Russian state from external threats, and they inhabited a territory that itself posed a threat to that state. Muscovy therefore had a real interest in making a loyalty bargain that was in both sides' interests, and which protected exilic autonomy. Mayans from Chiapas, on the other hand, are forgotten rather than useful. Even worse, they are in the way of ranchers and resource hunters, who see in the Lacandon rainforest a *terra nullius* that should be opened to exploitation. It is no surprise, especially in the age of neoliberalism, that the Mexican state should favour fortune hunters over exiles. Thus, the Zapatistas' ability to strike a favourable loyalty bargain with the state was limited from the start. They had no choice but to look elsewhere for partners. Rather than facing the Cossack problem, in which the state bought off loyal factions against autonomists, the very fabric of Zapatista society is based on autonomy. Without it, exile has no meaning. The Zapatistas thus sought to secure resources through a loyalty bargain that would not threaten autonomy. They found a partner in national and international civil society; and whenever their bargain with civil society threatened community solidarity, the Zapatistas rather masterfully changed the bargain, sometimes taking advantage of a narrative that insists that activists and donors serve the needs of the Zapatista communities, rather than the other way around.

Yet autonomy still faced subsistence problems that were exacerbated by world-systemic trends. Zapatista communities became threatened by a sudden rise in emigration, especially among the youth. The balance is difficult: remittances ease subsistence problems, yet the loss of youth could be fatal to communities. In response, the Zapatistas apparently decided that their exilic community could only move forward by bringing other Mexican communities into the exilic experiment, a strategy they called the 'other campaign'. There can be no 'socialism in one country'; could there be 'exile in one territory'? The struggle continues, but so far, the Zapatistas appear to have moved toward greater autonomy, whereas the Don Cossacks moved in the other direction (admittedly, in a period of decades in one case, and of centuries in the other).

## Conclusions

Let us return to the original basis of our proposal: that Polanyi's model of a *double movement* – whereby the development of world capitalism imposes limits on material life, but also where popular classes (sometimes through states and sometimes on their own) try to regain wellbeing and liberties – could be reinterpreted through the lens of Kropotkin's proposals about mutual aid. In particular, as the practices and institutions of possessive individualism and 'free-market' capitalism are imposed by state and capitalist formations, people react by trying to strengthen or even reinvent institutions and practices of



sociability and mutual aid. One characteristic way they may do so is by creating *exilic spaces and practices*. We define these as areas of social and economic life in which people and groups attempt to escape from state authority and capitalist economic processes, whether by territorial escape or by attempting to build structures that are autonomous of capitalist processes of accumulation and social control. We propose to study exilic spaces because we have hope. We have hope that another society is possible, in which social relations of mutual aid predominate, and where the *work* of building community and producing joy is recognised as being a central part (perhaps the central part) of *economy*, at least as much as is the work of producing commodities and services. We think that another approach to politics is both useful and necessary, in which the production and circulation of exilic spaces and practices are recognised as a central part of the *politics* of world economy. It is not just the noise of the dominant system and the anti-systemic voice of resisting movements that produces dissonant notes in the world-system; the struggle is also expressed in silences and refusals that are sometimes less vocal, but no less confrontational. Such refusals once traveled on ships and lived in jungles, steppes, and mountains; today, they still live in jungles and mountains, in Zapatista and Aymara regions, but also in the urban exilic spaces of Kingston, autonomous Kurdish regions, supermax prisons, and occupied town squares.

## Endnotes

1. We are hardly the first to attempt to bring the two research programmes closer. The autonomist Marxist tradition, including Harry Cleaver (1994, 2000) and John Holloway (2013), made important contributions. One *Capital & Class* reviewer also drew our attention to parallels in the work of the Marxist Evgeny Preobrazhensky (1965) and the anarchist Freddie Perlman (2002).
2. The concept of exilic spaces was introduced by Gray (2004), but our use of it differs in its breadth (exile is economic and social, as well as political and cultural) and its historical range (beyond urban Jamaica). We conceive of space as a dynamic social product and as a constitutive dimension of (always temporal) social relations, not as a physical location emptied of time and movement.
3. For a less intentional yet equally state-resistant view of non-history among Apaches, see Basso 1996.
4. We are thankful to David Graeber for suggesting the importance of fun to exilic community.
5. The analysis of Cossacks and Zapatistas here is a shortened version of our analysis of exilic spaces in Grubačić and O'Hearn (2016), which also considers the position of isolated prisoners as exilic communities

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