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Afterword: From Colonial History to Colonial Genealogies
“Capitalism-Catholicism-Colonialism”

Jody Blanco

Special issue of *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*

Editor: Daniel Nemser, University of Michigan

"How is an opposition resolved?" Marx once famously asked. His answer? "By making it impossible."¹ Marx's comment was directed against a pamphlet published by Bruno Bauer called "The Jewish Question" in 1843; and presented, in summary form, a critique of Bauer's assumption that the Jewish religion was irreducibly at odds with the Christian secular state. Yet Marx's observation just as easily applies, as guest editor Dan Nemser implies, to scholars of early modern Latin American history and culture confronted with the seemingly irreducible opposition between adherents of political economy (particularly world-systems theory) as the privileged lens for analyzing the conquest and colonization of the Americas, and proponents of "the coloniality of power" perspective, which subordinates questions of political economy to lens directed at the power politics of domination, sovereignty, racial hierarchy, and the politico-theological continuity of Spain's Reconquest of the Iberian peninsula overseas (see Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder" and "Coloniality of Power"; and Mignolo, "*The Enduring Enchantment*"). Both frames of analysis begin with the observation that "the early modern Iberian world occupies an ambiguous place in the history of capitalism" (see Nemser, Introduction to this issue); and both have tended to see this ambiguous place as a *problem* that required some resolution or synthesis in order for the histories of the Americas to "fit" into either the history of capitalism as a structure or mode of economic production; or the history colonial

domination as a tale of what Indian Subaltern Studies editor Ranajit Guha famously called "dominance without hegemony" (see Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony*, chapter 3).²

Buoyed by the rise of "new," decentered and heterogeneous histories of capitalism, the scholars presented in this special issue share not only a common impatience and exhaustion with the limits of political economy and coloniality-of-power as they manifest themselves in Latin American (and increasingly, Pacific and trans-Pacific) Studies (particularly the humanities); but also a willingness to engage directly with the third, triangulating term of the conference (held at the University of Michigan in February 2017), which spurred the publication of this JEMCS special issue: Catholicism or Christian thought, particularly neo-Scholastic and Jesuit. Yet far from attempting to resurrect or generalize a uniquely "Catholic," Christian, or Counter-Reformation approach to the subfields of early modern colonial studies - the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the proliferation of contraband trade and informal economies, the role of accounting and finance in the standardization and expansion of a money economy - the contributors return us ever again to the unexplored or in any case undertheorized elements of Marxist thought, which have provided a veritable toolbox of concepts for redrawing the political geographies and ecologies of colonial empire and globalization. These concepts - beginning with Marx's treatment of "so-called primitive accumulation" and extending to the distinction between formal and real subsumption, the prehistories of monetization, the divergent interpretations of "use value," and the subordination of law to the economy of profit - not only explode the myth that the formal coherence of capitalism as a system corresponds to its various realizations in history, but also demonstrate the permanently unfinished, incomplete, and partial character of capitalism as a lived experience and social order in the Americas (Mignolo 929-932). In this regard, Dipesh Chakrabarty's observation acquires its full weight: this is to say that our insistence on theorizing

historical *transitions* to the history of capital from its peripheries, which we identify as the history of Western modernity or Eurocentrism, belies the underlying work of constantly *translating* the experience of our modern world, "divergent modernities" or "modernity at large" as Julio Ramos and Arjun Appadurai (respectively) called these, into the language of capital and its seemingly unique and extraordinary narrative of gestation, coalescence, consolidation and crisis (see Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* 47-96; Ramos, *Divergent Modernities* 187-218; Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* 1-47).

It should come as no surprise that one of the original frames for thinking Colonialism-Capitalism-Catholicism together in the expansion of the Iberian powers overseas developed in and around a critical reading of Max Weber's (in)famous essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, published in 1905. A brief discussion of this problematic can help to trace one of the less visible threads that winds its way through the contributions to this special issue, even if this problematic was abandoned later as a somewhat clunky and artificial way of generating productive dialogues around the three interrelated themes of the conference. Why return to a critique of Weber?³ A first explanation might go as follows: if political economy came to organize the study of modern society around the role of the state, laws, and institutions in reinforcing and expanding the accumulation of wealth as capital, the expansion and regulation of markets, and the conversion of all forms of productive work into increasingly commodified labor, Weber's contribution to the sociology of religion wittingly or unwittingly elevated or transposed the apparent singularity of modern capitalism as a Western and Eurocentric phenomenon to the spiritual or ideological realm, by linking capitalism to the rise of Protestantism, particularly Calvinism. While expressly denying any causal link or direct influence between the religious movements of the European Reformation and the rise of

capitalism, he at the same time insisted on an "affinity," perhaps homology, between the Calvinist's reinterpretation of God's calling as a profession, and the capitalist's reinterpretation of accumulation as the goal of accumulation. Such affinity, in any case, was sufficient for Weber to ascribe an irrational substratum beneath the logic of infinite accumulation in capitalism; he even went so far as to suggest that the ascetic tendency in the Protestant (and particularly Calvinist) outlook paradoxically animated the very critical impulse behind rationalization, secularization, and what he famously called at the end of *The Protestant Ethic* the "disenchantment of the world."

Let us grant at the outset that Weber's object of investigation and critique in this essay was the so-nineteenth-century tendency to narrate a philosophy of history that equated scientific rationalism, the legal separation of Church and State, social contract theory behind the modern republic, the international division of labor, and finally, technological innovation, as all elements belonging to the fulfillment of some great European destiny. In this respect, Weber's essay was quite influential. His claim to a "madness" that paradoxically propelled the project of Western rationality and / as civilization clearly animated the work of writers associated with the Frankfurt School, as well as the sociology of Georges Bataille and critical and genealogical histories of Michel Foucault. This qualification notwithstanding, there are at least two interrelated aspects of Weber's thesis that came to present a problem to scholars of the early modern period, particularly when we shift our perspective to any region outside those countries affected by the Protestant wars of religion and their various legacies throughout western Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first is the question of how exactly the Protestant "ethic" goes from being a singular historical conjuncture in Europe as Weber describes it to a kind of quasi-sociological "ideal-type" of historical formation that one then applies as a norm for evaluating

the success or failure of capitalism, if not civilization itself, everywhere else in the world. While Weber may have seemed reluctant to identify one with the other so readily, his 20th and 21st century readers have not. To sum up the studies that follow this line of thought in a vulgar way, the Protestant-ethic ideal-type might be expressed in the following formulation: “[if] no Protestant ethic, [then] no progress!” The Eurocentric pretensions of Weber's thesis override what was perhaps Weber's original intention, i.e., to challenge the identification of scientific rationalism as the product of European genius or genesis. Far from calling into question the presumed rationality of European economic and political development, the Protestant Ethic thesis has been employed to argue that rationality is a uniquely European gift precisely because it is propelled by an irrational and culturally specific Protestant asceticism.

A second problem, much closer to the work of the contributors in this special issue, had to do with a very different kind of historical conjuncture taking place in the Americas and later, the Philippines, while Martin Luther was posting his 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church. Can one speak of this historical conjuncture -- characterized by the violence of overseas conquest, massive forced labor, large-scale epidemics, European transoceanic immigration, the mission as frontier institution, and the introduction of the trans-Atlantic slave trade -- in the same way that Weber spoke of the Protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism? Can there be more than one historical conjuncture that accounts for the modern world-system? To answer these questions with a simple "no" or "yes" leads us immediately to the approaches developed by political economy, on the one hand; or the coloniality of power, on the other. This issue's contributors have taken a decidedly more measured strategy: setting aside the quick conclusions to which both approaches tend in favor of pursuing the patient work of what Foucault once called genealogy, which proposes to uncover the formation of statements (e.g.,

"slaves are illegal, except under certain conditions") and the development of colonial practices at the point of their instantiation into emergent networks and relations of power overseas.

"Genealogy," Foucault writes, "does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things" and continues:

[Neither does it] resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent [Nietzsche uses the word *Herkunft*, which means ancestry but which Foucault translates as *descent*] is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; *it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations - or conversely, the complete reversals - the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us*; it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, *but the exteriority of accidents*" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* 146. Italics added).⁴

The first aforementioned consequence of this attention to "the accidents...and faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us" has been a rediscovery and revaluation of the work of Scholastic and neo-Scholastic and Jesuit thought around the anomaly of colonial discourses and practices. By returning to the works of Solórzano, Alonso de Sandoval, José de Acosta, Francisco Suárez, and Luis Molina, among others, our contributors highlight the unique situation, "the exteriority of accidents," that placed the task of theorizing and anticipating the ultimate ends of Spanish world expansion in the hands of religious missionaries, even as they struggled to preempt or at least direct some of the conquest's

most disastrous corollaries. In some cases, neo-Scholastic and Jesuit thinkers abetted the very atrocities they ostensibly set out to contain. In other cases (the Philippines being the most extreme example), they managed to ward off the unmitigated intrusion of Spanish immigration and settlement, along with the influence of Crown officials, until the expulsion of the Jesuits from the overseas territories in 1768.

Another consequence of colonial genealogies has been to provincialize the conflation of capitalism as a structure or mode of production and capitalism as a history (or amalgam of histories) that presumably engenders such a structure in the first place. In this regard, the revaluation of "primitive or original accumulation" as the necessary link between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies leads to the open question of whether pre- or non-capitalist societies *necessarily* lead to capitalist ones at all; or whether it is possible to engage with capitalist societies from a principle or set of values that are non- or anti-capitalist. Let us recall Marx and Engel's foundational statement of the subject in *The Communist Manifesto* as well as volume 1 of Marx's *Capital*:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and [the] looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. On their heels treads the commercial war of the European nations, with the globe for a theatre . . . Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power.⁵

Yet in reconsidering the various precedents and legacies of these events, one begins to question the certitude with which we tend to identify capitalism as a system of interrelated parts with capitalism as a singular historical event. The recent work of world-systems historians like Andre Gunder Frank's *ReOrient* and Giovanni Arrighi's *Adam Smith in Beijing*, as well as Kojin Karatani's rereading of economic history from the perspective of modes of exchange instead of modes of production (in *The Structure of World History*) have pushed the envelope in reconsidering the history of capital as a "Western event": the bedrock upon which narratives of Eurocentrism are ultimately based.

With this revaluation in mind, is it not then possible to open up new avenues or question the finality of capitalism as the *telos* of globalization; as well as reintroduce counter-histories that concatenate events dating back to preconquest indigenous societies and African *cimarrón* and maroon communities in ways unrecognizable to the precapitalist-primitive accumulation-capitalist series with its many faces? A diverse body of work, for example, from Michael Taussig's anthropology of silver mining in Potosí, to Bolívar Echeverría's reflection on use-value and utopia and Lucía Linsalata's recent study of indigenous struggles to protect and limit the commodification of common goods [*bienes comunes*], all have undertaken a radical revaluation of "use value" at the historical conjuncture that it becomes inextricably bound and subordinate to "exchange value" in Marx's account of the historical transition to [Western] modernity (see Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism*; Echeverría, *Valor de uso y utopía*; and Linsalata, *Valor de uso, poder y transformación social*). Other works, from those of Richard Price and Lourdes Carril on the continuing legacies of slavery among black communities in Brazil, Suriname, and the Caribbean Basin - not to mention Dennis Childs's recent astonishing account of the Louisiana State "Angola" Penitentiary from its origins as a slave plantation - question the

very abolition of slavery, which flies in the face of the Thirteenth Amendment of today's US Constitution.

Finally, between the history of capitalism's alpha and omega, colonial genealogies refocus our attention to the ostensibly marginal and peripheral epiphenomena that contradict or undermine the functioning of capitalism on a microeconomic level in order to reinforce it on a macro level. Do corruption, contraband, and the informal economy, in colonial times as well as the present, represent the marginal aberrations of capitalism or rather the continuation of alternative genealogies that have made a shadow of capitalism recognizable? Does the continued existence of borderlands and frontier regions in the Americas and Asia, studied respectively by the Latinx feminist poet Gloria Anzaldúa and the historical anthropology of James Scott and carried forward by younger scholars like Cecilia Sheridan Prieto and Jessica Krug, represent the as yet unclaimed territory marked by capital's expanding search for markets; the wastelands abandoned by the network of urban metropolises; or the inaccessible reaches of land and sea where communities have successfully resisted their insertion and synchronization with globalization? Is it possible that, under the aegis of Spain's *Monarchia Universalis*, we are speaking instead of an *Anarchia Universalis* that coincided and ran alongside the rise of the concept of sovereignty, the origins of international law, and the birth of a world economy, while remaining heterogeneous to the historical narrative that ascribes these developments to the centrality of Europe?

One might be tempted, at this juncture, to undertake to write a postcolonial "Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism," which accounts for that strange encounter of neo-Scholastic and Jesuit thought with the political ecologies of indigenous belief-systems as well as the Amerindian empires. From the perspective of liberation theology, a text like Michael Löwy's

War of the Gods lays the groundwork for such a treatise, by highlighting Weber's conviction that "the Catholic Church is a much less favorable - if not outright hostile - environment for the development of capitalism than the Calvinist and Methodist sects" (*War of the Gods*, 1). This thesis in any case dovetails with contemporary analyses of "Catholic anthropology" in the work of Bartólome Clavero, Antonio de Hespanha and Marcel Henaff; not to mention Giorgio Agamben's later extrapolations of homo sacer (see Clavero, *Antidora*; Hespanha, *A Política Perdida*; Henaff, *The Price of Truth*; Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*). But repeating Weber's gesture under the guise of a "Catholic Ethic Against the Spirit of Capitalism" not only ignores the way religious orders profited from the trans-Atlantic slave trade as well as the conversion of indigenous lands into agricultural haciendas; it also fails to consider the partial, incomplete, unfinished character of Christian evangelization in the colonial period - a protracted project that not only failed to "extirpate" indigenous beliefs and ways of valuing their environments and societies, but also unwittingly engendered traditions of (re-) invention to counteract the invention of a new (Christian) tradition. Finally, it fails to consider what scholars have recently called the "political ecologies" of communities and societies, whose values and practices fall outside the spheres of political economy and political theology.

Perhaps at the end of the day, the *Anarchia Universalis* of the Iberian contact and transformation of the Americas and parts of Asia demands less a new theory of "Latin American difference" and more a re-functionalization of those tools and strategies of Latin America's ongoing engagement with Marx, Fanon, Arendt, Foucault, and Indian Subaltern Studies for mapping out Latin America's heterogeneity to itself (my recourse to Antonio Cornejo Polar's use of the word is inevitable) as well as to world history as the history of an economic structure. In

this regard, this special issue of JEMCS presents a worthy contribution to scholarship on the question of globalization in the early modern world.⁶

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¹ Karl Marx, "On The Jewish Question," *Works of Karl Marx 1844*, See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/>. Web.

² For one of the few yet insightful comparisons between Latin American "coloniality" and Indian Subaltern Studies critique, see Sudipta Sen, "Dominación imprecisa: el Estado colonial y sus contradicciones." In *Modernidades coloniales: otros pasados, historias presentes*. Eds. Saurabh Dube, Ishita Bannerjee Dube and Walter Mignolo. México: El Colegio de México. Centro de Estudios de Asia y África, 2004. 165-182.

³ For a concise summary of the main legacies of Weber's essay, see Marcel Henaff, citation forthcoming.

⁴ In distinguishing between the critical and genealogical tasks of history, Foucault writes: "[T]he critical aspect [treats] the analysis of instances of discursive control. The genealogical aspect concerns the effective formation of discourse, whether within the limits of control, or outside them, or as is most frequent, on both sides of delimitation. Criticism analyses the processes of rarefaction, consolidation and unification in discourse; genealogy studies their formation, at once scattered discontinuous and regular. To tell the truth, the two tasks are not always complementary" ("Discourse on Language," 233).

⁵ Marx, *Capital*, v. 1, chapter 31 (emphasis added). See <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch31.htm>. Last visited May 14, 2009.

⁶ See Cornejo Polar, *Escribir en el aire*